A call for online anticipatory orientation for international students

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ABSTRACT

Almost one million international college students came to the U.S. in 2014/2015 adding billions of dollars to our economy and diversity to our campuses (Institute of International Education, 2015). Too often U.S. tertiary institutions leave these students to fend for themselves as far as adjusting to a new culture. Although it is believed that orientation programs are beneficial, there is a dearth of scholarship into what needs to be covered in an orientation program for international students.

The focus of this study is to determine what international students in the tertiary system would have benefited from knowing before they came to the U.S. While acculturation and the social networks of international students have been studied for several decades, the study of the retention of international students and specially designed orientation programs for them is sorely lacking.

This study of international students studying in a Midwestern city and surrounding areas combined web-based questionnaires that have been in use in cross-cultural studies for several decades with original questions geared toward the specific purpose of the study. The data were both numerical and descriptive. After the initial data analysis, several international students were interviewed in order to gain further insight into the experience of acculturating to the United States. The findings and assertions from these data made from the data analysis in this mixed methods study lead to recommendations that will hopefully have the potential to positively facilitate the anticipatory adjustment of international students as they begin to acculturate to the United States.

Keywords: acculturation, international student, orientation, retention, sojourner

1. INTRODUCTION

During the 2014/2015 academic year, 974,926 international students attended universities and colleges across the United States, an increase of over 30% in the past decade (Institute of International Education, 2015). Tertiary institutions are actively recruiting international students for several reasons. First, international students bring diversity to our nation's campuses and communities. It is this diversity that introduces our domestic students to other worldviews and helps them gain an understanding of the global economy we now live in while helping the international students learn about the American culture and worldview (Andrade, 2011; Andrade & Evans, 2009; Montgomery, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Moreover, we can hope that these international students will form positive opinions of the United States and of Americans and will return home to share these feelings with others in their countries, thereby promoting international relations.   Additionally, according to the Institute of International Education, international students brought almost $30.5 billion to the U.S. economy in 2015. Higher education is one of the country's largest service sector exports (Zhang & Goodson, 2011, p. 140). In these days of state and federal budget cuts, tertiary institutions look to outside sources to make up their financial shortfall. One of these sources is international students (Andrade & Evans, 2009; Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999).

All students, whether U.S. domestic or international, go through some kind of adjustment process, be it from high school to college or college to graduate school. Nonetheless, this adjustment process is frequently much more difficult for international students, who must often learn a new language along with a new culture and a new academic system. The process of adjusting to a new culture, or acculturation, has been studied for decades by anthropologists and psychologists. One of the major findings is that sojourners, or "individuals who temporarily reside in a foreign place for activities such as work and education" (Gullekson & Vancouver, 2010, p. 315), lose familiar cues and cannot predict host nationals' behaviors, thereby causing them embarrassment, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy (Berry, 2005; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960).

When an international student has difficulty adapting to a new culture, s/he is said to suffer from acculturative stress. Berry's 40 years of research positions him as one of acculturation's leading experts. He defines acculturative stress as "a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of acculturation" (Berry, 2004, p. 32). Symptoms of acculturative stress include sleep problems, digestive problems, loneliness, homesickness, and depression. If the symptoms are severe enough and persist over time, the student gives up and returns home. Not only does this hurt the institution in the loss of revenue and the decrease in its retention rate, but it is the student who must grapple with failing to achieve his/her dream of a degree from an American university.

1.1 Orientation programs

Beginning the adjustment-to-college process early has positive effects on a student's persistence (Mori, 2000; Rice et al., 2012; Sam, 2001; Suanet & Van De Vuver, 2009; Zheng & Berry, 1991). Institutions have long recognized the need for orientation programs and have even established student affairs offices to coordinate such programs. Mayhew, Vanderlinden, and Kim (2010) conducted a study investigating the influence of orientation programs on social and academic integration, two dimensions found to be crucial to student persistence. Their study

showed that attending an orientation program had a direct effect on both the students' academic and social integration. Pascarella, Terenzini, and Wolfle (1986) also found that attending an orientation had significant direct effects on social integration and institutional commitment. Many schools offer some kind of orientation for their new students, but these are usually held after the students have arrived on campus.

Because international students must not only transition from high school to college, or from college to graduate school but also must acculturate to a new culture and language, they face greater obstacles. Many institutions, however, seem to expect international students to adapt on their own (Kelly & Moogan, 2011, p. 24). Studies have found that having accurate prior knowledge of norms, customs, and values of the host culture aids in the sojourner's adjustment (Church, 1982, p. 549). As Black and Oddou (1991) noted:

> The more accurate expectations individuals can form, the more uncertainty they will reduce and the better their anticipatory adjustment will be. The better the anticipatory adjustment, the fewer surprises and negative affective reactions or less culture shock individuals will experience, the more appropriate behaviors and attitudes they will exhibit, and the smoother and quicker their adjustment will be (p. 304).

American tertiary institutions need international students to enhance their finances and to provide needed resources in their quest for producing global citizens. In order to help international students persist to graduation, an effective orientation program, beginning prior to departure and continuing upon arrival, is one way to help students begin to acculturate. We can take advantage of today's technology to create such an orientation, but first we need to discover what areas are most problematic for international students. To do that, I created a survey to ask students themselves what they wish they had known before they had come that might have made their acculturation a little easier so that they suffer less acculturative stress.

1.2 Research questions

RQ1: What do college-age international students in a city in the middle of the country and the surrounding areas wish they had known before they came to the United States in order to aid their academic, sociocultural, and psychological acculturation?
RQ2: What resources did college-age international students in this area access prior to their departure for the United States?

1.3 The concept of acculturation

The scholarship on acculturation processes refers to international students as "sojourners." As mentioned previously, Gullekson and Vancouver define a sojourner as an "individual who temporarily resides in a foreign place for activities such as work and education" (2010). A sojourner, then, does not intend to stay but plans to return home eventually. When sojourners go to another country for an extended stay, they come into contact with another culture. Acculturation is what happens when two cultures come into contact with each other.

Acculturation has been taking place for as long as there has been human contact. The concept was originally proposed by anthropologists in the 1930s (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 473). It was seen as a group-level phenomenon, or how groups who came into contact with each other changed over time. Psychologists became interested in acculturation as an individual level

phenomenon in the 1960s (Graves, 1967) and, in particular, how acculturation affected the individuals within the acculturating groups.

1.3.1 Berry and Ward

There are two researchers in the field of acculturation who today are recognized as experts in acculturation theory and research: Berry and Ward. The two have researched acculturation for over four decades and have built on each other's work. Berry defined acculturation as "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members (2005, p. 698). According to this definition, changes co-occur at the individual level (psychological acculturation) and on a group level as well (cultural acculturation) in both cultures (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 701). "No cultural group remains unchanged following culture contact; acculturation is a two-way interaction, resulting in actions and reactions in the contact situation" (Sam & Berry, 2010, p. 473). In other words, not only is the sojourner undergoing changes, but the host culture and host nationals are undergoing changes as well, albeit not as dramatic as those of the sojourner. The changes seen in individual host nationals are in their attitudes and behaviors toward the sojourners; the changes seen in host cultures are reflected in their policies and programs for sojourners, among other things.

Ward et al. (1998) postulated that the process of acculturation consists of two constructs:
1. Psychological adjustment, or emotional well-being.
   a. Affected by the sojourner's personality, social support, life change variables, and coping styles
   b. Best understood from a stress and coping framework in which acculturation is seen as one of life's many stresses and something which can be coped with
2. Sociocultural adaptation, or the ability to fit in the host society and perform one's daily activities.
   a. Affected by length of residence in the host country, language proficiency, cultural knowledge, cultural distance, and the amount of contact with host nationals (Searle & Ward, 1990; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006).
   b. Best understood from a culture-learning perspective

These two constructs are interrelated but not the same. They are distinct for three reasons. First they are predicted by different variables. Psychological adjustment is generally operationalized as depression. As stated earlier, psychological adjustment is predicted by personality, life changes, and social support (Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Ward & Searle, 1991). Sociocultural adaptation, on the other hand, is measured by the amount of difficulty the sojourner has in the performance of daily tasks and is dependent on variables such as language proficiency, length of sojourn, cultural distance, and amount of contact with host nationals (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1992, 1993a, 1993b). Second, psychological and sociocultural adjustments fluctuate differently over time. The greatest adjustment difficulties occur at the point of entry for both; however, sociocultural problems steadily decrease and eventually level off, while psychological problems are much more variable (Ward & Kennedy, 1996a, 1996b; Ward et al, 1998). Third, although the two are interrelated, research findings show the magnitude of the correlation increases with greater integration and cultural proximity, which means that the more the sojourner is in contact with host nationals and the

more s/he learns about the host culture, the greater his/her emotional well-being (Ward & Kennedy, 1996b; Ward et al, 1998; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999).

The sociocultural dimension involves how the sojourner handles daily life in the new culture. The psychological acculturation dimension is concerned with an individual's satisfaction and overall emotional or psychological well-being. According to Berry, we need to consider the psychological changes that individuals undergo when faced with a new culture (2004, p. 28). These could be behavioral shifts, such as changes in the way one speaks, dresses, eats, and so forth, or attitudinal shifts, such as how they view these differences as compared to their heritage cultures. Even though there are vast differences in individual responses, there are commonalities to the acculturation process (Barry, 2004). It is these commonalities my study sought to discover.

2. METHOD

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher needed to find out (a) what international students found most problematic in adapting to a new culture and (b) how familiar they are with various technologies as well as what access they have to these technologies in their home countries. Three primary techniques to collect data related to these questions were used:
1. questionnaires with close-ended and open-ended questions administered to international students from seven institutions in the Midwest,
2. interviews of 12 international students, and
3. a review of the orientation programs currently in effect in the institutions at which the participants study.

2.1 Instrumentation

Two versions of the same questionnaire were offered: a Web-based version using Qualtrics for those who liked the convenience of filling it out at home and, because of the potentially low return rate of online questionnaires (Brown, 2001; Dörnyei, 2007), a paper-and-pencil version administered at each location. Having responses from over 200 students (126 online and 81 paper-and-pencil) provided more reliable statistics from a more diverse sample.

Scholarship has proposed that there are two domains to acculturation: (a) sociocultural (behavioral), or the ability to fit in, and (b) psychological (affective), or one's emotional well-being or satisfaction with life. Ward and Kennedy's (1999) Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS) was used to measure sociocultural acculturation. Zung's (1965) Self-rating Depression Scale (SDS) was used to measure depression, or psychological acculturation. Both instruments have been used in many cross-cultural studies and, in fact, have often both been used in these studies.

2.1.1 The Sociocultural Adaptation Scale (SCAS)

The SCAS has Cronbach's alpha scores ranging from 0.75 to 0.95. Participants are asked to indicate the amount of difficulty they experienced in particular situations using a five-point Likert scale (no difficulty/slight difficulty/moderate difficulty/great difficulty/extreme difficulty). The items in the SCAS are divided among three factors: (a) daily life, (b) academic/university life, and (c) social interaction. As such, it is close-ended and therefore a quantitative data

collection instrument. There was one potential limitation to the SCAS: while students may rank certain items as being quite difficult, it is possible that they may feel that these items are also relatively unimportant to them. Therefore, a scale to each item where respondents ranked the degree of importance (not at all important/a little important/important/very important/extremely important) was added. In addition, text boxes for each item were added and participants were encouraged to give personal examples or explanations. These were open-ended and required qualitative analysis. The complete questionnaire is found in Appendix A.

2.1.2 Self-rating Depression Scale (SDS)

Psychological adjustment was assessed by the SDS, which consists of 20 statements that tap affective, physiological, and cognitive components of depression. Participants respond to each statement on a four-point rating scale (a little of the time, some of the time, good part of the time, and most of the time) to decide how much of the time the statement describes how they have been feeling during the past several days. Cronbach's alpha scores in over a dozen studies range from 0.70 to 0.92. The scale for the SDS is as follows:

< 50 normal
50-59 mild depression
60-69 moderate depression
≥ 70 severe depression

2.1.3 Other questions

To more completely answer the research questions, questions were added regarding orientation programs, resources used by students prior to their departure, and technologies available in their home countries. Demographic questions regarding gender, country of origin, length of residence in the United States, type of English language program (if any), marital status, and whether the student was an undergraduate or a graduate student were also asked.

2.2 Demographic information

The demographic information on the respondents is presented in Table 1. A little over 200 questionnaires were completed. The modal respondent is a single Asian or Middle Eastern male undergraduate, 20-23 years of age, who has been in the United States more than eighteen months and is taking all ESL classes. According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Student and Exchange Visitor Program, in 2015 55% of the international students in the United States were male, and 45% were female. In this study, 60% were male, and 40% were female, so these respondents reflected the national trend.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Data analysis

Data analysis involved the following:
1. Use of descriptive statistics from the demographic questions to create a profile of respondents,

2. Determination of mean item scores and standard deviations,
3. Mapping mean item scores onto the three scale labels (daily life, university/academic life/ and social interaction) to determine which items were perceived to be most/least difficult and most/least important,
4. Grouping demographic information into categories in order to conduct a series of *t* tests with the demographic information that had two categories and *F* tests on the other demographic questions, and
5. Running post hoc tests to determine where the differences lie.

After analyzing the quantitative results, the open-ended responses were coded and categorized. The same three factors (daily life, university/academic life, and social interaction) were used and all answers to individual items in the SCAS and then all answers to all items within each category were studied to determine if there should be additional, or other, categories. Responses were grouped based on gender, length of residence, and country of origin to discern any commonalities. Demographic statistics are found in Table A1 in Appendix B.

3.2 Interviews

Once the results from the questionnaire were analyzed, international students were interviewed using open-ended questions developed on the basis of the results of the quantitative analyses. The purpose of these interviews was to delve more deeply into the lived experiences of acculturation among the participants. In terms of the sample, ideally, the researcher wanted to have a mix of those who had been more successful vs. those who had been less successful at adapting, male and female, and those from a public/research institution vs. those from a small private liberal arts school. Additionally, the researcher had hoped to interview those who felt adept at using technology and those who did not. Unfortunately, the proposed matrix did not work out for a number of reasons that arose upon analysis of the quantitative data. First, a large majority of the respondents considered themselves to be digital natives. Also, a series of one-way ANOVAS revealed that there was no statistical difference in the means for public/private institutions, or for small/large institutions. Gender also was found not to be a significant variable. Instead, region definitely produced some statistically significant results.

Because of the findings above, the interviewee selection was adjusted to focus on an equal representation of home countries, which were divided into regions. Four students from the Middle East (36.8% of respondents), four from Asia (37.2% of respondents), and four from Latin America (14.7% of respondents) were interviewed. Two males and two females from each region were interviewed; six were undergraduates and six were graduate students. Interviewees who approached the extremes on the SCAS and SDS were selected in order to understand more fully the acculturation experiences of those who appeared to be acculturating well and those who appeared to be having difficulties, either socioculturally, psychologically, or both. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

3.3 Review of Orientation Programs

After analyzing the data from the questionnaire and the interviews, orientation materials from each participating institution were reviewed. The researcher looked for the kinds of information they provide international students prior to their arrival and immediately upon their arrival to see if it is the information the students themselves feel they need. These were

accommodations, transportation, weather, food, clothing, health care, visa/work regulations, writing academic essays, plagiarism, cultural differences, and what is available on and around the campus. [More detail on these topics is found in the Discussion section]. The written materials the schools provided as well as their websites that are accessible to anyone were reviewed.

3.4 Findings

Results of the SCAS are found in Table A2 in Appendix C.

3.4.1 SCAS: what students found most difficult

The SCAS asked students to rate the difficulty of various everyday activities in three categories: (a) basic needs and daily life, (b) academic/university life, and (c) communication and social skills. Respondents answered using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (no difficulty to extreme difficulty). The specific activities with their respective means and standard deviations are found in Table 2, specifically the data labeled Difficulty. The data show that finding their way around the city was the most difficult activity in basic needs and daily life (mean = 2.73), while buying daily necessities was the least difficult (mean = 1.88). As for academic/university life, writing papers was judged to be the most difficult (mean = 2.87), while dealing with staff at the institution was the least difficult (mean = 2.33). In social interactions (communication and social skills), understanding American jokes was the most difficult (mean = 3.19), while making friends with people of other cultures was the least difficult (mean = 2.36).

3.4.2 SCAS: what students found most important

A scale was added asking students to rank the importance of these same activities also using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (not at all important to extremely important). These results are also found in Table 2 below, labeled Importance. Responses indicated that buying daily necessities is the most important daily activity (mean = 3.97), whereas going to restaurants is the least important (mean = 3.18). For the category academic/university life, understanding lectures is most important (mean = 4.41), and dealing with bad service at the university is the least important (mean = 3.62). A surprising finding for this category is the relatively low ranking students gave the importance of "expressing your ideas in class" (mean = 4.15). This was unexpected because class discussion and participation in American universities and colleges is generally a part of the grade. Because students did not rank this near the top of importance, they need to be told how the American educational system differs from what they are used to.

3.4.3 Summary

Meyer (2001) suggested that orientation should begin before students leave their countries and should provide information about students' basic needs and how they can meet those needs in the United States (p. 66). An effective orientation should attempt to address what students consider important yet difficult to do. For example, according to the survey responses, in the category of basic needs and daily life, finding one's way around the city is not only difficult, but also important to participants, indicating the need for an orientation that would

involve discussing transportation and available stores in the area. For the category of academic/university life, writing papers is considered difficult yet important, so an introduction to American academic writing would be deemed appropriate. For the category of communication/social skills, making American friends was cited as important yet difficult to do. An orientation should thus provide lists of campus organizations and athletic intramural sports that students could join.

4. DISCUSSION

As a result of this study, it was found that international students see a need for an orientation, and many would like an online orientation they can begin in their countries and continue over a period of several weeks or months once they arrive in the United States. In this anticipatory orientation, students would like information on what some students term "urgent" needs: accommodations, transportation, weather, food, clothing, the health care system, visa/work regulations, academic writing, plagiarism, and an introduction to such basic American ideals as the need for independence and for physical space.

Even though tertiary institutions actively recruit international students to provide more diversity on their campuses and to provide needed revenues, international students are still an understudied population. In their study of international student retention, DiMaria and Kwai (2014) found that 63.6% of student affairs administrators had not made adaptations to services to meet the unique needs of international students. They quoted a Student Union manager, "It's like they [international students] come here and you turn them loose, but you don't give them a guide" (PowerPoint slide 43).

Theorists and researchers in higher education retention, such as Tinto (1975), point to the first year as being critical to student persistence. All students go through a transition from high school to college, or from college to graduate school. This transition is even more difficult for international students because they often have to contend with learning another language along with learning about another culture, both socially and academically. Orientation programs can help with this critical first year by laying the foundation for a student's successful persistence.

The purpose of this study was to find out what college-age international students wish they had known prior to coming to the United States that might have eased their acculturation. The researcher had wanted to discover if students would be interested in a pre-arrival online orientation. Although no one had heard of such an orientation, participants were overwhelmingly in favor of one and offered suggestions as to topics that they felt should be covered. There are, indeed, universal commonalities that international students felt would help them to acculturate. Based on these commonalities and on what the participants themselves said, the following are recommendations for topics to be covered in an online pre-arrival orientation [in the order students put them]:

- Accommodations: for those students who will live in dormitories, provide pictures of rooms and common areas along with a list of amenities (e.g. kitchen, laundry facilities, common areas for relaxing). Include a price list for the various dormitories and anything else that may not be included in those prices.

  For those students who will live in an apartment, provide names, addresses, and e-mail addresses of apartments in safe neighborhoods near the campus. Include an explanation of terms such as lease, security deposit, pet deposit, and utility companies.

Have a list of utility companies, including Internet service providers, with their contact information, and explain whether or not deposits will be required.

- Transportation: Students need to be told whether or not there is public transportation. In my area, for example, public transportation is poor, and students need to know that they should either live on campus or close to campus. Cars are a necessity as many stores are not within walking distance. One student commented, "Transportation? It means most of the time I was in my room because I didn't have anybody to take me. I didn't have a car." Information about getting a driver's license could be in this section along with the requirements for having a car (inspections, insurance, taxes).

  Students would also like to know how they would get to the campus from the airport. If they need to find their own transportation, they should be told that. In that case, they should be advised to write their complete United States destination address on a card to show taxi drivers.

- Weather: Describe the seasons and the kind of weather each season typically has. In this part of the country (the Midwest), students need to know about the cold winters. For students coming from warm climates, they need to know they will have to buy warm clothes once the cold weather comes. One respondent remarked, "The first year I was here, we had a lot of snow. I wasn't expecting that."

- Clothing: In addition to warm clothes for the winter, students should be advised to bring a suit for the times they need to be a little more formal (e.g., presentations or interviews). Several students suggested having pictures of students and what they typically wear in each season.

- Food: Many students were completely overwhelmed in the beginning when they went to the student cafeteria, a restaurant, or a grocery store. They had no idea what the food was, what it was called, or how to pronounce it. Pictures of typical American foods with their names and an audio pronunciation would be helpful. Information about student meal plans and their costs should be provided along with typical menus for each meal.

  Although students were eager to try American food—which many described as burgers, fries, and pizza—eventually they grew tired of it and wanted their own food. They would like a list of ethnic grocery stores and restaurants with their addresses and contact information. Male students in particular will need to be told that they will, in all likelihood, be cooking many of their meals.

- Local area and activities: Students expressed a desire to know what services are on campus and what is within walking distance of the campus. These would include banks, coffee shops, restaurants, pharmacies, movie theaters, grocery stores, and basic needs stores (e.g., Dollar General). Moreover, students would like to know what athletic facilities are available to them and at what cost, if any. Sports mentioned most often were soccer, basketball, volleyball, badminton, swimming, and cricket. Furthermore, students would like a list of clubs on campus with a short description of what they do and how often they meet. Several students request a list of nearby churches, temples, and mosques for those who would like to attend religious services.

- Visa and work regulations. Students need to be told what they are required to do to keep in status. Many students come here thinking they will get a job to help with expenses only to find out they are here on a student visa and, therefore, severely restricted in their opportunities to work. Work-study opportunities exist but are limited, and students need to be told this.

- Academic and university life: The one topic students mentioned over and over was plagiarism. It is not as serious an offense in many other countries, and students need to know it is a very serious offense here. They need to know (a) what constitutes plagiarism and (b) what the consequences are. One student expressed to me that "plagiarism isn't a big problem in my country. It's no big deal."

  Another suggestion by many students was to have an online writing class to introduce them to American academic writing. Nearly all students felt that all international students, regardless of English language proficiency level, should take a class in American academic writing.

- Health care system: Students do not understand the American health care system. They should be encouraged to buy health insurance when they arrive and shown how the student health insurance the school has works. They need to learn terms like co-pay, deductible, and in-network provider. One interviewee noted, "Medical care is another thing that shocked me. Insurance doesn't pay for anything. We need to know these things. We need someone to tell us to go to urgent care and not the emergency room."

- Cultural learning: International students can begin learning about American culture before they even leave home. The American need for independence (as evidenced by 18-year-olds leaving home) and physical distance were cited often as being puzzling to many international students, or as one Latin American student put it, "Americans like their bubbles." The idea of designing a cultural learning course may seem daunting at first, but, fortunately, Mikk, Cohen, and Paige (2009) of the University of Minnesota have an excellent instructional guide on the topic of cultural learning titled <u>Maximizing Study Abroad</u>. This guide offers strategies for culture learning, both culture general and culture specific, and even includes activity sheets for students to do. Many of these activities could easily be put into an online course.

This is not an exhaustive list, but students do not expect to learn everything in an online pre-arrival orientation. As stated above, they are concerned with "urgent" needs. Once they arrive they would like to continue orientation sessions. Many schools make these sessions mandatory, but the students would prefer a mandatory session on topics that are crucial in the first few days, such as necessary paperwork that needs to be filled out, university and dormitory rules, and so forth. After that, they would like a schedule of orientation sessions, each one covering a separate topic. These sessions would ideally be offered on a rotating basis so that students could attend as the topics became salient for them. Topics such as the health care system and visa/work regulations, among others, could be re-visited and explained in more detail. Workshops on computer labs, the library, counseling services, academic tutoring, writing center, and cross-cultural training are more suggestions for the orientation.

Students would like a tour of the campus, especially once they have their class schedule so that they can see where they have to go. The tour would include finding out where to go if there was a problem with their tuition bill or their visa. They would also like to know where to go if they feel sick. If there are campus buses, they would like to be shown how they work. They would like to see what athletic facilities are available to them. In addition, they would like a walking tour of the surrounding area to see what is available. Two students mentioned that what would be helpful would be to have a Club Fair at some point during the first few weeks at which representatives of the clubs on campus would set up tables and students could visit with which club representatives they wanted to.

Many students commented on how helpful Conversation Groups or Cultural Coffee Hours were in which they got together on a weekly basis to discuss whatever topics come up, usually with regard to American culture and customs. These seem to be most effective when American students attend and offer explanations. Reactions were mixed when asked whether hearing about other countries' customs was helpful; some students enjoyed learning about other cultures, while others wanted the conversation to stay with American culture and customs.

In addition to a pre-arrival orientation and subsequent ongoing sessions, based on the information received from participants, there are five additional suggestions for universities and colleges:

- Pair each new international student with someone from his/her country or at least with someone who speaks the same language. This "buddy" could begin e-mailing the new student before s/he even leaves home and, once s/he arrived, would show the new student around the campus and the surrounding area, attend orientation sessions (to translate, if necessary), and be available to help with any needs or questions.
- Check Wikipedia to see what is written about the institution. Almost every student in this study mentioned using Wikipedia as a resource. If there is erroneous or incomplete information, correct it.
- Redesign the International Student Services website so that any information an international student might need is contained there. The topics mentioned in this article would be a good starting point, but also consider having links to student resources such as the Writing Center and the library. Make sure there is an easy way to get back to the home page of International Student Services.
- Help each group of students from the same country set up a social media page (e.g., Facebook) where they can post questions, requests, or suggestions. The Saudi students already have a national site. The Chinese and Indian students usually have sites set up at individual institutions. Be sure to tell prospective and current students about these sites, and encourage their use. If there are too few students from the same country, consider grouping students who speak the same language.
- Consider the needs of married spouses. Too often these, usually female, sojourners are ignored, and they are left to sit at home all day with nothing to do. If the institution does not offer free ESL classes for spouses, find libraries and/or churches that do. Take spouses to stores and area attractions.
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4.1 Limitations

Many international students cited their lack of fluency as the main reason for their acculturative stress. Because this survey was in English, the selection of respondents had to be limited to those who were already fairly proficient in English. The directors of the English language program at each institution made the determination as to which of their levels would be able to understand the survey questions. Even with this screening, there were over 300 questionnaires that were not completed and, therefore, could not be used. The findings revealed that the participants in this study were acculturating well, and that may be due to their already high level of English proficiency.

In addition, the survey was very long, requiring an average of 40 minutes to complete (data from Qualtrics). Even though Qualtrics saves answers and a student can return to the survey, over half of the 541 who began the survey did not complete it.

The response rate for electronically delivered questionnaires is generally lower than for face-to-face questionnaires. Because of this, a large pool of international students from which to draw was needed in order to end up with the goal of 200 responses; therefore, the search for participants was expanded to include other universities further away than had originally been planned.

For the interviews, some of the interviewees were former students of the researcher, but one-half of the interviewees were pulled from the survey based on their region, gender, and their willingness to be interviewed. Because they were unknown to the researcher prior to the interview, it is highly likely that they are more extraverted, a personality trait that could not be controlled for.

The respondents were from a Midwestern city and surrounding areas, including suburban and rural institutions. Undoubtedly, their needs could be different from students living in other parts of the country.

4.2 Future research

There are three countries whose students comprise the majority of international students enrolled in tertiary institutions in the United States: China, India, and Saudi Arabia. Students from these three countries comprise 50.9% of all international students in the United States in 2014/15 (Institute of International Education, 2015). Future research targeting each of these groups is suggested in order to see if they have any unique needs or difficulties that are different from others.

Additionally, collaborating with someone in Educational Technology to design an online pre-arrival orientation program based on what the participants in my study suggested is needed along with testing its acculturative impact with a control group who does not use the online pre-arrival orientation and a group who does.

4.3 Conclusion

This study began by questioning if international students would avail themselves of an online pre-arrival orientation, and, if so, what topics should be covered in it. To answer these questions, over 200 college-age international students in a Midwestern city and the surrounding areas completed a lengthy survey. More in-depth information was provided by interviews. International students would definitely like to begin their anticipatory adjustment before coming to the United States and suggested focusing such an orientation on urgent needs. The list of topics can be applied to everyone, graduate or undergraduate, male or female, from every region in the world. The students would like orientation to continue in a face-to-face format once they arrive as they begin acculturating to the United States both socially and academically.

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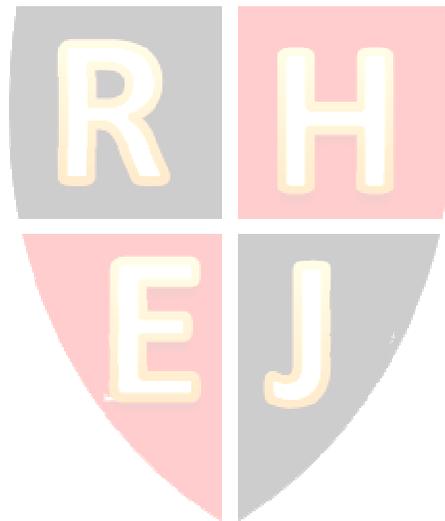
APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE

Part I: Daily life and fitting in

This part measures how difficult you found certain situations to be and how important you think these situations are.

INSTRUCTIONS: for the items below, please circle a number from 1 to 5 that best describes the amount of difficulty that you have experienced in the U.S.

1 = not at all difficult
2 = slightly difficult
3 = moderately difficult
4 = very difficult
5 = extremely difficult

Below that, please circle a letter from A through E that explains how important you feel that item is

A = not at all important
B = slightly important
C = moderately important
D = very important
E = extremely important
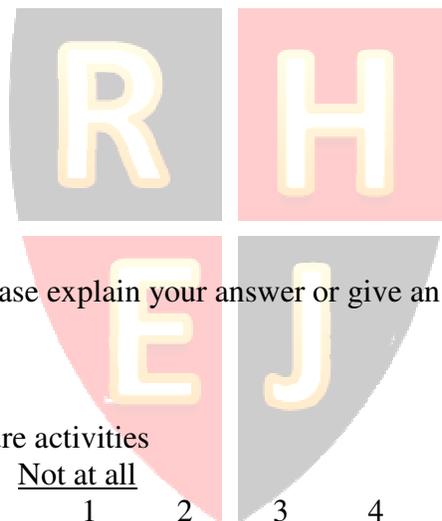
In the space, if you choose, please explain your answer or give an example.

BASIC NEEDS

1. Enjoying your favorite leisure activities
                        Not at all   Extremely
    How <u>difficult</u>?   1   2   3   4   5

    How <u>important</u>?   A   B   C   D   E

2. Finding your way around the campus
                        Not at all   Extremely
    How <u>difficult</u>?   1   2   3   4   5

    How <u>important</u>?   A   B   C   D   E

3. Finding your way around the city

                        Not at all   Extremely
    How <u>difficult</u>?   1   2   3   4   5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

4. Buying daily necessities such as food, toothpaste, soap, etc.

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

5. Going shopping

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

6. Going to restaurants, fast food restaurants, etc.

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

ACADEMIC AND UNIVERSITY LIFE

7. Writing papers that earn you good grades

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

8. Expressing your ideas in class

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

9. Understanding what is required of you at the college/university

	<u>Not at all</u>				<u>Extremely</u>
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5

How <u>important</u>?　　　　　A　　B　　C　　D　　E

10. Dealing with staff at the college/university

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

11. Understanding lectures or teacher explanations

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

12. Reading and understanding course materials

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

13. Getting used to teaching methods

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

14. Dealing with bad service at the college/university

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS

15. Making friends with people of other nationalities or cultures

	Not at all				Extremely
How <u>difficult</u>?	1	2	3	4	5
How <u>important</u>?	A	B	C	D	E

16. Making American friends

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E

17. Understanding American jokes and humor

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E

18. Understanding the local accent

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E

19. Dealing with someone who is unpleasant or rude

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E

20. Living away from family members and friends back home

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E

21. Dealing with people in authority

How difficult?	not at all 1	2	3	4	5 extremely
How important?	not at all A	B	C	D	E extremely

22. Dealing with people being physically close and/or touching you

	Not at all				Extremely
How difficult?	1	2	3	4	5
How important?	A	B	C	D	E
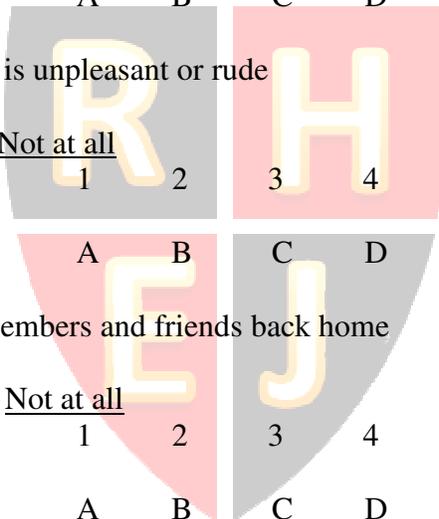
Part II: Emotional well-being and satisfaction with life

This part measures your own perception of how satisfied with your life you are at this moment.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please read each statement and decide how much of the time the statement describes how you have been feeling during the past several days. Put an X in the appropriate box.

	Not often	Some of the time	Good part of the time	Most of the time
23. I feel sad.				
24. Morning is when I feel the best.				
25. I sometimes cry or feeling like crying.				
26. I have trouble sleeping at night.				
27. I eat as much as I used to in my home country.				
28. I notice that I am losing weight.				
29. Sometimes my stomach hurts.				
30. My heart beats faster than usual.				
31. I get tired for no reason.				
32. My mind is as clear as it used to be.				
33. I find it easy to do the things I used to do.				
34. I am constantly moving and cannot sit still.				
35. I feel hopeful about the future.				
36. I am more easily annoyed than usual.				
37. I find it easy to make decisions.				
38. I feel I can help people, and I do.				
39. My life is pretty full.				
40. I feel that others would be better off if I were dead.				

41. I still enjoy the things I used to do.				

Part III: Resources and communication

This part will tell me where you got your information about the U.S. before you came and what language it was in.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please put an X in the box that describes each resource you used and which language(s) you used.

Resource	Your native language	English
42. Friends/family		
43. People from your country who attend/have attended this American college/university		
44. American college/university's mailed materials		
45. American college/university's website		
46. Other websites Which ones:		
47. Agent in your country		
48. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)		
49. E-mail		
50. Online video (youtube, vimeo, etc.)		
51. Local library		
52. Books, magazines, newspapers		
53. Online chats		

54. In the space below, please describe any other sources of information you used to learn about your American college/university:

55. Of all the resources you checked and listed above, which ones do you feel helped you? How did they help you?

Who would you have liked to communicate with BEFORE coming to the U.S.?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box that best describes how likely you would have wanted to communicate with these people.

	Not at all	Probably not	Maybe	Probably	Definitely

56. Professors					
57. Current student from <u>your</u> country studying at this American college/university					
58. Current student from <u>another</u> country studying at this college/university					
59. American student at this college/university					
60. Student from <u>your</u> country who studied at this American college/university					
61. Student from <u>another</u> country who studied at this American college/university					
62. American student who studied at this American college/university					
63. Advisor in your major					

64. Are there any other people you used to get information?
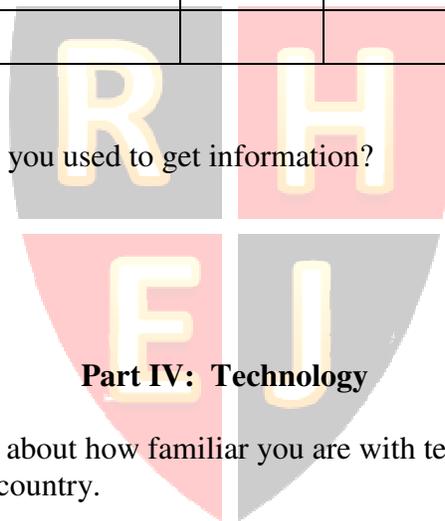
Part IV: Technology

This part gives me information about how familiar you are with technologies and what access you had to them in your home country.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following questions.

65. How many years have you used a computer? _____

66. How many years have you used the Internet? _____

67. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of expertise in computer usage:

   Poor 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Excellent

68. How would you rate your level of expertise in computer usage BEFORE coming to the U.S.?

   Poor 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10 Excellent

Experience with technologies

How good are you at using these technologies? Put an X in the appropriate box.

	Never used	Poor	Average	Good	Very good
69. Learning management systems (Blackboard, Moodle, Jusur, Canvas, Angel, etc.)					
70. Microsoft Office Powerpoint					
71. Microsoft Office Word					
72. E-mail (Microsoft Office Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo, etc.)					
73. Web search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.)					
74. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)					
75. Texting with smart phone					
76. Online videos (youtube, etc.)					
77. Teleconferencing					
78. Skype					

79. List any other technologies that you use:

Which of these technologies are most useful for you <u>in your home country</u>?

Put an X in the appropriate box.

	Not useful	A little useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful	Extremely useful
80. Learning management systems (Blackboard, Moodle, Jusur, Canvas, Angel, etc.)					
81. Microsoft Office Powerpoint					
82. Microsoft Office Word					
83. E-mail (Microsoft Office Outlook, Gmail, Yahoo, etc.)					
84. Web search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.)					
85. Social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.)					
86. Texting with smart phone					
87. Online videos (youtube, etc.)					
88. Teleconferencing					
89. Skype					
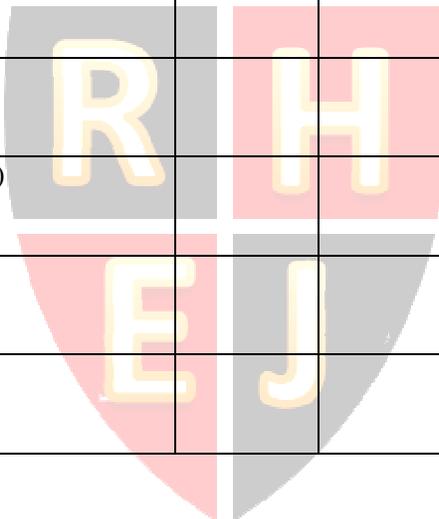
90. If you had been offered an online orientation before coming to the U.S., would you have taken it?

_____ Yes

_____ No

91. What kind of orientation do you prefer? Please check one.

_____ Face-to-face only

_____ Online only

_____ Combination of face-to-face and online

_____ Either

_____ Neither

Barriers that affect using technologies for online orientations

Would it have been difficult for you to take an online orientation in your country BEFORE leaving for the U.S.?

INSTRUCTIONS: For each statement, please put an X in the box that indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
92. I did not have enough technology experience.					
93. I did not have a computer at home in my country.					
94. My school did not have computers for students.					
95. I did not have Internet access at home in my country.					
96. My school did not have Internet access.					

Part V: Demographic questions

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following questions.

97. Gender:

_____ Male

_____ Female

98. Age: _____

99. Marital status:

_____ Married with no children

_____ Married with children
Ages of children:

_____ Single (divorced or never married)

100. Country of origin: _____

101. Population of home city: _____

102. How long have you been in the U.S.?

How many academic years? _____

How many months (if less than a full academic year)? _____

103. Current level of education

_____ undergraduate student

_____ graduate student (Master's)

_____ graduate student (Ph.D)

104. Department/degree area:

_____

105. Type of English language program (check one)

_____ I took no ESL classes.

_____ I have exited the ESL program and am currently taking academic classes.

_____ I am taking some ESL classes AND some academic classes.

_____ I am taking all ESL classes.

106. What do you wish you had known before you came to the U.S.?
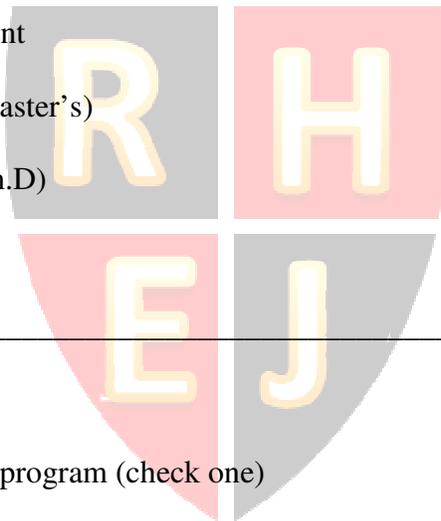
107. Are you willing to talk to me at a later date about your experience adapting to the
     U.S.?

     _____ Yes
     Please write your name and your e-mail address:
                    _____

     _____ No

Thank you very much for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.
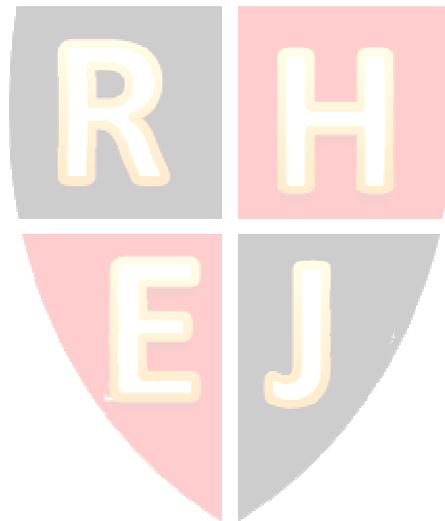
APPENDIX B – TABLE A1 DESCRIPTIVE DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

	N	%
Gender		
Male	124	59.9
Female	83	40.1
Age		
<20	26	12.7
20-23	81	39.5
27-28	57	27.8
>28	41	20.0
Marital Status		
Married with no children	23	11.2
Married with children	27	13.1
Single	156	75.7
Length of Time in U.S.		
<3 months	53	25.9
3-6 months	30	14.6
7-12 months	36	17.6
13-18 months	16	7.8
>18 months	70	34.1
Level of Education		
Undergraduate student	131	63.9
Graduate student	74	36.1
Region of the World		
Middle East	75	36.8
Asia	76	37.2
South America	30	14.7
Europe	14	6.9
Africa	9	4.4
Type of English Program		
No ESL classes taken	53	26.0
Exited ESL program	51	25.0
Combination ESL and academic classes	40	19.6
All ESL classes	60	29.4

APPENDIX C – TABLE A2 ACADEMIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL ACCULTURATION

		Range 1-5			
		Difficulty		Importance	
Basic needs					
Enjoying your favorite leisure activities	N=278	Mean 2.20	SD 1.172	Mean 3.49	SD 1.097
Finding your way around the campus	N=277	Mean 1.97	SD 1.127	Mean 3.76	SD 1.199
Finding your way around the city	N=278	Mean 2.73	SD 1.144	Mean 3.63	SD 1.224
Buying daily necessities	N=276	Mean 1.88	SD 1.131	Mean 3.97	SD 1.160
Going shopping	N=278	Mean 2.37	SD 1.337	Mean 3.56	SD 1.205
Going to restaurants	N=278	Mean 2.35	SD 1.290	Mean 3.18	SD 1.266
Academic/University life					
Understanding what is required of you	N=240	Mean 2.39	SD 1.148	Mean 4.24	SD 1.005
Dealing with staff	N=242	Mean 2.23	SD 1.121	Mean 4.00	SD 1.086
Understanding lectures	N=243	Mean 2.33	SD 1.093	Mean 4.41	SD .912
Reading course materials	N=243	Mean 2.30	SD 1.166	Mean 4.34	SD .970
Getting used to teaching methods	N=243	Mean 2.28	SD 1.115	Mean 4.10	SD 1.023
Dealing with bad service at the university	N=242	Mean 2.56	SD 1.239	Mean 3.62	SD 1.280
Understanding what is required of you	N=240	Mean 2.39	SD 1.148	Mean 4.24	SD 1.005
Dealing with staff	N=242	Mean 2.23	SD 1.121	Mean 4.00	SD 1.086

(continued)

TABLE A2 ACADEMIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL ACCULTURATION (CONTINUED)

Communication/social skills					
Making friends with people of other cultures	N=228	Mean 2.36	SD 1.217	Mean 3.83	SD 1.087
Making American friends	N=228	Mean 2.98	SD 1.342	Mean 3.84	SD 1.098
Understanding American jokes	N=229	Mean 3.19	SD 1.294	Mean 3.15	SD 1.264
Understanding the local accent	N=229	Mean 2.69	SD 1.259	Mean 3.78	SD 1.216
Dealing with someone rude	N=228	Mean 3.11	SD 1.270	Mean 3.32	SD 1.376
Dealing with living away from your family	N=229	Mean 2.90	SD 1.347	Mean 3.88	SD 1.173
Dealing with people in authority	M=228	Mean 2.43	SD 1.134	Mean 3.68	SD 1.126
Dealing with people being physically close to you	N=226	Mean 2.45	SD 1.289	Mean 3.48	SD 1.254