Graduate International Students' Social Experiences Examined Through Their Transient Lives: A Phenomenological Study at a Private Research University in the United States

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GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES EXAMINED THROUGH THEIR TRANSIENT LIVES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY AT A PRIVATE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Dissertation
by
NISHMIN KASHYAP

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December, 2010
ABSTRACT

Title of Document: Graduate International Students’ Social Experiences Examined Through Their Transient Lives: A Phenomenological Study at a Private Research University in the United States

Nishmin Kashyap, Doctor of Philosophy, 2010

Directed By: Professor Philip Altbach
Department of Higher Education

This is a phenomenological study of ten graduate international students at Chardin University (pseudonym). Through 30 in-depth interviews, multiple social contacts, and group and member checking sessions, stories emerged that highlight the social experiences of these graduate international students through their transient lives. Theoretical frameworks used to interpret the findings were transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate socialization model.

This study provides a forum for participants to narrate their stories instead of being invisible and silent as they pass through our institutional corridors. What emerged from these narratives is that graduate international students cannot be grouped as one monolithic entity because they all lead variant and divergent lives. This research enumerates the intricacies, shades, and textures of their lives as they persist, succeed, and develop identities. In the past, graduate international students’ social experiences have been portrayed in an oversimplified fashion, when in fact such students lead extremely complex lives as they negotiate a world that comprises both home and host country. Strongly lacking in the realm of
social experiences have been meaningful relationships with American peers (looking beyond superficial ones), the university, and the local community.

Operating within transnational social fields, regular prolonged conversations with family and friends from home tend to prevent participants from seeking out new connections in the United States. Most participants find comfort within their own ethnic enclaves, leading to cross-cultural isolation, which is still prevalent after decades of research conducted on this population. This study challenges universities to forge new pathways to engage with this vital and vibrant student body in meaningful, innovative, and creative ways. It is the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to understand the intricacies of their lives, as well as differences in religion, language, and socialization patterns. Universities need to find new ways to stay relevant in the lives of graduate international students during their tenure in the United States.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to my chair, Professor Altbach, for guiding this research and always encouraging me to move forward. My deepest gratitude goes to Professor Lisa Patel Stevens for showing me pathways that were insightful and helpful during this research. I owe my sincerest thanks to Professor Heather-Rowan Kenyon for molding this research project in a direction that was helpful for student development.

I am deeply indebted to all ten participants, who actively participated and shared so much of their lives to contribute towards this study. They provided great depth and richness to this research by honestly and openly sharing their personal stories.

On a personal note, this dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Sudha and Pervez Balsara. Their guiding hand and careful nurturing has been with me all my life. Although they cannot be here to enjoy this achievement, I am sure that they are smiling as they look down and realize that their focus on education did not go unnoticed by me.

I would like to thank my husband, Thomas Garrettson, for always being supportive and encouraging through all these years. I would further like to thank my brother, Professor Nitash Balsara, who has always been the perfect role model.

Lastly, I am grateful to my dearest friends and colleagues, Mark Hazelbaker and Maurice Washington, for always believing that I could take on this endeavor.
Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................... i

Chapter 1 Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2 Methodology ..................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 3 Literature Review ............................................................................................... 33

The Global Context ............................................................................................................. 34

Understanding Graduate International Students’ Social Experiences ......................... 45

Theoretical Frameworks to Understand Social Experiences ........................................... 56

Chapter 4 Stories: Elif, April, and Nikita ......................................................................... 75

Elif—Her Father’s Daughter: A Statistician in the Making .............................................. 79

April—A Third-Culture Kid: Still Searching for the Ideal Community ............................ 95

Nikita—A Tumultuous Childhood: A Young Woman Determined to Succeed ............... 117

Chapter 5 Stories: Cindy, Claire, and Victoria ................................................................. 132

Cindy—Determined to Speak Out: Always Exploring New Possibilities ....................... 132

Claire—A Complex Life: Conflicted About Her Future .................................................... 149

Victoria—Transition As a Way of Life .............................................................................. 162

Chapter 6 Stories: Jude, Jose, Michael, and Rajiv .......................................................... 178

Jude—A Journey to Find Himself ..................................................................................... 178

Jose—A Soft-Spoken Lawyer from Mexico Learning to Be More Assertive .................... 193

Michael—A Maverick by Nature and a Nonconformist .................................................. 206

Rajiv—A Born Optimist: Using Every Connection As an Opportunity ......................... 222

Chapter 7 Analysis and Interpretation .............................................................................. 238

Chapter 8 The Research Questions .................................................................................... 302

Chapter 9 Recommendations and Conclusion .................................................................. 321

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 348

Appendix A First E-mail .................................................................................................... 362

Appendix B Second E-mail ............................................................................................... 363

Appendix C Informed Consent Form ................................................................................. 364

Appendix D Interview Questions ....................................................................................... 366
Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate graduate international students’ social experiences through their transient lives at a private research university. Social experiences include friendships, cultural and religious acceptance, and adaptation to new norms and traditions. Although academic experiences are germane to the overall experience of international students, this study will not purposefully investigate this area. Graduate international students spend several years in host countries and institutions; whereas they have clear academic goals, their social experiences are mostly left to chance. Studies have shown that students, both international and local, benefit from frequent social contact and involvement with their peers as they adjust to their new environment (Astin, 1984; Klomegah, 2006; Trice, 2004).

Little has been done to understand graduate international students’ social experiences through their transient lives. This study attempts to address this area of unmet need by enumerating the dynamics of success and persistence as these qualities manifest in participants’ lives and in their personal stories. The three theoretical frameworks used in this study are transnationalism (Gargano, 2009; Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001); adult transitional theory (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989); and the graduate student socialization model (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001), all of which will help analyze graduate international students’ social experiences. Transnationalism helps us recognize that international students survive, develop, and persist through transnational and transcultural networks (Gargano, 2009). Adult transitional theory highlights the need for support systems as adults transition into university life.
The graduate student socialization model is used to support the importance of social experiences in academic success as well as adjusting to new environments.

Historically, graduate international students have gravitated to the United States to attain advanced degrees and make substantial contributions to our society through the creation of new and applied knowledge (COSEPUP, 2005). International student enrollment is relatively marginal within US higher education; it accounts for only 3.7% of total enrollment, which is approximately 18 million (IIE, 2009). However, 10.5% of the overall graduate student body in the United States is made up of international students (CGS, 2009). Overall, the United States’ global market share of international students has declined by 7% from 2001 to 2008 (IIE, 2009).

In recent years, the worldwide competition, especially for talented graduate students, has substantially increased. If this trend continues, the United States will lose gifted graduate international students and scholars to other countries (West, 2009). Despite the high quality of graduate-level higher education the United States, we can no longer assume its dominance as the number one destination of foreign students (CGS, 2009).

This study focuses on the need to investigate graduate international students’ experiences in order to stay competitive globally. Other countries have been paying close attention to such experiences. For example, Australian researchers have clearly stated that evaluating satisfaction levels and experiences among international students is important to compete globally for students (Mahat & Hourigan, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). International student recruitment has become big business for many governments across the globe. Adding to the competitive pressure, some countries that traditionally sent students to the United States have been building up their own higher education quality, capacity, and capabilities in recent years (Altbach, 1998).
Problem Statement

Global competition for talented graduate students is fierce, and other countries are paying close attention to graduate international students’ needs, adjustment issues, and experiences (CGS, 2009). By presenting personal stories of graduate international students, this study hopes to raise awareness among university administrators and faculty about their social experiences, thereby engendering the development of new theories and programs to support this population. Graduate international students are an important component of higher education institutions in the United States. Beyond academic achievement, they offer many benefits: They contribute to campus diversity, generate substantial revenue for their institutions and host countries, engender long-term goodwill, improve national security through enhanced cultural understanding, increase research capabilities (especially in the sciences), and provide access to international talent across the globe (Altbach, 2006; NAFSA, 2003).

International students are often regarded as a homogeneous group of highly talented individuals, and thus there is a prevalent sentiment that they can adjust to narrowly defined rules and expectations set by US institutions and society (Leong & Chou, 1996). This study challenges the assumptions that international students are homogeneous as a group; deficient in some way owing to lack of competency in English; and alien, lacking in basic social skills. In the past, researchers have portrayed oversimplified versions of graduate international students’ social experiences, when in fact they lead extremely complex lives as they negotiate a world that moves between home and host country (Gargano, 2009). Graduate international students are often identified as a monolithic entity, when in reality they are unique individuals that lead distinctive and divergent lives. International students come from varying cultures, traditions, and religions, and in fact are an extremely heterogeneous group of individuals. Some researchers
have stated that international students are often stereotyped by their American peers, faculty, administrators, and community (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mestenhauser, 1983). This study will examine graduate international students as a heterogeneous group; each individual participant’s social experiences will be revealed through his or her personal life story.

**Significance of This Study**

This study will attempt to show the intricacies of graduate international students’ lives as they persist, succeed, and develop new identities in their host country. According to Tinto (1998), the more involvement and engagement students have with faculty and peers within their institutions, the more likely they are to persist in their studies. The more positive interactions students have with institutional staff, the more valued they are likely to feel within the university community and be prone to persist (Rendon, 1994).

**Transnationalism.** Transnationalism is a theoretical framework that assumes that migrant and immigrant experiences are a complex weave of home and host countries rather than assimilation; in part, transnationalism is a rebuttal of the incomplete and somewhat racist perspective of assimilation theories. A recent study of Latin immigrants in the United States found that older and well-educated immigrants, rather than recent arrivals, maintained stronger ties with their home country, and these findings contradicted conventional assimilation theories (Portes, Escobar, & Arana, 2009). Gargano (2009) uses transnational social fields as part of an analytical framework to understand international student mobility by listening to students’ voices rather than the dominant cross-border educational discourse. She also uses social fields to understand how university students construct identities and negotiate social and physical spaces.
The complexity of international students’ experiences is absent from educational conversations and hence not fully understood. By concentrating on social, cultural, academic, and support networks, it is possible for international students to use transnational and transcultural networks to further their self-representation and identity development (Gargano, 2009). These “transnational acts” are not unidirectional or bimodal; rather, there is a constant flow back and forth of cultural and social interactions between home and host country. Transnational identity formation can be found in economic, political, religious, and cultural practices that propel migrant incorporation and transnational connectivity; this subject has been explored and researched extensively (Kayle, 2001; Levitt, 2001; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Graduate international students cannot be classified as migrants, although they mimic several of their characteristics. This study will attempt to highlight how graduate international students view their identities within the context of American culture and society. In so doing, it will attempt to exemplify ways in which graduate international students’ transient lives are complicated, unique, and diverse.

**Adult transitional theory.** Using the lens of adult development is helpful in trying to understand social experiences of graduate international students. How adults manage transitions, the inherent challenges, and obtain the support systems required to ensure their academic success can be used to understand graduate international students’ experiences. Nancy Schlossberg’s (1989) adult transitional theory provides insights into factors that relate to the transition of adults into a learning environment. Graduate international students face the same transitional predicaments as adults who have experienced discontinuity in their lives because they, too, have been uprooted and forced to adjust to their new environment (McIntire & Willer, 1992).
The graduate student socialization model. A brief look at the graduate student socialization model highlights in numerous ways the importance of social experiences as graduate international students adjust to new environments. This model helps strengthen the argument that institutional members, such as faculty and administrators, should pay more attention to graduate students’ experiences. Socialization can be described as a continuum of experiences; some socialization patterns are common among students, and others perceive these experiences differently (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Purpose of This Study

Information garnered from this study will highlight the needs and social experiences of contemporary graduate international students on university campuses. By understanding the lived experiences of current graduate international students, the university community may see the importance of concentrating on this population. In addition, this study will underscore the need to develop theories and make efforts to practically implement these theories on college campuses in order to better understand and enhance graduate international students’ social experiences. Past research has shown that it is important to critically understand why graduate students struggle in host environments (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007) in order to ensure a smoother adjustment to a new country and to enhance the transplant’s overall experiences. There is also a need to adapt to changes in international students’ expectations for countries to stay competitive in the global marketplace (Mahat & Hourigan, 2006).
Research Questions

This research hopes to answer three main questions, as follows:

1. How do graduate international students perceive their social experiences as they persist in their studies and construct identities through their transitional lives at a private research university in the United States?

2. How do graduate international students decide on an institution and country in which to study? Why do they choose the United States rather than other competing countries? What are the perceived and real barriers to entry (if any)?

3. How do graduate international students plan for life after graduation? If they return home, how do they plan on reintegrating into their social and family lives? If they plan on immigrating to the United States, what factors help facilitate the decision?

Research Design

This is a qualitative study that uses phenomenology to guide the interview questions in order to highlight and understand graduate international students’ lived experiences and worldviews. This study involves ten graduate international students from Chardin University (pseudonym). The reason for choosing a private (predominantly White) research institution is the ability to understand graduate international students’ social experiences within a monocultural environment. The monocultural makeup of the institution, juxtaposed with the graduate international student population, is ideally suited for this type of inquiry. The breakdown of participants is as follows: Six females and four males participated in this study, five of whom graduated in May 2010. There were two PhD students, five Master’s students, two MBA students, and one Law student. Six were married or had a significant relationship in the
United States, and four were single. Their ages ranged from 23 to 30. Each participant was interviewed three times, each interview being held one week apart. Such in-depth interviews gather experiential narrative material that can be used to understand and make meaning of human phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology uses three iterative interviews that focus on life history, details of experience, and reflection on the meaning of that phenomenon (Seidman, 1998). Giorgi Amedeo and Giorgi Barbro (2003) explained that phenomenology uses the entire transcript of the interview to develop a holistic picture of the interviewee. The analysis determines parts called “meaning units,” which are later transformed and their structure determined to understand the experience (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

In addition, at least two social meetings were conducted with all ten participants. These meetings involved informal gatherings with the participant’s significant other (if they had one) or by themselves if they were single. The researcher had the opportunity to meet the parents of two participants as they were attending their graduation ceremony. These informal meetings gave the researcher significant insights into participants’ lives; their contents were handwritten in a journal and later transcribed and added to the participant’s story. However, the main core of the data analysis comprised the three interviews, each of which was 45 minutes to one hour long.

**Literature Review**

The literature review is divided into three main sections: The first section frames some of the reasons for the shifts in student mobility in the context of global trends; the second section examines theories and relevant research to help elucidate the factors that affect the social experiences of graduate international students; and the third section reviews three theoretical
frameworks for understanding social experiences. The shifts in international student mobility
due to global trends tell only part of the story; they explain some of worldwide shifts but do not
specifically explain why the United States is losing talented international students to other
countries. Reviewing studies on the social experiences of graduate students in the United States
reveals limited research into this population. The lack of effort that institutions of higher
learning in the United States put forth in understanding the social experiences of graduate
international students’ transient lives undermines the importance of this talented group. The
development of theories and practices to understand and cope with graduate international
students as a holistic being, with attention paid to their social integration into the United States
and higher education institutions, can no longer be ignored.

As Engle and Tinto (2008) contend, universities must encourage the engagement of
students on college campuses in order to connect students in academic and campus life.
Although they studied specifically low-income and first-generation students, they highlighted the
need for considerable support to transition them to college. Providing support through
orientation programs acclimates students to academic environments and helps them to persist in
their studies (Engle & Tinto, 2008). This practice is applicable to graduate international
students, most of whom need financial assistance and support to navigate through college
environments in the United States.

Studies conducted so far (Hanassab, 2006; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007) have evaluated
specific programs or fields of study within institutions, by examining one specific subset of
nationalities or by grouping international students as a homogenous group. What has been
missing from the literature is research that specifically explores the social experiences common
to contemporary graduate students. The new worldwide landscape has changed with the advent
of increased terrorism concerns and the crash of global financial markets. Patterns and theories that were applicable in the past may not be relevant in today’s environment. This study provides an impetus for other researchers to develop new theories and models to specifically understand graduate international students’ social experiences and identity development.

**Overview of the Study**

This dissertation is framed within nine chapters. Chapter one introduces the study and summarizes the purpose and significance of graduate international students on college campuses. This chapter briefly introduces the topic, the three research questions, the research design, and reviews the relevant literature.

Chapter two delineates the methodology; this qualitative study uses phenomenology to guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The selection of site, participants, data collection methods, analysis, and interpretation of data are outlined in this section.

Chapter three details relevant literature as it pertains to graduate international students. The literature review is be divided into three main sections: The first section frames the causes in the shifts in student mobility in the context of global trends, the second section examines relevant research to help elucidate graduate international student needs and experiences, and the third section outlines three theoretical frameworks to understand the factors that affect their social experiences. The global trends in student mobility tell only part of the story, as the United States could lose talented graduate international students to other countries owing to enhanced competition from other countries. The second section, an analysis of past and current research into experiences of international students, sheds light on the importance of this population but also highlights gaps in the literature. The third section highlights three main theoretical
frameworks: transnationlism, adult transitional theory, and graduate socialization model, used as lenses to analyze the data.

Chapter four presents the life stories of Elif, April, and Nikita. The reason for grouping these three participants is because they are returning graduate students. In addition, Elif and April are both doctoral students, and Nikita plans on applying for her doctoral studies this year. Elif is a 26-year-old Turkish female; April is a 25-year-old Korean female; Nikita is a 23-year-old Indian female Master’s student; and all three are enrolled in the School of Education but in different programs.

Chapter five elaborates the life stories of Cindy, Claire, and Victoria. These three participants have graduated from their programs; Cindy and Victoria have left the country, and Claire is returning for one year of Optional Practical Training at Chardin University. Cindy is a 28-year-old female Chinese student in the Master of Science in Finance program in the School of Management; Claire is a 25-year-old French female Master’s student in the School of Arts and Sciences; and Victoria is a 24-year-old Paraguayan female Master’s student from the School of Education.

Chapter six highlights the life stories of Jude, Jose, Michael, and Rajiv, the four male participants in this study. Jose and Rajiv graduated in May 2010; Jude and Michael continue their journey here at Chardin University. Jude is a 28-year-old Master’s student from New Zealand in the Continuing Education program; Jose is a 30-year-old Law student from Mexico in the Law School; and Rajiv is a 25-year-old Indian student who just graduated from the MBA program in the School of Management.

Chapters four, five, and six chronicle the journey of the ten participants’ lives. They illuminate their past in their home country, their current social experiences through their transient
lives, as they persist and develop identity, and their future plans, as they weave through their complex situations and navigate between home and host country.

Chapter seven discusses the composite structures or overall findings of this research and links them to the three theoretical frameworks (transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate student socialization model). The stories of graduate international students, which are often silenced or ignored, will be at the center of this discussion.

Chapter eight revisits the research questions and discusses them at length. The analysis and interpretations from the previous chapter are used to answer the research questions. In addition, material from the group session held on April 16, 2010, is used in this section.

Chapter nine outlines recommendations derived from the findings and reviews the overall conclusion to this study. Based on the overall findings, this chapter covers suggested recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. This chapter concludes this dissertation but will hopefully generate ideas to create innovative program initiatives and encourage other researchers to develop new theories.
Chapter 2
Methodology

This research uses phenomenology as a qualitative methodology to guide the collection and analysis of data, which was collected during the spring and summer semesters of 2010. The main qualitative data collection method consisted of multiple in-depth interviews with ten participants. I interviewed each participant three times, each interview lasting between 45 minutes and one hour; the interviews were spaced at least a week apart. Although I collected data mainly through individual interviews, informal observations were made during programming sessions organized by Chardin University and social gatherings with participants.

Owing to the extended and multiple contacts that phenomenology requires with participants, my study limited the number of participants to only ten graduate international students. In addition, the study conducted by Guest, et al. (2006) guided my reasoning for the number of participants. During the Guest study, the researchers conducted 60 in-depth interviews with women in two West African countries. Their study found that saturation occurred in the first 12 interviews, and meta-themes were notable after the first six interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).
Research Questions

Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Information Source</th>
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<tr>
<td>How do graduate international students perceive their social experiences as they persist and construct identities through their transitional lives at a private research university in the United States?</td>
<td>• In-depth interviews with ten Chardin University graduate international students, 45 minutes per interview, three interviews per participant, at the minimum of a week apart • Data analyzed through the theoretical framework of transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate student socialization model</td>
<td>• Analyze social experiences (of graduate international students) such as friendships, engagement with university community, religious acceptance, and cultural adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do graduate international students decide on an institution and country of study? Why do they choose the United States rather than other competing countries? What are the perceived and real barriers to entry (if any)?</td>
<td>• In-depth interviews with ten Chardin University graduate international students</td>
<td>• Identify reasons for choosing the United States, in the words of the participants • Are there common themes to perceived and real barriers to entry?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do graduate international students plan for life after graduation? If they return home, how do they plan on reintegrating back into their social and family lives? If they plan on immigrating to the United States what factors helped facilitate the decision?</td>
<td>• In-depth interviews with ten Chardin University graduate international students</td>
<td>• Identify any future plans of returning home or staying in the United States • This question will be asked during the last interview</td>
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Phenomenology

My research used phenomenology to query graduate international students’ social experiences and relied heavily on sociocultural, political, and economic frameworks to understand these experiences. Not only do I identify barriers to entry (e.g., immigration policies), but other unmet needs are identified and required to be addressed to enhance graduate international student social experiences. It is my hope that insights gleaned from this study will lead to a better understanding of the particular challenges graduate international students face.

I conducted a series of three iterative, in-depth interviews with ten graduate international students to review their life story and history, elicit personal reflections of their self-knowledge and identity through their social experiences, and catch a glimpse into their future. My use of phenomenology dovetails with the three theoretical frameworks of transnationalism, adult development transitional theory, and the graduate socialization model. Phenomenology guides the interviews and interpretation to depict the complex lives of graduate international students as they negotiate transnational social fields and as they transition to their new environment.

In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, and this source cannot be doubted. Intentions are united with sensations that translate into full acts of perceptions, and the full-bodied presence of a phenomenon occurs (Husserl, 1970). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenology is the first way of knowing, and it begins with what we are trying to observe. Methodically, phenomenology eliminates prejudgment, sets aside assumptions, and reaches new levels of understanding and acceptance. It features a readiness to see everyday life that is not obscured by preconceived notions of customs, beliefs, and prejudices but is informed by pure knowledge of everyday occurrences. This research has grown and developed out of years of interest I have spent on the topic of international student social
experiences. My passion for this topic has been sustained for almost a decade through personal experiences as an immigrant and as a former graduate international student. Although the landscape has shifted significantly during this time, some of the issues surrounding life transitions remain the same. Through presenting personal history and the stories of these ten individuals, I bring to light the core of graduate international student social experiences. Social experiences that emerged went off on various tangents which complicated the identification of the specific question at hand. This research applies phenomenology methodology, as described by Moustakas (1994). As the researcher, I have sought to reveal more fully the meaning of the human experience, to identify qualitative descriptions of the experience rather than the quantitative, not seek to generalize or identify causal relationships, and to describe the experience with clarity.

This research used Van Kaam’s (1959, 1966) method of analysis, in which the complete transcription of each participant is used. I conducted a preliminary analysis in which every expression relevant to the experience is listed. I also performed the process of phenomenological reduction called horizontalization in this study. Horizontalization means viewing the experience of things that exist in the world from the point of view of self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge. The phenomenological reduction allows the mind to discover its own nature and to find itself by the means of these reductions (Kockelmans, 1967). Each horizon is considered and textural qualities sought to enable the researcher to understand the experience. Phenomenological reduction forces one to uncover the meaning of experience and to look at the description again and again, unearthing deeper layers of meaning. As the researcher, I evaluated each experience singularly and then bracketed and described the phenomenon in totality in a fresh and unrestricted way.
The steps of phenomenological reduction I took included bracketing, which was related to the research questions, and horizonalization, which was the process whereby every statement is given equal value. Irrelevant statements that were not related to the topic or repeated were discarded, and only the horizons (the textured meaning of the invariant constituents of the phenomenon) were kept. I sought to cluster the horizons and organize the themes into textural descriptions. I identified the themes and invariant constituents and checked and verified that they were explicitly expressed in the complete transcript. If they were not compatible and not explicitly expressed, then they were eliminated because those statements were not relevant to the experience. I then assembled all the validated findings as a textured description of each participant or co-researcher. Then, I created a structured overall description of each individual that basically tells the participant’s whole story. From this, I created a composite of all ten participants: the description of the meaning and essences of the experience of the whole group (Van Kaam, 1959, 1966). Individual structural descriptions provide an explicated account of the social experiences of graduate international students. Their themes and qualities revealed how the feelings and thoughts connected to these social experiences were identified. The composite structure represents the total group of individually textured descriptions and the invariant themes of each co-researcher (Moustakas, 1994).

My research used Moustakas’s (1994) modified version of Van Kaam’s (1959, 1966) method of analysis of phenomenological data. In this method, a complete transcript of each participant was used, although this process does not include my life story. I chose to use this method because it was important to understand the experiences of contemporary graduate students. I followed the guidelines of using the epoche process, which involves avoiding or abstaining from prejudgments, biases, and preconceived notions about personal experiences.
According to Sallis (1982), the researcher must remove all presuppositions from view and look at experiences as they are presented anew, seeing them as though for the first time. From the epoche perspective, the researcher is challenged to create new ideas and a heightened level of consciousness that permits the use of nascent experiences and becoming aware of experiences with fresh perspectives. The process of epoche requires a concentrated and involved look at the experience; it has to be present and be able to be identified (Sallis, 1982). The researcher has to see the person with fresh eyes and to leave all attendant perceptions and biases behind. Although epoche cannot fully be achieved, it should be a frame of reference and a regular practice by the researcher. Sometimes, the participant’s experiences are severe and ingrained so that they cannot be bracketed. In this case, epoche provides a way towards renewal and dedication (Moustakas, 1994).

As the researcher, I paid close attention to noema and noesis, as they go hand in hand. Noema gives consciousness a direction towards the objects, whereas noema gives meaning to what one sees, touches, and feels (Moustakas, 1994). Noesis is the act of perception in the meaning of perception, recollection of what is remembered, and judging what is judged (Husserl, 1931). Noema is the “what” that is being experienced—the object correlate, and noesis is the “way” in which the “what” is experienced (Ihde, 1977). In the noematic description, which is objective, the “what” is described and nothing is omitted, so there is a textural description and every aspect is given equal dimensions. The bracketing of the phenomenon starts with epoche being considered as one views the many sides and angles of the phenomenon. With extensive descriptions of textures, one is able to describe how the phenomenon is experienced: the noesis elements of the “what” that exists. The texture and structure are in a continual relationship, and one moves from what is experienced to how it is experienced, which is reflexive. Although
textures and structures are not as simple as object and subject, or concrete and abstract, they are the hidden appearances that together contribute to the appearance of the whole. Although they are intertwined during the research, one may focus on texture or structure at different phases of phenomenological work (Keen, 1975).

Identity and temporality are the themes of transcendental phenomenology. Gurwitsch (1966) states that identity and temporality also go together like noema and noesis. Temporality is the past, present, and future of the experience, and certain elements transcend temporality and determine identity. Perceptions hold variety for us: Each time we look at something, a new experience emerges; however, certain elements remain and are carried forward each time (Gurwitsch, 1966). Temporality often works against identity because it gives the illusion that something new has appeared with time. Nonetheless, what you see yesterday is being seen today; thus, with experience, both are being seen today and in this way, identity and temporality come together (Gurwitsch, 1966).

**Researcher Stance**

My personal story is important to capture because it explains my interest in this particular research topic. I identify with the participants not only as a former graduate international student, but also as an immigrant. My journey in this country began 19 years ago as a graduate student at UMass Amherst, some of my experiences being similar and others divergent from those of the participants in this study. By stating my life experiences clearly, I am able to explain my interest in this research and also elucidate any biases and prejudgments that may have occurred. However, because this research is about the life stories of these ten participants,
not mine, I would like to only briefly explain my background so that there is complete transparency as to who I am and how that might figure into this research.

I have been working in the division of Student Affairs within the Department of Residential Life at three major Universities in the US for the past 19 years. Before working at Chardin University (pseudonym), I worked at two major institutions UMass Amherst and New York University (NYU). I have progressively risen (albeit slowly) through the ranks, starting my career as a graduate student in the United States. I was permitted to work on campus because I held an F1 student visa (all international students are allowed to work on campus for 20 hours per week). From those beginnings, I received my first work permit (H1B Visa) to work at the University of Massachusetts (UMass) Amherst, then became a green card recipient, and finally applied for US citizenship in 2002.

Tracing my personal history further back, to my days after my undergraduate studies in Bombay, India (now Mumbai), I joined the airline industry. This industry provided me with what can be characterized as a “real-world global education.” I worked for carriers that included British Airways, Cathay Pacific, and TWA. However, it was my tenure with Cathay Pacific, the airline of Hong Kong, which was particularly invaluable. As a flight attendant, I not only traveled throughout Europe, Australia, the Middle East, and various parts of Asia but I lived in Hong Kong, where I learned valuable life lessons. Because I worked with crews from various parts of Asia, relationships were transient and difficult to sustain, forcing me to become more independent and resourceful. Traveling to various parts of the globe helped me appreciate and understand differences and similarities among the world’s cultures and religions. I realized, more than ever, how religion plays an important part in the lives of many people around the world. I began to appreciate and learn how to survive in a world of differing customs, values,
and traditions that were foreign to my way of life and thinking. This experience was organic and
dynamic in all its aspects.

After spending nine years in the airline industry, I decided it was time to go back to
school and get my Master’s. I enrolled as a graduate student in the Hotel Restaurant and Travel
Administration (HRTA) program at UMass Amherst. I arrived in this country as did these ten
participants, albeit in the early 1990s. I worked three jobs while studying as a graduate student: I
taught math in an upward-bound program, as a teaching assistant in the department of HRTA,
and was an Assistant Residence Director in the Residence Life program. The educational and
learning experiences in the Department of Residence Life were varied and inspiring. I enjoyed
working with students and realized this was a venue I had not explored before. I realized that, in
connecting with students at a different level, I gained a great level of personal and professional
satisfaction. This changed the trajectory of my life; thereafter, I changed paths from being an
airline industry professional to a Student Affairs professional.

I worked as a professional Residence Director at UMass for three years before moving to
NYU. The experience at UMass grounded me as a Student Affairs professional: The staff was
nurturing and caring and I learned a great deal. I was recruited by NYU in 1998, hired
specifically to open one of the largest leased properties within a university setting in the United
States. I believe that my tenure at NYU has made me increasingly well-rounded. The
Department of Housing and Residence Life experienced significant change in 2002. I played an
active part in developing the Department of Residential Education as it evolved, in part owing, to
a change in focus for the entire division of Student Affairs and the volatile local and global
environment. Over the years, I initiated several program initiatives to meet the new vision and
goals of the fledgling department. I spearheaded the creation of the Residential International
Student Education (RISE) program, an initiative that supports our international students in residence. Since it has become increasingly difficult to provide an adequate level of support to our residential international students, the RISE initiative was my passion during my tenure at NYU. During that era, immigration laws were becoming more complicated, and the United States had become a complex and unfriendly country to international students.

As a professional in the field of Student Affairs for 19 years, I have followed trends in student development and dealt with a broad landscape of issues that students of today face. During the past decade, I have been interested most in analyzing and evaluating the global educational climate. I have closely followed the media in order to track international relations and political progress within the United States. As an immigrant, I have gone through the process of being an international student and later becoming a US citizen. My journey has not only afforded me an education but offered me a broad perspective on global events; this, in turn, has only deepened my interest in international students and their experiences. The breadth and depth of my experiences help me better to understand the unique lives that graduate international students face throughout their journey in the United States.

Site

A private Jesuit research university in the Northeast region, Chardin University (pseudonym) is the site for this study. The school enrolls approximately 14,700 students, out of which approximately 900 are international students (approximately 500 graduate and 400 undergraduate). The overall graduate international students make up only 9% of the total enrolled graduate population (approximately 5,700), so these students can get easily lost in a university system as large as Chardin’s. Given the small size of the graduate international student population and the intimate setting, Chardin University is ideal for this qualitative study.
The reason for choosing a private research university that is also a predominantly White institution is the ability to understand graduate international students’ social experiences within a monocultural environment. The monocultural makeup of the institution, juxtaposed with the graduate international student population, is ideally suited for this type of inquiry. Also, as I work at Chardin University, I gain a better appreciation and understanding of the inner workings of this institution. Being an insider also facilitates prolonged access (formal and informal) to graduate international students, which is needed in a phenomenological study. The number of graduate international students at Chardin University increased by only 26 (5.6%) from 2000 to 2010, according to international student statistics published yearly on the Chardin University website. Thus, it would appear that graduate international students are a low priority at Chardin University; this study may highlight the need for upper-level administrators to concentrate on this population. This study may also provide a safe space for graduate international students to have a voice at their own institution, which in turn allows me to give back to the graduate international student community at Chardin.

For the first 70 years of Chardin University’s existence, its academics emphasized Greek and Latin classes within a liberal arts education. In the 1920s, the University charter was incorporated by expanding its graduate departments, law school, evening college, and summer sessions. Chardin University has continued to rise in national rankings by focusing on enhancing the quality of the institution through research. Although the school’s mission focuses on internationalizing the university, increasing the number of international students has not been a priority. The international student population at Chardin University is made up of 49% Asians, 26% Europeans, 8% South and Central Americans, and 17% from other countries. Graduate
international students are enrolled mainly in the Schools of Arts and Sciences, Management, Education, Theology, and Law.

**Participant Selection**

The Director of the Office of International Students and Services (OISS) agreed to facilitate my research by providing access to the LISTSERV of prospective participants. I sent out an e-mail to all graduate international students at Chardin University (Appendix A). Eighteen graduate international students responded to my first e-mail, sent in early March 2010. These eighteen respondents were sent a second e-mail (Appendix B), which detailed the involvement and engagement I would require of each participant. After the second e-mail, I selected ten participants to be a part of this study.

My criteria for selecting participants were to get a good cross-section and representation of graduate international students, including gender, country of origin, major, and level of study (Table 2). I selected these ten participants based on their willingness to engage in all three interviews and the social gatherings that followed. Some respondents were dropped owing to scheduling issues. All participants were enrolled as graduate students at Chardin University, and all held a student visa that permitted them to be in the United States until they completed their studies. I interviewed each participant three times (45 minutes to one hour per interview); I also sought multiple forms of engagement in natural social settings. Alternative forms of engagement included social gatherings organized either by Chardin University or by participants themselves, with their friends or spouses. One reason I chose only ten participants was the need for prolonged engagement, as some students were not able to sustain involvement owing to time constraints or other personal circumstances.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Type of Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajiv</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Gathering, Analysis, and Interpretation

I collected data predominantly through interviews and informal interactions with the ten participants during the spring and summer semesters of 2010. Most graduate international students do not go home during the summer months; this enabled me to continue to build meaningful relationships with participants. Interviews were loosely transcribed immediately in preparation for the second and third interviews with each participant. Keeping close contact with the data has been my goal throughout the data analysis process. Through regular listening to the taped interviews, the participants’ stories have been narrated accurately, with categories and themes emerging from the transcripts. Thirty interviews from ten participants were formally transcribed by three professional transcribers. I performed analysis and interpretation of the data during the summer semester of 2010. I completed my final write-up and recommendations in the summer semester of 2010.

I made field notes and journal entries after each formal and informal contact with participants. According to Miles and Huberman (1984), qualitative data consist of words rather than numbers, which are used during analysis. Words are communicable, practical, and easy to understand; however, words can be ambiguous and difficult to compare objectively. Miles and Huberman (1984) proposed a useful guide to an iterative process of analysis, which requires more thought and time be taken with the data. They developed a chart that moved from data display, data reduction, and conclusions from drawings and verification. Data display is an avenue for valid qualitative data analysis because it organizes and assembles information into an easy and compact form via which a researcher can justify conclusions. The biggest challenge lies in reducing the data because everything looks important when the researcher first begins the analysis; however, large amounts of data eventually have to be reduced to a manageable form.
In addition, valid counting techniques have to be used; otherwise, researcher-preferred data or bias will distort the conclusions and findings. Although counting is a quantitative form of assessment, it is used in qualitative findings to tag something as significant or important. There are counts, comparisons, and weights constantly occurring during the analysis of qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). In this study, I developed structured descriptive codes for each participant and later composite structures to be applied across participants. Both structured and composite codes received the highest ranking; they were quantifiable because the segments were coded into Qualrus software.

I sought broad categories and generated subthemes in order to enumerate the type of meaning-making of participants (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). As I gathered data through individual interviews, I immediately organized the information. Following each interview, I listened to the digital voice recording of each participant and entered field notes into a journal. Through this constant organization, reading, and review of data, I immersed myself in the flow of events and activities so that analysis and interpretation followed intuitively. I used the concept of “thick description,” as explained by Rossman and Rallis (2003), to detail physical surroundings, time, actions, and events. My analysis of the data contributed to categories which, in turn, contributed to the formation of themes.

This research utilizes inductive and deductive analysis for interpretation. The inductive analysis takes place largely from the emic view, which is weighted towards the participants who are insiders within the cultural group. Deductive analysis takes place from an etic view, which is from an outsider perspective, i.e., the researcher’s. I used a blend of both inductive and deductive analysis to avert the criticism of having researchers perform only deductive analysis (Patton, 2002). I conducted inductive analysis by involving participants as the data were being...
analyzed in order to ensure that member-checking is occurring and that their stories are being portrayed accurately and truthfully. Deductive analysis from me as the researcher was useful to gather an outsider perspective. As the researcher, I identified with the group reflexivity helped in the analysis. As the data were being reviewed and analyzed, categories and themes emerged; these categories were first determined within the three interviews per participant and then across participants. From these categories, I generated themes using Van Manen’s (1990) guidelines. For our purposes, themes comprise the experience of focus and meaning, are a simplification of meaning, cannot be objectified, and capture phenomena that the researcher is trying to understand (Van Manen, 1990).

I used Qualrus software to generate codes, along with general hand-coding. Bracketing and hand-coding the data helped me to keep close to the data. According to Denzin (1994), interpretation is an art and cannot be based on formulas and mechanical calculations; thus, a good interpretive process moves tactfully from field to text for the readers, and is complex and reflexive (Denzin, 1994). As Kvale (1996) identified, this research sought to classify three contexts of interpretation: participant, commonsense, and theoretical understanding (Kvale, 1996). This study involved the participants in the interpretation process in order to ensure validity and reliability. All ten participants were involved in reviewing the analysis of their life stories. Also, my experience was used to strengthen this study by including my thoughts and perceptions in the research. Interpretation is not an attempt to determine a causal explanation, to predict, or to generalize (Rossman & Rallis, 2003); instead, this research aims to tell a story which details participants’ voices, researcher’s experience, and uses theory to explain phenomena.
Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this study is that this qualitative research involved only ten participants at one private research university. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized to other international graduate students and other research universities. However, this study delves deeply into the lived social experiences of these specific ten students owing to the prolonged engagement that phenomenology necessitates. A second limitation of this study that was originally perceived is that, because of the selection process and prolonged contact needed, the respondents would necessarily be active and engaged graduate international students. This, however, did not turn out to be the case; only one student was actively engaged in several clubs and organizations. The other nine were graduate international students that wanted their stories to be told and participated for various reasons. For example, some participated to help a fellow graduate student; some wanted to help other students that shared the same cultural background; and one participant wanted to practice his English. For whatever reason, they all were actively engaged throughout the research process. This research did attract a specific type of student across the board—one that was willing to share their lives in a deep and meaningful way.

A third limitation is that I work at the institution where the study is being conducted. Although this offers several advantages (prolonged access to participants and insider knowledge of institutional culture), it is still a limitation. I ameliorated this limitation by using triangulation during the coding and analytical phase of the research. I shared interpretation of the data with participants and colleagues from other universities and at Chardin University to ensure validity and reliability. Every Thursday, from March to August 2010, I met with a colleague from Chardin University who is also a graduate international student. We discussed topics pertinent to our research, such as interview questions, the coding process, and analysis. These conversations
helped me clarify my analysis and thoughts as I proceeded with this research. I included the participants during the interpretation phase and scheduled meetings for member-checking to ensure that their stories were being portrayed in a fashion that was honest, truthful, and clear. If there were facts about participants’ lives that were incorrect, changes were immediately made (for example, when I had misspelled the name of a town). With participant involvement, I used feedback loops for clarity of data during analysis and interpretation. As the researcher, I was not looking for congruence during interpretation from participants. In fact, if participants did not agree with my interpretations, their thoughts were included in the final analysis even if the actual findings were not changed. Such points of convergence and divergence were noted in the study.

Interview Questions

I developed the interview questions, which grew out of the overall research questions. These questions were tested with another graduate international student, who was not a participant in this study. This brief pilot study was conducted with one graduate international student to see whether the questions engendered in-depth conversations. After this student’s input, I modified some of the questions to enhance conversation and dialogue with participants. Interview questions were fairly open-ended, and they evolved and changed with each participant; however, I maintained the broad framework of the three research questions so that they would remain the focus of the interviews at all times. (Please see Appendix D for interview questions for all three sessions.)

The ten participants (also called “co-researchers” in the world of phenomenology) were actively engaged with me during the spring and summer semesters of 2010. Out of the ten, five will still be on campus during the 2010–2011 academic year. Of the graduating participants,
four graduated in May and one in August of 2010; of the four who graduated, one has returned in
the fall of 2010 to teach French part time at Chardin University and another has found an
Optional Practical Training position in Boston. Two participants have returned home in May
2010 owing to lack of job opportunities in the United States. During the entire data collection
process, my co-researchers came up with additional questions that helped to clarify their
experiences. They introduced topics I did not originally perceive, for example, the concept of
dating and how these relationships played an important part in their social experiences. One of
the participants suggested that she would like to meet other members of the group, even though
she was graduating and probably returning home. This was posed to all the participants, and I
was quite surprised that all seemed excited by the possibility. All but one participant (owing to a
scheduling conflict) showed up for the group session. Two seemed hesitant at first but
participated enthusiastically during the group session.

I have assigned pseudonyms to all participants, family members, and friends; however,
their life stories that involved country of origin and schools have not been changed, in order to
provide an accurate context for their experiences. Also, some of the participants talked openly
about their participation in the study, a factor that I could not control. The participants seemed
not to be concerned that they could be identified in the study, but I nonetheless ensured that strict
confidentiality of participants, from my perspective and Institutional Review Board (IRB)
standards, were followed and maintained. All participants signed the informed consent form that
was mandated by IRB guidelines and understood that their involvement was completely
voluntary and that they would be free to leave the study at any time should they desire. In the
third interview, all participants were asked to clarify or correct any of their previous thoughts; at
this opportunity, all but one participant changed some of his thoughts from his first two
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

interviews. In addition, all ten participants met with me at least twice after the interviews, often with their spouse or significant other. These social interactions were held in local and on-campus cafés and consisted mostly of evening tea or lunch. The social interactions that involved spouses and significant others were helpful in understanding the participant fully because they gave me a rare glimpse into the true personal lives of some participants.

This chapter outlined the methodology, research questions, data gathering, analysis and interpretation, site and participant selection, study limitations, and my stance as the researcher. The next chapter will review the literature background for this dissertation.
Chapter 3

Literature Review

The literature review is divided into three main sections: briefly, the first section frames the causes in the shifts in graduate international student mobility and puts them in a global context; the second section examines theories and relevant research to help elucidate social experiences; and the third highlights transnationalism, adult development theory, and the graduate socialization model as the three theoretical frameworks used herein to understand graduate international student lives.

The first section sets forth the framework to understand the reasons for the recent fluctuation in student mobility globally—specifically, in the United States. Several factors have contributed to the current shifts in enrollment of international students in the United States: restrictive immigration policies, increased competition from other countries, better economic conditions in developing countries, escalating tuition and living costs, and globalization.

The second section of this chapter explores research and the use of theory to understand graduate international students’ social experiences. Several research concepts are highlighted, such as the importance of harmonious relationships with local community and peers, adjustment issues, cultural shock, U-curve, and needs assessment using Maslow’s hierarchy (Kleinberg & Hull, 1979; Lysgaard, 1955; Mosalai, 1980; Winkelman, 1994). In addition, several qualitative and quantitative studies are reviewed that evaluated international students’ experiences through the lens of neo-racism, discrimination, and alienation (Hanassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Mahat & Hourigan, 2006; Moffett, 2006). The need for intercultural competence by a host country has been identified for decades, and this is also briefly reviewed in this section (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; Bennett, 1986).
The third section examines graduate international students’ transient and transitional lives through the theoretical frameworks of transnationalism (Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001); adult development theory (Knowles, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989); and the graduate student socialization model (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001) in order to elucidate their social experiences.

Studies conducted to date have tended to assess international students’ experiences within specific programs or fields of study within an institution. In these studies, international students were likely to be evaluated either as one specific subset within a country or as a homogenous group. What is missing from this literature is research that specifically explores the social experiences of contemporary graduate students. It is this researcher’s contention that graduate international students need to be treated as a *heterogeneous* group, with their social experiences highlighted, in order to develop better support systems within institutions of higher learning. By better understanding the lived experiences of contemporary graduate international students, university administrators and government officials will be able to determine how to enhance their learning and development.

**The Global Context**

It is important to understand the reasons for the recent global shifts in international student mobility and, specifically, their implications for the United States. Several global factors have contributed to the current shifts in graduate international students’ mobility: national policy changes (Student Exchange Visitor Information System [SEVIS], the Patriot Act, and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security); other countries stepping up their recruitment
of foreign students; improving economic conditions in developing countries; escalating tuition and living costs in the United States; and globalization.

**Policy changes.** Post–September 11, 2001, organizations and policies were instituted that largely contributed to the decline in international student numbers from 2003 to 2006. Since 2006, the numbers have stabilized, and there is an upward trajectory in enrollment; however, compared with other countries, the United States has no direct policy to increase international student recruitment. Three central policy changes have had a direct effect on international student mobility in the United States: (a) the creation of the department of Homeland Security (b) the Patriot Act, and (c) the mandatory tracking of all visitors and scholars through SEVIS.

Immediately after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush and his advisors created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS, 2002). According to the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was reorganized to report to the Department of Homeland Security. Sweeping changes were made immediately following the terrorist attacks without identifying short- and long-term consequences. The infrastructure within departments was insufficiently developed to conduct the type of foreign national inquiries now required by the INS (DHS, 2002).

The Patriot Act was enacted in 2001 to provide tools to protect America from terrorists (PA, 2001). However, according to Paden and Singer (2003), the Act created several restrictions for international students and scholars. For instance, many of the policies in the Act encroach on the civil rights of US citizens. The government contends that US citizens are much safer after the enactment of the Patriot Act (Paden & Singer, 2003), which was renewed in the summer of 2005 with very few changes. The former President Bush stated in his briefing during the days before the renewal of the Patriot Act that the Act has enhanced cooperation and data sharing
between the FBI and CIA, thereby making great strides in securing the United States from terrorists and unwanted visitors (Hulse, 2005).

Following the September 11, 2001, attacks, Congress authorized more than $36 million to implement and expand a visitor tracking system (Wood, 2003). By January 1, 2003, the INS had completed its development of SEVIS, an online tracking system of all visitors and international students in the United States (Wood, 2003). All universities within the United States had to have SEVIS operational by January 2003. Each international student, after arriving in the United States, has a few days to report to their university’s international student office. From that moment on, the government can track that international student. Restrictions regarding degree completion dates, majors, and advisor information require strict adherence. Any changes to an international student’s address, advisor, or any kind of absence have to be entered into SEVIS. International student advisors are now required to take on a new role of continuous reporting on foreign students to the Department of Homeland Security (Kless, 2004).

**Visa delays and denials.** Visa applications decreased significantly in 2002–2003. Even for those who successfully obtained visas, this process, which used to take a few weeks, started taking six months to a year (Paden & Singer, 2003). In the name of national security, the US government has instituted several programs that, in essence, treat all international students and scholars as potential terrorists (Eggspuehler, 2005). The US government needs to figure out an efficient way of deciphering the difference between a terrorist and an international student or scholar. Historically, the United States held the reputation for being the most sought-after country for higher education. This is a standing that is now in question (Eggspuehler, 2005). The INS has stepped up its visa processing initiatives and improved services it provides to international students. In April 2005, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Visa Services,
Janice Jacobs, and other officials visited NYU. This was one of the many briefings by the US State Department in an effort to reach out to international students and administrators (Jacobs & Ammerman, 2005).

**Other countries step up their recruitment of foreign students.** Several countries have realized that international students are an untapped revenue source; these countries have developed strategic marketing plans to target niche communities. For example, New Zealand advertises that students will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in just three years instead of four, in turn reducing tuition, room, and board costs. Australia and United Kingdom market themselves as offering low cost of living and lowered work restrictions. Australian embassies in Asia have mobilized to help recruit students, and universities have been encouraged to adopt business-based strategies. Asian countries like China undercut Australia and the UK by further lowering costs (Marginson, 2002).

A large number of European countries are offering US-style education taught in English. Foreign student numbers have risen by 21% in Britain, 23% in Germany, and 28% in France. Germany has an added incentive of providing free education to foreign students as well as domestic students (Economist, 2005). With strong financial incentives and a need for immigrant labor in high-tech areas, these countries are competing more vigorously for the same population. In addition, China and India (traditionally the two largest exporters of international students to the United States) are expanding their higher education capabilities. The result is that the lead in international student enrollment the United States has enjoyed during the past few decades is shrinking (Davis, 2004).

**Improving economic conditions in developing countries.** A large majority of international students come from developing countries such as India and China. But the
developing economies of these nations, in particular, have dramatically improved economic conditions. In the fields of science and technology, they have experienced unprecedented growth. The younger generations are finding reasons to stay behind, and scholars are returning home as opportunities and access levels increase (Economist, 2005).

A survey in the *Economists Review* (2005) concluded that the sharp decline in international students coming to the United States from India and China in 2004 can be attributed to improved living conditions, a booming economy, and strong educational programs back home. For those students who do elect an American education, they keep in close touch with their home countries and send money home to support their families. Eventually, many return home after a few years of working in the United States to take advantage of the lucrative markets in Shanghai and Mumbai. As a result, there is today no longer a question of the proverbial “brain drain” but a “brain gain” or “brain circulation” (Economist, 2005).

**Increasing tuition and living costs in America.** Zusman (2005) contends that American institutions are shifting the burden of the costs of higher education to individual students and their families. As government support and funding has dried up, institutions need to look to other avenues to raise money. Many turn to private companies to help carry the financial burden. But it is clear that the cost shift is now directed to the individual—the price to be paid for anticipated future earnings (Zusman, 2005). According to the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1973), total expenditures for higher education rose from 1.1% to 2.5% of gross national product in the 1960s. The number of PhD programs tripled, while total enrollment at the undergraduate level more than doubled. The rate of increase in cost per student generally exceeded the annual rate of inflation at 2.5%, and as high as 8% in some institutions (Hines & Hartmark, 1980, p. 22).
Increase in cost of living is also something that the United States will have to deal in this century. As oil prices and cost of living rise, it is increasingly difficult for foreign students to make ends meet (Reddy, 2007). International students pay full tuition and are not entitled to any financial aid from the US government. Devaluation of foreign currencies, especially from developing countries, against the US dollar also makes the cost of an education for many international students prohibitively expensive. An international student’s parents’ yearly income is marginal when compared with US standards. Although some foreign students come from affluent homes, without their parents’ financial support, it would be impossible for them to study in the United States (Cummings, 2001).

**Globalization of higher education.** Globalization continues to affect higher education systems worldwide in a myriad of ways and has strongly contributed to changes in student mobility. Although not a new phenomenon, there are several definitions of globalization, which is often confused with internationalization, to which it is related. Altbach and Knight (2007) have developed a good working definition for both terms. Although globalization is most often seen as a positive phenomenon, strong criticisms are voiced when related new policies and initiatives are applied to higher educational systems. Globalization, as defined by Knight and De Wit (1997), is the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas across borders. Globalization affects each country in a different way according to a nation’s individual history, traditions, culture, and policies (Knight & De Wit, 1997, p. 6). Globalization has an international component because it connects countries, sectors, and institutions worldwide. Although globalization of higher education systems is a necessity in today’s world, several criticisms have been made of this growing phenomenon, the most important being that it strengthens worldwide inequities by mostly helping wealthy developed countries to profit while
third-world realities remain the same. On the positive side, the new globalization trends are exciting and ultimately become a necessity for institutions and nations to survive. The knowledge economy is the most coveted trend in globalization because it has heady implications for countries as they try to enhance their higher education systems (Altbach, 2007b).

A report in the *Economist* (2005) concluded that technology is improving by leaps and bounds; the Internet has been integral to increasing educational offerings. With the advent of the World Wide Web, global communication and education have become easier and more affordable, obviating the need to travel to other countries or locales. The ability of technology to connect individuals within universities instantaneously for an immediate sharing of ideas, research, and thought has brought about unprecedented change in how the business of higher education is conducted globally. This has been the impetus behind the creation of so-called distance learning, which has rocked traditional brick-and-mortar institutions to their very foundation (Economist, 2005). Although the online learning bubble burst onto the educational scene in the late 1990s, universities such as Columbia, NYU, and Wharton School of Economics have closed their online ventures, making it clear that this type of higher education will exist but will not replace traditional learning environments (Economist, 2005).

Altbach and Knight (2007) state that the process of internationalization of higher education markets is also a key factor that strengthens the economic argument. Many countries such as Australia, the UK, Canada, and the United States recruit international students because the profits from doing so are extremely high. For example, international graduate students provide teaching and research services for a modest compensation. International treaties and reforms like the formation of the European Union, Bologna Process, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) will continue to change international student mobility patterns.
The growing trends of globalization, internationalization, and multinationalization will continue to affect international student mobility. The opening of branch campuses, twinning programs, and franchising will also change the flow. Franchising is a less prestigious method of internationalizing higher education and is often criticized as the “McDonaldization” of college campuses (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

The World Bank has calculated that global spending on higher education amounts to $300 billion per year; further, the proportion of adults with higher educational qualifications in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries has nearly doubled from 22% to 41% between 1975 and 2000 (Wooldridge, 2005). Douglass (2007) states that the higher education race is being fueled globally by the idea that it will benefit the national economy and provide socioeconomic mobility to its citizens. While other nations are increasing their enrollment capacities, however, the United States has stagnated in terms of higher education enrollment and access rates. According to the data provided by the OECD, post-secondary school participation in the United States has fallen from 38% to 34% during 2000 to 2005. In contrast, many OECD countries have reached participation rates that exceed 50%. The United States has become extremely complacent in maintaining its higher education edge, and US higher education is a second-tier political issue for the government (Douglass, 2007).

**Cumulative effect.** The cumulative effect of all these factors is threefold: continued decline in the United States’ global market share of international students; talented graduate students gravitating to other countries where they are being actively recruited; and a continued lack of cross-cultural understanding between Americans and international students. International education is the foundation for addressing some of the issues that this country faces, and future generations will require the capability of understanding the international community. Restoring
the United States as a global leader in higher education needs to be a strategic initiative undertaken actively by the government (NAFSA, 2003). In the long run, the lack of any sustained government policies to enhance graduate international student enrollment in the United States will reduce diversity on college campuses and limit access to talented students across the globe, thereby reducing financial gains for institutions and the country.

**Effects on diversity and access to talent across the globe.** International students enrich cultural diversity on campuses worldwide (Hanassab, 2006). For example, greater understanding of varying nations and cultures comes more easily when friendships develop during the college years. Foreign students act as ambassadors for their own countries and then go back home to become cultural ambassadors of goodwill in return (Altbach, 1998). Hanassab (2006) contends that a diverse campus provides students with an environment to learn how to function in ways that will help as they engage with society at large. Students in such an environment learn views that are different from theirs and to negotiate and resolve conflicts in ways that are mutually beneficial (Hanassab, 2006). However, the benefits of such cross-cultural understanding will not be realized immediately; instead, goodwill can develop over a span of decades, best seen after 30 years or so. These students often become future leaders of developing countries and are empowered by the strong ties they have established with the foreign institutions from which they graduated (Altbach, 1998).

International students also bridge gaps in knowledge and understanding that greatly improve the strategic position of the United States in the world. Kofi Annan, the former Secretary General of the United Nations; Prince Saudi Faisal, Saudi Arabia’s minister of foreign affairs; Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, president of the Philippines; and Vincente Fox, former president of Mexico, are just a few of the many foreign leaders who studied at US universities.
As students at US schools, they developed strong ties to the country, laying the foundation for
the productive relationships they have relied on in their leadership positions (Paden & Singer,
2003).

Enrolling international graduate students at research institutions offers a myriad of other
benefits. They perform research at both the doctoral and the master’s level, many of them
working as research assistants and staying on to work for a few years before they go back home.
Not only do host countries benefit from foreign exchange, business transactions, and trade, but
there are cross-cultural benefits that are unquantifiable (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985). As an
illustration, the “new Argonauts,” as portrayed by Saxenian (2006), are the thousands of
international students who received their degrees in engineering and science and remained in the
United States. They have created social enclaves in this country, integrated themselves into the
local economies, and are often considered the brightest people in their home countries. These
promising individuals, seeing opportunities back home, have transplanted relationships and
institutions by means of technological entrepreneurship, thereby reshaping global technological
competition. The new Argonauts have made America richer, not poorer, Saxenian (2006)
elucidates; for example, former international students from China, India, and Taiwan have
created a technological bridge between home country and the Silicon Valley. The new
Argonauts are a small group of highly educated individuals from research universities in the
United States whose contributions to economic development have been disproportionately
significant. Long-distance migration is not new; however, transferring production to a new
location requires a deep knowledge of local contexts and an understanding of social, cultural, and
institutional settings (Saxenian, 2006).
Economic implications. According to the most recent Open Doors Report (2009), international students and their families contribute $17.9 billion yearly to the US economy (IIE, 2009). International students, particularly undergraduates, pay full tuition; the government does not subsidize any part of their education. Student expenditures include tuition, cost-of-living expenses, and the costs for family dependents, who often reside with students during their stay in the United States. Primary sources of funding come from personal contacts and family (67%); the balance is paid for by home governments, US colleges and universities, and a small contribution from the US government (IIE, 2008). From a business perspective, the current government agenda seems to make little sense. While the United States makes it difficult for many of the brightest college students to enter the country, these same students will choose other, more welcoming countries (Davis, 2004).

During the past decade, the United States has faced a rapidly shifting economic, political, and security landscape. Any lack of global competence will disadvantage our students because they will be ill-prepared to handle the levels of expertise needed to negotiate today’s world markets. The ability to relate to other cultures and gain familiarity with issues from around the world are essential for our graduates to remain competitive. Inadequate cross-cultural training of employees has cost the United States an estimated $2 billion in annual losses (Brustein, 2007; CED, 2006). Altbach and Knight (2007) state that the process of internationalization of higher education markets is also a key factor that strengthens the economic argument in favor of international student enrollment. International graduate students provide teaching and research services for a modest compensation. The European Union (EU) has actively pursued academic internationalization for more than two decades as part of its move towards economic and
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

political integration. Most of the world’s two million international students are self-funded; they are not funded by governments, philanthropy, or academic institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

**Conclusion on global context.** This section of the literature review has highlighted global factors that have contributed to overall shifts in international student mobility—especially in the United States. The most dominant factors are the efforts by other nations to attract talented graduate international students. If the downward shift in the United States’ market share of international students continues, there will be significant implications for future research and development and the creation of new knowledge, which has been dominated by graduate international students in this country (COSEPUP, 2005). In addition, cumulative deleterious effects will be seen on the recruitment of talented graduate international students (especially in the fields of science and technology), cross-cultural understanding of people around the world will erode, and financial benefits to institutions in the United States will shrink.

**Understanding Graduate International Students’ Social Experiences**

This section of the literature review investigates research in order to understand graduate international students’ social experiences. Over the years, several researchers have examined and used such concepts as the importance of harmonious relationships with local community and peers, adjustment difficulties, cultural shock, U-curve, and needs assessment using Maslow’s hierarchy (Kleinberg & Hull, 1979; Lysgaard, 1955; Mosalai, 1980; Winkelman, 1994). In addition, several studies have used qualitative and quantitative methodologies to evaluate international students’ experiences through the lens of neo-racism, discrimination, and alienation (Hanassab, 2006; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Mahat & Hourigan, 2006; Moffett, 2006). For decades,
many researchers have identified the need for intercultural competence by the host country; this concept is also reviewed in this section (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; Bennett, 1986).

**Importance of harmonious relationships with peers and local community.** Graduate international students spend several years of their lives in the United States. They arrive with clear academic goals and aspirations, although some of them have not thought through what their social lives might be like in their host country. Research has shown that positive contact with American students enhances their overall experience (Trice, 2004). One such study, which paired host national students with international students in an eight-month program, resulted in higher retention rates and grades compared with students who were not involved in the program (Westwood & Barker, 1990). Perrucci and Hu (1995) studied personal factors influencing 428 graduate students. Graduate international students were most satisfied with their academic appointments (the best predictors being self-esteem) when they had contact with domestic students and low perceptions of discrimination. When graduate international students have positive relationships with American students, they have higher satisfaction with their academic programs (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Researchers have linked overall satisfaction with social and academic experiences to positive interactions with the host community (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; Kleinberg & Hull, 1979).

Conversely, researchers have found that if there is no or limited contact with the host community, feelings of cross-cultural isolation, depression, and fear can be experienced by international students (Hull, 1978; Schram & Lauver, 1988). International students might have difficulty communicating their thoughts and ideas effectively and therefore be reluctant to form friendships with American students. They might stick to their own ethnic enclaves, if those groups exist on campus or in the nearby community. Research has shown that when
international students spend more social time with Americans, they adapt better to their host country than if they connect with students from their own country (Surdam & Collins, 1984).

When international students have limited contact with host nationals, they come to perceive that they are unable to adjust and fit into their new environment. At a Canadian university, a qualitative study found that African and Southeast Asian students who isolated themselves from the locals were more likely to face adjustment problems socially, academically, and culturally (Heikenheimo & Shute, 1986). In another study, the frequency of interactions with local students enhanced the adjustment of international students (Zimmerman, 1995). Trice (2004) surveyed 497 graduate international students at a research university to elucidate the benefits of interactions with Americans. The research findings concluded that graduate international students were well adjusted and involved with on-campus activities and American culture because they had close social interactions with American students (Trice, 2004).

Klomegah (2006) studied social factors that alienate international students in the United States. His study found evidence contradictory to previous literature, which had suggested that international students face more alienation when adjusting to new campus life when compared with American students. This quantitative study examined 94 students over a period of two semesters. There was no evidence to suggest the level of alienation experienced by foreign and American students varied within the context of a small college that caters to minorities (Klomegah, 2006). This study had limitations, though, because the site was a minority-serving institution. Feelings of alienation are a common phenomenon for both international and minority students; hence, trying to find differences between host and international students would be difficult. In addition, level of alienation (which includes feelings of powerlessness and isolation) cannot be measured through a quantitative analysis. However, the study did show that frequent
social contact with other students is a reassuring factor that helps students adjust to a new environment (Klomegah, 2006).

A study by Montgomery and McDowell (2009) of international students in the United Kingdom presented different perspectives on adjustment issues international students’ face. This study showed that international student communities provide substantial academic and social support among themselves. The lack of interaction with local students did not disadvantage them in any way, as past research had shown. However, the superficial relationships and interactions of international students with local students did not contribute to their development or help enhance their global perspective (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). The limitations of this qualitative study were that the findings could not be generalized, and the study involved only a small group of international students that were studying in the United Kingdom.

**Adjustment issues, cultural shock, and the U-curve.** Quantitative research on international students’ adjustment, satisfaction, and needs has also been undertaken to ensure that universities were doing enough for this population (M. Y. Lee, Abd-Ella, & Burks, 1981; Mosalai, 1980). More recent studies on experiences and adjustment have found adjustment problems, discrimination, and negative interactions in the United States, especially if international students come from particular regions of the world (Hanassab, 2006; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Moffett, 2006).

Research has been used to provide guidelines for managing cultural shock using strategies that foster awareness, learning, and adaptation. Cultural shock refers to anxiety and feelings of disorientation and confusion that people feel when they are in an unfamiliar social environment, especially in another country. Strategies used to manage it include preparation
before departure from home country, understanding personal and social relations, and obtaining skills for conflict resolution (Winkelman, 1994).

The U-curve hypothesis, first identified by Lysgaard (1955), states that the adjustment process over time flows in a U-shaped pattern. Adjustment is posited to be easy and manageable at first; then a level of crisis occurs when one feels less adjusted, is lonely and isolated; and later, one feels integrated again and well adjusted to the new country. However, no empirical study supports this theory (Lysgaard, 1955). A study designed to show the cross-cultural problems that international students face, however, showed no support for Lysgaard’s hypothesis. In it, the frequency of the key variables—depression, loneliness, and homesickness—had no relationship to the length of stay (Kleinberg & Hull, 1979). Even though Lysgaard’s hypothesis turned out to be questionable, it did highlight the fact that international students are potentially filled with stress as they embark on their journey (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985).

**International student needs assessment.** Abraham Maslow outlined a motivational hierarchy consisting of five levels of human needs arranged in a pyramid (Adler, 1977). In this scheme, the needs of one level must be met before its determination of behavior diminishes and the next hierarchy of needs becomes necessary. Progress up the hierarchy towards self-actualization constitutes positive movement towards psychological health. Further, Maslow himself has stated that his theory is so imprecise that it cannot be tested. However, there is intuitive value to his theory, and as such, it is used in management literature. For example, this theory was used to understand immigrant adjustment patterns (Adler, 1977).

Using Maslow’s theoretical basis, Mosalai (1980) attempted to identify and compare the perceived needs of 73 graduate international students at the University of Missouri–Columbia. Five independent variables (sex, nationality, degree level, level of teaching experience, and five
years of teaching experience) were measured, and five dependent variables (security, social, esteem, autonomy, and self-actualization) were examined. Researchers concluded that international graduate students do not differ with regard to their perceived need for importance when they were grouped by sex, degree level, and years of teaching experience. However, they did differ with regard to autonomy when grouped according to nationality. The study also showed that further research with different nationalities and a larger sample was needed in order to investigate perceived needs satisfaction and deficiency among international students (Mosalai, 1980).

Among the principal findings from a study conducted by NAFSA: Association of International Educators (1981) on the needs of international students from developing countries were the following: international students are most concerned about their finances, acquiring credentials and relevant skills, finding a job in their home country, and undergoing practical training before returning home. Lower on the scale of needs were food, English language courses, and religious practices (M. Y. Lee, Abd-Ella, & Burks, 1981).

**The lens of neo-racism and discrimination.** In recent years, qualitative studies have used neo-racism and discrimination as a conceptual framework to understand international students’ experiences. A qualitative study by Lee and Rice (2007) that interviewed 24 students from 15 countries found that the issues international students face cannot all be attributed to adjustment factors. Some of the more acute challenges they face come from inadequacies in their host country. This study utilized neo-racism as a conceptual framework to explain international students’ experiences. There were several particular difficulties international students faced: from being ignored, to verbal insults and confrontation. In contrast, students from Western countries faced fewer of these hardships. One of the concerns researchers from this
study raised was whether the positive effects and goodwill generated during international students’ stay in the United States were being overridden by these persistent negative interactions (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007).

The findings of a study conducted by Hanassab (2006) to assess the experiences of international students in terms of perceived discrimination indicated that they did experience discrimination, and that students from different regions faced varying degrees of intolerance. The findings also showed that students from the Middle East and Africa experienced more discrimination than did students from other regions. The study also revealed that international students faced more discrimination off campus than on campus (Hanassab, 2006).

International students are often regarded as a homogenous group that are highly talented and that can adjust to the narrowly defined rules and expectations set by American institutions and society (Leong & Chou, 1996). In fact, international students come from varying cultures, traditions, and religions and are an extremely heterogeneous group of individuals. Some researchers have stated that international students are stereotyped by their American peers, faculty, administrators, and community (Leong & Chou, 1996; Mestenhauser, 1983). Scholars have argued that international students are viewed as handicapped, deficient, lacking in English language skills, and unfamiliar with the American educational system (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983; Mestenhauser, 1983; Paige, 1990). Unfavorable experiences with the host country community have negative effects on international students’ psychological well-being (Schram & Lauver, 1988). If host nationals harbor feelings of animosity or prejudice against international students, then significant consequences result for international relationships (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001).

**International student satisfaction.** Unlike the United States, other countries have been paying close attention to international students and their experiences. Mahat and Hourigan
(2006) conducted a comparative satisfaction survey between domestic and international student experiences in Australian universities. This study investigated the utility of two of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) scales: generic skills and good teaching. These two factors were compared in order to study the differences between domestic and international students. The researchers believed that a better understanding of these students’ experience could engender meaningful comparisons and allow administrators and policy practitioners to make critical decisions in program planning and educational policy. The goal of their research was to enhance international students’ overall experience. Developing academic links and networks across national borders provides domestic students with greater opportunities for understanding other cultures and being exposed to different perspectives about social and academic ideas. However, social challenges come from leaving behind familiar environments and support networks; coupled with unfamiliar learning environments, these challenges can create a problematic environment for international students and can have a significant impact on international students’ overall experience (Mahat & Hourigan, 2006).

Smith, Morley, and Teece (2002) examined the satisfaction levels of 1,132 international students who finished courses in 1999 at one of 75 educational institutions. Satisfaction levels were highest in relation to meeting students from other countries, followed by quality of teachers and courses (G. Smith, Morley, & Teece, 2002). Several researchers have concluded that paying attention to the satisfaction levels and experiences of international students is important for a country to compete globally for their enrollment (Mahat & Hourigan, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

**Intercultural competence.** There is little doubt that graduate international students provide many benefits to higher education institutions in the United States, for example, by
increasing awareness of different cultures and bringing fresh perspectives into the classroom (Harrison, 2002). The United States is a pluralistic society, and it is hard to imagine that colleges and universities would not want to train students in the necessary skills for living and working in a multifaceted environment. It is a challenge for most institutions to educate a diverse student population so that they are competent multicultural and can function successfully in a pluralistic society (Rong & Brown, 2002). Higher education institutions need to prepare their administrators and faculty to support, facilitate, and enhance the multicultural mission shared by universities (Grieger, 1996). International students provide a means of diversifying college campuses (Hanassab, 2006); from them, domestic students can acquire different perspectives on their own societies and other nations and cultures. This interaction gives students a more global understanding that will effectively prepare them for future careers that have international and multicultural facets (Paige, 1990).

Since the 1980s, intercultural competence has been identified as an important feature in the development of college students. Then, Bennett (1986) formulated the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which measures the progression of a worldview through sophisticated and increasingly complex intercultural experiences. Bennett identified two main orientations: ethnocentric and ethnorelative. The ethnocentric orientation comprises three main concepts: denial, defensive retreat, and minimization. The ethnocentric orientation is one in which one’s own culture experience plays a central role. The ethnorelative orientation consists of acceptance, adaptation, and integration and of making meaning of one’s own cultural experience in the context of other cultures (Bennett, 1986).

According to Bennett (1998), intercultural understanding is a complex question and is needed not only by diplomats and the occasional traveler; rather, this type of communication is
needed in a pluralistic society, where there is an expectation of tolerance and respect for diversity. Monocultural communication comprises common language, behavior, and values—similarities that allow humans to predict and understand each other’s behavior. Whenever this is not so, the difference in cultures causes friction and misunderstandings; hence, social differences have historically been discouraged (Bennett, 1998).

**Gaps and under-researched domains.** Historically, there have been gaps in research into trying to understand international students’ experiences. Some of the gaps are as follows: the impact international students have on cross-cultural understanding of local students and host communities, academic life through the setting of curriculum and courses, faculty attitudes, female students’ adjustment, and counter-adjustment when students return to their home country (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985).

The question that has remained mostly unanswered is whether international students have any impact on the cross-cultural understanding of students in host countries. The fact that international students are present on campus and in the community does not necessarily mean that there will be an enhancement of understanding. Merely studying in a foreign country does not assist in breaking through cultural barriers and may even strengthen stereotypes. The possible enriching effect of cross-cultural experience for both host and international students has not been fully appreciated (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985).

Another area that has not received much attention in the literature is the impact graduate international students have on the academic life of host institutions, especially when planning academic curriculum and courses. What effects do these students have on courses and curriculum, as teaching assistants, and how does their presence influence the quality of the undergraduate experience?
Faculty attitudes in host countries towards international students have also not received much attention. The work by Goodwin and Nacht (1983) found that faculty had negative attitudes towards international students. If this is a prevalent attitude, and university faculty find international students deficient in language skills and competence, then more research needs to be done to uncover these aspects (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983).

There is a need to know more about the reintegration of graduate international students and their families as they return to their home countries. When international students, especially those from developing countries, return home, what is their journey back like, and how do they reintegrate into society? Research on countercultural shock is still fairly nascent, although some studies have been conducted by a few researchers to get at the heart of the post-journey resettlement into the home country (Arthur, 2003; Hood & Schieffer, 1981). Another area that has been unexplored by researchers is the support needed to help talented graduate international students immigrate to the United States. There is a need to pay attention to this group of graduate international students, especially in the fields of science and engineering, because they are needed as researchers in the United States (COSEPUP, 2005).

Female international students have also been overlooked historically. There has been a considerable rise in the number of female international students during the past few decades, and yet their unique experiences and support needs have not received much attention. There are particular issues females face when they study in the United States, and this area is fairly under-researched (Rowe & Sjoberg, 1981).

What is missing from the literature is research that specifically explores the social experiences of contemporary graduate students in the United States. In the past, social and academic experiences as they pertain to specific groups from particular countries of origin have
been explored. Studies conducted so far have evaluated specific programs or fields of study within an institution, either focusing on one subgroup within a country or considering all international students as a homogenous group.

**Theoretical Frameworks to Understand Social Experiences**

Which theories might best apply to helping us understand graduate international students’ identities, needs, and experiences? Although there is no one theory developed to understand this population, several theories can be used to try to tease out unique aspects of their social experiences. The ones identified that relate best to international student experiences are transnationalism (Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001), adult development theory (Knowles, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and the graduate student socialization model (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

**Transnationalism.** Graduate international students mimic transnational migrant behavior as they navigate between home and host country. Guarnizo (1997) contends that transnationalism describes complex contemporary migratory activities. In addition, transnationalism covers a series of economic, sociocultural, political, practical, and discursive relations that transcends the territorially bound jurisdiction of the nation-state (Guarnizo, 1997). Transnational literature is expansive and far-reaching; however, in order to understand graduate students’ lived experiences, certain concepts must be queried and researched. The beginning of this section defines common terminology used in transnational literature. It goes on to explore the complexities of transnational literature.

It is important first to understand some basic definitions that are frequently used in transnational discourse. According to Handlin (1973), the word “immigrant” conjures images of a person that has left their country and abandoned their old life and painfully learned a new
culture and language (Handlin, 1973). There is also a need to define the term “migrants,” who are, on the other hand, transients who have come to work in a host country and will return home after their work is done (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 2008). According to Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (2008), “transnationalism” is a process in which immigrants develop a multilayered pattern of social fields across boundaries. Immigrants that span boundaries and maintain multiple relationships, for family, economic, religious, and political reasons, are called “transmigrants.”

**Ethnocentrism, Whiteness, and xenophobia.** Ethnocentrism is a form of hostility towards different ethnic groups. It is important to discuss ethnocentrism in this context because graduate international students tend to form ethnic enclaves during their tenure in the United States. Erdmann (2008) contends that the effects of globalization are far-reaching and are a force that is causing the world to be at once unified and fragmented. The amalgamation of cultures and products across continents can often lead individuals to feel that they lack control and a sense of identity. As a result, immigrants often have to construct dual identities: They have mixed emotions at leaving family members behind, which imbues them with a sense of loss and sadness, along with a parallel sense of immense accomplishment at being in a new host country (Erdmann, 2008). Immigrant and minority groups often do not clearly know where their loyalties lie: with their home country or the place they currently reside (Cornwell & Drennan, 2004).

Race, ethnicity, and colorism are important concepts to understand as we move forward with this discussion. **Race** is the assumption that individuals can be divided into groups that have significant differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2009). **Ethnicity** refers to a subset of people who share common national, ancestral, cultural, immigration, and religious characteristics (Daniel,
2002). *Colorism* is the allocation of privilege or disadvantage as it applies to the lightness or darkness of a person’s skin (Burke, 2008). Elements of critical race theories are entrenched in research on socioeconomic mobility. Ethnographic studies have been cited infrequently in family science literature and to explain structural influences on inequality and social mobility among immigrant families of color (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010).

So-called Whiteness studies comprise a growing body of literature that explains ways in which White people get a racial classification that comes with privilege and power for some but not all (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Bartolome and Macedo (1997) have moved these discussions beyond the monolithic constructs of “Whiteness” and “Otherness” to help interpret the complex dynamics of ethnic relations in the United States. They have revealed that the politics of racism and division do not exist only with extremist hate groups but are an unappreciated but forceful trend in mainstream America. They argue that examples from popular media, culture, and politics illustrate the larger issues educators must face but largely ignore. Their work sheds light on racist ideology that shapes the social order; their work also strives to move beyond binary, reductionist views of White-versus-Black racism. Their deconstruction of “White ideology” involves understanding how ethnicity and race interrelate (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997).

*Xenophobia* is a deeply rooted fear or hostility towards foreigners. Crush and Ramachandran (2010) contend that large-scale migration from developing to developed countries has led to a growing resentment of immigrants. Their study uncovers the fact that xenophobia is strongly entrenched in developed countries but is also prevalent in developing countries. Without a coordinated effort to recognize this problem by international and regional constituents, xenophobia will continue to undermine the rights of migrants (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010).
Bartolome and Macedo (1997) contend that there is a general false perception among some Americans that jobs are lacking for citizens as a result of the influx of immigrants—specifically illegal immigrants. Calls that we need to take our country back from Mexicans are an indication that as we deconstruct ethnicity and race, they appear to play an important role in reproducing undemocratic structures of power relations that break down along racial, ethnic, and class lines (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997). Tsai (2006) states that immigrant youth often have to reconstruct their social networks in a new country, which affects their psychosocial development. The study Tsai conducted found that, owing to limited English proficiency, immigrant youth stayed away from their American peers out of embarrassment and nervousness. Further, Tsai contends that English as a second language (ESL) programs inadvertently promote “otherness” and make such immigrants targets of discrimination (Tsai, 2006).

**Power, rights, and social capital.** Power relationships permeate multiple settings in the lives of international students, just as they do for migrants; they intersect within nations and across borders. Similarly, the ease with which graduate international students gain entry into the country is determined by whether they are from developing or Western countries. The law’s scope goes beyond the local authorities and expands from the power that is legitimate in social fields at large (Foucault, 1980). In this way, migrants in multiple social fields experience different layers of power and authority as they navigate back and forth between home and host country (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

According to Bartolome and Macedo (1997), it is not necessarily important to understand how cultural differences are structured with behavior patterns, but it is important to understand the anger and tension that come from cultural differences coexisting in the context of uneven power relations. Culture is strongly linked with language, but it is rarely examined as an attempt...
at multicultural understanding. There is little understanding as to how English can subordinate and distance people that we study through English. There needs to be more of an understanding of how English masks the ideological centering of White culture and places all other ethnic groups outside its realm of study. According to these authors, the English language is used to convey dominant White ideology, thereby creating social and cultural inequities. Using language as a focus, one can see how US society demonizes the other as though it were an enemy and responsible for all the ills of society (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997). Language plays a huge role in the experiences of graduate international students. Altbach (2007) contends that English is playing an important role in globalization. Worldwide higher education systems use English as their primary medium of instruction, and it has replaced other classic world languages such as Latin, German, and French. The implications are that English as the lingua franca for the world community is here to stay (Altbach, 2007a).

Bartolome and Macedo (1997) deconstruct cultural conditions that have given rise to an assault on undocumented immigrants, the concept of affirmative action, African Americans, and other racial and ethnic groups. It is the opinion of these authors that ideological factors have led highly educated individuals to blindly follow and believe in narrowly held conservative views, as portrayed by the media. Racism and high levels of xenophobia are not caused by isolated individuals but represent the dominant wing of society waging a war on the poor and on people of various ethnic groups; in this skewed worldview, members of a particular race, language group, or class are second-class citizens and can be scapegoated as national enemies responsible for the ills of society. As anti-immigrant sentiment grows stronger, there is no guarantee that the INS will be able to protect the rights of human beings documented as aliens or illegals. This dehumanizing process has been met with silence from politicians from all sides. Some of them
call for liberty and equality and the moral irrelevance of race, and others claim that differences have to be tolerated (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997).

**Transnational social fields.** Another concept that is used frequently in transnational literature is the “transnational social field,” that is, an abstract space immigrants use as they stay connected to both host and home countries (Gargano, 2009). Levitt (2001) contends that individual migrants cannot be viewed in isolation because they are embedded in social fields. Social fields are transnational social groups that consist of migrants and nonmigrants as they engage in sociocultural, political, and economic activities that shape the social groups. When transnational communities and organizations emerge, their energies are distributed between sending and receiving countries.

Transnational individuals maintain dual loyalties and keep their feet planted in both worlds (Levitt, 2001). Gargano (2009), in her study, used transnational social fields to unveil the meaning-making of international students. She contends that fields of study that highlight border-crossing rarely if ever examine the lived realities of international students in an educational environment. Transnational migration discourse does not incorporate international students’ voices or educational trade realities as analytical approaches. Although international students are not specifically mentioned in any transnational literature, they constitute a migrant population that is growing, so their experiences as examined through transnational social fields must be recognized (Gargano, 2009).

Transnational scholars have used social fields to understand migration patterns; similarly, this framework can be used to understand graduate international students’ social experiences. Levitt and Schiller (2004) have used social fields to study migration and to distinguish between *ways of being* and *belonging*. They argue that assimilation and sustaining transnational
connections are neither contrary nor dual opposites. In addition, transnational processes are occurring in several fields, and the concept of society can no longer be equated with boundaries of nation and state (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Migration scholars have long contended that, to make it in the socioeconomic realm, migrants need to abandon their customs, traditions, and language. Recent scholars stake the claim that contemporary and former migrants are able to remain connected to their country of origin and still succeed in their host country (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Points of similarity lie in the fact that migrants are embedded in multilayered and sited transnational fields, and the lives of migrants can no longer be seen from within only one nation or boundary (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). There is simultaneity in the social lives of graduate international students, just as there is with migrants. Migration scholars contend that transnational acts are not unidirectional or bimodal; instead, there is a constant flow (back and forth) of cultural and social interactions between home and host country. Transnational identity formation takes place in economic, political, religious, and cultural practices that propel migrant incorporation. Transnational connectivity has been explored and researched extensively (Kyle, 2000; Levitt, 2001; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Recent research on second-generation migrants continues the debate on assimilation, which states that the classic transnational migration is a short-lived, first-generation phenomenon. Other researchers now speak of new forms of transnational connections, which encompass youth in both lands (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2003).

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) have adopted a transnational social-field approach to studying social life, which distinguishes between transnational social networks and one’s consciousness of being embedded in them. Such a distinction is important for understanding the experience of simultaneously living within, yet beyond, the boundaries of a country and for
developing methodologies to study such experiences. According to them, the nation-state concept does not capture the complex reality of interconnectedness in today’s world (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Several other scholars have highlighted the interconnectedness of societies affected by the flow of media, capital, and people (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Such a cosmopolitan perspective is provided by Beck (2000), who describes reflexive cosmopolitanism in which technology is the key to communication. The flow of information across the globe leads to a new form of consciousness in which social relations and positioning are no longer evident, but the individual intersects with global information (Beck, 2000).

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) describe ways of being as actual social relations and practices rather than identities associated with their actions. That is, individuals can be entrenched in a social field but not identify with any cultural politics associated with that field. Although they may have the potential to act within or identify themselves with the social field at a particular time as they live in it, some may choose not to. On the reverse side, ways of belonging refer to practices that endorse identity and that entail a conscious connection with a particular group. Ways of belonging have both an action and an awareness of identity that the action entails (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Transnational inquiry first analyzes transnational phenomena across space; second, it analyzes transnational form across time; and third, it investigates different types of transnational activities (business, religious networks, social movements) (Khagram & Levitt, 2008). Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004) contend that transnational migration studies make us alter and challenge the social process and social reproduction. Social reproduction is the process of transferring certain aspects of society (such as class) from one generation to the next. Cultural reproduction
is the transmission of cultural values and norms and is sustained over an extended period of time, which often results in social reproduction. Social reproduction is an understudied aspect of transnational studies, as many of the studies on globalization focus merely on production and not on social reproduction (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). For example, migrants actively seek to engage or neglect ties with family and connections back home. Such transnational acts vary, and there are numerous ways of being and belonging. Based on their needs, individuals might choose to stay connected or let some relationships slide; social reproduction occurs in social and cultural contexts (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) argue that immigrants may not differentiate between ways of being and possible ways of belonging. Eventually, their desire and capacity to engage in transnational practices will change during their lifetime (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

According to Khagram and Levitt (2008), social life crosses and transforms boundaries of nation and state. Social movements to advance human rights, gender-based causes, and family values get recognized and travel across physical boundaries. Economies, in contrast, form around manufacturing, investment, and production (Khagram & Levitt, 2008). Social movements and fields for immigrants center around economic, political, and religious aspects of life. Religion and immigration are closely linked in transnational literature because immigrants form religious institutions in their host country, and it seems that, for future immigrant children, there is a loss of power to form new institutions. The study of religion in transnational literature provides insight into migrants’ ways of being or belonging (Levitt, 2003). These authors describe how migrants often enact rituals that help them recover their past through translocative and transtemporal spaces (Tweed, 1999).
Just as migrants, neither are graduate international students a homogeneous group. Transnationalism manifests itself from below based on the everyday practices of individuals and group activities and from above as a result of global governance and economic activities (M. P. Smith & Guarnizzo, 1998). In a similar way, international students are governed largely by governmental restrictions from above as they form social networks and bring meaning to their everyday lives. Transnationalism is used to describe the economic, political, and sociocultural occupations and activities that require regular, long-term contacts across borders for their success (Portes, Guarnizado, & Landolt, 1999). According to Levitt and Khagram (2008), empirical transnationalism focuses on describing, classifying, and categorizing transnational dynamics. Transnational acts take place between bounded forms over space and time. The world of global studies literature tends to equate transboundary phenomenon with integration and worldwide isomorphism. Global scholars do not capture cross-border agents and interactions that have a worldwide scope; instead, they assume a level of convergence and homogenization which in reality does not occur. Transnational phenomena remind us of socioeconomic contexts; they warn us neither to make generalizations nor to erase critical shades of differences between individuals, knowledge, and cultural practices (Khagram & Levitt, 2008).

Portes and Rumbaut (1990) contend that the history of America is constituted largely of immigration, and the progress made by the country is reflected mainly in the expansion of the nation. Although there have been problems and struggles among this diverse, talented, energetic, and motivated immigrant group, they have provided richness and variance to the cultural structure. Because they are different from the native residents, there is an assumption that immigrants are uniformly poor and uneducated, and that they arrived in America to escape hunger and persecution. Thus, there is an assumption that all immigrants behave in similar ways.
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

The lack of uniformity of contemporary immigration has become apparent, and generalizations are no longer possible. Immigrant America is a much different place than when early immigrants arrived at Ellis Island (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Therefore, the unvarying menu of services provided to international students also does not make sense, as the needs and wants of these students vary and are substantially diverse—depending not just on their nationality but also on the regions in which they resided in their home country (Hanassab, 2006). Gargano (2009) argues that cross-border conversations about international mobility lack the complexity of international students’ lives, experiences, and identity constructions. Cross-border literature tends to homogenize and generalize international students’ experiences even though great variability and dimensions of complexities exist (Gargano, 2009).

Portes and Rumbaut (1990) contend that moving to a new country is not easy, however enhanced the circumstances are in the host country. The new language and culture are enticing but also generate anxiety; also, the great expense related to travel and relocation weighs on the immigrant’s mind. Those who feel that they cannot achieve their goals at home choose this migrant path despite its drawbacks (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). International students also tend to leave their own home country for some of the same reasons, and many of them stay in the United States and participate as engaged citizens. Employers value migrant workers because they have a strong work ethic, working for long hours and for low pay. Migrants are regarded as superior in certain tasks mainly when Americans are unwilling to do these tasks. Besides those who are part of the lowest echelon of the workforce, there are highly skilled workers that come to the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990).

Adult development theory. Using the lens of adult development theory is helpful for understanding the social experiences of graduate international students. Graduate international
Graduate International Students’ Social Experiences

Students often fall under the category of “nontraditional” students because many of them have worked for several years before coming to the United States for a graduate education. Therefore, ways in which adults manage life transitions, their challenges, and the support systems required to ensure academic success all can be used to understand graduate international students’ experiences as well.

To understand the development of young adults (undergraduates), several theorists have used age-stage perspective to explain various levels of progressive growth and maturation (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1982; Perry, 1981). Nancy Schlossberg’s (1989) transitional theory provides insights into factors that relate to the transition of adults into a learning environment. Her work can be viewed as both psychosocial and a counterpoint to the age-stage perspective as well as a vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Graduate international students face the same transitional predicaments because they, too, have experienced discontinuity in their lives, having been uprooted and needing to adjust to their new environment (McIntire & Willer, 1992).

Several similarities emerge in the transitional aspects of graduate international students’ lives as they relate to adult transitional theory upon reentry into the academic environment. Some international students may need more support than others, but as a whole, they are a more goal-oriented and mature group of people. Schlossberg’s (1984) work reflects a theory based on transition, and she describes transition as any event or nonevent that leads to a change in relationships and daily routines. As a consequence, roles change and accommodations need to be made to absorb the new way of being. Schlossberg’s transition theory provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment, all of which are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time. The transition
process may be caused by a nonevent or anticipated decision but still take a long time. The transition consists of a series of phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out. Transitions extend over time: As the individual moves from preoccupation with the transition to integrating it into daily life, these transitions can lead to personal growth or decline (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

Graduate international students are motivated learners; many of them are extremely self-directed in their educational endeavors, which they consider to be life-centered, with a great deal of value placed on their own experience. Another important factor to consider is that individual differences among people increase with age (Knowles, 1990). Because they are older on average, graduate international students are especially differentiated and cannot be grouped as just one subset of the student population.

Lynch and Chickering (1989) summarize as follows: Adult learners have a wider range of individual differences such as multiple demands and responsibilities in terms of time, energy, emotions, and roles; more varied past experiences and an array of ongoing experiences; more concern with practical application than pure theory; greater self-determination; and a greater need to cope with transitions. International students also vary considerably in their language proficiencies, cultural beliefs, and religious practices (McIntire & Willer, 1992). Graduate international students are highly differentiated from each other, and hence, adult development theories can be used to understand their experiences.

McIntire and Willer (1992) contend that the United States is known for its youth-oriented culture, which is strongly featured in the social dynamic. They contend that most graduate international students are mature because they have journeyed to the host country to further their education. Many of them are bilingual and hold responsible positions in the private or public
sector. As the cultural gap around the world is rapidly closing, they posit three fundamental differences between international and other students: requirements for entering and staying legal; language proficiency in oral and written communication; and dependence on financial support, which can be easily terminated owing to wars and natural disasters, especially when international students come from developing countries (McIntire & Willer, 1992).

Schlossberg (1989) contends that the “need to matter” is another critical dimension of making a successful transition. Indeed, the belief that an adult matters to someone else and that he or she is the object of someone else’s attention is appreciated. Dimensions of mattering include attention, importance, dependence, ego extension, and appreciation. Learner–environment fit is the continuous interaction between the two. The barriers to learner–environment fit could be dispositional (past experiences and self-perceptions); situational (real-life conditions such as lack of money, time, or previous commitments); or institutional (administrative, organizational, and educational practices). This theory integrates well with other theories and is conceptually sound; further, it is based so closely on the individual that it is easily applicable to and integrates cultural differences. However, the number of variables it lists poses challenges to future qualitative and quantitative studies. Also, there needs to be more research using this model for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), international, and other diverse populations. It is important to assist in people’s ability to move in, move through, and move out of the process—in other words, to make a successful transition (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

Owing to the integrative and individual nature of its applicability, adult development theory is used as a lens for understanding the lived experiences of graduate international students.


Graduate student socialization model. A brief look at the graduate student socialization model highlights the importance of social experiences as students adjust to new environments. This model will not be used extensively in this study because it helps mainly to understand aspects of professional socialization and mentorship, which are not the predominant focus of this study. Nonetheless, certain aspects of this model help strengthen the argument that institutional members, such as faculty and administrators, should pay greater attention to graduate international students’ experiences. Socialization can be described as a continuum of experiences; some socialization patterns are common among students and others perceive these experiences differently (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

The expanded framework developed by Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) helps enumerate the graduate students’ socialization process, which takes into consideration differences and commonalities within their professional expectations. The core socialization process in graduate degree programs consists of understanding institutional culture, such as academic programs and peer climate; interaction and integration; and core elements such as knowledge, investment, and community involvement. This section of core elements is controlled by the university. Surrounding the core socialization elements are personal communities, graduate student background, professional communities, and novice communities (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001). The graduate student socialization framework is important to review because it supports the importance of social experiences contributing to academic success as well as the adjustment to new environments. This model also supports the significance and usefulness of adult transitional theory and transnationalism as a window onto how graduate international students navigate new environments in their host country.
During 1958–1988, the number of non-US residents receiving PhDs in the United States increased dramatically, from 772 to 8,589 (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992). According to Weidman et al. (2001), many faculty members found it difficult to deal with cultural differences and interaction patterns; thus, they tended to concentrate on academic themes rather than socializing international students to the norms of their profession. As a result, international students have turned to their peers to help adjust to the new norms and culture as they adapt to the United States (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

**Conclusion on Research on Social Experiences and Theory**

This section enumerated current and past research on graduate international students’ social experience, along with gaps in our knowledge and under-researched domains. Several research concepts were highlighted, along with qualitative and quantitative research conducted to evaluate graduate international students’ experiences. Found missing from the literature was research that specifically explored the social experiences of contemporary graduate students. Studies conducted so far have evaluated specific programs or fields of study within an institution, using either one specific subset within a country or grouping international students as a homogeneous entity. The theoretical framework of adult development theory, transnationalism, and the graduate student socialization model were suggested as superior tools for understanding graduate international students’ social experiences.

**Overall Conclusion**

This tripartite literature review first framed the causes in the shifts in graduate international student mobility in a global context; next, it examined theories and relevant
research to elucidate social experiences; lastly, it highlighted transnationalism, adult
development theory, and the graduate socialization model as the three most useful theoretical
frameworks for understanding graduate international students’ lives.

The first section explained some of the reasons for the recent global fluctuation in student
mobility, and specifically, their implications for the United States. It is clear that the current
mobility trends among graduate international students cannot be attributed to any one factor.
Instead, an interplay of factors is at work, such as restrictive immigration policies, improving
conditions in developing countries, other English-speaking countries increasing their higher
education capacities and capabilities, the rising costs of higher education, and globalization. The
US global market share of international students has been declining for a decade (IIE, 2009).
The continued lack of any national policy to attract or set a threshold on international student
enrollment numbers for institutions is contributing to this trend (CGS, 2009). These trends have
considerable implications for higher education institutions in the United States. International
students contribute to campus diversity, generate substantial revenue for their institutions and
host countries, engender long-term goodwill, improve national security through enhanced
cultural understanding, increase research capabilities (especially in the sciences), and provide
access to international talent across the globe (Altbach, 2006; NAFSA, 2003). Graduate
international students who stay behind in the United States form a core highly skilled workforce
that will be key to the country’s future economic competitiveness (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009).

There are currently 2.7 million students studying outside their home countries. It is
predicted that, by 2020, this number will increase to somewhere in the range of 7 to 10 million
(IIE, 2007). The recruitment of graduate international students is a way for countries, including
the United States, to fill gaps in areas that lack local applicants. Countries like Denmark,
Germany, Australia, and the United Kingdom are increasing their recruitment efforts of graduate international students (West, 2009). The United States lacks a consistent policy that would set a threshold for international student recruitment for institutions. Many institutions operate without documented guidelines for admissions, financial aid, housing, and curricular program relevance (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985).

The second section of the literature review explored research and the use of certain theories to understand international student experiences. Several research concepts were highlighted, such as the importance of harmonious relationships with local community and peers, adjustment issues, cultural shock, U-curve, and needs assessment. In addition, studies that evaluated international student experiences through the lens of neo-racism, discrimination, and alienation were reviewed. Several gaps in research were identified, along with the importance of intercultural competence. The third section discussed graduate international students’ transient and transitional lives through the theoretical framework of transnational identity (Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001), adult development theory (Knowles, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and the graduate student socialization model (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Studies conducted to date have assessed international students’ experiences narrowly, within specific programs or fields of study in an institution. International students have a propensity to be evaluated as one specific subset within a country or as a homogeneous group. Specifically lacking are studies that intentionally explore the social experiences of contemporary graduate students in the United States. Graduate international students need to be treated as a heterogeneous group and their social experiences highlighted in order to develop better support systems within institutions. It is hoped that the information garnered from this study will
highlight the needs of international students on university campuses. By better understanding the lived experiences of graduate international students, university administrators and government officials will be better able to determine how to enhance the learning experience and development of contemporary international students.

In the midst of the global economic downturn and a complex security environment, it is difficult to concentrate on institutional strategies for improving globalization efforts. To keep international students engaged and interested in higher education systems in the United States, there is a need to form partnerships between the federal government and higher education institutions and to have strategic initiatives for linking international student recruitment and enrollment with areas of foreign relations, economic development, and national security (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009). The worldwide landscape has changed dramatically with the advent of increased terrorism concerns and the crash of global financial markets. Patterns and theories that were applicable in the past may not be relevant in today’s environment. This study aims to enumerate the factors that are needed for the success of graduate international students in the United States and to provide an impetus for researchers to develop new theories to understand graduate international students’ social experiences and development.

To this end, the next chapter will concentrate on the stories of three participants: Elif, April, and Nikita. These participants were grouped together because they are all in the School of Education and are returning graduate students. Elif and April are doctoral students, and Nikita will be applying for a PhD program in 2012.
Chapter 4

Stories: Elif, April, and Nikita

In this chapter, I briefly introduce all ten participants, explain the process that went into developing each story, and delve deeply into the life stories of Elif, April, and Nikita. The reason for grouping these three participants together is that they are returning graduate students. In addition, Elif and April are both doctoral students, and Nikita plans on applying for her doctoral studies this year.

Introduction to All the Participants

Elif is a 29-year-old graduate student from southeast Turkey; she is a second-year doctoral student in the School of Education. Elif is a confident, smart, intelligent, and determined young woman. She comes from an accomplished family: Her father is a statistician, her mother is a former teacher, and an older sister is a practicing physician. Elif is her father’s daughter, a statistician in the making. She is Kurdish, which defines who she is today, being an identity that has shaped her life. Elif’s desire to find a new life away from the tensions between the Kurds and the Turks came through clearly throughout her interviews. The United States has given her the opportunity to experience freedom of speech and the ability to discuss equality among class structures in education and research.

April is a 25-year-old Korean female doctoral student in the School of Education. April has been in the United States since high school and has lived away from her parents since she was 14 years old. Her family moved from Korea to the Czech Republic. She has attended two prestigious institutions in the Boston area: one an all-female university and another the oldest
and most prestigious institution of higher learning in America. She then came to Chardin University for her PhD. April is deeply religious, mature beyond her years, and a third-culture kid still looking for her ideal community. She believes that she has slowly unpacked her experiences and has raised her level of critical consciousness.

Nikita is a 23-year-old Indian Master’s student in the School of Education. She is the youngest of all participants. Having never left Mumbai, she struggled the most during her initial transition. Feelings of homesickness and isolation are not new to Nikita, and she has had to fight those to survive her transition. Nikita is an only child and extremely close to her mother. Her mother was diagnosed with cancer two years ago; this has made her transition even more difficult. Nikita has successfully completed her first year of school and is on her way to apply to PhD programs to secure her future in the United States. Although Nikita has had a rough start, she is determined to succeed.

Cindy is a 28-year-old Chinese student in the one-year Master of Science in Finance (MSF) program in the School of Management. Cindy was born and raised in the Eastern part of China in a midsized city called Xuzhou. Because of the one-child program in China, she has no siblings and is extremely close to her parents. Raised within the confines of Communism and as the only child, her father had high expectations of her as he would of a son. He always encouraged her to become independent and strong. Cindy is a young woman determined to speak out and is always looking for new possibilities to find happiness and true love.

Claire is a 25-year-old French student in the School of Arts and Sciences. She is extremely close to her parents and twin siblings. She misses her family and is conflicted about her future. Claire has been in a relationship with Barry (pseudonym), her American boyfriend of several years. She feels that she acts or behaves very French in this country and is always
talking about her family, friends, and the good food that she misses. She is not sure why she feels this way because she is not really patriotic, but even so feels the need to identify the differences to her boyfriend and the people she encounters.

Victoria is a 24-year-old female from Paraguay enrolled in the School of Education. She is married to Peter (pseudonym), a German student she met during her undergraduate days at Barry University in Miami. Her journey to the United States has been wrought with complexity and transitions since she was a very young girl. It was only in the third interview that Victoria broke down and revealed that her uncle (her mother’s brother) was kidnapped this past year; thankfully, he was released, but this particular incident had a profound effect on her emotionally and on future decisions to return to Paraguay.

Jude is a 28-year-old Master’s student from New Zealand enrolled in the School of Continuing Education. He is originally from Bombay, India, but identifies himself as a New Zealander who spent most of his adult life in Auckland—the longest he has stayed in any one city. Before coming to CU, Jude worked in New Zealand for eight years. He has led an extremely transient life; his family unit is small, consisting of just his mother and him. Jude believes that his journey to the United States has been a mistake; he feels that he is stuck in shallow quicksand and needs to find his way out. His journey to find himself continues.

Michael is a 26-year-old German male in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program in the School of Management. He is a maverick by nature and a nonconformist. Michael comes from a small town in Germany called Eddersheim. Michael had a typical childhood; he lived in a loving household with his parents and was their only child. In the eleventh grade, he developed a passion and desire to study in the United States. Michael wants
to indulge in and experience American culture and has actively sought ways to stay away from anything familiar, especially German students.

Jose is a 30-year-old lawyer from Victoria in Tamaulipas, Mexico, enrolled in the one-year Master’s program at the Law School. He and his wife Alicia (pseudonym) are both enrolled in the LLM program. They are both lawyers and have taken a break to study US law for a year. Jose was the oldest participant in this study and spoke limited English. He speaks Spanish fluently and openly admitted that he was interested in participating in the study because he wanted to practice speaking English. Jose is an accomplished lawyer in Mexico with an impressive academic portfolio: a bachelor’s degree, Master’s, and JD from Monterrey universities.

Rajiv is a 25-year-old male Indian student enrolled in the MBA program in the School of Management. Born and raised in India, he lived in Goregaon, which is a suburb of Mumbai. Rajiv comes from a small Maharashtrian family and lived with his parents all his life before coming to the United States. He is the only participant actively engaged in multiple student clubs and organization. Rajiv is a born optimist, constantly networking at every opportunity.

The Process of Developing Each Participant’s Story

My research followed these ten participants’ journeys as they reflected on their past lives in their home country and their current social experiences in the United States. I watched as they persisted, developed their identity, and carved out their future. Their stories wove a path through their complex lives as they navigated and negotiated between home and host country. While I was developing individual stories using the foundations of phenomenology, and specifically horizontalization, themes and essences started to emerge through participants’ life experiences,
all of which I documented, leaving nothing out from all three interviews. After performing a lengthy analysis of each participant’s story, horizons started to emerge, which in turn went through the process of phenomenological reduction. From reduction, I was able to form textural essences that finally led to structured descriptions for each participant. From the original 35-40 pages of analysis for each participant, I reduced each story to approximately 15 pages. This process synthesized the meaning units and essences for each participant. Individual stories provided me with individual shades and textures to illustrate participant lives, which in turn provided a deeper level of understanding of each participant. I developed each story with a title that explains the essence of the participant. In addition, I identified structured descriptive codes at the beginning of each story: the highest ranked codes for each individual participant. These codes pinpoint what is most important to them as individuals and permeate the themes of each participant’s life story. All themes are self-explanatory except for transnational acts, which scholars of migrants define as the constant flow of social and cultural information between home and host country (Kyle, 2000; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Elif—Her Father’s Daughter: A Statistician in the Making


The story. Elif is a 29-year-old Kurdish female from Southeast Turkey; she grew up in a town called Diyarbakir, which means the land of Copper and Bakir. Elif speaks Kurdish, and English is her second language. She has a fairly strong accent but can articulate her feelings and thoughts extremely well. She was born and raised on a university campus because her father is a professor in Southeast Turkey. Her father is a biostatistician; however, owing to the difficult
political situation for the Kurdish minority in Turkey, he teaches mathematics and calculus in the School of Education. Her mother was a primary school teacher but ended up staying at home to take care of Elif and her sister. Elif’s older sister recently married and is a practicing physician in Turkey. What came through during all three interviews was the high level of tension in Turkey between the Kurds and the Turks. The Kurds are a minority and are not allowed to speak their own language; this seemingly simple act could put them at risk for violence.

Elif has been studying at Chardin University since 2005. She first came to the United States to do her Master’s in Curriculum and Instruction, and later worked as a research assistant for a year. She is currently enrolled in a PhD program in the School of Education. I got to know Elif really well during the course of a few months and interacted with her socially on many occasions. Some social engagements were planned, but mostly we attended the same functions hosted by Chardin University. I believe that we will stay connected in the future. She is a confident, smart, intelligent, and determined individual. Being Kurdish is important to her and defines who she is today, and this aspect of her identity has shaped her life. Elif explained to me during her first interview:

Because of the place that I grew up … Kurdish people live in Turkey, so it’s a politically tense environment…. also, the resources and the economic status of the city of that region … as compared to others are not very good.

Elif grew up on a college campus at which her father was a professor; she has been living in the same home on campus since she was nine months old. Hence, her connection to this campus community of friends and family is really strong. In Turkey, the professors live on campus and the students live in dormitories that are far from the main campus. The living conditions for the students are not as good as they are in the United States. According to Elif,
going to school made her really tense, and there were not many good teachers around. Because of these conditions, her father was the one who taught Elif and her sister in the evenings. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom, ensuring that the children and home were well managed. Elif’s father taught her mathematics and science and instilled in her a strong academic background from an extremely young age. Her sister is also an accomplished physician in Turkey. Elif always wanted to go to a foreign, English-speaking country for a different experience. She has always wanted to get her PhD, for which her father was her role model. Elif states in her first interview:

When I was in college, I wanted to go in a foreign country somewhere … speaking English. My first aim was to have some, like, a different kind of experience in a foreign country, but I also always wanted to get my PhD. I think like my father was a good role model for me.

**The transition.** Because Elif wanted to study in a foreign country, she planned her transition by watching what her friends were doing to come to the United States. She took her Graduate Record Examinations (GREs) and prepared her documents to apply for her student visa. She received an assistantship from CU but also borrowed money from her parents to finance her education and living expenses. Since this past year as a doctoral student, she is more self-sufficient and does not need her parents’ financial assistance.

Elif taught for two years before she first came to the United States in 2005. She said that the work experience helped make her a stronger applicant. In terms of making the transition, Elif was already living away from home when she was an undergraduate, studying at Istanbul University. Getting her student visa to come to the United States was easy, and there were no impediments that got in her way. Her documents were in order, and after her interview, she
received her visa in two days by mail. She had to show evidence that she was going to return to her home country and could pay for her education in the United States.

Elif is very close to her family; in 2005, she would call home with phone cards and speak to her relatives daily. She now talks to them through Yahoo! Messenger, which is much less expensive than calling by phone, and she uses a webcam to stay virtually in touch. When she first came to this country, she was calling home daily, which turned out to be expensive. Now that she has settled in, she speaks to her family only once a week; her mother is constantly trying to connect with her, but her father does not disturb her as much. Her sister is very busy as a physician, although she does talk to her often. Elif stated the following during her first interview:

With my parents, it’s once a week or twice a week if I’m available. Because my mom is like, whenever she is online, she is like, Elif, what are you doing? Are you at school? If you’re not at school, let’s talk…. With my sister, we e-mail each other. She is very busy. She is actually a physician. She sometimes works at nights when she is on duty, or she gets very tired during the day, and she just got married this year.

Unpleasant Turkish history. Because Elif is Kurdish, the tension between the Turks and the Kurds has had a huge influence on her as she grew up in that environment. She was sheltered from much of this unpleasantness all her life, as she lived in a safe community of educated people in Diyarbakir. People from Turkey discriminate against Kurds, who have no laws to protect them against discrimination as they would in the United States. According to Elif, this injustice is the subject of an ongoing debate and a cause of a lot of political tension. When she was a child, she and her sister were not allowed to speak Kurdish in school. Elif explains during her first interview:
So it’s still a really ongoing debate. But political [sic] it is tense, because before it was more like you can speak your language, you can say you are Kurdish, you can do this, but there were a lot of bans. For example, they didn’t teach us, my parents, but like for a long while, probably until I was 15 or 14, you were not allowed to speak Kurdish, but like when you go to the school, like half of people are speaking Kurdish. That is their native language.

Elif would hear about difficult situations and incidents when she was in school. However, she has never personally experienced any of this discrimination. She believes that the bias and discrimination come from the uneducated people in Turkey. If a person is a fervent nationalist, then they get into arguments. For these reasons, education is really important to Elif and most of her decisions in life have been made in order to get away from the political tensions in Turkey and to live in a just and free society.

Religious complexity a way of life. Elif states that religion did not play a huge part in her life, but when she described it, it seems that it has had a significant impact on her identity. Elif is a Muslim, and her parents are from different sects; her father is an Alevi and her mother a Sunni—polar opposites in terms of religion in Turkey. Her grandparents were open-minded and did not object that her parents were in love and wanted to get married, but they also knew that there would be societal pressures to overcome. In Elif’s words, “my mother is a believer and my father is not.” According to Elif, the Alevis are more educated and less fanatical about the Muslim religion.

Her parents did not force her to follow any particular religion. In Turkey, most women do not wear veils; they love fashion and are more westernized. Her parents shielded her from any of the differences their backgrounds could have caused. Elif started realizing that there was
a difference only after she was ten years old. She would watch the news as a young girl and 
realize how religion and religious beliefs tore the country apart. The Alevis are a minority 
group, always being targeted by the dominant group. Elif and her family were Kurdish, another 
factor that posed a problem for them in Turkey. It seemed to her that the Kurds were not allowed 
to speak their own language, and their freedom of speech and religion were restricted. Although 
Elif had never personally experienced any violence in her country, she was aware of the unrest 
and the difficulties that existed.

**Identity.** In this country, Americans most often think that Elif is a Christian and do not 
realize she is a Muslim. Because she is Kurdish, she does not wear a veil; thus, there are no 
obvious cues to signal that she is a Muslim. Elif always introduces herself as a Turk. She does 
not specify that she is Kurdish because she believes that people in the United States are unaware 
of the various ethnicities that exist in Turkey. With her Turkish friends, she does not bring her 
Kurdish identity to the forefront even though she believes them to be open-minded. She does not 
want to create any dissonance within her Turkish community of friends. Elif reflects during her 
third interview:

> I can actually say I’m Kurdish, but then they wouldn’t know which country (they are all 
over). And also, the other thing is I don’t want to be what they say—like pinhead, they 
say. Like sometimes, if I’m with my Turkish friends, I know they are all open-minded, 
but I wouldn’t try to disturb them by putting my Kurdish identity to the front all the time. 
And I know they are also sensitive, being Turkish, so I try to avoid as much as possible, 
because I know with those people that are sensitive, if we happen to start discussing, I 
don’t think our friendship would go in a good direction.
**Social experiences.** Elif found a place to live through the resources provided by Chardin University. She has moved once since she has been in this country. She currently rents a private room, where she has been living since 2006. She likes her current accommodations because the rent is reasonable and it is close to campus. She revealed only in her second interview that she has a boyfriend; however, they have their own separate apartments.

Elif has been dating Mahir (pseudonym) since 2007. Mahir is Turkish, and she met him through her outside network of Turkish friends. He is a postdoctoral student at a prestigious school nearby and is currently looking for a job. There is a Turkish graduate student network that connects Turkish students across universities in the Boston area. She met Mahir at a nightclub, and they started dating soon after. Mahir lives in the city, and Elif spends a lot of time traveling back and forth from CU to the city. Elif sees him five times a week, which is probably all the time she has for social engagement. Mahir has been unable to find a job, but Elif is still optimistic. Elif believes that compared with Eastern cultures, the West has an easier dating environment. She likes the freedom to choose her relationships and not be judged for dating.

Elif had a network of Turkish friends before coming to the United States, so she had someone who picked her up from the airport; her transition, unlike some participants I interviewed, was a smooth one. In her first apartment, she lived with two Americans and an international student. At first, she thought she would find it easy to make American friends, but now she admits it has been difficult. She wished she had known this before she arrived, as she would have learned how to speak in a manner her peers would have understood better. During her first few years in the country, she observed American social and language cues. After a few years, it got easier to socialize in a predominantly English-speaking community. Elif explains during her second interview her experience with her American peers:
In my first apartment, I lived with two Americans and one Irish exchange student. Two of them were like Master’s students, and the Irish student was an undergraduate. I actually was hoping that it would be better with my roommates and that I was going to meet a lot of Americans, that it was going to be nice fun, and I would be enjoying my time a lot. I enjoyed my time a lot, but I actually didn’t happen to make a lot of American friends at first. It was more like international friends. I had Indian friends more than Americans.

Elif has done her best to assimilate into this country and Chardin University. She believes that it is her responsibility to get the social cues right. She believes that on account of her poor language skills, it is difficult for American students to relate to or understand her when she speaks. I have met Elif on multiple occasions during interviews and socially and have to state that, as the researcher, I had no difficulty understanding what she was saying. Maybe the words she used to express her feelings or a situation are different, but I found it not at all difficult to understand her. Elif stated the following during her second interview:

But you have to listen and observe and make the connections, and then you know what you are going to say when somebody is sick, when something happens…. And then they start feeling that you are speaking like an American, so they don’t think you are an international student, and then it is just your accent more, like if you put the words, like sentences, in the order they are used to hear, then it is just your accent that makes the problem.

Elif is extremely grateful for her overall experience in the United States. This attitude comes through in all her interviews and interactions. She never once complained or said anything negative about either the political tensions at home or the adjustment difficulties she
has had in this country. She acknowledges that the cultural and social adjustments are huge, and some of her friends have been unable to break the barriers. As Elif narrated her story, it became clear to me that she seems to have connected mainly with other Turkish students from universities in the Boston area. Although Elif has every intention of connecting with her local peers, she still socializes predominantly with her Turkish friends. She does believe that this past year she has been able to connect with her American peers in the classroom, but the connection is mostly centered on schoolwork and assignments. It is quite apparent that she is still not socially engaged with her American peers. Elif explains in her second interview why it has been difficult to make American friends:

So I started feeling that, okay, you have to get to know different cultures…. everybody is going to be like “Oh, let’s go have fun,” those kind of stuff, but everybody was acting a little bit skeptical, and everybody was avoiding. So at first two years, it was a little slow making American friends especially.

In her first two years here, Elif observed and watched for differences in communication style in order to gain confidence in interacting with American students. She has also been learning to engage in the superficial aspects of social interactions. However, she believes that her accent gets in the way of communicating effectively. She also believes that the communication between international and American students is a matter not of miscommunication but of difficult communications. Her take on this aspect of social engagement is divergent from April, who believes that Americans and other university administrators should have to make the effort to engage her socially. Elif takes full responsibility for learning and observing how to communicate better with her American peers. Elif explains during her second interview how she manages social cues as follows:
So, like, there is not miscommunication, but difficult communication; so it gets expressed a little later than it should. I thought this kind of stuff sometimes makes you stay away [from] making communications because you feel like, okay, they are not going to understand me, so maybe I should stay away rather than say something. So I felt like in my first two years, I was more like listening to the people, observing what they were doing, how they are doing, especially Americans, and trying to pick up the daily language, the social cues more. And then I started realizing, oh okay, these are different from Turkish, but then I thought the way that they talk back in Turkey is actually different here, so I was, like, adjusting all those kind of stuff.

Elif stays connected to her culture by eating food she is accustomed to from her home country. Food is important to Elif; she likes Turkish food because she feels that in Turkey, the food is fresh and not frozen like it is here in the United States. She believes that the Turkish cuisine has more fresh vegetables that make it healthier than hamburgers and a lot of meats. Elif loves to dance, and here at CU, she was in a dance ensemble for three years. She is a dancer and loves to go salsa dancing with her friends. Salsa dancing seems to be popular with several of the participants. Claire and Elif find that salsa dancing is a good way for them to socialize and connect with other students in the Boston area. She admits that she hangs out with and is comfortable with her Turkish friends. When she compares those friendships with those with her American peers, she sees an issue on both sides: She can see that both her American peers and Turkish friends are avoiding engagement. The emergence of ethnocentric behavior by her Turkish friends surfaced in her third interview. Elif sees herself primarily as a US student, as she explained in her third interview:
Right now, I see myself as a student. In the social life, sometimes I think, like—maybe we discussed this before in the first interview—I still see I’m more like involved in the Turkish community, my Turkish friends, and I feel like it’s something two-sided. Like both maybe we are avoiding getting involved with the American culture, but at the same time our American friends, but I also feel that, when they feel that we are different, they are also a little bit timid.

Elif had a suggestion on how programming could be better at CU. She likes the programming model provided by other universities in the neighborhood where they have social gatherings for all international students. She has met more friends through those events than at any that have been provided here at CU. From speaking with her, I got the impression there is a large Turkish community in Boston, and Elif has stayed connected and engaged with this community since the day she arrived.

**Academic experiences and persistence.** Elif is enjoying her academic experience at Chardin University and in the United States. She is comfortable with her academic work and loves working with her faculty. Her days are packed with work generated from her research assistantship and classes. Elif appreciates the freedom afforded by language, research, speech, and thought. She believes that the quality of education in the United States is far superior to what she has experienced in Turkey. She believes that in US classrooms, students can voice their own thoughts and opinions. Professors provide new and relevant material for examination and show examples to explain their point of view. Professors are supportive as they provide the necessary guidance and learning materials. They also provide feedback on assignments in a timely fashion. For all these reasons, students can grow and learn in the academic arena, an experience completely divergent from Elif’s in Turkey. In Turkey’s culture, one has to listen to
elders and professors; students cannot have input and have to do as they are told. According to Elif, they do not really acknowledge students’ thoughts and opinions. Elif believes that in this country, professors encourage freedom of thought, an approach that improves knowledge of the subject matter immensely. As Elif stated during her second interview:

In Western cultures and in Turkey, especially if you are younger, you will be more like: you should be quiet, you should be respectful, you should listen to people who are like elder than you, so it’s like … you should do whatever you have to do, so they don’t really acknowledge that you are here. But here, I think it’s very different and people appreciate … and I think it has improved me a lot. So I like that professors think here.

Elif appreciates the fact that at CU, faculty acknowledge different sides of issues and you can speak your mind freely and openly. It is important for Elif to feel safe when speaking about certain social issues. She believes that there are inequity problems in the educational systems in the world and feels that she can speak her mind about such biases as she sees them. Elif believes that she has grown and changed from her experiences and believes that she will continue to learn in this environment. She still feels that she is in the observation period, and I have to wonder when she will start participating, or if she will ever feel ready enough to engage fully in the American culture. She believes that her mindset has changed from those of her friends back home. Elif believes that many people feel that they cannot change, but she observes that she has changed positively in the last five years. Elif reflects on how she has changed during her third interview:

I can see how my mindset has changed because of the experience that I had here adapting to a new culture: learning how the work is done in a new culture and their habits and approaches to things in the world. So I think now it has been an observation period for
me, so I was always learning, and probably I will continue to learn. But I can see, like, how my mindset has changed and how much it differs from my friends’ or family back home.

**Unpleasant history of education in Turkey.** Elif is appreciative that research and education in the United States are very open and inclusive. Her perception of the academic environment in Turkey is of one that is very closed and noncollaborative. To get ahead in life, academicians in her country are very snobbish and allow only a few into their inner circle. They do not let everyone contribute to their research, and there are certain rules of entitlement. In this country, it is just the opposite: Everyone asks for feedback in order to improve their practice. In Turkey, people are not open and do not help or encourage students to learn and grow. Elif stated the following during her third interview:

There is always levels between people. There is always, like, you can’t contribute your ideas, there are certain rules about who can do what, and that people don’t usually allow other people to contribute or provide some input for whatever they are doing. But here it is more like collaborative—everybody asks for feedback, it’s more an open process, and I think it is helping me to learn a lot about how things are carried out in a working environment.

Elif reflected that in Turkey, there is an academic hierarchy, and people do not want anyone interfering with that structure. Information is power, and in Turkey, it is not shared with everyone as it is in the United States. Elif was surprised and disappointed that her professors from Turkey were not encouraging when she stated that she wanted to come to the United States for her Master’s degree. Only one professor wrote her a recommendation, and several others told her she should stay behind because Turkey needs teachers. When she tried to get involved
with a research team with her advisor, to gain some experience, her professor did not choose Elif to assist her. What was particularly surprising was that the professors who discouraged her to apply to US schools and gave her no support were all women. Not providing support and opportunities for young students even when they are enthusiastic seems counterproductive. There seems to be an inordinate incidence of favoritism that permeates Turkish classrooms.

Elif called favoritism a Turkish habit. The ones who are favored get the experience and attention from the professors, and the rest get left behind. Although her father was a faculty member and practically home-schooled Elif and her sister, his influence as a professor did not get Elif connected in the academic world. I wondered whether being in the Kurdish minority had anything to do with this disconnect.

**Finances.** Elif is generally one of the most upbeat and positive participants in this study. When asked what worries her, she stated that she was hoping that her financial situation would have been better by now. She is 29 years old and she had hoped to be more stable by now. She hopes that by the time she is 35, she will be financially stable. She still has to find an internship for the summer, and her boyfriend Mahir needs to find a job to bring financial stability to their future. Elif is very satisfied with her current academic experience; she believes she is learning a lot and that this is an investment in her future. She believes that all the financial hardships she has had will pay off when she finds a job. Elif reflects during her second interview on her finances:

I was thinking it was going to be much better. I think it is because Boston is expensive compared to other places. Financially I am a little disappointed. But I do understand how things work here, the idea, the background. I know why it is not very good.
Facing an uncertain future. Elif’s future is extremely uncertain. Her parents would love for her to come back to Turkey. But she is trying not to build up hopes and expectations in any one direction. Because she is close to her family, she would like them to live with her, either in the United States or in Turkey. Mahir and his future job situation will also dictate where Elif will go after graduation. However, as that is a few years away, she is not sure what will happen.

I met the spouses and significant others of all the participants except Elif, so I am unable to gauge the dynamics between them. Elif talked about her thoughts on her future during her third interview:

Yes, they will expect me to come over there, so I’m keeping the doors open. I’m trying to be politically correct. And so I’m like, it’s up to the situation over here, but my desire is, like, if I have a family here, and if I have a huge commitment here, so I would prefer to stay here; but otherwise I’m open to staying here or going to Europe, but I’m a little bit skeptical about going back to Turkey. So I would love to do, I would love to enroll in a project, or like studies that are being done in Turkey, but I feel like one of my foot [sic] should be outside, and maybe one of my foot can be in Turkey.

Elif is probably one of the few participants who clearly states that she wants to stay in this country. She does want to stay connected to Turkey and her family and travel back and forth, but she wants to make this country her home. Based on her negative feelings of the academic world in Turkey, and given that she would like to make a future in that area, she believes that the best career options for her are in the United States. She understands that the recession is a big deterrent and that getting a work permit would be difficult, but as she says, she can dream. Ideally, she would like to have a foot in both worlds. Elif contemplated her future during her third interview:
So I’m hoping to have a career in which I would be able to do some outside work, collaborate with people in Turkey, and in a way improve what is happening over there and be a part of my own career as well. But at the same time, I want to continue focusing on what I have been doing here, professionally. So that is a desire, but I don’t know how well it is going to work. So it is a dream.

Elif is extremely close to her family, so for her to stay behind in this country there would have to be a very good reason. There are her Turkish friends, who have their parents in the United States, but they get bored easily because there is nothing to keep them engaged in this country. So either decision is going to be difficult and will need to be managed. If there is a future with Mahir, she is also open to the idea of his parents coming over to stay with them for extended periods of time. Elif talked about her parents during her third interview:

It’s like, family is really important for me and I’m like, why do I spend all the time away from my parents if I don’t have a very good reason, because it’s like life goes by, and those are the most valuable people in my life, so I should be much more closer to them. I should have a good reason to be here. That is the thing that makes me think why I shouldn’t be away.

If she goes back to Turkey, she wishes that people would get to know her better. She would be more proud of her mixed identity and hope that people would recognize and appreciate that aspect of her life. She would also like to be a role model for younger students who are trying to come to the United States for an education. Elif would like to work at a private institution that is a nonprofit organization and to help the underprivileged get ahead in life. For example, she would like to help mothers who are not working or girls who are not in school in Turkey. If she stays in the United States, she would hope to continue her academic career and
would like to be a professor, just like her father. She realizes that these jobs are not easy to get, so she could still work as a researcher in a for-profit or nonprofit organization. I believe that, in her heart, she would like to be a professor just like her father.

April—A Third-Culture Kid: Still Searching for the Ideal Community

Structured descriptive codes: Family, Connections, Academic Experiences, and Social Experience.

The story. April is a 25-year-old doctoral student from South Korea studying in the School of Education. Her participation in this study provides a level of maturity and richness that gets to the heart of graduate international students’ social experiences. Although still a young adult, April possesses the ability to articulate her experiences in a manner that is critically analyzed and well thought out.

April was born in South Korea, and when she was in the third grade, her family moved to the Czech Republic. Her father was looking for better opportunities; he wanted to get away from the rat race that young men in South Korea went through during that era. April has come to think of the Czech Republic as her home mainly because her parents continue to live in that country. April stated the following during her first interview:

Yes, it was a job-related move. My dad was, I think he always felt trapped in the country. There is a very prescribed route for men, especially. You graduate from college, you become a salaried man, and you earn money for your family. And there is a real hierarchy within companies and corporations, so I think he always wanted an out.

April speaks Korean and English fluently. She first learned English when she moved to the Czech Republic when she attended an American International School. She started to learn English in the third grade; before that, she did not even know her alphabet. She was able to pick
up the language in six months, and by being bookish, was able to learn to read and write fluently. However, even now there are some idioms that she does not understand. April has one older sister, June (pseudonym), and a younger brother, Danny (pseudonym). April is the middle child but seems to be the one who is mature and takes care of her family in various ways. Her family is very close and she communicates with them often. During her first interview, April spoke about the closeness of her family:

My family is very tight. I think it kind of has to do with our immigration experience. We’ve sort of had to stick together. We’re very communicative and loving. We are very open to pretty much anything, so even now we talk frequently on the phone or e-mail or whatnot, although it’s been a while since we really lived together.

Unlike other participants who purposefully came to the United States for higher education, for April, her journey began more because of family circumstances. After April’s family moved to the Czech Republic, her father quit his job to start his own business. It became too expensive to educate April and her sister June in the Czech Republic, so they were sent to the United States to a boarding school in Michigan. The school was a small coeducational boarding school that housed 300 students. They started their schooling in the United States in the eighth grade, when April was 14 and her sister June 15 years old. So from a very young age, April has lived away from her parents; this is the one factor that has made April mature and wise beyond her years. She is mature and has had to fend for herself and her sister since their high school days. Her high school was an all-White German Lutheran school. April and June were both placed in the same grade; they shared the same room in the boarding school and did everything together. They had no other friends and could rely only on each other for support. The school faculty and administrators really did nothing to engage them more fully. So all through high
school, April was isolated from her peers and extremely homesick. April and June survived high school by being together all the time. They had each other but no one else to guide and help them through the transition. April reflected during her first interview as follows:

And I remember it being really hard the first year. I didn’t have a lot of places to talk about my experiences. Now I do, after having unpacked a lot of these things as more of an adult, but back then I didn’t really know how to talk about these things. So I remember it being really hard, and my first year I remember having nights where I just really cried my eyes out and just being left alone for the first time, not having a parent to kind of help me manage my time. I didn’t even have a lot of things to manage back at home. It was just very home, school, home, school type of thing, not a lot of extracurricular, apart from church on Sunday.

April comes from a Christian family, and all her life she has been involved with the church. The transition to the United States was very stressful because she had to manage everything on her own. Although April is younger than her sister, she acts like the older sister, worrying and looking out for her sister’s well-being. April is extremely intelligent and strong academically; she was ranked number one in her class for almost four years in high school.

One way that April knew she could connect with her peers in high school was in academics. Because she is smart, her classmates would ask for her help to explain difficult subjects. There was a particular computer class in which she received a B+ rather than her usual A+. It seems that she missed submitting an assignment. Owing to this less than perfect grade, she got pushed to the number two slot and to date holds a grudge as to how that happened. April reflects that she might have missed one by mistake because she was busy helping other students in the class. In addition, the professor knew her for a year and was aware that she was a diligent
student. She sees this drop in her grade as a huge failure because it may have caused her sister June to miss the opportunity to be a salutatorian. Because of April’s downward shift, she believes, June was not in the picture in the class rankings. For this reason, April still feels guilty because she believes her lower grade in that one class somehow prevented June from getting the recognition she deserved.

High school was a blur for April: She remained in survival mode and her social life was almost nonexistent. When kids were having fun and exploring at that young age, April was isolated and disconnected from her peers. April perceived that because she and her sister looked different from the other kids, they were left alone, and no one really engaged them or tried to get to know them better. It was the typical high school scene where their peers were trying to be popular themselves. She was also fearful of the upper-class students because there were peculiar rules around the dormitory. Although she did not go into details, it sounded as though hazing was going on among the students. April recalls the following during her first interview:

I remember being really fearful of upperclassmen because they had these ridiculous rules around the dormitory. Oh my gosh—I can tell you later. It wasn’t a very accommodating, kind of welcoming environment. We were just kind of left alone. Even the faculty didn’t know what to do with us to talk about what was going on for us. So I basically just did schoolwork and went to church.

April regards Boston as her second home because she has been in the area since 2003. She and her sister both attended a prestigious all-female university and ended up with the same major. April and June have a strong bond, and their relationship has evolved over the past few years. They continue to be their best allies: They look out for each other and are the best of friends. There were some rough patches, but they outgrew them and are now closer than ever
and love each other deeply. April attended a prestigious graduate school to study risk and prevention, and after that, she came to CU last year for her doctoral work. Unfortunately, three years ago, June was abruptly sent back to Korea when her H1B Visa did not get approved. She currently lives in Korea by herself, where she has a hard life, with only some church connections, and she badly wants to return to America. She is looking into graduate schools but must decide on a field or area of study.

**Visa and immigration.** When April and June came to the United States for their high school education, the church helped them prepare their documents. Since they were coming from the Czech Republic and not South Korea, the visa process was a great deal easier. Once they entered the United States, it was easy to get in and out of the country. But April had a bad experience trying to get her student visa from South Korea for her Master’s program; the immigration officer needed additional documents because the school had not sent all her paperwork on time. She had one day to run around obtaining financial statements from her bank and documents from government agencies to prove she was born in Korea.

April openly admits that she would love to be a US citizen—the only participant to say this outright in the first interview. She does believe that the whole visa and immigration process is anxiety-provoking because they have the power to change your future in a heartbeat, as they did with her sister June.

**Transnational acts.** The evolution of connectivity with family is beautifully illustrated by April’s experiences. When April was in high school, she and her sister would wait in front of a pay phone until their parents called at a certain time; sitting in front of the phone booth, they would wait for the phone to ring, reading books, often in inclement weather. Later the family evolved to using Gmail Chat (which she refers to as G chat) and Skype. Most recently, they
have found it easy and convenient to communicate with Internet protocol (IP) phones on which, for a flat fee, family members talk for free. This phone resembles a cordless phone but works through the Internet. This was the first I had heard of this new style of communication. April connects with her family weekly, and sometimes daily. There are periods of time when the frequency of contact will drop off, but then her parents will complain and remind her and the connectivity resumes. April’s family seems to use all possible means for staying in touch: Gmail Chat, IP phones, Twitter, Facebook, etc. During her first interview, April captured the evolution of technology as follows:

We’ve had to kind of evolve with the whole technology. I remember in high school, my sister and I used to wait in front of a pay phone just kind of reading books until our parents called at a certain time. I think they were able to call more often for a time, and then came Skype. And then we were doing video chatting. We now, we use G chat more now, and most recently my mom bought a set of IP phones. I think they are Internet protocol phones. It is an actual phone that is connected to the Internet, and it’s actually free for all family members. So for some reason, just having a machine that looks like a phone allows us to communicate more often. It’s a handheld cordless phone.

April finds her life compartmentalized as a result of the many transitions in her life. During holidays and other vacations, unlike other students, their family does not meet regularly, owing to financial constraints. But they all meet at least once a year during the summer or winter vacation break.

**Social experiences.** April does not have close friends from South Korea—maybe a few from her church and a few relatives, but these are mostly superficial relationships. In the Czech
Republic, she has no relatives besides her parents, and owing to the transient nature of her life, friendships from Korea and Czech Republic are limited.

When she was attending high school in the United States, even simple aspects of sports and understanding their nuances were lost on April. Involvement in sports is a huge part of the American social experience, yet no one took her under their wing to explain how to prepare for tryouts or get better at athletics. She always felt herself to be on the outside looking in. April during her first interview stated the following:

It was kind of hard for me to be integrated to the track team. I would have loved for somebody like the coach to be more in tune with what I’d been missing out on and kind of draw me into the group and include me. There was none of that.

One of the things that struck me about April’s experiences was that here was a young, intelligent girl who was articulate and friendly and yet has struggled to get to know people. The most telling statement about her overall experience in this country is the feeling of being very visible yet invisible. Being invisible in terms of no one realizing there was a need to reach out and get to know her better and make sure she was surviving the whole experience. At the same time, she had high visibility by virtue of the fact that she and her sister were the only Koreans in her high school.

In her high school years, April was isolated, but in her senior year at the all-female university, she developed some meaningful relationships. Her only close and meaningful relationships before her senior year were with family members. However, as a senior, April got involved with the church and spent a lot of energy and time developing friendships through that avenue. She became committed to that local parish and spent the last five years developing relationships and friendships through her involvement there. She chose Chardin University
because Boston was a huge part of her life and social network and was drawn to the social justice elements of her program at CU. She truly believes that she is marginalized and has struggled throughout her time in the United States; as a result, she would like to help effect a smoother transition for people in the same situation. April during her first interview stated the following:

I really do believe in making the world a better place and really reaching out to people who are isolated, kind of like me, you know—just kind of marginalized in a larger society who may be struggling. So I think the social justice part really drew me to CU, and then everything just kind of came together really nicely too. I had my brother also living with me at that point, and I couldn’t leave him. So it just all kind of worked out really nicely.

April has found it difficult to develop a satisfying social life at CU. She feels that she is tucked away and would like more interaction with the Korean undergraduate students, especially because she can help them with their transition. She looked for that opportunity at first, but it did not work out. She acknowledges that she has time constraints and is booked solid with classes, teaching responsibilities, and a clinical practicum. If she did anything additional, it would be yet another responsibility for which she does not have the time. Her life is fragmented enough, and she has a hard time keeping track of it all. Dealing with extracurricular activities at this point would be like adding on to her already full life. So although she desires to enhance her social life, she does not have the time or energy. Most of her social interactions remain church related.

April believes that cultural differences have defined every aspect of her experience, in terms of how people relate to each other, their sense of humor, the food they eat, and what is important to them. She had hoped she would have more access to the American way of life so that she could observe and connect, but she feels that Americans should make a reciprocal effort.
It has always been a matter of her trying to understand their culture; it has never been the case of them trying to get to know her. When people first meet April, they experience an initial fascination because she is different. She uses her standard line to tell people where she is from, and then the fascination ends, and they do not care to know anything beyond that. April during her second interview stated the following:

I probably should have more non-Asian friends to try to have access to what their life is like. I bet it’s not that different. But I wish they would do the same—kind of extend themselves into the other culture. It’s always me trying to understand their culture, and it’s not them trying to understand our culture.

A place to live. Although April has been in this country for several years, finding a place to live after Wellesley was not easy. She searched on Craigslist and got good support from someone from her church, who was informed about the housing market and drove her around to appointments. Luckily, April’s first rental was in a nice house, and she and her brother Danny lived on one of the three floors. At that time, April was putting Danny through high school, but after he went away to college she did not need all the space, so she moved into a smaller place with her church sisters. She knew they were trustworthy and she wanted to get to know her housemates really well. The actual move was stressful, as it involved moving all her belongings along with the accumulation from her sister and brother. Throughout the interviews, it came through that April was shouldering many of the financial and emotional responsibilities of the family.

In search of meaningful relationships. April’s current relationship with her housemates is not fulfilling. She thought that by moving in with her church sisters (all Asian Americans) she would connect and have the great social life she has longed for all these years. However, this did
not go as planned because the open dialogue and willingness to share did not exist within this group. So even though they were a disappointment, they are all moving out, and April hopes that the new house sisters will want to connect and form closer friendships.

Even after all these years, April finds comfort with Americans with an Asian background. There are people she connects with on the Internet, but she does not consider them close friends. There are some students at CU from the Czech Republic that she knows individually, here in Boston. But most of them want to hang out with April but not with each other. She wishes they were all part of one group so she could maximize her time with them. In her high school, there were no Asians; of those, April has two friends she stays in touch with, and they would be closer if they lived in the same town. They are White and the only non-Asian friends that April has made after all these years.

When April found her niche community, she was in her senior year at Wellesley. She found her church and became really committed to God. It was the happiest time of her stay here in the United States. In her Master’s program, she formed a close group of friends who called themselves the Mustard Seed Generation. They continue to chat on Gmail once a week and plan semiannual conferences. This is another community she has found and socializes with regularly. She is deeply satisfied with the relationships within this like-minded group, who really connected when they were in their Master’s program. The group is now scattered all over the country, but they communicate over the Internet every week.

**Lack of acceptance and power dynamics.** April believes that when students come to the United States, they are unaware of the difficulties the American experience can bring. The isolation and disconnection from peers can mar their overall experience, harming their sense of well-being or even safety. This was also experienced by Nikita, Cindy, and Claire. They
experienced the same sense of disconnection and lack of belonging that can be harmful to personal growth and development. April, during her third interview, stated the following:

I just don’t think a lot of people are aware of the difficulty of the American experience and what the implications are for a person’s well being. And I think just having gone through it myself—the isolation, the disconnection from the general community, and not having a voice to even talk about those things—I think it is a real suffering. And I want to—since I experienced it, I think I see it more in other people, and it pains me to see that, so I want to address it. I want to help them kind of rise beyond that so that they can really live out the life they would like to live.

April believes that students need to know and understand they are walking into a radicalized situation in an unfamiliar country. All international students by default fall into a marginalized category because they display differences culturally, in the spoken language, and possibly, in physical appearance. Although participants did not view them as all negative, the different approach and the feeling of isolation from the local community were apparent and clearly noted by most. Only Michael seemed not to follow this pattern since he has had a different approach to his socialization in the United States.

April was the first one to talk about the power dynamics in this country. The feelings of isolation and loneliness are part of the course, but how one deals with them is the key. The feeling that something is wrong with them, whether their language or communication style, was common among the participants. It was experienced by Nikita, Elif, and Cindy, in whom the initial cultural shock of being in a different country and adjusting to the radically different way of doing things was strong. Other countries practice rampant discrimination, in some cases more openly conducted and without any consequences. However, in the United States, there is a level
of awareness, and when discrimination is overt, serious consequences follow. So as April puts it, raising the level of critical consciousness is important for someone to survive the overall experience in this country.

**Life as a transient.** April talks about the lack of a stable life and believes that you have to experience a transient life to know what it is like. What does it mean to have family members come and go in your life, never knowing when you might see them again? You do not become attached to anything or anyone in particular, because there is no sense of permanence. April is always in transient mode as people enter and leave her life.

April believes that her experiences, although similar in many ways to those of other Korean Americans, are unique and complicated in many ways. She is trying to use her rich experiences to improve other students’ lives. She believes that they are a part of her that no one can and will truly understand, not even her parents. Although her parents were there to support her emotionally all the way, albeit from a distance, the woman she has become and what is important to her are alien concepts to her parents. April, during her third interview, stated the following:

Yes, I will be forever a Third-Culture Kid, I think, and struggling with the whole transient nature of my life. I think it will have lasting implications of who I am. To me, it’s not that salient anymore. It’s who I am, so let’s move on, don’t you think? I think I’ve kind of come to that point. It’s sad. I don’t think anyone would really understand that part of me. And maybe that’s why it’s not as salient. I try to ignore that and just, like, pretend to be an almost like a Korean American person here. It’s sad that I don’t think anyone would ever understand the richness of my complicated experience, but I just have to move on from it.
April harbors feelings of disconnection and isolation from her American peers. She is left feeling that no one is taking the time to include her or to make her feel at home. April feels that she sits in the cafeteria by herself while, it seems, the rest of the students are enjoying their lives and excluding her. These are subtle social behaviors that are not overt, as they are in Czech Republic. For example, in that country, there are people on the streets that heckle and call you names, a practice that is nasty and, in some instances, dangerous. There are terrible stories about personal safety in other countries, but in the United States, one must overcome a subtler, less visible experience of emotional neglect. April, during her third interview, stated the following:

Yes, I think the whole disconnection has a lot to do with race, and I think my experiences have been subtle in that—well, not so subtle because it’s so apparent when someone is not interested in you and not reaching out and not including you, and you are just really sitting alone in the cafeteria, and you’re just doing your own thing. Everyone is laughing and you’re not, that kind of thing. So in that way, it’s not so subtle. People haven’t been like, okay, well, in the Czech Republic people just walk by you on the street and call you names: ching chung chong, viet natzi, yaponsky, things like that, and you hear these horror stories of skinheads who murder Asians and foreigners, so I think there was a little bit of fear, too. So in the CR I think it was a little bit more overt in that way, but just being invisible again, I think that’s just how my experience has been.

**Suggestions for universities.** Since April has been in this country, she has found general apathy from faculty and staff towards engaging international students. In her experience, they are curious about you at first but nothing beyond that. There was no enduring effort made to reach out, connect, and help her transition. April does not feel that any of the institutions have in general done anything special for her in a systematic way to make her feel included on campus.
or in the classroom. However, she believes that a few people along the way have been helpful. As April very clearly puts it, events are not going to cut it; there needs to be more of an effort on the part of the university to get international students engaged more fully in campus life and activity. In terms of programmatic efforts, April is very clear that the university should be reaching out more to her and to others who are disengaged. She believes that once you engage people who seem disconnected, they will start attending events. She appreciates our interview because she feels that, after all these years, someone is finally interested in her experiences. April, during her second interview, stated the following:

    But I think it’s a good idea to come and reach out a little bit more, rather than just say here is an event, come, to kind of actually make more of an effort in the beginning to engage. Once you engage people who seem disconnected, then they would start coming to these events, but I think at first more effort needs to be put in to engage them and to have them feel like someone is interested. I really appreciate this whole interview because I’m like, wow—someone is finally interested in my experience as an international student.

April believes that faculty members in US universities are more interested in their research than their students. She hopes that if she becomes a faculty member someday, she would dedicate more time for community outreach. She would be mindful when students come from a completely different culture. Allowing students to integrate their international experiences would help in the overall experience of university life. April, during the second interview, stated:

    I would be doing more outreach, and I think I would always try to be mindful that there is this person who comes from a completely different cultural and everything experience. I
havent’t seen it being done, so I wouldn’t really know myself how to do it, but I think just giving the person more of an opportunity to try to integrate their international experience with what we’re learning, and just try to engage them more.

Only after graduate school has April really unpacked her experiences in the United States. April felt really invisible in all the predominantly White institutions she has attended. She has always felt excluded from groups and that no one tried to pull her in or reach out to her. She revisits these difficulties when she walks into a classroom and there are all White students who seem to engage only with each other and not with her. If it is a group that is aware of the Asian stereotype at work, then there are some possibilities to connect and contribute in a group setting. She notes that there are people who constantly talk and then there are people who are respectful of others and let them join in the conversation. In those instances, April feels that she can participate. April believes that Americans are verbally gifted: that they are witty and funny and can make people laugh. At her practicum sessions, only two or three people speak up, and in these situations April feels lost. Some of the jokes go right over her head. She wonders why she cannot engage a crowd with the ease of an American. If there is no structure to a meeting or discussion, then April can get easily lost and her voice never get heard. April has a hard time when people do not pay attention to group dynamics. On days when she has the energy to fight, she might have the stamina to muscle into the conversation. Otherwise, she just lets the conversation evolve around her. April, during her second interview, stated the following:

Smaller groups I’m better at, where I have control. It’s just privilege: These people come in with that because they are male, they are White, because they are American, and they have all the cultural knowledge and the verbal whatever. It’s a shame that they don’t really see that and kind of pay attention to other people in the group. So I have a harder
time dealing with people who are not aware of group dynamics, like the people who don’t notice these things. It’s true in my experience as well. And only in my good days where I’m not tired and I’m feeling like I can fight—that’s when I can butt in and say something. Otherwise, I’m just too tired and, okay, there it goes again.

April believes that universities can take first-time international students as a group and help them find housing and connect with university resources. Such a proactive approach is necessary, rather than just concentrating on the adaptation model as though it was the only key to succeeding in this country. Instead, invest in the time to get people connected, develop a sense of community, and generate a network that can help them personally and professionally. There are people who are going through similar experiences, and they are not the only individuals on campus who feel isolated.

A need for a community and a sense of belonging. From the beginning of her journey, April has been highly interested in belonging to a community. She is also the only participant who articulated it perfectly. April had to make the best of her experiences in the United States; she has had no other choice. Going back home was never an option for her, as the Czech Republic was the only place to return to and her parents her only connection there. The transient nature of April’s life has robbed her of a sense of security and a feeling of being grounded. She sees Boston as her second home, although she is on a student visa and knows that there is no permanence in her stay in the United States.

For transients like April, communal empowerment would grow out of personal empowerment, and there would be a sense of grounding one’s experience. Simply sticking with people from the same cultural background provides a one-dimensional view of an overall experience that could otherwise be rich, engaging, and educational. Staying within one’s safety
zone is fine at the beginning, but truly getting out there and taking risks is also crucial. Thus, April believes that raising the level of credible and critical consciousness is important. April, during her third interview, stated the following:

Yes, I think so. It’s still a process, but it definitely has helped. Now that I have that sense of grounding but also this kind of, like, a mind that I made sense of my experience, now I can do [the] reaching out, I think. Just sticking with your folks without any kind of, like, I keep wanting to use credible consciousness, but without that, then you would just stay at that safety zone and that would be the rest of your life, and that wouldn’t be an ideal picture, but coupled with that communal empowerment and also that critical consciousness, when those two come together, I think then you can do a lot of reaching out.

April has always had the connection to her parents and other family members. Although her parents guided her from a distance and were not there in proximity, she always felt they were supporting her. Their emotional support and security have been very valuable to her persistence in this country. She believes she has a clear sense of her development from before and after being in the United States. At her church, April has sought guidance from counselors and elders in lieu of her parents’ presence. She has always looked for people to lean on and trust. Some of these counselors were not ready and they were frightened away by the level of emotional and spiritual intimacy she wanted with them. April believes that she drove them away, and this has been the most traumatic experience for her in America. It is clear that April has been seeking meaningful relationships and guidance from mentors because she had to survive on her own in this country, mature beyond her years, and make sense of her experiences. April stated, during the second interview, the following:
I didn’t have as much expectations of them, but I’m talking about in my church, there are some leaders who I went to for counsel, and things like that, and because I haven’t had parents in my life since I was 14. I think I’ve always been looking for people to kind of lean on and trust and be a kid in front of, but some people were just not ready for that. They were scared because I was so trusting, and because I wanted intimacy and I wanted a closer relationship with them, and I think that drove them away, actually. And they ended up hurting me, and it’s been one of my most traumatic experiences, I would have to say.

April had been toying with the idea of moving away from Boston after these experiences. She believes that when something is not fulfilling, one has to make a decision and move on to other things. For two years, she did not confront the pain she was suffering from these rejections. When there is a conflict, people normally avoid it and move on and seek out other relationships. Only recently has she confronted these people and found some relief. She moved on by talking about it and reconciling their differences.

April believes that there is enough support and guidance here at Chardin University. More financial assistance would always help students. But she believes that acknowledging graduate international students’ needs is important because they are fundamentally different. All the institutions where April has studied have not helped her discern her vocation or who she wants to be when she graduates; she has had to fend for herself. She believes that the institutions are making a lot of money from graduate international students and that they should, in turn, be investing in meeting their needs. April, during her third interview, stated the following:
The institution has done nothing for me in that respect. I was left to figure this out by myself. And thank God that I did. I think there could be more that the institution could do. Frankly, they are getting a lot of money from us.

April believes that a direct message could go out to graduate international students that CU is thrilled to have them contribute to the campus culture and community. She sees herself as an alien, as she is constantly reminded when she fills out her tax papers.

April appreciates the fact that she can talk about her international experiences and that someone is interested and asking these questions. She believes that even getting the participant group together so they can meet each other is helpful. She is looking forward to a continued dialogue with me as a researcher and the other participants. April stated the following during her third interview:

I think it’s personally—it’s so great to be able to talk about it, and to know that someone is interested. And I think, like, those gatherings that you are going to have for the focus group, I think it will be a really awesome way to kind of get connected. So I think your work is being used in that way too. It does bring people together and kind of talk about it. I think it will be really awesome. I’m looking forward to it.

April was the only participant who did not attend the participant group session (she had a clinical appointment at that time). However, she remains interested in the social aspects of international students’ lives. Her participation in this research was valuable because she brought a deeper level of understanding to the issues that graduate international students face. Regardless of the length of time spent in the United States, social engagement, feeling connected to a community, and a sense of belonging were important to all participants.
Shouldering the burden of her family. April financed her brother’s high school education in the United States, and he just finished his freshman year at Virginia Tech. Managing her finances has been stressful for April, who has been supporting her family. She believes that now that she has all this education, she will be able to make something of herself and teach. She has three years of funding in her PhD program but is unsure how she is going to fund her last two years. She will then have to start looking for other work to make ends meet. International undergraduate students receive no financial aid or scholarships and have to pay full tuition. Her parents made great sacrifices to send her and her sister to college. Everything they earned went to pay for their education. In their junior year, her father’s business was not doing well, so they had to go to Korea to complete their junior year. April and her sister worked and went to school, having to support themselves to pay for their education.

What worries April is that her family is scattered: Her sister is in Korea and wanting to reenter America, and her brother will be a sophomore next year at Virginia Tech. Her parents are in the Czech Republic, where they have no relatives and just each other for companionship. She would like them to be with her eventually and have a vibrant, less isolated life. For a person who is only 25 years of age, April is very wise and mature. She seems to be the strong one who is holding the family together through rough years and is determined to make it in the United States. She is the peacemaker who brings people together. She believes she is privileged, for she has her church community, a place to live, and a stable network of friends, and her next three years of her PhD are secure. The rest of her family is still trying to get to the place they need to be.

Looking to the future. April has always imagined that someday she would go back to Korea to contribute to the community. She believes that it is a rat race in South Korea and
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

difficult to survive owing to lack of opportunities. She believes that there is a great need to address mental health issues in Korea. She would like to train psychologists and counselors on how to deal with these problems, which are largely ignored. When I probed her further, I discovered that it is not that she does not desire to live in the United States on a permanent basis but that she is unsure whether her circumstances will allow it. Ideally, she would like to move back and forth between the two countries, staying connected with South Korea and the United States. Whether she stays here or goes back to Korea, however, she wants her parents to be with her. Even so, she does not see them moving back to Korea, which they left decades ago for a better life. So the future is uncertain and riddled with complexities; April currently lacks the optimism she deserves. April also mentioned that if she were to get romantically involved, that would change her future. April stated the following during her third interview:

I haven’t really thought about that, because they wouldn’t come to the United States if we weren’t here. So maybe Korea will be the place where we converge, I don’t know. I know what the ideal thing would be: If I get married here, I would get my US citizenship here, and then I would have my parents settle down here. And when I talk about working in Korea and like doing things, I think I would travel back and forth. I think I would do that because the work that I would be doing in Korea, I think it would still involve a lot of collaborations with the US, my colleagues, and my mentors here, so I think I would do more of that.

April is particularly interested in working with the teenage Korean American population. She believes there are many issues within this population that need attention. As she has experienced great isolation, silence, and loneliness, she wants to make sure that if there are adolescents facing these issues, they are addressed and not ignored, as was the case with her and
her sister. She believes that this is her true calling professionally. She believes that a few years of work experience in the United States would be extremely valuable to get her situated professionally.

**Developing identity.** The feeling of not being White enough or American enough is a constant presence that needs to be addressed. For April, being okay with this feeling and understanding that there is nothing wrong with it has been the key to transcending it. But for her, reaching this level of “critical consciousness” has been painful, and April would like other students—especially Korean Americans—not to have to go through the same experiences.

April identifies herself as a Christian woman and then as a Korean. She calls her generation the “Third Culture Kids (TCKs)” because they have moved around so much; even her own parents do not understand who she has become after being away from them for so long. She does not know any other way to cope but to do her best in school. Her parents have worked hard so that she could get an education and be able to stand on her own two feet. April has had high expectations for herself academically, as did her parents. Her parents always assumed she would do well, and that has led to constant, underlying pressure. In addition, as seen from the incident when her grade dropped, April could never live with herself if she did not do exceptionally well academically. She is thankful for the opportunities in this country and believes that, although it is a mess here, it is so much farther along than other developing countries in terms of rooting out corruption and practicing freedom. She believes that if she had been educated in the Czech Republic, she would not have become the person she is today, so she is extremely thankful for the opportunities this lifelong transition has afforded her.
Nikita—A Tumultuous Childhood: A Young Woman Determined to Succeed

Structured descriptive codes: Change, Family/Home, Culture, and Connections.

The story. Nikita is a 23-year-old graduate student from Mumbai, India. She is finishing her first year in the Mental Health Counseling program in the School of Education. Her story was compelling to me, as she was the youngest of all the participants. Nikita was the only participant who had no family or network of friends in the Boston area or in the United States. At first Nikita hesitated to be in the study because she felt she did not meet the criteria as she did not socialize often. This objection was disconcerting to me because, although it was not a necessary element for this research, it did indicate that she did not have a well-established circle of friends. I informed her that it was not essential for me to meet her and her friends at social gatherings; rather, the three interviews were the main focus of this study. However, I left the decision up to her, and after a few e-mail correspondences, she agreed to be interviewed. Owing to her initial reluctance, I was not sure whether she would sustain the prolonged contact this study required; however, to my surprise, she remained actively engaged throughout the process.

When we met for our first interview, Nikita was surprised that I was a woman and had assumed I was male. I wondered whether this was the reason she hesitated to participate in the study. Once we both settled into our respective roles, our relationship strengthened and our conversations flowed in an easy and natural way. Because Nikita was from Mumbai, we shared the ease and familiarity of knowing the local areas and the overall Indian culture.

Nikita was the only participant who admitted right from the beginning, during her very first interview, that she had been struggling with loneliness and homesickness during the first few months at Chardin University and in the United States. This struggle was not in the
academic realm but more in the areas of personal and social adjustment, although I am sure that it must have affected her studies at times. Several factors contributed to Nikita’s rough transition to America during her first year at Chardin University. She was young and unprepared to live alone without her parents to assist with her transition. In addition, she had never lived away from her parents and her home in Mumbai; hence, this experience was completely new and alien to her. During her first interview, Nikita stated, “I didn’t have anybody in the US Boston had—I mean, I didn’t know anybody in Boston—no friends, no family, no nothing.”

Nikita is extremely close to her mother, who is her friend and confidant: someone she has counted on for her entire life. In 2008, Nikita’s mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. This incident caused Nikita to attempt to break away from her reliance on her mother; she figured that she needed to become independent and learn to survive on her own. From Nikita’s descriptions, her mother sounds like a kind and gentle soul who continues to provide her daughter with the emotional support and guidance that she needs. Nikita’s mother is her beacon of hope and has motivated her to become more independent. Nikita has a younger sister she mentioned only twice, but she never elaborated on their relationship.

According to Nikita, her father has quite a temper and she is extremely afraid of him, a fact that she mentioned several times during the interviews. Nikita’s family is extremely religious, god-fearing, and strict. Smoking, drinking, and dating are strictly prohibited at home. Nikita seems to be able to reveal some of what she is doing in the United States to her mother, but definitely never discloses anything to her father. Nikita acknowledges that her relationship with her father has improved since coming to the United States, but she never really expanded on how or why. As Nikita stated during her first interview, “My dad is—he’s got a bit of a temper, so I usually get very scared of his anger. And my mom is like the complete opposite.”
Nikita has been through several transitions in her life. She lived through a tumultuous childhood, during which her mother was seriously ill twice, and those times have been trying and difficult for Nikita. Her ninth and tenth grade experiences were so bad that she has yet to forget or let go of some of the trauma she endured during that period of her life. She struggled academically and did not do as well as she could have, even while receiving ample tuition and assistance. She was studying all the time, but somehow, the more she studied the more her academics suffered. When she graduated from high school, she made it a point to move away from all her friends. Thinking she needed a fresh start, she enrolled in Ruparel College, an institution where she did not know anyone from her high school days. Nikita stated the following during her first interview:

I was missing tuitions, and then tuitions people started complaining, and then my father started getting angry: Why are you not … doing well in tuitions and you are not doing well in school? And Mom was in the hospital, and I didn’t know whom to talk to.

As a child, Nikita cried a lot when her mother dropped her off at school. She was allergic to several food groups, and that prevented her from socializing with other children. The ninth grade was the worst because her mother had to undergo an operation on her uterus and was in the hospital for three months. Her father was unsympathetic with Nikita’s struggles and was very upset with her when she did not get good grades even after several hours of additional tutoring.

According to Nikita, she went through several phases of personal growth and development. In her early teens, she became a social butterfly; later on, she turned into an extremely serious student and studied all the time. She joined her undergraduate institution to get away from all the friends knew in high school. At Ruparel College, she made a core of five friends with whom she is still extremely close and talks to on a daily basis via Skype. After
finishing her undergraduate degree, she decided she needed to get accreditation that would be recognized abroad. She initially thought of going to the UK, but they did not recognize the one year she had completed at Mumbai University. So she applied to five schools in the United States, some of which rejected her application because they did not recognize her degree, except for CU and Indiana University Bloomington. She had heard that Boston has a large population of people from India, and Chardin University gave her a small tuition waiver for only one course, but it was something.

**Visa and immigration.** To prepare for her GRE and her visa application papers, Nikita did not hire a consultant as many Indian students do these days. By her own admission, she did everything last minute, and prepared only minimally for the transition. Her father and two friends guided her through the whole process. People had scared her by saying that the immigration process would be difficult and that they would ask her questions to see whether she intended to settle down in the US. She countered that she always had the noble intention of coming back to India, and therefore she was not worried.

The visa application and immigration experiences were not difficult for Nikita. Although there was limited planning on her part, the process of getting to the United States seemed to go smoothly. The government of India has done nothing since then to try to get her to return home. She actually laughed at that question and stated that the government of India would probably place obstacles in her way if and when she decides to go back. I agreed with her sentiment and that it is sad that, after 20 years or so, the situation in India has not changed, and the country does not make it attractive for international students to come back.

**A rough transition to America.** When asked about her initial days in America and her transition, she stated that she would never be able to cope with such an experience again. When
Nikita first arrived, she was placed with a host family for a few weeks. She had a wonderful time during that period, and was exploring the city with another international Chinese student. They got along really well, and with this Chinese friend, Nikita purchased a cell phone and computer as part of her transition into her new environment.

The difficulty began after she moved to her apartment in September 2009. Nikita was alone, her roommate had yet to arrive, and she began to feel lonely and missed home. She found it difficult to sleep at night and feel comfortable in her new surroundings. Nikita did not like her apartment, which seemed big, empty, and had yellow lights she disliked immensely, as she was used to white lights. Her apartment had sparse furniture and she did not have the money to buy new furniture. She missed the sound of the vehicles passing below and the noise from the streets of Mumbai. Nikita stated the following during her first interview:

Like, as I mentioned, where I come from, we were six of us living in a two-bedroom, hall, kitchen flat. And it’s on Baldaji Road, which I don’t know if you know about, but it’s very crowded, that road, and there’s constant noise. I mean noise of trains, the vehicles passing outside. So it’s very noisy and living in a house. I’m not saying crowded, but kind of like crowded with people, and suddenly you are all alone. No noise. The silence disturbed me a lot in September. I just could not sleep. I should be able to sleep, but I could not sleep because I missed all the noises.

One day she was talking to her parents through Skype while she was cutting carrots. She cut her finger, saw her own blood, fainted, and hit her head on the kitchen counter before hitting the floor, breaking her front tooth in half. To make matters worse, her parents saw it all on Skype; her mother was shouting her name as they watched the accident helplessly. Fortunately, Nikita was able to call her friends to take her to the emergency room.
To overcome her feelings of loneliness and homesickness, Nikita tried counseling services at Chardin University, but the sessions did not help her much. What really helped was meeting someone her parents had found for her to contact in Boston. Nikita got in touch with this person, and soon she started dating him. According to her, meeting him got her out of her homesickness and loneliness. Although they have since broken up, she is now dating someone she knew from back home. Only her mother knew about her first boyfriend; although her parents are acquainted with her second boyfriend, Sailesh (pseudonym), they are unaware of their relationship. The concept of dating is new to Nikita, and she never dated before coming to the United States. Nikita stated the following during her second interview:

I can say my fall semester here was very tumultuous: a lot of emotions. I mean, I was in a depression initially, and I got out of that. I started dating someone that helped me a lot. I don’t regret that happened, though I had never dated before. I don’t regret it happened because it happened at a time when I needed somebody in my life.

Before coming to America, Nikita lost a lot of weight through diet and exercise. Nikita always thought she was unattractive and that boys would not approach her because of her weight problem. Her circle of close friends in India decided to start a diet and exercise regime, and she joined in; within six months, she had lost all her excess weight. Nikita has started drinking alcohol since coming to the United States, but of course her parents are unaware of this aspect of her life. She comes from a very religious background, and they would not readily understand or forgive her if they knew that she drinks, attends parties, and dates. That is why she enjoys staying in touch with her friends from Mumbai so that she can discuss those elements of her social life with them.
Social experiences. With regard to social experiences, Nikita believes she has changed because she now can have a conversation with strangers. In India, she was shy and an introvert and would wait for people to come to her to start a conversation. She is looking for deep, meaningful, and consistent relationships but has yet to find that level of friendship here at Chardin University. Nikita reflected on her relationships during her first interview as follows:

But even over here, it’s like, slowly I’m realizing—I cannot just be the kind of person who likes superficial friendships, or like you hang out with this group. There are some people who can do that; they hang out with one group for partying, one group for studying. I cannot do that. I mean, I need to have some kind of constancy. I need to have some sort of a deep, meaningful relationship. So that’s the essence of my relationship with people. I just cannot—I mean not that I have to go in depth with their lives, but I like to know a little bit more about them rather than just what did they drink yesterday night, or where did they party yesterday night.

Nikita’s expectations were that she would have a large Indian community to hang out with at Chardin University, so she was disappointed to find out that there is no Indian Association here at the university. When she first started her journey from India, she was most interested in finding new friendships with other Indians in the United States. Nikita believes that only by engaging with other Indians will she be able to combat her loneliness and homesickness. She believes that other Indians in this country are facing this deep sense of loneliness, too, and many have resorted to drugs and alcohol. Although she herself has started drinking and dating in this country, she is proud that she has not succumbed to any major addictions, like drugs. Nikita stated during her second interview:
And I did struggle in the start, but I am proud of myself in the sense I have taken care of myself up until now without resorting to other means of coping … and seriously, I keep telling you about the substance thing because it is a major issue which I’ve seen a majority of the Indians using to deal with life over here.

Nikita was completely unprepared for such a new environment. The distance from home and everything familiar, the freedom from family pressures and the strictures of religion, dating, and drinking have made her life what she thought she wanted. But being thrown into this unknown environment without any guidance or mentorship has also made her feel alone and isolated. Nikita leads a dual life: one that she portrays to her parents at home, and one that she lives here. This duplicity has created an acute sense of dissonance in her personal life. Her friendships at Chardin University are with other international students and among the Indian community; her roommate and boyfriend are both Indian. She longs for the type of meaningful relationships and friendships she had back home in India and talks to her five core friends from Ruparel every day rather than engage with the local community here at Chardin University.

Nikita faces cross-cultural isolation, which was experienced by most participants. Nikita, during her second interview, stated the following:

It’s just at home, like listening to songs and everything; I don’t listen too much to English music, even after coming here and being here for like seven months now. Because I prefer Hindi songs. I listen to Hindi songs. I like watching Indian movies.

Even though she stays close to the Indian community, Nikita believes she has changed to become more individualistic and independent. Her parents looked after her all her life, and she had never done anything outside the realm of her home in Mumbai. Their protectiveness left Nikita to fend for herself when in a new situation, with very little preparation for her new life.
Her expectations were that she would find comfort with other Indians and not have to integrate into the local community. Nikita lacked the desire to have any cross-cultural experiences in the United States. As she has transitioned through her life changes, she has gone from being quiet to blossoming into an extrovert. Her mother’s illness, father’s temper, and extended families’ disdain of her journey to America have all contributed to her struggling for independence yet persisting through it all. She believes that she has matured as an individual and has emerged as a much stronger person. Nikita stated the following during her second interview:

I’m learning how to be assertive, how to put my needs forward because, initially, it always used to be other people’s needs ahead. I still have got to learn that completely, but I am much better than what I was. I can take care of, I mean, I know I can take care of myself now.

**Dating.** Nikita believes that dating has saved her from the loneliness of being in America. In India, she did not date because it was not permissible; then, she also believed herself to be fat and unattractive. She has long-standing body-image issues that were revealed at various points during the interview. Although they seem to be in the past, I believe that these issues will need to be addressed appropriately at some point in her life. Nikita reflected during her second interview on what she saw in the mirror:

It’s much better; at least I don’t mind looking in the mirror at myself. Back home, I used to hate it because I used to just see myself as fat, and like not worth loving, and all that. And the fact that guys had not approached me ever or asked me out—it used to hurt very badly.

In the United States, she has dated two Indian boys this past year. She attributes her not needing counseling or other forms of sustained assistance to these relationships. She expressed
the hope that her current relationship will last and lead to marriage, although she does not see this as a certainty. There are cultural barriers to overcome as well: She does not believe that her parents will accept their union readily, even though their parents know each other. Crossing cultures, even within the Indian community, seems impossible to Nikita, let alone integrating into US society or marrying someone in America. During her third interview, she reflected as follows:

I don’t want a boy from another culture; it will be very difficult in India. Getting married to a Guju or to somebody else is difficult adjusting. Getting married [to] somebody from a completely different culture? No, I don’t think so.

Transnational acts. Nikita connects with family and friends on a daily basis. Initially, she would have hour-long conversations on Skype with her parents, who knew her course schedule and everything that was happening at school. Now she talks daily on the phone but Skypes with her parents only once a week, though the conversations last for a long period of time. She believes that she can be more open and free with her friends about her relationship with Sailesh.

Nikita also stays connected to her religion on a daily basis. Religion has been a strong influence in Nikita’s life and she describes being socialized by her parents in Mumbai in the setting of prayers. Their house is a shrine for several Hindu gods, and she missed that when she started her life in America.

Nikita often found herself alone in her large apartment. It was bare and unfurnished at first, but over the past few months her friends have helped her purchase a few items so that her room does not look so stark. Last December, her parents sent her some posters of Hindu gods,
and now she has them plastered all over her walls and her room looks like a shrine. She now feels at home surrounded by these deities.

**Academic experience, identity, and persistence.** Nikita’s academic experience seems to have been relatively smooth compared with the social aspects of her life in the US. Nikita’s father has taken out a loan to pay for her studies, and she plans on repaying him once she starts her PhD. English is her first language, so she has no problem expressing herself adequately. The differences in the classroom environment did not bother her, and she easily adapted to the transition. Class participation and eating in class seemed to be the differences Nikita noticed at first, but they were not difficult to adjust to. Nikita reflected during her third interview as follows:

Initially, even I used to hesitate a little bit, like, what would the others think? But then Americans—honestly, many times they just put up their hands, and then they are so confused by what they are saying. It’s like they think out loud, so even I have kind of started like doing that. Even eating in class, for example.

Nikita did not have many expectations from faculty or administrators. She felt that perhaps events that were more in-depth or that explored cultural events would be desirable, and she found the current programming to be superficial and boring. Students were not engaged in the events the university planned; they came for the food and left. I concur with her observations, having attended a few cultural events during the spring of 2010. At them, I found that there was excellent food served, but students arrived in small ethnic groups, sat together, ate some food, and left. There was one cultural event where students were supposed to wear ethnic outfits, but no one dressed in anything other than their regular clothes. The event had no music or any real cultural or social significance.
As mentioned earlier, Nikita had expected there would be a large Indian community in the Boston area and was extremely disappointed that there were only a few international students in her program. Nikita’s socialization had taken place mostly with other Indians, and crossing cultural boundaries was not something that immediately came to her mind. Nikita has survived her time in the United States, fending off intense loneliness, feelings of isolation, silence, and disconnection from the community around her. She has done well in school, completed her first year, and is planning on applying for a PhD program in her department at CU and at another school in California. She feels that she has had to prove everyone back home wrong who doubted that she would succeed in the United States. Nikita during her second interview stated, “If I know there are obstacles around, and everybody’s waiting for me to fail, I have to prove everybody wrong and succeed in that.”

Nikita sees herself as an Indian girl who is studying in the United States. The description below is telling and explains how she has matured during her tenure in the United States. Nikita, during her second interview, stated the following:

Actually, I was telling my parents, actually last semester, like, when I came, I was a baby; I had not seen the world. I mean, I was going to college … very close to home. I had not seen the world. Now I am a teenager, at last the teenage stage. I still have lots to learn, so I guess by the time I go back home, I might be a woman finally, coming back home. But it has actually been that way.

Nikita believes that she has become more individualistic during her time here: to become self-reliant and to think only of herself instead of putting others first. She believes that in this culture, people are more selfish and individualistic. Unlike other international students who find it difficult to speak in class, she has no problems participating.
Future and career prospects. Nikita’s future is laden with uncertainty, despite her making great strides to adapt. If she were to return to India, she would need to figure out whether her degree would be applicable in Mumbai. Finding an internship in the United States, even one that is unpaid, has been difficult because she does not have any work experience. Had she known that getting an internship would be such a major hurdle, she would have gained the necessary experience and then applied to the program.

Nikita sees no problems or issues keeping her from completing her Master’s program. However, she is trying to stay here longer and get into a PhD program, which would mean staying here for another five to six years. If she does not get into a program next year, then she will apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) and then reapply for a PhD program. Like the other participants in my research, she definitely does not want to return home after her Master’s; however, the reality is that she may have to return to her home country because of the lack of jobs and internships. The US job market that was robust a few years ago has dried up, and firms that were hiring international students are no longer sponsoring H1B Visas.

Nikita would like to work in America but does not see any prospects of raising a family in this country. This country offers her a lifestyle and career that she would not be able to sustain in India, but she does not believe that she wants to stay here long term. She has not completely thought through how she might reintegrate into the crowded home of her parents. Although she realizes that going back home may sound great for a holiday, she would not be able to do anything in her area of expertise, and she would have to do work at a grassroots level. This dilemma is the same for Elif, Victoria, and April. Nikita commented as follows during her third interview:
See, if we get married and everything, and I don’t know how comfortable I am raising kids in this culture. I don’t mind staying here; I mean, staying here, working here, would be great for me. I know I’ll make a lot of money. Career-wise it will be great. For him also, career-wise it will be very good. And going back to India is going to be a struggle for both of us because even his field is in information and security.

The constant change Nikita has gone through this past year has ultimately been good for her but has also created dissonance within her overall experiences. Her initial bout of loneliness and homesickness is a theme that threaded through the interviews. Her lack of understanding that she is leading a life she was unprepared for is apparent. She still misses her home, parents, and friends and continues to connect with them on a daily basis. Her desire to break free from her past is evident, yet not being able to be honest and open with her parents about all aspects of her life in this country also holds her back. Her fear of failure and societal pressure have pushed her along and led her to persist and to succeed academically. Through all the extremes of battling loneliness, seeking counseling, and dating in order to feel connected, she has survived and not given up and returned to India. Through all these emotional times, she has successfully completed her first year at CU, acquired two unpaid summer internships, and is continuing to network with her professors to get admitted to a PhD program.

I met with Nikita in person for tea during the summer of 2010 to go over her story and analysis. Nikita was under the impression that her experiences would be aggregated with those of other participants. She was the only participant who seemed surprised at some of the information she had revealed. During her interviews she felt that she had incorrectly mentioned that she was depressed when she first came to the United States. However, after learning what clinical depression means, she wanted me to specify that she was not clinically depressed. I
promised to include this statement in my final analysis. After our meeting, I removed the word “depression” from her narrative because she strongly felt that she was lonely and homesick but not clinically depressed. However, if the word depression was part of a direct quote used in the study, I have left it in place. I informed Nikita how I would be addressing her concern. Her story is compelling as there are several other graduate international students facing the same issues. She realizes that by allowing me to tell her story, she will be helping others who are experiencing the same difficulties with this life transition. At the end of our meeting, I double-checked to see whether she was still fine with her story being told, after this consultation she seemed to be satisfied.

Conclusion

This chapter unveiled the complex lives and future aspirations of Elif, April, and Nikita. Their stories are compelling and significant and describe the nuances of their social experiences. The next chapter elucidates the lives of Cindy, Claire, and Victoria.
Chapter 5

Stories: Cindy, Claire, and Victoria

Chapter five elaborates the life stories of Cindy, Claire, and Victoria: three participants who have graduated from their programs. Cindy and Victoria have left the country, and Claire is returning for one year of OPT.

Cindy—Determined to Speak Out: Always Exploring New Possibilities


The story. Cindy is a 28-year-old female student from China enrolled in the one-year Master of Science in Finance (MSF) program in the School of Management. Cindy responded to my e-mail, and I met her for the first time when she arrived for her interview. During the past few months, I have been most impressed by her tenacity and perseverance. Cindy was always well dressed and prepared for all her interviews. She showed great pride and interest as she shared her life and social experiences with me. I have had several social engagements with her, and we have connected at a very personal level; our conversations over tea have lasted for hours.

Cindy was born and raised in the Eastern part of China in a midsized city called Xuzhou (pronounced Shijo). Cindy is close to her parents, who still live in Xuzhou. English is her second language, but she has no problems expressing and articulating her thoughts. Cindy is her parents’ only child, owing to the one-child policy in China. Her father is a middle school teacher and her mother a retired accountant. She admitted that her father is an extremely strict person who has high expectations of her. Because she is an only child, he treats her as he would a son. Her father was a young man during the Cultural Revolution in China and feels that he lost out on opportunities during his lifetime. He did not want the same to happen to Cindy, so he always
encouraged her to become independent and strong. Her mother, on the other hand, paid greater attention to Cindy’s emotional development and treated her as a daughter. So she grew up always trying to meet her father’s expectations while being supported emotionally by her mother.

According to Cindy, the lines between men and women are now blurred in China because their roles have been reversed. The girls are now competing with the boys, and the rules have changed; the boys do not have the dominant role they once did when families were allowed to have multiple kids. The girls are equal in status and sometimes surpass the boys in their performance at school and work. During her first interview, Cindy stated the following:

I thought probably it is related with the one-child policy … in a one-child family, for example, myself, I’m the only child in the family. So my father treated me as a boy, while my mother treated me as a girl. My father always has very high expectations of me. If I had a brother, probably he would give high expectations to my brother, but I have no brother, so he would expect me to become more independent and successful in the future. My mother treated me more like a girl. She was always concerned about my personal life, whether I’m happy with my school life, how my physical conditions are going, and am I really happy—stuff like that.

Cindy finished her primary and middle school education in her hometown and then completed her undergraduate degree at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. She chose this university because she was interested in international affairs and foreign languages. During her studies, she was exposed to several Western students and was able to learn a lot from them. She has always been interested in Western culture and has appreciated its differences from her own. In China as an undergraduate student, Cindy volunteered as an interpreter for sporting events, which enabled her to watch them for free.
While Cindy was a full-time student, she taught English on the weekends as a volunteer to children of emigrant workers. There are some public schools that specialize in teaching emigrant children; however, they are government-funded and do not have enough teachers. Therefore, Cindy volunteered to teach while she was a student in Beijing.

**Drawn to better opportunities in America.** Cindy likes the American higher education system because it is more diversified and there are multiple options for students at the college level. She believes that the curriculum in China is very academic and does not prepare students for the real world and social life beyond college. As a result, Chinese students are woefully underprepared to face real-world issues and challenges. In China, at the undergraduate level, there are no choices in classes; students have to take the set curriculum whether they are interested in it or not. The courses are assigned to the students at the beginning of their four years, and they have to complete all the courses to graduate. Cindy finds that here in America, students can develop skills other than just academics. For example, they can launch careers in music and sports and still be successful. What concerns Cindy is that Chinese students are not thinking of their future, and by the time they start doing so, it is too late. She believes that planning for your future is a gradual process, and thinking of these issues in high school is very important. She believes that hers is a lost generation: When they are given options, they do not know what to do with them. Cindy commented during her first interview:

That is probably the reason the ’80s generation—that’s my generation—[is] kind of a little bit lost now; when they were facing more options, they don’t know which one to choose because they don’t know what is the thing they really want in their life.
**Self-mandated transitions.** Cindy states that she *broke away* from her family gradually as she left her province of Jiang Su and headed for Beijing. She lived on campus during her four undergraduate years. After graduation, she worked at a multinational telecommunications company and accepted the opportunity to work in Indonesia as a financial manager. She requested to work in Indonesia because she wanted an international experience. Her experience there taught her how to navigate and work in an Islamic country, which differs from communist China. In Indonesia, she volunteered to teach Mandarin. She found her experiences in Indonesia extremely rewarding and interesting.

Cindy has managed several transitions in her life that seem to have been propelled by her own efforts towards change rather than family decisions. So in this respect, Cindy was unique among the other participants. She has had several transitions: from her hometown Xuzhou to Beijing, from Beijing to Indonesia, then back to China, and finally to Chardin University. All these transitions were driven by her desire to internationalize her experience by exploring different parts of the world. She spoke a lot about poverty and how poor people cannot get a good education in China. In her own way, she has tried to help out by volunteering to teach English and Mandarin. She has volunteered to help people who did not have the same opportunities and resources she was born with. She calls all her transitions and experiences calculated risks taken at various times during her life. Cindy, during her first interview, made the following comments:

> When I chose the college that I would enter in the future, my parents said, Why don’t you go to some college that is close to our hometown? It will be easier for us to see you periodically. And I said no. I want to live an independent life in a new city, so I went to Beijing. I think it is related to my personality. I am kind of a risk-seeking person. Of
course, I have to calculate the risk first, and then I will decide whether I will take the risk or not, but basically I am a risk-seeking person. I think I have only 70 to 80 years’ time during my whole life, and I just want to make it different, so I intentionally left my hometown after my high school. That’s why I went further and further and further, and now I’m in the United States.

Cindy is just about to complete her Master’s degree in August of 2010. Her research interests focus on how money can be used to make people happier and wealthier and lead to better lives. She had hoped to work in the United States for a few years after graduation; unfortunately, this did not come to fruition. She has been unable to find an internship in Boston or New York, where she had originally wanted to live for a few years. She is well on her way to graduation, but her ultimate goal of working in the United States is not panning out as originally planned.

When Cindy first arrived, she landed at Boston’s Logan Airport and booked into a motel for one night because she had no place to live. She knew some people from China who were studying in the Boston area, but not well enough to meet her at the airport or put her up for the night. After that, she was very lucky in finding accommodations and liked the first apartment she visited. The owner was a Chinese woman and an artist who has lived in this country for ten years. Cindy was drawn to the apartment and the Chinese artwork the landlady had created, which made Cindy feel right at home. The landlady turned out to be a good mentor and friend; she was originally from China and helped Cindy meet new people in Boston. Although significantly older, the landlady (who occupied one of the bedrooms in the apartment) helped Cindy make the transition to America by introducing Cindy to her American and Chinese
friends. Cindy believes that she is close friends with her landlady; they speak Mandarin, cook
 together, and socialize often. Cindy described their relationship during her second interview:

  And this living room is decorated with sculptures and paintings. It is really a nice place.
  She originally comes from China, and we have the same language. It’s easier for us to
talk in our mother tongue. In the meantime, she’s local here, so she knows fun places in
the city, so I think this is probably a good choice.

A significant disconnect in social experiences. Cindy has several Chinese friends from
schools in the Boston area that she knew before she came to the United States; however, she did
not elaborate on how she knew them back home. Even so, she really wants to broaden her
horizons and learn from a variety of people and friends. It seems that most of the American
friends she has made were introduced to her by her landlady, although she would not categorize
all these friendships as close ones. She has a Chinese classmate she connects with, with whom
she shares the same cultural background, interests, struggles in life, and issues in the classroom.
This Chinese classmate is the same age as Cindy and graduated from a university in Shanghai.

Cindy, during her second interview, had this to say:

  In terms of really close friends, I have one who is my classmate here at Chardin
  University. She is also Chinese, because in terms of intimacy I think it would be easier
  for me to have very close friends who share the same culture…. It’s easier for us to
  understand each other, so that’s why we’re kind of closer friends. We talk a lot about our
  future—what we are going to do after graduation. We also go to the symphony together
to relax a little bit. We also discuss the class, how … we feel about the professor. It is
really intimate and sometimes we cook together. Sometimes I make a very delicious
dish, and I’d like to share it with her.
Cindy has strived for independence and, although she has lived away from home since a very young age, she had never learned to cook. Even in Indonesia she did not have to cook for herself because she had a cook that prepared her meals. She dislikes American food and finds it too fatty and unhealthy. She has learned to cook since coming to America and often does so with her roommate and Chinese classmate on weekends. Cindy likes spicy food and loves to eat at Chinese restaurants in the city. This is one similarity Cindy and I share: I also learned to cook only when in this country, and this kept me grounded and connected to home.

Cindy believes herself to be a very curious person who wants to know and learn about Western culture. During her first three months at CU, Cindy did not feel connected to the university community at all. She felt that there was something wrong with her because she was unable to communicate effectively with the local students and lacked the ability to speak good English. There is a level of superficiality in communication in this country, and she felt that she had yet to master that aspect of Western culture. However, she now believes she was wrong in feeling as she did and blames it on her Chinese way of thinking. She then felt that somehow it was wrong for her to want deep and meaningful conversations and relationships with people.

For Cindy, there is a clear disconnect when it comes to building relationships with peers. She believes that, somehow, she lacks the necessary skills to engage with her American peers. This sentiment was also expressed by several other participants, as English is their second language and they have strong regional accents. Although Americans are friendly by nature, there is a level of superficiality with which one has to get accustomed as they try to connect. Cindy believes that her American peers are not interested in knowing deep stuff about a person; they are just as happy to engage superficially over a few drinks in a bar. This is also something that Claire, Jude, and Elif found in common during their social experiences when they were
trying to integrate and connect with their American peers. Cindy has noticed that CU puts forth many programmatic efforts to encourage discussions on campus. However, the participants are mostly international students; American students tend not to participate. Cindy during her second interview noted the following:

It’s like frustrated. Initially I thought, Is there any problem with my communication skill? It’s just like, I meet this person, I want to talk further to him or her, but he or she kind just of stopped there, not continue any more. We could just talk some very superficial stuff…. People here sometimes don’t talk very deep stuff; they just want to have simple happiness, simple fun, simple good times, that’s all—drinking, drinking, and joking, and stuff like that.

**Dating.** Cindy believes that the dating culture is a lot bolder here. She is not interested in dating an American because she believes in serious relationships; she finds American men are more easygoing and speak their minds freely. She finds this to be a bit offensive, as it is not so in the Chinese culture. She states that, in her culture, they are more reserved; for example, she does not recall her parents ever saying that they loved each other, yet they have been together and married for several years. Cindy has dated a few people since she has been here; they have all been Chinese, as she believes that there should be cultural similarities for a relationship to work. She believes that it is easier for her to date in the United States than in China and that she will eventually marry a Chinese person, although there is a possibility that this might change in the future.
The communist influence. Cindy does not practice any religion because it is prohibited in communist China. Her grandparents were Christians, but her parents are not. According to Cindy, Chinese culture teaches the tenets of good citizenship, morality, and service. Cindy believes that her family is influenced by Buddhism though they dare not practice it in China. Chinese are taught that religious practices are based on superstitions and that they should believe in science instead. Some of her American friends are very inquisitive about this aspect of her life. For them, communism and the restrictions it brings to personal freedoms might be difficult to comprehend. Cindy has read the Bible and feels that it is a good piece of literature, but she could never believe or practice Christianity. As she stated during her second interview:

Well, in my past education, I was educated in such a way that religion is not required. That means it’s okay if you don’t have a religion. But you must have your moral[ity], and you must know how to behave in the world, and you must know which is right and which is wrong. So I would say that probably, the moral standards play the role of religion in my life.

What I found particularly interesting was that, in all of Cindy’s interviews, she did not mention any names of people who had passed through her life, unlike Victoria, who throughout her interviews disclosed the names of everyone she knew. I wondered whether this was a cultural habit—training from living in a communist regime in China. When I asked her about this during our last meeting, she stated that she did not realize she was doing it and attributed it to being a private person. As a teenager, Cindy was compelled to join the youth league, a program that prepares young people for the communist party. Cindy talked about this experience during her third interview:
In China, I think to be honest, I couldn’t recall any voting experience in China. I think I was a youth league member in China. It’s like every teenager will join that organization. It’s a youth league. I was a member there, and it’s like a preparation for the communism party, but you can choose to become a communism [sic] or not after a certain age. So most of the teenagers in the youth league becomes a free man, without any preference.

**Transnational acts.** Cindy talks to her parents twice a week through the Internet. She uses Chinese software instead of Skype, which is too advanced for her parents, who are older and cannot learn new technology at their age. The software they use is called QQ, which is similar to Google and is free. She has some good friends from work and college with whom she was very close when she was in China. However, unlike other participants who spent hours daily talking to their friends from back home, Cindy did not mention these friends during her interviews. Cindy has noticed how communicating with her parents is different from when she was in Beijing, versus here in Boston. When she was in Beijing, she used to keep in touch with phone calls, but now the free Internet communications take place weekly. Elif and April also experienced this; they found that, over time, the cost and ease of communication improved dramatically since arriving in the United States. Cindy reflected during her third interview as follows:

Yes, that helps me communicating with my friends and my family…. I really benefit a lot from the IT development. And when I, for example, when I was 18, that was the time that I left my home and went to Beijing. The Internet was not that developed at that time in China, so the communication was done through telephone. I called my family every week, and as I started my work, I could talk to my parents on Internet, through some Internet software. And after I came to the United States, my parents installed the camera,
so we can have camera talk on the Internet. It becomes more and more convenient to have long-distance communication.

**Constant cultural comparisons with China.** Cindy believes that the American people are very straightforward, share openly, and try to make you feel comfortable. She believes that she has learned a lot from her American peers and their way of thinking. When Cindy compares Chinese people with Americans, she concludes that Chinese people are too worried about the future and that they do not live in the moment. This is completely different from the experience of Jude, who came from New Zealand. He felt that Americans are stressed out all the time and do not know how to relax. Cindy believes that she has the same traits as the other Chinese students and that worrying about her future is a bad thing. So she has come to the conclusion that having American friends neutralizes the negative feelings she has inherited from her Chinese culture. Cindy during her second interview stated:

> They will think about it. It’s just that, sometimes, we cannot figure out the answer immediately, so [Americans] won’t continue thinking about it. But for Chinese people, it’s like oh, if I cannot figure it out, I will just feel worried, I feel concerned all the time, so that is the negative part of me or of my other Chinese friends here. But staying with those American friends, this negative part is kind of neutralized.

**Visa and immigration.** The visa and immigration process for Cindy was not overly problematic. According to her, the visa application is standardized, and so long as the documents are in order, the process is simple. Even though there was a glitch in mistaken identity, it was sorted out, and Cindy was allowed to enter the United States. Her name had been confused with another person by the immigration officials (the Chinese characters in Cindy’s
name and the other person’s were different, but the English spelling was the same). She arrived late and missed her first class, but it did not present too much of a problem.

**Academic experience and persistence.** Cindy takes classes in the evening from Monday to Thursday. During the day, she completes her reading and homework in order to prepare. Most of her group meetings take place during the day from Monday to Thursday. There is a lot of group work that Cindy does with her classmates. On Fridays she does not have class, and for the most part is free from any structured activity. On Thursdays Cindy participates in a volunteer program to mentor school kids. This is not a part of her curriculum, as it is for MBA students; instead, she does it, as she puts it, to keep a loving heart. She does not want to be someone who is driven just by money but wants to be a more balanced person. Cindy explained during her second interview:

I’m just doing it totally out of my interest. Some MBA students just asked me, why do you do this, because you don’t have to. I told them that I used to work in the business area for three or four years, and I know how cutting-throat business is, and I really want to keep my loving heart. So I want to participate in this program and help those kids, and I will maintain a loving heart, which will make me feel comfortable. I really don’t want to be a cruel person and a profits-driven person, and I just want to be a more balanced person, so that’s why I participate in this program.

Cindy believes that if she had learned sociology, she would never have found a decent job in China. She had to choose a field in which she could earn good money in China. Cindy believes that she has been encouraged in America to *speak out* and not stay silent. In China, the students have to be obedient and humble towards others, because they learn quickly that the more humble you are, the less likely you will be seen as a troublemaker. But in America, she has
learned to speak her mind because if you do not, then everyone thinks you are in agreement.

Cindy during her second interview reflected:

We are not encouraged to speak out because we don’t want to cause much trouble. We just want our life to be simple. If one person speaks too much, he probably will induce some trouble. But here, if you don’t speak out, probably you are seen as a mindless person because you have no opinion to express.

Cindy likes the fact that she is encouraged to actively participate in the classroom. She is aware that her grades depend on class participation and finds that it enhances her learning. Cindy raises her hand even if she does not know the answer immediately, and then while her hand is raised quickly organizes her thoughts. She has learned how to express her feelings, an ability I witnessed during the time we have spent together. She believes that sometimes, the answer does not matter, but it is the thinking process that matters. She believes that she has changed and developed these skills during her tenure at CU.

Identity, independence, and personal growth. Cindy believes that she has become more independent in this country. When Cindy first went to college in Beijing, everything was organized for her; her classes and living accommodations were all taken care of. When she went to Indonesia, the apartment was prearranged and rented by the company that employed her. She did not have to worry about her next meal, as it was prepared by her cook. But in the United States, she had to find her own place to live, look for job opportunities, and cook for herself. She had a lot of friends here (as she puts it), but for the most part has had to figure things out for herself. Cindy during her second interview stated:

But here in the United States, I have to look for a dormitory by myself, I have to look for job opportunities, I have to think about my future. I have to cook by myself, I have to
think everything, I have to just be independent. I have no one to rely on. I have friends at CU, which is a good treasure to me, but still, a lot of things I have to figure out by myself.

Cindy has said throughout her interviews that she is a curious person who wants to live and learn outside the Asian environment. She wants to keep up with changes because she believes doing so keeps her youthful. Cindy regards herself as a student in this country who has left behind the hassles of work life to lead a simpler life. She sees herself as a girl rather than a woman because of the way her parents have always treated her. She believes that, unless she has a full-time job, she will not be able to connect with the local community here in the United States. Cindy believes she has become more confident and can speak her mind—in the classroom and beyond. This style of thinking and living, which she is drawn to, is completely different than in China. She believes she has become more honest and does not remain silent when she does not agree with a subject. Cindy during her third interview stated:

I think that is because of my nature. By my nature, I am a very curious person. I want to know what is happening outside of my living environment. And I believe that change keeps a person youthful. If you want to know new things, if you want to improve yourself, you have to change your life from time to time, and that's why I just made these changes in my life.

**Overcoming obstacles to a better future.** Ten months ago, Cindy quit her high-pressure job in order to find peace. She came here to experience the Western world, to meet new people, and to build relationships. She came here, as she put it, as a “blank piece of paper,” ready to learn and absorb new experiences. She does not believe that the academic experience has been that demanding. What she does not realize is that it is impossible to be a “blank piece
of paper,” and that one comes with preconceived notions and ideas. She acknowledged that during the latter part of the second interview:

I think I’m more peaceful. Ten months ago I had just quit my job. I was a little bit tired of job, high pressure, busy schedule, meetings after meetings, spreadsheets after spreadsheets, and [with] the company there is always political issues and stuff like that. I really wanted to find a place to calm down and think about my future—what kind of life do I want to live? I don’t want to be blinded by what happened in the company, no matter if it’s good or bad. I can only see my life by jumping out of those hassles. So after I left my previous company and came to the United States, I was like a blank piece of paper. I was ready to accept everything new here. And I was in the attitude of learning, absorbing fresh ideas, and this really makes me feel more peaceful.

Cindy is grateful for all the experiences she has had, when she compares her life to her peers in China. She feels that in China, the pressure is really high to find a good job to be able to pay rent, because space is at a huge premium in cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Most of her friends are struggling, very unhappy, and not satisfied with their life there. Cindy believes that she is very lucky because she has persisted through all her transitions in her life. Her last job was a good one, and she could afford the good life in a major city. However, she wanted to experience life outside China and work in a different environment. Indonesia was still Asia and similar to China in many ways, although it has the largest Muslim population in the world; there, she experienced cultural differences with China. However, she wanted a totally different cultural experience, and that is why she decided to come to the United States. One of the major obstacles she encountered in doing so was that her parents were not supportive of her moving far away; nor had they been happy about her move to Indonesia. According to the Chinese culture, she
should be married with a child by now. Most girls Cindy’s age get married and follow their husbands around; they do not have careers and lives of their own. Cindy during her third interview stated:

And one of the biggest obstacles, I think, is from my family because they don’t want me to go to the United States. They want me to stay with them. I’m the only child in the family. My mother was not so happy for me going to Indonesia, as a matter of fact. She said, as a girl, you shouldn’t go traveling around and around and around. You should settle down as soon as possible.

Cindy’s plans keep changing because she has been unable to find a job in the United States upon her graduation in August 2010. Through some of her work connections from China, she has found a position in Singapore at a bank, but her heart is not in it. She has not yet confirmed or accepted the post and is still applying for jobs in this country. The MSF program is a rigorous, one-year program, and the students do not get a lot of time to dedicate to their job search. Also, almost no companies in America—especially in the financial arena—are willing to apply for H1B Visas for international students.

Throughout the interview, Cindy kept comparing her life in America with her life in China. She believes in and respects the Eastern culture and the communist environment she grew up in. She obeyed all the stringent rules in China by joining the youth league; she followed the policy of no religion and prayer. Even so, although she did not say it outright, I believe that Cindy would like to settle down in the United States in part because she finds the Western work culture and environment more friendly and positive. According to Cindy, work is done in a straightforward manner, whereas in China, one normally does not tell people what one truly thinks of their work because it is disrespectful. As she puts it, you have to hide your feelings and
cannot tell the truth. Because it is part of Chinese culture not to speak one’s mind, and because there is no freedom of speech, this leads to several inefficiencies.

Cindy has always charted her own path to the future. She did not succumb to societal pressures of settling down and starting a family. Even her mother’s constant reminders did not make her alter her plans to study overseas. Her mother worries that she is now 28 years old and needs to settle down. As Cindy stated during her third interview:

And for me, I’m just following my heart. I’m not following anyone. I’m following my heart. So my mother is a little bit worried because I’m not following the traditional life path of the Chinese woman. That’s why she is a little bit worried. She will never know the result. She thinks I’m facing uncertainty in my future life, and she does not like that.

Cindy does believe that she will have to go back home someday. If she settles down in the United States, she plans to bring her parents to live with her. She sees that this might pose a problem for them because they do not speak any English and might not be able to make the transition. This was a significant worry for most participants who thought of the possibility of settling down in the US. This sense of responsibility towards their parents was always something at the forefront of their mind as they discussed their future. If Cindy has to go back home, she would go back to Beijing and not any other part of China, and her parents would still come and live with her. Cindy believes that her advanced degree will be very useful in getting her a better job in China.

I met Cindy before she had accepted the full-time job offer in Singapore. She is excited about Singapore but believes she will come back to the United States someday and that her quest to stay in this country is not over yet. She did admit that she would like to settle down here
rather than go anywhere else in the world. As of this writing, she has arrived safely in Singapore after a short visit home to see her parents.

**Claire—A Complex Life: Conflicted About Her Future**

Structured descriptive codes: Academic Experience, Future, Culture, Friendships, and Family/Home.

**The story.** Claire is a 25-year-old graduate student from France, where she lived all her life before coming to the United States. She left home for the first time three years ago to teach French at a school in Indiana; the next year, she enrolled in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, in the Romance Language program, at Chardin University. Claire’s family home is 30 minutes from Paris; she is extremely close to her parents, siblings, and friends. She has two younger twin siblings: a brother and a sister who are 21 years of age.

Her family background in France is interesting and shapes who Claire is today. Religion also has had a unique impact on how she views the world. Her father is Jewish and her mother is Christian; however, she and her siblings were encouraged to follow whatever religion they were drawn to, as there was no formal religion practiced at home. Her parents never married, though they loved each other, and Claire and her siblings grew up in a loving and caring home. There seemed to be some family history where the differences in religion played a role, as her father moved out of his parents’ home to live with her mother. Interestingly, she or her siblings do not really know what exactly happened in their parents’ past, though they suspect that it was significant and connected to their religious differences. Claire is an atheist and, during her second interview, stated that people in France are more skeptical about religion:
I chose nothing, because I wasn’t sure, and France is the most atheist country. This is where there are the most atheists, and especially in school, we don’t talk about religion. People are kind of skeptical, people are more skeptical about religion in France.

Claire’s first language is French, but she speaks English fluently. Although her syntax is slightly different and her speech rather rapid, she can articulate her feelings and thoughts clearly. Claire was one of the only participants who could clearly explain why she really missed her family and home. After being away from France for almost three years, she is certain she will eventually return home. As Claire told me during her first interview:

I always see myself living here for another two or three years, but beyond that, I really see myself in France, just because of this strong bond that I really have with my family and my friends and who I miss a lot—actually, all the time.

Claire has two Master’s degrees, one of which is in French from the University of Sorbonne in Paris. She specialized in Anglo-American studies and in US culture and history. In her second year in the Master’s program in Paris, she came to Indiana, where she taught at an all-male university. This year at a small institution was extremely important, as she experienced the classic cultural shock that most international students face in their host countries. At first she was enjoying herself, as everything was new. She lived with a group of girls from various countries and relished the experience as she learned a lot from them. Claire during the first interview stated:

It was the Midwest, and I was not really ready for that. And coming from Paris, I was going to a very small town, and there was no public transportation. And the people were, some of them were very narrow-minded, and very conservative. First it was great, and then it was a culture shock as I got to know the people a little better.
Claire had traveled to Germany, Switzerland, England, and America before coming to Chardin University for her Master’s. She met her current boyfriend Barry (pseudonym) when she was 14 years old, visiting her cousin in Boston. When she later came to Indiana to teach, she started dating Barry, who is American and a few years older than she. Her decision to come to CU and Boston was made mainly to reconnect with her boyfriend, as they had been in a long-distance relationship for several years.

The one-year Indiana experience was fairly negative. In 2007, the political environment was tense in the Midwest, and the opinion about France and French people was negative. There were several classroom debates that made Claire uncomfortable. There was an incident at a house party, where her friend was told that if she wanted to speak Spanish, she should go back home to South America. There were several such incidents that made Claire uneasy about the overall climate on campus. Although her experience with the local community in Indiana sounded fairly negative, Claire did not dwell on these feelings and seemed to have taken it as an experience worth noting and moved on. However, it was one that definitely shaped her overall experience of this country. Claire believes she should have expected this, as her professors in France did tell her that the Midwest was conservative and not welcoming to foreigners. There was no particular emotion when Claire was stating this fact, but she did say that compared with Indiana, her time at CU and Boston has been much more positive.

Claire was well prepared to come to CU, having taken her GREs, compiled her papers, and applied for her visa. She had no particular problems with getting her visa or entering the United States. However, immigration officers always asked her why she was coming from France in order to study French in the United States. She would always answer in the same rehearsed manner: that she was interested in getting a Master’s in French literature from CU.
She never mentioned her boyfriend Barry because she knew that the immigration authorities would look on this negatively. Claire during her first interview explained:

And I never, usually don’t tell them that I have a boyfriend and I am coming to meet a boyfriend, to be with a boyfriend. Because that is one of the reasons, but that is not the main reason, I usually try to avoid that. They don’t ask that question, but I don’t say it. Just because I don’t want them to think—oh she’s coming to get married and all that stuff, because that’s not true at all. I don’t want them to investigate and say, what is she doing? No, I am here to teach and study and get my Master’s.

**Transnational acts.** Claire is lonely, even though she has several support systems here in the United States; she lives with Barry and has a cousin who lives in the Boston area. In addition, she had vacationed in the United States on several occasions before coming to CU.

Even so, she does not feel that this culture is suited to her and believes that in France, it is more laid back, relaxed, and the quality of life is much better. Her parents have visited her once, and she has been back to France several times during school breaks, so she has lived a very transient life these past few years. She is constantly in touch with her family through Skype and spends a great deal of time connecting with family and friends from back home, where she has a strong network of friends. Claire during her second interview stated:

And I try to speak to my parents at least once a week on Skype. So if I don’t talk to them, I e-mail them. So I take time also to send e-mails to my parents, my brother, my sister; I always include them when I send them, okay, these are the updates. Sometimes it’s twice a week, sometimes it’s once per week, but we try to talk on Skype for at least two hours.
Claire talks to her family and friends every week, and spends several hours keeping them up to date with her life. She always goes back to France during school breaks to relax and reconnect with them. Claire believes that her transition has been easier owing to the constant communication with her parents. This constant connection with family and friends from home is the norm for the contemporary international student. The Internet has made it so easy to stay connected with their families and past life that they are not forced to integrate and engage with the community in their host country. During her first interview, Claire reflected as follows:

I do have a lot of friends. I have friends that don’t know each other. I have friends from school. I have childhood friends. I have friends from when I go salsa dancing, because I love salsa. So I have different groups of friends. And I communicate with them all the time. At least once a week, they know what is going on.

**Social experiences and friendships.** Claire shares limited social experiences with her American peers and the local community in the Boston area. Although she maintains a strong network of friends in France, unfortunately, she has not made those types of friendships in this country. She believes that she has not put in adequate effort to ensure meaningful relationships here at CU. She takes personal responsibility for this lack and believes that her relationship with Barry might have contributed to this disconnect. I saw clearly from interviewing her that Claire communicates with her classmates only to talk about coursework and teaching matters. During lunch, she normally sits by herself and does not engage with any of her classmates, whom she believes to be too busy. She sometimes socializes with Barry’s American friends, but feels somewhat disconnected from them because they are his friends, not hers.

Claire keeps extremely busy during the week and does not leave much time to socialize. Her idea of a good time is salsa dancing, which she did pretty frequently in France. She is
extremely critical of the practice of partying in the United States and the abuse of alcohol. She mentioned several times during the three interviews that this is not her idea of fun. In her experience, socializing in America is fundamentally centered around alcohol. She does not even like having conversations during parties that are based on drinking because she is simply not interested in telling someone who is drunk her life story. Claire during her second interview stated:

We end up at some sort of random party, and people are drinking, and it’s 9:00 at night, and they are already drunk or it’s not even interesting. So to me, when I go, I don’t even socialize sometimes, because people are drunk, and I don’t really see the point of telling them who I am, where I’m from, because they don’t even remember, and I’m not interested in this type of thing. So I don’t really like the idea of, oh, we have a reason to celebrate today. We have a reason to drink, so let’s drink. Today is St. Patrick’s Day—we have to drink. Everyone has to drink. So I don’t understand that. I understand [having] a beer with a friend, but you sort of try to do some sort of discussing. Five o’clock, everyone is drunk—girls, boys, everyone. And it’s, I’m not having fun, I can’t have fun. I don’t really have fun at all when people around me are all drinking, saying stupid things, and I’m never really—I don’t know—comfortable, and I don’t know what to do.

Cross-cultural isolation. Claire has been here for three years and has made attempts to engage with the American community. And yet, she feels disconnected with the mainstream population. She feels isolated from the main social and cultural customs of this country, and has really not made meaningful and significant relationships at CU. I found this disconnect to be common among all participants. One of the contributing factors to this disconnect is the use of
technology to stay connected to friends and family back home, and thereby not letting go of familiar relationships and being forced to forge new friendships and connections. On the flipside, there seems to be apathy on the part of American students to better understand or be engaged with the international student population. Claire reflected that even simple daily acts of having coffee and lunch are done in solitude, as she believes that her American peers are too busy with their own lives. As a result, she never asks them out for lunch and invariably eats alone.

**Health issues.** Claire was seriously ill for an entire semester last year, suffering from severe gastritis. Her illness contributed to her feelings of loneliness, stress, and being overwhelmed by all the schoolwork she had to complete. Her classes needed to be taught by other graduate students, and she had to get an extension for all her assignments. I met Claire during March 2010, when she had just completed all her past-due assignments and was beginning to feeling confident that she would graduate on time. When she first started feeling sick the previous year, for several months the doctors offered no firm diagnosis; thus, her recovery took longer than it should have. She was eating a very limited variety of food and was getting extremely weak. She made several trips to the emergency room, and her boyfriend was helpful in trying to get to the bottom of her illness. Her parents also came to visit her from France, as they were worried about her well-being. Her illness was extremely stressful because she was scheduled to graduate in May 2010, and her academic submissions were accumulating.

**Academic persistence.** Somehow, even after falling so far behind, Claire has completed all her necessary schoolwork. Her proudest moment came when she defended her independent study to her faculty. She was gratified by the fact that most of the faculty showed up for her presentation, all had very positive things to say about her work, and they encouraged
her to pursue a PhD. Her academic and teaching loads remain hectic from morning until evening, and yet she has always been able to get everything done in a timely fashion. She teaches two courses at CU in addition to being a full-time student. On the weekends, she spends time studying and preparing for her lectures. Because she is nearing graduation, her time is spent mostly doing schoolwork, applying for jobs, and writing and updating her resume. Claire will be graduating on time, and her entire family will be here to see her commencement. She is happy that they are all going to be present and foresees her graduation to be the happiest moment of her life here at CU. Claire will be appearing for a board exam in May so she will be able to teach in state and public schools in Massachusetts. She has applied for a position at Tufts University but is not confident she will get it, as several people have applied for the same job.

Claire feels that she has changed during her tenure in the United States and become more hard-working and focused. These qualities will help her as she progresses in her career as a teacher. Claire stated during her second interview:

But I became more hard-working, and I understand the work ethic even more. And I think that if I go back to France—and I’m sure I will, and I’d like to eventually in the future—I think I will keep this with me.

Identity. Claire regards herself as an immigrant because, at every step of the way, she has to state who she is and show her ID. She does not believe this situation will ever change from a documentation perspective and the way she has experienced the country. She perceives that she acts or behaves very French in this country—always talking about her family, friends, and the good food she misses. She is not sure why she feels this way, because she is not really patriotic, but feels the need to identify this difference to her boyfriend and the people she encounters. She does not enjoy the partying and socializing aspects of life in this country. She
was one of the few participants who articulated why she found it unsatisfying to meet people at bars over drinks. I believe that her experiences at Indiana University Bloomington also played a large role in her trying to reclaim her French identity, as that experience was so negative. Claire is constantly identifying with aspects of life in France: food, culture, politics, and style of living. And, although she came here to make a future with her boyfriend, she has come to realize that she will not be settling down in the United States.

**A complex life.** Claire has led a complex life and continues to deal with the multifaceted aspects of her existence. She is torn between her desire to return home to France, to pursue higher education, and to nurture her relationship with Barry. Her family history: the dual religions and the fact that her parents are not married, gives a glimpse into her life that has shaped her identity and guides future plans. She also does not talk about the future with her boyfriend’s family because she knows that they want him to stay in Boston, whereas she wants to move to France and is hoping that he will come with her. The fact that he does not speak French and has made no attempt to learn indicates that he has been expecting her to settle down in the United States and not return to France. Claire stated optimistically during her first interview: “And I want my boyfriend to come with me when I return to France, and I hope he’ll be okay, although he doesn’t speak any French, so it’s going to be hard adjusting.”

How her future will shape up seems fairly apparent to her, although I do not believe she has communicated those thoughts clearly to Barry as she has to me during her interviews. I believe that she feels guilty about changing her mind because earlier, she probably wanted to stay in the country for at least ten years. This change in expectations has also caused a high level of uncertainty: Based on the terms of her student visa, she has a short time window after graduation to get a job, but so far she does not have one. Her window of opportunity is small,
and she has to get organized within the next three months. She does not want to stay in this
country without a job, but she also is running out of time and money. Claire during her third
interview reflected on her predicament:

    And this coming back and forth, it’s really, sort of, that’s why I was so torn apart, you
know. I was so torn between the US and France, and I never really stayed here for an
entire year without returning to France, without coming home, so this constant, you
know, coming back and forth is one of the reasons why it’s hard for me to make a choice
to say this is where I want to live, and say I’m feeling great here, I’m feeling good here.
It’s a little ambiguous. It’s a little hard for me to make a choice.

    Even though Claire shares her expenses with Barry, she does not understand how other
international students manage, as she can barely scrape through the month. There are costs
associated with trying to secure her future through job applications, exams, driving tests, and
apartment rent; they all have a very high price tag. She has been a student up to this point and
has never really made a full salary; she looks forward to that opportunity in the future. However,
the fact that she has not found a job so close to graduation is an indication of the depth of the
recession. Claire during her third interview stated:

    But I hope it’s going to work. And if not, I’ll be looking. I’m still looking. It takes time;
it takes energy and money, but I’ll do it. I need to apply to several jobs because I really
need one. I know that if I don’t work for three months in the United States, if I stay
unemployed, I can’t stay in the US.

**Expectations from university administrators and faculty.** Claire has had a great time
at CU and is very complimentary about the services provided by the Office of International
Students and Services (OISS) and career services. She is aware of all the programs that OISS
plans, but has never attended any of them owing to her busy schedule. She has gone to the graduate tea sessions and liked them very much, although folks from her program do not attend. This semester, she was planning to reach out and participate more than she had in the past.

She has a great deal of respect for her faculty and speaks to some of her French professors in her native language. She is still nervous expressing herself in English and is confident that in French, she will not make a mistake. During our conversations, Claire never criticized the administrators or faculty and told me they are doing all that they can, for which she is grateful. Claire blames herself for the lack of engagement with the university and the local community. I personally have met Claire on two social occasions, and once had the pleasure of meeting Barry. The uncertainty of her future was palpable during our meeting, and she looked visibly worried about her future on both the personal andprofessional fronts.

**Culture and food.** Claire feels strongly about eating high-quality, healthy food. She found that the food in Indiana was terrible: It was not fresh and extremely unhealthy. Although she did not have a lot of money while studying there, she cooked her meals at home and did not use the free meal plan that her program provided. Also, because of her illness during the last semester, she had to ensure that she ate well. She also prefers to eat healthy French-style food because doing so keeps her connected to her culture. She has incorporated French cooking into her meal preparation at home with Barry, and makes it a point to integrate that style of cooking into their daily diet. Claire has noticed a cultural difference surrounding food in America that differs from France. For her, it is a strange custom to eat entire meals in the classroom or at any random time during the day. Claire reflected during her second interview:

The students were eating all the time, at random times, like 10, 11, 12, eating sausages and hotdogs at 10 in the morning. We saw random things. They were all having coffee,
having tea; they are all having juice or mocha, or something, all the time drinking something. And we don’t really do that in France; we don’t go to class with coffee. That’s also one of the things I have to get used to. The students here come and go, and eat, and come with their croissant in the morning, and come with their egg sandwich or whatever it is and their coffee. And we don’t do that in France—people don’t bring food in class.

The ever-changing future. When Claire started this journey, she wanted to stay in the United States for ten years. Now she has downgraded her plans to two to three years because the job market for international students is practically nonexistent. In addition, reduced state and federal budgets have forced schools to lay off teachers, especially in Massachusetts. Time is running out for Claire to stay in the country because she needs to take her exam in May and find a job within the next three months. Claire reflected during her third interview as follows:

I hope that maybe they renew my contract. I think first of all it’s a good sign because that means that they like my work, and they want to keep me in the department. So that would be a positive thing, that would be great…. I’d like to have a real work experience. Maybe two or three years would be ideal—better I think. After the OPT, after the one year, I would like to continue. I would love to teach for a couple of more years in the States, get more experience, and maybe go back to France. I would like to have more than one year.

Owing to her prolonged illness, accompanied by feelings of depression and loneliness, Claire decided that eventually, she needs to return home to France. It is difficult for international students to manage their lives when they fall ill or have to manage prolonged feelings of loneliness. Along the way, Claire has changed her expectations. She now realizes that she
should be thankful for the opportunity to study in the United States, but the decision to go back home seems clear.

Claire’s future was all set, at least when she met with me for her interviews—she was heading back to France for the summer. On the day after her graduation, she stopped by with her mother and gave me the good news that she had just acquired a part-time job teaching French at CU. So for now, she is all set for one year of OPT. She seemed to be very happy as she had just graduated and her whole family was in Boston. In the meantime, she did not appear for her teaching exam as previously planned because of lack of time and preparation. Since she was rejected by Tufts University, this CU teaching job gives her breathing room for a year. She will be back from her break in France this summer and promised me that she would be in touch. Her mother appeared to be an elegant and caring person; she spoke mostly French, but was totally engaged in our conversation and understood English perfectly. Although Claire has secured this job for a year, her desire to go back to France was clear throughout her interviews. Owing to the new, harsher economic reality, graduate international students are forced to return home without the work experience they hoped to gain during their tenure in the United States. Just a few years ago, students like Claire would have been able to find a job without any difficulties.

Claire was very receptive to talking on Skype while working in France in early July. She is now working as a teacher in Paris and lives in the same building as her students. She visits her parents on the weekends, and in a few weeks will be traveling to an island to vacation with them. I reviewed her analysis with her, and she felt it was a good representation of her life experiences. She will be returning to CU at the end of August 2010 and will be living closer to campus, again with Barry. At the end of the academic year, the two of them plan to settle in France.
Victoria—Transition As a Way of Life


The story. Victoria is a 24-year-old female from Paraguay enrolled in the School of Education, in the Counseling Psychology program. I met her for the first time when she responded to my request to participate in this study. Victoria was an active and engaged participant until she graduated in May 2010. She is married to Peter (pseudonym), a German student she met during her undergraduate years at Barry University in Miami. Her journey to America has been wrought with complexity and transitions since she was a very young girl when it began.

Victoria was brought up in Asuncion, Paraguay, a big city where poverty is rampant. She realizes that she has been privileged to have the level of education and material possessions she has enjoyed all her life. Her mother is a stay-at-home mom, and her father owns a car dealership in Paraguay. Her parents both come from prominent and wealthy families in Paraguay. Victoria has four siblings: an older brother Abraam (pseudonym) who is married and has a young daughter, two younger twin sisters, and another brother. All her siblings, except for Abraam, are close in age. Except for Victoria, all her siblings have US passports because they were born in this country. Victoria has an Italian and a Paraguayan passport and maintains dual citizenship. English is Victoria’s second language, but she speaks it fluently. In the American and British schools she attended growing up, the emphasis on Spanish and English was equal. She believes that Spanish is tied to her emotions and enjoys speaking Spanish because it reminds her of home and family.
Concerns about kidnappings and safety led to multiple transitions. Victoria’s childhood has been filled with transitions: negotiating new friendships and change. When she was in the tenth grade, a woman who lived next door to Victoria was kidnapped. Although she was returned after a few months, this incident set in motion the changes that would follow in Victoria’s life. To me, this was probably the most shocking part of Victoria’s story. As she divulged during her first interview, kidnappings are a common occurrence in Paraguay, and their family had to deal with this safety concern:

This lady that lived behind me … she was kidnapped, and then after that, she was kidnapped for like a few months, and it was like over Christmas and New Year’s. And it was horrible, and of course, like, you know what happens. She got raped and all of these horrible things.

She mentioned her first transition, to Miami, only in her third interview. Victoria completely forgot about this transition during her first narration as she had completely blanked out this particular move. She remembers the time in Miami as being a terrible time for her entire family. She hated her new school and cried every day when she had to attend it. She missed her two best friends in Paraguay and did not understand why her family had taken her away from her familiar surroundings. The trip to Miami did not go as planned, as the visas for Victoria and her parents did not get approved. After a few months of trying to settle down in Miami, the family moved once again: her father back to Paraguay, to attend to his car dealership, and her mother to Uruguay. This transition was traumatic for Victoria and its effects have played out during later years of her life. Victoria during her first interview recounted:

My dad stayed in Paraguay to work, because he has this whole business there and he couldn’t leave, but my dad and my mom wanted us out of there because my mom is, like,
very overprotective, very sensitive. She wasn’t sleeping at night, thinking something would happen to one of us. And so we moved, and we were crying, and it was so hard, because imagine—it’s like tenth grade, you have, it’s like, 15 or 16 years old—you have all your friends. I had my two best friends, who are still my two best friends today, and I was so sad about leaving and we cried.

When Victoria broached the kidnapping incident, I knew it was significant but did not realize the full importance this event would have in Victoria’s future. Victoria’s mother and her mother’s family are prominent farmers in Paraguay. Victoria started her interviews by recounting the kidnapping of her neighbor and how that changed her life, but it was not until our last interview that she cried as she narrated the story of her uncle Felix (pseudonym), who was kidnapped in October 2009. He was, thankfully, returned in January, but still suffers from posttraumatic stress, night sweats, and bad dreams. The whole family went through a very difficult time, not knowing whether he was dead or alive for four months.

The kidnappings bring back bad memories for Victoria, and she always starts crying when she thinks of those difficult times. It seems that because of rampant poverty in Paraguay, these acts of terrorism are very common and always involve ransom money. Because the government is corrupt, these episodes have gotten worse over the past few decades. Families in Paraguay hire bodyguards for protection, but often these bodyguards are corrupt too and help with the kidnappings. After her uncle Felix was kidnapped, the family’s move to Uruguay finally made sense to her; until that moment, she had always resented being uprooted from all her friends and family. Victoria remains very close to her uncle (her mother’s brother), who is also her godfather, so this particular kidnapping affected her profoundly. This entire episode of
Victoria’s life story brings to it unique shades of complexity. Victoria during her third interview reflected:

So I guess people know in Paraguay, my family for being hard-working, and I guess you would say, like, a business of the people, because they work in the farms in the countryside. It’s not like a car dealership like my dad or anything like that; it’s more like with the land. So then my uncle, he really built the business up, and he made it really big, and he bought more land and he bought more cattle, and it just became bigger. And he is the president of this society of farmers, also in Paraguay, so he is like a public figure too.

Victoria decided that she would attend Barry University in Miami for her undergraduate studies. Her grandparents live in Miami and have been there for 40 years, so although this was another transition, she did have family and a significant support system already present. She loved her undergraduate years, as there is a strong Spanish community in Miami. She also met her husband Peter (pseudonym) during her freshman year.

Victoria and Peter got married in Germany in 2008. The wedding was relatively small compared with what it would have been like in Paraguay. Peter loves her large family and how close they are because he is an only child and comes from a small family. Peter is a professional tennis player and was studying on a scholarship at Barry University. Victoria’s father is a huge tennis fan, so from the beginning, they got along really well. Tennis is big in Victoria’s family and all the siblings play the game. Her father travels around the world to see tennis matches, so for Peter, being accepted into her family circle was not difficult.

After Victoria and Peter graduated from Barry University, they both came to Boston. Peter wanted to attend an MBA program, and Victoria wanted to get her Master’s degree in
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES
counseling psychology. Peter got accepted in the MBA program at Bentley and Victoria at Chardin University. Compared with all the other participants in this study, Victoria is the only one that seems to have a good network and support system in this country. Although they are both international students in America, they have been in this country for four years, which has helped with their transition to the Boston area.

Transnational acts. Victoria has a large family; she is close to her parents’ siblings, uncles and aunts, and has about 40 cousins. Her entire extended family used to visit one of her mother’s siblings every Sunday, so there was always some type of family gathering each week. She has cousins who are close to her age and her brother and sisters’ ages, and there are several babies in the family. Victoria misses her family and home since she has been away for six years and longs for her everyday life in Paraguay. The many transitions in Victoria’s life made her mature quickly. Although she moved to Miami, where her grandparents lived, she still left behind the rest of her family. But the move that was most significant and life-altering was the one from Paraguay to Punta de Este to Montevideo. Victoria during her first interview stated the following:

With my mom, she is not such a fan of technology, and she doesn’t do e-mails, but she does do Skype. My brother taught her, so then we do Skype, or I call her with a calling card, and we talk for hours, updating the whole family thing. And then with my brothers and sisters, to my sisters I call, because they are in Miami; to my older brother, we both have Blackberry, so we text each other on Blackberry Messenger all the time. He tells me about all his drama with his wife, but he doesn’t talk much. He is just, everything is fine and all that. He is like my dad in that way. And my sisters are a little bit like my dad too, but my little brother and I are very similar.
I get the impression that she is in contact with someone from her family daily. Her siblings have all moved; her older brother is in Paraguay, and her younger brother has just enrolled in the University of Miami. Victoria connects with her extended family on a weekly basis. Victoria has several close friends in Paraguay and Uruguay. With all the e-mail messages, Skype conversations, phone calls, and text messages, I wonder how Victoria manages to stay engaged with her life at Chardin University. It becomes clear through all her interviews that her friendships back home are meaningful and significant. Although Victoria craves similar friendships at CU, she has been unable to foster them, partly because she has Peter in her life and partly because she is already well connected to family and friends at home. The level of daily connections with friends and family take up a lot of her time and energy.

Throughout her six years in the United States, she has moved back and forth during holidays and breaks to visit family. It is amazing how this has been a constant theme among so many of the participants. Technology has kept these international students connected to home, culture, language, and friends. Communication takes place on a daily basis, and it almost feels like they never left their home country. Victoria stated during her third interview:

So I guess like I told you, I wasn’t speaking Spanish a lot, and so I was talking to them. And when I talked to them, I was practicing Spanish with them, I guess, talking Spanish with them all the time on Skype every weekend. And now I’m also talking to them every weekend, and they helped me with the fallout with my friend, and when I was missing home.

Victoria was the only participant to be so deeply connected culturally with so many friends and family members from her home country. Although, on the surface, Victoria seems social and engaged with her friends here in Boston, she imparts a sense of loneliness and
disconnection from her surroundings. In contrast to Victoria, Peter is more stoic and fairly unemotional—his personality is the polar opposite of Victoria’s. When I first met him, he seemed disengaged, but when we started talking he conversed energetically. He seems to have his own opinions on his international experience at Bentley (a business school). The biggest difference between Bentley and CU is that Bentley has a large international population. His closest friend is an Indian student in his program; by his account, more than half of his cohort is Indian, which according to him is a bit off-balance and skews discussions a bit.

**Social experiences.** When Victoria arrived for her orientation program, she remembered meeting two students while looking at a map on lower campus. Those two students—Kiran (pseudonym), an Indian international student, and Amy (pseudonym), an American student—would turn out to be good friends during her tenure at CU. Friday evenings or weekends she spends with Peter. The couple is trying to go out more, as they will be leaving in a few months, and to make up for the fact that they have not done too much socializing during their time in Boston. Because Victoria is married, her social life is spent mostly with Peter rather than with her other friends. However, although she believes that she is a homebody and an old soul, she does go out with her friends, even without Peter. Victoria during her second interview described the following:

I don’t know if it’s lazy or just an old soul…. And Peter is the same, so in that sense it was nice to find him. But I did go out this weekend, which was nice. It was cold, but we had fun. I went out with my coworkers from the internship, which I also made really good friends with. Two of my coworkers, which are from UMass, they are also doing the same program—the Master’s in mental health counseling—and they are amazing friends.
At her internship, Victoria has made some good friends, in particular, a student from Utah who is a Mormon, and a Canadian student she seems to connect with at this time. These two coworkers have the same dislikes and frustrations when dealing with their supervisor. Victoria believes that her cohort has been very united this year because they were doing internships together. Victoria gets along with everybody; it is easy to gravitate towards her warm and friendly personality. She believes she has made some good friends, especially in her second year, and that they all have had a positive influence on her.

Victoria has a good support system here in the United States. Her siblings seem to be in and out of the country for various reasons, and she has a broad network of friends from her undergraduate days in Miami, where her grandparents live. Victoria had hoped there would be more international students at CU, and specifically, more South Americans. When she was in Miami, the large Hispanic population made her miss home a bit less. Although she has made good friends at CU, she does not feel that she belongs here. She would like to cultivate more friends who share her own culture and language. Victoria reflected during her second interview as follows:

And I would say, like, coming into the program maybe I expected that there would be more international students. I feel like there are a few in my program, but not, I expected maybe more South American people. There are three or two, and I don’t know, I guess I kind of, I mean, probably because I was in Miami before and it was full of Hispanic people, that I kind of felt more—how would you say? Like I belonged more. And not that I don’t feel like I belonged here. I made really great friends that are not Hispanic, which is great too. But I don’t know, I wish maybe they would have more Colombians, Argentineans, like other people in the program.
Victoria regrets not being able to attend the international student orientation, and knows that would have been a great place to meet other international students. She takes personal responsibility for not taking the time to attend the weekly discussion series. She never knew anyone who was attending these sessions and therefore was never motivated to go. She believes that CU does enough in its programs, although she has made good friends on her own. Victoria also believes strongly that there should be more of an effort made to recruit students from South America, a point she mentioned several times during her interviews. Victoria lamented during her second interview:

But then I know they have weekly discussions, and I never got the time for some reason, and I never knew of anyone who went there. So I guess I was never motivated to go…. So I don’t know if I could blame CU for that or blame myself. But I definitely do know there are three people in my program from South America. I really wish they could make an effort to recruit people from South America more.

There is one friend in particular, Alice (pseudonym), to whom Victoria is very connected. Alice is from Canada and shares the same interests as Victoria. Whenever Victoria is feeling down, her close connection to Alice seems to get her through the loneliness. What is interesting is that she does not seek that particular type of comfort from Peter. Because of the strong personality differences she has with her husband, Victoria needs a friend who can relate to her work environment. Victoria is happy she has met Alice and knows she will be friends with her for the rest of her life. Victoria described this key relationship during her second interview:

I feel like they really are good friends of mine, but like, you know, friends that are just like close to your heart and like best friends. And I feel like that is my friend from my internship, and I was so glad that I met her because she was there to support me. Usually
I get down when I know that I’m so far away from my family, and all of these things, and she is always there, and we love watching movies together.

Even surrounded with all these friends, Victoria seems to be lonely and spoke frequently about how she misses her family and friends in Paraguay and Uruguay. Her occasional loneliness results from not finding a friend with whom she was deeply connected, like her friends from back home. Victoria grew up in a collectivistic culture. She does not mind building friendships on differences and learning from them, but she also likes to take comfort in similarities. In Alice, she found the sort of friendship she was hoping to achieve at CU. Victoria does not want to compartmentalize her life or become overly individualistic so as not to care for others; she likes to have meaningful and purposeful relationships. Victoria affirmed this value during her second interview:

Like, it was just such a relief because, I don’t know, I feel like at times, I get lonely. I didn’t have that friend that you could do everything with. I grew up with a collectivistic culture that you always were with someone, you always share that with someone, and I feel like here, it’s different. Here you do certain things with your friend, but you don’t do everything with your friend, like, every single thing in your life with that friend. And I am that person. And I feel like Alice is like that too. And with the friends I met in my program, I feel like I could do certain things with them, but then other things I couldn’t because they didn’t share that common interest. Or maybe they weren’t that emotional, or maybe they weren’t that family driven.

Although religion is not a huge factor in Victoria’s life, she does consider herself to be spiritual. She would go to church every Sunday with her mother when she was in Uruguay and Paraguay. Peter is Catholic, too, but he is not at all religious, so she does not go to Mass every
Sunday here in Boston. She does pray every night, so she stays connected to her faith although, currently, not in any organized fashion.

**Academic experience and persistence.** Victoria seems to have loved all her professors, both at Chardin University and at Barry University. With just a few exceptions, she spoke very highly of all of them. In her first year at CU, she worked on a research team, stopping last year after she began her internship because it was not possible to balance the workload. The week is pretty busy for Victoria; she must do numerous hours of clinical work before she graduates, which is scheduled three days a week. This internship is unpaid, so it does not help with the financial burden of being a full-time student. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings she has class. Friday is the only day she does not have any classes or internship hours, so she uses the time to sleep, study, and rejuvenate for the following week.

There were two professors in her program that she was not fond of. After she complained about an unfair grade, that professor did not respond to her e-mails for months. However, she did get an A− versus an A+ in both classes; it was not as though she was failing them. She just wanted to graduate with a perfect 4.0 and felt that she deserved it. I found these sort of perfectionistic expectations were common among all my participants. According to Victoria, doing badly academically was never an option; merely getting an A− seemed to be undeserved.

**Identity.** At Chardin University, Victoria believes she has had a good network of support, which comprises her husband Peter, her friends from her internship, acquaintances from her classes, and professors that have helped with her transition. She feels that her social personality has helped her make and sustain all these connections. She sees herself as a perfectionist, a fighter, and someone who gets what she wants in life. She believes that her
comments in class are valuable and that she has contributed positively in the classroom and academically.

Victoria believes she is a student first and an immigrant second. When she thinks of all the illegal immigrants who come from disadvantaged backgrounds to make a better life for themselves, she believes that she is privileged and lucky not to be in that type of a situation and is thankful she is financially well-off. However, her struggles are of a different sort and often seem to preoccupy her and tinge her life with sadness.

Although she admits that she left her country for better opportunities, she is annoyed that she is unable to work here while she is a student. She had hoped to legally do some odd jobs, like babysitting, to make some money. She is frustrated with the restrictions that her student visa status brings. She has seen the ease with which her siblings can enter and leave the country, as they all have American passports, and believes she is contributing to the economy by paying taxes, renting her apartment, and so on. When she graduates in May, in a few months she will not be allowed to stay in the country. This makes her feel like a criminal, even though she has contributed financially to this country. Victoria reflected on this irony during her third interview:

I feel like a criminal because you have two months to leave the country. I’m a student for six years, and you want me to leave in two months and you can’t let me work here. I guess it’s just stupid. And I’m not saying that I have more of a right to live here than any other immigrant that comes, struggling to get a job, but I guess there is some sort of, not criminal, but like, some sort of like, yes, some sort of criminal police like status, like some sort of negative component attached to not being able to stay here after.
A complex and difficult path to the future. Victoria believed she needs a warm and nurturing environment in which to grow and develop and that she did not truly get that at CU or in Boston. The rules she had to follow at her internship troubled her. She often spoke about the collectivistic versus the individualistic lifestyle and described her internship work environment as cold, stern, and strict. She also felt that there needed to be warmth during her sessions as these were young children that had problems and needed to connect with someone emotionally. In one particularly troubling incident, Victoria’s supervisor reprimanded her because a kid hugged her during termination (the end of clinical sessions with a client). This incident deeply affected Victoria’s work experience in this country, and she revisited it several times during each of our interviews. This incident exemplified the fact that she could not survive in such an individualistic society. As she saw it, this was an unwelcoming environment, and all the cultural differences were becoming all too clear to her. Victoria affirmed during her second interview:

I am used to South American—even psychologists, they are more warm. And I remember one of the kids hugged me when it was termination, and then I explained to the kid after about boundaries, so she understands boundaries and things like that. But apparently one of the case managers saw that kid hugging me in the hallway, so then instead of the case manager bringing it up with me, and asking me what happened with the hugging, she directly went to my supervisor who is the director of the program. So my supervisor called me and asked me if I’m having, because I expressed to her as one of my securities that I have difficulty saying goodbye to kids, but that doesn’t mean I’m going around hugging the kids, which I’m not doing … but it’s like for them, it’s completely something different. So culturally I’m shocked by that.
Meeting Peter gave Victoria other opportunities and options in life. Although Peter wanted to stay in the United States at the beginning, eventually he was very willing to move to South America or Paraguay. The kidnapping of Uncle Felix and the safety concern it triggered made it difficult for Peter and Victoria to decide whether Paraguay would be a safe destination for them. Victoria stated during her third interview:

Peter and I were decided on going, and now everything changed. All our plans changed. And we were like, do we really want to go and risk being part of this whole insecurity thing? So then, but we talked, we had a family gathering and we talked about it, and my Uncle Felix said he wasn’t leaving, and he was going to go back to his farm, and he was going to raise awareness on it, and he was going to up the security in the family.

Victoria is very confused right now. All she knows is that she does not want to stay here in America. She might ultimately land in South America or Uruguay, depending on what happens in the next few years. She says that, even though Paraguay is not a safe place, she is unhappy when she is not around her immediate family. Her uncertainty and confusion were peppered throughout our third interview. She feels increasingly guilty and confused about her future, and ideas of where she wants to be next grow more complex and confusing. Paths that were clear to her have changed every month. The global recession has also affected them deeply. Peter is in the financial world, but the banks in America are not presently recruiting international students.

Victoria believes she needs to contribute to society in Paraguay, as it is her home. As she put it, getting a better education abroad was good, but it is time give back to her home country. Victoria knows many people among her friends and family living in Paraguay who are contributing to the economy there and are not scared off by acts of terrorism. One of her friends
works at a hospital, and another started a nonprofit organization to help school kids learn to use technology. Victoria expressed the following during her third interview:

And she’s helping now. I think it’s about, I don’t know, 3,000 kids when it started, and I don’t even know where it is. And all these kids are starting to be exposed to technology. This is how the country changes. All these kids are going to grow up wanting more and wanting to be educated, and not wanting to kidnap that person who has the big house there in that corner. You know what I mean? And I want to be part of that. So it’s that and my family.

Victoria believes that the constant contact with family and friends back home has kept her grounded during her tenure in the United States. She feels that she has been brainwashed (in a good way) by her friends who are doing great projects in Paraguay to help bring the country out of poverty. When I met Peter a few times this past semester, he too was fairly certain he did not want to stay here and had already made up his mind that they were leaving. I remember Victoria being surprised when she heard him say that with such certainty. At that time, he had not received any job offers and his future was extremely uncertain. So even if Victoria might still see Miami as a place that she could eventually land and be safe and secure, I do not believe that Peter shares this sentiment. This dynamic with her husband has only added to the conflicting feelings about the future and the tug between home and safety. In her mind, Victoria has still not written off living in the United States and thinks that she might come back in the future.

Last year, Peter made a bold move. He worked for the World Bank as an intern in Paraguay, living with Victoria’s father and family. Even Victoria was surprised that he survived and enjoyed his time in her home country. Victoria and Peter’s parents came for their
graduation. Peter and Victoria have moved to Paraguay where Peter now has a job with the World Bank which he started on May 31, 2010.

In July 2010, I spoke to Victoria using Skype while she was in Italy on a family vacation. Victoria looked happy, and I could glimpse her sister in the background. It was nice to see Victoria and, although the medium was awkward at first, I really felt myself to be in the same room with her. I had experienced this form of communication only once before, but for such an extended time it was quite surreal. I finally got a taste of what all participants were experiencing. We promised that we would stay in touch in the future.

**Conclusion**

Cindy, Claire, and Victoria all graduated May 2010 and have left the country. Cindy is working in a financial firm in Singapore, Claire will be returning for one year of OPT to teach French at CU, and Victoria has returned to Paraguay. The next chapter highlights the stories of the four male participants: Jude, Jose, Michael, and Rajiv.
Chapter six explores the life stories of Jude, Jose, Michael, and Rajiv. Jose and Rajiv graduated in May 2010, while Jude and Michael continue their journey here at Chardin University. The following is a brief introduction of the four male participants in this study. Jude is a 28-year-old Master’s student from New Zealand enrolled in the School of Continuing Education. He is originally from Bombay, India, but identifies himself as a New Zealander. Michael is a 26-year-old student from the small town of Eddersheim, Germany, in the MBA program in the School of Management. He is a maverick by nature and a nonconformist. Jose is a 30-year-old lawyer from Victoria in Tamaulipas, Mexico, enrolled in the one-year Master’s program at the Law School. He and his wife Alicia (pseudonym) are both enrolled in the LLM program. They are both lawyers and have taken a break to study US law for a year. Rajiv is a 25-year-old Indian student enrolled in the MBA program in the School of Management. Born and raised in India, he lived in Goregaon, a suburb of Mumbai.

**Jude—A Journey to Find Himself**


The story. Jude is a 28-year-old student from New Zealand who was born and raised in Bombay, India. He has just completed his first year in the Master’s program in the School of Continuing Education. Before coming to CU for a graduate degree, Jude worked in New Zealand for eight years. In addition, he was a Resident Assistant (RA) this past year and worked
in the IT department as a student employee. Jude was unique among my study participants: he was the only participant I met last year, as he was a prospective RA, and he was one of the few students from India. Also, he was the only male participant who expressed true uncertainty and vulnerability during his interviews. He confided in me throughout his interviews that his sojourn in America has been unfulfilling. However, he has persevered and is now doing extremely well, academically and professionally.

Jude grew up in the suburbs of Bombay (since renamed Mumbai) called Bandra; coincidentally, we grew up in the same neighborhood. His family unit is extremely small: just he and his mother, a grandmother, and no siblings. I discerned that there was some negative history surrounding his father, as his mother sent Jude to a boarding school up north to shield him from conflicts within the family, and it was extremely difficult for his mother to be a single parent in India. In India, a child being sent to boarding school is always frowned upon and is a child’s worst nightmare. However, Jude made the best of his time at boarding school, which was to be the beginning of Jude’s transient life. Jude stated during his first interview:

The first couple of weeks when I got there, I was balling and homesick, but that seemed to be the way it was with everybody who was there for the first time. But after that, I really enjoyed it. It was some of the best years. I enjoyed it more than I enjoyed my time in college.

After boarding school, Jude attended St. Xavier’s College in Mumbai studying geology. Before he could finish his undergraduate education, however, he and his mother moved to Auckland, New Zealand. Soon thereafter, he returned to Mumbai to complete his last year of undergraduate education. There he lived in a hostel, and later with a friend. Having experienced the difficulty of finding decent living accommodations in the city, I am quite sure this was
neither a pleasant or comfortable situation for Jude. While in Mumbai he started doing freelance work in computer graphics. In about a year, when they moved to New Zealand, he was able to find work at several firms in their IT department. At first he was simply moving and helping set up computers, but later his job duties progressed to advanced work in the technology area. Jude worked for eight years at a wholesale travel agency and later at an IT company; he subsequently returned to work at the same travel agency.

When asked about his mother and grandmother, Jude stated that he is close only to his mother and that she is the main influence in his life; they share a bond that grew out of adversity. At various points when I asked about his mother, Jude sidestepped the question to avoid the topic. It seems that he is trying to find his own identity and to get out from under his mother’s shadow. I have met Jude’s mother, who is a dynamic lady, an accomplished professor and writer. I was a bit surprised that Jude did not talk more about his mother, given that they are so close and connected. During his first interview, Jude affirmed the following:

You know how you get people going to drugs, and all that kind of thing, when they go through this kind of thing? I’m not damaged or anything. She has really been an example I guess, if you will, for me. If you ever feel like slacking off or anything, you always think, my mom has put in double the amount of time that I’m going to try to put in. I guess she always forced me to study, and I’ve probably always pushed back on that because I don’t like being put in her shadow. Wherever I go, people always say, “Oh, your mom did this, and your mom did that."

For all Jude has done to develop his own identity and break away from his mother, he stays in contact with her daily. In New Zealand, there was a rough patch in their relationship when he moved to an apartment in Auckland. But after a while, he moved back home because
living on his own did not make financial sense for either himself or his mom. After working for about eight years in New Zealand, he decided to come to CU for his Master’s, a decision he believes has been a mistake and a waste of time. This situation was extremely unexpected, since up until now, he has been a model student and employee. During his first interview, he expressed why he thinks the journey to CU and the United States has been a mistake:

To be honest, I think now it’s been a mistake. Well, this is just my thinking process, because I guess when I was there, I had things that were familiar, I had a job, I was earning money, and I guess I was doing useful things. I can’t see the immediate use of a lot of the things I’m doing here right now.

I observed that this is a common phenomenon among graduate international students who have worked before coming to this country. Being self-sufficient for several years and then coming here on a student visa, with limited to no income, is a big transition that affects their everyday life. Suddenly, financial burdens can dominate their life, because often, they have other family responsibilities. Jude’s ambivalence about coming to this country was apparent throughout our interviews. His previous work experience was extensive, requiring a strong work ethic and extremely long hours (6:00 AM to 10:00 PM) by any standards. Owing to his extensive work experience, Jude is unsure how his current degree will propel his career forward. In New Zealand, he had advanced as far as he could go in the travel agency; the organization wanted to promote him to manager, but he was not interested in that role. Jude reflected during his first interview as follows:

And I guess one of the things was, I was always being pushed into management, and I didn’t really like that. I preferred to get my hands dirty. Actually, I used to do all the management stuff and doing the other things. I think I was ending up doing 100 hours
plus a week. I would get up in the morning and do some work; and then I would get to
the office and work, work, work; and then I’d come home and work some more, and then
collapse. And I enjoyed it.

Jude had also been bored with living in New Zealand. He loves to get on his bike and
roam the country by himself, but as he put it, he had “run out of country” because New Zealand
is so small. He seems to have explored the South and the North Island thoroughly. So, after
weighing all his options for a long time, he decided to come to the United States.

**Visa and immigration.** Jude had no particular difficulties either with getting his student
visa or entering the United States because he has a New Zealand passport and had been admitted
to Chardin University, a fact that impressed the immigration officers. Jude mentioned that
immigration officers try to intimidate you with angry looks and stoic expressions, but he was
well prepared with all his documents, so the process went smoothly. Jude during his first
interview stated:

So I go to this office, and you know how Americans like to make everything really
imposing, and guns and security and all that? Well, they didn’t have guns because they
are not allowed to do that in New Zealand. And [there are] these really big security
guards and big huge bulletproof glass doors, and everybody looking really angry and
everything. And they pat you down, and you go through metal detectors, and you can’t
bring in phones or stuff in.

The New Zealand government has a program called Kea, which helps expatriates set up
businesses when they return to the country. Jude sees it as more of an advertising campaign to
attract citizens back. He believes that New Zealand has a big brain-drain problem because young
adults tend to go to Australia, where there are better job opportunities. He believes that all the
skilled labor is going to Australia, where it is easy for a New Zealander to migrate and settle down.

**Academic experience and persistence.** Jude started school during in the summer of 2009 and found his first year at CU to be easy. He lived with a friend of his mother near CU and walked three-and-a-half miles each way to get to campus. During the fall of 2009, he started his RA position and was able to manage academics and his RA responsibilities really well. Jude no longer wants to be an RA this year because he feels it has caused him to miss the opportunity to discover America. He has been a stellar RA this past year, having won the Men and Women for Others Award, which acknowledges that he was the most caring and giving RA of the year.

Beyond the three interviews, I met with Jude on several occasions for coffee and had extended conversations with him about his life and future. Jude related during his third interview:

I don’t mean to blow my trumpet, but I’ve just found that I’ve been able to get whatever I want done. And almost everything I want, I’ve been able to get it done without—and I wouldn’t say not putting in an effort, because I definitely put an effort into getting things done—but I haven’t really had to bang my head against a brick wall or anything like that.

After the first semester, Jude found it more difficult to manage his time because his academic load doubled and he had to do a program every week for his residents. Jude was enrolled in six classes—a huge academic load for a graduate student—and I was surprised he was permitted to take that many graduate-level courses. He was also doing a research project that took up a lot of his time and attended classes from Monday to Saturday. On Sunday he found time to do some errands, but for the rest of the day, would catch up on his schoolwork. Jude believes that the faculty and administrators have been a great support, echoing several participants who had positive things to say about CU’s efforts to connect with them. Jude stated
during his first interview: “Well, I have to say that all the faculty and administrators have actually been great. I don’t know that there is much [more] that CU could have done as such.”

Jude has made considerable effort to network and connect with the CU community. He offered the interesting perspective that CU could have been any school anywhere; rather, it is the people who have connected with him that have made all the difference. It seems that Jude has made individual alliances and been mentored by faculty and administrators. However, he made these connections through his own efforts. I believe that Fr. Warren (pseudonym) has been a great mentor for him. Jude told me during his third interview, “I like the people at CU, but CU could be anything, really … CU could be anything anywhere, but for me, CU is more about the people there.”

Jude is uncertain how his education will pay off in the long run as he reenters the workforce. There seems to be a wide disconnect between what he is learning in the classroom and how he will be able to apply this knowledge in the future. When asked whether he had any suggestions as to how CU could have helped his transition, Jude stated that it would have been nice to be matched with a local family for the entire duration of being a student at CU or while students are in the US for professional development. This family would mentor the international student and provide the student with networking opportunities. Jude feels this would also give students a valuable opportunity to meet real working people in America and see how they manage their own business or workplace. Dinner with a family is nice, and a week’s stay for transition is good, but taking it further would be really helpful. He qualified his statement by saying he was unsure how matching students with families and the prolonged engagement with them would be feasible.
Social experience. Jude has been a nomad all his life; although he has origins in India, he regards New Zealand as his home. I always found it interesting that whenever Jude introduces himself, he always states that he is from New Zealand, tending to leave out India. The reasons for this omission could be that his childhood was built around several hardships and he would rather leave that part of his life behind. Jude reflected during his second interview:

I say New Zealand, but the way that I put it is I say “I live in New Zealand.” I don’t say I’m from New Zealand, so if someone says, “But you don’t sound like you’re from New Zealand,” I say I live in New Zealand. But I guess I say New Zealand first because that is where I worked, and that is really where, I guess, I developed an identity of who I am and knowing what I liked. I mean, it depends on who I am talking to.

Jude’s circle of friends in the United States, and back home in India and New Zealand, is limited. He is in contact with his mother daily, a common phenomenon among participants in this study. Because his mother is a faculty member at a university, she is able to give him advice on his studies and papers. Jude affirmed the following during his first interview:

I normally see her on Gmail Chat almost every day, and we talk about something or other: It’s usual practical stuff like she needs to go somewhere or do something and talk about that. Pretty often, if I have something to write, I send it to her, and if there is a problem in the dorm or something like that, I might run it past her to see what she has to say.

Except for this daily contact with his mother, compared with other study participants, he does not keep in touch with anyone else that regularly. Jude has actively tried to engage and immerse himself in the American culture but believes he has remained disconnected from people and the community at large. He believes that his being in America is short term; thus, he can
move through this phase of his life easily without forming any ties. He believes that if he were to get a job anywhere in the world he would not want to worry about saying goodbye to friends. This detachment from his surroundings is a way of coping with his extremely transient life. He sees it as a virtue and believes that he can get what he wants and critically analyze situations owing to this lack of connectivity with the local community. Jude during his third interview explained:

I guess the other thing I noted down was under advantages. Not having to make connections or being tied down to too many things has allowed me to focus on getting exactly what I want at the time, which I guess up to now has been, like, not in a bad way, like income. Money makes it sound bad. I guess now I’m trying to go beyond that. I’m getting old.

Jude does not seem to have a huge social network of friends in New Zealand and India, and connects with them only occasionally. This style of relating is different from most of the participants, who were constantly chatting with friends from home. He keeps loose contact with a few friends in the UK, Germany, and Australia. However, such interactions over the Internet, either by Skype or Facebook, are not as involved as some of the other participants’. Jude also maintains connections with his buddies from his office in New Zealand. However, with them too, it is limited to an e-mail or so every few months to keep in touch. Jude stated during his first interview, “I talk to my office pretty often. That’s still there. I made good friends, and three of them I keep in touch with pretty often, but it’s mostly the odd e-mail or something to that effect, nothing scheduled.”

He tends to blame himself for not doing enough to engage with others and make friends here at CU. It is not for lack of wanting to engage with the local students—he has definitely
attempted to make connections. Jude is very active on campus and attends most of the OISS luncheons (he was there for most of the ones I attended). He was even a presenter at the OISS luncheon on astronomy. From my perspective, he seems to have been making all the efforts in the world to stay connected and engaged. Jude during his second interview described his outreach:

I think it was a mix of really me reaching out more and saying, “Let’s go here,” or “Everybody is free on such a day, let’s go do something.” That’s one. And I guess maybe I’m a little more settled, and I’m noticing social opportunities more.

Although he has been successful as an RA, he believes that this responsibility has kept him from getting the true American experience. He feels that he has remained in the CU bubble and would now like to venture out in order to live a little, even though it will cost him quite a bit of money to get an apartment of his own. He believes strongly that everything will be different now that he has decided to live off campus. Jude affirmed during his second interview:

I guess for me personally, I am worried that if I’m here on campus for too long … I’m actually going to miss out on an actual American experience, the city, and America, etc. I guess, like everybody says, the “CU Bubble”—everything is different when you step outside. Actually, that’s been something that’s been bugging me for a while.

Because of his RA position and responsibilities, Jude has felt disconnected from his graduate peers. He is enrolled in the evening school, and the people in his class, who are mostly Americans, disappear after class to go to their homes and families. He has made one very good friend, a person named John (pseudonym), whom he has helped move between apartments several times, and he does believe that he has found lasting friendship with him.
Because of the transient nature of his life, Jude displays a lack of emotional connection to any place or friend. The one constant he has in his life is his mother, but the rest of the elements come and go. He finds it easier to stay disconnected emotionally because it makes it possible for him to move on to the next phase of his life. His uncertainty about where he will be in the future only adds to the solitary existence. At the age of 28, he is trying to find permanence in his life. Jude stated during his third interview:

The negative part of that is there has not been too much of an emotional connection. So I guess you are always on your own. You are doing things, like coming here and going to other places, and you tend to pass through experiences or places without picking too many things up, which at least I’ve felt for me. I’ve felt it’s been positive up until now, but I think around this time I’m more interested in kind of settling down with something and getting some routine going. I wouldn’t really say that’s a negative thing yet, but I think I’m trying to change from transiency to maybe being more settled.

Since childhood, Jude has attended Catholic schools, so attending Mass is a common experience for him. Although he does not consider himself a religious person, he frequently attends Mass on Sunday at St Martin’s (pseudonym), the campus chapel, more for the solitude than for the religious aspect. He likes St. Martin’s because it holds a dignified Mass where there is not a whole lot of song and dance or a circus act, as he puts it. There is a religious focus in Jude’s life, as all his educational experiences have been at institutions run by some Christian religious order. Jude during his second interview stated:

I’m not really a religious person. I just go to Mass because that’s what I’ve been doing all my life. I don’t go every Sunday … I know it sounds weird, that you go to religious services but not for religious reasons, but I guess it’s just some quiet time, I suppose.
Jude and his mother have only each other for support. He has used all of his savings to be here in the United States, so becoming an RA was one way to save money and make ends meet. The RA position has provided him with housing accommodations and a meal plan. The food in the dining halls is very expensive, so Jude cashes in this money to pay for other expenses. Jude is not a picky eater and prefers not to spend too much money on food.

One of Jude’s main passions in life is to be outdoors—to get on a motorcycle and explore on his own. He had to sell his bike when he left New Zealand but would like to explore this country more thoroughly in the near future. Even without a motorcycle, Jude would rather go for a walk for six hours exploring than go to a game, a concert, or read on his own. Because these extracurricular activities are unique at his school, he has yet to find friends that share the same passion and interests. Jude during his first interview stated the following:

I guess it’s a bit of passion, obsession, and challenge. A good ride for me would be to leave the house at 4:00 AM and just keep going to some crazy corner and then come back at 12:00 or 1:00 the next day. So that was good.

The future looks uncertain. It seems that Jude has been trying to discern the purpose of his coming to the United States, but so far, he unfortunately feels that he has wasted his time. He has begun to realize that he will not be able to use what he has learned in his program in any substantive way. He also fears that he has left the real world behind, in a manner of speaking, and that it will be difficult to reintegrate into that life. His uncertainty was palpable during every interview, but the following excerpt from his second interview speaks volumes:

It’s hard to point at one thing, but I get the feeling that I’ve wasted a lot of time, like a lot of this year. I’m sure it’s wrong, and a lot of people will look at me and tell me to shut up. I just feel like a lot of time is wasted, and I don’t feel like I’m whole, and I’m
wondering why I am here and why did I leave everything and come here. I guess it’s hard to put my finger down on one thing.

Jude is uncertain whether he wants America to be his home, though he is not against the idea. Like most of the other participants, he could see himself here for four to five years before having to make any decisions. He believes that staying here it would be the logical conclusion to his journey in the United States and has been trying to decide what he would like to do after graduation. During his second interview, he stated the following;

I want to try and find some kind of work I can do after I graduate. That’s more of a challenge than a worry. I guess if I look to the past, I’m a little nervous about the fact that I’ve kind of quit my place in life, and I won’t be able to get back into it if nothing else works out, because I have no idea what’s going to happen in a year’s time or two years’ time.

Jude definitely wants to do something in the area of information and technology, where he has the most work experience. He feels that he can start a consultancy firm helping small and midsized firms build and upgrade software systems. He would also like to get on a motorbike and travel the wide expanses of this country. A more creative option for him would be to explore this country and write for a magazine about his travels. Both are very ambitious yet very different plans for his future. He has also thought far ahead about wanting his mother to retire and live with him, as it is just the two of them. Jude feels that his mother has had a difficult life and has worked extremely hard, and he would like her to take it easy when she retires.

Regarding next steps, Jude will choose OPT and work somewhere in the United States for a year after he graduates. He still holds out New Zealand as his safety net, but it is clear to me that he has not thought of how he would reintegrate back into life there. He does not yet
A transient life. Jude realizes he should be grateful for the opportunity to be in the United States and at Chardin University. He seems to be a restless soul who found New Zealand to be easy-living but needed a change. However, after coming to this country, he wonders whether this was a mistake and how his future will take shape. He understands all the logical reasons he came here; his move was well thought out, and academically, this is a really good place for him. However, he has still to realize his adventure, be independent, and do something for himself without his mother’s help or in her shadow. However, finding himself and his purpose and place in life has been difficult. At the beginning of his third interview, Jude attempted to qualify the negative quality of his experiences. Although he still felt that he had accurately portrayed his experiences, he wanted to add that he had been a bit “grumpy” during his second interview. Here is what he said during the latter part of his third interview:

I always felt that life in New Zealand was too easy and it had to change. I don’t know why humans are never happy with what they’ve got. Everything just happened. If I wanted something, it just happened somehow, and I just felt that everything was too good to be true. This has been a good opportunity to strike out on my own, if you will. I mean, the academics aside, just coming here and being plunked into an unknown place has been a good way, kind of, to figure out how I deal with things myself. It’s obviously been hell. I guess the impetus has been what I want to do with myself.

Jude states that he is tired of moving around and would like to settle down. The journey has been long and confusing, filled with contradictory feelings. Although he is deeply engaged in the Chardin University community, a sense of isolation and lack of connection persists. When
I reviewed his journey from the outside, he seems to have succeeded here academically and socially. However, he has completely different perceptions about where he is and what he has accomplished. I believe that the main reasons for his ambivalence can be traced back to his transient life, small family unit, fractured home, and uncertainty of finding a job. The complex nature of his life will continue to shape his decisions. Jude lamented during his third interview:

I would say that maybe because I’ve moved around so much, I’ve been a bit sick of moving around. And I had some level of stability in New Zealand, and coming here completely took all that away. It’s not a bad thing; it just means that you have to start again, and you get better every time you go. I’m really fed up with doing it.

**The last few meetings.** I met with Jude a few times during the summer of 2010, once to specifically go over his story and analysis. Jude stated that I had him pegged, and that my analysis of him was accurate. Another memorable meeting took place with Jude and his mother on July 10, 2010, for tea. Jude’s mother was visiting from New Zealand, and I had the privilege of meeting her again. We had a great time reminiscing about Bombay and caught up with each other’s lives. We chatted as though we were long-lost friends, although we had met only once before. She looked relieved and happy to see the progress her son had made in a year. Jude’s mother and I chatted for most of the evening while Jude respectfully listened. He has now solidified his plans for when he graduates: Canada seemed to be a viable option, and he is more confident about his future.
Jose—A Soft-Spoken Lawyer from Mexico Learning to Be More Assertive


The story. Jose is a 30-year-old lawyer from Mexico. He and his wife, Alicia (pseudonym), who is also a lawyer, are both enrolled in the LLM program at the CU Law School. They are both practicing attorneys who have taken a break to study US law. Jose is the oldest participant in my study and is fluent in Spanish. He spoke limited English and openly admitted that he was interested in participating in order to practice his English. I was unsure how his interviews would turn out; however, as they progressed, he became engaged in the study and provided valuable insights into graduate international students’ lives. I had the opportunity to meet Alicia for tea one evening. She is a confident, outspoken young woman and speaks English more fluently than Jose. When I first met Jose, he seemed nervous, though I realized later that he has a quiet, halting way of speaking.

Jose is from Ciudad Victoria in northern Mexico, a city with a population of approximately 300,000. Jose has three sisters, the oldest being Rebecca (pseudonym), who is married with four children, living in Victoria. His second oldest sister, Elena (pseudonym), is single and lives in Monterrey. Jose is very close to her because they are only one year apart. The youngest sister is Sofia (pseudonym), who has settled in Brownsville Texas, recently married, and has no children. Jose is very close to all of his family members; in fact, his wife Alicia has often stated that he is too close and should break away to become more independent.

According to Jose, he comes from a very large, typical Mexican family. His mother has six sisters and his father four brothers. One of his father’s brothers married his mother’s sister. On his mother’s side, all his aunts are divorced, and his mother is the only sister who is still
married. It seems that is just the way it turned out for all of them. Both his parents came from very well-known and wealthy families. He has 18 cousins on his father’s side and 21 cousins on his mother’s side, in addition to many more second cousins. Back home, the family gatherings were large and people would get together every Saturday when they were all living in Victoria. Jose later married Alicia, who is from Chihuahua, a town known for drugs and violence. Jose stated during his first interview:

So, my father and mother’s family were very close, I have to say. It was, as I already told you, a small town, so their families were very good families, I guess, if I can say wealthy.

So they knew each other.

Jose attended a private religious school called La Salle, which is well known worldwide. (There were only two schools in his hometown: one for men and one for women.) He spent his primary school years in one place and developed some close friendships during his childhood. Kids from the neighborhood would play all day, which was a normal thing to do in his hometown. After finishing primary school, he went to Monterrey, a metropolis of 3 to 5 million people, and continued his education at Nuevo Leon. He attended law school at Tecnologico de Monterrey, where it took him four-and-a-half years (nine semesters) to complete his law degree. From there, he worked for four years as a business lawyer at the State Treasury Department in Monterrey, writing agreements and negotiating with banks and private companies.

Alicia had always wanted to come to America to study, so they applied for a Master’s program in this country. In addition, Jose’s job was coming to an end because the term of the current government was ending, so it was the perfect time for them to try something different. He and Alicia both applied to CU and another Boston-area university, and CU accepted them both.
From the beginning, Jose was reluctant to come to the United States and leave behind his life in Mexico. I got the impression that the whole move was driven by Alicia, who wanted to come and work here. Because his English language skills are very weak, he had difficulty writing his essay and getting his application in order. They applied to Georgetown, and when they got a denial letter from that school, Jose was actually quite relieved. According to him, he has had conflicting feelings about coming to this country. But then they applied to Chardin University, to which they were referred by the Director of the Law School in Monterrey. Jose felt a bit more confident about this choice and convinced that the LLM program suited their needs. Jose reflected during his first interview:

I didn’t know what the—I didn’t know if that was the right moment for me or not, or if I don’t want to go. So when we chose to do it, it was very fast. So she was the one who had all the papers in order and all. And when I had to sit down and write my paper and all that, I wasn’t one hundred percent sure that I wanted to come here, or anywhere. I didn’t even know what to say in the documents. Then, the first one we applied was to Georgetown, I guess, and they didn’t accept us because they didn’t tell us [why], but I knew it was because we were a couple. Because our good friend—I got his recommendation letter because he was very attached to that school; I don’t know why. And he told me that that was the reason. And when we received the letter with the denial, I don’t know, I felt relieved, I guess.

**Visa and immigration.** Jose stated that the visa process was very easy. He and Alicia never went to the embassy together; they made separate appointments, ostensibly because they both had different sponsors. Jose was sponsored by the State Treasury Department and Alicia by her father. The visas were sent to them in the mail a month after they applied. Jose had to come
to Boston early during the summer to attend a course to strengthen his English at an area college. So they both arrived a few months before the semester started at CU. Alicia was bored then, as she did not have anything to do during the first few months.

**A place to live.** Jose and his wife arrived at the airport and went directly to the apartment they had sublet from an acquaintance in Monterrey, in Allston, a working-class neighborhood of Boston. When they arrived, they found the apartment to be old and dilapidated and the living conditions very poor. Neither of them was happy living there, but they managed to get by for 15 days, seeing as they had prepaid that month’s rent. The apartment was close to BU, which was convenient for Jose, but Alicia was at home all day with nothing to do. They felt trapped in a neighborhood that was overcrowded and not very welcoming. Their friends told them about an apartment complex near CU. They toured it and much preferred it to the one they were living in. The final arrangement to leave their sublet was to deliver the keys to the landlord, but when they went to the address to return the keys, it turned out to be a real estate company. The company informed Jose that what he was doing was illegal, and that he should not be either delivering the keys or subletting this apartment. Jose had always been nervous about this arrangement and was worried from the start that someone would come to evict or arrest them. They paid double the rent for 15 days, as they moved before the month was up from their first apartment. According to Jose, it was well worth it, because he had been worried about Alicia. Jose stated during his first interview:

Well, we were very nervous with the housing because we have an apartment from a friend. Well, he was not my friend: one guy I knew from Monterrey who was here last year. And he still had his apartment for two months for the summer, and he subleased it to me. But I didn’t—I mean, I came here. It was my first time through customs, so we
didn’t even know where the apartment was. And then we arrived to the apartment, and it was very old and very—in Allston.

**Transnational acts.** Jose is very close to his family and stays in touch with them daily. His parents do not use the computer, so he speaks with them directly on a Nextel walkie-talkie. He uses instant messaging and e-mail to communicate with his sisters. He is especially close to Elena, whom he had lived with in Monterrey, and talks to her daily. He is also regularly in touch with Sofia through the Internet.

Jose retains a strong network of about 10 to 15 childhood friends who all went to the same school. The whole group socialized together, either playing soccer or football or hosting dinner parties. In Monterrey, he lived with a few of his friends, then with Elena for a while, and later with Alicia. Although his friends are all scattered throughout Mexico and other countries, he stays in touch with them at least once a week. Jose stated during his first interview:

> But when I lived with my friends, it was very nice. We were always studying but also playing Nintendo, and it was very fun. But then each one got new friends, in different cities, and different people. But I speak with them every week, I guess. Not with the same ones always, but I always speak with someone. So we are very close.

Jose and Alicia have gone back to Mexico twice this past year: once for Alicia’s brother’s wedding, and once to Acapulco for a vacation and later to Victoria to see Jose’s parents. The last time Jose was on holiday in Mexico, he started to miss his life in Boston, which he seems to love and where he can see himself staying for the next few years. He told me that he likes the city, the people, and the way of life. Jose’s parents also have a family home in Texas, two hours away from the Mexican border, and he has visited the United States often during his childhood for family vacations.
Social experiences. All Jose’s social and academic experiences are shared with his wife Alicia. They are friends with several couples, all from South America. Jose and his wife have tried making friends with other American students, but they do not seem interested. He knows a few from the LLM program that he plays soccer with, but he does not socialize with them at all. His American peers tend to be amused by his accent and lack of English speaking skills. So they take notice of him superficially but they do not go out of their way to get to know him. The LLM program has only 12 international students, so Jose attends classes with other JD students, who are mostly Americans, and they do not see the value of spending time hanging out with one-year Master’s students.

During our interviews, I discovered that Jose is quite the sportsman, having played tennis, soccer, golf, and boxed when he was in Mexico. Throughout his school and college years, he engaged in all these sports, and he now plays on the LLM soccer team. Jose and Alicia also lead an active social life. They like to go to the cinema and watch films with their friends at least twice a week, and have a few friends in the apartment complex with whom they watch movies on a regular basis. They often go to restaurants and bars with their friends to socialize. Jose and Alicia have visited public gardens and parks in the Boston area and have attended a few sporting events: baseball, football, and hockey.

Jose has learned a lot during the year he has been in the United States. He has observed that, while American families respect their independence, they are also family-oriented. He has also noticed that they are not as friendly as the people in Mexico; for example, the residents in his building do not acknowledge him in the elevator. He believes that people here are very patriotic and that compared with Mexico, there is a lot of diversity. In addition, he finds that students he’s encountered are very competitive and direct with professors. When he went to visit
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

a law firm in the United States, he found that the lawyers did not like contradictory viewpoints. In Mexico, even lawyers are more laid-back and relaxed. Jose reflected during his second interview:

Well, just the fact that the people here—it’s another difference, I guess—they are very direct, I mean, straight to the point with the professors. With the lawyers, when we went to the law firms, it’s like you’re trying to make a conversation or something, like looking for a point of view, and they say, no. They don’t like the question or something. But now I realize that that’s just the way the Americans are.

Socially, being in Boston has been good for Jose and his wife because they have been able to branch out on their own as a unit. Their relationship has improved since there has been no interference from relatives, and they spend all day together, relating to each other on a more consistent basis.

**Academic experience.** Jose has had to study a lot harder in America than Alicia because it is difficult for him to keep up with the English lectures and to master simple concepts. When he was in the larger classes with other Americans, it was intimidating to participate. On the other hand, the LLM classes were small, so participation did not present any problems. However, most of the classes with other JDs are very large, and the students in these settings are mostly Americans. Jose has to be extremely attentive in class in order to understand the subject matter and discovered that he could either pay attention or write notes. At first this task was very difficult, but he feels that it has improved. Often he finds himself thinking like a Mexican lawyer, his thoughts conflicting with what the professor is teaching, which diverges greatly from Mexican law.
Jose believes that this one year will give him an advantage when he goes back home to Mexico. By then, he will have enough knowledge of American law to be useful in negotiations and writing briefs with American clients. Jose’s grades have been better here at CU than they were in Monterrey, although he has had to work much harder to overcome his language difficulties. He observed that because professors at CU are mostly teachers, they seem to treat him like he is in high school. In Mexico, the teachers are also lawyers, so the relationship is more informal, and they treat students as adults. Jose during his second interview observed the following:

Another difference, for example, [is] the relationship here with the professors, the academic[s]. There … at least, the law professors, most of them are lawyers. They practice law. Here, they are teachers or professors; they don’t practice it. So their relationship is very different. Here it is more like high school; it’s more like student/professor. And there is more, “Come on. Let’s go to a restaurant and drink a beer. Let’s talk about this negotiation.” I don’t know, it’s different.

**Suggestions on how to improve the program.** Part of the reason Jose came to this country and to CU was to develop a network of business associations. He was disappointed that he did not benefit from being in the classroom with other lawyers because he would have liked to make contacts with his classmates so they could have stayed in touch for future business and career opportunities. Instead, he has had to rely on his former job connections to get him work back in Monterrey. Jose stated during his third interview:

Yes, and we are very different…. I feel like we are not a very uniform group. And it’s interesting to have people from different parts of the world, but yes, we don’t have the same interests so we don’t get together that much. One of my objects and goals to come
here or to be in LLM was the networking. If someday you have some business or some association is [sic] some specific area, then you remember you have some friend that was living somewhere, and you call him—that kind of stuff. And I didn’t have that. But as I told you, that is not my—I couldn’t change that.

He believes that he would have put more effort into finding a job in the United States from the very beginning. The timing was never right, as they were always doing something, and then it was too late. This is the same sentiment shared by Cindy, who enrolled in the MFS program for a year. She had to find a job in Singapore because she was unable to acquire one in this country. In my research, almost all the participants blamed themselves or the recession rather than the institution for not reaching their career goals. None of the participants in the LLM program have jobs in this country; they are either enrolling in a PhD program or are returning home. Jose also suggested that the LLM cohort should have been larger and not just composed of international students. He would have liked more exposure to public law and business firms, and this could have been accomplished by having more professional lawyers visit as guest speakers to teach the class.

During Jose’s first interview, he stated that he felt he had to be honest about participating specifically to practice his English. But now that he has been engaged in this study, he has found it enjoyable to talk about his experiences and feels that his participation might help improve certain aspects of the law school. Jose has provided some excellent program suggestions for the LLM program. For example, he stated that he would have liked to see more emphasis on job opportunities and networking. He feels somewhat deceived because this program did not meet these needs for him or his wife. They are both accomplished lawyers in Monterrey and had
hoped that this experience would give them connections for a better future. Jose during his third interview stated:

Yes. Well, in the beginning, [I participated] because I like to practice my English, as I told you, to be honest. But sometimes, I mean, I didn’t know you, but now that I know you, sometimes it’s very nice to speak with people that, I guess, well, for me, this is very interesting for me the idea of continue [sic] your preparations and all these kinds of analyses. I like it very much, so I like to participate if I can help with something that is going to improve the school or something.

**Persistence and identity.** As a lawyer at the top of his field in Mexico, Jose has an impressive academic record: a bachelor’s degree, a Master’s, and a JD from Monterrey. He has worked for four years in the private and public sectors. Jose believes that since coming to Boston, he has changed in one way—he has become more direct in his interactions with people. He has become more assertive, so people will take him more seriously. Jose during his third interview stated:

That part also helped me because the different prior experience in America was like, you know, the people here are very serious, very direct with your sentiment. They talk to you very strong. And I, as a Mexican, I used to say, “Okay, you don’t want it, don’t do it.” Now, I feel with the, I don’t know with what, but now I can tell them, “You have to do this, or I have a right to this.” And that helped me, I guess.

Jose was having a difficult time expressing how he has changed during his tenure in the United States. He asked his wife Alicia, who told him that he has changed in many ways. For example, he is more independent from his family and has developed a closer relationship with her. In his academic work, his English has improved, he is no longer shy, and he participates in
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

class. When asked whether the professors treated them any differently because they were a couple, Jose said that, for the most part, in the large classes the professors had no idea, but there were a few professors who taught the small LLM classes that used to joke about their being married. It did not seem to matter that they were in the same program, although Jose acknowledged that it could have been a problem.

Jose identifies with being a student in this country. Outside the campus setting, he notices that people treat him differently in restaurants because he is a Mexican, but he takes it in his stride. He believes that he is now older and wiser by virtue of having had the experience of living and surviving in another country.

Looking to the future. Jose and his wife Alicia had originally wanted to stay in the United States and work for a few years. They tried to apply for jobs but did not succeed even in scheduling interviews. It seemed inevitable that they were returning to Mexico. Jose affirmed during his first interview:

Well, yes, I can for a limited time, like for a year as an international associate, or something like that. If I want to stay more, I have to take the bar exam in New York or California. They are the only states that we can work as lawyers. We are trying to have some interviews to get jobs, but it is very difficult right now. So I don’t know. We are planning to—if we don’t get anything good here, we have to go back. And I was working there; I have like, four years I work for the state government four years.

Alicia had contacts from her previous job who scheduled her an interview at a law firm in New York. Because the economy is not doing well, however, it is uncertain whether this opportunity will materialize. Jose feels that CU should have done more to let them know there were no job opportunities in the United States and feels as though he was deceived by the
university. The job fair did not even include the LLM students. Although he feels that “deceive” is a harsh word, he does feel that some of the blame lies with CU. He and his wife have no interviews scheduled through the program despite their having tried for several months.

By our third interview, Jose was fairly certain he would be returning home, as there were no job opportunities for him or his wife. He believes that the one-year LLM degree might get him a better job in Mexico, but he is not sure whether the recession will permit that to occur. He is excited about returning home to family and friends but fears that his professional relationships will have weakened. While he was here for a year, he did stay connected to his former employer and looked over some briefs at his request. Jose believes that his former boss will give him a temporary job until he can find a new one.

Their last day in the apartment is May 31, 2010, when their lease ends. Jose and his wife plan to pack up their car and leave on that day, taking two weeks to drive all the way to Mexico. One of the things that Jose has to do when he returns is to campaign for his uncle, who is running for governor of Tamaulipas. After that, he and Alicia plan to go back to Monterrey and start looking for jobs.

**Back home in Monterrey.** In an e-mail correspondence during the summer of 2010, I inquired how his uncle had fared during the election season in Tamaulipas. Jose informed me that his uncle was assassinated a few days before the election and his brother got elected to the governor position in his place. This was shocking news, as I had heard of the recent violence in Mexico but had not connected it with Jose and his family. This incident highlights the complex and sometimes dangerous situations that many graduate international students must negotiate.

During member checking I conducted through Skype on July 22, 2010, Jose informed me that he has been working in Monterrey since the day he got back to Mexico. We spoke for an
hour on the computer, and it was good to reconnect. I offered my condolences for his uncle, who was the victim of this act of senseless and tragic violence. Jose informed me that the whole incident with his uncle was very heartbreaking but that he had to move on from it. Staying focused in the present, Jose gave me a virtual tour of his office through Skype and a first glimpse of Monterrey from his office window. He listened to all that I had to say and stayed engaged with me the whole time. Jose gave me an A+ for my analysis. He told me that he misses Boston and hopes to return someday soon.
Michael—A Maverick by Nature and a Nonconformist


Life story. Michael is a 26-year-old German student studying in the MBA program in the School of Management. He has just completed his first year at Chardin University. At first Michael did not think he would be an ideal participant as he believed he has different thoughts and ideas on how international students should socialize in America. I reassured Michael that his experiences, even if different from other participants, were valuable to this research. From the beginning, Michael wanted to indulge in and experience American culture and actively sought ways to stay away from anything familiar, especially other German students.

Michael comes from a small town in Germany called Eddersheim, which has a population of approximately 5,000. Michael had a typical childhood; he lived in a loving household with his parents and was their only child. In the eleventh grade, he developed a passion and desire to study in the United States. He had visited America a few times and liked the culture and freedom he experienced there. In high school, Michael was not doing too well academically, and at that juncture he realized that he wanted a different educational experience. After high school, he attended ten months of compulsory military service. He performed mostly administrative duties, since Germany was not actively engaged in any war during that time.

Michael does not like the European style of free education; according to him, the quality of higher education is not as good as it is in America. He believes that you basically get what you pay for. The education he received in Germany was theoretical and not very practical. In 2004, he enrolled at the Hawaii Pacific University, double-majoring in Management and Marketing, and completed his undergraduate degree in two years. Michael chose this particular
institution because it enrolled a large number of international students. After graduating, he tried to get a job in the United States but was unable to, so he returned to Germany, where he worked for three years as a financial consultant for the multinational firm KPMG. This was a good job that enabled Michael to travel extensively around Germany and Europe during those three years. He worked in the advisory branch of the company, in business performance services, and ended up in the restructuring department, helping companies in financial distress. Michael speaks English fluently, but German is his first language. He has developed a good grasp of the English language from studying subjects in English, which he started doing in the fifth grade. Michael does have a German accent and a unique style of speaking, but articulates and expresses himself quite well.

**Different goals and expectations from life.** Michael claimed that he is the black sheep of his family because he has always diverged from societal norms and does not conform to preset notions of success. His family grew up in a small town and close-knit neighborhood; his whole family lived a few minutes from each other. Michael always wanted to get away from it all, and had different motivations and goals than his extended family. Having said that, he is very close to his parents and they are happy with all that he has achieved. His father is proud of him, as Michael has earned more than he ever did even after working for 30 years.

Michael keeps away from his extended family. He did not state that he has a problem with them, just that he prefers to stay away. He believes that his extended family is aware that he is not very fond of them. When he was young, his parents tried to force him to visit family for birthdays and other occasions, but he always tried to get out of these family obligations. Michael has always been unconventional and feels that he did not have a choice when he was
baptized a Protestant or when he inherited all his relatives. Michael during his third interview reflected:

For me it’s pretty clear—it’s just because I see things a little unconventional, I guess.

The question I ask myself is, why should I like them just because I’m related to them that are not my choice? Yes, it’s my father’s brother, but how does that make me being related to this person except for blood? And I don’t really care about that. So to me it’s just, there is this social pressure, this social norm [that] you’ve got to like your family, and I just don’t see why. And I ask “why” a lot.

For Michael, it comes down to the question of why we, as a society, are asked to do certain things. Usually when he asks such questions, most people cannot provide an adequate answer. If Michael does not understand the concept behind rules, he will not abide by them. He was a rebel as a young boy, though he wanted to make it clear that he did not do anything destructive, such as being a vandal or punk. He just asked a lot of questions and did not blindly follow the lead of family members.

**Transnational acts.** To Michael, his family is an interesting topic; he is the only child and is very close to his parents. He has an aunt, an uncle, and two cousins he is close to, but does not care or wish to be in touch with the rest of his extended family. He says that he does not have any connections with them at all; since he was a little boy, he never really could understand their mindset. The other people he knows and is close to are not related to him. He has a close circle of friends he has known since high school. He told me that, compared with other international students, he does not communicate frequently with family or friends. Michael told me during his first interview:
When I talk to other people, I almost feel bad because, usually, people communicate quite heavily with their parents. In my case, it’s just not. It’s not that I don't like them. Again, I’m a very big fan: I have the greatest parents in the world. But I’m just not that communicative in that sense. So usually I try to keep it within at least once a month, usually Skype, maybe for an hour. Right now it’s a little more. I talked to them two weeks ago. I tried to get them this weekend because they are coming in May to the United States to visit Boston and New York. And since they don’t really speak English, I kind of have to tag along and show them around. So we have to make that arrangement and all that. But usually I would say once a month. It was even less in Hawaii because back then, I didn’t really have Skype.

Back when Michael was an undergraduate in Hawaii, Skype was not in use, so it was difficult to communicate with his parents. There was a 12-hour time difference between Hawaii and Germany, and it was expensive to make phone calls. He did not write letters, so his contact with home and family were much more limited. He did send e-mails frequently to his parents, as they tended to worry about him more during his undergraduate years.

Michael has several childhood acquaintances he would still categorize as good friends. For instance, he has one good friend he made in seventh grade with whom he connects daily through the Internet. All through high school he made friends, and he later moved on to make friends in different areas of his life. Michael is insistent that it is only due to technology that he is in contact with his friends daily. Michael during his first interview stated the following:

I would say, I mean, my childhood friends I still call my best friends, simply because I grew up in a street where we had a lot of kids all my age and we just did everything together between the ages of four until high school. And in high school, you branch out a
little bit because you go different ways. People, you know, evolve differently. And in high school, I picked up new friends, which I also count as my best friends right now. My best friend definitely is a guy that I met in seventh grade basically. And with those I would say I have daily contact, actually. Again, technology plays a huge part here—chat programs, Facebook, and whatnot.

**Social experiences.** Michael is still in touch with his childhood friends, but the long-distance relationship has created a bit of a disconnect, since the bonds of friendship are rooted in the past and not the present. He believes that this disconnect is the sacrifice he had to make when he came to the United States. During his time in Hawaii, Michael made friends he would classify as good, but not close, friends. Michael finds that he is much more comfortable socially in Boston than he was in Hawaii, which he attributes to maturity and experience improving the way he handles himself in social situations.

In terms of extracurricular activities, Michael plays soccer and basketball whenever he gets an opportunity and socializes with other MBA students. He attends Thirsty Thursdays, a weekly gathering of MBA students at a neighborhood bar. There are times when he has been criticized for attending Thirsty Thursdays, as some of his classmates do not drink. He believes that it is not the alcohol at these events that is important but the socialization. Michael believes that there has been unfair criticism that alcohol needs to be present at a party for it to be successful. He believes there should be no reason why he cannot hang out with his friends who might socialize in a different way, or even smoke marijuana.

Michael strongly believes that he has to have the true cultural experience of being in America, and he cannot do that by just hanging out with other Germans. He does not understand why people would speak in their own language and hang out only with people from their own
country. According to Michael, this defeats the whole purpose of being in another country and learning from their culture. Staying within your own cultural or ethnic group also prohibits integration and connection with local peers. As Michael expressed during his first interview:

And then I see the Indians very much being close with each other, and the South Americans, especially. When you go into class, at least the Indians speak English. The South Americans don’t. They just speak Spanish the whole time. And I don’t know—I don’t see the point. That is what bugs me the most about the international experience. And actually, I feel like the international office [OISS] sometimes enforces that by having those international sessions all the time. I don’t participate in those either because it is exactly the opposite of what I want to achieve, which is integration. And basically, what you do with that in my opinion, you prohibit integration.

Michael has been asked about German cuisine and he claims that he does not really know much about the subject. He believes that German food is in keeping with other European cuisines. He does not like eating for pleasure; he feels that it is a complete waste of time and is an exercise just to stay alive. At lunch, he usually grabs a candy bar and a coke.

In contrast with his dietary choices, Michael believes that he has had a good, balanced social experience here in the US. He has made a few American friends and a lot of international friends, so he is satisfied with his social experiences here at Chardin University.

**Purposefully seeking out the American experience.** Michael wants the whole American cultural experience. However, he does admit that he has more international friends than American. He does not believe that he will have the same type of closeness with them as he has with his friends from childhood: He does not believe that those types of friendships are possible, since his time in the United States is too short. However, he hopes that the friends he
has made in this country will stand the test of time, just as his friendships from high school have. Michael during his second interview stated the following:

It takes years. And I’m just not sure if that’s going to happen, simply because I don’t know if I’m going to be here two years from now, or if they will be here two years from now, because after this program is over, everyone is going to spread out again. But if that happens, I can see it happening, yes, definitely, with some people.

Michael does not believe that the depth of friendships he has here is all he had dreamed about, but overall they have been fairly satisfying. In comparison with his experience in Hawaii, his social life has dramatically improved. Michael believes that having the right attitude is important; one has to fit in, try to assimilate, and work hard in order to have a better experience. Although Michael is very busy at school, he often goes into Boston with his friends to take in his new surroundings. Over the winter break, Michael and a few of the MBA students went snowboarding, an outing that was the best time he has had since coming to Boston. He experienced an American winter sport which he enjoyed and found very relaxing.

According to Michael, there are not many cultural differences between Germans and Americans, although the most noticeable one is that Americans are much friendlier compared with Germans. He thinks that Americans can also be superficial, and that he would rather be honest with people than have meaningless relationships. He does not want people to be nice just to his face; he would like to know the truth. According to Michael, one major cultural difference is that Americans are nice for the sake of being nice. Someone once told Michael that Americans are polite but not friendly, and he believes that although this is a huge generalization, in his experience he has found it to be true. Michael during his second interview observed the following:
That is very difficult because there is not that much difference between Western Europe and the US in terms of culture, at least not like you’d have the huh effect. What’s much more noticeable, especially compared to Germany, is obviously that people are very friendly and very open but also very superficial and shallow at times. What I prefer to do is be rather honest with people … [T]hen people are very nice to you, and all of a sudden someone else turns around and doesn’t like you, and you realize they were just nice for the sake of being nice but actually, they don’t like you. That is a very American thing in my opinion, a very cultural thing.

**Transition.** The decision to come to the United States took root in the eleventh grade, when he developed his desire to study in America. He wanted a different cultural experience and felt that he liked the freedom and the chance to branch out on his own. He wanted to be more individualistic, rather than live in a socialist society such as Germany. Michael told me that it was a gut feeling he had, not a specific or traumatic experience, that made him feel this way. For all the planning he did to move to Hawaii, Michael admits that he was completely lost for the first three to four weeks. It was an alien culture and, although he had been in this country on vacation, it was different when he arrived to live and study. Although the United States is not that far removed from living in Germany, some differences that threw him off. According to Michael, even going to the supermarket is a challenging experience, and something as simple as trying to find a product can be frustrating. Registering for classes was also an ordeal, and because he did not have a phone or a laptop, getting connected was challenging. He was wandering aimlessly throughout the first few weeks in Hawaii, wondering what he was supposed to do to get ready for classes. Michael stated that Hawaii Pacific University lacked the support that international students needed to make the transition to a new country. During his first
interview, Michael explained how the first time he studied in the United States, there was not that much support available:

Despite the support system the university had, signing up for courses, I had no idea how to do that. So what do you do? You don’t have a laptop, you don’t have a phone, you have nothing—and you can’t even contact anyone because you don’t know anyone. So you basically are stuck in your apartment, and you wonder, because you basically have to register for classes (because that’s what it says on the sheet), but nowhere does it say what do I have to do, where do I have to go. So that was a problem.

For Michael, Boston was an entirely different experience. He was highly aware of the culture and the process needed to do certain everyday tasks and less worried about negotiating his transition. Michael found an apartment near campus, which he shares with two American students from CU. When he first arrived in Boston, he walked around town and explored the city. The whole transition was smoother than it was during his first experience.

**Visa and immigration.** Because Michael came from Germany, there were no problems getting a student visa, and the process was fairly standard. According to Michael, most German students return home after studying in the United States. In fact, all the German students in his undergraduate program in Hawaii returned home. He is the only one who has returned to the United States for graduate work. Michael did find the lines at the port of entry very long, and it took him three hours to get to an immigration officer. Michael was frustrated by that experience and wished there was another line for international visitors from Europe. The German government is not actively making attempts to bring Michael back to Germany in any way, as the New Zealand government does, for instance. Nor does Germany pay for tuition to study
abroad like the Swedish government. Michael does not believe that the German government really cares whether he stays in the United States or returns.

**Just a place to live.** Michael found it easy to find a place to live. The MBA program set up a Facebook account for all international students, and through that network, Michael decided to live with two American guys. Michael purposely did not seek to live with other Germans as he did when he was at Hawaii Pacific University, but decided to immerse himself in the American culture and community. Although Michael and his American roommates do not socialize much, their living arrangement works for them. Michael believes that he learns a lot simply from living with them as they engage in different types of discussions. The three men are very different individuals and lead their own lives. One of his roommates is religious and goes to church every Sunday, whereas Michael currently does not believe in God and considers himself an atheist. Michael likes to compare the political climate in both countries and is very interested in the opinions of Americans in general. Unlike other participants, Michael did not find this part of his transition stressful and was able to find a decent apartment and American roommates without much of a problem.

**Religion.** Michael was baptized a Protestant and is upset that he was not given a choice to choose his religion. Michael believes that so long as religion makes people happy, they can “go for it,” but he does not want to be bothered or forced into any aspect of it. Initially he was a bit worried because CU is a Catholic Jesuit institution, but his contact assured him that CU would not impose that religion on him. He likes the fact that there is a variety of churches on campus, which he appreciates for their architectural value. Michael does not care about religion; he believes that people should practice or not practice whatever faith they want. He finds that
people in the United States are pretty religious, but as long as they accept other people who are atheists, Michael is fine with the concept.

A critique of the program. The main reason Michael planned on doing his MBA was to advance his career. However, he believes that there is not enough support for international students to help them with their career aspirations. He is sympathetic that American students are also not finding jobs, but he believes that for international students, it is much harder. He believes that all the social programming the university concentrates on is not really helpful; instead, he thinks they should be focusing on supporting students to manage their careers. There should be one dedicated career advisor for the international students. After all, students recruited into the MBA program are heavily relying on moving up the corporate ladder and are using the program to get ahead.

Michael has not been disappointed with any of his experiences at CU in particular, but he was annoyed that he had to attend the program Language, Culture, and Careers (LCC). It was a disappointment that he was not given the option to waive the class, which he thought was too basic and a waste of time and money. He noticed that several students in the class also did not need such a basic course and thought they should tailor this course to students’ needs. In addition, Michael felt that, during the admissions process, CU could have done a better job. From December to April, there was no communication from CU. Michael suggested that there should be frequent communications so that international students know where they stand in the admissions process.

Identity and persistence. When Michael left Germany, people would have described him as reserved, shy, or an introvert. But since being in this country, he believes he has changed in many ways, as he has been forced to be open-minded and to adapt and assimilate. For
example, five years ago, he would not have participated in this study. On the academic front, his studies in the United States have taught him a great deal and broadened his skill base. Michael believes that his motivations have not changed since he has been in this country, although he has become more social and extroverted. He can project a kind of superficial friendliness, although inside, he is still the same person. Although Michael enjoys the superficial aspects of being friendly, he is not a fan of small talk, does not understand it, and has no idea why people indulge in it. Michael prefers to think before he speaks instead of just blurting things out. As he put it during his second interview:

I think [I maintain a] balance with a slight introvert tendency simply because, for example, I’m not a big fan of small talk. I don’t know why people do it—it bugs me. And if you think about what makes an extrovert an introvert—an extrovert being that you usually express your opinion about everything before you think about it—I usually think before I talk. Not always, but that’s where the balance part comes in. But usually I’m more of the, okay, let’s think about things first, and then say my point instead of just babbering things out. That doesn’t make any sense.

Michael is in a very rigorous academic program and is basically in class from Monday through Thursday. On Fridays there are no classes, but that is the time for group work and for completing assignments. In terms of persistence and expectations of doing well academically, he has sets his own goals. Michael’s father would have been happy if Michael had settled for a middle school education. All the higher academic expectations came from Michael himself; he did not have any family pressures. Michael is constantly striving to get good grades, but since coming to the United States, does not believe he has had to adjust his learning style in the classroom.
Michael regards himself as a migrant and believes he will continue to travel in the future, seeking out international experiences all his life. Since, he reasons, the world is flat in terms of people being hired in various multinational companies, his ability to work with and relate to people from different parts of the world is valuable. Michael, who is only 26, does not want to settle down in one place for the rest of his life and believes that he does not need to think of permanence just yet. Michael stated during his third interview:

I think “migrant” fits pretty well in my opinion because, as I said, I’m thinking about going to different countries. And like you mentioned before, it’s sort of this flat world: globalization not in terms of companies, but in terms of people moving around the world to opportunities wherever they are. And I think that fits me and the whole experience that I had as well in Germany, as well as in the US. It lays a foundation for that whole concept, I would say, at least for my ability to actually do it: to move to different countries, to live in different countries, to easily adapt to their cultures and the new surroundings, and having new people around you and everything. You have to learn that.

In contrast with many of the other participants, who enrolled in their program to make connections to advance their career, Michael had harsh words for social networking and believes that getting a job through this method is corrupt and unethical. He states that in the MBA program, there is much focus on networking, but he does not believe in it and does not participate in the process. As he put it, being friendly with someone just so that there can be a professional gain is not a fair way to get a job. Michael has changed his career path and wants out of consulting because the whole job is about becoming a partner and building a base of clients through networking. He realizes that his philosophy is going to hurt him in the future but sees this as a sacrifice he has to make to stand by his principles.
Future. Michael had originally thought he would stay in the United States for seven to eight years, making Boston his home for the next few. Michael stated that he had begun rethinking his future during the interview process. By the third interview, he had come to the realization that he is not opposed to going back to Germany. Now that he has more experience, going back to Germany would be a good move for him. He also might think of going somewhere totally different, perhaps the UK or France, to get more international experience.

Although Michael’s first choice is to stay in this country for a few years, he is not going to do so without proper work papers. As he comes from a first-world country, he does not believe that his predicament is as dire as a few other classmates’; for example, he knows a student who is trying everything not to have to go back home to South Africa. He believes that if he were to settle in Europe, he would have to make only minor adjustments. Michael has also been looking at Germany as a viable option for an internship, reasoning that he is better off in Germany than in the United States. Michael stated the following during his third interview:

Yes, it is an option that I’m looking into, probably even this very day. I’m going to look into that option by trying to find some internship in Germany. I thought just randomly, I thought about different things that are really better about Germany in comparison to the US, some things to maybe convince myself that it wouldn’t be the worst of things to happen. But yes, it’s comfortable for me to go back to Germany too. I know what I have there. It might not necessarily be Frankfurt. If I go to Munich, I don’t know, well, I do know some people in Munich there—work-related people, so that would be different. If Michael moves back, he would have to stay with his parents for a time before he could find an apartment of his own. He is sure that even his friends would put him up if needed.

Michael believes that the recession has taken its toll on students finding internships in the United
States—not just international students. Ninety percent of the job postings he has seen require US work papers. Although he would have been willing to take an unpaid internship, even those are not easily available. He is trying to break into the financial side of the entertainment industry, a different field from what he is used to, so he expected it would be a difficult transition. He believes he needs to gain some experience in the real world in order to break into that market, but opportunities are scarce. Michael’s dream job would be in TV and movie production finance, but his perception is that firms are no longer willing to process H1B Visas for international students; they do not want to invest the time if they are unable to hire the student permanently. According to Michael, for the past few years, firms were offering H1B Visas like peanuts, but now the glut has turned into a shortage.

Michael has little leeway when it comes to finances. He has been living off his savings and a scholarship, which was an important factor in his decision to come to CU. He believes that his money will last until the end of this summer, but after that, he will have to look to his parents for a loan (it would be much cheaper for him to take a loan from his parents than to go to a bank). To save money, he shares his apartment and keeps his expenses to a minimum. Sometimes he splurges on a trip, like snowboarding in New Hampshire, but feels that it is well worth the expense, because you have to live a little and have fun to get the true American social experience. After all, Michael states, he will make money again when he graduates, so he wants to enjoy this experience. Being in debt is part of the American cultural experience as well. Michael explained during his second interview:

I’ll make money the rest of my life, and if I don’t have it right now, I’ll make it at a later point. Maybe that’s all part of the American culture: Go in debt—who cares? Someone will pay for it. Sometimes people, I think, think someone will pay for it. I try not to
overspend, but I think I’ve gotten to the point where I try to live my life. I’m just not overdoing it.

I met with Michael on July 15, 2010, at Athan’s Café to go over his story. He was already at the café, and after briefly updating each other, we got down to discussing my analysis of his experiences. Michael is currently working as an unpaid intern at a bakery, helping out with the business end of the establishment. It took me an hour to go over the analysis, and he agreed that the overall description and story were spot on. He listened intently and clarified one aspect of the story, regarding his friends from Germany. After our meeting he left for a basketball game. He has one more year at CU, and I hope that he is able to break into the entertainment industry. I am thankful that Michael was a part of the participant group because his thoughts were significantly different from the others’.
Rajiv—A Born Optimist: Using Every Connection As an Opportunity


The story. Rajiv is a 25-year-old Indian student enrolled in the MBA program in the School of Management. He has been at Chardin University for two years and will graduate in May 2010. Rajiv is one of only two participants who were actively engaged in several student clubs and organizations. He readily volunteered to participate in the interviews and stayed engaged with me during throughout this study. I have met Rajiv several times for lunch and had the pleasure of meeting his father when he came for his son’s graduation.

Rajiv was born and raised in Goregaon in suburban Mumbai. Rajiv comes from a small Maharashtrian family (the dominant ethnic group in Mumbai) and has lived with his parents all his life, to whom he is extremely close. He has one brother, who is a year older, and his entire extended family in Mumbai, although he did not talk about anyone other than his parents and brother. He went to a coeducational high school called St. Teresa’s, where all the courses were taught in English; two secondary languages, Marathi and Hindi, were also in the curriculum.

Rajiv’s academic strengths are in mathematical and analytical skills. After finishing high school, he received his diploma in Electronics and Video Engineering, ranking first in his class and third in the state of Maharashtra. Because of his high ranking, he was accepted to Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI), an engineering school in Mumbai. He is now an electronics engineer by profession, and after graduation joined one of the biggest IT firms in India: Tata Consultancy (TCS). During his four years at TCS, he traveled within India to Bangalore and Trivandrum and, towards the end of his tenure, traveled and lived in the Netherlands for three months.
For the most part, besides travel within India for work purposes, Rajiv has lived at home with his parents in Mumbai. He comes from a Maharashtrian family and speaks Marathi at home. Rajiv spoke very fondly of his mother and was proud of all her accomplishments, which include an education at the JJ School of Arts in Mumbai and a variety of careers as a photographer, commercial artist, and a real estate consultant. She is a great cook and has won awards for her cooking shows, which have aired on TV. Rajiv’s father worked at the Aarey Milk Factory and later moved to Worli Dairy in Mumbai. Rajiv is very close to his brother, and no one could come between them, as they have always looked out for each other. They would always back each other up, even if they were fighting. The only time Rajiv showed any emotion was when he spoke about his mom. Otherwise, he narrated his story very matter-of-factly, without much emotion. I attribute this to a cultural style or to an unwillingness to show any kind of vulnerability.

In the seventh grade, Rajiv moved to the Aarey Milk Colony, which is a very green sector of Mumbai. It is protected by the government, and people have to pay a toll to enter the colony. Rajiv recalled the huge red “mud ground” on which he played cricket and several other sports and spoke fondly of the 64 or so families who lived in the colony. There were fruit trees everywhere, and during the summer months, there was a wide variety of fruits to choose from—a rarity for someone living in Mumbai. Rajiv spoke of eating a myriad of Indian fruits such as mangos, peru, chikoo, and zambul, straight from the tree. Rajiv reminisced during his first interview:

So that was a very good time. We had a big red mud ground…. Mostly all the people working in the dairies, so most of them were Maharashtrian. There were a few who were
non-Maharashtrian, but it didn’t really matter. That place was really like a very big family of seven buildings. I don’t know how many, like 64 families lived there.

**Transition.** At TCS, Rajiv started as a software engineer and got promoted quickly within his firm to become a project lead. At the end of three years, he realized he needed an MBA to strengthen his academic and professional portfolio. He chose to attend CU because they offered him a scholarship and a graduate assistantship, plus they had a strong program in finance. He believes that understanding finance is more technical than other aspects of management, which rely more on common sense. CU also had a lot of financial companies in the area, which he believed would increase his chances of getting a good internship.

When he went to the Netherlands, it was like a dry run for the entire family to live away from each other. As a result, he feels that he was prepared mentally and professionally when he transitioned to the United States: He had given it a lot of thought, researched it, and was ready to make the move. Rajiv described his preparation during his first interview:

> And when I was in the Netherlands for some time, it gave my family a taste of not having me and me a taste of not having my family and [of my] staying abroad, you know, and things that you need, or I need to carry along, or I need to learn…. It was like a pilot for both of us, because then I came back in three months, and then I was home doing the visa process and all that stuff. And then I came here, so they were pretty prepared then, and I was pretty prepared by then. So it wasn’t a real big problem as such.

Quitting his job was entirely up to Rajiv. His parents were anxious about it, but they supported his decision. They knew that he was doing well at TCS and had received awards for outstanding performance, so they believed TCS might rehire him when he came back with an MBA. For Rajiv, the preparation to come to the United States was mostly mental. He was
prepared in terms of what he needed—utensils, important documents, clothes, and food—and views this transition as part of a logical progression in his life. Although Rajiv has not gone home in the past two years, his father has visited him twice.

**A place to live.** Rajiv found a place to live through a network of Indian students enrolled in the MBA program. A total of eight males in his class were from Mumbai, seven of whom decided to live together in a big house. An Indian who was already situated in Boston picked up all the new Indian students when they first arrived. Out of this group, five were from Mumbai, and they all met for the first time on the flight over. Rajiv had no desire to live with other Americans, and I am not sure whether the thought even crossed his mind. Instead, Rajiv’s cultural immersion seemed to center around networking for future career opportunities. Experiencing other aspects of American culture, integrating into American life, and learning from his peers did not seem to be Rajiv’s main goals.

**Social experiences.** Rajiv has a good group of friends from back home, all of whom are doing well, scattered around the world or in areas of Mumbai. Some of them are living in the United States and Canada, so when he wants to go traveling, he always has friends he can call on. Outside his circle of friends is the Indian community, which is large and well connected. Rajiv did not mention any one person he was close to in either Mumbai or the United States; rather, it seems he has been engaged in multiple groups all his life and has not been close to any one particular person. I found this fact interesting, seeing as he was the only participant who was involved in multiple campus organizations in a leadership capacity.

Rajiv loves to go on long walking trips, or “treks,” and would conduct many weekend and overnight excursions at TCS. Some of the groups he led consisted of 100 to 200 people, and he had to speak and direct large groups. In India, he performed in theatrical dramas and dances,
mostly during festivals and on religious occasions. Rajiv was also on the chess team at VJTI and had a good handle on the game, though he is currently out of practice.

What sets Rajiv’s social experiences apart is that he spends most of his time planning and organizing events. He is on the Graduate Management Association (GMA) and was elected to a communications position, the only international student to be so chosen that year. Rajiv is also on the board of the Graduate International Student Association (GISA), which helps bring together all the different schools at CU for social events. He is also on the board for the Consulting Club in the School of Management.

Rajiv has heard his classmates complain that they have no time, but he feels the opposite way: that he has had all the time in the world for activities besides academics. If there is a job to be done, he would volunteer for it, and always seems to have the time and the capacity to absorb more work. Rajiv believes you have to manage your time properly; for example, many weekly meetings are held for GMA, but he has no problem keeping up with them. By keeping so busy, he knows he is acquiring the skills to manage budgets, organize events, and troubleshoot when things do not go as planned. Rajiv stated the following during his second interview:

It was like, suddenly I am working so hard. I was aware that if I’m going back to academics, it’s going to be hard work, and I had, like, the Indian standards in mind, where these are just built into it. And I was used to the Indian way of life. The work here was maybe less at times, or maybe more at times, in terms of what I thought. So I was like, I could manage things. And some of things that I did in GMA, you know, we had weekly meetings, then [discussion of] who’s doing what. It did take some time, but if you manage your time properly, there’s all this time. I had enough time to watch movies. I would talk at home almost daily, sleep, clean, cook.
When asked about engaging with his American peers, he answered the same way as the other participants. In the classroom, a mix of international students and Americans work together on group projects. He has also gone on one trek with a group of seven Americans. The house he shares with the other students from his country is known as “India House” and has a reputation for wild parties. Before attaining this status, in the first year, Rajiv used to go to Thirsty Thursdays (although he does not drink) for the social outlet and to develop a rapport with other MBA students. Rajiv affirmed during his second interview:

Our house was, all of us Indians in the house. We participate in class, and we had our own groups, like, following the class activities, we had our own group and we were pretty—we had a good rapport with our friends in terms of that. And when we had this Thirsty Thursdays, every Thursday the MBA class goes to some bar to drink…. So we did have a good rapport with people. I got some early feedback, as well, within my first couple of months from some of my friends that they valued my participation in class.

His Indian housemates were known for being social and outgoing. During Halloween of his first year, they decided to have a big party at their house, attended by approximately 200 people, the word spread like wildfire. Rajiv was extremely proud of this party, at which there was a lot of dancing to Hindi music. Rajiv during his second interview stated:

And that party was really happening. I mean, people loved the party, and we have big decks at that place. So we played English music as well as Hindi music—all dance numbers. And people were dancing like crazy. We had one girl and one of my roommates who is like a damn good dancer, and things just clicked off. You know, it became a little wild at the end. People were really drunk; they didn’t know what they
were doing. We had a bit of physical damage in the house … some bars broke and stuff like that.

As a college administrator, parties like this make me very nervous, and I was surprised the neighbors did not complain. Rajiv believes that this party made a huge statement within the MBA community because afterward, they became instantaneously popular and were known for that event. Someone paid him the compliment that he was amazed Indians could organize such a popular party: It was like an American going to India and putting on an Indian party, and all the locals attending having a great time. Rajiv also went into great length talking about this social event during his second interview.

After attending about four or five Thirsty Thursdays, Rajiv no longer needed to spend time with a drinking crowd because he already got to know American students through his involvement with clubs and organizations. Rajiv reflected during his second interview as follows:

But once we started off, the first four or five Thursdays, we sort of stopped that. I don’t drink, so I was just going there for getting to know people. That was kind of done; I knew people by then. And me being in the GMA got me into touch with a lot of people. The … club director[s], there literally were 15 clubs there, and when you do something, you eventually, at some point of time, you have to get in touch with me, with the negotiations. So I had to get in touch with so many people for so many different things. Toastmasters got me in touch with some; Consulting Club got me in touch with some; GISA got me in touch with the entire Chardin University community, including the Friday lunches we had.
Rajiv likes to be in the thick of things. In addition to his involvement with clubs and organizations, he also helped organize the leadership breakfast at the CU Club, planning the agenda and giving the opening speech to introduce the guest speaker. Rajiv likes being a student in the US rather than an employee in the Netherlands with TCS, where he could not really say anything to his supervisor if he disagreed with him for any reason. But in the classroom, everyone and their opinions are equally valued.

Rajiv has found that you can get in with the American crowd, but you have to make the effort. American students realize that international students do not have a car and that some of the trips (such as skiing) can get pretty expensive. Most of Rajiv’s social experiences have grown out of planning functions using CU money and learning how to get things done through networking.

Friendships. On the topic of friendships, Rajiv reflected on why it is easier to hang out with other Indian students, with whom he can talk about any topic. To relate to his American peers, he has to actively research topics of discussion, for example, sports or TV shows, which he does not usually watch. He tends not to participate when such topics come up and instead rotates through people when he is in a mixed gathering. He has no interest in shopping, so when girls talk about buying clothes or shoes, he tends to get bored.

Rajiv is so actively engaged in organizing social events that he genuinely believes he has no problems socializing with Americans. However, his entire social experience speaks of cultural isolation: He lives with Indians, watches Hindi movies, and eats Indian food. The only interaction with his American peers he told me about has taken place in the classroom and on a trekking trip he participated in during his first year. He is active in several clubs and organizations across campus, through which he gets to interact with American students, but even
the social aspect of his life he has treated as a networking opportunity, not something for relaxing and taking time out during the day. Rajiv stated the following during his second interview:

And I thought I might be really interested in watching these TV series. So talking about TV series is not a topic I want to talk about. So what happens when such kind of talk comes up? You sort of tend to not participate, or change topics. So those are the things that you follow a little different, culturally. I am culturally [involved with] other things. Many of our classmates either got engaged or married during this time, so a lot of marriage talk. You can talk a little bit, but if it’s girls, they talk a lot about shopping, and I don’t know where they shop or all, what are all those things … I have no clue of that. And for guys, talking about insider sports, politics, and things like that—no. And other than [that,] random things that you talk about are good, but again, what they consider as really fun or their definition of fun is different than—like, from my understanding, their definition of fun involves … alcohol, which is absolutely not my definition of fun. So things do change a bit, so that’s what it is. We talk for some time, then we go back for something. And I have been in a position where I’m, like, maybe this only Indian, so then I rotate.

**Dating and marriage.** Rajiv is not closed to the possibility of finding a girl in the United States and getting married. However, it seems that he will follow in his brother’s footsteps by having an arranged marriage. Rajiv is embedded in his own culture and religion and does not see any other option. He analyzes marriage as a relationship that one might research, as a business project, again with no emotions or feelings. He has seen several of his friends marry;
some of these relationships worked and some did not. He believes that a lot of adjustments need to happen before a relationship can work. Rajiv stated during his third interview:

So if you’re getting into something like [marriage], you should be aware that there will be adjustments. And if you are fine with that aspect, that you are taking the step fully cognizant of the fact that there will be adjustment required on both of your parts, then it makes sense to go ahead. You know, just because suddenly you feel you love this person, and now you’re blind in love, [you will] go ahead and discover that, you know, it’s totally different. Then there’s going to be a problem. So I believe this is a decision that should also be taken not only emotionally, but also, you know, using your brains. That if I do go ahead with this, you know, though I think it will work … there would be adjustments. Right now, first couple of years you might think everything is rosy, but it’s not just for two years that you are doing this.

**Visa and immigration.** The visa process was not a problem for Rajiv; he was prepared with his paperwork and had his documents ready for examination. According to him, the immigration officers were looking for documentation to prove he was financially capable of paying for his education. He believes that you need to do your homework and be knowledgeable about the institution you are attending. Rajiv took out an educational loan before coming here in order to cover living expenses besides tuition. His father loaned him additional money to complete an additional course called Tech Trek, where a group of MBA students travel to the West Coast and, within a span of two weeks, visit 24 companies, where they meet high-level management.

**Transnational acts.** Rajiv talks to his parents and his brother daily, usually at 9:00 PM, after he has finished his day and they are having their morning tea. Together all four of them
have a conversation every night. He believes that their daily connection has made his transition much easier. In Mumbai, Rajiv would come home at night and converse with his parents. Now it is almost the same, as he has a nightly conversation with them through Skype. The only difference is that his parents are having their tea and he is having his dinner. His mom specifically requested a visual connection so that she could see him, whether he was excited, tired, happy, sleepy, or just going through the motions. These conversations could last for a few minutes or go on for hours.

Rajiv grew up in a very religious household. One of the most prominent celebrations his family celebrated was Ganesh Chaturthi, based on the life of the Lord Ganesha. This celebration is very intense and practiced every year in his family. The ritual consists of the statue of Ganesha residing in his home for five days, during which there are prayers performed daily (called aartis). Since Rajiv left India, these prayers have been conducted with his family through Skype, Rajiv being the only one who participates through the Internet. The camera is pointed towards Lord Ganesha’s statue, and all his family members participate in the ceremony. Rajiv tries to follow a few other religious practices, like fasting, because for him it is just a way of life. However, certain rituals are community-related, so without a core group of Indians who follow these practices, it would make no sense to conduct the ceremonies in solitude. Indian festivals are filled with delicious food, and Rajiv loves to sample it, so he sometime celebrates auspicious occasions by making a special Indian dessert. I am surprised that he knows how to make these dishes, some of which can be quite complicated. During big festivals, he and his Indian friends will go out for lunch to celebrate. Rajiv during his third interview confided regarding religious practices, “We do have festivals that we tend to follow, so like, from my point of view, say Maha Shivaratri … generally we have a fast when I was at home, so I continued that here.”
Rajiv has relied heavily on Orkut (a Google-based social networking site) to keep in touch with friends from his neighborhood and work in Mumbai. Most of his friends have traveled and settled in different parts of the world. Several are here in the United States, and he occasionally gets to see some of them. The Indian community uses Orkut a lot to stay socially connected instead of Facebook.

**Academic experience and persistence.** The first year of the MBA program at CU is based on the quarter system, and the second year is based on the semester system. Rajiv has classes all week; on Friday, no classes are held but there are group meetings and catching up with schoolwork. This schedule was common among all the participants. His weekend is relatively free except for a few group meetings that are scheduled then. Hence, his calendar is rather full with academic engagements.

Rajiv made sure he adapted to his new environment quickly. He states that he actively participates in the classroom and has never had a problem doing so. There are times during presentations that he finds himself speaking too fast, so he has to consciously make it a point to speak slowly so that his classmates understand what he is saying. Rajiv is very confident about his abilities and accomplishments, and nothing seems to intimidate him. He appeared to be a spectator as he described his life during our interviews with very little emotion or passion. Rajiv stated during his second interview:

> And what happens is, when we talk that fast, our fellow Indians can understand us but fellow Americans find it difficult. So it’s like a vicious cycle because, if you’re calm, you can be slow. And if you get excited or if you get nervous, then you tend to speak fast. And that’s like, if it’s really important and you get nervous or excited, and you have too much anxiety, then it’s going to cause problems.
He believes it is important to speak slowly and clearly communicate your thoughts. Rajiv was the only participant who seemed confident about his future in the United States. He admitted that, by nature, he is an optimistic person and tends to see the positive side of any situation. He remains hopeful about the job market and thought that students need to put in sufficient effort to get a paying internship. He believes that, to perform well at school, one needs to have emotional stability, which he gets from his family as he connects with them daily.

Rajiv identifies as an Indian man and believes that his identity is the same as it was in India and that he has not changed. His perspective has broadened, and the way he looks at India has changed, as before he did not have an objective view. Rajiv tries not to be judgmental and believes that the first impression is not always correct, so it is always best to give someone a second chance. It is easy to judge, as you are not aware of that person’s background, so one should keep an open mind. For the first few months, he applied this principle: He was open to new ideas and was simply observing how the system works. He believes you should respect others, especially when you are in another country. Passing comments and saying negative things about people is not a way that will get you anywhere in life.

Future. The MBA program requires all students to do summer internships. While a student in the program, Rajiv wrote a business plan for a real estate agency in Maine and worked as a business analyst for New England Computer Solutions. Although he was not offered a full-time position, he is working at this company for his OPT and is getting paid, although it is a temporary position.

Rajiv had originally planned to work in the United States for three to four years after graduating and definitely wants to get a job with an H1B Visa. Eventually, he plans on returning to Mumbai, unless an incredible opportunity opens up in this country. Rajiv had the opportunity
to take a sabbatical from TCS and return to his old job, but he did not take that offer. He wanted to leave his options open, which indicates that he is open to living in the United States. His classmates are always asking what his plan is, and it seems that all the Indian MBA students have the same plan: to finish the MBA program and then work for three to four years in the United States. Rajiv during his third interview shared the following:

Nowadays, even if I look at my current colleagues, my classmates, most of them have a plan of, like, stay here for three or four years and go back. That’s like what most of us discuss when we sort of say, “What’s your plan?” People usually don’t have plans, but whenever it does come out, it’s like, be here for around three or four years and then go back…. I mean, I don’t think everyone would be doing that, but to say it, this is what everyone says.

Rajiv believes he has gained a significant skill set, learning how to manage various parts of his life. He was more at the entry level at TCS, but since then he has learned how to manage departments, prioritize different departments, and take care of workflow issues. He now understands how organizations market their goods and has an understanding of their motivations. I informed Rajiv that he probably knew that before going through the MBA program, but he insisted that there were many new aspects he has learned.

If Rajiv were to go home to India, he would stay with his parents. He believes that getting the job he wants would be more of a challenge, and that if one is desperate, there will be a need for compromise. He believes that because he has taken the risk of coming to the United States, he has to try to get a job, even knowing that it is a bad time economically. He is confident that he is good at negotiations and will eventually land on his feet. Rajiv reflected during his third interview:
Because if you’ve taken that step, that risk of coming here for two years, you might as well push it for one more year to sort of buy time to get a job. And if that does not happen, say within a year, after ten months you see that things are not working, then by that time I would have certainly thought of what I would be doing going back…. So I’m keeping my options open. The other option is [to stay] where I’m interning right now. TCS is another option that I have, so this is something that I learned in negotiation: You know how to sort of juggle multiple things without committing.

Once Rajiv gets married, he will think of settling down in Mumbai. He does not believe that staying in the United States long term is an option and would not want his children to be schooled in the primary education system here. He believes that primary education is far superior in India. I do believe that Rajiv is open to staying longer but is not willing to admit it openly.

**Aware of the social disconnect.** In Rajiv’s view, he has a group of Indian friends who all work well together for the most part, and whose friendships are solid. Although extremely engaged in the CU community, it seems to me as though Rajiv has never left Mumbai and is only superficially engaged with American culture and everyday life. This disconnect has resulted from the fact that he is a strict vegetarian, does not drink alcohol, and does not follow American sports and TV shows.

Rajiv and I spoke for an hour to go over his analysis on July 26, 2010. He agreed with his story and analysis and clarified a few facts. The meeting was conducted through Skype on account of his work schedule, even though he was still living at the same place near campus. The room in which Rajiv was sitting in was stark. His father, who was also in the room, was listening in on the conversation, although for most of the session I did not notice that anyone was
in the room with him. Rajiv’s father liked the story as narrated and stated that he is aware of all of his son’s activities in the US and that, as a parent, nothing came as a surprise to him.

Conclusion

Chapter six highlighted the journeys of Jude, Jose, Michael, and Rajiv. In the next chapter, I will review the composite structures or overall analysis across all ten participants. The data will be analyzed through the theoretical frameworks of transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate socialization model. In addition, a discussion will ensue as to how useful the three theoretical frameworks have been for interpreting the findings.
Chapter 7
Analysis and Interpretation

Overview

This chapter briefly reintroduces all the participants, reviews the composite structures for framing their stories, goes over the process of developing themes, and discusses overall findings by connecting them to three theoretical frameworks. In addition, it discusses the usability of all three theoretical frameworks for analyzing the data: transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate student socialization model. The central theoretical framework for this study is transnationalism.

Participants

This section briefly reintroduces all ten study participants: six female and four male. The six female participants were Elif, April, Nikita, Claire, Cindy, and Victoria. Elif is a confident, smart, intelligent, and determined young woman. April is originally from South Korea and has been in the United States since high school, having lived away from her parents since she was 14 years old. Nikita is the youngest of all participants; having never left Mumbai, she struggled the most during her initial transition. Cindy was born and raised in the Eastern part of China. Because of the one-child program in that country, she has no siblings and is extremely close to her parents. Claire is from France and is also extremely close to her family. She misses her family and is conflicted about her future. Victoria is from Paraguay and is married to Peter (pseudonym), a German student she met during her undergraduate days at Barry University in Miami.
The four male participants were Jude, Michael, Jose, and Rajiv. Jude is from New Zealand, originally from Mumbai, India, but identifies himself as a New Zealander. He has been a nomad all his life and is on a journey to discern what is next for him—possibly, settling down. Michael is from Germany, a maverick by nature, and a nonconformist. Jose is a lawyer originally from Victoria in Tamaulipas, Mexico, enrolled in the one-year Master’s program at the Law School. He and his wife Alicia (pseudonym) are both lawyers and have taken a break to study US law for a year. Rajiv was born and raised in India and lived in Goregaon, a suburb of Mumbai. He is always searching for new work opportunities in this country.

Composite Structures

After coding all 30 interviews into Qualrus software, five composite structure codes emerged to the surface: Family (246) and Home (240), Academic Experience (240), Future (167), Change (162), and Social Experience (150). All 30 interviews with ten participants revealed that Family and Home were the most important factors in their lives (they are combined, as there is a strong link between the two). Home is where participants grew up and what they associate most with their identity. Family constitutes parents and siblings and, in some instances, aunts, uncles, and cousins. The second most important code was Academic Experience, the main reason for graduate international students being in the United States. Academic Experience is linked to career prospects, language, studying, accomplishments, expectations, and persistence. All the participants I interviewed are doing well academically, earning high levels of achievement through unfaltering persistence. The third most important code was Future, which seemed to be of concern to all the participants owing largely to the lack of job opportunities in this country. The Future included plans after graduation and, in some
cases, marriage, taking care of parents, changing expectations, visa immigration restrictions, and uncertainty. The fourth most coded segment was Change, which highlighted the transitional aspects and the resultant uncertainty in their lives. Change was induced by the decision to study in the United States, which engendered feelings of depression, cultural shock, inner conflict, personal growth and development, attainment of independence, and becoming more individualistic. The fifth most frequent, but also important, code was Social Experiences, which take into account culture, friendships, meaningful relationships, extracurricular activities, sports, and connections.

**Process of Developing Overall Themes**

During the development of individual participants’ stories, certain common themes started to emerge. As soon as participants articulated similar points of view, I started documenting them separately. While developing individual stories using the foundations of phenomenology, through horizontalization, concepts started to emerge through participant life experiences. I documented all individual participants’ experiences, leaving nothing out from all three interviews. From a lengthy analysis of each participant’s story, horizons started to emerge, which I put through the process of phenomenological reduction. This process synthesized meaning units and essences for each participant. Individual stories impart unique shades and textures to participants’ lives, which in turn provide a deeper level of understanding of each participant. However, the analysis of all the participants as a composite group adds to the individual’s complexity, as each participant is so different and variant in his or her experiences. A few commonalities in experience were shared across all ten participants, but those that were held in common resounded with all of them strongly.
After completing all the interviews, I held a group session on April 16, 2010, during which I came up with a handful of questions to ask the participants. This was one form of member-checking and a way to confirm preliminary composite findings during this research. By constructing overall themes, which were connected to the most prominent codes, answers to my research questions began to emerge. The highest ranking codes of Family and Home were embedded in the most important and common finding: that graduate international students remained connected to family and home on a regular basis. This finding clearly signaled that this aspect of their life was most important. Through these connections, several participants combated feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression. They developed a strong sense of identity, formed as a way of \textit{being} or \textit{belonging}.

The second most important factor was their Academic Experience, the reason for participants being here. I noted high levels of persistence among all the participants. However, the need for professional mentorship was an apparent need as well for all of them. The most common overall finding was that participants were worried about their Future. And, because Future is a moving target, many of them were frustrated by the lack of work permits for temporary jobs. The high levels of Change caused by life transitions were also evident in the overall findings. However, the participants managed these transitions on their own, with very little intervention from the university administrators. I concluded that greater levels of support are needed during the occurrence of mental health and physical health problems in international students.

Lastly, Social Experiences emerged as important to participants. Most participants experienced cross-cultural isolation, which has been researched for decades and was found to be prevalent among these graduate international students. I examined the lack of connection with
American peers and superficiality of friendships through the lens of xenophobia and cross-cultural differences. Several participants formed ethnic clusters, which I examined from ethnocentrist and ethnorelative orientations. Participants developed individual identities based on their past and current experiences.

**Overall themes.** The composite structure codes Family, Home, Academic Experience, Future, Change, and Social Experience emerged throughout the overall findings. The codes Social Experiences, Home, and Family emerged through the following themes:

- Graduate international students regularly stay connected and engaged with family and friends in their home country through transnational social fields;
- Cross-cultural isolation is still prevalent after all these years;
- Alcohol is the main nexus for American socialization;
- Formation of identity constitutes a *way of being or belonging*;
- Ethnocentrism and xenophobia played a role in participants’ lives;
- Issues of personal power, social capital, and rights affect international students, regardless of country of origin;
- Conflicting gender roles and political involvement are quiescent factors;
- Religion is a strong factor for some; and
- It is time to move away from assimilation theories.

Academic Experience ranked second among the participants. It emerged through the following themes:

- Unwavering academic achievement and persistence;
- The need for support through the transition during physical and mental health issues; and
The need for professional mentorship and career counseling.

Future and Change appeared through the following themes:

- They handle change and transitions on their own;
- Graduate international students are heterogeneous with variant needs; and
- Their future is a moving target.

Home, Family, and Social Experiences

Social Experiences, Family, and Home emerged through the themes, as elucidated in the following section. Transnationalism is the predominant theory I used to understand these composite structure codes.

**Graduate international students remain connected and engaged daily with friends and family in their home country through transnational social fields.** Graduate international students mimic transnational migrant patterns, as they both have strong ties to home and host country. A transnational social field is an abstract space between host and home countries, which international students use to negotiate between the two worlds (Gargano, 2009). In my research, I asked the participants how often they stayed connected to family and friends back home, how often they traveled to their home country, and what their future plans were after graduation. From their stories and lives in the United States emerged a network of connections that were daily, complicated (for some), and often their sole social network and support system while in the United States. Each participant’s simultaneity of engagement back and forth was apparent.

One of the most significant findings in this study is that graduate international students communicate on a regular basis with family and friends from home. Participants communicate
often for hours at a time due to the ease of the Internet and with the help of free Web-based communication such as Skype. Several participants overcame feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation by resorting to these daily connections. Comparing these contacts and connections with my experience as an international student, the difference is astounding. At that time, it would have been too expensive to stay connected in such a prolonged manner.

This instant and cheap connectivity for graduate international students has many positive elements. However, on the negative side, it keeps them connected to what they are most familiar with, thereby causing them to miss opportunities to engage with the local community. The time they could use to make friends in this country is absorbed staying connected with friends and family. Rajiv illustrated this point well during his third interview:

Back home, I used to talk almost virtually daily at home. So, you know, it wasn’t very different because, in India, during the day I might go to the office, come back late at night. So it’s like, at the end of day, you know, by dinner we would talk, whatever, and then I would go to sleep. And the same thing kind of continued because I was having my dinner when I was talking, and they were having their tea. That was the only difference: that they were having tea when I was having my dinner.

Several scholars have highlighted the interconnectedness of societies affected by the flow of media, capital, and people (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Such a cosmopolitan perspective is provided by Beck (2000), who describes reflexive cosmopolitanism in which technology is the key to communication.

Migration scholars have long challenged the conventional wisdom that, to succeed in the social and economic realms, migrants need to abandon their customs, traditions, and language. However, recent scholars have stated that contemporary and former migrants remain connected
to their home country and are still successful in their host country (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Similarly, graduate international students remain strongly connected to their home countries and families. Unlike migrants, they often return home sooner than expected, owing to the lack of job opportunities following graduation. Sadly, many students miss the opportunity to truly understand or engage with the host community, remaining socially and culturally isolated.

Migrants and international students share points of similarity in that migrants are embedded in multilayered and sited transnational fields, and their lives can no longer be seen only from within one nation or boundary (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Also, simultaneity exists in the social lives of graduate international students, as it does with migrants. Graduate international students stay in regular contact with family and friends from their home country and are thereby able to retain former connections, relationships, and religious practices. These daily connections also sustain relationships with former co-workers and supervisors, thereby keeping these relationships and networks alive. The Internet has increased the possibility that these interactions will occur and thrive. Also, contemporary modes of online communication are so inexpensive that conversations with family and friends in the home country can last for hours and contact be sustained daily.

April’s experiences beautifully illustrate the evolution of connectivity with home. When April was in high school, she and her sister would wait in front of a pay phone in inclement Michigan weather, reading books until their parents called at a certain time. Only recently has their family’s communication evolved to include Gchat and Skype. When I was a graduate student over a decade ago, we wrote letters by hand to update our families once a month. Phone calls were prohibitively expensive and were reserved only for emergencies. Being cut off from easy contact with my family forced me as a student to develop relationships and connections
quickly within my host community. As I navigated its unfamiliar terrain, some people helped
with my transition, but I was the one who mainly sought them out. At the end of the day, I had
to find my own way, nurture my own relationships, and make the best of the resources available.

According to a new theory to be found in transnational literature, migrants stay connected
to their homeland longer than originally assumed (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). Similarly,
graduate international students stay connected to family and friends on a regular basis. The
difference between the two groups is that graduate international students are here for a limited
time—especially the Master’s students—and do not invest significant time engaging in local
communities or even their institution. This study found that participants were, at best,
superficially engaged with their American peers and that deep and meaningful relationships were
still found primarily with their family and friends from back home. Those students who stayed
longer developed more sustained relationships and friendships in America, but they still stayed
connected to their own ethnic communities. April is a typical example: She has been in this
country since high school but remains connected specifically to the Korean immigrant population
and thereby linked to her ethnic community. Elif has been in the United States for five years, but
she too socializes predominantly within the Turkish community.

My research has reinforced the idea that the traditional assumptions regarding
acculturation for understanding how international students should navigate this country are no
longer holding true. Contemporary international students are staying connected to their past and
present but without making much effort to engage with the local community. Their engagement
with the academic realm seems to be strong and fulfilling, but in the social arena, it is at best
superficial and perfunctory, or in some participants, absent. Nikita, Rajiv, Victoria, April, and
Elif all have protracted conversations with either a family member, friend, or coworker on a
daily basis, sometimes briefly, but often for hours at a time. With their academic schedules taking up their entire day, whatever little time is left for socializing is often spent in a kind of “virtual reality” with friends and family from home. Nikita explained during her first interview how often she spoke to her parents:

Initially, I used to Skype with them almost every day when I came [home]. Now Skype is like maybe once a week, or once in ten days. But I call them up every day. I have taken the daily calling plan. If [I] have that, it’s very cheap, so I call because my mom told me, she’s like, “At least call me up every day so I can hear your voice.”

With the US immigrant population growing, these students easily find connections to their own heritage food, culture, and religion. For example, Elif and April are connected mostly to their own ethnic groups; Nikita and Rajiv live and hang out with Indian friends and eat mostly Indian vegetarian food. For some of my participants, staying connected to what is familiar seemed to be the norm, even though this “comfort zone” eventually prohibits new connections and relationships from forming. A sense of adventure and of new possibilities seems to be missing from today’s contemporary graduate international student.

With all the participants, I observed their stronger or weaker ties with friends back home. Michael and Jude were not as actively engaged in social networks across borders with their home country but still communicated regularly with family. Jude always sought adventure from the very beginning, and continues to strives for it throughout his journey. However, it has remained elusive after being in America and at CU for one year. Jude talked about his longing for adventure during his third interview:

I was looking forward to the adventure, really, of coming to a new place. And also at my age, it’s fun to try out another life, get a taste of a new life … [O]ne of my dreams is to
ride around the Americas—North, Central and South—and I was excited because I’d be in the same continent, and hoping to make some contacts in that area to help me get a motorcycle and start a journey, and ride around the whole country.

**Cross-cultural isolation after all these years.** My findings have reinforced those of research conducted decades ago, which reported cross-cultural isolation among international students. Researchers have found that if there is no or limited contact with the host community, international students can experience feelings of cross-cultural isolation, depression, and fear (Hull, 1978; Schram & Lauver, 1988). These students perceive that they are unable to adjust and fit into their new environment. At a Canadian university, a qualitative study found that African and Southeast Asian students who isolated themselves from the locals were more likely to face adjustment difficulties, socially, academically, and culturally (Heikenheim & Shute, 1986). In another study, the frequency of interactions with local students also enhanced the adjustment of international students (Zimmerman, 1995). In a more recent study, Trice (2004) surveyed 497 graduate international students at a research university to elucidate the benefits of interacting with Americans. The research findings concluded that graduate international students were better adjusted and involved with on-campus activities and American culture because they had close social interactions with American students (Trice, 2004).

Most participants in my study were culturally isolated. Despite their attempts to engage with the American students at Chardin University, most have not formed meaningful and significant relationships with their American peers. I believe that a strong contributing factor is their use of technology, which keeps them connected to familiar friends and family back home instead of forming new friendships and connections. On the part of the American students, there seems to be a degree of apathy when it comes to understanding or engaging in meaningful ways
with this population. Although American students are not bound morally to connect with graduate international students, the fact that they do not engage with them in significant ways indicates a lack of interest. Claire described her isolation on campus in her second interview:

I’m usually by myself because I don’t have friends that I can call and say, “Hey, do you want to get coffee?” or “Do you want to have lunch with me?” I guess I could do it, but I always feel that people are so busy and overwhelmed that I just don’t ask them, and I go and eat lunch by myself.

Graduate international students can add richness and cross-cultural understanding on college campuses, but this potential is most often squandered. Claire and April both stated that they eat lunch by themselves and can see their American peers engaged with each other, but no one reaches out to include them, even in the simple social setting of the lunchroom. Jose and his wife Alicia tried but gave up after several failed attempts. Jose, in his second interview, spoke of his efforts to connect with his American peers:

I don’t know because, at the beginning, we tried. I mean, it was one of the things we are here [for:] to network with people and all. But it’s like, the Americans are not very interested. I mean, they pay attention, they know that you are there in the classroom or cafeteria, because when I have to speak in class, they hear that I speak weird[ly] so they’ll turn and see me, but that’s it.

According to proven research, it is important to understand international students’ experiences because, unless they have harmonious relationships with the native population in the host country, their stay will lead to cross-cultural isolation (Kleinberg & Hull, 1979). Graduate international students are highly visible on campus by virtue of their differences in appearance, accents, and behavior, yet all too often, the campus community by and large acts as though they
were invisible (although the international office staff attempt to reach out to them). Graduate international students come from countries across the globe in order to better themselves through academic and work experiences. Thus, they need to have an environment where they are encouraged to engage with this population, which is mutually beneficial to the international student, the university, and the host country. During our first interview, April spoke about her disconnection from the campus community:

> No one took the time to get to know me personally. People didn’t even say hi to me in the halls. I didn’t say hi to them either. But there was no recognition—I was kind of invisible: visible but very invisible at the same time.

Researchers have shown that when international students spend more social time with Americans than in connecting with students from their own country, they adapt better to their host country (Surdam & Collins, 1984). Perhaps international students are reluctant to form friendships with American students because they find it difficult to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively. So instead, they turn inward: sticking to their own ethnic communities, either on campus or nearby. This cross-cultural or cultural disconnect is apparent on contemporary college campuses and has not changed after all these years. Ethnic enclaves still flourish, and graduate international students socialize with people who understand them best.

Bennett (1998) posited that intercultural understanding is complex and is needed not just by diplomats and the occasional traveler, but in all strata of a pluralistic society that holds out the expectation of tolerance and respects diversity. Monocultural communication, by contrast, is the norm and comprises common language, behavior, and values. These similarities allow people to predict and understand each other’s behavior. Whenever it is disrupted, however, the difference
in cultures causes friction and misunderstandings. As a result, social differences have historically been discouraged (Bennett, 1998).

During the group session, Elif stated the following about the cultural disconnect:

I knew five Turkish people from my undergraduate [years,] and they were already here when I first came, and I started hanging out with them…. But then you start living in a bubble with only Turkish people, and Chinese people [are also] living in a bubble. Even though, like, you think, it’s like, you know, other international students [are around], but still there are the people from your background, and you don’t get to meet a lot of, like, cross-culture with friends, like really friends who are not from your culture…. I think this creates, like, little bubbles around which [people don’t] interact with each other at all, and with the Americans maybe to a degree. This has been my experience, and I feel like most people had similar experiences.

Victoria finds comfort spending time with other South Americans with whom she can speak Spanish. She can have meaningful conversations with them because Spanish is connected to her emotional life, not just to her academic life. Victoria is glad to have gone back to her home country, where the warmth of her culture and the people matter, rather than being successful and making money in a country that is alien to her values. Both Cindy and Elif have found comfort in their own ethnic communities, but if not enough students from their own country are available, they default to spending time with other international students, with whom they find comfort in shared experiences.

Learning social cues is a huge element of understanding American (or any new) culture, and some participants acknowledged that it took years to understand them. Cindy felt that she had come here to experience the American culture, to learn, and engage with the local
community, comparing herself to a blank piece of paper. However, she did not succeed in this effort, as cultural and language barriers got in the way. Cindy reflected during her second interview on the superficiality of American friendships by stating the following:

In terms of identity, there was a period, a very short period, when I came to CU when I didn’t feel like I fit in. I think that period maybe lasted for three months. I said I wanted to be a piece of blank paper, but I was not; I just wanted to be a piece of blank paper. Still, I am Chinese, and sometimes I would use my Chinese thinking to judge what happened around me, and I would feel a little bit frustrated. For example, when I was in China, if I really like you and I want to make friends with you, I will try to be very intimate with you and talk [about] something very personal, something very deep, something very insightful. But here, when you like someone and you try to be close to that person, you find it very difficult. Not everyone is willing to talk heart to you. People here like to talk something very superficial: “Hey, how are you doing?” It’s just like, “Hey, how are you?”

Regardless of the length of time graduate international students spend in the United States, the need for meaningful social engagement, feeling connected to a community, and a sense of belonging remain important. According to April, communal empowerment should grow out of personal empowerment. If it does, one will gain a sense of grounding one’s experience in a larger context. By sticking with people from the same cultural background, one will get only a one-dimensional view of a much broader experience that could otherwise have been enriching, engaging, and educational. She believes that staying within one’s comfort zone, while fine at the beginning of a transition, is no substitute for getting out there and taking risks. Thus, April believes that raising the level of credible and critical consciousness is important. April contends
that she met with cultural differences at every point in her experience: how people related to each other, the food they ate, their sense of humor, and what was important to them, or not important. She had hoped to gain more access to the American way of life so that she could observe and connect with it, but she feels that Americans should also be making the same effort. During our interviews she expressed disappointment that it has always been a matter of her trying to understand their culture rather than them trying to get to know her. When people first meet her, they are fascinated with her because she is different. After she delivers her standard line to explain where she is from, she sees their interest wane, and they do not care to know anything beyond that.

The superficial elements of American social life also get in the way of international students’ adjustment. Research has shown that superficial relationships and interactions between international students and local students did not contribute to their development or enhance their global perspective (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). In my experience, participants from this study wanted to cultivate deep, meaningful relationships and conversations, which is not easy to do considering the busy lives of their American peers. As Michael observed, Americans are polite but not friendly. He was one of the only participants who actively sought engagement with his American peers and accepted the superficiality of it all, while at the same time craving honest friendships and relationships. Michael commented during his second interview:

What’s much more noticeable, especially compared to Germany, is obviously that people are very friendly and very open, but also very superficial and shallow at times. What I prefer to do is be rather honest with people … [T]hen people are very nice to you, and all of a sudden someone else turns around and doesn’t like you, and you realize they were
just nice for the sake of being nice but actually, they don’t like you. That is a very American thing in my opinion, a very cultural thing.

During our second interview, Jude commented on where the disconnect lies with his American peers:

Everyone is always on the edge of something or the other. Whereas in New Zealand, if you kick back and close your eyes for a little while, the world will still be the same when you open your eyes. If you do that here, you’ll probably fall off.

**Alcohol the main ingredient for socialization.** During the group session, the participants were able to articulate reasons for the cultural disconnection very well. There is a clear disconnect, they said, between what constitutes a good social experience for graduate international students versus for their American peers. Almost everyone complained that American students’ idea of fun always revolved around alcohol, and the participants agreed that meaningful conversations cannot take place when most of the group is drunk or getting intoxicated. During the group session, one participant commented as follows:

They just need a reason to drink. It’s like, pretty common. There will be alcohol. For me, it … took some [time] to get to know how to be with such kind of situations. But it was, and I expected them to drink, but not like one hundred percent of their time.

The idea that people need alcohol to have a good time, or even to have a meaningful conversation, is what is perceived as regular American engagement. There is a feeling that people from other countries also party and use alcohol, but that it is not the only way they socialize. They like to engage in alcohol-free events like salsa dancing or having coffee with friends to discuss their lives in more meaningful ways. In addition, the alcohol-soaked environment is not conducive to meaningful conversations or creating lifelong relationships,
which a majority of the participants have not found with their American peers. Here is what one participant said during the group session:

Well, I don’t drink very much; I’m not a big drinking person, even [with] friends back home. I mean, I go out, out dancing, that’s my thing when I go out; that’s the way I party…. I left this part of myself back home, and I don’t do the things that I like to do. And when I go out, I go out with people who like to drink, so it’s very boring for me, very boring for me, because it is not super fun. They drink, have one drink, two drinks, and then it’s 9:00, and it’s super early for me to go out first of all. By 9:00 PM they start drinking, and by 9:30 PM they’re all drunk. So you’re like, boys, girls, everyone—just drunk.

Participants shared the sentiment that social experiences have to be meaningful and insightful, and the one-dimensional interactions taking place at a bar drinking alcohol do not work for them. Also, going to a bar and watching a game for three hours is not something they find entertaining. In addition, these students do not share extracurricular activities and forms of entertainment with their American counterparts. Many participants have never experienced American sports and do not understand the basic rules of football, basketball, and hockey. Thus, they have to actively learn the rules of the sport to understand and engage in these events. Although some participants enjoy this experience, most stay away from sporting events. Athletic events are a huge part of CU campus life. Although several participants had attended and enjoyed going to a few games, just to check them out, they did not participate or engage in these sporting events in any sustained manner as their American peers did.

As these international students shy away from mainstream activities, they lack topics of conversation with which to engage with their American peers. This is their biggest challenge in
socializing with their American peers. Hence, conversations do not unfold naturally. Many international students do not watch sitcoms, and some listen to music and watch movies only from their own home countries. So when other students make references to certain shows, they share no connection or understanding. Several participants felt that learning was a continual process for them that went on during all their waking hours. In the classroom, they had to adapt to new forms of instruction and learning, and when they socialized, too much effort was involved in trying to connect with their American peers.

In terms of culture and simple social cues, some have adapted quickly, others after a few years spent observing and learning. Those who found the cultural divide unacceptable and too difficult have chosen to return home. However, it is a combination of two aspects—the cultural disconnect and the lack of any career prospects—that have forced international students from this study to return home after graduation.

**Formation of identity as a way of being or belonging.** This research has explored in detail how graduate international students develop their identities within the context of their transient and multifaceted lives. This identity formation has been explored by Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), who adopted a transnational social-field approach to studying social life that distinguishes between transnational social networks and the consciousness of being embedded in them. Such a distinction is important for understanding the experience of living simultaneity within and beyond the boundaries of a country. It also helps researchers develop methodologies for studying such experiences. The nation-state concept no longer captures the complex reality of interconnectedness in today’s world (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) have posited *ways of being* as actual social relations and practices, rather than the identities associated with their actions. In their system, individuals can
be entrenched in a social field but not identify with any cultural politics associated with that field. They may have the potential to act within or identify themselves with the social field at a given time, but may choose not to. *Ways of belonging*, in contrast, comprise practices that endorse identity and that entail a conscious connection with a particular group. *Ways of belonging* carry both an action and an awareness of identity that the action entails (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Participants in this study displayed different *ways of being* and *belonging* within a social field. For example, Victoria, Claire, Rajiv, and Nikita remained completely embedded in their home country as a *way of belonging*. Victoria longed for warm and meaningful relationships as she enjoyed in Paraguay; Claire identified herself as French, relished French cuisine, and stayed deeply connected to family and friends from home, wanting to return eventually. Claire described her identity during her second interview:

> Well, you know, I think I’ve never felt so French. Like I’ve never felt as French. I realize that sometimes with my boyfriend I say: “Oh, this is not how we do it in France,” or, “Let me tell you how we do it,” or “Let me show you like a French recipe or a French show that I really enjoyed.” So I’m always bringing this up.

Similarly, Nikita and Rajiv remained completely embedded in social networks in India. Nikita was disappointed that the Indian community at CU was so small. Michael, on the other hand, stayed connected to Germany as a *way of being*, identifying himself as from Germany. In many ways, he remained connected to the core nucleus of his family while choosing not to identify himself or connect with anything German on campus. As our interviews revealed, he wanted to get away as far as possible from other Germans, to immerse himself in and learn from American culture, and to develop new relationships. Jude also exemplified someone who stayed
connected to New Zealand and India as a *way of being*, although it became clear to me that he remained open to new possibilities, adventure, and cultural immersion in the United States.

Michael commented during his first interview:

> If some German guys said “we all get together every week,” I would say “no, I’m not coming.” I don’t want that. I want to have that experience of getting [to know] different cultures, and also the American culture, because that is one of the reasons why I’m here.

Going back to Levitt and Glick Schiller, when individuals engage in social relations and practices across borders, they enact transnational *ways of being*; when they express and focus on transnational factors, they are in the mode of transnational *ways of belonging*. *Ways of being* between home and host country are not linear but feature simultaneity of connection that moves back and forth and keeps changing direction. Transnational ties between home and host country influence each other (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). In a similar way, graduate international students have transnational ties that serve as *ways of being or belonging*. Their decision as to whether or not to stay longer is determined by their depth of desire to engage with the host community and their need to build social capital in a new country.

Graduate international students must comply with regulations in the host country. The more they have back home in terms of connections and social capital, the more likely they are to return. In this study, one might theorize, participants from developing countries such as India, Paraguay, Korea, Turkey, Mexico, and China would probably want to form a base here in the host country, while maintaining their ties back home, in order to be successful. Jose, Cindy, and Victoria have returned home after graduation, but all three did so owing to the lack of job opportunities. Elif and April’s experience held true to this theory, as both stayed on to do
doctoral work, would love to have a base in the United States, and are still hoping to do altruistic work in Turkey and Korea.

In contrast, participants from first-world countries, such as France and Germany, might seek a different future. If given the opportunity, Claire would work in the United States for a few years, but eventually would want to return home to France. This desire persisted even though she had an American boyfriend and social ties to this country for several years. Michael, on the other hand, wanted to prove himself anywhere else in the world but then if he had to eventually return to Germany.

Transnational migration studies make us alter and challenge the social process and social reproduction—the process of transferring certain aspects of society (such as class) from one generation to the next. Cultural reproduction, which is the transmission of cultural values and norms sustained over an extended period, often results in social reproduction. Social reproduction is an understudied aspect of transnational studies, many of which (especially those on globalization) focus merely on production and not on social reproduction (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). For example, migrants actively seek to engage or neglect ties with family and connections back home. Such transnational acts vary, and include numerous ways of being and belonging. For example, based on individual needs, a person might choose to stay connected or let some relationships slide; social reproduction occurs in social and cultural contexts (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002). Michael is a good example of someone who nurtured some relationships but had others he did not wish to continue. He stayed closely connected to his parents and a few other family members but did not wish to engage with his extended family or get overly close to people he would meet while living temporarily in the United States.
Ethnocentrism and xenophobia as it unfolded with participants. Race and ethnicity are important concepts to define as we move forward with this discussion. Race assumes that individuals can be divided into groups that have significant differences (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), whereas ethnicity refers to a subset of people who share common national, ancestral, cultural, immigration, and/or religious characteristics (Daniel, 2002). Elements of critical race theories have been entrenched in research on socioeconomic mobility. However, ethnographic studies were cited only infrequently in family science literature and in studies of structural influences on the inequality and social mobility of immigrant families of color (Burton, Bonilla-Silva, Ray, Buckelew, & Freeman, 2010).

As discussed throughout, most participants experienced a lack of connection with their American peers. Although none of the participants mentioned that this disconnect was the result of racism, racist elements are embedded in their experiences. For example, Elif constantly categorized her efforts to connect with Americans as a matter of difficult communications rather than miscommunications, and told me she has not learned the social cues as of yet (this after five years of being in the United States), although she did acknowledge it had become easier. As she told me during our second interview, “And I was thinking it’s going to warm up, the environment, I’m going to get a lot of friends. But then I realized it’s really not easy when you come from different cultures to warm up to each other.”

April was the only participant who could articulate succinctly the power dynamics in this country. She experienced feelings of isolation, silence, and loneliness during her time in the United States. According to her, these feelings are par for the course; it is how one deals with them that matters. In her third interview, April articulated how race and power work in the United States:
Well, people need to realize that they are walking into a very racialized country, and I would love them to develop more of a critical consciousness and [ability] to kind of look at their environment and actually be able to make sense of it, to kind of see the cultural, and the sociopolitical, and the kind of power dynamics that exist and be able to articulate what their positionality is, and say yes—I am kind of oppressed. I am kind of like, disadvantaged, and start from there, and be in power to make changes in their immediate and larger environment and not really see whatever negative experiences they are going through. It’s not that something is wrong with them, it’s actually just a normal part of this whole experience, of coming into this kind of a country, where definitely there [is] the dominant culture and this subordinate culture.

Ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism, by definition, is a form of exclusivity, or hostility towards different ethnic groups. The effects of globalization are far-reaching and have caused the world to be simultaneously unified and fragmented. The amalgamation of cultures and products across continents can often lead individuals to feel that they lack control and a sense of identity (Erdmann, 2008). Often, immigrant and minority groups do not clearly know where their loyalties lie: with their home country or the place they currently reside (Cornwell & Drennan, 2004). As a result, immigrants often have to construct dual identities: They have mixed emotions at leaving family members behind, which imbues them with a sense of loss and sadness, along with a parallel sense of immense accomplishment at being in a new host country. Their sense of loss propels them into identifying closely with their own heritage and language, spoken since childhood. Ethnocentric behaviors have long been studied among Caucasian Americans, but few studies have been done on levels of ethnocentric behavior within a given ethnic group (Erdmann, 2008).
Since the 1980s, intercultural competence has been identified as an important feature in the development of college students. Bennett (1986) developed a model for measuring intercultural sensitivity and identified two main orientations: ethnocentric and ethnorelative references. The ethnocentric orientation has three main concepts: denial, defensive retreat, and minimization. In this orientation, one’s own cultural experience is central. The ethnorelative orientation involves making meaning of one’s own cultural experience in the context of other cultures. It consists of acceptance, adaptation, and integration (Bennett, 1986).

The effects of both orientations played out among participants; they were not uniform across the group. Nikita and Rajiv fell into the ethnocentric category: They both expressed the desire to live and develop friendships only with other Indians, although I believe they were not close-minded about accepting cultural differences or relating to other ethnic groups. Nikita and Rajiv were both interested in developing friendships with other Indians, whom they chose to live with. Socially, they listened mostly to Indian music and watched Indian movies. Rajiv told me during our second interview: “What happens is, you talk with so many people, and you’re friends with so many people, but after some time, you know the common topics that you talk on are sort of limited … which is not true with Indians.” Both Rajiv and Nikita came from deeply religious backgrounds, and Rajiv seemed to have maintained his sense of identity. Nikita dedicated her room to several Hindu gods, whom she believed helped her combat loneliness. Nikita also often exhibited behaviors that were contradictory to her strict upbringing regarding dating and drinking. Claire sometimes displayed an ethnocentric orientation: She never lost an opportunity to mention to friends and acquaintances that she was French and felt that French cuisine helped her stay healthy and kept her grounded.
Cindy, Elif, Jose, and April shared a somewhat ethnorelative orientation. Although not overtly exhibiting the desire to communicate only with their own ethnic group, they ended up eventually connecting with people who shared their cultural background. Victoria, who had been in this country for six years and was married to a German, had friends from multiple backgrounds. Even so, she stated that she was looking for friendships that were meaningful, just as she had when she was back home in Paraguay. Michael and Jude were more like outliers in this regard. They shared an ethnorelative orientation, but on the far end of the spectrum when compared with Cindy, Elif, Jose, and April, in that they were both seeking novel experiences and friendships. Jude always first identified himself as a New Zealander before stating that he was born and raised in India. Michael, on the other hand, expressed the desire to hang out with other Americans in order to gain exposure to their culture.

All my participants identified a problem on campus: that their American peers were not interested in prolonged and meaningful relationships with them. Thus, they were at the receiving end of ethnocentric behavior towards graduate international students.

**Xenophobia.** Bartalome and Macedo (1997) deconstruct cultural conditions that have given rise to an assault on undocumented immigrants, the concept of affirmative action, African Americans, and other racial and ethnic groups. It is the opinion of these authors that ideological factors have led highly educated individuals to blindly follow and believe in narrowly held conservative views, as portrayed by the media. In their scheme, isolated individuals are not the source of racism and high levels of xenophobia. Instead, these phenomena represent a dominant society waging a war on the poor and on people of certain ethnicities. Members of a particular race, language group, or class are second-class citizens and can be scapegoated as national enemies responsible for the ills of society (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997).
Xenophobia, by definition, is the deep-rooted fear of or hostility towards foreigners. Although none of the participants claimed outright that they were experiencing this phenomenon, some of their experiences could signify that elements of this cluster of behaviors were in play. April, who had been in this country since high school, still found it difficult to join conversations in a group. The gift of speaking English so as to naturally and seamlessly join a group and be given “airtime” still had not been perfected. I have also experienced xenophobia in the classroom. I still find it difficult to jump in and get my point across. Whenever I join in the conversation, it seems that I have to raise my hand, even in a small group, to be given the opportunity to speak. American students start speaking without raising their hand and are allowed into the conversation as a matter of course. Elif, Jose, and Cindy all spoke to the difficulty of communicating because of their accents and syntax, both socially and in the classroom. Cindy’s need to speak out boldly lest her voice not be heard was a lesson she learned from her experiences in this country. Within the purview of xenophobia, an in-group and an out-group mentality prevails.

Most participants (except for Michael) saw themselves as outsiders looking into another world, into which they were allowed only infrequently. The concept of superficiality within American peers’ socialization patterns did not go unnoticed by any participant. The desire to fit in on the part of Elif, Cindy, Victoria, and Jude was apparent throughout their interviews. Nikita, Claire, and Rajiv maintained a hold on their individual identities, as did Michael, although he believes he can easily fit in with his American peers because he is from Germany.

Lee and Rice (2007) found in their research that international students face several difficulties, ranging from being ignored to verbal insults and confrontations (although students from Western countries faced fewer of these hardships). One of the concerns researchers from
the study raised was whether the positive effects and goodwill generated during international students’ stay in the United States were being overridden by these persistent negative interactions (J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007). Scholars have argued that international students are viewed as handicapped, deficient, lacking in English language skills, and unfamiliar with the American educational system (Goodwin & Nacht, 1983; Mestenhauser, 1983; Paige, 1990). Unfavorable experiences with the host country community have negative effects on international students’ psychological well-being (Schram & Lauver, 1988). If host nationals harbor feelings of animosity or prejudice against international students, then significant consequences result for international relationships (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001).

Crush and Ramachandran (2010) contend that the influx of people from developing to developed countries has led to a growing resentment of immigrants. Their study uncovers the fact that xenophobia is strongly entrenched in developed countries but is also prevalent in developing ones. Therefore, without a coordinated effort and recognition by international and regional constituents, xenophobia will continue to undermine the rights of these migrants (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010). Bartolome and Macedo (1997) contend that there is a general false perception among some people in the United States that there are no jobs for citizens because of the large number of immigrants, specifically, illegal immigrants. Calls that we need to take our country back from Mexicans are an indication that as we deconstruct ethnicity and race, they appear to play an important role in reproducing undemocratic structures of power relations. These structures invariably break down along racial, ethnic, and class lines (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997). To illustrate, Jose noticed that people treated him differently in restaurants because he is a Mexican, though he takes it in stride and chalks it up to being a part of the
American experience. Here is what he said during our third interview with regard to being treated differently:

Well, as a student, sometimes the people here are very tough with the Mexican—I mean in the stores and restaurants. If they know that you are a tourist, and they can know because of the language … they don’t treat you the same, I guess.

According to Bartolome and Macedo (1997), it is not necessary to understand how cultural differences are structured with behavior patterns. However, it is important to understand the anger and tension that come from cultural differences coexisting in the context of uneven power relations. Culture is strongly linked with language, but it is rarely examined in an effort to advance multicultural understanding. For instance, there is scant understanding about the ways in which the English language can subordinate and distance people that we study through it. Therefore, we need to better grasp how English masks the ideological centering of White culture and places all other ethnic groups outside its realm of study. According to these authors, the English language is used to convey dominant “White ideology,” thereby fostering social and cultural inequities. Using language as our focus, we can see how American society demonizes the “other” as though it were an enemy and responsible for all the ills of society (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997).

The feeling that something is wrong with them, whether it was their language or communication style, was common among participants, including Nikita, Elif, and Cindy. Their initial cultural shock of being in a different country and adjusting to the vagaries of its culture was felt strongly. Nikita, after a rough first semester transitioning, refocused her energies on what was really important: She realized that the main reason for her being in the country was her academics. Cindy, in her second interview, articulated it perfectly:
It’s like frustrating. Initially I thought, Is there any problem with my communication skills? It’s just like I meet this person, I want to talk further to him or her, but he or she kind just of stopped there, not continue any more … they are just not interested.

Claire related that, back in 2007 when she was studying in the Midwest, the common opinion about France and French people was very negative. There were several classroom debates that made Claire uncomfortable, and an incident at a house party, where her friend was told that if she wanted to speak Spanish she should go back home to South America. Several such incidents made Claire uneasy about the overall climate on campus. During her first interview, she reflected as follows:

A couple of times I just felt uncomfortable going to parties and hearing what people had to say about what was going on in the world, or what was going on in their country and about … politics, different things, social issues in the United States. Or racism sometimes, actually. I remember my Argentine friend—I wasn’t there when it happened—but she went to a party, and she was speaking in Spanish with a Mexican American. He was there at this party, hanging out and having fun, and they were speaking in Spanish, and then this lady came, and she said, ”Oh, who do you think you are? You are at our house. It is an American house. Why do you two speak Spanish together? If you want to speak Spanish, go back to your country. Go back to a third-world country.” Weird stuff like that.

Throughout the group session, the topic of language kept coming up. Accents are also a factor, and the participants realized that they always received a different response when they speak on the telephone. One participant made a recommendation to avoid phone interviews, reasoning that it is one thing for American friends not to understand us, but if an employer has
difficulty understanding the accent, it might cost a job opportunity. During the session, one participant mentioned the following:

All my friends are internationals; I mean, all of us are from different countries and locales, so I am actually getting an international experience, which many people come here crave.… Another thing is: Don’t ask personal questions, mind your own business. I like that because nobody’s asking me what I’m doing. So this privacy thing initially irritated me, but then, now it’s like I’ve gotten used to it. Even if it’s like a very close friend, per se, you have certain, you have your limits, you cannot go beyond that…. It’s not like the way it was back home, where you can have deep conversations—you can’t.

In terms of conversation topics, international students think it is a slippery slope to talk about politics, and they normally shy away from it. One participant during the group session stated that she normally stays silent because there is so much tension on the political front.

There were many cultural norms that most participants followed: one was not to engage in political discussions, and another was to stick to superficial conversations and mind their own business. One of the participants during the session felt that American society is very private, and that people keep their business to themselves, so this person had learned not to share private matters with others. During the session, one of the participants mentioned the following:

That’s usually not a topic for me. Like one of our professors keeps talking, you know. So that’s something I’ve tried to sort of understand: What are the common topics? Even when I’m working right now in [the] office, they talk about certain things [and] I am not aware of who they are talking about, so I just don’t say anything. I’m just there and keep mum because I don’t want to say something about someone I have absolutely no idea
[of], being that I have strong political views. They say Obama is an idiot, you should sort of keep quiet. My landlady asked: I think Obama is an idiot, what do you think?

**Issues with personal power, rights, and social capital.** Power relations permeate multiple settings in the lives of international students, just as they do for migrants. Similarly, the ease with which graduate international students gain entry to the country is determined by whether they are from developing or western countries. The law goes beyond the local authorities: It expands from the power that is legitimized in social fields (Foucault, 1980). Migrants in multiple social fields experience different layers of power and authority as they navigate back and forth between home and host country (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Participants in this study hope to gain power and respect in either their home or host country by earning advanced educational degrees and gaining enhanced work experience. The issues of social mobility and social capital as they apply to the participants are interesting to tease out. The very fact that the participants made this long and complex journey and paid full tuition reflects, at least on the surface, that all of them come from a wealthy background. To even get a student visa in order to start their journey, participants have to show financial stability and prove that they will return to their home country. They have to show substantial sums of money in the bank, own land or property, and have strong family connections and responsibilities, thereby ensuring their return home.

According to the most recent Open Doors Report (2009), international students and their families contribute $17.9 billion yearly to the US economy (IIE, 2009). The US government does not subsidize any part of an international student’s education. Student expenditures include tuition, cost-of-living expenses, and the costs for family dependents, who often reside with students during their stay in the United States. Primary sources of funding come from personal
contacts and family (67%); the balance is paid for by home governments, US colleges and universities, and a small contribution from the US government (IIE, 2008).

I asked all the participants how they funded their US education. What came through in their answers were differing avenues to get to this phase of their lives. Jude, Michael, Jose, Cindy, and Rajiv each worked for four to eight years before coming to Chardin University, saving up money from previous jobs and, in most cases, supplementing it with loans from the government and parents. Nikita, Claire, Elif, April, and Victoria were all funded by their parents, at least at the beginning of their tenure as graduate students. In addition, several participants were working on campus to help subsidize their living expenses (on a student visa, international students can work up to 20 hours per week on campus). Elif, April, and Claire currently work on campus as teaching or research assistants to earn extra money. Several participants, such as Victoria, Nikita, and Michael, worked at unpaid internships. Rajiv was the only participant who was able to get a paid internship during his second year of the MBA program. Under certain circumstances, some students are entitled to Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which allows international students on F1 visas to work at local companies in their second year of an MBA program.

Family wealth and social capital varied among participants; for example, Jose and Victoria came from families that were wealthy and politically well connected. Nikita and Rajiv seemed to come from families of modest means, but they did not directly speak about family wealth. Michael spoke of his father not being highly educated, and commented that he was making more money than his father had when he worked at KPMG. Claire, Elif, and Cindy seemed reluctant to talk about financial troubles, but they were worried about starting to earn a living on their own without relying on their parents. Jude appeared to be the only one who came
from a single-parent home and who had spoken of a bond he built with his mother based on adversity. The two of them had survived difficult times, as Jude’s mother tried to shield him from the scrutiny that came from a single mother raising a little boy in Bombay.

All the participants are living on modest means, at least while they are in the United States. They all are living off their savings or a loan from their parents or government and are able to afford their living expenses by sharing apartments, either with roommates or a spouse. April mentioned that she could have benefited from a higher stipend, and the need remains for healthier stipends so that graduate international students can rely less on their savings and loans from family or government. Whatever their origins, the journeys of these ten participants have only just begun: They have a long road ahead of them, and even the doctoral students are still trying to make ends meet after being in this country for several years.

The participants’ stories show that it is not a straightforward matter to say that, if they are from the Western world (Michael, Claire, and Jude) they automatically occupy positions of power, whereas if they are from developing countries (Victoria, Nikita, Cindy, Jose, Rajiv, April, and Elif), they are disadvantaged players within the power structure. However, it is fair to say that the participants from this study have yet to gain a voice in which to talk about their rights as students, which could help them improve their experiences at Chardin University. The concept of graduate international students’ rights as such never seemed to arise throughout our conversations. The participants never once complained about their experiences or the infringement of their rights as students. If anything, they tended to blame themselves for not being prepared or ready for the next step. Their lack of having a voice to talk about their rights, when compared with American students, is striking. In my 19 years of experience working with students (graduate and
undergraduate) at three major universities, it is a regular event for students to let it be known that their needs are not being met and that their rights are being violated.

**Issues with immigration.** When one reviews the profile of the participants, it is apparent that they all come from reasonably well-off socioeconomic backgrounds, enabling them to afford the journey to the United States and pay full tuition. Having said that, one should not minimize the struggles that their families, or they themselves went through to get to the United States to further their education. These demographics indicate that CU is attracting well-off graduate international students who can pay their way for a good education. All participants experienced a fairly simple and straightforward path to getting their student visas.

How does their situation compare with the plight of other immigrant classes coming to America? According to Bartolome and Macedo (1997), the illegal immigrant is a public enemy, strengthening claims that there are no jobs for Americans due to immigration. As anti-immigrant sentiment grows stronger in the United States, there is no guarantee that the INS will be able to protect the rights of human beings documented as aliens or illegals. This dehumanizing process has been met with either silence or rancorous debate from politicians on all sides of the issue (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997). Although the visa and immigration process for this study’s graduate international students entering the United States was *pro forma*, several restrictions were imposed during their stay as students.

For example, graduate international students have to register with the office of international students as soon as they arrive; they have to be entered into the SEVIS database, an online tracking system of all visitors and international students in the United States. Graduate international students cannot change advisors or majors without being in contact with the international student office. Nor can they leave the country and return freely without proper
signatures on their I-20 forms. Graduate international students can work only 20 hours per week, and only on campus. They have difficulty getting a driver’s license and other forms of identifying documentation. Claire had to take additional exams in order to teach in Massachusetts after graduation. Jose and his wife Alicia would have had to get special licenses to practice law, and then have their practice limited to the states of New York and California. Interestingly, none of the participants spoke of the inconvenience of these limitations but accepted them as the normal way of being and operating in the United States. Although there were few distinctions among participants to indicate the difficulty or ease of entering the United States owing to nationality, they were all frustrated by the dearth of H1B Visas to temporarily work in this country.

**Conflicting gender roles and political involvement.** Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) contend that migrants may hold different gender, race, and class statuses in their home and host countries while overlapping within transnational social fields. Understanding these multiple statuses helps us to elucidate the social processes these migrants go through. Immigrant women often differentiate themselves as being quite timid in terms of demanding rights and recognition. Migrants of color who are poor might single out their struggles from those of the African American community, often reinventing the wheel rather than joining in the efforts and struggles of other groups (Waters, 1999). Sometimes migrant workers in their new home create wider gender differences than they had in their home country (Caglar, 1995). This contradictory behavior by migrants and immigrants is to the result of the multiple social positions they hold (Pessar & Mahler, 2003).

As an illustration, Nikita from India entered into social fields differently than she did when she was in her home country. She started dating and drinking alcohol after coming to
America, both behaviors that were unacceptable for women in India. Her contradictory behavior resulted from the freedom that was suddenly available as a result of her being away from her parents. Nikita chose to shed part of her cultural identity to cope with the transition. For example, she engaged in dating and drinking, which were culturally unacceptable in her family, without her parents’ knowledge or consent. Nikita reflected on her conflicting feelings during her second interview:

My parents are very god-fearing, very religious. And my father has never smoked, never drunk, nothing. So drinking, like, is taboo back home, I mean, for me. So I cannot afford to—they cannot come to know I drink over here really. Or even like partying and stuff: They cannot afford to come to know all that, because they are not used to that kind of a culture.

Men who have higher positions and status in their own home country are more likely to hold political connections and identities there. Both women and men may hold conservative positions regarding family values, which may be linked to their class back home. Some migrants might have higher status back home but work as laborers in their host country. Women might use income earned abroad to improve their social standing back home (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). For example, Nikita was very keen not to give up her desire to get an advanced degree in the United States. Although she struggled immensely during her first year to adjust to the new environment, she was determined not to go back home without completing her degree.

Graduate international students’ desire (or unwillingness) to engage in transnational spaces is also apparent as they try to figure out what their future will be like. Several of the participants were closed to the idea of finding a spouse in this country. Nikita, Cindy, and Rajiv believed that having the same cultural background was important to them and their families.
Rajiv was more open to the idea of having an arranged marriage back home and went as far as to consider the type of primary education his children would receive were he to settle in this country. Nikita was dating Sailesh, someone she knew from India; although her parents were unaware of this relationship, she expected problems to arise on account of religious differences.

Transnationalism also evaluates the variations in political activism between migrants in home and host country. Although such activism did not play a huge role in graduate international students’ lives, political decisions made in their home or host country did play a part in their desire to study abroad. In this study, two participants were politically connected to their home country: Victoria and Jose both had family members who were prominent political figures. Victoria’s uncle was a well-known farmer in Paraguay and a victim of kidnapping, which affected Victoria’s reality and her future. Jose went back to Mexico after completing his LLM degree to help his uncle be elected governor of Tamaulipas, but his uncle was tragically assassinated a few days before the elections. Hence, just like migrants, a significant number of graduate international students are affected by political situations that impact upon their family and home country. To wit, Elif’s desire to find a new life away from the tensions between the Kurds and the Turks came through clearly throughout our interviews. She came here in search of a free and just society and believes she has found that in America.

All participants stated that their countries’ governments did not offer incentives to return home, either financially or politically. Instead, their reasons to return home were driven mainly by the recession, lack of job opportunities in the United States, and the desire to reunite with family and friends.

Religion a strong factor. Transnational scholars contend that transnational acts are not unidirectional or bimodal; instead, there is a constant flow back and forth of cultural and social
interactions between home and host country. Transnational identity formation can be found in economic, political, religious, and cultural practices that propel migrant incorporation and transnational connectivity; this subject has been explored and researched extensively (Kayle, 2001; Levitt, 2001; M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998).

Religion and immigration are closely linked in transnational literature because immigrants form religious institutions in their host country, and it seems that, for future immigrant children, there is a loss of motive to form new institutions. (Levitt, 2003). The study of religion in transnational literature provides insight into migrants’ ways of being or belonging (Levitt, 2003). Although religion, as it affects migrants’ ability to gain a political foothold in their home country, does not really apply to graduate international students, it is relevant for understanding abiding connections to religious practices in host and home country.

In my research, some participants were deeply religious and connected to their faith, some merely spiritual, and a few were atheists. Rajiv was a deeply religious Hindu and maintained several religious practices such as fasting, celebrating auspicious occasions through formalized prayers and songs, and being a strict vegetarian. He performed religious prayers during Ganesh Chaturthi, one of the largest Hindu festivals in India, using Skype with his family. April identified herself as a Christian Korean woman, deeply religious, and connected to God. Her relationships in this country were strongly associated with her Christian church and her church sisters. She also maintained connections with her church back home in Korea, even though her parents had moved to the Czech Republic when she was very young. Cindy, who came from China, adhered to communist beliefs by not practicing any organized religion. Michael and Claire were both atheists, strongly believing in freedom of religion and practice. Nikita missed the religious
rituals from her native India. Her family was very god-fearing, and when Nikita was a child, her whole upbringing and socialization centered around going to one temple or another with her parents. Her house was a shrine to various Hindu gods, and her father performed several prayer ceremonies, called *poojas*, at home. Nikita was able to transcend her loneliness and negative start in the United States by putting up pictures of deities all over her room. She found comfort in these images, which helped her through difficult and trying times. Migrants often enact rituals that help them recover their past through translocative and transtemporal spaces (Tweed, 1999).

Nikita during her second interview described this process best:

I mean, they did want us to believe in God and all that, but it was not like we were forced to pray to God every day or something that. It was just like, before any exam or whatever, the few prayers that I know I say. I bow down to God, yes, and when I came here initially, when I was going through depression and stuff, I even used to come to church and I used to just sit there and pray. And I even cried in church once. If I am, like, really low or whatever, I just sit down in front of the idols. I can cry, and I can just do that. I find that more helpful than going out getting drunk or whatever.

Institutions of higher education need to appreciate the heterogeneous nature of this population. These students come from all walks of life, and as university administrators, we do not engage them or even know how they stay connected with everyday religious practices. Their persistence and perseverance in this country often depend on preserving these connections, because other forms of engagement are less than satisfactory. CU, being a Catholic Jesuit institution, for example, is interested in students’ formation and spiritual development yet gives no attention to this aspect of graduate international students’ lives. These students spend several years in the United States without university staff becoming aware of the breadth and depth of
the different faiths they practice. All the participants stated that the religious aspects of this
institution did not bother them; some (like Michael) were relieved that they did not have to
engage in any spiritual way. Others did not really think of CU as a religious institution in any
significant way, taking into account the churches that are fixtures around the campus. Michael,
during his second interview, talked about his beliefs:

Yes, it bugs me that you’re not asked. But first and foremost, I’m not religious at all. I
don’t believe in God—nothing. Atheist is—I’m not sure about the definition. Some
people say that atheists try to oppose religion; I don’t do that. The thing is, I don’t
believe in anything, but I don’t care if people do. I think as long as it makes them happy,
go for whatever it is; just don’t bug me about it. That is basically my understanding of
religion. And my parents are religious, but I don’t know, I guess I’m not that conforming
to social and societal expectations. Also, I guess my background in Germany [is an
influence;] Germany is not overall a religious place.

**Assimilation has racist overtones.** Transnationalism as a theoretical framework
assumes that migrants’ experiences are a complex fabric woven of various strands of home and
host country, rather than a simple matter of assimilation. In part, transnationalism is a rebuttal of
the incomplete, and somewhat racist perspective, of assimilation theories. A recent study of
Latin immigrants in the United States found that older, well-educated immigrants, compared
with recent arrivals, maintained stronger ties with their home country; these findings also
contradict conventional assimilation theories (Portes, Escobar, & Arana, 2009). Recent research
on second-generation migrants continues the debate on assimilation, which states that the classic
transnational migration is a short-lived, first-generation phenomenon. Other researchers have
spoken of new forms of transnational connections, which encompass the youth in both lands (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2003).

Assimilation is a one-sided concept that places the burden of adjustment totally on the international student. In theory, graduate international students should reach out and engage more with the people and institutions in this country; because they have taken the journey, the responsibility should fall primarily on them to adjust to their new environment. However, my research and that of others points to the need for a better give-and-take between the local community, the institution, and the country. Several participants I interviewed believed themselves to be deficient in some way owing to their language skills, or flawed in their way of thinking—that is, because they differ from the norm. Often international students feel that they must change their style of clothes, food, and religious observations to better blend and fit in with the dominant culture. These students, although different from their American counterparts, are intelligent, academically outstanding, and possess great ability to sustain themselves through adversity with very little support and guidance. All the participants in this study found their way through difficulties during their tenure, and have by no means failed or even faltered academically. Their level of persistence and dedication to their original goal of getting an advanced degree remain fulfilled. April reflected during her third interview:

I thought there was something flawed in me—that people are not reaching out to me, that they don’t like me, that something, whatever was wrong, was just with me. It was just that I’m not White enough, that I’m not outgoing enough, that I’m not something, you know. But when I really started to unpack this whole racial dynamic and all these things, I realized that maybe I was kind of a victim in some sense, and just really working through the whole grief about that: like how I was the marginalized one, how I was the
disadvantaged person. It helped me to kind of grieve through that and then to rise out of it.

This study has brought to light the identity similarities and differences and the unique features of these ten participants’ social experiences. According to Khagram and Levitt (2008), this is the task of empirical transnationalism: to focus on describing, classifying, and categorizing transnational dynamics and acts between bounded forms, over space and time. Whereas world or global studies literature tends to equate transboundary phenomena with integration and worldwide isomorphism, global scholars do not capture cross-border agents and interactions on a worldwide scope. Instead, they assume a level of convergence and homogenization, which in reality does not occur. Transnational phenomena remind us of the socioeconomic contexts in which they occur, allowing us to make generalizations, but do not erase critical shades of differences between individuals, knowledge, and cultural practices (Khagram & Levitt, 2008). Even though graduate international students face adversity and complex situations, they seem to be able to develop a strong sense of identity. Nikita, Claire, Rajiv, and April remained strongly connected to their home country, with which they will always identify themselves. Michael and Jude identified themselves as citizens of the world, open to new possibilities and opportunities.

In order to develop a strong, newly crystallized identity, international students have to ride the tide of feeling isolated and different yet somehow come to terms with their cultural differences. Fighting them, or trying to make adjustments to the extent that they lose their identity, is not something any educational institution would want to encourage. Nikita, Elif, Cindy, and Claire seem to have retained their sense of identity even through an intense period of adjustment. For Nikita, she did so while trying to stay above water to combat homesickness and
loneliness; for Claire, it meant making sure that her French identity was never lost. For Elif, it meant making adjustments in order to communicate adequately with her American peers, even if that meant rarely revealing her Kurdish or Muslim identity. Elif, during our second interview, stated the following:

I think, like, friendship-wise, I made my way through. And I was okay, like, having an adaptation period. For some people, it is not very easy to adapt to a new environment, but I think I made myself aware before, and I was patient to be comfortable with some of the stuff. And I think it worked out well at the end. So I know some of my other friends were really complaining about some of the other stuff, so they were like, right back to Turkey whenever they were finished. So I think I have more patience and strength and, like, will to continue.

Academic Experience

Academic experiences involve studying, grades, persistence, and achievement. The themes that emerged among my participants were unwavering academic achievement and persistence, the need for professional advising and career mentorship, and managing transitions on their own.

Unwavering academic achievement and persistence. I found adult development theory effective for investigating the transitional aspects of graduate international students as they reenter the academic environment. I discovered that some graduate international students may need more support than others, but as a whole, they are a more goal-oriented and mature group of people. Whereas all the participants had to make adjustments in the classroom in terms of participation and learning styles, some had more experience doing so than others. For example Victoria, Michael, and April all completed their undergraduate degrees in the United
States. They were used to the grading format and had already adjusted to the academic environment. Some people are never able to fully adjust, however. For example, April still spoke of her struggles connected to participating in a group setting and of her inability to join naturally in a conversation with Americans. Often she does not have the energy to fight for airtime and simply lets the dominant group win. April explained during her second interview:

> Only from my Master’s program onwards have I really unpacked my experience. I think it was just that[,] in all the institutions, I was really invisible in [what] were all predominantly White institutions, and I always felt excluded from that group. No one tried to pull me in. I still have trouble when I walk into a room and there is a meeting, even in class, and it’s all White people, and they are engaging. I have a hard time speaking up, and I have a hard time feeling included in that group.

According to Lynch and Chickering (1989), adult learners have a wider range of individual differences than younger students, such as multiple demands and responsibilities in terms of time, energy, emotions, and roles; more varied past experiences and an array of ongoing experiences; more concern with practical application than with pure theory; greater self-determination; and a greater need to cope with transitions. Added to these characteristics, international students vary considerably in their language proficiencies, cultural beliefs, and religious practices (McIntire & Willer, 1992), making them more differentiated from one another. The similarities that exist between adult learners and international students makes adult learning theory a useful tool for understanding graduate international students’ development and experiences.

Claire, Elif, Michael, Cindy, Victoria, Jose, and April all learned English as their second language; only Jude, Nikita, and Rajiv learned English as their first language in high school.
Regardless, all participants have thick regional accents and use variant syntax, except for April, who has mostly lost her accent because she has been in the United States since high school. Victoria feels that she can express herself better when she speaks Spanish and used it as a way to stay connected to home and friends. Victoria confided during our first interview, “So I think it is tied to my emotions: I feel like I can express what I’m feeling better in Spanish. But I think [for] writing essays, academically I’m better in English.”

Elif, Cindy, and Jose struggled significantly to master the English language. After being here for five years, Elif had learned how to communicate well and was able to act as mediator for other international students in the classroom. Jose (whose English was the weakest among all the participants) had to pay extra attention to lectures: He could either listen closely to them or take notes, but he could not do both. Jose reflected in his second interview:

It’s very difficult. In the beginning, it was scary because I was ashamed because I was afraid of my English…. So the professor didn’t even know that I was there. So I’m one more JD, if you want to see it like that. And in my case, [with] most of the professors, I have to pay a lot of attention to what he’s talking about, and I can’t write [it down]: I can pay attention or I can write, but I can't do both. So that’s one of the more difficult things for me, but I guess now I’m better. It’s like any activity you’re getting used to, and now it’s not that difficult.

All the participants, although having different needs in the classroom, survived and persisted on their own. They transitioned into the university environment with only limited guidance or support, besides the initial orientation offered by the international student office. Some schools at Chardin University, like the School of Management, tried to acculturate graduate international students through mandatory classes that could not be waived. These were
so basic that students like Michael felt that it was insulting to be required to take them and that it was an unnecessary waste of time and money.

According to Tinto (1998), the more involvement and engagement students have with faculty and peers within their institution, the more likely they are to persist in their studies. Social and academic integration are strongly linked to persistence, although, taken separately, they influence and facilitate student persistence in different ways (Tinto, 1998).

Through all the transitional difficulties and distractions that a new environment brought them, all the participants were able to stay focused on their academics. Getting bad grades was never an option; in fact, to many high achievers, the only acceptable grade was an A+, and anything less seemed mediocre and unacceptable. Victoria spoke about how crushed she was when she received two A– grades. According to Rajiv and Jude, academics came easy to them, leaving spare time in which to engage in other activities. Claire, Victoria, and Nikita never stumbled academically, even during difficulties they encountered during their time in the United States. A prime example is Claire, who missed a substantial part of the fall semester because of her illness yet managed to submit all her requirements and graduate on time. In fact, she represented her graduating class during the commencement ceremony.

Elif wants to be a faculty member when she finishes her PhD; her father is a faculty member in Turkey, and she would very much like to follow in his footsteps. She would possibly set up a base in the United States but be affiliated with a Turkish institution. Cindy did volunteer work during the one year of her Master of Science in Finance program. Although it was not a graduation requirement, she wanted to make sure that she maintained a “loving heart” and did not become too cold, concerned only with making money and climbing the corporate ladder.
She also stated that she had changed her style to ensure that she participated more actively in the classroom. Cindy stated the following during her second interview:

And also in class, you are encouraged to speak out because of the grading of participation. So sometimes when I go to the class, when the professor says “hands up,” even if I’m not ready, I have to, because I don’t want my participation grading as zero. So I have to raise my hand, and then while I am raising my hand, I quickly organize my thought[s]. I just organize my thought while I am speaking out, so it is a great experience. I know how to express my thinking and how to let others know my thinking process. Sometimes your answer does not matter; what matters is your thinking process. That is part of the change I have made on myself. And another change is that I think I’m, no doubt, I’m more independent.

April has persisted through her high school days in Michigan, going on to complete her undergraduate studies at an all-female university and take a Master’s degree from one of the oldest and most prestigious schools in the Boston area. She has made it to her second year of a doctoral program at CU with an impressive academic portfolio, yet through all these transitions, she has persisted largely on her own, without significant support from any of the institutions she attended. Faculty and administrators from her high school overlooked her, so she relied on her parents and sister for support and encouragement. April managed to keep up her grades, despite feelings of loneliness and lack of friendships, through sheer persistence and self-imposed expectations. April, during her second interview, stated the following:

I think they’ve always had high expectations. They weren’t the type of parents, those typical Asian parents that are down your throat, like, “Do your work,” “Get A’s,” “How come you got one B?” They were never like that, but there were high expectations. I
think they kind of assumed we would do well, and there was implicit pressure, maybe. I
don’t think I could live with failure myself.

**Professional socialization and mentorship.** A brief look at the graduate student
socialization model underscores the importance of social experiences as participants adjust to
new environments. I did not use this model extensively in this study, because this model is
intended to help understand aspects of professional socialization and mentorship, which were not
my predominant focus. Nonetheless, certain aspects of this model help strengthen the argument
that institutional members, such as faculty and administrators, should pay greater attention to
graduate student experiences. According to Weidman et al. (2001), socialization can be
described as a continuum of experiences; some socialization patterns are common among
students, and others perceive these experiences differently. Many faculty members found it
difficult to deal with cultural differences and interaction patterns; thus, they tended to
concentrate on academic themes rather than socializing international students to the norms of
their profession. As a result, international students have turned to their peers to help adjust to the
new norms and culture in the United States (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Universities are well advised to find a better way to connect with graduate international
students to better socialize them into this country. Many graduate international students come to
America not knowing anyone, arrive alone, search for apartments the very next day, and have
limited resources to help them with their transition. They arrive, survive, persist, graduate, and
look for jobs with a minimum of guidance or intervention from the institution. Within the
university that was studied here, some schools manage to pay attention to classroom and group
dynamics. For example, the MBA program makes sure that group projects are set up with a mix
of international and American students, an arrangement that forces the two contingents to work
together rather than relegating each to their own communities.

Chardin University does not provide professional career counseling geared towards the
reality of graduate international students getting jobs. Most of the career counseling is geared
towards resume writing and how to interview well, which really do not matter if there are no jobs
after graduation. Career discernment, which could be provided by mentorship, is also lacking, as
several of the participants told me. Jude had been trying to discern the purpose of as well as
justify his coming to the United States, but so far, he feels he has wasted his time. He has begun
to think that he might not be able to use the material learned in his Master’s program in any
substantive way in the IT world. Also, he fears that, because he has left the real world behind, in
a manner of speaking, it would be difficult to reintegrate into that life. His uncertainty was
palpable during each of our interviews, and the following excerpt from our second interview
clearly reveals it:

Actually, come to think of it, I guess maybe saying “hole” is probably not describing it
accurately; maybe shallow quicksand. You’re not totally sunk … but you’re a little bit
stuck. You are trying to get your legs out and walk across it, but your legs get stuck.

The poor economy and the lack of jobs cannot be blamed on CU. However, several
students felt that they should have been told, prior to coming to the United States, that companies
were not hiring international students. Internships are a requirement for several programs and a
part of their curriculum, so the lack of even unpaid internships has caused these transplants much
stress and anxiety. In addition, some internships require prior work experience, which young
participants like Nikita did not have when she first arrived in this country. Cindy and Jose had to
leave after graduation because they could not find jobs and had difficulty even setting up
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

interviews. This experience proved extremely frustrating to several participants. H1B Visas that were given out easily to international students just a few years ago have been in short supply these past two years. Financial institutions can no longer hire international students because they received federal bailout money. This is creating an acute shortage of jobs for graduates like Michael and Cindy, who both wanted jobs in financial institutions. Cindy left the country in July 2010 for a job in Singapore. Michael is working at a biscuit factory as an unpaid intern helping out with that company’s finances. Students like Jose feel deceived because they were not even invited to key career events, and hence were unable to network. Jose mentioned in his second interview:

Yes, for example, we were not part of the job fair in New York—I don’t know why. And I know the director, and he’s trying because we have visited law firms and courts, the state courts, the federal courts, but I don’t know. We felt like they are not, they didn’t help us that much. But I understand that the economy now is very difficult, so it’s not their fault. But that is one of the most deception [sic] I get from the experience.

Lack of support during physical and mental health issues. Using adult development transitional theory helped bring to light the unique requirements the participants had while experiencing mental and physical health problems. Universities need to provide additional support to graduate international students when they are undergoing stressful health situations or personal crisis. Schlossberg’s (1989) transitional theory explains that adults need additional support as they move in, through, and out of the academic environment. Similarly, the participants in this study needed additional support as they moved through the new and unfamiliar academic environment. During illnesses, they needed additional assistance, as most of them were managing transitions on their own.
Schlossberg’s work can be viewed as a psychosocial counterpoint to the age-stage perspective and a vehicle for analyzing human adaptation to transition (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Graduate international students face the same transitional predicaments because they, too, have experienced discontinuity in their lives, having been uprooted and needing to adjust to their new environment (McIntire & Willer, 1992).

Several participants in this study could have used formalized support networks to help with their transition. Nikita, the youngest, went through homesickness and loneliness for the first six months after arriving in this country. She went to counseling for a few sessions but did not find any relief. She ultimately started dating someone her parents suggested as a contact—a drastic move that was probably not the best way to get over feelings of isolation and loneliness. Counseling and mental health are not well defined in her home country of India, where there is stigma attached to this form of support system. April also seems to have fallen through the cracks. She believed her passion for helping Korean immigrants transition to life in the United States grew out of her personal experience of feeling lost and disconnected. According to her, when she was a high school student, no one took the time to figure out whether she was engaged or connected socially and emotionally. What was most troubling is that she perceived no attempts to connect her to resources on campus in any of the three institutions she attended. Claire, for her part, became extremely sick in the fall of 2009 and had to nurse herself back to health with the help of her American boyfriend. Her parents had to come from France to help her regain her strength. Although Claire was fairly well situated (she was living with her boyfriend and had relatives in the area), her parents still needed to travel from France to support her during this difficult time. Also, they wanted to be with her, and she with them. During our first interview, Claire recounted how her illness affected her:
I sort of made the decision that I can’t live in the States for the rest of my life. I don’t know if it was because it was a tough semester; I got sick, and I was kind of depressed, and I don’t know what happened this semester. It was tough, and then when I went back home, I got all of my energy back, and it was so nice to be home, and my parents were taking care of me, and I said, oh I miss them. When I got sick, they weren’t here, and it was hard for me to be away from my family, and I didn’t know what was going on.... I need to be close to them, and if something happens to them, I want to be there too. And so I sort of made the decision, and when I got back, I told my boyfriend I can’t be here for the rest of my life.

Victoria’s uncle was kidnapped in Paraguay during her second year at CU. Fortunately, she had her husband Peter to rely on for emotional support. She dealt with this tragedy for several months before her uncle (also her godfather) was released by his captors. Had she been on her own, I do not believe that Victoria would have known where to get support during such a difficult time. Despite these traumatic experiences, she seems to have moved through a difficult phase of her life and discerned her next move after graduating in May 2010. She decided to go back home, even though the political climate makes Paraguay a dangerous place.

Clearly, Claire, Nikita, April, and Victoria could have used formalized support systems within the university when they were enduring physical or mental health problems or personal crisis. Lack of resources and family nearby exasperate the needs of such students during difficult times. Simple tasks that are taken for granted by local students can be difficult for international students to perform. Thus, there needs to be a more formalized venue from which graduate international students can get additional support during personal crises.
Change and Future

Transitions caused a great deal of uncertainty and change in participants’ lives. Contemplating their future was another source of stress that emerged throughout this research. Unifying themes that appeared were those indicating that participants managed their transitions largely on their own, their needs heterogeneous and variant, and their future a moving target.

Graduate international students manage change and transitions on their own.

Participants in this study managed their transitions on their own, with very little help and support from the university. If Schlossberg’s theory of transition had been applied to these participants, they might have been better supported during their tenure at CU. Schlossberg’s (1984) work reflects a theory based on transition, and she describes transition as any event or nonevent that leads to a change in relationships and daily routines. As a consequence, roles change and accommodations need to be made to absorb the new way of being. Schlossberg’s transition theory provides insights into factors related to the transition, the individual, and the environment, all of which are likely to determine the degree of impact a given transition will have at a particular time. The transition process may be caused by a nonevent or anticipated decision but still takes a long time. The transition consists of a series of phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out. Transitions extend over time: As the individual moves from preoccupation with the transition to integrating it into daily life, these transitions can lead to personal growth or decline (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989).

Most participants arrived at the airport from their home country not having friends or family in the United States. Their success in getting settled was largely a matter of happenstance. Cindy arrived from China, stayed in a motel for a night, visited an apartment she had seen on Craigslist, and as luck would have it, ended up residing there for a year. The
landlady turned out to be a good mentor and a friend. Jose and his wife Alicia sublet an apartment from an acquaintance in Monterrey that turned out to be an illegal sublet with unlivable conditions. Nikita lived with a CU faculty member for the first few weeks and moved into a large apartment with another Indian girl. Her transition was rough because she missed the sounds of home—the busy streets, cars, and familiar noises. Jude lived with his mother’s friend for the first few months when he arrived, walking three miles to get to CU during the hot summer. The transition from home to host country was not always smooth and seamless, but these students managed to make their way through trial and error and without complaining or making demands on the university. Nikita, in our first interview, clearly depicted her struggles:

I tell you something, Nishmin, if you tell me to go through the same thing again—like this here—any time in the future, I will not be able to do it. I still don’t know how I managed to do it, like, how I managed to come here in August, because I don’t have any relatives in the US.

Jude felt he had led a transient life and that it was time for him to settle down and have some permanence. He sees himself as lacking emotional ties to people and places because he has always had to get up and move. This sentiment was shared by Nikita, who also knew she would be changing to a new phase in her life when she got into her PhD program. April perceived that, throughout her experience in the United States, no one attempted to help her in her transition. During our first interview, she reflected on her sense of loneliness and isolation:

There was just general apathy, just [a] general sense of isolation and disengagement, from faculty, administrators, and students. They were interested—just kind of curious—but then, nothing much beyond that, I guess. I wasn’t even involved in the drama that was going on, just kind of an observer from the outside.
Graduate international students are heterogeneous with variant needs. Participants exhibited variant needs and told diverse stories throughout this research. Just like migrants, participants exhibited the fact that they are not a homogenous group. Portes and Rumbaut (1990) contend that, because immigrants are different from the native residents, there is an assumption that they are uniformly poor and uneducated, and that they arrived in America to escape hunger and persecution. Thus, there is an assumption that all immigrants behave in similar ways. Among contemporary immigrants, the lack of uniformity is obvious, and so generalizations are no longer possible (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). The unvarying menu of services provided to international students also does not make sense, as the needs and wants of these students vary and are substantially diverse—not just according to nationality, but also based on regional origin in their home country (Hanassab, 2006).

Gargano (2009) argues that cross-border conversations about international mobility lack the complexity of international students’ lives, experiences, and identity constructions. Cross-border literature tends to homogenize and generalize international students’ experiences even though great variability and dimensions of complexities exist (Gargano, 2009). This study had ten participants from all over the world: Mexico, Paraguay, India, China, New Zealand, Germany, France, Turkey, and South Korea. Their life stories and needs displayed great variety. Whether they came from a developing or a first-world country, their backgrounds and motivations were unique. Their need for positive social experiences was not well defined in their minds before coming to the US. They did come to this university to further their education and develop networks of friends and colleagues. They develop their own sense of identity and being, as they navigate the fairly unfamiliar terrain. The process of finding friendships and being engaged with the community is complex and difficult to define. However, all of them were
looking for meaningful and significant relationships and the needs within the group varied. Six
were married or had a significant personal relationship in the United States, and four were single.
The ages ranged from 23 to 30. Six females and four males participated in the study. In order to
understand the true complexities of these participants’ lives, chapters four, five, and six
recounted individual stories. These chapters were dedicated to portraying these individuals’
lives and stories so that each person would have a voice. Through telling their personal stories,
their lives can be explicated and understood.

All participants developed their own sense of identity and ways of being as they
navigated through fairly unfamiliar terrain. For them, the process of entering into friendships
and engaging with the local community was often complex and difficult to define, and herein lies
the problem for university administrators in trying to engage graduate international students in
meaningful ways. Owing to the complex nature of this demographic, there is a tendency for
administrators to ignore this group. In my experience, international students tend not to
complain about their experiences and appreciate the special orientation and ethnic programs their
school provides.

Based on this small sample, one can see how complex and varied their lives really are.
Cindy, from China, was brought up in a communist regime. Michael was trying to get away
from the German socialist society he knew and wanted to experience America. Jude was
cautiously trying to find his way, but seemed to feel that he had wasted his time coming to the
United States because he could not find a way to connect his education to practice. Claire was
torn about her decision to ultimately go back home to France, where she felt she belonged. Elif
grew up without being allowed to speak Kurdish, as it would have made her a target of violence
in her home country. April was still in search of her ideal community within this culture, even
after being here since high school. Victoria, still fearful of the kidnappings that plague Paraguay (and her family), nonetheless chose to return home.

Even for me as an administrator, listening to their stories, I would find it difficult to articulate what would meet the needs of all ten participants. Because this problem is so complex, it has long been ignored by most administrators. It would take a significant investment of time, effort, and resources to keep this student body engaged. However, universities ought to begin somewhere, by conducting regular assessments of these students and holding one-on-one conversations with them, to establish a pathway towards this goal.

**Future a moving target.** Portes and Rumbaut (1990) argue that a great deal of expense, related to travel and relocation, also weighs on the immigrant’s mind. Those who believe they cannot achieve their goals at home choose this migrant path (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). International students also tend to leave their own home countries for some of the same reasons, and many of them stay behind in the United States after graduation and participate as engaged citizens. Employers value migrant workers because they have a strong work ethic, working for long hours and for low pay. Migrants are regarded as superior in certain tasks, mainly when Americans are unwilling to do these tasks. Besides those who are part of the lowest echelon of the workforce, many highly skilled workers come to the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). A large number of graduate students stay behind after graduation, contributing to the intellectual capital of America. Students who return home often become unofficial ambassadors, generating long-term goodwill for the United States (NAFSA, 2003).

Finding a job or internships has been especially stressful for this graduating class. Once Jose decided that he and his wife were going back to Mexico, and that staying in America was not a possibility, they relaxed and started enjoying themselves. Before that, it was getting too
tense during the interval when they were both trying to find a job. Plans for the graduating class’s future seem to consist of returning home as a result of this lack of jobs and career prospects. Even though a few ambitious students have found temporary assignments, they will have to return after they finish one year of OPT, unless the economy picks up and the US job market improves.

Some participants believed that a reality check was in order after coming here: The rose-colored glasses needed to come off, and there needed to be an adjustment of expectations. After a while, home did not seem to be such a bad option, and many participants became comfortable with the idea of returning. Once they came to this realization, they were able to make a balanced comparison between what their home countries could offer versus the United States. Several participants had either changed their future plans or simply had no idea what to do next. One thing was certain: The reason for staying had to be a good one, as it would be a huge sacrifice to live away from family and loved ones. After living in this country, these students did get used to the wider prospects offered—the freedom to teach and learn, the many opportunities for social and career networking, and greater independence. Thus, the motivation to continue living here had to be strong; staying simply for the sake of being in America or to get away from the home country did not suffice for this group. They wanted to make educated decisions and keep their options open. Their future course and their goals seemed to be changing rapidly in response to their new environment. During the group session, one participant reflected as follows:

I came in here with a similar goal, like you. I felt like I wanted to work here, and I wanted to stay here. And as time passed by, I realized that I really need to be close to my family because I am, I do come from a different society, and I feel like I need, I do need
to talk about those deep subjects. I need that. And I need those deep, like, unconditional
friendships, and I feel like … I want to go home.

Discerning their future path could be an area in which the university can step in to help
with their transition. All participants had wanted to live in this country for at least four to five
years after graduation. However, as graduation approached, they all had to modify their plans
and quickly figure out their next steps. Among the graduating participants, Claire decided that
ultimately, she would return to France after doing one year of OPT on campus as a temporary
assignment. The realization that the connectedness needed to stay in this country was lacking
came through during our third interview:

When you first met me, well, I think I’ve always known, but it’s always, I don’t know
why, but it’s a little hard for me to … talk about it very freely…. So I don’t really talk
about those things with professors and people from CU. I tend to tell them, “Oh,
everything is great. I want to stay here. My experience is great.” It is great, but I still
feel that something is missing, like a part of me is missing, and it’s not there: It’s still
with my family back home.

A Discussion on the Overall Use of the Three Theoretical Frameworks

During the initial stages of developing this study design, it was a challenge to find
theories that related directly to graduate international students’ experiences. Although not an
exact science, theoretical frameworks help provide guidelines to faculty and administrators in
order for them to understand graduate international students’ social experiences on a college
campus. Although no one overarching theory has been developed to understand this population,
several theories could have been found sufficiently useful to tease out unique aspects of their
social experiences. After reviewing several theories of student development, I finally identified
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

three frameworks that could go far towards understanding graduate international students’
identities, needs, and experiences: transnationalism (Guarnizo, 1997; Levitt, 2001), adult
development theory (Knowles, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989), and the graduate
student socialization model (Weidman, Twale, & Stein, 2001).

Transnationalism was the most useful and frequently applied theory in this research
because socialization patterns for migrants were useful for interpreting certain findings. The
most important finding was that graduate international students stay connected and engaged
regularly with family and friends, holding true to the conclusions of recent transnational
literature. Framing their identity development as a way of being or belonging, as described by
Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), helped me interpret some of the participants’ experiences and
sense of self. Transnational identities are formed through economic, political, religious, and
cultural practices (M. P. Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Staying true to this axiom, participants in
this study used religious and cultural practices, which helped them stay grounded. Examining
the issues of personal power, rights, and social capital in the context of transnational theory
helped me to gain perspective on how these elements affected the participants. The political
aspects of life, as they affect immigrants, were not as heavily present in the overall findings for
these participant lives. In terms of social capital, several participants were well off, as they came
from prominent and influential families. Victoria and Jose’s families were politically well
connected in Paraguay and Mexico, respectively. All other participants had saved money from
previous jobs and had taken out some type of loan from their parents or the government.
Further, the effects of ethnocentrism and xenophobia played out differently in each participant’s
life. Phenomenology as a methodological framework complemented transnationalism
throughout this research and helped me to uncover the true lived experiences of all participants.
Schlossberg’s (1984) adult transitional theory was useful for better understanding the transitions all the participants made and for interpreting the three overall findings of this study. However, compared with transnationalism, I applied adult transitional theory less frequently because this theory is best suited to explaining academic transitions and the availability of help in the classroom, and less suited to examining social settings. The participants in this study developed their identity and persisted academically mostly on their own. However, they needed additional support during physical and mental health issues. The participants also seemed to manage their transitions on their own, requiring very little help. For several of them, this might have been because they had held jobs in large corporations and had been through enough hardships to sustain this transition. Jose, Elif, and Cindy who had the most difficulty with the English language, could have benefited from additional resources and services.

I applied the graduate socialization model only to a small extent, although it did help me to explain concepts of mentorship for managing participants’ future goals and aspirations. One of the overall findings of this study was that participants experienced much stress and worry about their future professional careers. Several of them felt that they had wasted their time and money on the educational component of their journey. The other goal of their journey—to make business contacts and work in the United States for three to four years—remained largely unfulfilled. They needed to make the connection from classroom learning to practice, and in order to do this, all the participants needed help with career discernment.

Despite their applicability to this population, the three theoretical frameworks could not provide perspective on how to help graduate international students in the following areas:

- Understanding the heterogeneity and variability of their life experiences;
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

- Effectively combating cross-cultural isolation and truly appreciating why they are experiencing this phenomenon, after decades of research on this topic; and
- Helping administrators to program social events that could engage both the graduate international students and their American peers.

Conclusion

This chapter briefly introduced all ten participants and outlined the overall findings from interviewing them. In addition, it discussed the applicability of the three theoretical frameworks introduced above: transnational theory, adult transitional theory, and the graduate student socialization model. From this discussion, it is clear that phenomenology and transnationalism complement each other, and effectively work together to help social science researchers understand the social experiences of graduate international students.

The composite structure codes Family, Home, Academic Experience, Future, Change, and Social Experience emerged from the overall findings. The three codes—Social Experience, Home, and Family—emerged from the following themes: Graduate international students stay connected and engaged regularly with family and friends in their home country through transnational social fields; cross-cultural isolation is still prevalent after all these years; in American culture, alcohol being the main nexus around which socialization takes place; formation of identity is a way of being or belonging; ethnocentrism and xenophobia played out in participants’ lives; issues of personal power, social capital, and rights affect international students; conflicting gender roles and political involvement are quiescent factors; religion is a strong factor for some; and it is time for social scientists to move on from assimilation theories.
Academic Experience, also a major composite structural code, surfaced through the following themes: unwavering academic achievement and persistence; the need for support through transitions during physical and mental health issues; and the need for professional mentorship and career discernment.

The composite structural codes Future and Change appeared through the following themes: graduate international students handle change and transitions largely on their own; they are heterogeneous as a group, with variant needs; and their future is a moving target.

The following chapter will discuss the three research questions in more detail. The group session with nine of the ten participants present, is the primary source for this discussion.
Chapter 8

The Research Questions

This chapter discusses the three primary research questions and links the overall analysis from the previous chapter to the research questions. The group session held with all the participants on April 16, 2010, has been used to strengthen this discussion. During the session, I presented to the group the predominant themes that had emerged from the interviews, in part for member-checking and in part to solidify my analysis.

First Research Question

How do graduate international students perceive their social experiences as they persist and construct identities through their transitional lives at a private research university in the United States?

After coding all 30 interviews, Social Experience ranked fifth highest; therefore, it appears to be an important factor that enhances the overall experience of graduate international students. Social experiences include culture, meaningful relationships, extracurricular activities, sports, religious practices, and connections with community, family, and friends. All participants were searching for deep and meaningful relationships within their friendships. Many of them found connections and support within their own ethnic communities and stayed within those communities during their time at CU. For the most part, their academic experiences were positive, and class projects focused significantly on group work. Most of the participants’ engagement with their American peers occurred in these academic settings. Some participants, like Rajiv and Jose, shared a few extracurricular activities with their American peers. However, neither of them would classify their American peers as close friends. The lack of common
ground upon which to hold conversations limited the scope of contact with their American peers because entertainment that involved American sports, TV sitcoms, and parties centered on drinking alcohol were not engaging to most participants.

Instead of blaming others, all the participants took personal responsibility for not engaging with their American peers; instead, they tended to blame this situation on having limited time owing to their academic load, having a boyfriend or spouse, their lack of strong language skills, etc. Unfortunately, this disengagement continued throughout their time in this country. As a result, they turned for comfort and support to their own cultural enclaves, within which they could find common ground in such areas as religion, language, heritage, and culture. If the participants were unable to find students from their own ethnic backgrounds, they engaged with other international students, who shared the experience of transitioning into a new country.

Another major finding was that graduate international students remained deeply connected to friends and family back home while living in the United States. The array of free Internet services promoted this connection on a regular basis, and as a result, participants did not find urgent the need to branch out in order to make new connections during their time here. In addition, the superficiality of American culture did not meet their desire for deep and meaningful relationships. As April stated, she was highly visible yet invisible since her high school days in the United States. Cindy and Elif felt that they had not yet mastered social cues, believing that their communication style was somehow deficient. Michael was the only participant who actively kept away from other German students and wanted to completely engage with his American peers, although even he admitted that he hoped he would sustain current American friendships and relationships, just as he had from his childhood days in Germany.
Academic Experience was the second most important factor in participant lives, and participants managed this aspect with focus and vigor that were impressive. Those who have graduated did so without significant struggles in this area. The social disconnect with the university and the local community did not get in the way of their ultimate goal of an enriching academic experience. Change and transition were also important factors for all participants. Simple transitional issues challenged them, such as finding equivalent products in the grocery store, getting a cell phone, finding a place to live, or registering for classes. Although the participants were not requesting special treatment to enhance their experience, their needs varied from those of their local peers, so universities need to be able to reach out to them during these transitional times in order to facilitate their adaptation. Participants relied on creating their own social networks (mostly virtual) in order to survive and persist in their new environment and remained at best superficially engaged with CU and the local community.

Some participants remained culturally isolated in their own ethnic bubbles. They would have liked to break the barriers to integration but were unaware of how to achieve this goal on their own. Hence, they stuck to their own communities for comfort and support as they navigated the host country’s unfamiliar terrain. Claire spoke about her friendships in France as follows:

But all my friends in France—we are all kind of the same. And we don’t do this type of thing; when we go out, we go [to] a café, or we go to a restaurant; we stay at home, we watch a movie, we have a nice conversation, we chat about our lives. We don’t necessarily need to drink to be having fun.

**A disconnect with programming efforts.** All participants appreciated and recognized the programming efforts made by CU. However, they had a growing sense of disconnection
from the college community after their initial orientation session. Out of all ten participants, only Rajiv was actively engaged in multiple clubs and organizations. Several participants felt that there was no formal encouragement from the university to be proactive. Even though it is the personal responsibility of the international students to get involved, they were able to figure things out only with trial and error, and could have used encouragement from the school. Rajiv mentioned the following during the group session:

I’ve been active: I’m on the committee, there are clubs, but it was because I was proactive. I see my colleagues who are not involved in too many things. There isn’t a formal push that encourages you to do something. It’s like, whatever. If you’re interested do it. Not interested? Forget it, leave it.

Participants also mentioned the lack of communication and there being no direct way for clubs and organizations to send out information to international students. Owing to the federal law that protects all students’ privacy, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), one participant found it difficult to get the word out to other students about events. News of most of the events was communicated by word of mouth—not the most efficient way; getting permission from every student to release their information would have been a tedious process that might not even have been possible. I explained the law’s intent to the participants during the group session, most of whom were unaware of this law and the reasoning behind it. So although the university has legitimate reasons for not releasing student information, it seems that in following federal law, the bureaucratic processes international students need to go through to coordinate an event are creating an undue burden.

All the participants agreed that the graduate international student orientation program, held at the beginning of their tenure at CU, was very helpful. It consisted mostly of information
on how to manage their first few weeks, which helped with their transition and coping with the initial cultural shock. Although students got to meet several people during that time, the session concentrated mostly on how to get a phone, legal rights when renting an apartment, where to buy groceries, etc. At the end of this basic but necessary information session, there was a question-and-answer period so that students could ask specific questions regarding their stay.

It seems that a few participants would have liked more information on clubs and organizations. They believed that those options should be presented during orientation, as that is the time to get involved. When graduate international students first arrive, they have the time, but by the time they settle in and find their way around, they have already become busy with other commitments. One of the participants told me, “I do agree that, even though there are [sic] some stuff that is basic stuff for international students, they are very basic. They are not geared towards our needs.”

The students I interviewed sensed that Chardin University, in general, concentrates more on undergraduates than on graduate students. One participant noticed that other schools in the neighborhood have a larger international student base, so their programs are more varied and offer more outreach to their international students. Several participants were connected to networks at nearby universities, where they were engaged in social activities outside the purview of the CU community. One of the participants commented during the group session as follows:

Well I think, like, most of the stuff here is [directed] more towards the undergraduate students, or I don’t think like the graduate clubs or, like, activities, events are […] as busy as [at] the other universities. Like I also told you during our interview, most of my friends are [at] nearby universities; I attend events more there than at CU. I think maybe it’s also about … the international graduate student, but is not that big, or like graduate
student, but it is not as high priority as [for] those other universities…. This is more, like, very focused on undergraduate students. I’m thinking that, like, most of the staff, the resources, and programs are [aimed] more towards their needs and interests.

Jose mentioned the social disconnect for law students who attended the satellite Nelson Campus (pseudonym). Even though he served on a student committee, there was no funding for any intrascholastic programs, so the law students definitely felt excluded from the rest of the campus and activities. Some of the graduating participants felt that, after their two years in the United States, they had missed out on being engaged within the CU community. They wished they had developed a stronger network of friends and had had more opportunities to get to know more of their American peers, thereby developing meaningful relationships. Some of them wished that they had met the participants from this research earlier in their term of study, not a month before graduation. One of the participants reflected during the group session as follows:

Well I haven’t been really involved in anything during these two years, so I don’t know many people. And I think the main reason is because I really got so busy, and I didn’t think it would have that much work, with just teaching and studying and everything else. This is the reason why I don’t have that many friends today. I know the people of my department, and that is pretty much it. I have my boyfriend here and that’s it. I mean, I have never seen these faces before, and I’m glad we had this meeting today because I, I feel like other people are, there are other international students here, and it’s sad that we don’t even get to meet each other and know each other, because some of us are graduating. Some of us will be here next year, but I mean, I’m graduating in a month and I feel like I missed out, missed out on a lot of things. I don’t know many people—very few.
Only a few participants were aware of the regular international student lunch series held every Friday by the Office of International Students and Services (OISS). Out of approximately 500 graduate international students at CU, about 20 to 30 students attend—only a small section of the overall graduate student population. During the spring of 2010, as the researcher on this study, I attended most sessions and saw the same students attending every week. At the participant group session, Cindy commented as follows: “I am not involved in the international students’ activities quite often, and this is the first official international student activity I have ever been involved in.”

One of the programming suggestions the participants made was to survey the students to find out their interests so that their needs could be attended to. Many felt that the university and the OISS communicated with them about events, but the topics did not interest them, so they rarely attended these sessions. The question then arose: How do universities stay relevant and engaged in the lives of graduate international students? The participants who were graduating and returning home explained why they were lonely and missed home. They had the general feeling that they lacked a meaningful connection with American students and that the overall culture was very cold, competitive, and individualistic. One participant missed the warmth of her own culture and was returning home to reconnect with it. She perceived American society to be more cutthroat, not the community of caring people she had expected. She stated the following:

It was like, more social, more interactive. Like, I don’t know, like I feel like in this country, it’s more, you know, individualistic and, like, money-driven. You know, that sort of thing, and not so much focused on friends, family. That was a culture shock for me when I came here.
Michael had different views on social connections than the others. He made a conscious effort not to connect only with other Germans. He believed it is the individual responsibility of the student to step out of his or her comfort zone, meet other people, and seek out different cultural experiences. Michael commented during the group session:

Well, I share your thought, you know, and I actively try not to be in the bubble, so that’s why I don’t know any Germans. I mean, I know one, but that’s about it, and I don’t have contact with him, and I try to actively go out and, as you just said, it’s your own individual responsibility to do that, you know. The university can offer the clubs, which they do, but unless you actively participate in getting into, you know, different circles, bonding with Americans or other cultures, I don’t know. I can’t really blame the school for that.

One participant suggested that there should be ongoing orientation sessions throughout the year. Then the issue of communication and language came up. One of the main reasons someone might stay in his or her own cultural circle is the issue of not being able to communicate effectively in English. This student opined that the integration of students who do not speak English confidently with the rest of the community should be facilitated right from the very beginning. That way, students would not have to wait for years to feel comfortable enough to approach their American peers. Participants who did not speak English fluently found they had to translate much of a conversation in their head before they could even formulate a sentence, and that it took them time and practice to get better at this skill.

Jose mentioned that his classroom experience was difficult because the subject matter was different than in his home country, and some of the classes had large numbers of students. He could either listen or take notes in the classroom, but doing both simultaneously was a
challenge for him. Jose did not find the social settings as challenging, but on closer examination, it turned out that he and his wife Alicia hung out only with couples from South America. For her part, Cindy felt that there should not be so much pressure to communicate accurately at all times during social gatherings. She believed that she communicated adequately, so that as long as the person she was with understood what she was saying, she did not try for perfection. The group also shared the sentiment that, in an organized setting, people who are not comfortable with their language skills would find it easier to speak out and participate. This idea was also shared by April, who was not in the group session but mentioned it during her interviews. Cindy echoed April’s idea during the group session:

And also I think, perhaps, a more organized communication environment could help the international students to speak more. For example, in very organized environments like here, a very organized meeting like this, everyone is motivated to say something, but in the very less organized [setting], a party or cocktail party …

**Talk about sports and entertainment contributes to the cultural disconnect.** The biggest disconnect in participants’ social experiences was not having common topics of interest with which to have a conversation. International students and their American peers lacked shared extracurricular activities and forms of entertainment. Many participants had never experienced American sports and did not understand the basic rules of football, basketball, or hockey. They had to actively learn about these sports to understand and engage in these events. While some participants enjoyed this experience, most stayed away from sporting events, preferring instead to concentrate on their studies. However, as international students avoided mainstream activities, they lacked topics of conversation with which to engage their American peers. They had little common ground for a friendly conversation and did not relate well to
others informally. Many of the participants did not watch TV, so when references were made to certain shows, they just didn’t catch on. Some participants listened to music only from their home countries and did not even listen to English-language music.

Most of them did not enjoy watching American sports, but they tolerated it so that they could stay engaged with the surrounding community. Career counselors and mentors told them to learn about American culture through movies and sitcoms. Several participants felt that the learning process went on continuously: inside the classroom and outside, while trying to socialize. When they socialized, they expended too much effort in trying to connect with their American peers. The one-dimensional interactions that took place at a bar, drinking alcohol, did not work for them. In any case, going to a bar and watching a game for three hours was not something they found entertaining. Most of the participants were trying to form significant and meaningful friendships, which they realized were hard to come by, and not readily provided by their American peers. They formed these relationships mainly within their own cultural community, in some cases renewing friendships that had been established before coming to this country.

In a foreign country, everything is new in terms of culture and simple social cues, which all have to be learned, grasped, and accepted on an ongoing basis. Some participants adapted quickly, as they came from Western parts of the world; others did so after a few years of observation and learning. Those who found the cultural learning curve too steep chose to return home.

**Persistence.** All the participants, although different from each other in so many ways, were intelligent, academically outstanding, and possessed great ability to sustain themselves through adversity with very little support and guidance. They all found their way through
difficulties during their time here, and by no means failed their course of study or struggled academically. Their persistence and dedication to their goal of earning an advanced degree stayed on course. Nikita reflected on her performance in the classroom during our third interview:

And I guess I’m becoming more individualistic in a sense, more selfish, being in this culture, like putting my own needs forward, whether it’s in class or whatever. Because in class, I know like a couple of the other international students don’t speak up because of English problems, the language problems, or just that they just get scared to talk in front of everyone else.

Claire spoke to the importance of graduating on time, as her entire family would be traveling from France to see it. Although she was sick for an entire semester during her second year, she has still managed to graduate on time. Claire reflected during our second interview on the fact that graduation day would be the happiest and proudest moment of the past two years:

I can’t fail. I need to graduate, and even when I was sick, I was really trying to force myself to be good. You really have to be good: you have to recover fast. I don’t want to be sick; I have to graduate. I don’t want to be here for any longer; I want to finish. I really don’t like failure, so whenever I fail, it’s the end of the world. If I get a B or something, it’s the end of the world. I usually never do, so I try to push myself.

Transitions. Participants managed their transitions in large part alone, without any intervention from the university. In many cases, they transitioned to the host country by living with roommates they had found through the Internet. When they faced other challenges, they managed them mostly on their own. I work in the Department of Residential Life, and among the participants, Elif was the only one who used our services when she first came to CU. All
participants found their own roommates and places to live when they arrived. Clearly, participants found their own way in this regard, not utilizing the services the university provided, which were outdated and irrelevant to their needs. For another example, participants infrequently ate in the university cafeteria; some were vegetarians, others found it too expensive, and still others found that the food did not satisfy their tastes or meet their dietary standards.

Victoria, Cindy, and Jude had already managed several transitions during their lifetime. Victoria had moved from Paraguay to Uruguay because her neighbor was kidnapped when she was young, and Cindy had moved from her small hometown in China to study in Beijing, later working in Indonesia, and then coming to CU for her MSF. According to Cindy, these were self-imposed transitions and calculated risks. Jude had moved from Bombay to a boarding school up north, then back to Bombay, then to New Zealand, and later to CU, although he tired of these moves and wanted to settle down. Based on the conversations I had with the participants, transitions were a way of life for a few who had learned to manage a great deal of change from their life experiences.

**Identity.** Participants developed, changed, and affirmed their identities during their time in the United States. Each participant had a different take on this process, ranging from identifying as a student, an immigrant, and sometimes, as an alien. Elif, April, and Claire affirmed their ethnic identities as Kurdish, Christian Korean, and French, respectively.

Several participants spoke about growing and developing their knowledge and skills during their tenure in this country. Nikita started out being quiet and then blossomed into an extrovert. Her mother’s illness, father’s temper, and extended family’s disdain for her journey to America all contributed to her struggle, and yet she persisted through it all. She believed that she had matured as an individual and emerged as a much stronger person. Michael similarly
believed that, while his motivations had not changed since coming to this country, he had become more social and extroverted. He was able to project a kind of superficial friendliness while maintaining his inner self. Before he left Germany, people would have described him as introverted, but since his experiences in the United States, he had become more open-minded, adaptable, and assimilated into American culture. Michael reflected on these changes during our second interview:

When I left Germany, I think people would have described me as reserved—shy maybe, even. I think that has changed a lot, and I’m pretty sure the American experience has a lot to do with it, simply because it forced me to open up because people are very open, and you adapt and you assimilate in a way.

Jose, an accomplished lawyer in Monterrey, Mexico, believed he had changed in one significant way—becoming more direct in his interactions with people. He has become more assertive, so people take him more seriously. According to his wife Alicia, he had become more independent from his family and developed a closer relationship with her. He also believed he would not have participated in this study five years earlier. Academically, he had expanded his knowledge and broadened his skill set.

Regardless of the length of time spent in the United States, or the degree of adaptation, participants still identified themselves with their country of origin. Nikita still perceived herself as an Indian woman. She did not feel that she would ever be totally a part of this community, but would always be a citizen of Mumbai, India. She reflected on her dual identity during the group session:

At least for me, even if I am here for 50 years, I’ll always identify myself as an Indian woman because that is what my whole identity is. But with regards to being a kind of
tourist over here, that really depends; like, if ultimately I decide to settle down here and have a career here, and have a family with my own family over here, then I—I mean, I wouldn’t say I feel like a tourist, but still—it is like I am not completely a part of this community. I mean, for me, still my home is back there in India, in Mumbai.

As researcher, I share part of her sentiment. Although I have been in this country for almost 20 years, having worked and spent a little less than half of my life here, I still identity myself as an Indian woman. I rarely go back to India, which holds for me few attachments to family or home, but somehow I remain inextricably linked to my country of origin, even though I am certain I will be living in the United States for the rest of my life. For me, the purpose of making the journey here was not just to get an education or a few years of work experience. The educational component was important, but it was a means to an end—I never considered the option of returning home.

Second Research Question

The second research question pertained specifically to the barriers to entering the United States, in terms of visa and immigration policies: How do graduate international students decide on an institution and country of study? Why the United States rather than other competing countries? What are the perceived and real barriers to entry (if any)?

The United States has come a long way in terms of improving visa and immigration policies for international students since 9-11. Visa applications decreased significantly in 2002 to 2003, and even for those who successfully obtained visas, the process (which used to take a few weeks) started taking six months to a year (Paden & Singer, 2003). In the name of national security, the US government had instituted several programs that, in essence, treated all
international students and scholars as potential terrorists. The US government needed to figure out a more efficient way of deciphering between a terrorist and an international student and scholar (Eggspuehler, 2005). Since its overreaching laws were passed, however, the INS has stepped up its visa-processing initiatives and improved the services it provides to international students.

None of the participants I spoke with had any significant problems obtaining their student visas. The process was all very formulaic: The participants were prepared for their consulate interviews, and they had well-rehearsed answers. They all had thorough knowledge of the school they were attending and downplayed any significant personal relationships they had in the United States. Their level of preparation increased further as they collected financial statements to show connections with family and reasons to return home. They strategically used websites and coaches to help them navigate through the immigration and visa process. Their reasons for choosing CU varied: Some wanted to be near the Boston area, while others wanted to move with their spouses to a college setting where they could both study. For many, the academic offerings at CU seemed to meet their educational needs. All the participants felt that they had the support of their families when they were applying, so even if they were not granted a visa, they still had other options.

The initial visa and immigration process is more than just an entrée into the United States; it also sets the tone for the overall experience. April admits that every time she deals with immigration officers, she gets edgy because her future depends on their decision whether or not to permit her entry into the country:

The anxiety, the heart palpitations—there is always that sense that they could reject me and say, “Go back to your country.” There is always kind of an anxiety, long lines,
making it very clear that I’m not a US citizen. There is that general kind of …

experience, but other than that, I’m kind of used to it. I wonder if, in my earlier years, if
it was something that I dreaded. I’m not sure.

Two participants had minor problems with their visa: Cindy had her name confused with
another person’s, and Victoria had not signed her I-20 form when she left Miami to go home for
a holiday and so had difficulty reentering the country. Victoria described this unpleasant
incident during the group session:

And then it wasn’t difficult for me to get the F1 visa, but I remember I didn’t, no one
informed me, and I didn’t get the information that you should, you know, in the, in the I-
20 form—you have to sign it every time you leave or every year or something. Once I
left the country without signing it, and when I returned, they were looking at me as if I
was a criminal. And they sent me, they sent me into this room that was full of, like,
suspicious people, I guess, and it was so traumatic for me, and they had to contact the
university and all these things. So that was bad.

Although the beginning of their journey has become easier, owing to standardized visa
and immigration procedures, the latter part of their journey, which was to include a few years of
work experience, has completely evaporated because of the recession. Firms are not providing
many internships (paid or unpaid) and are not willing to sponsor H1B visas for temporary three-
year employment. All participants coming here for a PhD, MBA, or some other type of Master’s
degree had originally wanted to work in this country for at least three to four years. Several
participants had worked for four to eight years in their field or had advanced degrees prior to
coming to the United States, so the draw to come to this country was partly the academic
experience, but equally, if not stronger, the desire to gain work experience.
Obtaining work papers to undergo OPT after graduation was not difficult for these students, merely tedious and costly. However, the fact that there were limited jobs for graduate international students to apply for created a sense of dissatisfaction. Several of the graduating participants had to change their plans and return home as it became increasingly clear that they had no possibility of finding work.

Third Research Question

The third research question was geared towards gaining information about participants’ plans after their educational endeavors were completed: How do graduate international students plan for life after graduation? If they return home, how do they plan on reintegrating back into their social and family lives? If they plan on immigrating to the United States, what factors helped facilitate the decision?

Another significant finding of this research was that graduate international students come to the United States not only for the academic experience but also for the work experience. All participants had expected to work in this country for at least three to four years after graduation. This expectation changed for all ten participants because most companies are not hiring or sponsoring H1B Visas for international students, a decision connected directly to the recession. Even unpaid internships were not easily available, as companies were looking to recruit and train employees for permanent positions.

Graduate international students who stay behind in the United States form a highly skilled core workforce that are key to this country’s future economic competitiveness (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009). Unfortunately, three of the five participants who graduated during this study returned home or went to work in another country owing to the lack of jobs here. Cindy landed a
job in Singapore after graduation following several failed attempts to get a job in the United States, though she still wanted to return and work in this country someday. Jose and his wife Alicia returned to Monterrey, Mexico, where they both resumed work as full-time lawyers. Jose told me that he missed Boston, which surprised him, and hoped to return with his wife to complete their journey by working for a few years in the United States. Victoria and her husband Peter returned to Paraguay after realizing that, culturally, America would not be conducive to their future plans. Peter, who is from Germany, is currently working for the World Bank in Paraguay. Victoria hopes to start a grassroots organization so that she can utilize her degree in Counseling Psychology. Victoria reflected during our third interview:

I think I’ve pretty much said it all. I think I had an original idea when I came here: I wanted to study and I wanted to live here. I’m not saying I’m not considering living here—maybe in the future, but for now, I don’t really want to stay here in the States.

Participants who are still completing their degrees will need to find alternative ways to survive and find employment in this country after graduation. Most of them will inevitably return home on account of the lack of jobs or find low-paying temporary employment. Some participants will find it difficult to transfer skills and knowledge they have learned from specific fields like counseling psychology because these professional fields are less well understood in their countries. During their third interview, several participants reflected for the first time on where they would go should they not find a job in the United States. Previously, they had not thought of their return journey to the home country. Most of them stated that they would return to their parents’ homes and later branch out on their own after they acquired a job. Michael stated in his third interview:
You said that you wanted those interviews to get me thinking in a way also, and they did, especially exactly [on] that topic, like what [to do] after graduation—and especially the difficulty of the internship search that we have right now as international students. I’m becoming more comfortable with the thought of going back to Germany.

Several participants had either changed their future plans or just had no idea what to do next. Rajiv and Claire had both taken temporary jobs for a year, but realized that the possibility of an H1B Visa might not materialize. However, all the participants were sure that they had to have a compelling reason to be away from family and loved ones. These students were already used to the opportunities this country has to offer (the freedom to teach and learn, chances for social and career networking, and greater independence), but staying simply for the sake of being in America or to get away from their home country was not enough. Their future plans and goals seemed to be shifting rapidly, so in response, they wanted to make educated decisions and keep their options open.

Conclusion

This chapter revisited the three primary research questions using participant interviews, social meetings, and material from the group session to strengthen this analysis. During the group session, I presented the dominant themes from the individual interviews so the participants could review and discuss them. This was in part a process of member-checking, and in part a way for me to solidify my analysis. Chapter nine will make recommendations for practice, policy, and future research. In addition, it will outline the overall conclusions from this study.
Chapter 9

Recommendations and Conclusion

This chapter systematically presents recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, and reviews the overall conclusions of this study. I gathered data from the ten participants during our 30 in-depth interviews, multiple social contacts, and one group session. I conducted triangulation through member-checking with each participant that lasted one hour, either on Skype or in person. Member-checking helped me as a researcher to clarify participants’ stories, verify findings, and solidify my analysis. All the participants agreed with the overall content and flavor of their stories. In addition, I reviewed findings and recommendations made by colleagues from CU and other universities.

Limitations of the Study

There are three overall limitations to this study:

- First, owing to the limited number of participants at the one university under study, these findings cannot be generalized;
- Second, I as the researcher work at the same institution; and
- Third, I as the researcher personally identified with the participants, having been a graduate international student and immigrant myself.

The first limitation consists of the fact that mine was a qualitative study that involved only ten participants at one private research university. Therefore, my findings cannot be generalized to other international graduate students or to other research universities. This study necessitated limiting the number of participants because it made use of phenomenology, which
requires the researcher to undertake prolonged and multiple engagements with all the participants.

The second limitation has to do with the fact that I as the researcher work at the institution where the study was conducted. Although this gave me several advantages—prolonged access to participants and insider knowledge of institutional culture—it is still a limitation.

The third limitation is that I as the researcher am a former graduate international student and thus identify personally with this population. Some reflexivity was helpful, however, because it enabled me as the researcher to compare experiences, connect with, and reflect on matters along with participants. This common point of view also helped me to connect with participants so that they were comfortable enough to share their experiences at a deeper level.

When this research was originally designed, another limitation was identified that did not materialize: that most participants also would be student leaders or highly engaged and visible students on campus. This turned out not to be the case. Rajiv was the only participant who was actively engaged in student activities and clubs in multiple leadership roles. Jude was a Resident Assistant for his first year at CU, but resigned thereafter.

A broadening aspect of the study design is that participants of this research came from a variety of programs and countries. There was some clustering of participants from the School of Education and the School of Management, but there were no respondents from the science programs. There were three participants from India: Rajiv, Nikita, and Jude. However, Jude identified himself as a New Zealander rather than as an Indian.

I shared my interpretation of the data with all ten participants either through Skype conversations or in person. To minimize the study limitations, I reviewed the triangulation of
findings and study recommendations with my colleagues from Chardin and other universities. I included the participants during the interpretation phase by scheduling meetings for the purpose of member-checking, to ensure that their stories were being portrayed in an honest, truthful, and clear fashion. However, I as the researcher was not looking for one-to-one congruence. In addition, I conducted a group session on April 16, 2010, where nine of the ten participants were present. During this session, I presented overall themes that emerged during my interviews and then sought input from the group.

**Recommendations for Practice**

My practice recommendations apply specifically to Chardin University. However, they also would apply to other midsized, monocultural private research universities. I am making eight recommendations for practice, as follows:

- Engage graduate international students in more meaningful ways;
- Make graduate international students a part of an engaged alumni;
- Graduate international students are a heterogeneous group, so tailored services need to be provided;
- Come up with innovative ways to connect graduate international students with their American peers;
- Use technology in effective ways to engage graduate international students;
- Formally address cultural isolation experienced by graduate international students;
- Enhance support when there are physical or mental health issues; and
- Improve career services to include assistance for graduate international students.
Engage graduate international students in more meaningful ways. One of the overall findings of this study is that the participants were not engaged sufficiently with the university or local community. Their nonacademic engagement with the university was superficial at best. Although the university did a good job of engaging them during orientation and in the classroom, other social aspects were left to chance. When the university as a whole (from administrators to student peers) does not engage with graduate international students in meaningful ways, it sends a message that these students are not important to campus life. I believe that it is crucial to engage and involve them in some of the decision-making on campus in order to gain insight into their unique needs. Research has also shown a link between overall satisfaction with social and academic experiences and positive interactions with the host community (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985; J. J. Lee & Rice, 2007; Perrucci & Hu, 1995).

Engaging graduate international students should not fall solely to university administrators from the international student office, whose primary job is to meet the needs of these students; rather, greater awareness and engagement with this student body should permeate all parts of the university. There is little doubt that graduate international students provide many benefits to US higher education institutions. In particular, they increase awareness of different cultures and bring variant perspectives into the classroom (Harrison, 2002).

Rong and Brown (2002) contend that we live in a pluralistic society, and that it is hard to imagine that colleges and universities would not want to train students in the skills necessary for living and working in such a multifaceted environment. It is a challenge for most institutions to educate a diverse student population so that they are competentmulticulturally and can function successfully in a pluralistic society (Rong & Brown, 2002). Thus, higher education institutions need to prepare their administrators and faculty to support, facilitate, and enhance the
multicultural mission shared by universities (Grieger, 1996). A diverse campus gives students an environment where they can function in ways that will help them to engage with society at large after they graduate. There, students will learn from views that are different from theirs, and learn to negotiate resolutions to conflicts in ways that are mutually beneficial. International students provide the ideal means of diversifying college campuses (Hanassab, 2006). From them, American students can acquire different perspectives on their own society, other nations, and cultures. This global understanding will effectively prepare them for future careers that have international and multicultural dimensions (Paige, 1990).

Participants in this study forged their own social connections, transitioned silently through our educational system, and rarely complained of the difficulties they were facing. If the university would like to nurture long-term relationships with this student body, it should actively engage with the international student community and empower them to have more of a voice. This is not an easy task, as it will take significant amounts of energy and resources from all faculty and administrators. However, a long journey begins with a few steps, and these efforts will go far towards involving this student body instead of having graduate international students pass silently through our corridors.

Universities need to figure out a better way to engage international students within the context of the current political and global environment, especially in light of the fact that there has been a lack of interest on the part of the American student body at CU and the local community to engage with this population. Participants in my study formed their own ethnic circles of friends, remaining cross-culturally isolated after multiple attempts to actively engage their American peers. For several participants, language was a barrier, in addition to cultural differences that applied in social constructs as they attempted to engage with their American
peers. There seemed to be a pervasive apathy by American peers to engage with and relate to this student body.

Altbach (1998) contends that international students enrich cultural diversity on campuses worldwide; a greater understanding of diverse nations and cultures comes more easily when friendships develop during the college years. Foreign students act as unofficial ambassadors for their own countries; when they go back to their countries, they in turn have the potential to become cultural ambassadors of goodwill (Altbach, 1998). However, such long-term goodwill is realized only after several decades, through meaningful friendships that were forged during an international student’s tenure in this country. What participants in my study were experiencing were more superficial forms of engagement, which are not an accurate experience of authentic American culture. There has to be a way for universities such as Chardin to effectively facilitate the engagement of this student body with local students and to transition them successfully into the monocultural campus environment.

April, the South Korean doctoral student, mentioned that merely planning events will not cut it. Instead, the university needs to do more to reach out to students like her in meaningful ways. She had been in the United States since high school, yet after all these years, she still felt invisible and that faculty and administrators in all the institutions she attended had done nothing to engage her more actively. Once the initial curiosity and the exotic qualities of her being international wore off, there was no further attempt to connect with her. Several participants stated that they ate their meals alone because they did not want to bother their American peers.

Make graduate international students a part of an engaged alumni. Graduate international students provide a myriad of benefits to their host country: by conducting their research at both the doctoral and Master’s degree levels; by working for a few years before they
go back home, from which the host country benefits from the foreign exchange of money and talent, leading to export orders; and by contributing to cross-cultural understanding—the one factor that is almost impossible to quantify (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985). From a purely economic perspective, it is important that these students (as for all other alumni) remain engaged with the university after graduation. However, the participants in this study were not connected to the institution in any meaningful way that would last beyond their academic tenure. As mentioned earlier, several of the participants came from well-connected families, and the university would have done well to nurture these relationships so that they would be mutually beneficial. Two politically well-connected participants, Jose and Victoria, went home prematurely. They appreciated their education, but like the rest of the participants, did not form significant relationships with university personnel.

Several countries have realized that international students are an untapped source of revenue and have developed strategic marketing plans to target niche communities. For example, New Zealand advertises that students will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in just three years instead of four, thereby reducing tuition, room, and board costs. Australia and the UK market themselves to prospective students as having low cost of living and less stringent work restrictions. Australian embassies in Asia have mobilized to help recruit students, and universities in Asia have been encouraged to adopt business-based strategies. In the price wars that ensued, Asian countries like China undercut Australia and the UK by further lowering costs (Marginson, 2002).

**Graduate international students are a heterogeneous group, so tailored services need to be provided.** Graduate international students are often regarded by universities as one-dimensional and treated as monolithic entities. But in reality, they are a complex, diverse, and
extremely heterogeneous group. Outmoded strategies of doing the same type of programming and outreach are making higher education institutions virtually irrelevant to these students as they transition into and find social outlets in the host country. In this complex, yet globally connected environment, higher education institutions cannot afford to ignore this population. New ways of engagement and outreach must be sought by universities, lest they become irrelevant entirely.

This study involved ten participants from all over the world: Mexico, Paraguay, India, China, New Zealand, Germany, France, Turkey, and South Korea. Their life stories and needs were highly diverse. Whether they came from a developing or a first-world country, their background and motivations were unique. Six were married or had a significant personal relationship in the United States, and four were single. Their ages ranged from 23 to 30, and there were six females and four males who participated. All participants developed their own sense of identity and ways of being and belonging as they navigated unfamiliar terrain. For them, finding friendships and being engaged with the local community was a complicated process that was difficult to define, and therein lies the problem for universities seeking to engage graduate international students in meaningful ways.

Jude recommended that, rather than have dinners with host families, it would have been nice to be connected with a family for mentorship. He would have preferred practical insights into working in the United States, building new businesses, and sustaining production in this difficult economy, although he acknowledged that organizing and matching families with students would be difficult to accomplish. Owing to these students’ complex nature, there is a tendency for administrators to ignore this group. In my experience, they tend not to complain about their experiences and appreciate the special orientation and ethnic programs that are
provided. Even for me as an administrator, listening to their stories, I would find it difficult to articulate what would meet the needs of all ten participants. It would take a significant investment of time, effort, and resources to keep this student body engaged. However, universities ought to begin somewhere, by conducting regular assessments of these students and holding one-on-one conversations with them, to establish a pathway towards this goal.

**Come up with innovative ways to connect graduate international students with their American peers.** This study found that graduate international students feel alienated from mainstream American students, leading to cross-cultural isolation, despite attempts made by the university and participants to connect with their local peers. Hence, CU and universities like it are well advised to think up innovative ways to attract and engage international and American students in shared events that can be mutually beneficial. More creative and unique programming must be put forth and outdated models reconfigured. Universities need to find new and enhanced ways to engage American students in a healthy exchange of cross-cultural dialogue, which could lead to deeper, more meaningful friendships.

Most participants were aware that programs were being sponsored by the OISS. However, most of them did not participate because a few were unaware of the events, and several did not find them useful after attending. Even at planned student programs, participants noticed that their local peers were absent. Most of the participants engaged with their American peers during group projects and in the classroom rather than socially. Alcohol and sports being the primary nucleus for many self-directed student events, the latter did not meet the needs of several participants, who felt isolated because they did not want to drink at every social gathering.
Universities should concentrate on providing alternative programs to those that are simplistic and easy to put together. For example, events that did not include alcohol would have been much appreciated by most of the participants. Administrators ought to develop programs that are not geared towards acculturation and standard American entertainment fare such as Super Bowl Sunday, Halloween, or The Simpsons. They should advertise programs that do not signal that they will be beneficial to international students only. The contemporary graduate international student is quite savvy, and hence, basic canned programs that have been planned for many years should be redesigned.

**Use technology in effective ways to engage graduate international students.** It has become apparent that students are now instantaneously connected to people across the globe, something that was not possible a decade ago. Michael, Jose, and Elif had connected with other students from their home country here, even before arriving in the United States. Michael found roommates and an apartment prior to coming to CU through networks that were facilitated by his program. Elif and Jose relied on their contacts from home to find acquaintances with whom they could connect after their arrival. Students do not necessarily have to go through the university any more to make these connections; based on this sample, they form their own social networks and maneuver through them to find old and new friends from their home country. The university can make good use of these tools to facilitate these connections and to enhance the way it communicates its services. For example, administrators can utilize these same social networking websites to efficiently and quickly connect students with suite mates, a reasonable place to live, or to advertise an event. Although the university cannot rely totally on the Internet and forgo the personal touch, this technology is still something most administrators have not capitalized on or explored fully.
Although Chardin University uses technology to provide many of its basic services to students, in the area of social engagement, they do not have a thorough understanding of which websites international students usually browse. As my study uncovered, participants used different forms of devices and methods to stay connected to friends and family, the most common being Facebook, Gchat, and Skype. In addition, Rajiv used Orkut, a social website that is very popular with the Indian community, and Cindy used a free Chinese website to stay connected to her family. Jose and April used Nextel and IP phones for instantaneous voice connection. University departments can use social networking sites such as Facebook and Orkut for connecting with students, advertising events, and on-campus job opportunities.

Universities should formally address cultural isolation experienced by graduate international students. Universities need to break the cycle of offering superficial forms of socializing. Although a daunting task, universities need to find common forms of engagement with which to bridge cultural differences, and more effective ways to engage students in healthier aspects of socialization. CU, for example, should make it a part of their mission statement to provide incentives to effectively engage with graduate international students. Such efforts will take time, energy, and resources, but such a positive shift in priorities—especially if it comes from the president—would be able to energize the university community at large.

New programming models need to be developed to better engage contemporary graduate international students. Even though their needs were divergent, complex, and heterogeneous, all the participants in this study had the desire to connect with others and form meaningful relationships. This is a very complex issue, and because it is difficult, it has not been tackled effectively by CU. No resources have been provided for researching or rethinking programming models for this particular population. If the university community actively connected to
understand graduate international student experiences, at the very least it would lead to a higher level of awareness. It would thereby enable graduate international students to have more meaningful social experiences that in turn could have a positive impact as they transition into and out of campus life.

Institutions of higher education need to realize and appreciate the reality that these students come from all walks of life. As university staff, we do not engage them in a personal way or even know how they stay connected to their everyday religious practices. Their persistence and perseverance in this country often depend on the strength of their connections, as other forms of engagements are less than satisfactory. CU, as a Catholic Jesuit institution, is interested in student formation and spiritual development, yet pays scant attention to this aspect of graduate international students’ lives, preferring to concentrate mostly on undergraduates, rather than graduate students. These students spend several years in the United States without the university staff ever understanding the breadth and depth of the faiths they practice.

The university must formally address xenophobia and ethnocentrism through educational forums: either one-on-one conversations or more formal instructional programs. I believe that most programs get so diluted when they try to be all-inclusive that they defeat their original purpose. For example, the fact that several participants in my study did not eat on campus at all is a finding that certain administrators would find difficult to comprehend. Participants did not eat in the university cafeteria for various reasons, ranging from being vegetarian, its food being prohibitively expensive, or preferring their own cuisine, as they found American food unhealthy. Claire had a special connection with French food, both Rajiv and Nikita were vegetarians, and Jude found the food too expensive. Elif preferred Turkish food, which is cooked with fresh ingredients; April bought food from home; and Jude went home for lunch in order to save
money, as he lived nearby. The social aspect of eating in the cafeteria is another untapped opportunity to do some creative programming. The university could plan programs to attract both international and American students during their lunch break. By thoughtfully planning an event that revolves around good food and meaningful conversations, administrators could attempt to bridge the gap in a sustained manner. Thereby graduate international students would have an avenue to socialize and engage with each other and with their American peers.

There needs to be more of an effort on the part of the university to engage international students in daily campus life and activities. In terms of programming efforts, the university could reach out more assertively and make the programs relevant to their experiences. International students often seem disengaged—nervous about their accents, language skills, and ability to pick up on social cues. The university staff and students need to break through this barrier in order to connect with these students. If they make a concerted effort, there will be more of an attendance and buy-in and the low attendance to specific program geared towards international students would increase.

It became clear to me that all the participants wanted to have meaningful relationships during their tenure in the United States, regardless of the way they went about cultivating them. Universities can program events that are specially targeted towards students who want to engage with graduate international students in meaningful ways. My participants seemed to be experiencing only the superficial aspects of American culture. Thus, the university should describe events in such a way that they attract American students who truly want to get to know someone from another country. Currently, programmed events are attended mostly by international students, and there ought to be equal engagement by American students.
On the other end of the spectrum, students from Western countries, like Michael, also have particular needs. The main reason Michael planned on doing his MBA in this country was to advance his career. He did not experience enough support for international students, however. While he sympathized with American students who were also not finding jobs, he believed that, for international students, it is much harder because they have no support systems to help them with their career aspirations. He believed that all the social programming the university concentrates on was not really helpful; instead, they should focus on supporting students in managing their careers. He felt that there should be at least one person dedicated to career advising for graduate international students. Students who are recruited into the MBA program are relying heavily on moving up the corporate ladder and on using their degree to move ahead in their careers. Jude also believed there should be more emphasis on career discernment rather than dinners with a host family. Both Jude and Michael wanted to get to the core of living and working in America, and their case demonstrates why old patterns of connecting with graduate international students ought to be revised. Although some set programs were required for graduate international students to take, Michael felt that these programs were not useful, a waste of money, and too basic. He also felt that the social events planned by the university were a waste and that there needed to be more of a focus on career development.

As can be seen from these testimonies, owing to the broad spectrum of needs graduate international students have, there probably cannot be a one-size-fits-all formula for meeting them. There needs to be a better understanding reached by assessing the socialization patterns of these students. This cannot be a static assessment once every five years, but an ongoing, iterative process that keeps current with the times. Every few years, the American student body
changes significantly, and so does the international student. There needs to be effort and resources devoted to capturing these modifications on a regular basis.

**Enhanced support when there are physical or mental health issues.** University personnel should receive enhanced training so they can provide formal support when graduate international students have mental and physical health issues. Often, by the time these problems come to light, the standard protocols and procedures (student counseling, etc.) are ineffective. A wider safety net to assist students like Claire, Nikita, April, and Victoria during their times of need would be helpful.

**Improve career services to include assistance for graduate international students.** Several participants mentioned that they would have liked career advising and guidance. CU concentrates its career services mostly on local graduate and undergraduate students. It offers workshops on resume writing and interviewing skills, which are important to learn but extraneous if there are no job opportunities, a situation that participants would have liked to be informed of prior to their arrival. Armed with this knowledge, they would have made an informed decision before coming to this country. Participants were drawing from their savings or borrowing money to have this educational experience, and for many of them, their original expectations were to work in the United States, earn some money, and generate valuable business contacts. However, all had to readjust their expectations as they realized that no jobs were available. Claire and Rajiv used some career advising services, which pertained to transferable skills and resume writing. The rest of the participants used the Internet and departmental LISTSERVs for their job hunt.

Resources need to be invested in providing career support to international students that goes beyond the basic skills of resume writing, how to interview, and American etiquette. These
are all helpful for students for whom English is their second language, but they are very basic programs, and universities need to start thinking of the contemporary graduate international student, who is far more sophisticated. Among the ten participants I studied, several struggled with the English language, but most of them were articulate and could convey their thoughts and feelings succinctly. Interventions for them have to be at a higher, more sophisticated level, rather than at a basic level. In addition, there is an unmet need for career officers who understand the nuances of graduate international students’ restrictions and are able to guide them appropriately. Also, someone from the university needs to act as a liaison and lobby on behalf of graduate international students at US corporations and firms.

**Recommendations for Policy**

My first policy recommendation would be to open doors for employment to graduate international students after they finish their programs. This will enhance “brain gain,” instead of the “brain drain” that would occur if they left the United States without any work experience, and would ensure the creation of long-term goodwill. My second recommendation is for universities to connect graduate international students with specialized areas of recruitment that could specifically help the American economy. For example, the financial industry could use graduates with new ways of thinking in an effort to undo the consequences of the recession. Recommendations from this study are congruent with recent findings from organizations like NAFSA: Association of International Educators, which lobby for policy changes for international education.

**Lobby for governments to open doors to graduate international student workforce.**

America is shutting its doors yet again on graduate international students’ future job
opportunities instead of swinging them wide open for this talented group. In a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Marmolejo (2010) described the trends of recent migration in developed countries. Worldwide migration, whether temporary or permanent, will be a significant factor in the knowledge-based economy. In today’s world, governments and universities should pay attention to these patterns, of which graduate international students are very much a part. According to UNESCO, more than 200 million people live outside of their home country for a significant time, and a small but rapidly increasing portion are made up of higher education students (Marmolejo, 2010).

According to Marmolejo (2010), Canada has a major government-sponsored campaign entitled “Education in Canada,” which makes it possible for international students, once they graduate, to stay and work in the country and eventually become permanent residents. Australia is an aggressive recruiter of international students, who comprise 20% of their enrollment compared with 3.5% in the United States. The Australian government also has made plans to help students stay and work after graduation. It is clear that governments like those of Australia, Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Canada are making it easier for international students to transition into the workforce because they realize that this skilled labor force of international students will help them out of the recession (Marmolejo, 2010).

On the other end of the spectrum, the United States has engaged in plans to impede the transition of international students after graduation. In this study, all ten participants found it discouraging and difficult to get any type of temporary jobs or internships. Hence, NAFSA has criticized the US government by stating that, while the whole world is adjusting to the recession, global mobility, and tapping into the resource that is these skilled students, the US is taking a protectionist stance by blocking and prohibiting employment opportunities for them. Victoria,
Cindy, and Jose left the United States to go back home because of the lack of jobs; they had great difficulty even scheduling interviews. Claire and Rajiv took temporary jobs for one year, with limited to no hope of finding a temporary three-year assignment. The five participants who are still continuing their education are hoping that the tide will turn in their favor. Jude and Michael are hoping to find jobs in the United States but are resigned to the fact that they may need to go to Canada or Australia to gain employment. Nikita is applying for a PhD program as a means to stay in the country longer. April wants to stay in the United States, but has been put on her guard by the experience of her sister June being sent back to South Korea (June has not been allowed to reenter the country after trying for three years). Elif is hoping to get an academic position in this country. Although both April and Elif are not opposed to the idea of working in their own country, they would like the flexibility of being able to work in both places. Just as migrants aspire, their dream job is to have one foot in both worlds: April wants to work with the Korean migrant youth population, and Elif wants to challenge the academic hierarchy and bureaucracy in Turkey while teaching in the United States.

**Brain circulation instead of brain drain is a win-win situation.** The United States can promote brain circulation instead of the proverbial brain drain by employing graduate international students temporarily. Developing countries get to keep their brightest citizens engaged politically, academically, and economically. While first-world countries get to tap into the minds of resourceful graduate international students.

Graduate international students can provide insights when entering developing global markets, which are unfamiliar terrain for most first-world countries. The new Argonauts, as explained by Saxenian (2006), are a small cadre of individuals who are highly educated, from research universities in the United States. For instance, former international students from
China, India, and Taiwan have created a technological bridge between their home country and Silicon Valley. Transferring production to a new location requires a deep knowledge of local contexts and an understanding of social, cultural, and institutional settings (Saxenian, 2006). Graduate international students provide a myriad of benefits to their host country by conducting their research at both the doctoral and Master’s degree levels; working for a few years before they go back home, from which the host country benefits from the foreign exchange of money and talent, leading to export orders; and contributing to cross-cultural understanding (Altbach, Kelly, & Lulat, 1985). According to Levitt and Khagram (2008), social life crosses and transforms the boundaries of nation and state. Social movements to advance human rights, gender-based causes, and family values get recognized and travel across physical boundaries. Economies, in contrast, get formed around manufacturing, investment, and production (Khagram & Levitt, 2008).

According to Marmolejo (2010), the mobile learner chooses a country or university based on several factors, including prestige, scholarships and financial aid, language of instruction, and openness to foreigners. In recent years, students are also factoring in the ease with which they can receive a visa and convert their education into practical training. The fact that the United States is not capitalizing on this strategy is intriguing, seeing as there is a graying of the population there (and in other first-world countries), an exponential development of technology and communications, and acute economic disparities with certain poor countries (Marmolejo, 2010).

**Goodwill and future ambassadors are still a necessity.** For decades, graduate international students have been regarded as goodwill ambassadors. These students can help the United States understand customs and rituals that are difficult to comprehend only through
theoretical frameworks. We live in a more global, knowledge-based society, in which insights from these students can be invaluable. International students also tend to leave their own home country for some of the same reasons as migrants, and many of them stay behind to participate as engaged citizens in the United States. According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990), employers value migrant workers because they have a strong work ethic, working for long hours and for low pay. Migrants are regarded as superior in certain tasks mainly when Americans are unwilling to do these tasks. Besides those who are part of the lowest echelon of the workforce, there are highly skilled workers that come to the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990).

Unfavorable experiences with the host country community have negative effects on international students’ psychological well-being (Schram & Lauver, 1988). If host nationals harbor feelings of animosity or prejudice against international students, then significant consequences result for international relationships (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). When graduate students stay behind after graduation, as many of them do, it adds to the intellectual capital of America. Those students who return home have the opportunity to become ambassadors of goodwill for the United States (NAFSA, 2003); that is, if their experience in this country was positive. It is the university’s responsibility to generate and set in motion such goodwill and lifelong relationships so that mutually beneficial friendships and networks can be formed in this highly connected and integrated global world.

Brainard (2005) contends that millions of students study outside of their home country and that countless others are visiting scholars, not working towards any specific degree. Scholars now form part of an “invisible college” that comprises numerous disciplines and specialties. Foreign students carry knowledge across borders, form a corps of researchers and teachers, and keep the areas of science and technology flourishing. They keep close ties with
their host countries after they go home and act as cultural bridges. Foreign students across the globe are the most visible and important part of a worldwide exchange of ideas, knowledge, ideologies, culture, traditions, norms, and religious practices. The lessons learned from them are valuable for their host countries (Brainard, 2005).

**Connect graduate international students to areas that are needed in the American workforce.** Recruiting and employing international students for jobs that pertain to languages and foreign relations, which are helpful in the areas of military and government agency work, would be a productive step. In the financial arena, having the expertise of graduate international students could provide a new pathway out of the global recession through a better understanding of varied business and financial practices. This might help financial institutions to reevaluate, assess, and help solve complicated problems they are facing.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

At this juncture, I would like to proffer three recommendations as a foundation for future research. They are as follows:

- To develop a theoretical framework specifically to help graduate international students with their development and transition;
- To continue and sustain research on international students’ needs; and
- To conduct a comparative study between American and international students.

**Develop a theoretical framework to specifically understand graduate international students’ development.** When designing this study, it was difficult to find a theoretical framework that could explain the growth and development of individuals within this student body. Although theories are not meant to fit any one subset of students exactly, they provide
helpful guidelines and tools for administrators and faculty, as well as researchers. It is imperative that there be a new paradigm for understanding contemporary transitional issues that graduate international students specifically face.

**Continue to conduct sustained research that keeps pace with the needs of contemporary graduate international students.** University personnel should continue to have conversations with graduate international students to gain perspective on their experiences. Other countries are doing such assessments as a matter of course in their regular university operations. In contrast, the last time CU sent out a formalized survey to international students was several years ago.

**Conduct a comparative study of graduate international students and their American peers on social experiences.** There have been comparative studies done in the past. However, such studies need to be done regularly because the international and American student body, culture, and socialization patterns are ever changing.

**Overall Conclusion**

This study conducted 30 in-depth interviews with ten graduate international students from Chardin University, a private Jesuit research university in the United States. Through three individual interviews, multiple social gatherings, and group and member-checking sessions, stories emerged that highlighted these students’ social experiences. This study provided the space for participants to explain their journey instead of silently and invisibly passing through our corridors. What emerged from their stories is that graduate international students cannot be grouped into one monolithic entity, as they all lead diverse lives. This study enumerated the
intricacies, shades, and textures of their lives as they persisted, succeeded, and developed integrated identities during their stay in the United States.

What struck me the most was how all the participants remained actively and energetically engaged during this study. They all arrived on time for their interviews, eagerly engaged with me socially, introduced me to their significant other, continued to respond to my e-mails, and Skyped with me when needed, even after they had left the country. I also had the privilege of meeting participants’ parents during these past few months. These participants opened their lives to me and trusted me to tell their stories, for which I am deeply grateful.

This study enumerated individual participants’ life stories, which journeyed through their past, current social experiences, and future plans. Their stories weave a pattern through their complex lives as they navigate and negotiate between home and host country. While I was developing these individual stories using the foundations of phenomenology, through horizontalization, themes and essences started to emerge within the participants’ life experiences. From a lengthy analysis of each participant’s story, horizons started to emerge, which in turn went through the process of phenomenological reduction. From reduction, textural essences were formed, which finally led to structured descriptions of each participant. Individual stories provided me with individual shades and textures to illustrate participant lives, which in turn provided a deeper level of understanding of each participant.

I analyzed overall findings or composite structures through the lens of three theoretical frameworks: transnationalism, adult transitional theory, and the graduate student socialization model. After coding all 30 interviews into Qualrus software, I identified five composite structure codes: Family and Home, Academic Experience, Future, Change, and Social Experience. Phenomenology and transnationalism complement each other, and effectively work together to
help social science researchers understand the social experiences of graduate international students. The composite structure codes Family, Home, Academic Experience, Future, Change, and Social Experience emerged from the overall findings. The three codes Social Experience, Home, and Family emerged through the following themes: Graduate international students stay regularly connected and engaged with family and friends in their home country through transnational social fields; cross-cultural isolation is still prevalent after all these years; alcohol is the main event for socialization in American culture; formation of identity is a way of being or belonging; ethnocentrism and xenophobia played out in participants’ lives; issues of personal power, social capital, and rights affect international students; conflicting gender roles and political involvement are quiescent factors; religion is a strong factor for some; and it is time for social scientists to move on from assimilation theories. Academic Experience, which was also a major composite structural code, surfaced through the following themes: unwavering academic achievement and persistence; the need for support through transitions during physical and mental health issues; and the need for professional mentorship and career discernment. The composite structural codes Future and Change appeared through the following themes: graduate international students handle change and transitions largely on their own; they are heterogeneous as a group, with variant needs; and their future is a moving target.

In the past, oversimplified versions of graduate international student social experiences have been portrayed, when in fact this demographic sector of the population leads extremely complex lives as they negotiate between home and host country. Strongly lacking within the realm of social experience were meaningful relationships with American peers (looking beyond superficiality), the university, and the local community. Most participants found deep and meaningful relationships and comfort in ethnic enclaves they found through their own networks.
Operating within transnational social fields, regular prolonged conversations with family and friends from home had the effect of preventing them from seeking new connections in this country.

Like migrants, graduate international students’ social fields are complex, simultaneous, and multilayered. Administrators and faculty need to understand these complexities before attempting to engage these students during their tenure on college campuses. Engaging graduate international students during their time here would benefit the institution, at the simplest level, by understanding their needs and providing support. If these same students are to become long-term ambassadors of goodwill for the university, and for the United States as a whole (as they have in the past), their engagement with the university must extend beyond the academic realm: Anything short of this would mean that the opportunity for exchanging ideas and forming lifelong friendships would be lost forever.

There seems to be little natural impetus by the local students to reach out to this particular population. Graduate international students are highly visible owing to their differences in appearance, accents, and behaviors, yet the campus community by and large acts as though they were invisible. Graduate international students come from all over the globe in order to better themselves through academic and work experiences, so they need an environment where there is encouragement to interact with the American students on campus. Such interchange would be equally beneficial to the international student, the university, and the country.

Other countries have been paying close attention to international students’ experiences. Australian researchers have clearly stated that evaluating their satisfaction levels and experiences is important to compete globally for their enrollment (Mahat & Hourigan, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In the United States, universities are in need of a superior way to connect with
graduate international students to better socialize them into this country. It should not fall just on the shoulders of international student advisors to connect with and figure out the needs of this particular population. The university community as a whole needs to actively engage with them, as do their American peers, who year after year pass these students by without giving much thought to such contact. The potential for learning from students from different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds is untapped; conversely, graduate international students are not reaping the benefits from developing new friendships with American students and on- and off-campus networking in the local community to form future business partnerships.

Although immigration policies are now more formulaic, and visas are fairly standard to acquire, the door has been shut at the back end of these students’ journey. While other countries are trying to tap into this educated knowledge base, America is busy restricting their movements, essentially forcing students to return home. Three of the participants herein had to return home or go to other countries for employment. All participants changed their expectations of working in the United States for a few years after graduation owing to the dearth of future career prospects. Unless US business enterprises open their doors to graduate international students, the future for the remaining participants will be to either return home or be recruited by another country.

International students contribute to campus diversity, generate substantial revenue for their institutions and host countries, engender long-term goodwill, improve national security through enhanced cultural understanding, increase research capabilities, and provide access to international talent across the globe (Altbach, 2006; NAFSA, 2003). Graduate international students who stay behind in the United States form a core of highly skilled workers that will be key to our future economic competitiveness (Douglass & Edelstein, 2009).
This study challenges universities to rethink how they engage (or fail to engage) with this vital and vibrant student body in meaningful and creative ways. It is time to engage this population socially on college campuses, as they have much to teach us about the global environment. Globally, we are all connected, even if it is in complex and indirect ways. As educational institutions of higher learning, it is our responsibility to understand the intricacies of their lives—differences in religion, language, and socialization patterns. Universities need to come up with creative and new ways to stay relevant in the lives of graduate international students during their tenure in the United States. The difficulty for universities lies in understanding and then meeting such divergent needs. To this end, the last chapter highlighted recommendations for practice, policies, and future research.

If we as a university do not connect with this multinational population in a way that is relevant to the contemporary situation, we will lose the opportunity to engage with some of the brightest minds who are the future in this knowledge-based society. It is my hope that this research will inspire administrators from educational institutions to take the initiative in connecting with this diverse and energetic student body.
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GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES


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Appendix A

First E-mail

March 8, 2010

Dear Graduate International Student:

My name is Nishmin Kashyap and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Higher Education, School of Education at Chardin University (pseudonym). Some of you might have met me during the Friday graduate international student luncheons. I would like to invite you to participate in an exciting opportunity, in which your invaluable insights will benefit the experiences of graduate international students at Chardin University.

I am conducting research on graduate international students’ social experiences examined through their transient lives. Your participation will not only advance our understanding of the complex lives that graduate international students lead, but will highlight the importance of graduate international students to administrators and faculty at Chardin University.

As a participant in this study you will be interviewed three times (45 minutes per interview) in a relaxed informal environment. Some other venues for informal engagement will be sought, for example during programmatic events or other gatherings with friends. Social experiences include friendships, engagement with university community, religious acceptance, and cultural adaptation.

The interviews will be conducted during the spring and summer of 2010. The interviews will be at least a week apart and I will work around your schedule and convenience to schedule these meetings. Your participation and information provided by you will be kept strictly confidential.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary; please respond to kashyapn@cu.edu if you are interested in participating. I thank you in advance for your participation and interest to improve the quality of graduate international students’ lives. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Nishmin Kashyap
Doctoral Candidate
Chardin University
March 15, 2010

Dear Graduate International Student:

Thank you for responding to my request to participate in this study. Please let me know which days of the week/times you are available to set up a meeting for an interview. I would also like to provide additional information to help guide your participation and involvement in this research.

To reiterate, this study is on graduate international students’ social experiences examined through their transient lives. As a participant in this study you will be interviewed three times (45 minutes per interview) in a relaxed environment. I would also like to participate in a few social gatherings with you and your friends.

You will be asked a range of questions to help you reflect on your past, present, and future social experiences. Social experiences include friendships, engagement with university community, religious acceptance, and cultural adaptation. This study is designed to tell your personal story so that the university community can better understand the lives of graduate international students.

The interviews will be conducted during the spring and summer of 2010. The interviews will be at least a week apart and I will work around your schedule and convenience to schedule these meetings. Your participation and information provided will be kept strictly confidential.

This study will encourage you to reflect around three main themes:
History and past experiences: How did you decide on coming to Chardin University and the United States? Why the United States rather than other competing countries? What are the perceived and real barriers to entry (if any)?

Present social experiences: How do you perceive your social experiences to be here at Chardin University and in the United States?

A final reflection on your past, present, and your future: How do you plan for life after graduation? If you return home, how do you plan on reintegrating back into your social and family lives? If you plan on immigrating to the United States, what factors helped facilitate the decision to study in the US?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please respond to kashyapn@cu.edu if you have any questions regarding this study. I thank you in advance for your participation and interest to improve the quality of graduate international student lives. I look forward to our future meetings.

Sincerely,
Nishmin Kashyap
Doctoral Candidate
Chardin University
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Dear Graduate International Student:

You are being invited to take part in a research study about graduate international students’ social experiences. The study is titled: Graduate International Students’ Social Experiences Examined Through Their Transient Lives: A Phenomenological Study at a Private Research Institution in the United States. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are a graduate international student at Chardin University (pseudonym). If you take part in this study you will be one of ten participants.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not have any effect on your grades or academic standing. Please feel free to ask questions if there is anything that you do not understand.

The person doing this study is Nishmin Kashyap, a graduate student at Chardin University. She is being guided in this research by Professor Philip Altbach in the Graduate School of Education at Chardin University. No funding has been received for this study, and neither Ms. Kashyap nor Professor Altbach expects to receive any extra money from companies because of the results of this study.

The purpose of this study is to investigate graduate international students’ social experiences through their transient lives. Social experiences include friendships, cultural and religious acceptance, and adaptation to new norms and traditions. By doing this study we hope to bring your voice to the center of the discourse to raise awareness among the university community on the importance of this group on campus. We also hope to be able to make recommendations on the basis of the information that is gathered to continue to improve the social experiences for graduate international students.

The research will be done at Chardin University. This study requires each participant to engage in three interviews, each lasting for 45 minutes. In addition, we are interested in being a participant/observer in at least two social gatherings. The first interview and meeting will be held mid to late March, the second mid-April, and the third during the end of April of 2010. Interview questions will ask participants to reflect on their past, present, and future experiences as a student. To the best of my knowledge, the things that you will be doing in this study will have no more risk of harm to you than what you would experience in everyday life.

You will not receive any direct benefit from being in this research study, but we hope to gather information that will benefit graduate international students not only here at Chardin University but in the United States. You do not have to pay to participate in this research study, and will not receive any compensation for your participation. You may choose to stop your participation in this study at any time. Your decision to stop your participation will not have any effect on your grades or academic standing.
Your name will not be on the interviews, so your answers will be anonymous. You will be asked if you would like to give a pseudonym for your interviews so that your real name is not ever connected with them; if you do not wish to choose a pseudonym, one will be selected for you in order to make sure that the interviews and social gatherings are confidential. This informed consent document, with your name on it, will be stored in a locked cabinet in Nishmin Kashyap’s home, and no one but Ms. Kashyap will have access to this cabinet. The informed consent documents will be destroyed by shredding three years after the results of the study are published.

Although it happens very rarely, we may be required to show information that identifies you, like this informed consent document, to people who need to be sure that we have done the research correctly. These would be people from a group such as the Chardin University Institutional Review Board that oversees research involving human participants.

The information you give will be entered into an electronic database and analyzed. In this process, your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When I write up the results of this study to share it in my study, you will not be identified in these written materials.

You are encouraged to ask questions now, and at any time during the study. You can reach me, Nishmin Kashyap, at 617-552-4713. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please contact the Chardin University Office for Human Research Participant Protection, 617-552-4778.

CERTIFICATION
I have read and I believe I understand this Informed Consent document. I believe I understand the purpose of the research project and what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily. I understand that I may stop my participation in this research study at any time and that I can refuse to answer any question(s) that I would like. I understand that my name will not appear on the interviews; meetings; and that I will not be identified in reports on this research. I have received a signed copy of this Informed Consent document for my personal reference. I hereby give my informed and free consent to be a participant in this study.

Signatures:

________________  ______________________________________
Date    Consent Signature of Participant

________________________________________
Print Name of Participant

Person providing information and witness to consent
Appendix D

Interview Questions

First Interview

During the first interview, participants were informed of the interview protocol and the overall purpose of the interviews. The first interview was intended to gain trust and gather background information from participants.

1. Demographic questions on family, hometown, and educational and work history.
2. Where were you born and raised?
3. Do you have family in the area?
4. How long have you been in the United States?
5. How often do you connect with friends and family back home?
6. What specifically made you choose the United States for your studies? Why did you choose Chardin University?
7. Please share your overall experience with the process of getting to the United States. How was your experience at the consulate office back home? How did you go about applying with the consulate for your visa?
8. How were you received by immigration officers at your port of entry? What was your experience like with US immigration officers?
9. How was your experience every time you entered and exited the country?
GRADUATE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

Second Interview

Questions about the social experiences at Chardin University and the United States will be addressed.

1. What was your experience in acquiring living accommodations? How easy or difficult was this process?

2. Describe your typical week at CU.

3. Describe your social network of friends and family here in the US. Describe the friendships you have formed. How easy was it to make friends?

4. How would you describe your overall social experience? Has your social experience been all that you had imagined?

5. What was the happiest time or most satisfying experience here at CU or the US?

6. What was your greatest disappointment during your tenure here at CU or the US?

7. How have you made friends here in the US? Do you have any American friends?

8. How has CU helped to enhance your social life?

9. What worries you the most at the present time?

10. How has your transition been to Chardin University and the United States?

11. Describe your engagement at the institution and community outside the university.

12. Are there any constraints that you currently face? Examples are financial, religious, cultural, etc.

13. What adjustments did you make after coming to CU and the US to fit in?

14. What part of the US culture was most different from your own? Were there any cultural issues or differences that struck you the most?

15. What are your thoughts on the dating culture here in the US?

16. How have you managed to maintain your identity (religious, cultural, personal)?
17. What has your academic experience been like at CU? How does it compare with that in your home country?

18. What factors will enhance successful completion of your degree program?

19. What were your expectations before coming to the US on friendships and culture? Have these expectations been met or not?

20. Are you happy here in the US and your program?
Third Interview

The third interview will focus on the future plans of the participant and give a chance to reflect on the first two interview sessions.

1. As you reflect on the last two interviews, is there anything that you would like to add or change?
2. What are your thoughts on the transient nature of your life in the United States?
3. How do you stay connected to family and friends back home? Describe your involvement with friends and family back home.
4. What are your plans after graduation? If you plan on going home, what do you perceive your transitional needs to be? If you plan on staying in the United States, what kind of support would you need?
5. How do you believe you have changed during your tenure here at Chardin University?
6. As you reflect on your past and current social experiences, would you have liked to have done things differently?
7. How do you view your status in the United States, for example, do you view yourself as a migrant, a student, etc.?
8. How is your own government trying to get you to come back and rejoin the workforce? What are the incentives to stay here or return?
9. What organizations are you involved in? In your home country and in the community here?
10. What are your thoughts on policies back home? Are you aspiring to change the educational system or work environment?
11. What are your political affiliations in your home country?
Clarifying Questions

1. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview?

2. Is there anything that you would like to clarify?

3. Going back to the original research questions, is there anything that I have missed or should have included during these interviews?