The Acculturation Experience of College of Lake County’s International Students

Jacob Cushing
jake.cushing@gmail.com
ABSTRACT

THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF COLLEGE OF LAKE COUNTY’S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Jacob Cushing, EdD
Department of Counseling and Higher Education
Northern Illinois University, 2020
Gudrun Nyunt, PhD, Director

This dissertation examined the acculturation experience of community college international students in the hopes of providing practitioners with a guide on best support practices. Considering the important contributions international students at community colleges make to the economy and the diverse environment on community college campuses, it is essential that higher education leaders provide effective academic, social, and cultural support in order to retain international students and to remain relevant in the international recruitment field. This study addresses the gap in the current literature on community college international students and provides institutional leadership with a foundation of knowledge and strategies to improve international student access, retention, and success.

Interviews with 12 international students at a community college in Illinois led to the following five themes: the need for improving international student experiences with transition and onboarding, the influences of language barriers and establishment of the proper mindset, the role academic experiences play in acculturation, the need to enhance opportunities for socialization and interpersonal relationships, and the impact of institutional culture on the acculturation experience emerged from the analysis.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DE KALB, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2020

THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF COLLEGE OF LAKE COUNTY’S
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

BY

JACOB CUSHING
©2020 Jacob Cushing

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF COUNSELING AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Gudrun Nyunt, PhD: Doctoral Director
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I have to thank the international students who so willingly provided me with rich
details of their acculturation experience at the College of Lake County.

I have been so very fortunate to complete this dissertation under a fantastic committee
comprised of Dr. Kortegast, Dr. Hu, Dr. Nyunt, and Dr. Fish. Dr. Nyunt, your prompt,
supportive, and detailed feedback was a blessing and I am truly lucky to have had you as my
committee chair. Dr. Fish, thank you for your constant encouragement and belief in my abilities
as a researcher and professional in the field of international education. The following colleagues
and friends lifted me up when I needed it most: Jill Bruellman, Eric Tammes, Christine Lewis,
Erin Fowles, Tanya Woltmann, Jill Izumikawa, Dr. Lauren Nehlsen, and Dr. Steven Hales.
Special thanks to Carmen Aravena for taking a chance on a young kid all those years ago and for
giving me a start to a career in international education that has so easily developed into a passion.
To my family for allowing me to follow my dreams. To my grandmother, for her unwavering
support, love, and encouragement. Thank you to the Panera in Round Lake Beach, Illinois for all
of the Saturdays of providing a quiet place to study and for the corner table equidistant from the
pastry counter and the coffee station.

Finally, without the selfless dedication of time, sweat, diaper changes, tantrum quelling,
coffee runs, snack prepping, single parenting on Saturdays, love, support, encouragement and
sacrifices of my wife, this study would not have been possible. I owe her everything.
DEDICATION

Most graciously dedicated to all international students enriching higher education

in the United States
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Problem of Practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Key Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of Relevant Literature</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Methodology</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case Description</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Abstract 36
Introduction 36
Literature Review 38
Theoretical Framework 39
Methodological Approach 40
Description of the Case 41
Participants 42
Data Collection 44
Data Analysis 45
Trustworthiness 46
Results 47
Discussion 58
Limitations 60
Future Research 62
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demographic Information of Participants</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summary of Common Themes and Findings</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lysgaard’s U-curve Model</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Berry’s Acculturation Framework</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF APPENDICES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. IRB DOCUMENTS</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. RECRUITMENT LETTER</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. INTERVIEW GUIDES 1 AND 2</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, the United States hosted more than 1 million international students on the F-1 student visa (NAFSA, 2018). This unique population contributed nearly $37 billion to the U.S. economy and supported nearly 450,000 jobs (NAFSA, 2018). In addition to their economic impact, the enrollment of international students on college campuses is widely known for assisting peers and educators in dispelling stereotyping, guiding more informed opinions regarding international issues, and providing various opportunities for necessary campus global diversity and cross-cultural engagement (Krislov, 2019; Wong, 2018; Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). International students also represent a vital source of diversity on college campuses, and this cultural diversity aids in the ability of faculty and students to develop cultural sensitivities and skills for working with people from different cultures, customs, and backgrounds (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Considering the economic and educational impact of international student enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions, U.S. institutions have a vested interest in attracting and retaining a large number of international students.

While there were 1,094,792 international students studying in the U.S. for the 2017-2018 academic year, the number of new international students entering the country that year totaled only 271,738 (Institute of International Education, 2018). This represented a decline of nearly 20,000 and roughly 6% in new international students from the 2016-2017 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2018). Drastic declines in overall new student enrollment as seen in the three previous academic years, which breaks from a continuation of increasing
international student enrollment since the 2004-2005 academic year, are concerning and highlight a shift in the American grasp of being the global destination for higher education (Institute of International Education, 2018).

While pinpointing the exact cause for the decline is difficult, several factors are proposed as responsible for the deceleration of international student enrollment in the U.S. The change of leadership at the national level is widely considered one possible cause for this recent trend. President Trump’s visa ban coupled with his unpopularity in Canada and Mexico, causing a student enrollment drop of nearly 40% from those two countries combined, is partially to blame (Belkin, 2019; Berman, 2019; Redden, 2018). Additionally, restrictive policies on visas, price increases for student visas, and divisive political rhetoric at the national and state levels are also causes for the enrollment decline (Adjusting Program Fees for the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2018; Belkin, 2019; Berman, 2019; Redden, 2018).

Other causes for the decline go beyond the impact of Trump’s administration. China, the largest sender of international students to the U.S. at 363,341 students for 2017-2018, has been heavily investing in its own university system to bolster enrollment (Gao, 2017; IIE, 2018; Rampell, 2018). The Saudi Arabian and Brazilian governments have each drastically reduced the scholarships that previously sent significant numbers of students to U.S. colleges and universities (IIE, 2018; Rampell, 2018; Redden, 2018). Additionally, Australia has heavily invested in international student recruitment over the past several years and reported an international student enrollment of over 690,000, an increase of 11.4% over the previous year (ICEF, 2018). The increase of international competition for international students in China and
in Australia and changes with state-sponsored scholarships programs have put a strain on U.S. attractiveness and is affecting new international student enrollment.

With international student enrollment declining and likely to continue to decline for the above-mentioned reasons, the U.S. needs to provide better services and support to international students if higher education institutions want to be able to continue to attract this population. Developing the appropriate support systems for this specialized population has been a challenging task for most institutions, as culture shock and overall adjustment to U.S. campus life affect all students differently (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In addition to barriers affecting social prowess and academic success, international students face acculturation during their time in the United States in the form of social, academic, and language challenges and share similar adjustment periods and difficulties that interfere with their adaptation to the campus community (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Thus, if the U.S. and higher education institutions wish to continue benefiting from international student enrollment, administrators and those designated as campus support systems must do a better job of supporting this student population through systematic review of their academic, social, and cultural adjustment.

**Statement of Problem of Practice**

An often-overlooked population among international students are those enrolling at community colleges. Limited research has focused on international students at the community college level, and there is a need to better understand the unique needs of this population (Zhang, 2016). This lack of focus on community college international students was also evident at a recent research symposium hosted by NAFSA: Association for International Educators. During
the symposium, researchers, leaders, and scholars in the field of international education at various four-year higher education institutions across the country gathered to share theories, methodologies, and best practices pertaining to international education and international student adjustment and success. Following the presentations of research, the panel of scholars noted community college international students have not been the focus of most studies pertaining to international student adjustment, acculturation, recruitment, and retention. As a professional working with international students at a community college, this lack of focus on international students within the community college context is concerning. My position allows for constantly advocating for the students I serve, and further highlighting and informing the gap in the literature focusing community college international students is essential in improving, informing, and guiding my own and my colleagues’ best practices. With researchers, educators, and administrators not knowing what the international student experience is in a community college environment, practitioners at community colleges are ill-prepared to support this population.

Just as their peers at four-year institutions, international students at community colleges contribute to the economy, support jobs, and enrich the cultural diversity at their institutions. Of the more than 1 million international students studying in the U.S., 96,472 were enrolled in community colleges last year (IIE Open Doors Report, 2017). These international students at community colleges contributed over $2.4 billion to the economy and supported 14,470 jobs (IIE Open Doors Report, 2019). Specifically, the international students enrolled at the College of Lake County for the 2017-2018 academic year contributed $3.3 million to the local economy and supported 20 jobs (NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool, 2020). Thus, supporting this group of students is in the best interest of community colleges and the country as a whole.
Community colleges, for many citizens, provide the only access to higher education; therefore, it is crucial that they assume a leadership role for advancing international education and by educating their communities, students, and staff regarding the various cultures represented on campus (Boggs & Irwin, 2007). Nearly half of all undergraduate students in the U.S. are attending community colleges, and this fact alone provides institutional leaders with the challenging opportunity of preparing students to live and thrive after graduation (Boggs & Irwin, 2007). One way to ensure community colleges produce productive members in our global society is to enroll and support the interaction of domestic and international students. As the world becomes more connected and complex, the community college system can easily serve as a catalyst in ensuring that diversity, tolerance, and mutual respect remain valued national educational assets (Boggs & Irwin, 2011). Enrolling and supporting international students provides students in the halls of all community colleges a path towards appreciating and acknowledging diversity in a global context.

Considering the important contributions international students at community colleges make to the economy and the diverse environment at community colleges, it is essential that community college campuses provide effective academic, social, and cultural support in order to retain international students and to remain relevant in the international recruitment field (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009). This study strives to address the gap in the current literature on community college international students and provides institutional leadership with a foundation of knowledge and strategies to improve international student access, retention, and success. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to explore international students' acculturation process at
a community college in hopes of better understanding how community college professionals can support international students as they face the acculturation process.

**Research Question**

How do international students at the College of Lake County (CLC) experience the acculturation process?

**Subsidiary Questions**

1. How do CLC’s international students experience the transition and onboarding to CLC?
2. What influences the different acculturation experiences CLC international students have?
3. How does the academic experience of CLC’s international students affect acculturation?
4. How does socialization and interpersonal relationships factor into the international student experience at CLC?
5. How does CLC’s institutional culture factor into the international student acculturation experience?

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Acculturation.** Acculturation refers to the cultural changes and dominating factors resulting from interactions between two culturally different populations (Berry, 1997).
Acculturative stress. Acculturative stress refers to the type of stress that is directly associated with an individual’s adjustment to another culture, which can manifest in physical, social and psychological problems (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Assimilation. “Assimilation is the strategy used when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek close interaction with other cultures” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 476).

Domestic student. For the purposes of this study, domestic student refers to a native-born American student, or one who has previously participated in the U.S. educational system and are not in the U.S. on an F-1 student visa.

Integration. “The integration strategy is used by individuals with an interest in maintaining one’s original culture while having daily interactions with other groups—there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time they seek, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the larger social network” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 476).

International student. An individual on an F-1 visa category pursuing an education at a U.S. higher education institution.

Internationalization. “Campus-based internationalization initiatives include study-abroad experiences, curriculum enrichment via international studies majors or area studies, strengthened foreign-language instruction, and sponsorship of foreign students to study on campus” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 293).

Marginalization. “The marginalization strategy is defined by…lack of interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss) and little interest in having
relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 476).

**Separation.** “The separation strategy is defined by individuals who place a high value on holding on to their original culture and avoid interaction with members of the new society” (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 476).

**Social adjustment.** Social adjustment refers to the extent and success of social activities and functioning in general; involvement with other persons on campus, relocation away from home and significant persons there, and satisfaction with the social environment (Gomez et al., 2014).

**Review of Relevant Literature**

**Background**

The Immigration Act of 1924 was the first official permission given to U.S. higher education institutions for admitting and enrolling foreign students (Haddal, 2008). Early 20th-century U.S. colleges and universities offered few, if any, support systems for the international students they would enroll, and by the middle of the 1900s, the U.S. was enrolling a maximum of around 29,000 students per year (Bevis, 2019). As a new millennium approached, international student enrollment increased and the need to provide strategic support systems continued to grow (Bevis, 2019). Emerging from the increase were specific visa types, and of the three visas issued to international students to temporarily study in the United States, the F-1 visa remains the most common (Bevin, 2019; U.S. Department of State, 2018).

While the enrollment of international students is culturally and financially significant, there have been some tumultuous events in the past several decades that impeded potential
additional growth in the international student market. The September 11 terrorist attacks were thought to be conducted by terrorists on expired student visas, and this led to the strengthening of oversight of this non-immigrant population (Haddal, 2008). Much of the responsibility for this oversight was given to college and university officials with the establishment of the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and additional requirements for school officials to track, report, and hire individuals familiar with advising on immigration regulations (Haddal, 2008). This additional responsibility for higher education institutions could have been seen as burdensome; however, many institutions, including community colleges, continued to show an interest in enrolling and supporting international students. In recent years, the enrollment of international students as a means for campus-wide internationalization and the need to nurture global competencies within student populations has received heightened importance at all levels of higher education, especially at community colleges (Brennan & Dellow, 2013).

According to Jennings (2017), strong recruitment systems are needed and have been essential for the top community colleges enrolling international students. Institutions with strong recruitment systems have also developed strong transfer pathways with the knowledge of needing to provide transfer options to bachelor’s degrees. Retention programming and invested professionals are essential to keeping international students involved and happy on campus. International student enrollment can be a large source of revenue for community college campuses, can provide ample opportunities for pedagogical innovation, and can significantly diversify the campus community and provide for educating all students on their own cultural competencies (Jennings, 2017).
As community colleges increasingly expand their international student recruitment and retention initiatives on campus, they often undergo a sharp learning curve before successful programs thrive. Program success relies on the ability of an international student support services office to operate autonomously with support from institutional leadership, adequate financial support, and physical space (Jennings, 2017). Some of the biggest issues facing community college advancement in this area is the lack of broad knowledge regarding internationalization, lack of consistent executive leadership, lack of faculty involvement, and the need to balance resources between international and domestic constituents (Brennan & Dellow, 2013). The institutions that manage these variables effectively will be able to capitalize on a significant source of revenue and will see stronger backing for campus diversity through the development and support of strategic and purposeful international student support services.

**International Student Adjustment and Acculturation**

Ensuring that the move to a new culture is positive and that new international students feel welcomed and supported is a burden that falls on higher education institution support systems and international student support offices. Researchers have long labeled culture shock, or the more preferred term, “acculturative stress,” to reflect movement through John Berry’s widely accepted acculturation theory, as an inevitable consequence of intercultural relocation (Demes & Geeraert, 2015). Some have even gone as far to represent acculturative stress as a mental illness or disease that perpetuates OCD tendencies, bi-polar fits of rage, and general inattentiveness (Demes & Geeraert, 2015). In simpler terms, acculturative stress is a product of the acculturation experience and is directly associated with an individual’s adjustment to another
culture, which can manifest in physical, social, and psychological problems; however, moving from a familiar culture to one that is unfamiliar does not always have to carry with it a negative connotation (Demes & Geeraert, 2015; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

When international students choose to study in the United States, they are making a conscious decision to leave all things familiar behind while unconsciously designating themselves as cultural ambassadors for their home countries (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). This transition to cultural unfamiliarity can be vexing to most and learning to cope with new people, a new language, and new food perpetuates environmental difficulties for international students (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). The current research on factors related to acculturative stress focuses on feelings related to isolation and homesickness, challenges with the U.S. academic and educational practices, prejudice and discrimination, and socio-cultural challenges (Berry, 1997; Demes & Geeraert, 2015; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Tiwari, Singh, & Hassan, 2017; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, and Elsayed, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zvolensky, Jardin, Garey, Robles, & Sharp, 2016). These stressors can push international students into different acculturation frameworks and depending on the current political climate and personal feelings of the student, placement and severity of acculturative stress can change over time (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Social Connections with Domestic Students

The social connections between international and domestic students is a well-documented concern for ensuring support and success during the transition to a new academic culture (Gresham & Clatyon, 2011; Hamamura & Laird, 2014). International students often report that
their interactions and relationships with domestic students are infrequent, superficial, and consist of
mainly purposeful information exchanges such as inquiries related to accommodations and
directions (Chavajay, 2013; Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The resulting
acculturative stress created from this lack of a connection has been related to a variety of
negative attributes for international students, including depression and anxiety (Yakunina,

At the college and university campus level, the amount at which varying cultural groups
adopt one another’s cultural attributes is unclear. On U.S. college campuses, cross-cultural
differences in social interactions are known to prevent international students from forming
friendships with domestic students (Yeh & Inose, 2003). This inability to form non-superficial
relationships with domestic students is widely considered a contributor to acculturative stress and
likely to impact international student retention and success (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han,
Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh and Inose, 2003). Being unable to establish an effective social
support system will likely push an international student deep into acculturative stress (Han,
Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Sam & Berry, 2010; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

Gresham and Caltyon (2011) share one example of strained social connection from the
University of Newcastle in Australia (UNA). International students at UNA believed their
interactions with domestic residents and students to be superficial while the university strongly
believed it was doing enough to create authentic relationships. Students reported that the
friendships with domestic students never went beyond a very superficial and student experience
level, and in response, the Community Connections Program (CCP) was created. The CCP was
structured to focus specifically on an institution’s necessity to provide a catalyst for meaningful
connections between domestic and international students. The CCP provided structured interactions between international and domestic students that yielded a better understanding of other cultures and enhanced cultural awareness and social integration for participants. The results from the CCP highlights the overall need for forced interactions in order to mitigate the effects of acculturation and to provide the international students with a stronger sense of belonging to the campus. Without a program similar to the CCP, colleges and universities open up their international students to search for alternative ways to enhance their U.S. experience.

Rose-Redwood (2010) shares information about a similar pilot program, where departments at an East Coast university in the United States attempted to influence their international students’ social practices with domestic students. Certain departments hosted social activities, which allowed for mutually beneficial social interactions. International students in departments that hosted these events reported that the various social events allowed them to interact with a mixture of American students and even feel more connected to the institution. On the contrary, departments with limited efforts for social engagement yielded responses from students mentioning they were unable to develop close relationships with domestic students, thus perpetuating social segregation (Rose-Redwood, 2010). Deliberate and well-thought-out programmatic interactions between domestic and international students, much like those at UNA and on the East Coast of the U.S., have the potential to strengthen the connection of international students to campus and can mitigate negative aspects of acculturation (Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Hlan, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Rose-Redwood, 2010; Yeh and Inose, 2003).
Unfamiliar Linguistic and Academic Environment

Another emerging theme surrounds the common knowledge that international students experience an adjustment to college as much as domestic students, yet they are expected to adjust and maintain a successful path while in an unfamiliar culture and specifically an unfamiliar linguistic environment (Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2014; Han, Pistole & Caldwell, 2017; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Proficient command of the English language during the acculturative process is an important factor in deterring the effects of acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Proper understanding of English is essential in excelling in the new academic environment and in ensuring that one remains on a successful academic path in the U.S. Failure to understand or be understood will very likely contribute to acculturative stress and will drive international students to find other ways to fit in, or they will possibly leave the country altogether (Gomez et al., 2014; Han et al., 2017; Sumer et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Lack of English language ability or lack of confidence in using English on campus also greatly affects academic achievement (Han et al., 2017; Wu, Garza, & Guzma, 2015). The inability to connect with an instructor due to lack of command or confidence with English could greatly hinder the academic achievement for an international student who is already in an unfamiliar environment and without a social safety net (Meng, Zhu & Cao, 2018). During a 2015 study at Texas A&M University, participants expressed concern with academic integration and the inability to communicate effectively with their professors (Wu et al., 2015). This misunderstanding represented unfamiliarity with the U.S. teaching style and unawareness of collaborative environments often created in college classrooms. The connection between student and professor is a necessity to build loyalty to one’s institution, and the inability to understand
coursework, teaching methods, or lectures, coupled with the inability to be understood as students themselves, will not yield a culturally accepting and diverse environment (Glass, Gesing, Hales & Cong, 2017; Meng et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015).

The level at which an international student perceives social support through programmatic or structured social interactions will directly affect their ability to cope with the acculturation process (Ra & Trusty, 2017). Language barriers also affect social adjustment and perpetuate an inability of international students to develop substantial connections to various campus programs, student groups, and activities that can greatly hinder adjustment to a new culture (Gomez et al., 2014; Ra & Trusty, 2017). International students face social integration issues for a myriad of reasons, but one main reason is that international educators are not offering programs that transcend cultural identities or that help to create strong host networks (Gomez et al., 2014). Texas A&M responded to their 2015 study by noticing a positive correlation between leisure sport activities and the lessening of acculturation stress on new university international students. The administration noted that a focus on academics alone will not yield higher grades and that college campus orientation programs for new international students need to incorporate a leisure activity component (Gomez et al., 2014).

**Consequences of Acculturative Stress and Potential Interventions**

International students are often thrown into an environment of which they have little understanding and which places a lot of demands to conform and integrate. International students who are unable to navigate the social and academic aspects of acculturation can then fall into the American college culture of binge drinking and alcohol abuse. Several studies point to
an overwhelming amount of international student college freshman who were found to show that their drinking behaviors were a direct result of acculturative stressors (Hunt, Martens, Wang & Yan, 2017; Koyama & Belli, 2011). We know that American college students are particularly susceptible to abuse alcohol and that this is often the case for students who deem the demands of college life as too challenging (Koyama & Belli, 2011). Binge drinking and alcohol abuse is an issue among international student populations, especially among those who convey high levels of dissatisfaction with college and student-life-centered stressors (Hunt, Martens, Wang & Yan, 2017; Koyama & Belli, 2011; Sa, Seo, Nelson, Lohrmann, & Ellis, 2015).

International students navigating the U.S. college experience are considered a high-risk population and very susceptible to stress (Berry, 1997; Koyama & Belli, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). When determining the effects of acculturation and overall adjustment of international students, it is beneficial to be aware of the actions taken by students in order to fit in and acculturate and how community college administrators can help can drive and support college-wide initiatives and support systems. With this in mind, there is a strong need to understand the acculturation experience of international students, and utilizing John Berry’s framework below can help to define and allow for appropriately responding to acculturative needs of international students.

Theoretical Framework

The U-curve, Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

In ensuring best practices are set in place to support international student adjustment to U.S. college life, understanding the basic concepts surrounding intercultural adjustment and
acculturation that international students face is essential. Historically, the process at which international students adjust and adapt to their new student life in the U.S. has been referred to as culture shock and has followed a U-curve adjustment model. In the U-curve model, as proposed by Lysgaard in 1955 (see Figure 1), four stages of cultural adjustment are positioned over a U-shaped curve and adjustment is determined over a specific amount of time the international student spends in the host culture (Zhang & Zhu, 2014). At the first stage, positive feelings and the honeymoon period are seen at the initial entry period into a new culture, followed by a maladjustment stage, or culture shock phase, which is then followed by an adjustment, or recovery phase, and finally integration or mastery of the new culture is reached (Menzies & Baron, 2014; Suryani, Huzili, Hussin, & Kaur, 2008; Zhang & Yu, 2014).

Figure 1. Lysgaard’s U-curve model. (Suryani et al., 2008)
The Lysgaard model was revolutionary at the time but has since faced criticism. Several studies have found a sharp contrast to the assumptions that international students enter the country in a honeymoon period, followed by a chronological adjustment period (Ab Rahim, Hussin & Kaur, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008). Specifically, these studies (Brown & Holloway, 2007; Suryani, Huzili, Hussin, & Kaur, 2008; Zhang & Yu, 2014; Zhang & Yu, 2014) have found international students experiencing stress at the highest levels during the beginning of their stay. These same studies highlighted the positive feelings felt by the initial adjustment period, but noted these are overshadowed by the initial feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Suryani, Huzili, Hussin, & Kaur, 2008; Zhang & Yu, 2014). These studies show the inadequacies of the U-curve model and highlight the need for additional models to guide the efforts of international student services offices to support international students at the most significant time of their sojourn: the beginning. Because Lysgaard’s theory fails to successfully explore the individual international student adjustment period and process, John Berry’s (2016) fluid theory of acculturation has emerged as the preferred framework, which I will use for this study.

Acculturation is a widely held theory that seeks to explain the psychological and cultural changes experienced by an individual or group following intercultural contact (Sam & Berry, 2010; Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinnery, Sam, &Vedder, 2006). Berry (2006), specifically, defines the process as an individual experience involving cultural and psychological change following the meeting between two or more cultures. Berry’s acculturation framework focuses on the individual changes taking place during acculturation, how students acculturate, and the level to which the individual adapts to the new culture(s) following acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2010).
In this framework, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society (Berry et al., 2006). When these two issues are crossed, an acculturation space is created with four sectors within which individuals may express how they are seeking to acculturate (Berry et al., 2006). The reaction to this struggle for intercultural interaction is placed into four succinct categories representing the varying levels of adjustment and cultural acceptance: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2010). These categories are the foundation for Berry’s acculturation theory as seen in Figure 2 (Sam & Berry, 2010).

*Figure 2.* Berry’s acculturation framework (Sam & Berry, 2010).
Assimilation, as defined by Berry et al. (2006), exists when the international student shows little interest in maintaining their own culture, combined with ensuring heightened interaction with the larger host society. For instance, if an international student is willing to reject personal cultural heritage while accepting the host country’s culture, they would fall into the assimilation quadrant. Separation exists when an international student rejects the host country’s culture, avoids contact with others, and maintains a firm grasp on their own culture (Berry et al, 2006). International students would fall into marginalization when deciding not to maintain their own culture and also avoiding interactions with others; integration is reached when an international student maintains their own culture while also seeking involvement with the larger society (Berry et al, 2006).

This study utilized Berry’s acculturation framework by focusing on how international students relate, respond, and interact with the culture in the United States. Understanding international students’ acculturation process at a community college allowed me to identify areas that community college administrators should be cognizant of when developing and initiating support systems for international students.

**Research Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative case study approach to explore the acculturation experiences of international students at one community college, the College of Lake County. Berry’s acculturation framework guided the literature, research, and culminating recommendations. In this section, I will describe the research methods for this study, explain
how I collected data and selected international student participants, and discuss the data analysis. Additionally, I will provide a rationale for choosing a qualitative case study approach.

Qualitative research focuses on understanding how individuals interpret their experiences and what meanings are applied to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I am interested in the shared experience of international students as they adjust to being in a new country, a new institution, and to being surrounded by a new culture. While each of the students has experienced through the same adjustment to a new country and thus may have experienced similar acculturative stressors, their individual life experiences and countries of origin formed and shaped how they navigate this adjustment. Qualitative research allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of individual students’ experiences while also looking for common themes among students’ experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I approached this study from an interpretive/constructivist epistemology. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) frame interpretivism as assuming no single reality exists, and individuals experiencing single events or phenomena socially construct multiple realities. Creswell (2018) further asserts that the goal of qualitative research with a constructivist perspective is to allow the participants’ view of the situation being studied to guide the research. Utilizing both epistemologies allowed me to gain insight into varying views international students have on the same acculturation process while also allowing the research subjects to guide and further enhance the topic being studied. I am drawn toward qualitative studies of this nature because of my constructivist epistemology, as it allows the researcher to hear from the participants directly. This epistemology approach fits nicely with the goal of this study, as relying on the international student view of the acculturation process, and the focus on building meaning and
recommendations from data collection on this shared experience.

**Research Design**

This study will utilize a qualitative case study methodology. Case study research is effective when the object of the study, the case, is intrinsically bound (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study characteristics can include exploring a phenomenon focusing on a specific process, group, individual, or program (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The phenomenon of this study is the acculturation experience of international students at the College of Lake County. The bounded case or unit of analysis under investigation is the College of Lake County. The case study approach best fits as the College of Lake County intrinsically binds the case in space - one institution - and time - one semester of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define case studies as an in-depth description and analysis of a single unit from which data analysis provides an understanding of the case being studied. This case study is intrinsic and descriptive by design, as I want to know more concerning international students enrolling at the College of Lake County. Intrinsic designs do not seek to create general theories or to generalize findings to other campuses or populations (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The descriptive approach utilizes the details of individual people and places to guide and shape the narrative (Creswell, 2015). I did so by conducting semistructured interviews with international students to explore opinions and current assumptions or beliefs related to their experiences as international students on an F-1 visa. Case studies often utilize multiple methods of data collection or prolonged engagement to gain an in-depth understanding of the case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While I did not employ multiple methods of data collection, I conducted two
interviews – one at the start of the semester and one half-way through – with each of the international student participants to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences at different times of the acculturation process. Since the focus of this study is on the students’ experiences, their reflections shared in interviews was an ideal way to gain the data needed for this study.

**Case Description**

As the case for this study, I chose the College of Lake County (CLC). While all international students studying in the United States will share some common features, there will be several distinctive features guiding the international student experience at an individual higher education institution. I chose CLC because it is a community college that enrolls international students; thus, I would be able to answer my research questions. In addition, part of the purpose of this study is to advocate for and highlight areas of need for College of Lake County (CLC) international students to improve the practice at this specific institution. Finally, the site chosen is my place of employment; thus, I have a vested interest in seeing the institution succeed and have easy access to the research site. The College of Lake County has a unique Center for International Education office structure, as most community colleges in the state do not have a formal center model or as many full-time staff to support international student success. CLC is also one of the few community colleges in the state actively engaged in the recruitment of international students.

The College of Lake County is a public community college in Grayslake, Illinois, and annually enrolls over 13,000 students, of which 84 were international students in the Fall 2019 semester. Of the international student population, the top five countries of origin in order are the
following: 19 from South Korea, 11 from China, 5 from Brazil, 4 from India, and 3 students each from Guatemala, Pakistan, and the Philippines. On average, CLC hosts international students from 40 different countries and supports the acculturation of these students through efforts by the Center for International Education. The College of Lake County provides all international students with a home base in the Center for International Education (CIE), which strives to provide students with a space where they feel comfortable and safe.

The CIE’s mission is to facilitate global engagement and advance international education among CLC students, faculty, and staff through the support of international educational exchange, programs, and services. In support of international student adjustment, provided by the four CIE staff members, are the following, but not limited to, services: coordinate an intensive three-day orientation to introduce students to the U.S. and Lake County area; provide daily immigration and cultural advising services through our open-door policy; track and assist students in the maintenance of their F-1 visa status; plan and coordinate purposeful programming throughout the academic year; assign each new international student a semester-long peer mentor; provide a physical home-base for students; monitor student academic progress and implement academic recovery plans for struggling students; and facilitate interactions with domestic students through office events and an established F-1 international student club.

**Participants**

As is common in qualitative research, I will used purposeful sampling to select participants best suited to gain insights and understanding related to the case I explored (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, international students were the sample, as the
phenomenon studied specifically relates to the international student experience. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose individuals who meet the attributes most crucial to the study (Merriam, 2016). The site and participants were chosen because the information could not be collected from other sources. Since this study focused on first-semester acculturation of international students, a sample of eight to ten students entering the United States and attending the College of Lake County for their initial semester was needed. Creswell (2018) asserts that ensuring saturation, meaning the point when new data no longer yields new insights, is essential, and including eight to ten interview participants would allow me to reach data saturation. If, after analyzing responses from the eight to ten participants, I had not yet reached saturation, I would recruit additional participants. This was not necessary as data saturation was reached with the intended sample.

The Center for International Education (CIE) assisted in securing a pool of potential participants through targeted email campaigns (see Appendix B). The CIE did not determine final participants selected for data collection, as I determined final participants based on their country of origin and ensured that countries of origin related to the entire international student population at CLC. I sent recruitment letters and questionnaires (see Appendix C) to all CLC international students to collect participant gender, age, country of origin, major and English language proficiency. I selected participants on the basis of collected information, willingness to participate in the study, country of origin, an even distribution of gender, and majors. I asked participants to sign an informed consent document prior to participating in the interview (see Appendix D). I emailed the informed consent waiver to the participant prior to the interview and I asked them to sign it at the start of the interview. Prior to recruiting participants, I
obtained approval from the IRB for both Northern Illinois University and the College of Lake County (see Appendix A).

This study utilized two semi-structured interviews per participant with questions that connected to the guiding research questions and Berry’s theoretical lens of acculturation (see Appendix E). Semi-structured interviews allowed individual students to define their acculturation experiences through their own lenses; however, while individual responses were expected, I aimed to gather specific information regarding the acculturation experience from all respondents, and thus semi-structured was preferable to an unstructured method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, two interviews provided the opportunity to follow-up on what was said during the first interview through a longer, more in-depth conversation. There was also plenty of time to analyze initial data in order to have more input from participants in the subsequent interview, and a strong rapport was built with students through engaging with them twice.

The interview protocols for both interviews were based on Creswell’s (2018) recommendations and were structured as follows: collection of basic information, introduction to lay out the purpose of the interview and to promote a feeling of comfort, opening questions to set a safe tone, content questions tied to the research’s subsidiary questions, and closing instructions to set up additional interviews. Throughout the entire process, I used probing questions to ensure useful information from all interviewees.

In the first interview, I began by asking each student to share information about his or her individual background and his or her motivation to pursue an education in the United States. To begin, I ensured the participant understood what is meant by acculturation and then asked
questions related to their personal motivation for wanting to study abroad in the United States. I then asked surface-level questions related to their own adjustment to CLC and the United States. Gathering background information allowed for a view into the reality each participant had constructed and played a crucial role in extracting further information related to acculturation in the two interviews. The first interview was related to the acculturation experience, whereas the second interview was focused on the student’s interactions with current CLC support systems as they navigate their personal acculturation.

It is essential that the interviews yield information from participants who have fully understood the question. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) offer the following advice when deciding on how to frame interview questions to extract desired information: “An obvious place to begin is by making certain that what is being asked is clear to the person being interviewed” (p.117). Some international students may not fully comprehend the purpose of certain questions, or even what specifically is asked. This could potentially affect the flow of the interview and the level of comfort that the students would have in responding. Since it was not possible to have the interviews conducted in all the languages represented by our international student body and English was be used during interviews, I will strove to use simple words and phrases in order to extract the best possible answers and to ensure the greatest level of comprehension (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also encouraged participants to ask clarifying questions, if they were unsure what a specific question meant. I audio recorded interviews, as per recommendations from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) and Hancock and Algozzine (2017), and later transcribed them.
As is common in qualitative research, data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I utilized a best practice, as recommended by Creswell (2018), by engaging in memoing throughout the data collection process, which helped to guide the organization of the final report of findings. The need to analyze the data concurrently with data collection speaks to the importance of keeping the qualitative study focused and manageable. The data analysis adhered to the following guide: collect, read, code, develop themes, analyze, and report. One key method to maintaining manageable and easier access to collected data is to implement a system of coding. Coding allowed the researcher to easily retrieve specific pieces of data from the interviews through the assignment of various short-hand designations to various aspects of the responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Codes were developed based on information coming from the data and predetermined codes. Before coding began, I ensured close reading of all of the text until well acquainted with the content and any emerging themes. Following close reading of any raw data, I utilized the following three methods for coding: open coding, axial coding, and constant comparison. Open coding, or the first phase of coding, allowed for the formation of initial broad categories regarding the acculturation process of the international students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These broad categories were then assigned codes. During the second phase, or axial coding, I dissected each open coding category and related it back the other categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Common themes and patterns emerging through this stage allowed for a foundation for the next stage: constant comparison. Constant comparison allowed for the development of themes related to the shared experience of the other international student participants (Merriam,
Utilizing constant comparison, I went back and forth between emerging themes and my data to ensure that these themes accurately reflected the students’ experiences. I also looked for negative cases and disconfirming data to gain a more complex understanding of these students’ experiences.

I sought to understand where participants fell within Berry’s four outcomes of his acculturative stress model -- assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization during my first few rounds of coding (Sam & Berry, 2006). During axial coding, I looked specifically for connections between Berry’s four outcomes of acculturation and the college’s support systems. Such insights could highlight pitfalls and successes of current systems positively affecting international student acculturative stress. Tying codes and themes to Berry’s model allowed for a strong connection to the research question and provided a guiding structure for the results section. In order to ensure that codes and categories were exhaustive, through the various coding steps, I also allowed emerging data to create or develop new codes that did not naturally fit into Berry’s model for acculturation (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In order to track developing and predetermined codes and to maintain proper organization, I utilized the qualitative computer program NVivo for assistance. Following data collection and categorization, I constructed a narrative of prevalent themes from the coding process. Finally, I portrayed the descriptive results in a narrative that combines all interviews in order to make clear recommendations on additional support areas needed to enhance international student academic and social support on campus.
Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness in this case study, I used detailed descriptions, shared my positionality as a researcher, and conducted member checks (Creswell, 2018). First, I utilized a rich, thick description to convey findings. Offering a detailed description of the case and thick description of the findings provided for a good understanding of the setting and added to the validity of the findings (Creswell, 2018). Second, I explain the bias brought to the study in the reflexivity statement. Creswell (2018) mentions that this reflectivity statement is a core characteristic of solid qualitative research and ensuring validity. Finally, I used member checks. Member checks allow the researcher to gather feedback from those interviewed regarding the findings (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Taking the results, emerging themes, and findings back to the participants and checking it against their true feelings ensured validity. To achieve this, I shared emerging themes with participants at the beginning of the second interview. I asked participants to respond to the emerging themes and to confirm that the data represents what was shared (see Appendix E). Following the second interview, I e-mailed themes to get feedback on the unique questions asked during the second interview. This process also led to ensuring that the subsequent follow-up interview was productive and purposefully built off the initial responses (Creswell, 2018).

Reflexivity Statement

During my first year teaching in the Middle East, the Arab Spring erupted and we were faced with curfews, daily tire fires, tear-gas storms, and dealing with the deep-seated concerns of students pushed into a conflict they failed to fully comprehend. Experiencing the turmoil's
impact on the students and citizens of Bahrain and advising these students towards admission in U.S. and European universities provided me with a unique and challenging opportunity to build strong relationships with students, families, and the general population. This experience triggered my interest in international higher education administration and leadership. My work in Bahrain, coupled with my professional roles in college administration, has made me keenly aware of the central challenges and skills necessary for advancing strategic student support initiatives at the post-secondary level and has helped me become more cognizant of the need to further develop my educational leadership abilities to support international students.

As a director of international education, I am in a unique position that works with various campus officials, offices, and constituents. This interdepartmental connection allows me to highlight various roadblocks that the international community faces. At the department level, I have supported the international community through programming, academic monitoring, cultural adjustment workshops, advising sessions, and various advocacy initiatives. I am able to provide strategic and informative feedback and have served on both the college’s Environmental Scan and Strategic Planning committees. It is within these experiences that I remain keenly aware of the bias brought to research.

For this study, I was the instrument of data collection. Since I administered the interviews, it was essential that I make myself aware of any hidden biases or prior notions I have regarding the international student experience. My current knowledge surrounding the acculturation issues affecting international students, and my decade of supporting and advocating for international student support systems, could very easily have guided my interviews; however, my unique
experience and role within international education allowed me to anticipate responses and could prepare for more constructive follow up questions leading to better findings.

In ensuring that my researcher bias was minimized, and ensuring interviewees were not led to sought-after results and answers, I phrased all interview questions neutrally and paid close attention to the tone of my voice, facial expressions, and body language. I also engaged in member checking and shared emerging themes with participants to ensure that my findings accurately represented participants’ voices. My role was that of an outsider, as I am not an international student. But because I work in the field and the main responsibility of my position is that of ensuring international student retention and success, I have some previous knowledge about this population and its experiences, which helped me relate to and build rapport with my study participants.

**Limitations and Transferability**

Due to the nature of human experiences and the variation of services, environments, locations, and population demographics across all community colleges in Illinois, this study does not aim to generalize any findings or results to any other specific community college or international student population; however, transferability, or external generalization, is attainable with the knowledge that similarity exists among individuals with similar experiences and conditions (Demuth, 2018). It is essential to note that transferability alone does not necessitate generalization. The researcher’s responsibility in ensuring transferability is to ensure detailed descriptions of the research’s context has taken place; however, the reader and potential users of the study’s findings must take on the responsibility of inferring and applying findings to other
settings (Demuth, 2018). Thus, to fulfill my responsibility as the researcher, I have provided an in-depth description of the case here and will do so in any published materials. This description will allow readers to understand how their campus may be similar or different to this study’s research site.

While not straightforward in reaching generalization, users of this study will be able to take into account the overall complexity of acculturation and the phenomena of the international student experience. The results of this study could very well provide a solid foundation for transferability to other campuses to enhance their own international student support initiatives. Case studies can inform and be useful outside of generalization; they excel at proposing and answering new questions (de Saint-Georges, 2018). For this study, readers and users should focus on what set of questions have arisen around acculturation experiences and support services for international students that can be applicable to their institutional context (de Saint-Georges, 2018).

This study focuses solely on the perspectives of international students. Future studies should take into account the college faculty and staff, or domestic students, who interact with international students and may have perspectives to share on the international community at an institution. Gaining insights from other community members on their interactions with international students could help illuminate the community support provided to international students at that institution, which may influence international students’ acculturation experiences.
Significance

This study should result in various benefits for the researcher. As an international educator, I am interested in the results for my professional knowledge, growth, and understanding. As an aspiring higher education leader, the results should show how specific programs fit and affect overall institutional goals, missions, and values. As the leader of the College of Lake County’s Center for International Education, the site and scope of this research should provide many opportunities to execute strategic initiatives to improve program outcomes and overall international student satisfaction and retention. Thus, the practical significance of this study lies in furthering my own professional growth as well as providing benefits to the international community at College of Lake County, as I will be able to implement recommendations based on the findings at the institution.

This study adds to the existing literature focused on the international student experience studying at community colleges. While much research exists about international students’ acculturation experiences at four-year institutions, little is known about the ways these experiences may differ within the context of a community college. The demand for international student enrollment at all institutions – including community colleges - is not likely to lessen as the need to ensure colleges and universities are producing graduates ready to excel and to be productive in our global society is evident throughout higher education institutions. Thus, seeing as international students at community colleges are an often overlooked population, there is a strong need to further explore and better understand the needs of these students within the unique context of community colleges (Zhang, 2016).
The findings and recommendations arising from this study will also bring several benefits to the international students themselves. Primarily, this study gives a voice to the international student experience at the College of Lake County. In doing so, international students at CLC and other institutions could very well benefit from the findings and recommendations for campus leadership. Additionally, with proper integration and support systems, stemming from recommendations of this study, international students will be empowered to be successful during their time on campus. This study, along with others previously mentioned, will directly point towards the positive effects of purposeful and strategic international student support systems that yield positive acculturation experiences.

Community colleges can easily set the tone for international student support systems (Jennings, 2017). In doing so, community colleges can assist in mitigating acculturation stress and the negative consequences that arise when an underrepresented population goes through an adjustment period without proper support. This repositioning of community colleges within the international education landscape could easily perpetuate the simplest form of international diplomacy and could help ensure that the U.S. maintains itself as the top destination for international students for the coming decades. Research that fosters a greater understanding of shared experiences and perceptions of international students will allow for peers, faculty, staff, and higher education institution administrators to be more cognizant of the critical challenges faced through the acculturation process and will give a voice to a special population on our campuses that require additional support and attention (Demuth, 2018).
CHAPTER TWO
A HOME AWAY FROM HOME: SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS THROUGH THE ACCULTURATION PROCESS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Abstract

This qualitative case study examined the acculturation experience of community college international students. Interviews with 12 international students at a community college in Illinois led to the following five themes: the need for improving international student experiences with transition and onboarding, the influences of language barriers and establishment of a positive outlook, the role academic experiences play in acculturation, the need to enhance opportunities for socialization and interpersonal relationships, and the impact of institutional culture on the acculturation experiences that emerged from the analysis.

Introduction

In an era of nationalistic agendas and an “America first” mentality, in order for the United States to continue to attract international students, it is imperative that U.S. higher education institutions provide adequate support to their international students and ensure that these students have a positive experience. One subgroup of international students often overlooked are international students enrolled at community colleges. During the 2018-2019 academic year, nearly 8% of all international undergraduate students in the U.S. attended community colleges (NAFSA, 2020). Of the more than 1 million international students studying
in the U.S., 86,351 were enrolled in community colleges last year (IIE Open Doors Report, 2019). These international students at community colleges contributed over $2.6 billion to the economy and supported nearly 14,000 jobs (IIE Open Doors Report, 2019). Specifically, the international students enrolled in the 2018-2019 academic year at the College of Lake County, the research site for this study, contributed $3.3 million to the local economy and supported 19 jobs (NAFSA International Student Economic Value Tool, 2020).

These percentages and impacts may be surprising due to the fact that a majority of the research focused on international student support services, the development of international programs, and the implementation of internationalization strategies primarily takes place in four-year institutions (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010; Yao, 2015; Zhang, 2016). With researchers, educators, and administrators not knowing what the international student experience is in a community college environment, practitioners at community colleges are ill-prepared to support this population. Just as their peers at four-year institutions, international students at community colleges contribute to the economy, support jobs, and enrich the cultural diversity at their institutions. Thus, supporting this group of students is in the best interest of community colleges, the local communities, and the country as a whole.

Considering the various challenges international students may face in their adjustment to college in the United States, institutions need to be understand how to best support this student group. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore international students' acculturation experiences at a community college in hopes of better understanding how community college professionals can support international students.
Literature Review

When international students choose to study in the United States, they are making a conscious decision to leave all things familiar behind while unconsciously designating themselves as cultural ambassadors for their home countries (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). This transition to cultural unfamiliarity can be vexing to most, and learning to cope with new people, a new language, and new food perpetuates environmental difficulties for international students (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013). The stress associated with this transition to another culture is often referred to as acculturative stress (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Research on acculturative stress highlights experiences of isolation and homesickness, challenges with the U.S. academic and educational practices, prejudice and discrimination, navigating an unfamiliar linguistic environment, and socio-cultural challenges (Berry, 1997; Demes & Geeraert, 2015; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Tiwari, Singh, & Hassan, 2017; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac, & Elsayed, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zvolensky, Jardin, Garey, Robles, & Sharp, 2016).

In addition, the lack of social connections between international and domestic students is a well-documented concern for international students during the transition to a new academic culture (Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Hamamura & Laird, 2014). International students often report that their interactions and relationships with domestic students are infrequent, superficial, and consist of mainly purposeful information exchanges such as inquiries related to accommodations and directions (Chavajay, 2013; Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). This inability to form non-superficial relationships with domestic students is widely considered a contributor to acculturative stress and likely to affect international student retention.
and success (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh and Inose, 2003). If international students are unable to establish effective social support systems, they will likely experience higher levels of acculturative stress (Sam & Berry, 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017). The resulting acculturative stress created from this lack of a connection has been related to a variety of negative attributes for international students, including depression and anxiety (Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac & Elsayed, 2013).

International students have to manage not only the adjustment to college, like their domestic peers, but do so in an unfamiliar culture and for many an unfamiliar linguistic environment (Gomez, Urzua, & Glass, 2014; Han, Pistole & Caldwell; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Proper understanding of English is essential in excelling in the new academic environment and in ensuring that one remains on a successful academic path in the U.S. Failure to understand or be understood can contribute to acculturative stress and will potentially drive international students to find unconventional ways to fit in, such as leaning heavily into college party culture and binge drinking, or they will possibly leave the country altogether (Gomez et al., 2014; Han et al., 2017; Sumer et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003).

**Theoretical Framework**

Acculturation is a widely held theory that seeks to explain the psychological and cultural changes experienced by an individual or group following intercultural contact (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinnery, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Sam & Berry, 2010). Berry (2006), specifically, defines the process as an individual experience involving cultural and psychological change following the meeting between two or more cultures. Berry’s acculturation framework focuses on the
individual changes taking place during acculturation, how students acculturate, and the level at which the individual adapts to the new culture(s) following acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2006).

In this framework, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society (Berry et al., 2006). When these two issues are crossed, an acculturation space is created with four sectors within which individuals may express how they are seeking to acculturate (Berry et al., 2006). The reaction to this struggle for intercultural interaction is placed into four succinct categories representing the varying levels of adjustment and cultural acceptance: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2010).

This study utilized Berry’s (2006) acculturation framework by focusing on how international students relate, respond, and interact with the culture in the United States. Understanding international students’ acculturation process while utilizing Berry’s framework as a foundation allowed me to identify areas that community college administrators should be cognizant of when developing and initiating support systems for international students.

**Methodological Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative case study design (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case studies are an in-depth description and analysis of a single unit or case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study research is effective when the object of the study, the case, is intrinsically bound (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This case study utilized a nested case study design (Yin, 2014). Each individual international student was a case; these cases were nested within the larger bounded system of the College of Lake County. The phenomenon under
The College of Lake County (CLC), a public community college in Grayslake, Illinois, was the setting for this case study. CLC annually enrolls over 13,000 students, of which 95 were international students for the 2019-2020 academic year. Of the international student population, the top five countries of origin in order are the following: South Korea, China, Brazil, India, and tied for fifth are Guatemala, Pakistan, and the Philippines. On average, CLC hosts international students from 40 different countries and supports the acculturation of these students through efforts by the Center for International Education. The Center for International Education (CIE) strives to serve as a home base for international students, where they feel comfortable and safe. The CIE operates with four full-time staff members dedicated to supporting and leading
new international orientation, F-1 visa advising, social and educational programming, and peer-to-peer connections via a peer mentor program. Additionally, the CIE leads and implements the curriculum associated with our required first-semester experience course, titled Introduction to American College Culture. The various international student support efforts mentioned above and organized by CLC’s CIE have led to an average international student persistence rate of over 80% for the past four years.

I chose this research site as I believed it would be rich with information. CLC is one of the few community colleges in the state actively engaged in the recruitment of international students. CLC is also unique in that, unlike most community colleges in the state of Illinois, it has a center dedicated to supporting international students. Thus, CLC may provide valuable information on ways to support international students at community colleges. In addition, as director of the Center for International Education at CLC, I had easy access to the research site and research participants.

Participants

As is common in qualitative research, I used purposeful sampling to select participants best suited to gain insights and understanding related to the case explored (Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Eligible participants were international students at the College of Lake County. International students were recruited with the help of the institution’s Center for International Education (CIE) and through various email invitations and advertising of the opportunity within the CIE office. In ensuring that experiences were gathered at different stages of acculturation, I strove to obtain a diverse sample representing international students from
various countries and in different stages of their degree progress at CLC. Twelve participants responded to the call for participants. After interviewing the 12 participants, I reached data saturation, the point when new data no longer yields new insights (Creswell, 2018); thus, additional recruitment of participants was not needed.

Participants in this study were nine female and three male students, ranging in age from 18 to 64 years and representing a variety of country and geographic regions. Table 1 shares additional demographic information of the participants, who are organized in the table based on the order in which they were interviewed. Included in the table is students’ self-reported comfort level with English, which was determined based on the student response to the question, “Are you comfortable conversing in English?” Responses were a simple “yes” or “no.” Participants were assigned a pseudonym following the data collection to protect confidentiality.
Table 1

Demographic Information of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender (M/F)</th>
<th>Nationality/Geographic Region</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Semesters at CLC</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Comfortability with English (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do-woon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alesha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha-yoon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes participants with one interview only

Data Collection

To gain an in-depth understanding of the case, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant. Interviews, which lasted anywhere from 40 to 70 minutes, focused on the acculturation experience of the students through exploration of how various institutional attributes affected their adjustment. Conducting two interviews provided the
opportunity to follow up on what was said during the first interview through a second conversation, thus allowing for a more in-depth understanding of students’ experiences. The first round of interviews took place from mid-March through the beginning of April and included all 12 participants. The second round of interviews round included 10 of the original participants and occurred in the middle of June. I was unable to conduct second interviews with two participants as they had left the country due to Covid-19. I decided to still include data from initial interviews of these two participants, as they added valuable insights to the overall findings. The data from the interviews was collected through memos, notes, and digital recordings, which were later transcribed.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis occurred simultaneously (Creswell, 2018). Throughout the interviews, I engaged in memoing, which greatly assisted and guided the organization of the final themes. As a descriptive case study my goal was to explore the acculturation experience of international students and focus specifically on how aspects such as the academic environment, socialization, and institutional culture affected their acculturation. Consistent with multiple case study analysis (Yin, 2014), data analysis consisted of within-case and cross-case analysis. For the within-case analysis, I reviewed the two interview transcripts with the same participant and developed a narrative describing the participants’ acculturation experiences. I compared these narratives to the memos I had created right after the interviews and revised the narrative as needed. For the cross-case analysis, I went through multiple rounds of coding in an effort to compare students’ narratives and develop a set of themes. I allowed codes to emerge from the
data, though my knowledge of the theoretical framework shaped my analysis. As themes emerged, I went back to my interview transcripts – using the constant comparative method of data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) – to ensure that these themes accurately reflected the students’ experiences. In a last round of data analysis, I looked for negative cases and disconfirming data and revised themes as needed.

**Trustworthiness**

To ensure the trustworthiness of my findings, I used thick descriptions, shared my positionality as a researcher, and conducted member checks (Creswell, 2018). First, I utilized rich, thick descriptions to convey findings (Creswell, 2018). I provided a description of the case in the methodology section and shared quotes from interviews to showcase data that led to the development of my themes. Second, I reflected on how my positionality might have affected the research process (Creswell, 2018). My role as the director of the CIE may have shaped my relationships with the participants. To ensure that students felt comfortable sharing their experiences, I phrased all interview questions neutrally and paid close attention to the tone of my voice, facial expressions, and body language. I also made sure to ask constructive follow-up questions to get more insights into students’ experiences.

Finally, I used member checks to gather feedback from those interviewed regarding the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I shared emerging themes with participants at the beginning of the second interview and asked for feedback on those themes. This process also led to ensuring that the subsequent follow-up interview was productive and purposefully built off the initial responses (Creswell, 2018). Following the second interview, I emailed themes to get
feedback on the unique questions asked during the second interview. Overall, participants agreed with the findings and few changes were made following each round of member checks.

Results

Six broad themes pointing towards necessary supports emerged from the data: importance of support during transition and onboarding, English language challenges as a mediator of acculturation, using a positive outlook to overcome acculturation challenges, faculty members and academic support services supporting acculturation, shared responsibility in connecting with domestic students, and the impact of creating and sustaining a welcoming institutional environment.

Importance of Support During Transition and Onboarding

A general level of uncertainty regarding CLC, the greater Chicago area, and the level of support expected on campus perpetuated both frustrations and excitement among the participants as they traversed through their initial experiences on campus. International students, whether well traveled or leaving the comfort of their country for the first time, expressed a general concern regarding their adjustment to their new environment. For example, Emily, a student from Brazil, shared:

I always [knew] college would be hard, especially if you don't speak a bit of the language, um, as a first language. And I thought I'd have more time to, to hang out with people to, you know, meet other students and all that. That didn't happen because college [as an international student] is really hard and it takes a lot of your time.

Participants like Emily believed they would have more time to adjust before beginning classes and to connect with domestic students. Emily, however, realized that there was little time to do
so prior to the beginning of the semester, and once classes started, Emily, whose first language was not English, did not have many opportunities to connect with domestic students or learn about the area as coursework and studying took up most of her time.

Some participants also expressed doubts regarding the level of support they would receive once arriving on campus. Eddy, a student from Guatemala, shared:

I didn't expect to have that much support for an international student, you know, because maybe...in my country there are international students. I don't know. I've never noticed that. So, I never knew before that it was like a big thing to support international students until I came [to CLC] and I saw that there was like a whole office dedicated to supporting us.

Participants like Eddy were all shocked to receive so much support at CLC. Eddy, who had not been aware of resources for international students in his country, had not realized that an office dedicated to supporting international students would exist on a community college’s campus.

Similarly, Chloe, a student from France, shared:

[The CIE] has been incredible since the first day I came as an international student for orientation. I think orientation days were amazing. The CIE really made sure to create these connections between all the students and also with the staff, from the CIE.... I couldn’t survive without the CIE.

Chloe appreciated the activities provided by the CIE at the start of the semester as they allowed her to get to know students as well as staff. Knowing that she had that support and having made some of these connections, Chloe felt more prepared to face the challenges of being an international student. Many participants even noted the importance of making connections with the CIE before arriving on campus in order to mitigate anxiety and fear associated with studying abroad. For example, Allison, a student from Cambodia, met a staff member from the CIE at a recruitment event. She explained:
So we talked to [the CLC recruiter] and that's when I told my dad that's the school that I want to go...I don't know why I like connected with [the recruiter so well] ...but [I could tell] she really cared about you...not like at a schools that we talked to that...they don't care about you at all.

Her positive interactions with the CIE recruiter solidified Allison’s choice to attend CLC and was crucial to ensuring she felt prepared and happy with deciding to attend CLC. Interactions like the one Allison had were important to overcome some of the anxiety about coming to a foreign country and getting used to new surroundings.

**English Language Challenges as a Mediator for Acculturation**

Participants’ lack of English language skills shaped their acculturation experiences, but often also related to their interest in attending college in the United States in the first place. Some participants explained that while they knew they would be studying in an unfamiliar linguistic environment, the actual lack of English made adjustment challenging. For example, Do-woon, from South Korea, came to the U.S. with limited command of English but described his plan to study in the United States as a simple goal for his future so that he could communicate with people and be a global citizen.

I think as we live in [a connected world] and I should know how to interact [with] people globally. And in order to do that...you have to know how to communicate with those people. And obviously English is the language that we commonly speak in the world. So I wanted to learn English and I thought living in a country which speaks English will be best for me.

Participants like Do-woon decided to study in the United States primarily because they wanted to improve their English. While participants were thus motivated to improve their English speaking skills, the language barrier was a major hindrance for a smooth acculturation process. Isabella, a
student from Colombia, echoed the sentiment shared by Do-woon and her fellow international students:

For me, like my, my point of view [the biggest challenge for international students] will be language, the language barrier. I think. And...I'm talking about a personal thing because I will say that [others] might have learned English since they were little and they had English classes since they were little, like, they are so comfortable and they may have another challenge, but [for those learning English as they arrive in the U.S.], I will say that that will be like the biggest challenge...Just getting to feel comfortable, even though you don't speak perfectly, like just talking to people, that that will be the biggest challenge.

Isabella felt that for students like her, who had limited English language skills when arriving in the U.S., the language barrier was the biggest challenge. Feeling insecure about their English language skills, participants like Isabella struggled to engage in conversations with others. These language barriers led to worries about fitting in. For example, Eddy from Guatemala shared:

I mean I knew [some] English and I was practicing it, but then people notice, I guess it's very clear when you have an accent...So my first classes, I do remember that, um, people were talking slang and words I didn’t know...it was a little tough maybe [inside and] outside of class...I didn't understand...how to speak to fit in better.

In attempting to acculturate, Eddy mentioned that a big part of his personality is his humor and navigating jokes in a second language is difficult. This barrier of not being able to connect with peers the same way he normally would in Guatemala forced him to try and alter what he believed to be part of his cultural identity; however, even this effort created different barriers and possible feelings of not being connected or engaged in either culture.

Chloe’s initial adjustment to U.S. college culture and American culture in general was particularly stressful as she navigated using English in an academic setting for the first time. Chloe recalled an experience related to her command of English in the second week of classes with an American student that pushed her backwards in her adjustment:
I had an experience with a girl who...said she wanted to be my friend and she [was] American, but actually, she just took me out with her friends just because she wanted them to listen to my funny French accent.

This experience caused Chloe to shy away from speaking up among her peers for several weeks and added several layers of acculturative stress.

**Ensuring a Positive Outlook on the Acculturation Experience**

While each international student participant mentioned various strategies they implemented to mitigate acculturative stress and to acculturate to their new environment, the resounding theme that came through was that of establishing and maintaining a positive outlook and accepting the truth that they were no longer in their home country. Alesha shared:

> Whatever you had in your mind before [about the U.S.]...it's not going to be the same. It doesn't make sense to build up all these ideas based on what you see on TV. So if you [go] to a culture or a different country, what you see on TV...I would just say, you know, get rid of that. You have to have an open mind and see how people in your new culture live first...start to measure your experiences against your own culture and decide if you want to commit... [International students] can tend to want to live in the past, right? [Students] want to live in your own culture, but if you tend to live in your own culture, you will not be able to embrace the culture you are already in, you know, keep longing for home does not make sense...you need to re remind yourself of where you are.

Alesha quickly realized a change in her mindset was necessary in order to be successful in her new environment. She noticed that her expectations on her experiences, which had been based on what she saw on TV, did not match reality and she needed to establish her own positive mindset regarding the U.S. and her new home.

Julia mentioned focusing on all of the positive opportunities that come from studying abroad:

> There's a lot of opportunities to experience new things, [like] becoming a part of a student body that is diverse. Being an international student and being among
another...group of students that I wouldn't normally have had the opportunity to be around. You learn a lot about other people, [rather than if I] had I stayed in Canada and gone to school.

While going through acculturation, Julia realized that the experience she would have and the people she would meet would be culturally enlightening and a life-changing experience. Her personal acculturation strategies involved keeping an open mind and ensuring that she approached the cultural stressors as learning and personal growth opportunities.

The positive outlook, as evident with most of the participants, served as a catalyst that spilled over to influence both the academic and social experience during the acculturation process at CLC. Ha-yoon mentioned, “Confidence [in yourself] is key. You need to achieve a balance between who you are as a person in your country, into who you are in American culture.” Ha-yoon attributes her ability to find that balance as a key foundation to which she built acculturation success for herself. Emily shared, “[International students] should try to have American friends and…embrace everything. [International students should] come, open [their] mind, embrace everything, but also don't forget where you're from.” Emily and Ha-yoon’s sentiments of being true to one’s self while also leaning into acculturation with an open mind was a sentiment broadly shared among the participants.

Faculty Members and Academic Support Services Supporting Acculturation

While some participants mentioned building meaningful relationships with instructors was not common in their home countries and cultures, many indicated having positive experiences with CLC faculty. Julia, a student from Canada, shared:

[One professor] always made a point to try to throw in little Canadian tidbits for me, like stuff that I knew everything about. And the other students were kind of like, what the
heck is he talking about? But, I took two classes, two semesters in a row, with this professor. And even like every other time I see him in the hallway, he'll always stop, you know, remembers me by first and last name.

Having her instructor go out of his way to make her feel welcome seems to have meant a lot to Julia. Julia’s experience represents how important it is for international students to establish their own cultural identities to connect with professors.

Isabella highlighted her appreciation of being able to connect with her professors:

I think that was so surprising to me was the relationship between professor and student. And that for me was so hard at the beginning because in Columbia your professor is like, you [have to] respect so much. Like you need to ask permission to talk. There is no like, e-mail [communication]. No, it's like, so there is so much respect…there is [much] respect here…but I feel that there is a closer relationship with the professors…it’s more relaxed…it’s different…and shocking.

The openness created between faculty and student communication resulted in Isabella feeling relaxed, appreciated, and heard in her new academic setting.

In other cases, faculty members took on mentor and key support roles as the students adjusted to their new academic environment. Eddy shared:

At the end of the semester, um, I was struggling a little bit with which classes…to choose for the next semester...So, um, because I kept a good relationship with this professor…I thought that maybe he could help me on that, you know, so I reached out to him, um, for an advice of how to choose my classes and everything...[because of] the good relationship I had with him during the semester, he was able to help me. And also the next semester…I asked him for some advice…and that support is like constant, you know, I've talked to him [and] I stopped by his office. So, it was a good relationship that I made...He's been a mentor for me in every other aspect, you know, not, not only in his classes, so I do appreciate that.

Eddy highlighted key faculty member engagement as a reason for feeling connected to and supported on campus. Eddy’s ability to reach out to his faculty members and various other avenues of support positively impacted the acculturation experience.
Some students mentioned they felt their presence in the classroom presented the faculty members a unique challenge to address and, for the most part, were addressed with inclusive and supportive methods. With the language barrier it was interesting to see that so many of the participants were actively seeking out, and feeling comfortable seeking out, meaningful connections with their instructors. Emily mentioned that one of the hardest experiences she went through was having a professor who didn't understand her acculturation process and the language barrier she experienced during her first semester:

Maybe [the professor] never had an international student before and he didn't know how it would be. It was my first semester. My anxiety was level a thousand, and he didn't know how to deal with all that. And after that he'd helped me. But it took a long time...a few F’s on test to even convince him. I told him, “Hey, listen to me. I am a good student. I study, I do good. Can you, you know, um, listen to what I have to say [and know] that English is not my first language. But if you give me an opportunity, I'll show you that I want to learn. I want to be better, I want to grow.” And that's what he did at the end.

Emily’s resilience paid off and her outreach to the faculty member yielded additional support and understanding from the professor. The positive outcome of providing a real teachable moment for both the student and the faculty member led to a positive outcome that benefited both parties.

An additional common theme surrounding the academic experience’s influence on acculturation was the myriad of support services to which the international students had access on campus. Eddy commented on tutoring:

The Tutoring Center, I will say it helped me a lot. Like, um, my first semester I was still struggling with English. I decided to take math and...reading math problems in English, it was like super hard. And then sometimes I wouldn't understand the question that they were asking...and then you don't want to like ask in class because everybody gets it. So it kind of, you [don’t want to] slow the class down, ...And I have that support system [in the Tutoring Center], I mean, why not take [advantage of it] if you have time.
The Tutoring Center helped Eddy to mitigate the acculturative stressors of a new academic and linguistic environment by providing an additional outlet to seek help, specifically with his English comprehension related to math. Alesha also heavily relied on the Tutoring Center:

I was doing anatomy and to do anatomy, you need a second person. And when I went [to the Tutoring Center], you know, the person was able to help me with my anatomy, and I was able to finish it on time. So it helps you with time management. Let me just put it that way. It helps you to get, you know, you to the next space of your work quickly. So it's a great support system.

Alesha was able to rely on the Tutoring Center to assist with her time management as she juggled her acculturation.

The two essential services expressed by each international student participant were that of the CLC Library and the CLC Tutoring Center. While the services provided by these two areas are dedicated to the entire student body, the international students in this study identify their assistance as a key player in their acculturation journey

**Shared Responsibility in Connecting with Domestic Students**

The main theme that addressed how socialization and interpersonal relationships affect acculturation was interaction with domestic students. Alex, from Honduras, mentioned a lack of ownership on his part in terms of fully integrating with American culture and students: “I didn't give my best effort to connect with the domestic students...I just wish I had done that sooner. I don't know why I kept putting it off.” Participants like Alex note that reaching out and connecting with domestic students was a weak point in their acculturation, but there were also mentions of needing outreach from the domestic students as well. Chelsea, a student from the Philippines, expressed her views of a shared acculturation responsibility:
I think [acculturation] is everyone’s responsibility...Domestic students should be more accommodating and understanding of the transition taking place and should seek to help and acculturate international students. I think the instructors...should be more...sensitive to this kind of... environment...where there is friction…That's very important to international students.

Chelsea believed that in order for acculturation to be a success, both sides must be open to building meaningful relationships. Chloe echoed Chelsea’s sentiments:

[An international student] can make as much effort as you can try to make to make the acculturation easier. But if the people are not willing [to reciprocate] in front of you, it's not going to work. So I think it's important that it comes from both sides...if both students are actually open to know more, because if you, you meet someone and start talking and start asking enough questions, and then…the person is just answering and there's no exchange…It's not going to work.

Acculturation tied to socialization was widely viewed as a shared responsibility; however, in general, the international students mentioned outreach and connecting with American students have been difficult to foster. Ha-yoon highlighted this issue as one of the greatest challenges affecting acculturation:

For me making friends [with domestic students], um, when I come here, like, before this spring semester, I have only international students, friends, but now I have a few more domestic friends...So totally for me is, is really greatest challenge. Yeah. Making friends [with domestic students] and then, uh, spending time with them.

Ha-yoon’s mention that making friends as a major challenge to acculturation points to the need of structured interactions between the two groups. While many of the participants expressed concern regarding establishing friends with domestic students, suggested programmatic efforts to help foster connections between the groups with a driving force of socialization and language were well received.

Impact of Creating and Sustaining a Welcoming Institutional Environment
Study participants all expressed the essential role a Center for International Education, or any dedicated international student support office, plays in the acculturation of international students. For example, Eddy (Guatemala) shared:

If [the CIE] office was not there, I really don't know where, where would I be? You know?...Even the fact that they had peer mentors that were international students and they're from different cultures and there was one that could speak my language and could help me, uh, when I needed it. It was very comforting. And also, I guess the orientation week for me was like super comforting to come into the room and finding my flag, my name, meeting other students...So I was very impressed and I'm still impressed with the way that the CIE [supports] the international students.

It was clear from Edd’s and other responses that the CIE promoted a solid foundation for success during the first semester and beyond. Chloe’s experience with the CIE was very similar to Eddy’s:

[The CIE], it's been incredible...I think orientation days were amazing...the CIE really made sure to create these connection between all the students and also with the staff from the CIE. It wasn't just like, okay, we're the staff, here are the students, and we are going to put you there. And it was really a great connection in making sure that we feel welcome, making sure that we have housing, making sure that we were settled to start the semester with very helpful tips with showing us the way in, on campus. Always a great support system if we need it, no matter what if it's one month after we came or two years after we came...I couldn't survive here without the CIE.

Chloe, along with several of the participants, mentioned she knows she would not have remained in the country had it not been for CLC’s Center for International Education. Chelsea noted the service she and the other students receive is what is needed for support:

[The CIE] is great. Yes. I mean, I can't say I can say any better, but I really appreciate the support [given] to international students. Even if, you know, even if I don't go there often, but once I go there, I see the smile and...you know, and that...is what we need, you know, when we come [to the U.S.] and we, you know, come into the office...we need a smile, just a smile and it's enough, you know, I have come to the office for some help and some support, and [the staff is] very supportive. So I feel motivated by this kind of support that is immediately addressed.
The participants expressed that the CIE provides an essential home base for students who are in a new and unfamiliar place and that this spot on campus provides a sense of comfort and familiarity as they begin their cultural exploration.

**Discussion**

This qualitative case study of the acculturation experiences of international students at a community college indicated that participants face similar challenges as their peers at four-year institutions and that adequate support from the institution and the right mindset from students are essential for a successful transition. Similar to experiences of students at four-year institutions (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Lee, 2010; Yao, 2015; Yeh & Inose, 2003), participants of this study specifically felt that cultural differences and lack of structured interactions with domestic students impeded their ability to form relationships with peers, and this contributed to acculturative stress and negatively impacted their feelings towards their host culture. If students are going to approach the acculturation process positively, they must perceive a high level of social support through programmatic and structured social interactions with domestic students (Ra & Trusty, 2017).

The language barrier was also widely discussed as a major obstacle to overcome and was further exacerbated by a lack of interactions between international and domestic students. Proficient command of the English language during the acculturative process is an important factor in deterring the effects of acculturative stress and the participants reflected this sentiment in their responses to overcoming their greatest challenges (Yeh & Inose, 2003). The lack of confidence in using English also spilled over to academic achievement of the participants;
however, the feedback from the students was overwhelmingly positive in relation to the connection with their faculty members (Han et al., 2017; Wu, Garza, & Guzma, 2015).

In relation to studies focusing on international student and faculty interactions, the positive relationships built between community college faculty and international students at CLC was a surprising and welcome find. While studies exist that show some positive descriptions of student-faculty interactions, prominent research done at four-year institutions point to negative faculty--international student interactions and heightened acculturative stress as a result (Adrian-Taylor et al., 2007; Glass et al., 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007). From the student’s perspective, CLC faculty celebrated the diversity in their classrooms, and a strong connection was formed between the two groups. Establishing strong connections with their professors is a necessity to build loyalty to one’s institution, and the ability to understand coursework, teaching methods, and lectures, all with help and acknowledgement from the faculty member, yielded a culturally accepting and diverse environment (Glass, Gesing, Hales & Cong, 2017; Meng et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015).

The guiding theoretical framework for this study was John Berry’s (2006) theory of acculturation. This study is in agreement with previous research in dispelling the U-curve mindset and instead shows that while positive feelings were felt during the initial adjustment period, they were overshadowed by the initial feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Suryani, Huzili, Hussin, & Kaur, 2008). Throughout all interviews and data analysis, it was evident that the international student participants fell into Berry’s fluid framework, experiencing all four categories at varying points in their adjustment. The results of this study point towards a delicate balance each participant
has in accepting U.S. culture while also maintaining their own. The results show the fluidity of Berry’s theory as the different themes expressed in this study pushed and pulled students into and out of the different quadrants.

As students navigated their initial adjustment and faced uncertainty during the onboarding process, it was easy for each to slip into the separation or marginalization quadrant and to hold onto everything familiar; however, most of the participants expressed having a positive mindset in dealing with their new surroundings and a wish to learn from their new experiences. In the end, each participant sought out the best result possible – integration. It was with lots of engagement from faculty, encouragement and support from the CIE, and a community of their international peers that ultimately allowed CLC’s international students in this study to maintain and express their own cultures on campus while also seeking involvement with the larger CLC and U.S. society (Berry et al, 2006). This understanding will drive strategic and purposeful initiatives centered on holistic supports throughout the entire international student experience on college campuses. Understanding international students’ acculturation process at a community college, while applying Berry’s framework, allowed me to identify areas that administrators should be cognizant of when developing and initiating support systems for international students.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the study presents only the perspective of international students. Interviewing others who interact with international students could shed light on the relationships and context of international students’ experiences and thus provide...
valuable insights into possible ways to support this population. For example, participants highlighted a lack of interactions with domestic students and suggested ways to overcome this challenge; exploring domestic students’ perspective on these relationships, or the lack thereof, could help practitioners better understand what to do to foster social interactions between international and domestic students.

Second, two students were not able to participate in the second interview, thus they were not asked certain questions nor were they able to provide feedback on initial findings. As noted earlier, I chose to include these interviews as I believed them to provide valuable insights. However, readers should consider the limited data available for these two participants when interpreting findings.

Finally, students who responded to the study invitation all seem to have had an overall positive experience. Students who had a negative experience may have been reluctant to respond, particularly as I, the director of the CIE, served as the researcher. In my role with the Center for International Education, I have worked to establish a family atmosphere and an office that is open, welcoming, and utilized by many of our students. I am also very much involved in the support and services related to the international students. Due to this connection, it is likely that the participants were hesitant to touch on overly negative experiences because they were cognizant of my potential reactions. It is also likely that due to the nature of the Center for International Education, and the help from the office in the recruitment of participants, that those recruited were already engaged and willing participants in CLC’s international education efforts. Particularly targeting students who shared with other international students or staff that they had a negative experience, reaching out to students who were not retained, and recruiting students
who do not utilize the services of the CIE may provide different perspectives on the acculturation experience of international students and needed support systems.

**Future Research**

The findings from this study indicate, while some aspects of international students’ experience at community colleges are similar to those of their peers at four-year institutions, the community college context also leads to some unique acculturation experiences. Future research should explore international students’ experiences at other northern Illinois community colleges. This study was also unique in that the institution had a center dedicated to international students. Future research should explore the acculturation experience at community colleges that do not have these support systems.

As noted in the limitations, this study yielded participants who self-described as going through a generally positive acculturation experience. Future research should try to target students who self-identify as not going through a positive acculturation process to gain a more comprehensive picture of the support needed.

Additionally, future studies should consider including other constituent groups and diverse perspectives such as the faculty, staff, domestic students, and additional international students. Utilizing the various perspectives from faculty, staff, and domestic students regarding the acculturation of international students would further highlight gaps in support and could highlight the need for cross-cultural training and initiatives.
Implications for Practice

The findings of this study are relevant to several international higher education practices, including community college internationalization, international student support services, faculty development, and institutional capacity to provide intercultural experiences for all students.

The unique experiences shared by the students in the study all pointed to a primary support system as the main reason for the success: the Center for International Education. For the participants in this study, the services and physical space provided by the CIE were essential for student acculturation success. If community colleges are currently without a home base for their international student population, however big or small, this should certainly be a top consideration for moving campus internationalization to the next step. A CIE could be well equipped to address the various challenges expressed by the participants of this study. The CIE would also need to establish additional programming and strategic plans to ensure that connections between international and domestic students allow for language exposure.

Participants of this study also expressed that lower level command of English prevented higher levels of social adjustment. Some participants suggested language circles and social hours to perpetuate a collaborative language community that would also include domestic and native English speakers. Structured programs such as language circles or domestic to international student language buddy programs or even outreach to local families in a friendship family program would assist in providing additional opportunities where the students use English. Seeing as though most of the participants referenced the language barrier as being the biggest one to success, building and implementing similar programs to the ones mentioned above should be a top priority.
Participants of this study sought out strong relationships and support from their faculty members, and most of the participants referenced professors going out of their way to show support. Institutional leadership should thus encourage faculty to engage in these behaviors. Training faculty on the international student experience could foster such engagement from more faculty, as common awareness of what the students are experiencing acculturation could inform pedagogy and classroom support mechanisms. Institutional leadership may also consider how faculty’s support of international students could be rewarded in tenure and promotion systems as another avenue to encourage this outreach.

Professors have the ability to observe international students several times a week in their classes and can easily pinpoint students needing extra support or assistance. In order for the implementation of clear and consistent support mechanisms, this exposure to one another should result in a strong connection between the faculty and the office responsible for supporting the international student body on campus, a Center for International Education. Faculty should feel comfortable reaching out to the Center for International Education regarding any questions on how best to support their international students.

The participants expressed concern surrounding the unknown during their initial arrival and period of adjustment. To mitigate the anxiety associated with moving to and experiencing a new country and culture, international student service offices should provide as much interaction and information as possible during the pre-arrival period. Structuring a pre-arrival orientation to provide easy access to information about the local area, the campus, the international office staff, even what a classroom looks like, will help students mentally prepare for their future home. Implementing robust pre-arrival information will also likely lessen the negative impacts of
language barriers and additional acculturation stressors. Support offices for international students must ensure that programmatic efforts focus on building a social community and enhancing language acquisition opportunities that include interactions between domestic and international students.

**Conclusion**

The results culminating from this study can serve as a foundation on which community college leaders can build purposeful and strategic support systems for international students. Through developing a foundation of international student acculturation experiences, based in the five themes of this study, community college leaders will be able to actively support and drive international student support initiatives from all areas on their campuses. While much research exists about international students’ acculturation experiences at four-year institutions, little is known about the ways these experiences may differ within the context of a community college. The demand for international student enrollment at all institutions – including community colleges - is not likely to lessen, as the need to ensure colleges and universities are producing graduates ready to excel and to be productive in our global society is evident throughout higher education institutions. Thus, as international students at community colleges are an often-overlooked population, there is a strong need to further explore and better understand the needs of these students within the unique context of community colleges (Zhang, 2016).
CHAPTER THREE: REPORT OF FINDINGS

Executive Summary

This study strove to provide institutional leadership at community colleges with a foundation of knowledge and strategies to improve international student access, retention and success and to address the gap in the current literature on community college international student acculturation. Specifically, the purpose of the case study was to explore international students' acculturation process at a community college in hopes of better understanding how community college professionals can support international students as they face the acculturation process. Grounded in Berry’s acculturation framework and using qualitative methodology (see Appendix A), the following research question and five subsidiary research questions guided this study.

Research Question

How do international students at the College of Lake County experience the acculturation process?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How do CLC’s international students experience the transition and onboarding to CLC?
2. What influences the different acculturation experiences CLC international students have?
3. How does the academic experience of CLC’s international students affect acculturation?

4. How does socialization and interpersonal relationships factor into the international student experience at CLC?

5. How does CLC’s institutional culture factor into the international student acculturation experience?

This chapter first highlights and introduces the twelve participants of the study through a brief narrative, followed by a presentation of common themes and recommendations based on research findings. Throughout, the Center for International Education at the College of Lake County is referred to as the “CIE.” The research site is referred to as “College of Lake County” or “CLC.”

**Study Participants**

In this study, twelve international students attending the College of Lake County were interviewed. The data for this study was collected via two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews included 12 participants and the second round included 10 participants who were also part of the first round; and all were international students at the College of Lake County pursuing an associate degree. The two participants missing from the second round of data collection was the direct result of COVID-19 disruptions. The following analysis of participants is organized based on the order in which they were interviewed. Table 1 represents the order and provides a snapshot of the demographic information of the participants. Participants in this sample represent a diverse sample of the international student population at CLC.
Additional information provided includes gender, nationality (or region if there was a risk of violating confidentiality), semesters at CLC, first language, and self-reported comfort level with English. For English, participants responded to the question, “Are you comfortable conversing in English?” Responses were a simple “yes” or “no.” Participants of this study were between 18 and 64 years old and were each assigned a pseudonym by the researcher following the data collection to protect confidentiality.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Gender (M/F)</th>
<th>Nationality/Geographic Region</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Semesters at CLC</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Comfort with English (Y/N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do-woon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>French</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eddy</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tagalog</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mei*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily*</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Brazilian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allison</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cambodian</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alesha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ha-yoon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isabella</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes those participants with one interview only*
Study Participants and General Experiences

Participant Do-woon

Do-woon is a South Korean student who is wrapping up his final two semesters at the College of Lake County. Do-woon’s first language is Korean and he is majoring in Computer Information Technology. Do-woon describes his plan to study in the United States as a simple goal for his future so that he could communicate with people and be a global citizen:

I think as we live in [a connected world] and I should know how to interact [with] people globally. And in order to do that...you have to know how to communicate with those people. And obviously English is the language that we commonly speak in the world. So I wanted to learn English and I thought living in a country which speaks English will be best for me.

Do-woon further elaborates that while he initially thought of his plan to study in the U.S. as a simple goal, he quickly realized that not having any command of English and being far from his family, friends, and everything familiar were going to be exceptional challenges.

Do-woon remembers his first semester transition as a tough time but recognizes that the correct mindset is vital in transitioning through the acculturation process. Do-woon’s main advice for his fellow international students is to internally admit and accept that you are in a different country and to take advantage of the available support systems.

As Do-woon reflected back on this acculturation experience at CLC, he noted he felt an overwhelming and unexpected amount of support from the CIE and that the current programs, including new international student orientation, allowed him to participate and to move out of his comfort zone. Do-woon’s strongest suggestion was the need for more structured interactions between international students and domestic/U.S. students. These interactions, Do-woon
mentions, would be a good way to integrate the international students into the CLC and local community.

**Participant Chloe**

Chloe is a French female who just completed her fourth semester at the College of Lake County. Chloe’s first language is French and she is majoring in Early Childhood Education. Her first experience in the U.S. was that of an au pair with a family local to the College of Lake County’s campus. When Chloe’s time with her host family ended, she knew she wanted to stay in the U.S., and her main reason for studying at CLC was the goal of increasing her command of English and to earn an American degree.

Like most international students, Chloe’s initial adjustment to U.S. college culture and American culture in general was stressful. Chloe recalled an experience in the second week of classes when an American student who pushed her backwards in her adjustment:

I had an experience with a girl who...said she wanted to be my friend and she [was] American, but actually she just took me out with her friends just because she wanted them to listen to my funny French accent...That added some stress because after that I just, I didn't want to talk.

Chloe continued to mention how this interaction affected her transition, but she noted how lucky she was to have had some exceptional professors during her first semester who encouraged her to communicate and to share her culture. This was a change for her compared to very formal relationships with teachers back in France. She noted that some CLC professors specifically provided outreach and support because they knew she was an international student. Chloe noted in addition to the support from faculty, it is essential to have a CIE:

I have a place where if I need help, if I just need to talk and chat or anything, I can find people, I can find resources, and it's people that understand me because they're in the same situation. So I feel like, okay, I'm not the only one struggling with this [transition].
Chloe notes that her experience and transition has been a roller-coaster and that the psychological aspect of being abroad and away from all you know is mentally taxing. Finding support systems and making connections, Chloe believes, will greatly assist in facing the challenges that come with acculturation.

Chloe noted one of her strongest passions was to connect with domestic students. One of her proudest accomplishments was the establishment of a new club on CLC’s campus: the F-1 Club. The F-1 Club’s main purpose is to connect American students with the international student body. Like Do-woon, Chloe believes in connecting with domestic students and ensuring that the broader campus community knows that international students exist on campus.

**Participant Eddy**

Eddy is a Guatemalan male who just completed his third semester as a Music major at CLC. Eddy’s first language is Spanish, and the decision for him to study in a different country was fueled by his passion for music.

My major [music] especially in my country is not well supported... But at some point in my life I decided that's what I wanted to do and I wasn't able to receive the education or the support that I needed... in my country. So I was like, okay, if I want to do it and I want to really push myself, I mean I think I need to take a big step and try this process of studying abroad. And that's how I tried to push myself.

Eddy pursued his goal; he is thrilled with his experience at CLC, and he feels appreciated in his study of music.

Even more so than in his major program, Eddy feels supported in all aspects of his daily life in the U.S. When he first arrived, he didn’t expect much support from the college and never knew that some colleges and universities have full offices dedicated to supporting international
students. The support from CLC’s CIE was key in providing Eddy with the courage to develop strong connections with his faculty on campus.

Eddy mentioned that feeling comfortable speaking up in a new academic and linguistic environment was challenging for his first two semesters at CLC. He was very insecure of his accent and command of English at the beginning and found it very hard to express himself while also trying not to embarrass himself. Eddy mentioned that a big part of his personality is his humor and navigating jokes in a second language is difficult. There were times because of the language barrier that he was not being his true self; however, Eddy also mentions powering through and remaining committed to his original purpose for studying abroad, and being proactive in building relationships provides a good support system. Eddy stressed that there is a real need for broader awareness that the international student population exists and this push for awareness would hopefully create a better experience and more connections between international and domestic students.

**Participant Chelsea**

Chelsea is a Filipino second semester student studying Legal Studies, and her first and second languages are Tagalog and Filipino, respectively. Chelsea’s motivation for studying in the U.S. was to pursue the American dream, to get a solid education and credentials to then return to her home country. Chelsea chose CLC because she believed a community college would provide her with a more personal education and a stronger community, and she shared that after only a few months on campus, she believes that she was correct in her assumption.

One of Chelsea’s main concerns and challenges was the physical navigation of such a large campus. Finding her way around a large campus was compounded with insecurities of the
English language and feeling as though native English speakers, some professors specifically, were just as intimidated by the language barrier. This mutual intimidation goes against Chelsea’s views that the process of acculturation is not only the responsibility of the international student.

I think [acculturation] is everyone’s responsibility...Domestic students should be more accommodating and understanding of the transition taking place and should seek to help and acculturate international students. I think the instructors…should be more...sensitive to this kind of... environment...where there is friction…That's very important to international students.

Chelsea attributes the success of her acculturation process to her positive attitude and mindset.

**Participant Mei**

Mei is a female student from China and in her second semester studying Hospitality and Culinary Management. Her first language is Chinese. Mei’s primary reason for studying in the U.S. was to learn English so that additional doors will open for better paying jobs when she returns to China. This is also Mei’s first time out of her country and away from her family, and she was pleasantly surprised by the American culture she has experienced thus far.

Mei’s biggest challenges have been navigating her new linguistic environment and the barriers surrounding basic conversations and relationship building.

[Adjusting] means to be able to chat with American students...using American slang...sometimes I respond in the Chinese way [with slang]...but I don’t know to express in the American slang.

Because of the challenges Mei has faced, her belief is that an easy transition to another culture means fully understanding how to communicate. Following that understanding, everything else, Mei believes, will fall into place. Mei’s biggest piece of advice for international students is to
persevere and get over being nervous so that students can begin to explore their curiosities regarding their new culture.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mei had to return to China, and I was unable to conduct a second-round interview.

**Participant Emily**

Emily is a fifth semester student from Brazil studying Elementary Education. Her first language is Portuguese. Emily’s primary reason for pursuing her education in the U.S. was to better her English and to earn an American degree. In her pursuit of those goals, Emily mentions several times the need for international students to keep an open mind regarding their new cultural home and acculturation, but to also remain true to themselves:

[International students] should try to have American friends and.. embrace everything. [International students should] come, open [their] mind, embrace everything, but also don't forget where you're from.

Emily mentioned that one of the hardest experiences she went through was having a professor who didn’t understand her acculturation process and the language barrier she experienced during her first semester:

Maybe he never had an international student before and he didn't know how it would be. It was my first semester. My anxiety was level a thousand, and he didn't know how to deal with all that. And after that he'd helped me. But it took a long time...a few F’s on test to even convince him. I told him, “Hey, listen to me. I am a good student. I study, I do good. Can you, you know, um, listen to what I have to say [and know] that English is not my first language. But if you give me an opportunity, I'll show you that I want to learn. I want to be better, I want to grow.” And that's what he did at the end.

Emily shared that the support systems provided to her by the college gave her the courage to be resilient and to speak up for herself, which is very difficult in a new cultural, linguistic, and academic environment.
Participant Allison

Allison is a Cambodian first-semester student who is currently exploring her major options at CLC. Her first language is Khmer. It was a life-long dream to study abroad in the U.S., and she believed that this is the primary way to gain independence, to grow in self-confidence, and the ultimate process to go through for self-improvement. Allison reflected on this personal growth and what it means to be successful at CLC:

To become a successful student at CLC, as for me it means that I would get as much knowledge as I can from the professor, and of course the good grades. And also meeting new people and [to] try to explore...and adapt to the culture.

Allison’s success has been supported by her peer mentor, although she mentions that she still feels like an outsider in her new cultural environment. Allison believes this feeling comes from how challenging it is to speak to and culturally communicate with domestic students - a topic she deems the greatest challenge for international students at CLC.

Participant Alesha

Alesha is a Caribbean first-semester student studying Health and Wellness Promotion at CLC. Her first language is English. Her goal of improving her country in the future is the primary force driving her choice to study in the U.S. and to gain a globalist perspective through international education. Alesha shared some solid foundational knowledge that she has applied in ensuring she has a productive and balanced acculturation experience:

[International students] can tend to want to live in the past, right? [Students] want to live in your own culture, but if you tend to live in your own culture, you will not be able to embrace the culture you are already in, you know, keep longing for home does not make sense...you need to re remind yourself of where you are.
Alesha’s approach helped her deal with some negative aspects of her adjustment to CLC and to the U.S., most notably issues with cultural communication misunderstandings. Even with some pitfalls, Alesha commends CLC for their support of international students.

**Participant Alex**

Alex came to CLC from Honduras. He is studying Computer Science and is finishing his sixth and final semester. His first language is Spanish. Alex’s primary reason for studying in the U.S. was the reputation of the higher education system. Alex mentions several support systems that helped in adjustment and was pleased with the support he received, but he mentions some lack of ownership on his part in terms of fully integrating with American culture and students: “I didn't give my best effort to connect with the domestic students. I just wish I had done that sooner. I don't know why I kept putting it off.”

Alex further reiterated that promoting an inclusive environment is key, and recognizing that we need to build collaborative campuses and avoid an us vs. them mentality is one big step to making sure international students feel welcomed. While Alex feels as though his time at CLC has been successful, he regrets limited interaction with professors and domestic students and recognizes that this has hindered his ability to feel a part of the society in which he lives.

**Participant Ha-yoon**

Ha-yoon is a South Korean fourth-semester student studying Music Performance at CLC. Her first language is Korean. Ha-yoon came to the U.S. to learn jazz music skills, as she is aware of the history that the U.S. has with Jazz. She was also attracted to the U.S.’s reputation for excellence in higher education, particularly the community college model of open access and
affordability. This is in addition to wanting to grow her English language skills in a welcoming and diverse environment.

Ha-yoon noted the various influential support systems available to all international students on CLC’s campus but highlighted the need for additional English language support:

You know, we really, really need to get better in English. I think that's really, really important. Like, even though [some international students] started from the ESL courses...we [still] really need help to learn how to speak and how to write...I used the Tutoring Center a lot, but I hope for the international students, there is better communication circle [programs] to help with our adjustment. Like we can adjust, we can separate the people [into] similar levels...and then we can make a community...and then [we can] improve [our] communication skills.

While Ha-yoon is grateful for her experience, she still feels as though she is an outsider in the U.S. She mentions one reason for this is that her command of English has prevented her from overcoming what she believes is the greatest challenge for international student acculturation: making friends and forming a social bond with those who are not international students.

**Participant Isabella**

Isabella is a Colombian student in her second semester studying Graphic Design at CLC. Her first language is Spanish. The main motivation behind her choice to study in the U.S. was the pursuit of learning English in order to get a better job back in her home country. Isabella mentions that English isn’t widely taught in Colombia, but in order to land a good job, the expectation is that applicants have a strong command of English.

Isabella feels as though she has gone through an enriching acculturation process, and while her experience has been rewarding, it was not without struggles.

Well yeah, for me the beginning was really hard because it was so hard for me to find a place to live. I even cry and one day I was like, Oh my gosh, I'm just going to go back after two weeks. So it was so hard to find a place to live. It was so hard [because] you don't have a credit... I mean I, I'm no one here. Like there is no guarantee for you to be
able to pay for a place. I didn't have a roommate. I didn't know how to pay everything by myself. That was so hard. And then classes were starting.

Isabella highlighted some common stressors many international students face at the beginning of their time in the U.S. and was very open regarding her person struggles and triumphs throughout the acculturation process.

**Participant Julia**

Julia is a Canadian student in her fourth semester at CLC studying Pre-Medicine. Her first language is English. Julia’s primary reason for studying in the U.S. was to join her U.S.-based family members, which include her three children. This is in addition to her childhood dream of working in some capacity in the healthcare field. She’s also keenly aware of the opportunities that exist if one pursues their higher education in the U.S.

There's a lot of opportunities to experience new things, [like] becoming a part of a student body that is diverse. Being an international student and being among another...group of students that I wouldn't normally have had the opportunity to be around. You learn a lot about other people, [rather than if I] had I stayed in Canada and gone to school.

Julia further highlighted the need for students to accept where they are from and to dispel any notions related to direct comparisons between countries and cultures. Her personal acculturation strategies involved keeping an open mind and ensuring that she approaches the cultural stressors as learning and personal growth opportunities.

**Common Themes**

This study involved twelve participants from Brazil, Canada, the Caribbean, China, Colombia, France, Guatemala, Philippines, and South Korea. A brief snapshot of each participant was presented above to provide a foundation of the participant backgrounds, goals,
and struggles. While each international student provided examples and stories accounting for very diverse experiences, some commonalities were evident. The various responses recorded were also truthful, informative, heartfelt and clearly defined each individual’s goal to assist future international student populations at the College of Lake County.

While CLC is an educational institution, much more than academic experiences are felt and experienced by the international student population. Table 2 serves as a visual key in representing the common themes emerging of the study. The common themes are placed with the corresponding research question. The five sections are International Student Experiences with Transition and Onboarding to CLC, Influences of the Acculturation Experience, the Role of the Academic Experience on Acculturation, the Role of Socialization and Interpersonal Relationships on the Student Acculturation Experience, and the Impact of Institutional Culture on the Acculturation Experience (Table 2). The following section highlights common findings related to the research questions and introduces recommendations for CLC, in addition to other community college international programs, for the overall enhancement and betterment of the international student experience on U.S. community college campuses.
**Guiding Research Question:** How do international students at the College of Lake County experience the acculturation process?

1. **How do CLC’s international students experience the transition and onboarding to CLC?**
   - General Feelings of Uncertainty
   - Experience with the CIE

2. **What influences the different acculturation experiences CLC international students have?**
   - Language Barrier/Unfamiliar Linguistic Environment
   - Establishing a Positive Outlook Regarding Acculturation

3. **How does the academic experience of CLC’s international students affect acculturation?**
   - Rapport with Professors
   - Available and Known Support Systems Outside of the CIE

4. **How does socialization and interpersonal relationships factor into the international student experience at CLC?**
   - Interaction with Domestic Students

5. **How does CLC’s institutional culture factor into the international student acculturation experience?**
   - Need for a CIE and Home Base for International Students

---

**International Student Experiences with Transition and Onboarding to CLC**

The main themes identified that address the international student experience with transition and onboarding involved the following: General Feelings of Uncertainty, Positive
Interactions with CIE, and Addressing Misconceptions of the U.S. The following subsections explore the student’s initial reactions, transition, and onboarding to U.S. culture and CLC’s campus. Included in this section are interview excerpts that further highlight and explore the importance of each common theme.

General Feelings of Uncertainty

One of the CIE’s foundational goals in international student recruitment is recruiting to retain. In aspiring to meet this goal, all international student recruitment outreach is meant to inform and manage expectations of incoming international students. In this vein, the CIE hopes to recruit and welcome international students who will arrive on campus with a solid understanding of their environment before setting foot on campus, thus lessening the impact of acculturative stress that comes with adjusting to and being a part of a new cultural environment. Even with the goal of mitigating the unknowns, cultural adjustment was not easy for the international students in this study.

Each international student participant, whether they had been in the U.S. for one semester or five, expressed a continued longing for anything familiar to their home country or home culture: family, friends, holidays, geography, communication and socialization styles, government and political organization, and climate, to name a few. While each articulated they understood what they were leaving behind, two common themes emerged for their justification to study abroad in the United States: increasing command of the English language and to benefit from enrolling in the world’s most reputable higher education system. All but two of the participants had a primary goal of increasing their knowledge of the English language, but all of
the participants expressed their strong desires to get an American education, as they believed a U.S. credential would provide additional opportunities for self-improvement and career exploration when they returned to their home countries. Alesha’s goal of reaching beyond her developing country in order to become a global citizen encompasses most of the other participants' feelings of wanting to extend their personal knowledge base to be better off when they return home.

In terms of additional knowledge on what to expect from their educational experience at CLC and in the U.S., little was expressed. It was evident that participants, while some well traveled and others having left the comfort of their home countries for the first time, had little to no knowledge of the College of Lake County, the surrounding area, or how much time would soon be devoted to their studies. Emily, along with many others, thought there would be plenty of time to adjust and to get to know CLC and the surrounding area, but soon realized after her arrival that this would not be the case. Emily mentioned that she knew it would be hard, but she thought she would have more time to hang out and meet others and to explore the area. That did not happen for her, or the others, right away because the demands of their courses, whether ESL focused or academic focused, monopolized most of their time in their initial months in the U.S. This level of uncertainty regarding CLC, the greater Chicago area, and the level of support they expected to find on campus perpetuated both frustrations and excitement.

Each of the participants expressed doubts regarding the level of support they would receive once arriving on campus. Eddy’s feedback regarding the uncertainty of support echoed among his fellow students:

I didn't expect to have that much support for an international student, you know, because maybe...in my country there are international students. I don't know. I've never noticed
that. So, I never knew before that it was like a big thing to support international students until I came [to CLC] and I saw that there was like a whole office dedicated to supporting us.

He was not the only one pleasantly surprised by the Center for International Education. Additional participants, Do-woon, Mei, Allison, Alex and Chelsea, were all shocked to receive any support past basic paperwork. Most did not expect any assistance or for a CIE office to even exist on a community college’s campus.

**Positive Experience with the CIE**

The Center for International Education at the College of Lake County is a vibrant and critical component for ensuring CLC graduates students who are ready to be productive members of our global society. One of the primary responsibilities of the CIE team is to enable international students to come to the U.S. for access to higher education, to stay in legal status, and to pursue their academic and career goals. The CIE also organizes and structures all recruitment, onboarding and transition support for the international student population. When questioning the participants regarding the onboarding support from the CIE, a pattern of necessity emerged. Each participant noted the availability and the support from CIE staff as being indispensable. For example, Chloe shared:

> [The CIE] has been incredible since the first day I came as an international student for orientation. I think orientation days were amazing. The CIE really made sure to create these connections between all the students and also with the staff, from the CIE...I couldn’t survive without the CIE.

Chloe’s sentiment was shared among all of the participants, and many even noted the importance of making connections with the CIE before arriving on campus.
The aforementioned lack of knowledge that CLC international students bring regarding the U.S. and college life in general is somewhat addressed in the CIE’s pre-arrival support systems. Allison further touched on the outreach and support from the CIE as she was deciding where to study abroad last year. Allison, like some of the other participants, met a staff member from the CIE at a recruitment event and, while she knew very little about the U.S., having never left Cambodia, her very positive interactions with the CIE recruiter solidified her choice to attend CLC on the spot. Allison noted that the support only got better as time went on, but her initial interaction with CLC instilled confidence and reassurance:

So we talked to [the CLC recruiter] and that’s when I told my dad that’s the school that I want to go...I don't know why I like connected with [the recruiter so well] ...but [I could tell] she really cared about you..not like at a schools that we talked to that...they don't care about you at all.

This expression of support at the decision point for Allison was crucial to ensuring she felt prepared and happy with deciding to attend CLC. Following the stressful process of choosing the institution to study in the U.S. is the starting point for acculturative stress. For most of CLC’s international students it was evident that acculturative stress began with the college application and visa process but extended throughout the first several months in the U.S. Most of the participants conveyed feeling more confident with their new surroundings after interactions with the CIE staff in e-mails and orientation, in initial advising appointments, or by participating in various programming efforts organized by CIE staff members.

**Influences on the Acculturation Experience**

The main themes identified that address the influences on the acculturation experience involved the following: Language Barriers in an Unfamiliar Linguistic Environment and
Ensuring the Positive Outlook. The following subsections will apply the common themes through the exploration of shared influences of acculturation. Included in this section are interview excerpts that further highlight and explore the importance of each common theme.

**Language Barriers in an Unfamiliar Linguistic Environment**

Another theme that emerged from the participants centered on how command of the English language affected individual acculturation during their initial adjustments to the U.S. and CLC. Successful navigation of the acculturative process, and in turn the mitigation of acculturative stress, is primarily based on proficient command of English (Yeh & Inose, 2003); additionally, failure to understand or be understood will very likely contribute to acculturative stress (Gomez et al., 2014; Han et al., 2017; Sumer et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The majority of participants in this study, while primarily coming to the U.S. to improve their English speaking skills, all pointed towards the language barrier as a major hindrance to their acculturation.

Ha-yoon, like most of the other participants, struggled with learning English during her first semester at CLC, and because of the lack of English, she also struggled with adapting to and learning about U.S. culture and making friends. Eddy mentioned that his primary method for making friends was through humor, but his lack of English created several barriers when trying to tell jokes or be humorous among his peers. Isabella, along with several participants, listed the language barrier as the greatest challenge facing CLC international students, as they believed language is the first step towards building trust and acceptance among their peers. Isabella highlighted her struggle with acculturation as it related to her command of English:
For me, like my, my point of view [the biggest challenge for international students] will be language, the language barrier. I think. And...I'm talking about a personal thing because I will say that [others] might have learned English since they were little and they had English classes since they were little, like, they are so comfortable and they may have another challenge, but [for those learning English as they arrive in the U.S.], I will say that that will be like the biggest challenge...Just getting to feel comfortable, even though you don't speak perfectly, like just talking to people, that that will be the biggest challenge.

Misunderstandings with communication was the foundation of most initial negative feelings towards American culture as well. Chloe had an experience with an American student who pushed her to speak in front of a group of friends to display her French accent. This experience caused Chloe to shy away from speaking up among her peers and added several layers of acculturative stress. Several students were in Do-woon’s situation and came to the U.S. with little to no command of English. For most of the participants, English is and continues to be the access point to a path towards easing their cultural adjustment.

**Ensuring a Positive Outlook on the Acculturation Experience**

While all international student participants mentioned various strategies they implemented to mitigate acculturative stress and to acculturate to their new environment, the resounding theme that came through was that of establishing a positive outlook and accepting the truth that they were no longer in their home countries. Regardless of what the individual students were experiencing at the time, ensuring a positive mindset regarding the acculturation experience was of top concern. Alesha’s advice for future international students revolved around constantly reminding oneself of where you are and that continuing to live in one’s own culture will not allow for embracing the current culture or situation. Like the other participants, Alesha quickly realized a change in her mindset was necessary in order to be successful in her new environment.
Whatever you had in your mind before [about the U.S.]...it's not going to be the same. It doesn't make sense to build up all these ideas based on what you see on TV. So give one to go to a culture or a different country, what you see on TV. I would just say, you know, get rid of that.

Alesha’s view echoed throughout all of the participants in that it was important to establish their own personal views regarding the U.S. and that most of what they thought they would experience was the result of pop culture or media influences.

It may have been difficult for some, but in terms of mindset, being and staying positive was a top priority for the participants. Mei’s experience centered on being willing to join what she fondly refers to as the “international family” at CLC. Establishing the mindset of being active, positive, and involved is how Mei was able to mitigate her language and social stressors. She, like many other participants, believed that small mindset and personal changes are necessary to fit in with the new environment, and approaching those small changes with a negative scope will lead to the inability to adjust or to be accepted by the host culture. This sentiment was explored with Chelsea’s overall expression that dismissing the new culture just because it is different should be avoided at all costs. A positive outlook, as evident in all of the participants, served as a catalyst that spilled over to influence both academic and social experiences during the acculturation process at CLC.

The Role of the Academic Experience on Acculturation

The main themes identified that address the influences of the academic experience on acculturation are the following: Rapport with Professors and Available Support Systems Outside of the CIE. The following subsections will apply the common themes through the exploration of
shared influences of the academic experience. Included in this section are interview excerpts that further highlight and explore the importance of each common theme.

**Rapport with Professors**

While some participants mentioned building meaningful relationships with instructors was not something normally culturally possible in their home countries, all of the participants referenced having many positive experiences with CLC faculty. In many cases, the faculty members took on mentor and key support roles as the students adjusted to their new academic environment. Isabella recalled a time when she was in a terrible car accident and her computer was destroyed. She conveyed this information to her professors and one personally checked in on her multiple times throughout the following weeks. Eddy was struggling in some of his courses and with his degree plan, but he was able to get career and course advice through a mentor relationship he was able to establish with a previous professor. Julia mentioned how important it was to establish her own cultural identity to connect with her professors:

[One professor] always made a point to try to throw in little Canadian tidbits for me, like stuff that I knew everything about. And the other students were kind of like, what the heck is he talking about? But, I took two classes, two semesters in a row, with this professor. And even like every other time I see him in the hallway, he'll always stop, you know, remembers me by first and last name.

Julia was not the only student with similar connections with faculty members. With the language barrier it was interesting to see that so many of the participants were actively seeking out, and feeling comfortable seeking out, meaningful connections with their instructors.

Even with the constant language barrier pressure, every participant mentioned feeling comfortable contributing in class at some point, whether it be speaking up in a small group
setting or raising their hands to contribute to the class discussion. Some students mentioned they felt their presence in the classroom presented the faculty members a unique challenge to address, and for the most part were addressed with inclusive and supportive methods. This speaks volumes to the welcoming presence perpetuated by the faculty member leadership over their classrooms and the obvious positive effects this has on the international student’s acculturation to U.S. and college culture. It is evident that CLC faculty want to establish relationships with international students and this has helped the participants of this study walk away from campus knowing that their professors are cognizant of the additional support they may need in and out of the classroom.

Available Support Systems Outside of the CIE

An additional common theme surrounding the academic experience’s influence on acculturation was the myriad of support services to which the international students had access on campus. The two essential services expressed by each international student participant were that of the CLC library and the CLC Tutoring Center. While the services provided by these two areas are dedicated to the entire student body, the international students in this study identify their assistance as a key player in their acculturation journeys. Alex, Do-woon, Ha-yoon, Allison, Isabella, and Chelsea all noted that the tutoring center assisted international students, often whose first language is not English, with proper paper formats and especially grammatical errors, which they say contributed to their academic success. Isabella, Chloe, Allison and Eddy all expressed their appreciation for the additional library services such as checking out computers, access to essential software for their degrees, and the ability to print homework assignments.
The impact that these services have on the international student population should not be underrated. As the students navigated their command of English, with cultural norms and learning a new academic environment, the services mentioned by the participants no doubt played an essential role in mitigating acculturative stress while providing essential support for academic success.

**Socialization and Interpersonal Relationships’ Effects on Student Acculturation**

The main theme that addressed how socialization and interpersonal relationships affect acculturation was Interaction with Domestic Students. The following subsection will apply the common theme through the exploration of socialization and interpersonal relationships’ effects on acculturation. Included in this section are interview excerpts that further highlight and explore the importance of each common theme.

**Interaction with Domestic Students**

A lack of connection between international students and domestic students leads to varying levels of acculturative stress (Chavajay, 2013; Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Yakunina, Weigold, Weigold, Hercegovac & Elsayed, 2013; Yeh & Inose, 2003). In general, the international participants mentioned outreach and connecting with American students has been difficult, but it has been a personal goal to be successful during their time in the U.S. Some even mention that this has been a weak point in their acculturation and that they wish they had tried harder to create interactions and social connections with domestic students. Eddy, Julia, Alex, Allison, Chelsea, and Ha-yoon described their interactions with domestic students being minimal outside of the classroom. This inability to form strong connections likely impacted international
student retention and success on college campuses and is evident in the findings from CLC international students (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

While interaction between international and domestic students has been minimal, the participants expressed that they have been able to establish social support groups among their fellow international students. This support among a group of students all experiencing acculturation together speaks to the community created and perpetuated by the CIE; however, since the participants have not generally been able to effectively form social support systems with domestic students, acculturative stressors were expressed.

The Impact of Institutional Culture on the Acculturation Experience

The main theme that addressed how institutional culture affects acculturation is the following: Need for a CIE and Home Base for International Students. The following section will apply the common theme through the exploration of CLC’s role in the acculturation process. Included in this section are interview excerpts, which further highlight and explore the importance of each common theme.

Need for a CIE and Home Base for International Students

Each participant mentioned the need for an established and supportive office, or CIE, dedicated to international students. Participants reflected on how much the CIE has supported their acculturation process and each mention their journey was heavily influenced by the positive reactions and support that each received from CLC’s CIE. All of the participants point to the support from the CIE as being incredible since the first day or first interaction with a CIE staff
member. In all of the responses, it was clear that the CIE promoted a solid foundation for success during the first semester and beyond. Several of the participants mentioned they know they would not have remained in the country had it not been for CLC’s Center for International Education.

Chloe, Allison, Eddy, Ha-yoon, Do-woon, and Isabella all point to the CIE as being their primary support system. Outside of offering an international student hub and safe space, the CIE’s programs were also mentioned as primary supporters of the participants’ acculturation. The peer mentor program was widely mentioned as being essential to ensuring successful initial adjustment. Eddy’s summary perfectly aligns with all of the other participants in this regard:

If [the CIE] office was not there, I really don’t know where, where would I be? You know?...Even the fact that they had peer mentors that were international students and they’re from different cultures and there was one that could speak my language and could help me, uh, when I needed it. It was very comforting. And also, I guess the orientation week for me was like super comforting to come into the room and finding my flag, my name, meeting other students...So I was very impressed and I'm still impressed with the way that the CIE [supports] the international students.

Eddy, like the rest of the participants, heavily relied on the CIE to keep them informed of campus events, to plan social outings, and as a hub for connecting to their fellow international students. The participants expressed that the CIE provides an essential home base for students who are in a new and unfamiliar place and that this spot on campus provides a sense of comfort and familiarity as they begin their cultural exploration.
Recommendations

The following recommendations based on results of this study are divided into the following three subsections, which include recommendations for international student services, academic services and faculty, and further research.

**Recommendations for International Student Services**

The unique experiences shared by the students in the study all point to a primary support system as the main reason for the success: the Center for International Education. For the participants in this study, the services and physical space provided by the CIE were essential for the student acculturation success. If colleges are currently without a home base for their international student population, however big or small, this should certainly be a top consideration for moving campus internationalization to the next step. A CIE would then be well equipped to address the various challenges expressed by the participants of this study.

The participants expressed concern surrounding the unknown during their initial arrival and period of adjustment. To mitigate the anxiety associated with moving to and experiencing a new country and culture, international student service offices should provide as much interaction and information as possible during the pre-arrival period. Structuring a pre-arrival orientation to provide easy access to information from the local area, the campus, the international office staff, even what a classroom looks like, will help students mentally prepare for their future home. Implementing robust pre-arrival information will also likely lessen the negative impacts of language barriers and additional acculturation stressors.

The language barrier was widely discussed as a major obstacle to overcome, further exacerbated by a lack of interaction between international and domestic students. The CIE needs
to establish additional programming and strategic plans to ensure that connections between international and domestic students allow for language exposure. Participants expressed that lower level command of English hindered their social adjustment. Some participants suggested language circles and social hours to perpetuate a collaborative language community that would also include domestic and native English speakers.

In terms of overall social adjustment, the participants of this study specifically mentioned that cultural differences impeded their ability to form relationships with domestic students, and this contributed to acculturative stress and negatively impacted their feelings towards their host culture (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). If students are going to approach the acculturation process positively, they must perceive a high level of social support through programmatic and structured social interactions with domestic students (Ra & Trusty, 2017). Support offices for international students must ensure that programmatic efforts focus on building a social community and enhancing language acquisition opportunities that include interactions between domestic and international students.

**Recommendations for Academic Services and Faculty**

Each participant of this study indicated heavy utilization of structured CLC academic support centers: tutoring, the writing center, and the library. They each commented that these services are essential and that every student, especially English language learners, should be made aware of these services from their first day on campus. It is also clear that the participants of this study sought out strong relationships and support from their faculty members, and most of the participants referenced professors going out of their way to show support. This relationship among the two groups highlights a key area to both address and to recognize key support systems
Participants referenced that engaged faculty members, who showed an interest in their culture and their choice to study in the U.S., assisted in developing confidence to speak up and contribute in class and with their peers.

Professors have the ability to observe international students several times a week in their classes and can easily pinpoint students needing extra support or assistance. In order for the implementation of clear and consistent support mechanisms, this exposure to one another should result in a strong connection between the faculty and the office responsible for supporting the international student body on campus, a Center for International Education. Faculty should feel comfortable reaching out to the Center for International Education regarding any questions on how best to support their international students.

Participants also expressed appreciation towards faculty members who actively learned about, highlighted, and even integrated their cultures into the course’s curriculum. The diversity international students bring into the classroom pushes the faculty to develop innovative pedagogical techniques and to ensure students are educated through a cultural lens (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). In developing new techniques and in taking a strong interest in the cultures brought to their classrooms by the international students, faculty members create a culturally inclusive and supportive environment. Additional engagement with outreach to international students from faculty members in the classroom will help lessen the effects of acculturative stress and will promote cross-cultural engagement in and outside of the classroom.
Recommendations for Further Research

The findings from this study highlight various challenges in the acculturation process for international students in the U.S. Stemming from this study are the following recommendations for future research:

1. This study took place at a medium-sized, northern Illinois community college. It is therefore impossible to fully comprehend the level at which the findings can be extended to other community colleges or other international student populations. Implementing additional studies at other northern Illinois community colleges would provide essential information and common themes related to the acculturation of Illinois community college international students.

2. Exploring students from additional countries and implementing an overall larger qualitative study could move any future studies towards a stronger generalization of the acculturation experience among the international population.

3. This study yielded participants who self-described as going through a generally positive acculturation experience. An additional study exploring the acculturation of students who self-identify as not going through a positive acculturation process would be beneficial for further understanding the support needed to perpetuate positive acculturation experiences. Additionally, reaching out and including international students who were not retained by the institution, chose to return to their home country, or transferred to different institutions in the U.S. due to a disconnect with the college would provide additional insight.
4. Future studies should consider including other constituent groups such as the faculty, staff, and domestic students. Utilizing the various perspectives from faculty, staff, and domestic students regarding the acculturation of international students would further highlight gaps in support and could highlight the need for cross-cultural training and initiatives.

**Summary**

Four common themes for improving the international student acculturation process emerged from the data. First, the need for improving international student experiences with transition and onboarding. Second, the influences of language barriers and establishment of a positive outlook. Third, the role academic experiences play in acculturation. Fourth, the need to enhance opportunities for socialization and interpersonal relationships. Fifth, the impact of institutional culture on the acculturation experience. This chapter concluded with recommendations based on the common themes and recommendations for further research. These results highlight the various acculturative stressors international students experience on campus and thus provide a foundation for the overall enhancement and betterment of the international student experience on U.S. community college campuses.
CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Purpose Statement

This purpose of this study was to address the gap in the current literature on community college international students and provide institutional leadership with a foundation of knowledge and strategies to improve international student access, retention and success. Specifically, this study explored international students' acculturation process at a community college in hopes of better understanding how community college professionals can support international students as they face the acculturation process. The following research question and five subsidiary research questions guided this study.

Research Question

How do international students at the College of Lake County experience the acculturation process?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How do CLC’s international students experience the transition and onboarding to CLC?

2. What influences the different acculturation experiences CLC international students have?
3. How does the academic experience of CLC’s international students affect acculturation?

4. How does socialization and interpersonal relationships factor into the international student experience at CLC?

5. How does CLC’s institutional culture factor into the international student acculturation experience?

**Executive Summary**

This qualitative study explored the acculturation process of community college international students at the College of Lake County, a community college in northern Illinois. For large proportions of local populations, community colleges are one of the only avenues for accessing higher education; therefore, it is crucial that community college campuses assume a leadership role for advancing international education and by educating their communities, students, and staff regarding the various cultures represented on campus (Boggs & Irwin, 2007). Enrolling and supporting international students provide students in the halls of all community colleges a path towards appreciating and acknowledging diversity in a global context. Through studying a community college international student population, I was able to gain strong foundational knowledge regarding campus initiatives and goals in facilitating successful adjustment and acculturation processes.

Through the exploration of individual student interviews, I was also able to account for and develop common themes related to the various factors affecting individual and group acculturation and adjustment processes. Considering the important contributions international
students at community colleges make to the economy and the diverse environment at community colleges, it was essential to explore the role that community college campuses play in effective academic, social, and cultural support to retain international students and to remain relevant in the international recruitment field (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009). This chapter addresses the conclusions and implications drawn from this study. Also discussed is why this study is relevant to the field of international education, community college leadership, and specifically to the College of Lake County. The following sections comprise the chapter: a) Findings and Implications for Practice, b) Final Thoughts, and c) Summary.

**Findings**

This qualitative case study of the acculturation experiences of international students at a community college indicated that participants face challenges similar to their peers at four-year institutions and that adequate support from the institution and the right mindset from students are essential for a successful transition. In general, the findings of this study build on work already established in terms of what international students require to be successful in navigating their acculturation processes; however, clear recommendations for international student services and academic services, and faculty are evident.

**Finding: Importance of Support During Transition and Onboarding**

The first finding of this study points to the need to ensure that transition and onboarding services for international students are purposefully related to the concerns being brought into the country. Participants of this study described their anxiety and levels of uncertainty as they prepared for their study abroad in the United States and at the College of Lake County. Before
arriving in the U.S., all expressed their desire to pursue a U.S. education and to earn a U.S. diploma in the hopes of opening up more opportunities when they return to their home countries. Even with this strong desire and the knowledge of leaving everything familiar behind, the participants were left with uncertainty regarding support and knowledge of the campus or surrounding area during their initial transition. For most of the participants, in relation to transition and onboarding, it was clear acculturative stress was initiated with the uncertainty of the application, visa, arrival, and onboarding processes and extended throughout various cultural adjustments and interactions as the semester progressed. This uncertainty fueled acculturative stress and negatively affected most of their adjustments during the first semester; however, all participants noted that having a home base for international student support mitigated further stressors and was a source of positive support throughout their adjustment.

The findings from this study points strongly to a need of developing strategic and purposeful support systems as international students begin their initial acculturation journeys. If international student support offices push a strong pre-departure orientation for students and, by doing so, focus on mentally preparing the students for their upcoming acculturation, then much of the anxiety brought on by feelings of uncertainty could and should be mitigated. This study points strongly to the need for international student support offices to develop support programs in the pre-departure stage that connects and flows into the commonly planned orientation and semester programming activities that occur after arrival.

**Finding: Using a Positive Outlook to Overcome English Language Challenges**

The second finding of this study focused on the common influences of acculturation for CLC’s international students. Participants expressed two resounding common influences on
acculturation: the impact of an unfamiliar linguistic environment and the need to establish and maintain a positive mindset. It is well studied that when sojourning, a failure to understand the language and in turn to be understood by the domestic population contributes negatively to acculturation (Gomez et al., 2014; Han et al., 2017; Sumer et al., 2008; Yeh & Inose, 2003). An overwhelming majority of the participants expressed the need to further develop their English and mentioned that their command of English held them back from adjusting, feeling as though they were not integrating with the campus community.

The need to work harder and to realize and comprehend their current struggles, language ability included, was the foundation for the common theme of establishing a positive outlook and accepting their new cultural reality. All of the participants mentioned that their personal drive and goals to look at their acculturation in a positive light influenced how they approached both their academic and social experiences. With English language fluency being a top concern as a catalyst for enhancing interactions, a positive mindset, and in establishing a sense of belonging, this study points to the need for additional structured language support programs. With almost all of the participants citing the language barrier as the top concern for international students, there should be urgent movement in establishing language support circles and additional programming to support language development. With a stronger command of English and support from the institution, international students will feel as though they are able to integrate to the campus community, and in turn, maintaining a positive acculturation mindset is more easily obtainable.
Finding: Role of Faculty Members in Supporting Acculturation and Adjustment

The third finding of this study stresses the importance of the academic experience in relation to acculturation. In terms of the academic experience, the participants of this study overwhelmingly expressed positive experiences and connections with their faculty. Students related feeling supported in their language development in academic courses and pointed to specific faculty members who went out of their way to perpetuate a welcoming spirit in supporting and celebrating the diversity the international students brought to their classrooms. This connectedness and support with and from faculty members was an interesting finding in that international students and faculty have traditionally reported feeling disconnected from one another. This disconnect is often brought on by a faculty member’s assumptions regarding the language ability, the understanding the international student has for Western teaching methods, and the pedagogical frustrations that come along with similar misunderstandings (Redden, 2018).

This study makes a strong case for expanding the already positive interaction had between international students and their professors on CLC’s campus. Future initiatives for international student support should include faculty member engagement and even training on how best to cultivate a welcoming space inside classrooms. Expanding this knowledge base and training would likely yield additional positive interactions between the two groups and would increase international student satisfaction with the development of innovative pedagogical techniques.

Finding: The Importance of Connecting with the Domestic Student Population

The third finding of this study makes strong case for facilitated interactions between international and domestic student populations. Forming strong connections with the domestic
student population will positively impact international student success on college campuses, and this is evident in the findings from this study and others (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). While some of the participants note a need to reach out to domestic students to assist in the acculturation, there were others in this study who viewed acculturation and socialization as a shared responsibility; however, in general, the international students mentioned outreach and connecting with American students have been difficult. A majority of the participants admitted that interactions with domestic students outside of the classroom is minimal; however, several suggest programmatic efforts to help foster connections between the groups with a driving force of socialization and language acquisition. It is clear that interactions between international and domestic student populations on CLC’s campus occurred often, yet primarily were either superficial or restricted to the classroom and educationally focused. To that end, deliberate programmatic efforts to facilitate interactions between domestic and international student populations are needed.

Finding: Impact of Creating and Sustaining a Welcoming Institutional Environment

The fourth finding of this study points to the need of the community to be international-student ready. International students arrive on college campuses with many more needs than their domestic student counterparts. The additional support services needed to ensure a successful acculturation process should not be understated. Study participants all expressed the essential role a Center for International Education (or any dedicated international student support office) plays in the acculturation of international students. It was clear from this study that the CIE promoted a solid foundation for success during the international student’s first semester and beyond. Several of the participants mentioned they know they would not have remained in the
country had it not been for CLC’s Center for International Education. The participants expressed that the CIE provided an essential home base for students who are in a new and unfamiliar place and that this spot on campus provided a sense of comfort and familiarity as they began their cultural exploration; however, it is up to institutional leadership to decide if additional resources and financial expectations outweigh the benefits international students bring to campus. It is in that decision where an institution’s culture can easily be defined as international-student ready.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study are relevant to several international higher education practices, including community college internationalization, international student support services, faculty development, and institutional capacity to provide intercultural experiences for all students. The unique experiences shared by the students in the study all pointed to a primary support system as the main reason for the success: the Center for International Education. For the participants in this study, the services and physical space provided by the CIE were essential for student acculturation success. If community colleges are currently without a home base for their international student population, however big or small, this should certainly be a top consideration for moving campus internationalization to the next step. Staff in a CIE should be well equipped to address the various challenges expressed by the participants of this study. The CIE would also need to establish additional programming and strategic plans to ensure that connections between international and domestic students allow for language exposure. This type of program exploration and development would involve outreach to several other offices on
campus and would positively yield a relationship with the campus’s student activities or student
development offices.

The language barrier was widely discussed as a major obstacle to overcome, further
exacerbated by a lack of interaction between international and domestic students. Any office
designated to support international students must establish additional programming and strategic
plans to ensure that connections between international and domestic students allow for language
exposure. Participants expressed that lower level command of English prevented high levels of
social adjustment. While command of English will vary from student to student, there is a need
to ensure students are provided outlets in which to grow their confidence with English. Some
participants suggested language circles and social hours to perpetuate a collaborative language
community that would also include domestic and native English speakers. Structured programs
such as language circles or domestic to international student language buddy programs or even
outreach to local families and establishing a friendship family program will assist in providing
additional opportunities where the students use and learn English. Seeing as though most of the
participants referenced the language barrier as being the biggest barrier to success, building and
implementing programs similar to the ones mentioned above should be a top priority.

The participants expressed concern surrounding increased anxiety related to the unknown
during their initial arrival and period of adjustment. To mitigate the anxiety associated with
moving to and experiencing a new country and culture, international student service offices
should provide as much interaction and information as possible during the pre-arrival period.
Structuring a pre-arrival orientation to provide easy access to information regarding the local
area, the campus, the international office staff, even what a classroom looks like, will help
students mentally prepare for their future home. Most of the participants in this study mentioned arriving with little to no knowledge of what to expect in terms of support or how a typical academic schedule functions. Implementing robust pre-arrival information will also likely lessen the negative impacts of language barriers and additional acculturation stressors, especially if the student support office can articulate the language support and other support services. Offices for international students must ensure that programmatic efforts focus on building a social community and enhancing language acquisition opportunities that include interactions between domestic and international students. These types of programs, communicated to the students pre-arrival, would undoubtedly lessen anxiety regarding the unknown and would highlight their future campus as being international-student ready.

In terms of overall social adjustment, the participants of this study specifically mentioned that cultural differences impeded their ability to form relationships with domestic students, and this contributed to acculturative stress and negatively impacted their feelings towards their host culture (Hamamura & Laird, 2014; Han, Pistole, & Caldwell, 2017; Yeh & Inose, 2003). If students are going to approach the acculturation process positively, they must perceive a high level of social support through programmatic and structured social interactions with domestic students (Ra & Trusty, 2017). Support offices for international students must ensure that programmatic efforts focus on building a social community and enhancing language acquisition opportunities that include interactions between domestic and international students.

It is also clear that the participants of this study sought out strong relationships and support from their faculty members, and most of the participants referenced professors going out of their way to show support. This was by far one of most surprising finds of this study. This
relationship among the two groups highlights a key area to both address and to recognize key support systems for international students. Participants referenced that engaged faculty members, who showed an interest in their cultures and their choice to study in the U.S., assisted in developing confidence to speak up and contribute in class and with their peers. In developing new techniques and in taking a strong interest in the cultures brought to their classrooms by the international students, faculty members create a culturally inclusive and supportive environment. Additional engagement and outreach from faculty members towards international students in the classroom will help lessen the effects of acculturative stress and will promote cross-cultural engagement in and outside of the classroom. There is also an argument to be made for training faculty on the international student experience, as common awareness of what the students are experiencing with acculturation could inform pedagogy and classroom support mechanisms.

Professors have the ability to observe international students several times a week in their classes and can easily pinpoint students needing extra support or assistance. In order for the implementation of clear and consistent support mechanisms, this exposure to one another should result in a strong connection between the faculty and the office responsible for supporting the international student body on campus, a Center for International Education. Faculty should feel comfortable reaching out to the Center for International Education regarding any questions on how best to support their international students.

Participants also expressed appreciation towards faculty members who actively learned about, highlighted, and even integrated their cultures into the course’s curriculum. The diversity international students bring into the classroom push the faculty to develop innovative pedagogical techniques and to ensure students are educated through a cultural lens (Wu, Garza,
& Guzman, 2015). From the students’ perspective, CLC faculty celebrated the diversity in their classrooms, and a strong connection was formed between the two groups. Establishing strong connections with their professors is a necessity to build loyalty to one’s institution, and the ability to understand coursework, teaching methods, and lectures, all with help and acknowledgement from the faculty member yielded a culturally accepting and diverse environment (Glass, Gesing, Hales & Cong, 2017; Meng et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015). In developing new techniques and in taking a strong interest in the culture brought to their classrooms by the international students, faculty members create a culturally inclusive and supportive environment. Additional engagement and outreach from faculty members towards international students in the classroom will help lessen the effects of acculturative stress and will promote cross-cultural engagement in and outside of the classroom.

The guiding theoretical framework for this study was John Berry’s (2006) theory of acculturation. I used this framework’s foundations to explore how international students relate, respond, and interact with the United States’ culture and how support to ensure international student services are purposeful in responding to timely needs of acculturative stressors. In this framework, two issues are raised: the degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identity and the degree to which people seek involvement with the larger society (Berry et al., 2006). Primarily, this framework sought to replace the widely held “culture shock,” U-curve model and instead proposed that adjustment to a new culture is an on-going struggle occurring at all stages of cultural navigation. The reaction to this struggle for intercultural interaction falls into four succinct categories in Berry’s model, representing the varying levels of
adjustment and cultural acceptance: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (Sam & Berry, 2010).

This study is in agreement with previous research in dispelling the U-curve mindset, and instead showed that while positive feelings were felt during the initial adjustment period, they were overshadowed by the initial feelings of anxiety, depression, and stress (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Suryani, Huzili, Hussin, & Kaur, 2008). Throughout all interviews and data analysis, it was evident that the international student participants fell into Berry’s fluid framework, experiencing all four categories at varying points in their adjustment. This understanding will drive strategic and purposeful initiatives centered on holistic supports throughout the entire international student experience on college campuses. Understanding international students’ acculturation process at a community college, while applying Berry’s framework, allowed me to identify areas that administrators should be cognizant of when developing and initiating support systems for international students.

Users of this study and those who implement the aforementioned recommendations will be able to take into account the overall complexity of acculturation and the phenomena of the international student experience. The results of this study could very well provide a solid foundation for transferability to other campuses to enhance their own international student support initiatives. Case studies can inform and be useful outside of generalization; they excel at proposing and answering new questions (de Saint-Georges, 2018). Future studies should take into account the college faculty, staff, and domestic students who interact with international students and may have perspectives to share on the international community at an institution. Gaining insights from other community members on their interactions with international students
could help illuminate the community support provided to international students at that institution, which may influence international students’ acculturation experiences.

**Final Thoughts**

To some it might come as a surprise that during the 2018-2019 academic year nearly 8% of all international undergraduate students in the U.S. attended community colleges (NAFSA, 2020). This percentage is significant, especially considering the international goals and strategies of institutions whose historical foundations lie in establishing a local geographical community of education might seem conflicting; however, it has grown increasingly difficult to ignore the overall economic, financial, and diversity influences this special group of students bring to college campuses and surrounding communities. If community colleges aim to serve their diverse population and truly prepare graduates of their institutions to be productive members of society, then ensuring global diversity on campus must mean sufficient opportunities to thrive through international student enrollment.

For the international student population at the College of Lake County, we do have a few countries represented by ten or more students; however, for most of our international students, they remain the sole cultural ambassadors for their countries on our campus. The enrollment of international students on community college campuses and the interaction between students from different backgrounds, countries, socio-economic statuses, languages, no matter how many represent their respective country, is by far the simplest form of international diplomacy. This global understanding is the easiest way to ensure our students receive an education within an internationally diverse context. As a country, the U.S. is experiencing a racial and cultural
revolution among our domestic population, and I strongly believe that the international students on our community college campuses can provide, without even intending to do so, lessons to their fellow students, faculty, and staff surrounding the restoration of faith in humanity’s unavoidable and cherished diversity.

When administrators at community colleges and those directly involved with international student services take into account the unique experiences of international students, as provided in this study, strategic and purposeful support initiatives can be established. This study aimed to offer a foundation of knowledge to community colleges that already offer some support for international students and to be a guide for the next steps for those institutions without any formal structures built for international student success. The feedback provided by the students matched previous studies about support needs for international students; however, this is one of the very few studies that exists to provide a spotlight on this population at a community college. In giving a voice to international students experiencing acculturation at a U.S. community college, this study showed the varied experiences and the overall complexity of acculturative stress encompassing the move to a new cultural environment.

As a professional who has dedicated a decade of his professional life to supporting and enhancing the experiences international students have on college campuses, I can easily say that this process has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The rawness and willingness of the participants to truthfully and honestly share their experiences with such depth have helped to reframe my advocacy and support moving forward. To ensure that this study is shared and to maximize any potential benefits to the College of Lake County, to our international students, and to other community colleges, I plan to implement my research into practice in the
following ways. First, I plan to share the findings and recommendations with CLC campus leadership, the International Education Committee, and various stakeholders and interested parties in international education. My hope is that CLC’s Teaching and Learning Center will allow for professional development sessions focusing on the international student experience to formally be integrated into the offerings at the college. It is from these conversations that clear timelines and additional action items can be established. I also plan to share these findings with local organizations through presenting at NAFSA regional conferences, CLC professional development conferences, and at some of CLC’s peer institutions. On a wider scale, I plan on presenting at the Illinois Council of Community College Administrators to further reach out to institutions in need of guidance for international student support. Additionally, I will attend and share these findings with Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) and the Illinois Consortium for International Studies and Programs. Finally, I will work with my dissertation chair to submit at least one article to a peer-reviewed journal for publication.

**Summary**

A culminating theme for this study could be the following: if you cannot change the world, change the world within your reach. The results from this study can serve as a foundation on which community college leaders can build purposeful and strategic support systems for international students on their campuses and will in turn yield positive and enriching cultural interactions and understandings. Through developing a foundation of international student acculturation experiences, based on the themes of this study, community college leaders will be able to actively support and drive international student support initiatives from all areas on their
cAMPUS. While much research exists about international students’ acculturation experiences at four-year institutions, little is known about the ways these experiences may differ within the context of a community college. The demand for international student enrollment at all institutions – including community colleges - is not likely to lessen as the need to ensure colleges and universities are producing graduates ready to excel and to be productive in our global society is evident throughout higher education institutions. Thus, as international students at community colleges are an often-overlooked population, there is a strong need to further explore and better understand the needs of these students within the unique context of community colleges (Zhang, 2016). In order to, as practitioners in the field, change international student support services across the nation, we must first begin by addressing the needs of and possible gaps in support services on our campuses for the international students who so bravely made the decision to study in the United States, leaving everything and everyone familiar behind.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB DOCUMENTS
Application for Institutional Review of Research

INvolving Human Subjects

**Note:** Please complete this form thoroughly keeping in mind that the primary concern is the potential risk (economic, ethical, legal, physical, political, psychological/emotional, social, breach of confidentiality, or other) to the participants. Include attachments of all materials to be used in the investigation (PDF preferred). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) must have enough information about the transactions with the participants to evaluate the risks of participation.

**Names and employee IDs for all investigators (Z-IDs for students)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Employee ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jacob Cushing</td>
<td>Z1835324</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Status (select all that apply):**

- ☐ Faculty
- ☒ Graduate Student
- ☐ Undergraduate Student
- ☐ Non-NIU Affiliate

**Department (main PI):**

Department of Counseling and Higher Education

**Phone (main PI):**

815-753-1448

**E-mail address (for all investigators):**

All communications will occur via NIU email accounts (for all NIU affiliates).

Z1835324@students.niu.edu

**Project Title:**

The Acculturation Experience of College of Lake County’s International Students

**Note:** All projects involving human subjects research must receive formal written clearance from the IRB prior to the start of data collection.

**Type of Project (Check one)**

- ☐ Departmental Research (faculty/student projects not externally funded and not indicated below)
- ☒ Graduate Thesis/Dissertation (IRB application should be submitted AFTER proposal defense)

**Advisor/Committee Chair (& e-mail):** Gudrun Nyunt, gnyunt@niu.edu

- ☐ Undergraduate Project (Senior thesis/capstone, research rookies, independent study)

**Advisor/Committee Chair (& e-mail):**

- ☐ Externally Sponsored Research
A complete copy of the grant proposal or contract must accompany this application form for IRB review to take place.

Source of Funding:

Title of grant proposal (if different from IRB protocol):

- Name of principal investigator on grant proposal:

- Sponsored Programs Administration file number (or grant number if awarded):

SPA#

Other

Specify:

Part I. Purpose and Procedures:

1) Describe the purpose of your study and the reason(s) this study is needed. Include any necessary background information and a description of your hypothesis or your research question.

The economic impact of international student enrollment and the overall benefits of their enrollment to the U.S. cannot be ignored; thus, further campus social and academic support systems are necessary for the more than 1 million international students currently studying across the country. Future enrollment for international students faces a tumultuous road, and advocacy for international students has increased in importance due to the administration change at the national level; therefore, colleges must be prepared to attract and retain international students to benefit all members of the campus and local community.

Developing the appropriate support systems for this decreasing population, amidst barriers mentioned above, has been a challenging task for most institutions, as culture shock and overall adjustment to U.S. campus life affects all students differently. International students share similar adjustment periods and difficulties that interfere with their integration to the campus community, in addition to the barriers affecting their social and academic success and progress. Several studies currently exist that focus on acculturation stressors and the need for international students to have a well-developed support system on campus, and in these studies mentioned below one can build strategic and purposeful support systems.

Research Question
How do international students at the College of Lake County experience the acculturation process?

Subsidiary Questions
1. How do CLC’s international students experience the transition and onboarding to CLC?
2. What influences the different acculturation experiences CLC international students have?
3. How does the academic experience of CLC’s international students affect acculturation?
4. How does socialization and interpersonal relationships factor into the international student experience at CLC?
5. How does CLC institutional culture factor into the international student acculturation experience?

2) The following items will help the IRB reviewers understand the step-by-step procedures of your study:

2A) Explain the participant **eligibility** and **exclusion** criteria that will be used.

Participants must be international students studying at the College of Lake County. Participants selected will match the country of origin percentages of the entire population, as much as possible. Additionally, students will need to have been at CLC and in the United States for at least one semester, and no longer than 3 semesters to account for enough time to experience acculturation and to allow for appropriate reflection of the experience.

2B) Explain the **recruitment** procedures (how will participants learn about the study?). If using the snowball technique, please explain who contacts potential participants (other participants or the researcher). Please attach recruitment scripts, flyers, or postings.

The study will use purposeful sampling. The Center for International Education (CIE) will assist in securing a pool of potential participants through targeted email and text message recruitment campaigns. The CIE will not determine final participants selected for data collection, as the researcher will determine final participants.

Recruitment letters and questionnaires will be sent to all CLC international students. To volunteer for the study, students will be asked to email back the completed questionnaires, which ask about participant gender, age, country of origin, major, and English language proficiency. Participants will be selected on the basis of collected information – with the goal of having participants that reflect the make-up of CLC’s international student population in country of origin – and willingness to be participants in the study.

2C) Explain the **consent process** (verbal and/or written procedures for informing participants of the nature of the study and what they will do).

[Please attach all documents (assent, consent, parent permission) that are appropriate for each group of subjects participating in the study. Consent forms should be prepared for adult participants (age 18 or over). Assent forms should be prepared for minor subjects appropriate to their ages, and permission form(s) for parents or legally authorized representatives should also be prepared. For children too young to comprehend a simple explanation of participation, parental permission is sufficient only if the research will provide direct benefit to the subject, a member of the subject’s family, or other children with the same condition as the subject.]

An informed consent form will be e-mailed to all participants prior to participation in interviews, so participants have time to review the form. The
beginning of the interviews will consist of time set aside to go over the consent form and to answer any questions participants may have. Participants will then sign the consent form before the data collection portion of the interview begins. If a participant does not feel comfortable signing the consent form, after having their questions answered, participants will be free to leave. Participants will also be reminded that they can stop the interview at any time and withdraw their participation.

2D) Describe the data collection procedures including what data will be collected, how it will be collected (include a description of any interventions to be used), the duration of participation in the study session(s), and how the session(s) will end.

This study will utilize semistructured interviews with questions that connect to the guiding research questions and Berry’s theoretical lens of acculturation. Semistructured interviews will allow individual responses to guide and define the participant’s own experience; however, while individual responses are expected, the researcher is aiming to gather specific information regarding the acculturation experience from all respondents, and thus semistructured is preferable to an unstructured method. The first interview will focus on the initial acculturation of the student, and the second interview will be related to how the College’s support systems/faculty/staff fit with their acculturation experience.

Students will sit for two 45-60 minute interviews over the course of one semester. With participants’ consent, the interviews will be recorded. The session will end with a final wrap up question and an explanation of when I will reach back out to them regarding the second interview (during the initial interview) or member checking, to ensure their position on acculturation was accurately recorded (during the second interview).

2E) If applicable, explain the procedures for providing compensation.

N/A

2F) If applicable, explain the procedures for debriefing participants. Please attach a debriefing script or sheet

Reminder: Include copies of all questionnaires, surveys, interview questions, listing of all information/data to be collected, etc. with this application. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain any relevant permission for copyrighted materials. If the research involves an oral interview or focus group discussion that could evolve as it progresses, include a list of discussion topics and any “starter” questions for each topic that can reasonably be expected to be covered. If a draft of a written questionnaire or survey is attached, it should be clearly labeled as such and a final version must be submitted before data collection begins.
Part II: Research Participants

3) Participant demographics:

- Gender: All ☒ M ☐ F ☐ Trans M ☐ Trans F ☐ Nonconforming ☐
- Estimated age(s):
  - 18-30
- Are any subjects under age 18? Yes ☐ No ☒
- Potentially vulnerable populations (please indicate if any of the following groups are the target population of the study)
  - Pregnant women & fetuses
  - Prisoners
  - Decisionally impaired/mentally disabled
  - Specific racial or ethnic group(s) (list in box):

  If any potentially “vulnerable populations” will be the target of the study, be sure to include a response to 2A above explaining eligibility criteria.

- Target number of participants in the entire study (including controls) from start to finish (keep in mind that this is just an estimate of the total):
  - 10

4) Please explain any outside institutional (e.g., schools, hospitals) approval you will need to obtain and how approval will be sought. Provide scripts, letters, or emails providing any information that will be used to obtain needed approvals/permission. It is the responsibility of the researcher to follow all applicable policies of any outside institution(s).

N/A

Part III: Risk/Benefit assessment

5) What knowledge/benefit(s) to the field will be gained from the study?

This case study will provide a glimpse into the current state of international student acculturation and will likely provide administrators and international education offices a foundation on which to build purposeful and strategic support and success programs/initiatives.

6) What direct benefit(s) are there to the participant(s) (if any) from the proposed research? [For example, learning a new skill, psychological insight, teaching experience] [Please note that compensation is NOT considered a direct benefit.]

While there will be no direct benefits to the participants, participants will reflect on their experiences of transitioning and adjusting to the U.S. college environment. Such reflection may help students manage that transition better or recognize, if they are struggling, earlier. In addition, participants will be helping to shape the international student experience and support initiatives at the College.
7) Describe any potential risks (breach of confidentiality, economic, ethical, legal, physical, political, psychological/emotional, social, etc.) to the subjects posed by the proposed research. (Note: Some studies may have “no reasonably foreseeable risks.”) Investigators are required to report all unexpected and/or adverse events to the IRB. Therefore, it is important that you list all reasonably anticipated risks because unanticipated adverse events may need to be reported by NIU to OHRP.

This study will have no reasonably foreseeable risks for participants. Discussing some of the information, however, may be uncomfortable or lead to an emotional reaction from the participants; however, any such reaction to some of the topics is no greater than would be experienced in day-to-day conversations or discussions. If this occurs, participants will be provided with resources for support at the institution. Participants can also stop the interview at any point in time.

8) Federal regulations require that researchers use procedures that minimize any risks to participants. What procedures will be used to minimize each risk and/or deal with the challenge(s) stated in “7” above?

N/A

9) If support services are required to minimize risk of harm, explain what will be provided (list of services available).

[DeKalb area resource list: https://www.niu.edu/divresearch/compliance/resources/files/Counseling-Resource-DeKalb.pdf
If using this, please include with your application.]

N/A

10) How do the potential benefits of the study justify the potential risks to the participants?

N/A

Part IV: Consent Document Variations

11) Will audio, video, or film recording be used?  

Yes ☒  No ☐

If yes, specify the recording format to be used.

Audio recording and subsequent transcriptions.

Please keep in mind that specific consent must be sought in the informed consent document(s) by including a separate signature/date line giving consent for recording. This is in addition to the signature/date line giving consent to participate in the research project.

12) Will this project require the use of consent/assent documents written in a language other than English?

Yes ☐  No ☒

Reminder: If non-English documents will be used, please have the document translator provide documentation (email or written) that the translation is equivalent to the English version. [This can be done after the protocol is approved in order to minimize the number of changes needed.]

13) Are you requesting a waiver of a signature on the informed consent document?

Yes ☐  No ☒
Please indicate the justification for requesting this waiver:

☐ The only record linking the subject to the research would be the signed consent document and the principal risk of the research would be breach of confidentiality.

☐ The research involves minimal risk to the subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context (e.g., online surveys).

14) Are you requesting a **waiver/alteration** of some other aspect of the informed consent document? [This section is particularly relevant for studies involving deception.]

Yes ☐ No ☒

14a) Please explain which aspects of informed consent will be missing or altered along with a justification for the change.

14b) Please explain how the project meets all of the following criteria:

1) The research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to the participants.

2) The waiver/alteration will not adversely affect the rights or welfare of the participants.

3) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.

4) Whenever appropriate, the participants will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

15) Will any HIPAA protected health information be collected as part of the data? Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, describe the procedures for protecting the information.

[Please provide a copy of your HIPAA disclosure form to be given to participants.]

16) Will any protected school records be collected as part of the data? Yes ☐ No ☒

If yes, describe the procedures for protecting the information.

**Part V: Confidentiality and Anonymity**

17) Will identifying information be connected to the data, or is there a way to re-identify the data through pseudonyms or a code that is kept separate from the data? Yes ☒ (confidential data) No ☐ (anonymous data)
**QUALTRICS USERS:** You may want to keep your survey anonymous by allowing student participants to access a second Qualtrics survey where they enter their name and student ID if needed. This would require clear instructions in the original survey along with a link to the second survey where they enter the identifiers for course credit or entry into a drawing.

18) If you answered **yes** to question #17, describe precautions to insure the privacy of the subjects, and the confidentiality of the data, both in your possession and in reports and publications.

   All participants will be assigned pseudonyms. Once collected, data (interview recordings, transcriptions) will be stripped of all identifiable information and names will be replaced with pseudonyms. No identification key will be kept that could later link data to identifiable information again. Any reports and publications will use the participants’ pseudonyms. Limited demographic information will be provided about participants, ensuring that they cannot be identified by that information.

19) If you are collecting your data through an online survey tool, will the survey instrument collect email and/or IP addresses with the data?

   - No ☐ The survey will be set so that email/IP addresses are NOT collected
     (in Qualtrics: within a survey select “survey options” then “anonymize responses” toward the bottom)
   - Yes ☐ IP and/or email addresses WILL be collected with the data
   - N/A ☒ I am not using an online survey tool.

**Please Note:** Some electronic survey items may not be accessible to people who use screen readers as a way of accommodating their visual impairments. We recommend that you follow the link below to check the accessibility of your Qualtrics survey items: https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/survey-module/survey-tools/check-survey-accessibility/)

20) How will the records (data, recordings, and consent forms) be stored? **Also** indicate how long records will be kept and how and when they will be disposed of.

   [Note: Signed informed consent documents must be maintained for 3 years following completion of the study.]

   All records for this study will be stored on a password-protected personal computer and will be destroyed following the completion of the study. Signed consent documents will be maintained for 3 years following completion of the study; after that, signed consent documents will be shredded.

Part VI: Projects Involving Deception [complete only if your study includes deception]

21) Describe the deception being used. Be sure to clarify whether this is deception by omission (an important aspect of the study is withheld from the participants) or commission (the participant is misled about some aspect of the study) or both. [Complete item 14 if aspects of consent are missing.]

   N/A

22) Why is deception a necessary and unavoidable component of the experimental design?

   N/A

23) Debriefing of participants will be:

   - ☐ Immediate (directly following the research session)
   - ☐ Delayed
   - ☐ Full (all aspects of deception will be revealed)
☐ Partial (some aspects of deception will remain unexplained)

a) If debriefing is delayed, why is the delay necessary, and when will it occur?

N/A

b) If debriefing is not full, why is partial debriefing necessary? Would the participant be harmed in any way by full debriefing?

N/A

c) If debriefing is partial, will full debriefing occur later?

N/A

d) Does the presence of deception increase risk of harm to the participants?

N/A

e) Is the respondent free to withdraw his/her data after being fully debriefed?

N/A

24) Who will provide the debriefing?

N/A

Reminder: Please include a copy of your debriefing script/sheet with this application.

Part VII: Credit and Compensation

25) If participants will receive course credit for participation, please describe it below.

N/A

26) If participants will receive some other form of compensation for participation, please describe it below.

N/A

27) Describe any alternative tasks that will be available for participants to earn the credit or compensation.

N/A

Part VIII: Conflict of interest

28) Do any of the researchers conducting this study have any potential conflicts of interest?

[Conflicts of interest may include financial or personal interest, or any condition in which the investigator’s judgment regarding a primary interest may be biased by a secondary interest.]

Yes ☐ No ☒

29) If yes to the above question, please describe the nature of the conflict of interest.

N/A

Part IX: Researcher Qualifications
30) In addition to listing the investigators’ names, indicate their qualifications to carry out the research described in this application.

I am a doctoral student and have taken research courses. This research is done with support and guidance form my dissertation chair and committee.

31) State the date of completion of the CITI Human Subjects Protection training program(s) for the individuals listed in the question above. The required course is “Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher, Basic

Course. The required CITI training is accessible from the ORCIS website at https://www.niu.edu/divresearch/compliance/human/training/index.shtml

If you have comparable training elsewhere, please include the certification with this application.

[Note: NIU policy requires that research investigators must complete appropriate training before conducting human subjects research.]

March 23, 2019

To be completed by investigator and confirmed by advisor (if student project) and departmental reviewer.

To check the items that are accompanying this completed application form:

1. Subject recruitment/introductory materials
2. Informed consent documents (select at least one):
   - Consent form for adults (if participants are age 18 or over)
   - Assent form for minors (if participants are under age 18)
   - Parental permission form (if participants are under age 18)
3. All surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, or other instruments to be used
4. grant proposal SPA# included on front of application (for externally funded projects)

REQUIRED SIGNATURES: ALL PROJECTS

CERTIFICATION

I certify that I have read and understand the policies and procedures for research projects that involve human subjects and that I intend to comply with Northern Illinois University Policy. Any changes in the approved protocol will be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to those changes being put into practice unless it involves an immediate safety issue for a subject during a procedure. (In such instances, the researcher is required to promptly notify the IRB after the fact.) I also understand that all non-exempt projects require review at least annually.

Jacob Cushing 01/18/2020

* Investigator(s) Signature(s) Date

* Signature of Faculty Advisor (Student Projects Only) Date

* Signature of Authorized Departmental Reviewer Printed name Date

* PIs (both faculty and students), faculty advisors, and ADRs may choose to send an email statement (or email thread) indicating acknowledgement of the certification statement above in lieu of signatures.
06-Mar-2020

TO: Jacob Cushing (Z1835324)  
Counseling, Adult and Higher Education

RE: Protocol # HS20-0230 “The acculturation experience of College of Lake County’s international students”

Your Initial Review submission was reviewed and approved under Member Review procedures by the Institutional Review Board on 06-Mar-2020. Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval period: 06-Mar-2020 - 05-Mar-2021

If your project will continue beyond that date, or if you intend to make modifications to the study, you will need additional approval and should contact the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity for assistance. Continuing review of the project, conducted at least annually, will be necessary until you no longer retain any identifiers that could link the subjects to the data collected. Please remember to use your protocol number (HS20-0230) on any documents or correspondence with the IRB concerning your research protocol.

Please note that the IRB has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Unless you have been approved for a waiver of the written signature of informed
consent, this notice includes a date-stamped copy of the approved consent form for your use. NIU policy requires that informed consent documents given to subjects participating in non-exempt research bear the approval stamp of the NIU IRB. This stamped document is the only consent form that may be photocopied for distribution to study participants.

It is important for you to note that as a research investigator involved with human subjects, you are responsible for ensuring that this project has current IRB approval at all times, and for retaining the signed consent forms obtained from your subjects for a minimum of three years after the study is concluded. If consent for the study is being given by proxy (guardian, etc.), it is your responsibility to document the authority of that person to consent for the subject. Also, the committee recommends that you include an acknowledgment by the subject, or the subject’s representative, that he or she has received a copy of the consent form. In addition, you are required to promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems or risks to subjects and others. The IRB extends best wishes for success in your research endeavors.
APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER
January XX, 2020

Dear [international student name],

My name is Jacob Cushing and I am doctoral candidate at Northern Illinois University. I am conducting research for my dissertation focusing on the international student acculturation experience, and am recruiting international students at the College of Lake County who might be interested in participating in my study. The foundation of this study is to understand the level at which international students feel they have adjusted to their life in the U.S. as it relates to their enrollment as student at CLC.

If selected, participants will engage in two interviews, lasting approximately forty-five to sixty minutes in length. Your identity will be kept confidential and your participation in this study is voluntary. Whether you choose to participate or not will not affect your status at the College, and you may withdraw at any time you choose without penalty.

Once I have concluded the interviews, you will be given the opportunity to review my findings for accuracy and will be able to respond. All findings, including excerpts from interviews, will be published in my dissertation.

If you think you would be interested in this study, want to reflect on your own experiences of being an international student in the U.S. and at the College of Lake County, and want to assist other community colleges in their support of international students, please return the following questionnaire to jcushing@clcillinois.edu by January XX, 2020.

Thank you in advance for your willingness to support international student success!

Jacob Cushing
217-620-9031
jcushing@clcillinois.edu
APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
Name: ______________________________________

E-mail/phone number contact information: ______________________ / ____________

Gender:
☐ Female
☐ Male
☐ Non-binary/ third gender
☐ Prefer to self-describe _________________
☐ Prefer not to say

Please check your age range:
☐ 18-24 years old          ☐ 25 years or older

Nationality: _________________________________

Please check your race and/or ethnicity:
☐ Hispanic or Latinx
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
☐ Asian
☐ Black or African American
☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
☐ White

How many semesters have you spent at CLC?: ________ How many years have you been in the U.S.? ________

Major(s): ______________________________________________

First language(s): ______________________________________

Are you comfortable conversing in English?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Please return to jcusing@clcillinois.edu by January XX, 2020 if you are interested in participating in this study.

THANK YOU!
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM
Northern Illinois University

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Title of Study: The Acculturation Experience of CLC International Students

Investigators:

Name: Jacob Cushing
Dept: HESA
Phone: 217-620-4831

Key Information:
- This is a voluntary research study on the acculturation experience of international students at the community college level.
- This one-sentence study involves participants sitting for two forty-five to sixty-minute interviews.
- The benefits provide international education offices a foundation on which to build purposeful and strategic support and success programs for international students; the only risk in this study is a possible emotional reaction to the topics being discussed.

Description of the Study
The purpose of the study is to explore international students' acculturation process at a community college in hopes of better understanding how community college professionals can support international students as they face the acculturation process. If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following things: complete the recruitment questionnaire, participate in at forty-five to sixty-minute interview during the spring semester, and check the results of the findings from your interview.

Risks and Benefits
The only possible risk in participating is that discussing some of the information may be triggering or lead to an emotional reaction from the participants; however, this risk is no greater than would be experienced in day-to-day conversations. If this occurs, participants will be provided with resources for support at the institution.

The benefits of participating in this study will be to help address the gap in current literature on community college international students and will provide institutional leadership with a foundation of knowledge and strategies to improve international student access, retention, and success.

Confidentiality
The results of this study will be kept strictly confidential. Research records will be kept in a locked filing cabinet, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file. For audio recording, the researchers will be the only one with access. Following the completion of the study, all electronic data collected as part of this study will be destroyed. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Your Rights
The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact the researcher, Jacob Cushing at Jcushing@ecllinois.edu or by telephone at 217-620-4831. You may also contact the researcher's dissertation data, Gailyn Nyuant at gnyuant@ecllinois.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the researcher or you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety at 815-753-5588.

Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the study investigators.

Participant’s Signature _______________________________ Date ______

I also give my consent to be audio recorded during the interview(s) directly related to this research study.

Participant’s Signature _______________________________ Date ______

Northern Illinois University

3/6/2020

Approved by R.J. RB

Valid one year from above date
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDES 1 AND 2
Interview #1

Brief Intro and Warm-up

The purpose of this study is to understand the acculturation experience of CLC international students.

1. I know you’re from [specific country], what do you miss the most about your home country?
2. How is the U.S. similar to your home country?
3. How long have you been in the U.S.?

I will then briefly explain acculturation and that this study is focusing on adjustment to and with support by the College of Lake County.

4. Do you understand what I mean when I say “acculturation?”
5. What do you think acculturation means to you personally?
6. What does it mean to adjust to another culture?

Transition and Adjustment

7. What was your motivation for studying in the U.S.?
8. Why did you choose to study at a community college?
9. What were your expectations in the days leading up to your arrival in the U.S.?
10. What did you know about the U.S and CLC?
11. Thinking back to your first semester, tell me about your transition to the U.S. and to the College of Lake County.

   a. Optional follow-up: What were you going through?
12. What has your life been like as a college student here at CLC?
13. What is the best way an international student can adjust to a new culture?

14. What would be the perfect situations in which an international student could adjust successfully?

15. What have been your personal strategies in assisting with your acculturation?

16. Please tell me about a time when you felt as though you were connected to a student of a different culture on campus.

17. Please tell me about a time when an interaction with someone of another culture hindered your adjustment at CLC and in the U.S.

18. How would you evaluate or describe your experience at CLC?

That concludes most of my interview questions, but before we wrap up, I have one last question for you.

19. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your thoughts and experiences as an international student at the College of Lake County. As soon as I have completed the interviews for this round, I will reach out to you with the option to review a draft of the findings so that you may provide recommendations for improvement. We will also discuss these findings in person prior to your next interview.

**Interview #2**

Brief welcome and review of emerging themes from previous interview. I will walk the participant through the themes and will ask them to confirm the findings.

**Intro:** The purpose of this second interview is to follow up on the first interview, share with you some of the themes that have come out of my first round of interviews and get your thoughts on
those, as well as focus on the support systems. Today we will focus on the support systems in place to assist with your adjustment to the U.S. and CLC.

20. During your first interview, you shared...... Has this changed at all since then? How do you feel about that now?” (I’ll fill in individual info into the protocol for each participant)

21. In addition to you, I have interviewed X students for this study. Looking at what all of you have shared, I have developed a set of themes that seem to apply to most of your experiences. I will now share those themes with you and would love to get your thoughts on those.
   a. Share themes
   b. Potential follow-up questions to each theme: Do you think this theme reflects your experiences? Is there anything you would add or change for this theme to help others better understand your acculturation experience?

22. Describe an average day for you at CLC. Where do you go? With whom do you interact on a daily basis?

23. Describe your experience with the College of Lake County, in terms of this institution being ready to fully support international students.

24. Describe your experience with the Center for International Education.

25. What was your expectation on how CLC could help your transition?
   a. How did CLC meet/not meet those expectations?

26. What does it mean for an international student at CLC to be successful?
27. What advice would you give to potential international students on what it takes to be successful at CLC?
   a. Optional follow up: Are there any policies/procedures that you believe hinders the acculturation of international students at CLC?

28. What programs does CLC have in order to promote support of adjustment for international students?
   a. Please tell me how these support systems have aided your adjustment.
   b. If any support systems were missing, what would you recommend?
   c. Suppose you were in charge of designing support systems for CLC international students, what would you design and why?

29. In regards to fitting in, and interacting with American students, some would say that adjustment and acculturation is primarily the responsibility of the international student. What would you tell those people?

30. What has your experience been with adjusting to American college culture?

31. What do you believe is necessary for a college campus to have to be welcoming to international students?

32. Tell me about a time you made an effort to interact with domestic students at CLC.

33. Tell me about your relationships and interactions with college faculty and staff at CLC.
   a. Optional follow up: Are there any specific interactions you can recall that shows a connection between you and faculty members?

34. How comfortable you feel asking questions or speaking up in class?
35. Give an example of when you took advantage of the academic support systems available at CLC.

36. What do you believe are the greatest challenge for an international student at the College of Lake County?
   a. Optional follow up: Was this our greatest challenge, and if so, how did you overcome it?

That concludes most of my interview questions, but before we wrap up, I have one last question for you.

37. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me about your thoughts and experiences as an international student at the College of Lake County. As soon as I have completed the interviews, I will reach out to you with the option to review a draft of the findings so that you may provide recommendations for improvement.