

INTEGRATION AND PERSISTENCE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A U.S.
PRIVATE FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in
Educational Leadership

Charlotte

2015

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ABSTRACT

TITILOLA OLUWATOSIN ADEWALE. Integration and persistence of international students in a U.S. private 4-year institution: A qualitative case study. (Under the direction of DR. MARK D'AMICO)

Globalization has resulted in the rapid mobility of goods, ideas, services and people worldwide (International Monetary Fund, 2008). The influx of students into the United States continues to increase, making it the number one destination of international students with China and India being the top two countries that send international students to U.S. institutions. The perception is that America has the best educational system in the world.

Not only are international students agents of internationalization on their campuses, they also generate revenue for the U. S. economy. In 2013-2014, international students contributed over \$27 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses (Open Doors, 2014). However, due to lack of adequate research, their diverse needs have not been completely understood by administrators and faculty, thus limiting their integration and persistence in college.

Despite much research on college student populations, few studies have been reported to date on the college integration and retention of international students as a subgroup, representing a gap in existing literature on international students. This exploratory qualitative case study focused on the integration and persistence of international students in a U.S. four-year institution. Six undergraduate international students from non-Western cultures and two administrators were interviewed in-depth on

the phenomena of integration and persistence of international students at Falcon University.

The results indicated that homesickness, lack of friendships and language barrier were hindrances to social integration among international students, and lack of high school preparation, language barrier and the new American educational system, including new classroom etiquette were significant hindrances to academic integration. However, self-motivation, personal goals, self-pride, family support, friends, institutional support and vision of the future were factors that facilitated their persistence in college. The findings were in agreement with Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model of persistence with the exception of its rites of passage theory. International students needed support from home culture to integrate into the new environment. The students seemed to exhibit multiculturalism as they integrated into the new college environment.

The results of this study have implications for domestic students, new and current international students, faculty, administrators, the International Office and the institution to better understand the diverse needs of this student subgroup and to support them during their most vulnerable period so they can integrate and persist through college.

DEDICATION

To God be the glory great things he has done!

I dedicate this dissertation to the Immortal, Invisible, the only Wise God who has been my strength and inspiration throughout this journey; and to the love of my life, my husband, Dr. Kolapo Emmanuel Peluola (KEP) Adewale and our children,

Isaac, Funmilola and Tomilola

1Timothy 1:17

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This milestone has been achieved through the contributions of many. I thank God for giving me wisdom, good health and strength and for placing the right people along the way as I navigated this journey. My appreciation goes to my Chair, Dr. Mark D'Amico, a smart, diligent and compassionate mentor. Thank you for constructive criticism, thoroughness and prompt feedback throughout this research. I am glad you agreed to be my advisor. You have modeled for me the balance between compassionate mentoring and setting high expectations for a student. Thank you for encouraging me that the end was in sight, especially when I took up a new, demanding job after coursework. You have truly inspired me. Thank you.

I have always said that I had the BEST committee members. Dr. Corey Lock, I thank you for your genuine interest and support in my research. Your timely advice has been instrumental in the success of this work. Dr. Sandra Dika, thank you for pointing me in the right direction. You worked with me at the inception to refine the focus of this study into something more realistic and relevant to my current career and passion. I will always remember that one extended meeting in your office when we teased out my goals for the research and together arrived at a dissertation topic. You have been instrumental in shaping the course of this study. Dr. Spencer Salas, I am so glad you were on my team. You always encouraged me with sentences such as, "Titi, this is a great study," when I did not believe it myself. Thank you for the support, guidance and qualitative expertise you brought into this research. You kept me focused during the back and forth of the writing process. To the entire faculty of the Educational Leadership Department at the

University of North Carolina, Charlotte, thank you for this outstanding doctoral program. I am blessed to have received instructions from you.

Without Falcon University's approval to my request to use the institution as my research site, this work would not have been completed. Many thanks to the International Office for granting me access to its international student database. To the students who volunteered and participated in this research: Betty, Jackie, Eleanor, Rosalynn, Jimmy and Bill, and the administrator participants Michelle and Hillary, thank you so much for your time, excitement and contribution to the success of this study despite of your busy schedules. My sincere hope is that through your responses, positive reforms to policies, services and programs will emerge to assist international students in their integration to college life at and persistence till graduation from Falcon University. Best wishes in your future and professional endeavors.

To my parents, Elder Anthony Oladipupo Adegbite and his wife and my mother, the late Mrs. Elizabeth Olufunmilayo Adegbite, I thank you for the values you instilled in me. You taught me to dream big and to work hard in order to achieve those dreams. Thank you for teaching me to persevere and never give up trying even when I have failed. Daddy, I am glad you are alive to witness this milestone. May God grant you the grace and good health to witness more milestones in this family in Jesus name. Amen. To my siblings: Olaseni, Lillie, Yetunde, Olayemi, Kolawole (deceased) and Bolu, thank you for the support you have extended to my family over these years when things were difficult. The success of this program is yours as well.

To my in-laws and Adewale family: Mama (Mrs. Marian Adewale), Olubisi, Akin, Salewa, Kunle, Funmi, Biola and Bunmi, thank you all for standing by us during our wilderness experience. May the Lord continue to bless you all. Amen.

How can I forget my own nuclear family. I thank God for my best friend and husband, Dr. Kolapo Emmanuel Peluola (KEP) Adewale. You have been my rock and encourager throughout this program. Thank you for cheering me on even when I was tired and could not see the finish line. This degree is for both of us. I love you. To our children, Isaac, Funmilola and Tomilola, you are the BEST! You are gifts from God to us, and to HIM be the glory for keeping you till this day. May we continue to witness the transformations of your lives to be more like Jesus every day. Amen. We love you very much!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the last decade there has been a significant increase in student mobility from 2.1 million international students studying outside of their home countries in 2000 to 4.5 million in 2012 (Project Atlas, 2014). This represents over 100% increase. Of all the destination countries, the United States continues to attract most students (Altbach, 2004a; Project Atlas, 2014). According to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Open Doors Report, the international student population has been on a steady increase since 2001-2002 and in 2013-2014, 886,052 international students were enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions (Open Doors, 2014). In the 2011-2012, 3.7 % of all college students in the United States were international students and two years later it rose to 4.2% (Open Doors, 2014).

As students integrate into college life, the first year of enrollment seems to be the toughest and could result in significantly high stop out or drop out from higher education institutions (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Lipka, 2006; Tinto, 1993). According to the American College Testing (ACT) Report of 2013, the average retention rate among first- to second-year college students was 65.8% (ACT, 2013). In the last decade, the average fluctuated between 65.7% and 68.7% (ACT, 2013). Within these national averages, retention was significantly higher in four-year institutions than 2-year institutions and much higher in private than public institutions (ACT, 2013; see Appendix A). Knowing that students cannot graduate unless they persist early in college,

higher education institutions have intervened with support services and programs for first-year students to reduce their college departure tendencies; consequently student persistence has become a popular outcome analyzed by colleges and universities (Gardner, 1986; Jamelske, 2009; Tinto, 1993). Wilder's (1993) findings showed that 85% of college attrition occurs within the first 2 years of enrollment, with 50% of institutional dropouts occurring in the first year and 35% leaving by the end of the second year.

Recently, the persistence of second-year college students has begun to gain national attention. While significant resources have been invested in the retention of first year students (Alexander & Gardner, 2009; Gardner, 1986; Jamelske, 2009; Tinto, 1993; Wilder, 1993); yet for second-year students, challenges of self-discovery and doubts about future aspirations still persist, causing some to drop out of school thereby increasing the second-year institutional attrition rate (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Lipka, 2006; Scobie, 2010). According to Lipka (2006), the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange which collates data for over 400 four-year institutions, reported that 80.6% of the enrolled 2003 first year students persisted into the second year and only 70.7% of those sophomores persisted into the junior year while still enrolled by 2005 at the same institutions they started with. "Research by the U.S. Department of Education has shown that among all students who drop out of college, about two-thirds as many do so in their second year as in their first year" (Lipka, 2006, p. 1); a phenomenon called *sophomore slump* in the literature (Lipka, 2006). Early retention of students, which encompasses their persistence from first to second year and from second to third year, is crucial to students' persistence through graduation. However students cannot begin to

persist in college unless they are well integrated into campus life (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, Russo, & Stephanie, 1994).

According to Tinto (1993) the degree to which a student integrates into the social and academic facets of college life will determine if the student persists in college through graduation, or the student voluntarily drops out of college. “Generally, the more satisfying those experiences are felt to be, the more likely are individuals to persist until degree completion” (Tinto, 1993, p. 50). Rienties, Beausaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet, and Kommers (2012) stated that international students’ integration to campus life is a good predictor of their persistence through graduation.

Over the past few decades, a considerable amount of research on student persistence in college primarily focused on native U.S student subpopulations (Attinasi, 1989; Beam, 1980; Beam & Metzner, 1985; Berger & Milem, 1999, Castillo et al., 2006; Elkins, Braxton & James, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; London, 1989; Nora, 2002; Tierney, 1992); research on international student persistence has been grossly overlooked. Given the influx of international students into American higher education institutions and how expensive it is to recruit them, it is important for institutions to understand these students’ integration and persistence attitudes, to be able to target the potential nonpersisters with programs and services that will encourage persistence early in college.

Overview

Globalization in the 21st Century has been predicted to affect colleges and universities through increased enrollment of diverse students, rapid worldwide student mobility and higher quality of tertiary education (Altbach, 2004a, 2004b; Altbach &

Knight, 2007). The trend of globalization, which is the rapid exchange of technology, economies, knowledge, people, values and ideas (Knight, 2004; Marmolejo, 2011), has affected every facet of human society, including the internationalization of higher education (Altbach, 2004a, 2004b; Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004; Nasri, 1993; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Student mobility which has become an indicator of the internationalization of higher education has resulted in an increase in cultural diversity and an uptick in the numbers of degree-seeking international students on U.S. college campuses in the last two decades (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Soko, 2006). The presence of multiple nationalities and cultures on campuses has increased the interactions among staff, faculty and students from different cultures (Nesdale & Mak, 2003; Waxin, 2004). Although institutions seek minority students to diversify their campuses, international students continue to enrich the diversity in U.S. institutions (Andrade, 2007; Kwai, 2009).

International Student Mobility Trends

The rapid movement of students has increased the demand for the brightest and best students and by 2025 the population of international students worldwide is predicted to increase to over 8 million (Lee, 2010; Project Atlas, 2014). Today the ranking and prestige of an institution depends partly on the presence of international students on its campus (Lee, 2010). Consequently the increased competition among higher education institutions for these students has resulted in aggressive recruitment practices coupled with other innovative retention initiatives.

In the last decade, the United States and United Kingdom were the two leading study destinations of international students but the United States continues to be the

number one host country (Open Doors, 2014; Project Atlas, 2014). International students continue to make the United States their primary destination due to the superiority, rankings and flexibility of American colleges (Altbach, 2004b; Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013). They also choose the United States because of its diversity of people and economy, and good paying jobs in many fields, including in institutions of higher education (Open Doors, 2012).

International Students in the United States

In 2011-2012, U.S. institutions of higher education enrolled over 764,490 international students, a 5.7% increase over the population a year before (Open Doors, 2012). Since 2000-2001, the international student population has grown at an average of 5.6% per year, with the number of graduate students surpassing undergraduate students until 2011-2012 when the undergraduate population of 309,342 students outnumbered the graduate population (300,430 students) for the first time (Open Doors, 2012).

India and China remain the top two countries sending students to the United States. Among the top 20 countries sending students to the United States, India was the leader in 2003-2004, but China regained leadership in 2009-2010 and continued to lead with 194,029 students in 2011-2012, a 23.1% increase over 2010-2011 enrollment of 157,558 students (Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013).

International student enrollments from emerging economies such as Saudi Arabia continue to increase. The King Abdullah Overseas Scholarship program which started in 2005 has increased the mobility trend among Saudi students. The goal was to educate 50,000 students in the prominent 500 universities by 2020 (*Saudi Gazette*, 2012). Another emerging economy, Brazil, exported 9,029 students, a 2.9 % increase over the

previous year and Iran has shown significant increase in the number of students studying in the United States in past years (Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013). Open Doors (2012) data has shown significant shifts in enrollment patterns of international students by academic levels and programs. Although international students in the United States study a plethora of academic programs, business and engineering continue to be their top fields of study (Open Doors, 2012).

Benefits of International Students

International students in the United States contribute to research endeavors and scholarly publications, particularly in scientific research (Altbach, 2004a; 2004b). They are also considered “the embodiments of a world-wide trend towards the internationalization of knowledge and research in an integrated world economy” (Kwai, 2009, p. 17). International students benefit their campuses by building bridges between their countries and the United States, bringing global perspectives into American classrooms, augmenting initiatives on campus for all students through the payment of expensive out-of-state tuition, and contributing nationally to the economy (Altbach, 2004a; 2004b; Lee, 2005, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Open Doors, 2012).

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, international students contributed over \$27 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses in 2013-2014 academic year (Open Doors, 2014). Not only do they contribute significantly to the U.S. economy, they are also agents of internationalization on their campuses (Altbach, 2004a; 2004b; Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2010; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Trice & Yoo, 2007). While they are very similar to domestic students in

their transition to college, their adjustment can be complicated by language and cultural differences (Andrade, 2008; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008) which sometimes affect their academic performance (Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Sumer et al., 2008; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Factors Influencing International Student Achievements and Persistence

International students experience myriad challenges in the United States, especially in their early years of enrollment and these factors could influence their integration and the decision to persist or drop out of college (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008). Such challenges include: financial difficulties (Eviwie, 2009); cultural challenges (Andrade, 2008; Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), racial discrimination and stereotypes on- and off-campus (Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007); unfamiliarity with American educational system (Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux, & Smaby, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knotte, & Sakamoto, 2005); immigration problems (Lee, 2010); loneliness and homesickness (Andrade, 2007; Lee, 2005, 2010); alienation by peers (Klomegah, 2006); lack of social support (Hayes & Lin, 1994); climate and health problems (Huang, 1977); language difficulties (Lin & Yi, 1997; Sumer et al., 2008); and lack of comprehension of study materials and lecture notes among others (Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Thompson & Ku, 2005). Despite passing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination, or having studied in intensive English language programs, many still struggle with English language academically and socially, being non-native speakers (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008).

Studies also show that international students from developing countries experience greater adjustment difficulties than those from developed countries in the areas of language, finances, housing accommodation, socialization, and homesickness, all of which tend to hinder their social and academic integration into the campus life (Evvie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012a; Olaniran, 1993; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Rienties et al., 2012).

International students do not represent a homogenous group, they are different and their needs vary widely based on ethnic and cultural diversity, and demographic factors, such as age, gender, parents' education level, level of support, length of stay in the United States, as well as their social connectedness (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). The combined effects of their demographic, academic and ethnic attributes influence their integration into U.S. higher education institutions (Andrade, 2008).

The concern about the integration of international students was the topic at the 2014 Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) conference and according to Redden (2014), it is imperative for international students be integrated into U.S. institutions to increase the global perspectives of domestic students. Although student mobility has become a reality on American campuses, there is a need to understand international students' experiences as they integrate into the social and intellectual facets of the institution. Tinto's seminal research on college student persistence centered on traditional undergraduate students, but studies have shown that the findings could apply to other groups of students including international students (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008); and how well a student integrates into college life will

determine the student's persistence through college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, Russo, & Stephanie, 1994).

Due to lack of research, the international student population has not been completely understood by higher education administrators and faculty, and their diverse needs are still not sufficiently targeted by existing institutional programs and services. These needs include their integration to American campuses, how to enrich their social and academic experiences, and subsequently maximize the potential for persistence and global learning.

Past Studies on International Student Persistence

Past studies have demonstrated that international students are confronted by diverse challenges when integrating into their new environment and these difficulties may impact their ability to be retained at their institutions (Poyrnzli & Grahame, 2007). The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 may have compounded the difficulties international students face due to increased immigration monitoring and the society's distrust of foreigners (Hanassab, 2006; Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sumer et al., 2008).

A recent electronic search in the scholarly Journal Storage (JSTOR), the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Proquest Dissertations and Theses found that very limited literature existed to date on the persistence of international students in U.S. colleges and universities, of which only Kwai (2009) was a doctoral dissertation. Andrade (2007, 2008), Kwai (2009), and Mamiseishvili (2012a, 2012b) were the few researchers who have to date focused on international student persistence, in an attempt to identify factors that influence the students' decisions to continue in or

depart from college. Only Andrade (2007, 2008) used qualitative analyses to elicit international student integration and persistence in a private, religiously affiliated 4-year institution. Andrade's studies engaged senior-year international students in in-depth focus group discussions and captured their rich college experiences.

Understanding the factors that affect international students' persistence in U.S. colleges and universities will help these students be retained and better served on their campuses. Since societies and communities continue to evolve, it is important to constantly examine the college integration issues that international students encounter in different social and institutional contexts (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), knowing that international students' integration to campus life is a good predictor of persistence through college (Rienties et al., 2012).

Need and Purpose for Proposed Research

While past studies have provided better understanding of college students and the factors that affect their integration and persistence, few studies to date have been devoted to international students as a subgroup. According to Mori (2000), international students have received minimal attention on issues that affect them in college in spite of the unique adjustment challenges that confront them. There is a need to further explore how international students integrate into the social and academic facets of the new college environments, and what factors are facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through graduation.

While Andrade's (2007, 2008) studies focused on international students in a religious institution, this exploratory qualitative case study sought to understand the integration and persistence of international students in a private, non-affiliated,

specialized institutional type. The profiles of international students at this institution were constructed at the end of the research giving more information to the Admissions Office on the kinds of international students that are attracted to the institution. Therefore the findings of the research informed practice in the areas of international student recruitment and retention, and they could be used as the basis for the development of effective institutional policy.

According to Tinto (1993) college “departure is a highly idiosyncratic event, one that can be fully understood by only referring to the understandings and experiences of each and every person who departs” (p. 37), similarly, college integration and persistence among international students can be fully comprehended by tapping into the personal understanding and experiences of international student “persisters” which was the goal of this qualitative study.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto’s Interactional Model

Past studies (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b) on international student integration and persistence were based on Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) interactional model of student persistence, which provided researchers insight into the transformation that occurs in a college student. Tinto outlined factors that played major roles in college student persistence or departure, namely, (1) individual intentions (the higher the level of one’s educational or occupational goals, the greater the likelihood of college completion); (2) commitments, both individual and institutional commitments; (3) student’s personality; (4) adjustment to college (students’ responses to the stress of transition); (5) academic difficulty (meeting the minimum standard for

academic performance); (6) integration (student's social and intellectual experiences in college), the absence of which may have arisen from incongruence (mismatch or lack of fit between the student's needs, interests, and preferences and those of the institution), and isolation (the absence of ample contact between the student and other members of the social and academic communities of the college, and (7) external obligations which may pull the student away from participation in the local communities of the college, examples being family obligations among adult students.

The main tenet of Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) model is that students enter college with individual characteristics that influence their integration into the new environment and subsequently result in their college persistence. Characteristics such as: family background (family social economic status (SES), parental education level, parental expectations and support), individual attributes (race, gender and region of origin), and pre-college schooling experiences (characteristics of student's secondary school, high school achievement, educational goal) make up a student's entry characteristics. Tinto posits that student's entry characteristics are influenced by college experiences such as making friends, engagement in student organizations, living with peers in halls of residence, bonding with staff members, and interactions with faculty on intellectual matters, to the extent that the student could decide to persist or drop out of college (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Tinto, 1993). According to Tinto, academic and social integration is therefore a condition for college student persistence. The more academically and socially integrated a student is, the higher the likelihood the student will persist and graduate (Tinto, 2005). When students feel they belong on campus and

are engaged in extracurricular activities, they are likely to stay and graduate from college (Severiens & Wolff, 2008).

Tinto's Rites of Passage Theory

Tinto's rites of passage concept explained the longitudinal nature of college student integration and the process of establishing sense of belonging in the new environment. According to Tinto (1993), for each theoretical phase there is an impact on the interaction between the individual and other members of the community. The theory posits that in order to integrate into the new campus environment, students must sever all ties to their home cultures, develop new skills with which to relate with members of the new environment and begin to incorporate the skills and be assimilated into the new campus environment (Tinto, 1993).

Among the underrepresented groups in college, only recently did few studies research Tinto's model on international student integration and persistence (Andrade, 2007; 2008; Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b). Andrade's (2007, 2008) found that international students, while integrating into the new campus environment, preserved their home cultures but tweaked some aspects to integrate successfully.

Lysgaard' (1955) U-curve hypothesis

Previous studies on international student adjustment have reported on how hectic it is to integrate into a new culture (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Andrade, 2005; 2006; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Lysgaard' (1955) U-curve of Cultural Adjustment stated that at the beginning of an international student's sojourn, the student was excited about future possibilities and thought adjustment or integration in the new environment would be easy. This was the Honeymoon phase. It was followed by the

Culture shock phase, when the student was faced with the stress of day-to-day issues of adjustment to a new environment usually typified by the differences between the home culture and the existing culture on the U.S. college campus. There, students are confronted with the decision to adapt successfully to the new environment during the Recovery Phase. The initial phase of adjustment could be tough, but as the student adapted and began to change behaviorally to embrace the new culture; the stress was lessened and life became more manageable. At the Adjustment Phase the student has persevered and was successfully adjusted. The process of adjustment resulted in a U curve as portrayed by Lysgaard (1955).

The hypothesis was significant for its deduction on the stressful process of the international student adjustment (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006), and Barber, Morgan, and Torstrick, (1997) agreed that international students were confronted with challenges that arose from being foreigners in a completely new environment but that the stress reduced given some time.

In spite of past studies on cultural adaptation, international student population has not been well researched and so their college integration has been under-studied. This research sought to add to the few, existing literature on international students through its understanding of how they integrate into the new college life, the challenges of integration, and how integration affects persistence through college, specifically what factors facilitate or hinder their college persistence.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to elucidate the process of college integration for international students, the difficulties they encounter during

integration, and to understand the factors that are facilitators of or hindrances of their persistence through college. The researcher (I, Titi Adewale) examined the profiles of undergraduate international “persisters” (in their junior- and senior-year of study), and conducted two to three in-depth interviews each on six “persisters” and two administrators in a four-year institution in the Northeastern region of United States. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How does an international student decide on the four-year institution in the United States to attend? Specifically what factors influence the student’s institutional choice?
2. What helps or hinders an international student’s social integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?
3. What helps or hinders an international student’s academic integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?
4. What factors facilitate or hinder an international student’s persistence in college?

Research Design

The exploratory qualitative case study employed qualitative analyses to investigate international students’ choice of a U.S. institution; how they were able to academically and socially integrate into the new college environment, what factors they considered as facilitators of and / or hindrances to their persistence in college, and which programs and services the administrators considered to be of immense help to international students’ campus integration and persistence. Once the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC, Charlotte)

had given its approval (Appendix B), the research commenced. The research questions were analyzed qualitatively using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to elicit rich discussions among research participants.

A private four-year institution with pseudonym Falcon University was selected as the study site. A convenience sample of six undergraduate international students in the junior or senior year and two administrators was selected. The needed data were gathered using two rich in-depth 45 to 60 minutes interviews with each student and one interview each with administrators. The International Office at Falcon University was approached to liaise between me and international students, sending out introductory email on me and the research to students. In addition, I reached out to international student organizations in an attempt to recruit students by developing rapport with them.

Prior to the interviews, I gathered information about the study site on its international student population, how welcoming the site was to these students and how international students were recruited to Falcon. A pilot testing of interview protocol was carried out to ensure participants would not have difficulty understanding the interview questions. Based on the feedback of international students and an external jury, the questions were modified for easy comprehension. I engaged in observations of international students in areas on campus where they usually gathered to relax and documented fieldnotes on their interactions for rich description later. Interview protocols were sent to interview participants in advance of interviews so they could deliberate on them ahead of time. In addition, the website of the study site was studied to see if it was international student friendly or not.

I interviewed only currently enrolled undergraduate international students in their junior or senior years of study, who began their higher education careers at the same institution. These were the “persisters” and looking back, they were able to articulate the motivations for their college choices (institutional commitment), how they were able to integrate into the new college environment, and the factors that facilitated or hindered their persistence in college. The in-depth administrator interviews provided information on institutional efforts to assist international students in their integration and retention early in the first and second years of study on campus when they were most vulnerable to college drop-out.

From the study, profiles of international student participants were developed. The in-depth interviews captured international students’ integration experiences, revealing the motivations for institutional choice, how they integrated academically and socially into the new college environment, and the factors undergraduate international students considered as facilitators of and hindrances to their persistence in college. Follow-up interviews were carried out with interviewed student participants as needed. Digital recordings of the interviews were transcribed by professionals. The transcripts were sent to each participant for member check to be sure these were accurate representations of their interview conversations. The data generated from transcripts, fieldnotes, journals and other data obtained from the International Office were placed in categories according to the sections within the interview protocols.

The data were further analyzed using ethnographic fieldwork strategies developed by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). The data were read and re-read and using Microsoft Word, the common phrases were highlighted with comments differentiating them

according to the established categories. These common phrases and thoughts across the transcripts and under each category were grouped together and discussed as the common experiences of the participants in response to the research questions. Grouping the data into categories established a system of classification thereby compressing the mound of data generated into easy to understand and logical information on the experiences of the participants under social integration or academic integration, for example.

The benefits from the study were numerous because they informed practice on the chosen institutional type in the areas of international student recruitment and retention. The institution could use research findings to better understand the profile of international students that are attracted to the institutional type to aid in recruitment. They may use the results to evaluate current practices on international student persistence, or use the findings to develop policies and practices that will enhance the retention rates and college satisfaction of international students.

To narrow the scope of the study a few parameters were established. The exploratory qualitative case study focused on one private four-year institution, Falcon University which was small, suburban, private university, in the Northeastern region of the United States to ensure in-depth and rich study of the phenomena of integration and persistence among international students.

The sample of participants comprised of enrolled undergraduate junior or senior year international students (the persisters) attending Falcon University since the focus was on persisting students who had integrated into the environment. Only undergraduate degree-seeking international students on the F-1 visa status were selected as the research sample because the group consisted of students who were in the

United States to study. Graduate students were not selected because their experiences in the U.S. could be different from undergraduates' due to their longer stay in the country. Non-degree seeking students such as J-1 exchange students were not selected because they had shorter stay in the United States mostly one or two semesters and most of them came from the Western culture.

In order to study integration and persistence which have been influenced by cultural differences between American and international students, it was important to study international students from non-Western cultures; those whose cultures were different from the Western or American culture (Mamiseishvili, 2012a). Therefore the study included only international students from regions of Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. Hull (1978) and Klomegah (2006) stated that international students from geographical regions that are similar to the host region adjust quicker to the new environment than those whose regions of origin are dissimilar to the host region. Indeed international students from Western cultures (Europe, North America and Oceania regions) have cultures that are similar to the American culture.

This study used a convenience sample of undergraduate international student "persisters" in the junior or senior year because the study was interested in their stories of persistence. These were six participants who were interviewed two or three times and two administrators who were interviewed once each to allow for in-depth study of the phenomena and rich discussions and still allow the study to be completed within a reasonable time frame.

The findings of this research would apply to this institution alone; it should not be extrapolated to a larger population of international students or other four-year U.S.

institutions whether private or public. The data were collected during the fall 2014 semester and could only reflect this time period within Falcon University and not another semester or a longer time frame.

The information from the semi-structured interviews was what the students and administrators were comfortable sharing. Students were informed that their responses to interview questions would be used for the purpose of this research only.

To address these issues, the participants were asked the same questions in different ways, and their responses were triangulated. From the in-depth semi-structured interviews, I sought out common threads on the students' and administrators' perspectives regarding the integration of international students in the new college environment and the factors that were considered facilitators of and hindrances to persistence in the four-year institution. The study focused on the accessible sample of international students in their junior or senior years of study at Falcon University, situated in the Northeastern region of the United States.

Assumptions

In conducting this study, I made the following assumptions:

1. International students choose institutional types to attend based on certain institutional commitments such as family traditions on college choice, mission, program, size, diversity, college ranking, location, and others (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1993).
2. International students have college transition challenges. Past studies (Andrade, 2007; 2008; Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nora, 2002; Tinto, 1975; 1993) have shown that though

international students are similar to domestic students in their college transition, language and cultural differences do complicate their integration process.

3. The participants interviewed had the ability to articulate these challenges.
4. The participants responded freely and honestly to the questions asked.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout this research study. The terms were operationalized in the study as described under their definitions.

1. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), an international student is defined as an individual who is enrolled in courses at a higher education institution in the United States on a temporary, non-immigrant visa, and who is not an immigrant (permanent resident with an I-515 or Green card), a United States citizen, an illegal alien (undocumented immigrant), or a refugee in the United States (Open Doors, 2012). This definition was adopted for this research.
2. The term “persisters” was defined as undergraduate international students who have successfully scaled the vulnerability of the first and second years of college and are in their junior and senior years of study.
3. The term academic achievement was defined as making normal academic progress in the junior or senior year of study.
4. Persistence is generally defined as the progressive re-enrollment in college, whether continuous from one term to the next, or temporarily interrupted and then resumed (Tinto, 2005). For this study it was defined as the re-enrollment of international undergraduate students from first-year to junior year or senior year of college.

5. The words persistence and retention were used interchangeably in the study to mean re-enrollment (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2012b; Swall, Redd, & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 2005).
6. International students: the term “international students” was used in this study to represent students who are not citizens of the United States but are in the country on F-1 or J-1 student visas.
7. Adjustment is adapting, modifying, altering, or, settling down in an environment.
8. Success for international students is the ability to overcome challenges in the social (Mori, 2000; Rajapaksa & Dundes2003), cultural (Wan, 2001), academic (Stoyhoff, 1997), personal (Evans, 2001), and financial (Berger & Milem, 1999) arenas and persisting through graduation at an American institution
9. Challenges were difficulties students faced in adjusting to climate and living conditions, academic requirements and expectations, alienation and loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, financial constraints, cultural differences, and language proficiency.
10. NAFSA – National Association of Foreign Students Advisors is an organization of international educators that promotes the exchange of students and scholars to and from the United States.
11. SEVIS – Student and Exchange Visitor Information Systems- is an immigration system, launched by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and used by international offices nationally for reporting duties. It houses international students’ immigration records.

12. TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language is a test of English language proficiency which is taken by international students if required for admission purposes.
13. IELTS – International English Language Testing System – is equivalent to the TOEFL. The equivalence of each score can be calculated. The IELTS is a substitute for the TOEFL especially in countries where TOEFL is not offered.
14. ELTI - The English Language Training Institute (ELTI) provides intensive English instruction for international students planning to attend U.S. universities and for those wanting to improve general English skills.

Organization of the Study

I obtained significant amount of data from the participants using semi-structured interviews. The International Office at Falcons University served as the point of contact for international student persisters and administrators who were interviewed. This center was commonly referred to as “International Office.” I also actively introduced myself to international students by attending their meetings and inviting them to participate in the study.

The first chapter established the basic premise of the research, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the research questions, the need for the study, the study parameters, methodology and operational definitions. Chapter 2 included a comprehensive review of current and relevant literature on international students in the United States, their mobility patterns, models of persistence, including seminal studies in this regard, challenges international students face, and the factors that attribute to their success and persistence in college. Chapter 3 provided a

detailed description of this study's method, its theoretical framework, research design, research sites, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and justifications of qualitative research, my subjectivity statement and summary.

Chapter 4 of the dissertation included the findings of the study with regard to the research questions in the form of participant profiles, data analysis and thematic analysis. In Chapter 5 of the dissertation, I discussed the findings in relation to previous research and presented the implications of the study for the private four-year higher education institution and recommendations for further studies.

Summary

This study sought to describe the experiences of six junior and senior-year undergraduate international students and two administrators at Falcon University, a private four-year institution in the Northeastern region of the United States, on international student integration into a new college environment, and their perceptions of those factors that facilitate or hinder their persistence through college.

The research was designed as an exploratory qualitative case study. The International Office at Falcon University was the point of contact between me and international students. In addition, I actively met with international students at their cultural meetings and events and tried to recruit participants that way. I engaged in observations, conducted a pilot test of interview protocols and provided questions to participants prior to the interview sessions.

The participants were interviewed in-depth, and the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed. The transcribed information was re-checked for accuracy by matching it with original audio recordings and by sending it to each participant to check if they

accurately reflected their interview responses. The data were further analyzed and grouped into categories according to the questions asked in the interview protocol. In addition to the sample of international student participants; two administrators on the test site were interviewed once in-depth for 45 – 60 minutes each to obtain details on institutional efforts to retain international students to the campus. The data gathered were rechecked for accuracy by sending the transcripts to them for vetting and confirmation that they were true reflections of their thoughts during the interviews. .

Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive review of current and relevant literature on international students in the United States, their mobility patterns, models of persistence, including seminal studies in this regard, challenges international students face, and the factors they attribute to their success and persistence in college. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of this study's method, its theoretical framework, research design, research sites, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures and justifications of qualitative research, my subjectivity statement and summary.

Chapter 4 of the dissertation includes the findings of the study with regard to the research questions in the form of participant profiles, data analysis and thematic analysis. Chapter 5 of the dissertation discusses the findings in relation to previous research and presents the implications of the study for the four-year higher education institution and recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Students encounter diverse challenges especially in their early years of college enrollment and the impact of these factors could affect their social and academic integration and persistence in college (Gahagan & Hunter, 2006; Jamelske, 2009; Lipka, 2006; Tinto, 1993). The students' college transition in the United States can be further complicated by cultural, financial, and language differences, homesickness, racial discrimination and stereotypes on- and off-campus, unfamiliarity with American educational system, immigration problems, loneliness, alienation by peers, lack of social support, climate and health problems among others (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nora, 2002).

In spite of their presence on college campuses, international students' academic and social integration into U.S. colleges and universities has been understudied. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of related literature on the factors that influence international student integration, and how integration affects their persistence in a U.S. private four-year institution. It presents an overview of past studies that contribute to the understanding of both academic and social experiences as well as concerns and needs of international students in U.S. higher education institutions. The first section is a summary of what is known about the mobility of international students in higher education institutions worldwide, enrollment trends of international students in U.S.

higher education institutions, the profile of an international student and the benefits of international students to their U.S. colleges and universities. The second section is focused on the issues of persistence in higher education institutions, highlighting seminal studies and theoretical model of college student persistence. In the last section, the challenges to international student persistence, past studies on the issue of international student persistence, and the need for this study are discussed. Understanding the issues that affect international students will provide U.S. higher education institutions insight into ways of retaining these students on their campuses.

International Student Mobility and Enrollment Trends

Globalization is a 21st Century occurrence which has resulted in the mobility of people, ideas, goods and services across national borders (International Monetary Fund, 2008); and in turn has led to the diversification of higher education (Knight, 2004; Marmolejo, 2011). Student mobility is the most obvious sign of internationalization of higher education (Altbach, 2004a; Knight, 2004; Marmolejo, 2011). According to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Project Atlas Report, in 2001 the number of international students worldwide was 2.1 million; a decade later the number more than doubled to 4.5 million students (Project Atlas, 2014).

In 2013, the top host destinations of students worldwide were the United States which attracted 886,052 international students, United Kingdom with 481,050 students, China (356,499 students), France (295,092 students), Germany (282,201 students), Australia (247,093 students), Canada (237,635 students), and Japan (135,519 students) (Project Atlas, 2014).

Statistics show that the United States is the first choice of international students, but within two years new worldwide student mobility patterns have emerged. The number of international students who choose American higher-education institutions as their destinations continues to grow, especially from China which has doubled its number of students in the United States in the last decade (Marmolejo, 2012; Open Doors, 2012). In 2011-2012 enrollment increased to 764,495 students representing a spectacular growth of 39.5% over the total enrollment of 2000/01 (Open Doors, 2011). According to Chen (2013), the United States still remains the most preferred destination for Chinese students' higher education study, followed by United Kingdom and then Australia.

U.S. Enrollment Trends of International Students

American academic and research institutions remain the leader in the world, and students worldwide still recognize the United States as a major academic attraction for them (Altbach, 2004b). The advancement, diversity, rankings and flexibility of American colleges and universities are factors that make the United States the preference of international students (Altbach, 2004b; Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013). The United States is also attractive to international students because of its large and diverse economy and availability of good paying jobs for well-qualified foreign students in many fields (Altbach, 2004b; Open Doors, 2012).

The number of international students in the United States rose to an all time high of 886,052 in 2013/2014, an 8% change over the previous year, making it the eighth consecutive year of expansion in the total number of international students in U.S. higher education (Open Doors, 2014). Thus, there is an aggregate of 20% of the world's globally mobile students studying in the United States (Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013). The

enrollment of new international students (those who are enrolled for the first time on U.S. college campuses) increased by 7.65% to 270,128 students (Open Doors, 2014) Table 1 captures the international student enrollment trends in American colleges and universities for over a decade.

Table 1: International student enrollment trends in the USA, 2000 – 20112

Year	Number of International Students in the U.S.	Percent Change
2002-2003	586,323	0.6
2003-2004	572,509	-2.4
2004-2005	565,039	-1.3
2005-2006	564,766	-0.05
2006-2007	582,984	3.2
2007-2008	623,805	7.0
2008-2009	671,616	7.7
2009-2010	690,923	2.9
2010-2011	723,277	4.7
2011-2012	764,495	5.7
2012-2013	819,644	7.2
2013-2014	886,052	8.1

Source: Open Doors (2014)

Since 2000-2001 until now, the international student population has grown at an average of 5.6% per year. The trend all along had the number of international graduate students surpassing undergraduate students. Even in 2008-2009 when the undergraduate student population rose by 10.9% to 269,874, the graduate student population rose by 2.3% to 283,329. Table 2 shows that for the first time in 2011-2012, undergraduate international student population of 309,342 surpassed graduate international students who numbered 300,430 students, the result which was driven by an increase in the number of Chinese undergraduate students (Open Doors, 2012).

Table 2: Graduate and undergraduate student enrollment trends, 2003 – 2014

Year	Undergraduate	Percentage Change	Graduate	Percentage Change
2003-2004	248,200	-4.6	274,310	2.4
2004-2005	239,212	-3.6	264,410	-3.6
2005-2006	236,342	-1.2	259,717	-1.8
2006-2007	243,360	0.7	276,842	1.8
2007-2008	243,360	2.2	276,842	4.8
2008/09	269,874	10.9	283,329	2.3
2009-2010	274,431	1.7	293,885	3.7
2010-2011	291,439	6.2	296,574	0.9
2011-2012	309,342	6.1	300,430	1.3
2012-2013	339,993	10.0	311,204	4.0
2013-2014	370,724	10.7	329,854	6.0

Source: Open Doors (2014)

However, international student mobility is not enough, integrating the students on American campuses is more important because according to Tinto (1993) when students are not properly integrated on campus it could lead to incongruence (lack of institutional fit) or isolation, both of which could result in college drop-out. Integrating them to U.S. higher education institutions will increase global learning (Redden, 2014). This study seeks to understand the factors that help or hinder international students' academic and social integration in U.S. four-year institutions, and the factors that facilitate or hinder the students' persistence in college.

Origins of International Students

The enrollment numbers of international students have been increasing systematically and the top senders of these students to the United States have changed over the decade. For the sixth year in a row, China became the leading sender of international students to the United States, with 274,439 students, a 31% of the total

population of international students, and 16.5% increase over the Chinese population in 2012-2013 (Open Doors, 2014).

International student enrollments from select emerging economies have been growing fast. The rapid growth of Saudi students in the United States in the last eight years has been noteworthy (Open Doors, 2014). As of January 2012, the Saudi government was funding the education of two-thirds of all Saudi students in colleges and universities (Choudaha et al., 2013). The uptick in enrollments of Saudi students was due to the King Abdullah Overseas Scholarship Program which began in 2005. The goal was to educate 50,000 Saudis in prestigious 500 universities by 2020 (Saudi Gazette, 2012).

Another emerging economy is Brazil. The number of Brazilian students in the United States is expected to rise significantly as a result of the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program which was launched in 2011. In 2012-2013 the enrollments of Brazilian students reached 10,868, a 1.5% of total international student population and 22.2% increase over the previous year (Open Doors, 2014). As a way of developing their human capitals in order to remain competitive in the global environment, many countries have begun to actively educate their citizens, thereby resulting in government-initiated scholarship programs and subsequent increased enrollments among international students in the United States for countries such as Saudi Arabia and Brazil. It is noteworthy that students from the top five places of origin, namely China, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Canada – make up 59.7% of all international students in the United States (Open Doors, 2014).

International Students' Academic Levels and Programs

Open Doors Report (2012) showed the new trends in enrollments of international students by academic levels and programs. For the first time since 2000-2001, the enrollment number of undergraduate students exceeded graduate enrollments; a change caused by the rise in Chinese undergraduate students' enrollment reaching 74,516 in 2011-2012, a 30.8% increase over the previous year (Farrugia & Villarreal, 2013). By 2013-2014, the population of 370,728 undergraduate students continued to surpass graduate students' of 329,854 (Open Doors, 2014). While Open Doors Report provides annual information on undergraduate and graduate international students, it also reports on non-degree students who are mostly English as Second Language (ESL) students in the United States.

Although international students study a plethora of academic programs, business and management, and engineering continue to be the top two fields of study they pursue (Open Doors, 2012). As in years past, the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields were very popular among international students with an average of 40% enrolled in these programs annually, including doctoral / research institutions and over 50% of international students at the graduate level (Open Doors, 2012). On the contrary, at masters and baccalaureate institutions, international students mostly pursue studies in business and management, more than the STEM fields. Most international students make the United States their destination due to the quality of education, especially in the sciences and business that exists in the country (Tas, 2013).

American community colleges are beginning to attract international students who spend two years there before transferring to four-year colleges to complete the bachelor's

degrees. International student enrollment in two-year colleges increased by 6.7% in 2006, and over half of the visas issued by the U.S. Consulate in Vietnam were issued to Community Colleges which indicates that international students are beginning to find other pathways into U.S. four-year institutions (McCormack, Neelakantan, & Overland, 2007). The increasing population of international in the United States should also increase the curiosity of researchers on international student activities in college, including their integration and persistence processes.

Profile of an International Student

According to Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), international students are those who travel out of their countries to a country different from theirs in the pursuit of tertiary education and the study could be long- or short-term. The IIE categorizes international students as those who are neither citizens, immigrants, nor refugees, thus excluding them also from being permanent residents in the United States (Open Doors, 2012). The United States Department of State oversees the issuances of student visas which could be in the F, M or J visa categories to students. The F category is reserved for regular full-time students, including college and university student while the M category is issued to students in technical or vocational schools. J- visas are issued to exchange visitors, including some students, professors and researchers, but they are also issued to non-academics such as government visitors, au pairs and camp counselors (U.S. Department of State website, n. d.).

As far as personal characteristics are concerned, international students have maintained similarities over the years. Since the 1970s, international students have been primarily single (over 80%), have entered the United States on F (student) visa (over

80%) and over 40% were females in 2011/12 (Open Doors, 2012). Gender parity is comparable at the undergraduate level and for non-degree programs but at the graduate level male international students clearly outnumber their female counterparts, 59 to 41% (Open Doors, 2012). Although the proportion of married international students has been slowly declining over the past two decades, many international students at the graduate level are married and nearly 20% are in the United States with their spouses and sometimes children (Open Doors, 2012).

Reports between 2009 and 2012 showed that less than 30% of international students attended private institutions of higher education among the top 20 U.S. colleges and universities with the highest international student enrollment (Open Doors, 2012).

Benefits of International Students

International students form an important component of U.S. higher education institutions. They comprise 3.7% of the total U.S. higher education student enrollment (Open Doors, 2012). It is possible to argue that since international students represent a small percentage of the total U.S. higher education enrollment, especially at the undergraduate level, they are not the attention. Unfortunately the enrollment numbers do not reveal the impact of international students on campuses and nationwide (Open Doors, 2012). The presence of international students in the United States increases the spread of American values globally, encourages dialogue and respect for cultures and human rights, promotes goodwill, friendships and professional partnerships, and creates strong relationships that dispel stereotypes and breaks down divisions (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b). The U.S. Department of State posted over 200

pictures of world leaders from 81 countries who were educated in the United States on its website (Department of State, n.d.).

International students are significant forces of internationalization as they bring new perspectives into classroom discussions in their interactions with peers and faculty (Lee & Rice, 2007). They contribute to research and scholarly publication (Altbach, 2004a). They are considered “the human embodiments of a worldwide trend towards the internationalization of knowledge and research in an integrated world economy” (Kwai, 2009, p.17).

Higher education is among United States' top service sector exports and international students generate revenue to the U.S. economy (Chin, 2002; Open Doors, 2012). In 2013-2014 international students contributed over \$27 billion to the U.S. economy through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (Open Doors, 2014). After graduation some international students remain in the country and become productive members of the American society (Lee & Rice, 2007). International students are valuable to U.S. higher education institutions and their enrollments continue to increase at a steady pace (Open Doors, 2014). Unfortunately due to lack of adequate research their diverse needs have not been completely understood by higher education administrators and faculty to increase their retention on U.S. college campuses. Evidently there is a gap in existing literature on international students on American campuses. The findings from this study on international students' academic and social integration in four-year institutions, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their persistence in college will equip higher education

institutions to better serve and assist this student population in the college integration process.

Differences between Retention and Persistence

The terms “retention” and “persistence” may be identical but they still connote different meanings. Many researchers have stated that “retention” is an institutional outcome while “persistence” is peculiar to the student (Andrade, 2007; Hagedorn, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2012b; Reason, 2009; Tinto, 2005). “Retention” is usually used in relation to the institution, while “persistence” is used to describe students’ accountability as they integrate in college (Andrade, 2007; Hagedorn, 2005; Mamiseishvili, 2012b; Reason, 2009; Tinto, 2005).

While the two constructs are discussed as separate phenomena, it is important for the two forms of behavior (institutional and individual behaviors) to interconnect because “the ability of an institution to increase its rate of retention results from its capacity to construct conditions within the institution that promotes persistence among individuals” (Tinto, 2005, p. 90). This research will focus on the construct of persistence because the investigation is on the individual international student’s year to year college academic achievements.

Theoretical Framework

The following section of Chapter 2 presents a review of literature on Tinto’s interactional model of student persistence, and Tinto’s rites of passage theory. Past research on the issues of college achievement and persistence have focused primarily on minority students such as African American and Hispanic students in the last two decades (Berger & Milem, 1999; Kwai, 2009; Nora, 1987; 1990; 2001; Tinto 1993). Minority

students are usually enrolled in institutions that are influenced by beliefs, values and norms of White American culture (Castillo et al., 2006). Table 3 provides an overview of past studies of student persistence and academic achievements based on the views highlighted in Tinto's interactional model in relation to different student subgroups as reported by Attinasi (1989); Bean (1980; 1985); Berger and Milem (1999); Castillo et al. (2006); Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000); Hurtado and Carter (1997); Nora (2002); Pascarella and Terenzini (1980; 1983; 2005); and, Tierney (1992). Despite much research on college student populations, few studies have been reported to date on the college integration and persistence of international students as a subgroup.

“For the most part, these studies support the contention that departure among black and Hispanic students, like that among white students, reflects both issues of social contact/congruence and academic performance” (Tinto, 1993, p.73). In Tinto's opinion, academic difficulties, incongruence, isolation and financial challenges seemed to be more severe on minority students than students in general (Tinto, 1993). Tinto further argues that the observations on social integration and the result of college departure will most likely hold for any group of students who finds they are different from the majority of students on campus (Tinto, 1993), including international students who are usually underrepresented on college campuses.

Table 3: Past studies on student academic achievement and persistence

<u>Author/s</u>	<u>Study Sample</u>	<u>Finding/s</u>
London (1989)	First-generation college students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Breaking away” phase exists and dissociation can be stressful leading to less academic achievement and college dropout.
Beam’s (1980) student attrition model	First-year college students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men and women leave college for different reasons. • Men left in spite of satisfaction; the higher the satisfaction the more the commitment for women.
Bean and Metzner (1985)	College non-traditional students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attrition is affected by external environmental factors - family responsibilities and employment.
Pascarella and Terenzini (1980)	Undergraduate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social and academic integration determine academic achievement and persistence. • Time spent interacting with faculty outside of class strongly correlated to student persistence. • Pre-college attributes non-significant in persistence behavior
Attinasi (1989)	Mexican American students / Chicanos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school college preparation and performance, parents’ education levels, college expectation from student, parents and relatives, financial support, and institutional expectations to be statistically significant to persistence. • Author in favor of qualitative research to capture personal experiences (insider’s point of view).
Tierney (1992)	Undergraduate college students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage - an intra-cultural process not inter-cultural as Tinto stated. • Author argued against assimilation of students. • Institutions need to operate multi-culturally to accommodate diversity.
Hurtado and Carter (1997)	Latino students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student involvement with co-nationals enhanced integration to new campus environment – a contradiction of Tinto’s theory.
Berger and Milem (1999)	First year students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic and social integration depends on student’s home backgrounds

Table 3 Continued

		operationalized as high school grades and family socio economic status (SES).
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The higher the student's SES and grades, the more involved with peers, professors, and the greater the institutional commitment developed – a contradiction of Tinto's theory of separation from home cultures.
Elkins, Braxton, and James (2000)	Full-time first year students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recipients of strong support from family, peers, and faculty more likely to persist in college - a contradiction of Tinto's model. • Support from parents, siblings and other home contacts statistically significant to college persistence. • Parents' income found to influence support but parents' educational level not significant.
Nora (2002)	Undergraduate college students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severing ties with home support is counterproductive to student academic achievement and college persistence. • Drastic separation from family and community members results in early college departure. • Tinto's model best for homogenous institutional culture.
Castillo et al. (2006)	Latino students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Latino identity equals higher goal and institutional commitment and vice versa. • Perceived context influenced Latino college students' persistence attitudes.

In colleges, at-risk students are usually minority or underrepresented students because they tend to struggle in college with the likelihood of stopping or dropping out completely due to lack of college preparation since most usually come from poor schools with little resources and inferior instructions. Heisserer and Parette (2002) defined at-risk college students as students who are ethnic minorities, are academically disadvantaged, have disabilities, are of low socioeconomic status and are probationary students. They are admitted into college under special admission category and are supervised and supported by the institution to enhance their college retention.

International students represent an underrepresented subgroup among a majority of white students; they are admitted into college using special admission criteria such as the Test of English as Foreign Language score (TOEFL) and high school scores with differing education standards from those of the United States; and they are confronted by many challenges in college stemming from cultural and language differences which sometimes affect their integration and success, and if not given ample support, they too could be in danger of dropping out of college. But while other college student groups have been well researched, there is a lack of research on international students' integration and persistence into college. This study seeks to better understand what helps or hinders an international student's academic and social integration, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their college persistence. The knowledge will enable higher education institutions to better serve and retain international students to their campuses.

Tinto's Interactional Model of Student Retention

Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) interactional model of persistence suggests that students possess a variety of educational experiences, skills, values and norms in addition to family and community backgrounds prior to entering college (Rienties et al., 2012). Characteristics such as: family background (family social economic status (SES), parental educational level, and parental expectations), individual attributes (race, gender and region of origin), and pre-college schooling experiences (characteristics of student's secondary school and high school achievements) make up a student's pre-entry characteristics. Tinto posits that a student's entry characteristics will influence the (1) initial commitment to an institution, (2) goal of college graduation, and (3) level of academic and social integration into the new college environment. Tinto further states

when a student is academically and socially integrated into college, the student is most likely to succeed academically and become loyal to the institution to the extent of persisting till graduation (Andrade, 2007; Rienties et al., 2012; Tinto, 1993).

According to Tinto (1993), some degree of integration is therefore necessary in college for student academic achievements and persistence to occur (Tinto, 1993).

Consequently, social and academic integration have become the focus for many student integration and persistence theories (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993, 1999; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Berger & Milem, 1999; Nora, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 2005; Spady, 1970; Stage & Rushkin, 1993).

Tinto's rites of passage theory and college integration

Tinto's (1987, 1993) interactional model uses Van Gennepe's (1960) rites of passage theory to explain how college students integrate to become accepted into the prevailing culture on campus (Andrade, 2007; Attinasi, 1989; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; London, 1989; Tinto, 1993). According to Van Gennepe (1960), in tribal communities, the rites of passage to adulthood consist of three phases and Tinto used this model to explain the longitudinal stages in the college student adjustment process (as cited in Tinto, 1993). For each phase, there is a pattern change in the interaction between the individual and other members of the society (Tinto, 1993). Firstly, the Separation phase is characterized by a separation between the student's new college environment and the past home life; between the student and old contacts including family and friends. Secondly, the student begins to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to interact with members in the new environment in the Transition phase. Lastly in the Incorporation phase, new interaction patterns emerge and are adopted by the student.

For a student's persistence in college, Tinto (1993) then posits that for every new college environment there are existing norms and behaviors; the success in moving from one phase to another may be dependent on the difference between a student's pre-college norms and behavior patterns and the acceptable patterns in the new college setting; and students from backgrounds (families, communities, and schools) with widely different norms and behaviors from those of the college community may have difficulty adjusting to the new setting where it is important to reject unique aspects of the original culture in order to adjust to the new one and then persist.

Tinto suggests that students who do not disassociate from their original cultures do not reap the maximum benefits of membership in the new environment and are likely to depart (Tinto, 1993). The transition from being well-known to becoming a stranger can manifest through feelings of vulnerability and loneliness, especially at those times when the individual is in a state of "temporary normlessness" according to Tinto (1993). "Temporary normlessness" is that stage after separating from a known group and when one is not fully with the former culture and yet not entirely accepted into the new group. This stage if not managed well could result in the individual's departure without being incorporated into the new group (Andrade, 2007; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Tinto's rites of passage promote assimilation into the new campus environment. Andrade's (2007, 2008) studies on international student persistence suggest that integration and campus climate are relevant to international student persistence. In order to integrate into the new environment, international students do not abandon their home cultures; instead they modify their home cultures to accommodate the new campus norms and values, and operate with the bicultural identity.

Assimilation or biculturalism: International student college integration

Andrade's (2007; 2008) qualitative inquiries found that for international students to be successful, they need to maintain an equilibrium between academic obligations, social life, employment, adjustment to a new environment, and gaining self-confidence in the first year of college. English language ability is crucial for social interaction and the ability to relate to and with peers, faculty and staff; and in academic integration in the ability to communicate and participate confidently in class discussions and interactions with professors among others. Without English language proficiency, international students lack self-confidence and the ability to express themselves or interact for fear of making mistakes and embarrassing themselves (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998).

On the other hand, international student integration results in cultural modifications which seems to agree with Tinto's (1975, 1993) rites of passage. The wider the difference between a new student's home cultural values to the campus culture, the harder it is for the student to transition into the new environment, and without proper integration it may be difficult to persist to graduation or achieve in college (Tinto, 1987, 1993). For an international student to sever all ties with home culture in order to integrate into the new environment according to Tinto's integration theory seemed to be inconsistent with the findings of Andrade (2007, 2008). International students who participated in focus group interviews with Andrade (2007; 2008) felt they needed home support but they also needed to make adjustments behaviorally in order to integrate into the new environment in many ways. Examples were (1) they needed to change their

behavior to fit new American classroom etiquette to become active participants as opposed to continuing with the non-interactive styles many were used to from their countries. Although they gradually warmed up to classroom discussions, many of them had initial challenges with English language skills; (2) accepting new cultural norms such as public display of affection which was not part of their cultures but common in the United States; (3) embracing campus diversity meant that they learned that to be successful, they needed to know how to relate with people from different ethnicities and not just befriend their co-nationals.

While international students made behavioral modifications, students did not feel they had completely changed culturally (Andrade, 2007). Participants felt they were operating within two cultures, their home culture and the American culture, embracing biculturalism (Andrade, 2007). To the students, these changes were positive because they signified successful cultural adjustments and progress (Andrade, 2007). They did not reject their home cultural identities in order to integrate and be successful, rather, they adapted to the dominant norms and behaviors on campus (Andrade, 2007, 2008).

According to Castillo et al. (2006), the understanding from Tinto's rites of passage theory that minority students should sever connections with home cultures in order to integrate into the new environment seemed unfair to the students. In the study Castillo et al. (2006) found that the premise that new Latino students should conform to the university culture by separating from the culture they have always known or their identity makes them feel unwelcomed. Instead of the person-centered approach of individual assimilation that is related to negative persistence attitudes and high attrition among Latinos, Castillo et al. (2006) proposed adding a situation-centered approach

where “the context or environment is examined to identify systematic changes that could be made in the university” (p. 268) for a holistic understanding of Latino student persistence. The best thing is for campuses to promote the diverse cultural atmosphere where everyone feels accepted and that they belong on campus (Andrade, 2007; 2008; Castillo et al., 2006). An environment that is tolerant of cultural differences and devoid of stereotypes and discrimination will boost international students’ feeling of acceptance and facilitate their college integration (Andrade, 2007; 2008; Castillo et al., 2006; Hanassab, 2006, Lee, 2012).

While academic integration plays a pivotal role in the academic success and persistence of underrepresented students in college, social integration is equally important. Minority students face an uphill battle in fitting into the social facet of campus life in predominantly white institutions (Nora, 1987; 2002; Tierney, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Minority students may find it difficult to identify and become part of a supportive group on campus where they are under-represented because individuals who share same interests, ethnicity and beliefs with them are not available to build support groups with (Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2012). Consequently minority students may feel more isolated and marginalized on predominantly white campuses than white students, and this could lead to college departure if situation does not change (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Tinto, 1993). Just as Tinto argues, the observations on social integration and the result of college departure will most likely hold for any group of students including international students that are usually underrepresented (Tinto, 1993).

Andrade (2007; 2008) and Castillo et al., (2006) in their studies have uncovered the departure from Tinto’s Interactional model of student persistence as it relates to

international students. Since Tinto's model based its research on native, traditional, full-time college students, it could not explain the cultural adaptation dimension that new international students or any foreigner is subjected to before integrating to the new environment which has been explained by Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve hypothesis.

Lysgaard' (1955) U-curve hypothesis

Sverre Lysgaard, a Norwegian sociologist, studied 198 Norwegian Fulbright students in 1955 and offered his explanation on Cultural Adjustment which later became the Lysgaard Hypothesis. Since 1955 researchers have accepted and used his explanation as the basis for other theories of cultural adaptation. Lysgaard' (1955) U-curve of Cultural Adjustment argues that a foreigner in a new environment goes through four stages of adjustment before finally embracing the norms of the new environment and becomes adjusted.

Stage One (Honeymoon Phase): When a foreigner (such as an international student) is fascinated by the new culture and excited about its new and interesting sights and sounds and cannot wait to experience them. The stage is full of excitement and the perception that the move would be beneficial.

Stage Two (Culture Shock Phase): This is the stage when the foreigner has embarked on the journey and is now living within the new culture. It is sometimes characterized by a period of depression when faced with the reality and stress of day-to-day issues of adjustment to a new environment. For an international student, the day-to-day adjustment stress result from the home culture being quite different from the dominant culture on the U.S. college campus and the student is forced to adapt to the dominant culture in order to integrate and be successful in the new environment. The

excitement of Honeymoon stage has worn off and the student is confronted with realities of cultural adjustment.

Stage Three (Recovery Phase): The student is gradually adapting to the new culture and is learning how to behave appropriately according to the new culture. The initial phase of adjustment could be tough and stressful, but as the student adapts and begins to change behaviorally to embrace the new culture, life becomes more manageable and less chaotic.

Stage Four (Adjustment Phase): This is the period when the student is functioning effectively in the new culture and the student is eventually adjusted.

These stages resulted in a U-curve (Figure 1) as portrayed by Lysgaard (1955). The hypothesis is important because it explains the stressful progression of the international student integration into a new environment (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006), and Barber, Morgan, & Torstrick, (1997) agree because international students face challenges that arise in being a foreign in a new environment and that the challenges have not decreased over time. Although Lysgaard's study has laid the groundwork for subsequent cross-cultural adaptation models, some still doubt its validity (Berardo, 2006). As part of the debate on the validity of Lysgaard hypothesis, Berardo (2006) states that the stages of the U-curve do not apply to everyone, and the length or degree of each stage vary from one to another.

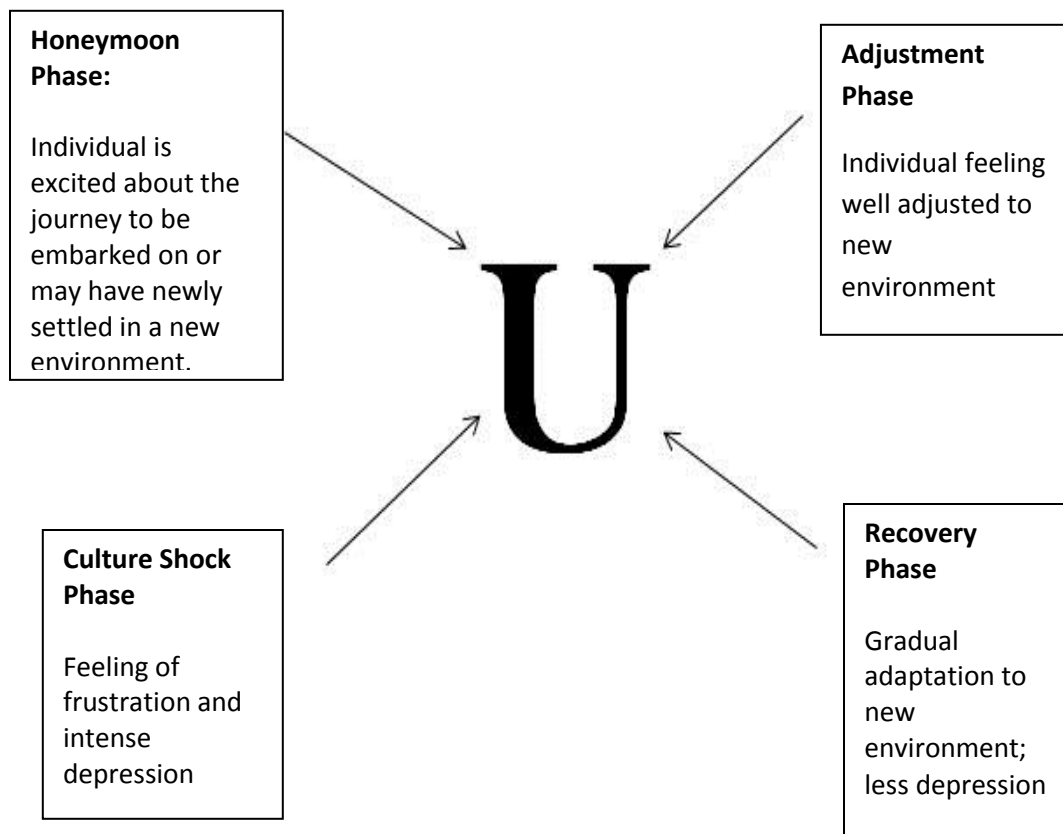


Figure 1: Lysgaard (1955) U-Curve hypothesis of cultural adjustment

Adapted version of Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve

Cultural adaptation is very important to a new individual entering into a new environment in order to exhibit full membership in the new culture. Although international students grapple with cultural adaptation in different ways, the process is a must for them in order to become adjusted to the new environment. This further elevates the issues of international student integration into a new environment.

Overall, some degree of academic and social integration is considered necessary in college for persistence through graduation (Tinto, 1993). Consequently social and

academic integration has become central to academic achievement and persistence theories (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993, 1999; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Berger & Milem, 1999; Nora, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 2005; Spady, 1970; Stage & Rushkin, 1993); and according to Seidman (2012) “researchers have also used academic performance during college as a measurement of academic integration” (p. 243). In this study, the question then is: what helps or hinders an international student to integrate into college life, and what factors do international students consider to be facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college? The findings of the study will equip American institutions with information on how to better serve and retain international students on their campuses.

Challenges International Students Face in U.S. Higher Education

International students’ transition to college can be complicated by language and cultural disparities (Andrade, 2007; 2008). When students from different backgrounds and cultures are grouped together in a foreign land with differing costumes and traditions, there are bound to be challenges. How these challenges are perceived and managed by international students is inherent in the culture, type of support and personal attributes the student possesses (Eviwie, 2009). Such challenges include: financial difficulties, cultural challenges, including racial discrimination and stereotypes on- and off-campus, loneliness, homesickness, alienation by peers while working on class projects for example, lack of social support, climate and health problems, and language difficulties among others (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Eviwie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nora, 2002). Despite passing the TOEFL or the IELTS examination, or having studied in intensive English language programs, many

international students still struggle with English language academically and socially, being speakers of other languages or non-native speakers.

Many have reported difficulties with comprehension of study materials, lecture notes, writing assignments, unfamiliar slangs and idioms, and professors' accents (Andrade, 2008). They also lack familiarity with U.S. educational system and cultural practices, which may affect social interaction and academic success (Eviwie, 2009; Isibor, 2008). Consequently, international students may find class participation stressful being accustomed to different classroom interaction dynamics in their home countries (Andrade, 2008; Nora, 2002). These could further alienate international students from their peers, resulting in social isolation in and outside of the classroom (Andrade, 2005, 2007; 2008; Eviwie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nora, 2002). Table 4 outlines the factors that can boost or hinder international students' academic achievements and persistence in U.S. colleges and universities based on the outcomes of past studies.

Table 4: Facilitators / barriers to international student persistence and academic achievements

	<u>Facilitators</u>	<u>Barriers</u>
Pre-entry attributes: Individual characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Country of origin (Kwai, 2009); • Financial sponsorship (Kwai, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); • High school GPA (Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012) • TOEFL scores / Language proficiency (Andrade, 2005; 2006; 2007; Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Stoyhoff, 1997) • College commitment (Andrade, 2008; Kwai, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Nes, et al, 2009); • Vision of the future / Value of education (Andrade, 2006; 200, 2008); • Spirituality (Andrade, 2008) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and cultural background – clash of cultural identities (Berger & Milem, 1999; Nora, 2001; Tinto, 1986, 1987, 1993; Rites of Passage Theory); • Parental SES / Finances (Andrade, 2008) • Language skills(Andrade, 2006; 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Stoyhoff, 1997); • Lack of future goals (Tinto, 1993)
Institutional experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University size (Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b); • Opportunities for clubs (Andrade, 2008); • On-campus employment (Andrade, 2007; Berger & Lyons, 2005; Kuh, 2009; Kwai, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) • On / Off-campus housing (Astin, 1973) • Academic self-discipline (Astin, 1993; Blimling, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005); • College GPA & academic performance (Adelman, 1999; Kwai, 2009; Makuakane-Drechsel & Hagedorn, 2000; Mamiseishvili, 2012; Hagedorn, Lester, Moon, & Tibbetts, 2006; Zhao et al., 2005); • Course load & credits earned (Kwai, 2009); • Faculty and staff support (Andrade, 2008; Astin, 1977, 1993; Deil-Amen, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of knowledge (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006); • New academic system (Eviwie, 2009; Isibor, 2008) • Incongruence/fit (Tinto, 1993)
On-campus integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interaction with peers (Abel, 2002; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994); • Sense of belonging and community – “mattering” or sense of importance (Dixon, et al., 2007); • Validation (Andrade, 2008); • Social connectedness (Tierney, 2004); • Multiculturalism / cultural identity – “validation of indigenous capital epistemologies” (Tierney, 1992; Pidgeon, 2008, p. 353); Cultural and social capital (Benham, 2006); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loneliness and social isolation (Braxton et al., 1997;); • Discrimination – perceived or real (Hanassab, 2006); • Social life – less time socializing (Zhao et al, 2005; Andrade, 2006; 2007);

Studies show that international students from developing countries experience greater difficulty than students from developed countries in the areas of language, finances, housing accommodation, making friends, and homesickness, which hinder their academic and social integration (Eviwie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007). In Eviwie's (2009) study on the challenges that confront African international students, all the six participants cited financial difficulties as the topmost challenge they faced. Four out of the six were F-1 international students who expressed they were under emotional stress due to their immigration status restrictions such as no access to federal loans and grants, and off-campus employment. The F-1 or J-1 student statuses are restricting and complex. The immigration regulations binding on these statuses were made stricter after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001; which led to the subsequent creation of the Department of Homeland Security and the implementation of Student and Exchange Visitors Information System (SEVIS).

The synergistic effects of these stressors go a long way in affecting the academic priorities of most international students in the United States but many still develop coping mechanisms that help them overcome their discomfort, integrate into the society, and persist through graduation (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Past Studies on International Student Persistence

Studies show that international students seek to pursue higher education degrees in the United States more than any other country (Altbach, 1991; 2004; Fry, 1977; Habu, 2000; Hanassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lou & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; Open Doors, 2012; Soko, 2006). Therefore if international students want to study in the United States in large number and they are of immense benefits to U.S. higher education institutions,

one would have expected different facets of their lives in the United States, including their college academic and social integration, and their persistence through college to have been thoroughly investigated by researchers. Now that institutions are investing significant resources in recruitment to grow their international student base, it is prudent of them to want to retain these students to gain the educational, global, and economic benefits they bring to campuses. Past studies on international students have focused on their recruitment and adjustment issues rather than their college integration and persistence through graduation (Andrade, 2008).

A recent electronic search in the scholarly journal archive (JSTOR) and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) turned up few studies to date on international student persistence. Even the search for studies on both college international student integration and persistence produced only one article by Andrade (2007). It was evident that very few studies exist to date on the issues of international student college integration and persistence. While studies on college students' academic outcomes abound, there is a gap in the literature regarding international student persistence. The outcome of persistence has long been considered by researchers as a significant pointer to student integration into college (Seidman, 2012). This research sought to bridge the gap in existing literature and better understand international student integration and persistence in college. The findings will help higher education institutions to better serve and ultimately retain international students on their campuses thereby increasing the domestic students' global perspectives (Redden, 2014).

Andrade (2007; 2008), Kwai (2009), and Mamiseishvili (2012a; 2012b) were the few studies that have to date focused on international student outcome of persistence, in

order to identify factors that influence international students' decision to continue or depart from college. Table 5 summarizes the outcomes of past studies on international student persistence.

Table 5: Past studies on international student persistence

<u>Study</u>	<u>Data</u>	<u>Method</u>	<u>Outcomes</u>
Andrade (2007)	Ethnographic interviews Sample: International undergraduate seniors	Qualitative study; interviews and focus group Methodology – ethnography	Areas of change for international student identified: college transitional changes; changes due to religious campus environment; and changes to home cultures. Integration not assimilation, a positive attribute of BICULTURAL adjustment
Andrade (2008)	Interviews and focus group for international undergraduate seniors on experiences beyond first year	Qualitative study; interviews and focus group	International student persistence could be improved by increasing vision, validation, and spiritual engagement. Institutional support needed to achieve above-stated factors.
Kwai (2009)	International undergraduate students in two public state-wide Midwestern four-year university systems. Data from Institutional Research Offices	Stepwise Binomial Logistic Regression	First year spring semester GPA, cumulative credit hours attempted, and on-campus employment had positive effect on student persistence to their second year.
Mamiseishvili (2012a)	Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study Data set (BPS: 04/06). Sample:	Non-experiment research design - combination of survey, and explanatory correlational research.	- Location, cost, and coursework reasons for enrollment at two-year colleges; - Asian international students predominantly at four-year institutions; Hispanics at two-year institutions.

	First time undergraduate freshmen	Descriptive statistics and Pearson's Chi-square tests.	- Academic advising and faculty interactions significant to first-to-second year persistence
Mamiseishvili (2012b)	Beginning postsecondary students longitudinal study data set (BPS: 04 / 06) Sample: First year undergraduate international students	Descriptive analysis used for sample characteristics Pearson's Chi-Square test or T-tests used Logistic Regression analysis	- GPA, degree goals and academic integration had significant positive effects on persistence of undergraduate international students; - Study groups, peer interactions outside of class, academic advising positive for international student retention; - Social integration was negative on persistence

Of the five studies on international student integration and persistence, two were qualitative, and three were quantitative studies. While quantitative studies summarize all responses with statistical data and seek opportunities to generalize results to one or more populations, qualitative studies seek to capture participants' personal experiences on the studied topic and consequently, the conclusions of the research were on individuals who were directly studied (Creswell, 2003; Patten, 2007). Qualitative research helps to search for discovery through the eyes of other people with as little disruption to the natural setting as possible (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998).

The present study used a qualitative methodology in the case study of undergraduate international students in a four-year higher education institution. The qualitative study aimed at better understanding the phenomena of international student college integration and persistence, and how integration affected persistence from the perspectives of those who were experiencing the phenomena. It focused on understanding

the lived experiences of undergraduate international students who had successfully integrated into college life and who were persisting through college; and, the rendering of a nuanced description of those perceptions and their significance for the participants (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973).

Data analysis was a combination of description, analysis and interpretation in accordance with the principles of qualitative exploratory inquiry (Wolcott, 1994). To identify the essences of the studied phenomena, the stack of qualitative data collected and content analysis of the generated data was guided by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) principles of ethnographic fieldwork.

The Need for a Study on International Student Persistence

Academic achievement such as strong GPA and persistence in form of reasonable academic progress from year to year are outcomes that show success in college. However, the outcome of persistence has long been considered by researchers as a vital indicator of students' integration into college (Seidman, 2012). Therefore the study sought to understand college integration and persistence through graduation of undergraduate international students in the United States.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) stated that past studies on persistence have focused on traditional American students in residential four-year colleges to the exclusion of others. The researchers recommended that future studies should focus on other student populations including first-generation college students, and other minority groups (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Past studies on college student persistence in the last two decades seemed to agree that gaps in literature and research existed with the inclusion of minority student

subgroups that were excluded from previous seminal models (Kwai, 2009). Such research included: Attinasi (1989) which focused on Mexican American or Chicano students; Berger and Milem (1999) studied persistence of African American and other minority groups; Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined the factors that influence persistence of Latino students; and, Nora (1990) investigated campus-based aid programs as a determinant of student persistence and retention among Hispanics in college. Absent from these groups were international students.

Andrade (2007; 2008) closely examined the issues of international student academic outcome of persistence, and the factors that influence international student persistence in a religiously-affiliated institution. Kwai (2009) studied international students in two public statewide four-year university systems, and Mamiseishvili (2012a; 2012b) built on Andrade's work by studying the characteristics of international students in U.S. postsecondary institutions and the factors that influence their integration and subsequent persistence. Pre-entry characteristics such as commitment to the institution and to graduation, coupled with college experiences encountered during social and academic integration, and involvement with faculty and peers, are regarded as crucial factors which influence college persistence (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's interactional model on student persistence has produced seminal research on college student integration and persistence through graduation, and it will be used as a framework for this study. Tinto (1975, 1993) explains that students enter college with pre-entry or individual attributes such as high school academic preparation, socio economic status, and parent's academic level among others, and these characteristics interact with college experiences including academic and social integration experiences

to produce outcomes such as persistence through college if the experiences are positive, or the decision to drop out of college if the experiences are negative.

Since there is a lack of research on international student persistence in college, more investigation is needed to fully understand what helps or hinders international student academic and social integration into college, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their persistence in U.S. four-year institutions. Given the influx of international students into American higher education institutions, it is imperative for institutions to understand the degree to which these students integrate into American campuses and what helps them to persevere till graduation.

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case-study is to better understand the factors that influence international students' college integration into their academic and social communities; and the factors that influence their decision to persist in four-year colleges. Using in-depth interviews the research elicited information on how international students integrate into college life, and what students and administrators consider as the facilitators of and hindrances to their persistence through graduation.

The anticipated benefits from the study are numerous because they will inform practice on the chosen institutional types in the areas of international student recruitment and retention. These institutions could use research results to better understand the profile of international students that are attracted to their campuses and begin to recruit such. They may use the results to evaluate current practices on international student academic integration and persistence, or use the findings to develop policies and practices that will enhance the retention rates of international students. The findings will enhance will assist the universities to make adaptations to their support systems to meet the needs of

international students especially during the early years of college enrollment (freshman and sophomore years). The study will also provide faculty who are the custodial of intellectual learning and staff who are in charge of support the insight into ways of assisting international students in their college integration. Faculty will be more sensitive to the plight of international students in their classes, especially during the early enrollment years when international students are still integrating into the college environment. The findings will assist the institution to customize services and programs or create new ones to support new international students as they integrate into the new environment.

The selected four-year university was a small suburban, private institution in the Northeastern region of the United States and given the pseudonym, Falcon University. It had a total student population of about 6,000 out of which 1,200 were international students.

Summary

International student mobility worldwide has increased in the last decades. Most of these students make the United States their destination for academic pursuits; but today, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada among others, now compete with the United States for international students.

International students benefit their institutions in many ways, including, acting as agents of internationalization on their campuses. Universities expend much funding on international student recruitment and to maximize their gains, they work hard to retain the students to graduation.

Tinto's interactional model is a seminal study in student integration, achievement and persistence. Tinto's rites of passage theory explains student's social and academic integration into college life through the longitudinal transformation of separation, transition and incorporation. However, the theory's integrationist approach of separation from home and family entities does not seem to hold true for international students (Andrade, 2007). The lack of explanation on cultural adaptation from Tinto's model has made it somewhat inadequate in that area for international students. Hence Lysgaard's U-curve hypothesis provided the much needed clarification of the cultural adaptation process international students confront, which is not a reality for domestic students who were the samples in Tinto's research.

Past studies have shown that some degree of academic and social integration is needed for student academic outcomes such as academic achievement and persistence (Astin, 1987; Attinasi, 1989; Berger & Milem, 1999; Cabrera & Nora, 1993; Elkins et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 2002; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1987, 1993).

International students' integration can be influenced by language and cultural differences which can subsequently impact their academic achievement and persistence in college. This study was an exploration into the ways international students integrate into college life, and what factors the students considered to be facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The study explored the perspectives of international students as they integrated into college life, the strategies they adopted for the integration process, and the factors that they perceived as facilitating or hindering their persistence through college. The study was an avenue through which the voices of persisting international students in the junior- and senior- years of college who provided information on their social and academic integration into college and the impact of integration on their persistence through to graduation could be heard. The findings should prove beneficial to students, faculty, administrators and the institution in general. International students who are new to the United States and Falcon campus would be better oriented and supported by the institution in their college integration process using strategies adopted by persisters. Currently enrolled students could also use the findings to make recommendations to the institution on how support systems could be enhanced to meet their college transition needs.

The findings could provide faculty with greater insight into the academic and social integration challenges that confront international students and create interventions to meet the students' needs. Lastly, the findings would assist the International Office at Falcon University to better serve international students and so increase retention.

Included in this chapter were (a) a restatement of the research problems, followed by (b) a discussion of qualitative research methodology, (c) the theoretical framework for the study, (d) a review of the purpose/s of the study, (e) research questions, (f) the research design, (g) the research site, (h) the selection of participants, (i) the data collection standards, (j) the data analysis methods, (k) my subjectivity statement, and (l) summary.

Restatement of the Research Problems

International students experience significant challenges in the United States, especially when they are new in the country, and these factors could result in incongruence and/or isolation leading to student drop out from college (Tinto, 1993). Among the challenges they face are: financial difficulties (Evivie, 2009); cultural challenges (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Constantine et al., 2005), racial discrimination and stereotypes on- and off-campus (Hannassab, 2006; Lee, & Rice, 2007); unfamiliarity with American educational system (Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux, & Smaby, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knot, & Sakamoto, 2005); immigration problems (Lee, 2010); loneliness and homesickness (Andrade, 2007; & Lee, 2005, 2010); alienation by peers (Klomegah, 2006); lack of social support (Hayes & Lin, 1994); climate and health problems (Huang, 1977); language difficulties (Lin & Yi, 1997); and lack of comprehension of study materials and lecture notes among others (Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Thompson & Ku, 2005). Studies show that international students from developing countries experience greater transition difficulties than those from developed countries in the areas of language, finances, housing accommodation, socialization and homesickness, all of which tend to hinder integration into the campus and persistence

through to graduation (Eviwie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Olaniran, 1993; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Rienties et al., 2012).

Of all the challenges international students face, many across the spectrum battle language challenges academically and socially even after passing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) examination, or after studying at intensive English language programs (Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Thompson & Ku, 2005). They struggle with English language in and outside of the classrooms being speakers of other languages (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008).

International students' needs are different based on their individual characteristics such as age, gender, country of origin/citizenship, country of residence, culture, parents' education levels, level of support from family and friends, length of stay in the United States and social connectedness (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). The interaction of demographic, academic, and psychosocial dimensions international students face sometimes fraught their integration into American colleges and universities (Andrade, 2008). Many of these students have struggled in the early years of college enrollment and have had to transfer to another school. Some have abandoned their studies all together and returned to their home countries due to integration difficulties which have sometimes cumulated into incongruence and/or isolation in college.

Due to lack of research, the international student population has not been completely understood by higher education administrators and faculty, and their diverse needs are still not adequately met by existing services on campuses. For that reason, the study sought to better understand undergraduate international students' academic and

social integration into college, and the facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college in order to bridge the gap in existing literature.

Qualitative Inquiry

For qualitative inquiry, I identified the topic of interest, collected data from different sources using different methods, such as in-depth interviewing, direct observation and document analysis. It approached data analysis by embracing the common factors that occurred within the information gathered in the course of the study and organized under different categories established in the interview protocols.

Qualitative research is “designed to reflect, as much as possible, the natural, ongoing context being investigated” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 10). In order to understand college integration of undergraduate international students, it was important to listen to the stories and experiences of persisting international students as told by them firsthand.

Qualitative research utilizes methods that seek to understand the quality as opposed to the quantity of its participants. This type of research was exploratory and it focused on personal experiences and behaviors. Qualitative research is based on the meanings constructed by those who have engaged in that reality (Eviwie, 2009). “Social realities” are dependent on the participants; therefore, different participants have different meanings for social phenomena (Seidman, 2013). The primary focus of qualitative research is to unlock those meanings through in-depth study of the phenomenon in its natural state (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999). Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of looking at phenomena in the natural setting in which they are found, and it is more often concerned with explaining the “why”, “what” and “how” of a phenomenon (Bricki

& Green, 2007; Yin, 2009) rather than the “when,” and “where” as in quantitative research.

The present study used a qualitative methodology and a case-study method in form of in-depth interviews for data collection from participants. However, some aspects of ethnographic approach were incorporated into the case study during data gathering, such as, field observations of international students at Falcon in places where they relaxed which was equated to their “culture” or “ways of doing things” on campus and the keeping of fieldnotes on observations and feelings. Ethnography entails “going out and getting close to the activities and everyday experiences of other people” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 3).

The data reflected experiences of participants who were persisting undergraduate international students in the junior or senior year of study. The purpose of in-depth interviews was to find out what views people held on the research questions. In this case, in-depth interviews enabled me to understand the ways international students integrated into the new campus environment, and the factors that helped or hindered their persistence, giving voice to the meaning they made of their everyday college experiences (Seidman, 2013). In-depth interviewing is a powerful tool that can be used to render thick descriptions of educational issues, by understanding the perspectives of those who have lived through those educational processes (Seidman, 2013).

This qualitative study aimed at understanding the phenomena of international student college integration and persistence, and how integration affected persistence from the perspectives of those who were experiencing the phenomena. It focused on understanding the lived experiences of undergraduate international students who had

successfully integrated into college life and who were persisting through college; and, the rendering of a nuanced description of those perceptions and their significance for the participants (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973).

This was a case study because it represented thorough analyses and descriptions of a group bounded by space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2009). The objective being to gain insight into the lives of international students by asking “how” and “why” questions on the phenomena of college integration and persistence (Bricki & Green, 2007; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Seidman, 2013; Yin, 2009). The case study was a nuanced description of individuals’ perceptions. Social scientists generally believe that for the exploratory phase of an investigation, case studies are the most appropriate (Yin, 2009) although case studies could be explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive in nature (Parthasarathy, 2008; Yin, 2005). I attempted to analyze the variables relevant to the subject under study (Creswell, 1998). The “case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). The “case” in this study was college integration process and the object of study was a group of international students.

The exploratory case study wanted to better understand the integration and persistence of international students at Falcon University. Using a qualitative methodology meant the findings could not be generalized to the entire population of international students in the United States (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yin, 2009). The study was a problem-based research seeking to understand two phenomena (1) the way/s international students integrate into four-year institutions and (2) how integration affects persistence through to graduation.

Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature revealed that a successful integration into college was essential for persistence through graduation to occur (Seidman, 2005; 2012; Tinto 1975; 1987; 1993). Integration centered on the student's social and intellectual experiences in college and the "more satisfying those experiences were felt to be, the more likely were individuals to persist until degree completion" (Tinto, 1993, p. 50). The indicators of the absence of integration were incongruence (or lack of institutional fit) and isolation (Tinto, 1993). Incongruence is the lack of fit between the interests of an individual and those of the institution, while isolation is the lack of satisfactory interactions between the individual and the members within the college community (Tinto, 1993). Unfortunately, international students are prone to challenges due to their language and cultural disparity from majority of the student population. These challenges include alienation, loneliness, discrimination, stereotypes, and lack of language proficiency among others. The literature ascribe their strategies for overcoming the challenges to their flexibility, family support, local support systems, school support systems, hard work, self-determination and motivation (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997).

The categories from the literature review regarding integration of international students into four-year institutions and the factors they consider facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence were descriptive. The students described the heart or essence of their college integration, persistence through college and how they interpreted or made meanings of their experiences. This was in line with how researchers used descriptive methods to understand human behavior in real world context (Bennett

deMarrais & LeCompte, 1998). Interpretivists believe that people's responses to others and their environments are influenced by the meanings they attribute to the context of their experiences during the interactions (Bennett deMarrais and LeCompte, 1998). Based on the afore-mentioned reasons, this study was a qualitative case study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and better understand the phenomena of college integration and persistence from the viewpoints of non-Western undergraduate international students in the junior and senior-years of study who had persisted and were successfully integrated into Falcon University, a small four-year institution in the Northeastern region of the United States. The research required me to explore each participant's thoughts, feelings, and perspectives after gathering in-depth knowledge regarding their experiences of the phenomena. The exploration was possible through in-depth interview method (Patton, 1990).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. How does an international student decide on the U.S. four-year institution to attend? Specifically what factors influence the student's institutional choice?
2. What helps or hinders an international student's social integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?
3. What helps or hinders an international student's academic integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?

4. What factors facilitate or hinder an international student's persistence in college?

Research Design

A research design is a “logical sequence” or work plan that carefully connects the data to be collected and the conclusions to be drawn to “the initial research questions” (Yin, 2009, p. 26). The case study design outlined the necessary actions taken from the inception with the research questions to the inferences. These steps included relevant data and mode of data gathering, then data analysis, with the guarantee that the data collected could answer the research questions (Yin, 2009). Also, Yin (2009) stated the following to be five components that are pertinent to a case study (p. 27),

1. The study's questions (research questions);
2. The proposition, if any;
3. The unit(s) of analysis;
4. The logic linking the data to the propositions; and,
5. The criteria for interpreting the findings.

In case study analyses, the last two components may be fuzzy, but pattern-matching (a form of coding) which may be time consuming, was Yin's (2009) suggestion as most appropriate method. Case study research designs usually answer the “how,” “what,” and “why” research questions (Bricki & Green, 2007; Yin, 2009). The examination of trustworthiness is crucial in qualitative study. To avoid common mistakes, Yin (2009) called for the development of a theory that would guide the design of a case study and differentiate it from ethnography or grounded theory designs where researchers delve into data gathering haphazardly. The theory should “cover the questions, propositions, units of

analyses, logic connecting data to propositions, and criteria for interpreting the findings” (Yin, 2009, p. 36).

To guarantee trustworthiness, I engaged in member check of the interview transcripts and triangulated the data collected and interpretation of the findings. It was, however, important to recognize that in qualitative inquiry, the intent was not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The phenomena in this qualitative case study were integration and persistence of international students to a U.S. private four-year institution, and the effects of integration on the persistence of undergraduate international students—the factors that were facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college.

Research Site

This study was conducted at a university in the Northeastern region of the United States. It was small in size and diverse in genders, cultures, languages, countries of nationality, experiences and lifestyles. Due to its unique characteristics as a business school, it was assumed that the university attracted a unique set of students, international students included. From this study, the profiles of international students attending this institution who were interviewed were developed and reviewed for unique characteristics. The research site was given a pseudonym of Falcon University. This university does not admit international students who are looking to gain proficiency in the English Language before progressing into degree-seeking programs, such as the English Language Training Institute (ELTI) program.

Falcon University’s distinct curriculum fuses business, liberal arts, sciences, and information technology, providing international leaders with business education and

research (Falcon University website). The results are graduates who are making an impact in their chosen fields and turning their passions into success stories. It is a leader in the promotion of ethical and socially responsible enterprise and the critical role of information and communication technology in achieving sustainable high productivity (Falcon University website). It awards eleven (11) degrees in business fields and five arts and science disciplines; 23 majors altogether. Every student at Falcon University, irrespective of academic major, must pass six to seven required general business courses (GB) in basic accounting, finance and law among others before graduation. The university's general business courses were tough according to students.

The university was approved to operate in the Northeastern region of the United States by the state Department of Education and accredited by the Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, EQUIS International and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Falcon University has over 44,000 alumni all over the country and abroad (Falcon University website). It is a highly residential, not-for-profit institution with a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II status. About 80% of its students reside on campus.

Out of the university's student population of about 6,000, about 1,200 were international students at any given semester. The university has its recruiters from the Admissions Office who travel every fall to recruit students from different locations except Africa. When I asked the Admissions Office about the decision not to recruit in Africa, they told me they doubted if they would have a steady stream of students who would afford to pay for tuition and expenses for four years from there.

The tuition plus living expenses at Falcon for undergraduate students was over \$60,000 per year excluding the costs of trips home twice or thrice in a year and the student's personal expenses. It was then reasonable to think that the international students attracted to Falcon must have high socio economic status to afford the expenses. The International Office at Falcon University was the point of contact for international students. It provided programs and services to international students on a wide range of visa categories, including the F-1 and J-1 programs. The International Office was responsible for the wellbeing of international students, and it provided immigration services and trainings, campus-wide events for cultural awareness and some forms of counseling on academic, personal, financial, health, cultural, taxes, employment and campus-wide programs (International Office website, n.d.).

Although the university did not have the English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Training Institute (ELTI) program, it provided some customized basic English language instructions in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses to assist non-native speakers of English language with their expository writing in the first year. The degree-seeking international students prove English language proficiency by scoring a minimum of 90 on the TOEFL, or 7.0 on the IELTS before admission.

While incoming international students were expected to have taken the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination and scored high on it to prove their language proficiency, the ESOL courses assisted non-native speakers in their academic integration by reinforcing the basics of critical thinking, reading, and writing in English. The rationale behind the ESOL courses was that although international students may have

scored satisfactorily on the TOEFL test, many, especially those from non-Western cultures, still struggle initially with writing skills. The ESOL courses not only addressed the rudiments of expository writing in English language, they also covered cultural differences and American academic culture, such as, classroom etiquettes. Being confronted with the same college integration issues, including limited English language skills and newness to the American educational system and culture, the ESOL students bond, emerging as a “learning community” or a support group for one another.

The International Office operated under the Student Affairs Division and had a Director, two Assistant Directors, one SEVIS Coordinator, one Administrative Assistant, 20 International Peer Advisors (IPAs) and many student workers. It provided services to about 1,400 international students each semester, 1,200 being those enrolled for the semester and about 200 on optional practical training (OPT).

Participants

The common sampling technique used for the case study research was convenience sampling (Patton, 1990). According to Merriman (1998), convenience sampling is a non-probability process and its objective is to quickly show a trend. It is commonly used for preliminary studies. Though it has its drawbacks, convenience sampling still remains a popular way of gathering data quickly and easily for different areas of study (Creswell, 2007). In order for me to gather an in-depth picture of the phenomena of college integration and persistence, the main study selected six currently enrolled international student participants who met the criteria listed below at the research site, Falcon University. Each participant:

1. Was at least 18 years of age,

2. Was a degree-seeking undergraduate international student on F-1 visa status,
3. Was enrolled as a junior- or senior-level student; they formed the pool of “persisters”—those who successfully completed the first two years of college when students were vulnerable to college dropout,
4. Was enrolled full-time in Fall 2014 semester,
5. Was an international student from non-Western culture since students from Western cultures are very similar in outlook to American students. Separating non-Western students for the study kept the pool of participants as homogenous as possible,
6. Was willing to participate in at least two 45- to 60-minute in-depth interviews using digital voice recorder (DVR), and a possible follow-up interview if it became necessary. The DVR provided much superior sound quality and recording accuracy. The recording device was compact and easier to use when compared to a cassette tape recorder.

The exclusion of non-degree seeking students, such as exchange students, who were usually in the United States for a semester or two, students taking courses for professional development, courses required for licensure, or graduate studies was to keep the pool of participants as homogenous as possible. Also including graduate and non-degree seeking international students, who did not intend to complete undergraduate degrees, could have introduced bias into the study since these students might not have viewed integration the same way as degree-seeking, four-year, undergraduate students. While exchange students only attended four-year universities for a semester or two, graduate international students were usually enrolled for about two years.

In addition to student participants, two current Falcon administrators were selected as participants in the study. They were those who had worked closely with international students over the years and who could volunteer information on such interactions and some characteristic behaviors of these students. Unlike student participants, each administrator was invited to participate in one 45-60 minute in-depth interview. Their perspectives were needed to triangulate the student perspectives on integration and persistence at Falcon University.

Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were advised they could withdraw from study at any time. Participants did not have to answer questions which were uncomfortable to them. Identifiers such as names and addresses were excluded from reports because revealing such information could reveal identities of the actual students and administrators. Pseudonyms were used to conceal identity. Each participant was given an Informed Participant Consent Form to sign (Appendix C for students and Appendix D was administrator consent form) before the first interview began. The consent forms stated that participant identity would be kept anonymous and that the digital recordings, my journals and fieldnotes, and transcripts of interviews would be kept in a locker and destroyed after five years.

For the research, regions of origin were coded as: Africa (1), Asia (2), Europe (3), Latin America (4), Middle East (5), North America (6) and Oceania (7) (Appendix E). Students from non-Western cultures were those from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America among the international student population on campus. In addition to two administrators, six undergraduate international students, four (4) in the junior- and two (2) senior-year students were selected for the research.

Adapting the method used by Alfred (1995) to contact participants and to avoid any conflict of interest in my role as the Director of the International Office and the researcher in this study, I contacted the Associate Dean of Students who supervised the International Office through email (Appendix F) to solicit the assistance of the Center in sending initial and follow-up emails to international students who were at the junior and senior levels of study. The email articulated the benefits of the study to the International Office, one of which was that it would assist the office to better understand the needs of international students they serve and how to meet these needs.

After the Associate Dean's approval, the International Office sent the initial email (Appendix G) introducing the study and me as the researcher to all undergraduate international students in the junior and senior years of study; invited them to participate in the research and urged them to reach out to me directly. An email from the International Office general email system gave credence to the research because international students were used to receiving credible emails through this system. The International Office was not involved in the main research. A week later, a follow-up email was sent by the office to remind students of the study, so they could contact me if they were willing to participate in the study (Appendix H).

Once a volunteer student had contacted me, a "Thank you" email was sent, thanking them for the willingness to participate. Each student participant was assigned an interview date, time and venue on campus, but was also given the opportunity to re-schedule and pick another interview date if needed (see Appendix I). Two days before the scheduled interview, each participant was contacted via email reminding them of the date, time, and location of the interview which had been determined at the participant's

convenience (Appendix J). Each administrator's participation was requested via email (see Appendix K). Once the date and interview location were established, a reminder email was sent to each administrator two days before the scheduled interview date (see Appendix L).

In addition to working with the International Office on email dispatch and in looking for a convenience sample, I broadened the recruitment strategy by mingling with international students at different events on campus in order to become more familiar with international student organization leaders who could assist in the recruitment of volunteers. A convenience sample of participants, six students and two administrators emerged for the study. Convenience sampling has the advantage of being easy to assemble and practical (Creswell, 2007).

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to better understand the college integration of undergraduate international students and the factors that were facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college. Data collection began after Falcon University had given me permission to use their campus as study site and IRB approval was obtained from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. According to Patton (1990), such exploratory research was possible through an in-depth interview method which was chosen for data gathering on the descriptive experiences of integration and persistence through college for international students.

Pilot Test

The pilot test was conducted prior to the main study after IRB approval from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte and research consent from Falcon University

were received. Two international students were conveniently chosen. The research questions and interview protocols were tested on the students to be sure they understood the questions and the ideas conveyed therein. The purpose of the pilot test was to remove any ambiguity in the research questions and interview protocols (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Examples were the words “integration” and “hindrance.” Would international students understand the words within the context of their uses in the interview protocol? If the students did not, then the word “integration” could be substituted with the word “fit”; and “hindrance” substituted with “obstacle” to simplify the sentences.

Based on the feedback obtained from the students, the protocol questions were slightly amended. For example the words “integration” and “hindrance” were replaced with “fit” and “obstacle” respectively to simplify the protocol questions for better comprehension for international students. Although the participants were juniors and seniors, international students may still have some lingering language barriers. This was done to remove any form of inconvenience from the research for students.

Also, an external jury consisting of two administrators in the field of international education was consulted to review the interview protocols and to clarify if the words used therein were easy enough for junior- or senior-year international students to understand; or should they be substituted with simpler words for easy comprehension. The external jury’s feedback agreed with the international students’. Some words needed to be simplified to increase understanding of the questions for international students. Once all necessary rephrasing of the interview protocols were completed, the slightly revised document was sent for a second IRB approval. The study did not commence until the second IRB approval was received.

Institutional Internationalization Efforts

I also kept fieldnotes and journals on the campus environment, including the university website. It was important to know if the university identified with international education, including recruitment and retention of international students through its mission/vision and symbols around campus and on the website. This attempted to answer the question: Is the campus welcoming to international students? This question served as a guide as my campus observation continued.

Observation of International Students

International students were observed in settings where they usually gather for relaxation in between and after classes on campus and I kept fieldnotes on observations. These settings included events common areas, the student center which houses one of the main cafeterias, a popular café where international students hang out and other public places on campus. The observation was not specific to consented participants; it was generalized to all international students. The purpose of the observation was to better understand international students in relaxed atmospheres, where and how they gather and their engagements in such places.

The gathered data sources included documents obtained from the International Office at Falcon University on international student demographics, my field notes and journals on campus observations, the digitally recorded in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with six undergraduate international student participants and two administrators, along with their transcripts and notes on striking participant behaviors during the interviews.

In-depth Interviews

Six undergraduate international students and two administrators were interviewed. Two in-depth interviews were administered to each student participant and one per administrator. Only those administrators who had worked closely with international students were chosen for the study. These were people who understood international students and the challenges they faced in college, having worked with them in the classrooms, at student support centers, or in tutoring labs among others.

The international student's first interview was for the purpose of rapport building, collecting stories on the students, why the students chose to study in the United States, and what attracted them to Falcon University. The result was a rich description of each participant and an attempt to answer Research question 1 to build a profile of each student participant. The second in-depth interview attempted to answer Research questions 2 - 4, the factors students considered to be facilitators of or hindrances to their college integration and subsequent persistence to graduation.

The student interviews were conducted at times and places convenient for the participants and the locations happened to be on the university campus because participants tend to "take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 189). Follow-up interview was scheduled as needed per student participant. If after the interviews there was a need to clarify some topics/issues discussed in the first two interviews, then a follow up meeting was scheduled between the student participant and me. Each interview lasted for 45 to 60 minutes and was digitally recorded.

The interview protocol (Appendix M) which consisted of questions asked during the students' in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview was divided into warm-up questions and categories such as: choice of university, college integration experiences, factors that facilitated or hindered persistence and closing warm-up questions where the participants were asked what advice they would give an undergraduate international student coming to the university and any recommendations for the International Office or the institution. Using the interview protocol for administrators (Appendix N), the questions asked were divided into warm-up questions, questions on international student support and institutional retention efforts and lastly closing warm up questions.

The interviews were digitally recorded so they could be easily archived. In addition to the interview recordings, I wrote journals during the interviews on facial expressions, hesitations, and gestures of interviewees. Each interview was 45 to 60 minutes, after which the recording was turned off to avoid diminishing returns even if the participant still wanted to talk. Sticking to the set interview duration demonstrated respect for the participant's time (Seidman, 1998).

Administrative documents on the general demographics of the international student population and information related to this study, including any newspaper clippings and articles on the office or international students appearing in the mass media were also requested from the Center. Using all these data sources to verify those collected during the in-depth interviews was advantageous because they demonstrated triangulation. All the digitally recorded student and administrator interviews were transcribed by paid professionals.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the organization and interpretation of the gathered information such as what the researcher has seen, heard and read, to figure out what has been learned (Glesne, 2006 as cited in Evivie, 2009). Qualitative data gathering and data analysis occur simultaneously; inferences or “hunches” from already collected data usually affect the kind of data being gathered and how they are collected (Merriman, 1998). The college integration of undergraduate international students, what challenges they faced during academic and social integration and the factors that were facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college were inherent parts of the interview discussion.

I checked the transcripts against the digital recordings to ensure accuracy and all necessary corrections were made. Then I sent the checked transcripts to participants for vetting and confirmation from them that the transcripts accurately captured their thoughts and responses to the interview questions, a form of member check approach. After confirmation, the data were analyzed. Data analysis followed Wolcott’s (1994) strategies, a combination of description, analysis and interpretation in accordance with the principles of qualitative exploratory inquiry. Trying to make meaning of the pile of qualitative data collected and content analysis of the generated data was guided by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw’s (1995) principles of ethnographic fieldwork.

Using the established categories within the interview protocols, the transcripts were organized under these categories. Each participant’s checked transcripts were read and re-read and then common phrases and words were grouped under each category, such as social integration, academic integration, persistence and others. The transcripts were highlighted in colors and commented on using Microsoft Word to distinguish the

categories. After reviewing all transcripts, the common or recurring verbalized thoughts under each category were grouped together still using Microsoft Word. The groupings under each category formed the common thread of experiences among the participants. They also showed the essence of the participants' experiences. Each grouping was further reduced to similar phrases, words and sentences in response to the question/s asked under the category. Doing this further compressed the mound of data into the essence of participants' responses to the question in each category. It was then easy to observe the common threads that ran through participants' responses per category. This process represented the coding method I used for the data analysis.

Data sources from the International Office archival documents, field notes from observations of international students, participants during interviews, website review, journals from my thoughts and feelings about the research and transcripts from in-depth interviews with students and administrators were analyzed and placed in categories.

It is important to note that after reading and intimately knowing the data, the data (students' and administrators' transcripts, fieldnotes, journals and database documents obtained from the International Office) were triangulated to develop the thread that ran through each category. Triangulation strengthens the authenticity of a study because multiple sources of information serve as confirmation of the same phenomenon; providing the guarantee that the researcher's descriptions are valid (Evisie, 2009). To place the participants' stories in the right context, profiles in form of stories (narratives), sometimes with participant's quotes were developed (Seidman, 1998). Conclusions were drawn and recommendations for further research were given.

The benefits of using the researcher as an instrument of data gathering and analysis in case study qualitative studies included openness, flexibility, comprehensive capabilities, knowledge-base expansion, immediate processing, opportunities for clarification and summarization, and the opportunity to explore unusual or distinctive responses (Evisie, 2009). To ensure authenticity, objectivity or credibility and transferability in qualitative study, I used the following techniques, (a) member check of transcripts with original data collected for correction, verifying no information was overlooked, (b) triangulation of multiple data sources and data collection techniques, by cross-checking data and interpretations, prolonged engagement through series of interviews with international students and administrators, interviewing each student participant for 45–60 minutes two – three times and administrators once each and observations of international students at favorite “hang out” locations and the test site for evidence of internationalization efforts, (c) a disclosure of my subjectivity to bring my beliefs regarding the objectives of this study to the forefront, to be conscious of them while working on every aspect of the study so as not to introduce bias and (d) a thorough review that ensured the research has followed good professional practice and that the results were consistent with the data collected (Seidman, 1998, 2013).

Researcher’s Subjectivity Statement

According to Peshkin (1988) a researcher’s subjectivity in a study is unavoidable but acknowledging and stating it from the onset of the study is essential for the reliability of the research. Subjectivity could interfere with the research by shaping the inquiry and its findings (Peshkin, 1988). The main challenge then was how to achieve the containment of my personal experiences to keep them from biasing the research to

establish trustworthiness (Merriman, 1998). To achieve this, it was important for me to reflect on how the research topic intersected with my life (Glesne, 1999).

Peshkin (1988) advocated that researchers should reflect and identify their own subjectivities. According to the author, when researchers do not own their subjectivities, they “insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes” (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). When a researcher volunteers the subjectivity statement at the onset of the study, readers then understand that this is one of the lenses through which the researcher interpreted data collected during the study (Peshkin, 1998). Being an American citizen with dual nationalities, my views could be subjective and could interfere with my objectivity. Therefore to enhance the credibility of my qualitative findings and help readers place the interpretative findings in the proper context, I have disclosed my subjectivity in this study.

My subjectivity statement

I was born in Nigeria, West Africa, to Nigerian parents. I grew up in Nigeria where I spent significant portion of my adult life. I earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in Zoology in Nigeria; I taught Biology to undergraduates for many years in a university before immigrating to the United States where I earned the master’s degrees in Business Administration and Higher Education Management. Being an African who grew up within the African community, my outlook to life was shaped by the African culture; an example of ethnic maintenance (Peshkin, 1988).

Although a U.S. citizen, my experiences in the United States were similar to those of my participants. The main difference was that while my participants had definite pathways as international students being guided by regulations, policies, supportive

family members and administrators, I had to wait for my family to transition into the society (while I was transitioning too) before returning to school for higher education. As an adult I battled culture shock and identified with integration challenges international students were confronted with in the new college environment. I faced academic challenges due to differences in the educational and cultural systems in Nigeria and the United States. Other challenges included loneliness, homesickness, unfamiliarity with the food and weather, financial difficulties, alienation, rejection and stereotypes.

In spite of the afore-mentioned difficulties and the demands on my time by family obligations as a mother, wife and an employee at a higher education institution, I earned the Master of Business Administration and Master of Higher Education degrees and began pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. I attributed my successes to my family's support, the support of fellow Africans and the drive to succeed and better myself. Even though I was far away from home in Africa, I continued to identify with other Africans in Diaspora as a way of maintaining my identity. This was an example of community preservation, another type of subjectivity mentioned in Peshkin (1988).

The issues of racial profiling, discrimination and stereotypes which sadly were part of my experiences in the United States spoke to the subjectivity of justice-seeking (Peshkin, 1988). Human beings are products of their environments and so they formulate ideas about justice based on their backgrounds. As an African in the American culture, I felt the sense of injustice and mistreatment rooted in discrimination. I belonged to a majority ethnic group in Nigeria and grew up in a part of the country where my ethnic group was in the majority. Living in the United States as an African where I belonged to

a minority group that was constantly marginalized and discriminated against was very difficult in the beginning but over time I learned to cope.

I grew up in an upper middle class home in Nigeria but found myself on the other side of the socio-economic ladder with financial difficulties at the beginning. Living in America was tough initially, not having a social support network, coupled with financial difficulties due to unemployment but after proving myself academically, the situation changed for the better. I became employed in a higher education institution where I worked for many years and gained rapid promotions. Based on my background and in my role as a qualitative researcher interviewing students who may have shared histories and common experiences in the United States, I had certain subjectivities. The subjectivity of justice-seeking came into play in my interactions with international students who have been subjected to some stereotypes too out of sympathy.

The fourth type of subjectivity highlighted by Peshkin (1988) was non-research human subjectivity which could soften a researcher's judgment and has a bi-product of affection. Therefore I needed to maintain some distance from the issues being investigated in order to be objective. Peshkin (1988) advocated "the enhanced awareness that should result from a formal systematic monitoring of self" (p. 5). Having this understanding, I was careful not to make wrong conclusions based on my own subjectivity.

Human interactions are inherent in qualitative research but the interactions need to be scrutinized to reduce behaviors such as reactivity and indeterminacy that may potentially introduce bias into the research to the barest minimum (Eviwie, 2009).

Reactivity referred to the human tendency for people to change behavior when under spotlight during a study. Sometimes it is called the guinea pig effect. It highlighted how participants changed their reactions to the investigator knowing they were the object of attention in a research which is a form of biasing behavior (Creswell, 2007).

Indeterminacy referred to any effort by the researcher to tweak or distort the outcome of a study thereby leading to false or incorrect inferences (Creswell, 2007). This is another form of biasing behavior. Indeterminacy could affect how questions are asked, which questions are asked and when they are asked by the researcher. Both reactivity and indeterminacy speak to the dynamics of human interactions in qualitative research.

Since human interactions were pertinent to qualitative research and this case study, I adopted the following techniques to mitigate the human biases, thereby introducing balance and fairness.

1. Used triangulation where I cross-checked data and interpretations through the use of multiple data sources and data collection techniques.
2. Used engagement and persistent observation.
3. Used journals writing to document my thoughts, philosophy and rationale for decision-making.
4. Used member checking where data were fed back to participants for their confirmation that they were accurate.

Summary

This chapter clarified the purpose and need for the study which was to understand undergraduate international student integration to the new college environment, how students were transformed during integration and the facilitators of and hindrances to

persistence. It justified why qualitative research was the preferred methodology and case study the best method for this study. The exploratory qualitative case study was described under the research design, research sites, participant selection, data collection and data-analysis methods, along with my subjectivity statement.

In chapter 4, the findings of the study were reported in forms of participant profiles followed by analyses of the categories and a rich discussion of the results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The chapter presented findings from data gathered using in-depth individual interviews of undergraduate international students and administrators, observations of international students in their natural locations and a thorough review of the test site for internationalization efforts and arranged them to identify the categories established in the interview protocols among all evidence gathered in the study in accordance with Geertz's (1973) interpretation of cultures and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) principles for ethnographic fieldwork. The first part of this chapter highlighted how each participant came to be a volunteer in the research, followed by an introduction of each participant through their profiles in answer to the first research question.

According to Seidman (1998), "Crafting a profile or a vignette of a participant's experience is an effective way of sharing interview data and opening up one's interview material to analysis" (p. 102). I narrated each profile in a way to transform the interview data into a persuasive story of the participant and to enliven the participant's experiences so as to connect the reader to the participant (Geertz, 1973; Seidman, 1998). The vignettes contained excerpts of interview transcripts that told stories of the participants' experiences of integration and persistence as international students in a four-year American university. These were my "own constructions of other people's constructions" of what these phenomena meant to them (Geertz, 1973).

To preserve the authenticity of each participant's story, the material was presented in the order it was obtained, but was transposed when materials in subsequent interviews fit better with the previous (Seidman, 1998). I observed that the participant became more comfortable with me in the second and follow up interviews, thereby volunteering more information on the questions asked, and adding to the experiences reported initially.

The first interview's objective was for rapport building with the participant. Each interview rapport was different in that it was individually built and dependent on the personality of the participant and how that interacted with mine, reflecting the goal, structure, and the method of in-depth interviewing (Seidman, 1998). Interviews helped others to understand and draw inferences from the participant's viewpoint by seeing how they experienced and lived the studied phenomena (Eviwie, 2009; Seidman, 1998).

Of the convenience sample of six international students, five were interviewed three times and one was interviewed twice. The two administrators were interviewed once each. The first interview focused on the participant's personal and family background and institutional support offered to students at Falcon University. The second interview focused on their college experiences with respect to social and academic integration, and college persistence till now. The third which was the follow-up interview sought further explanations on issues dealt with in the first two interviews but which needed the participant's clarification. Therefore the follow-up interviews were convened "as needed." While structuring three interviews is ideal in qualitative research, there are no absolutes to interviewing because it is possible to obtain good results from two or one interview (Seidman, 1998).

The interviews were conveniently spaced from three to ten days apart. The convenience sample of six international students and two administrators was considered effective sample size for the study because the point of saturation was reached by the end of the last student and administrator participants, no new information surfaced (Seidman, 1998). The analysis of categories in the participants' (students and administrators) transcripts followed the description of the students' profiles.

Participants

Among the six student participants, four (Rosalyn, Betty, Eleanor, and Jackie) were recruited through the introductory email sent to students using the International Office main email system. Rosalyn, a junior, introduced Jimmy to me; and I invited Bill after his name was mentioned by one of the students. Bill confirmed his interest in wanting to participate in the study but forgot to respond. The six were degree-seeking undergraduate international students on F-1 visa status from non-Western cultures of Asia (China), Africa (Ghana) and Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador and Peru / Venezuela). The convenience sample was homogenous enough to provide common factors on the essence of international student college integration and persistence; and also heterogeneous enough to represent different viewpoints (Evivie, 2009). Table 6 showed an overview of student-participant profiles.

Table 6: Student participant profile

Participant	Gender	Academic Status	Age	Campus Residence	Country of Origin	Country of Birth/Residence	Family Background	Education Finance Option
Betty	F	Senior	21	R	Colombia	Colombia	MC	Parents/ Merit Scholarship
Rosalynn	F	Junior	19	NR	China	Peru / Venezuela	MC	Parents
Eleanor	F	Junior	20	R	Jamaica	Jamaica	MC	Parents
Jackie	F	Senior	22	R	Brazil	Brazil	MC	Parents
Jimmy	M	Junior	21	R	Ghana	Ukraine / Ghana	MC	Parents/ Academic Scholarship (Honors program)
Bill	M	Junior	21	R	China	El Salvador	MC	Parents/RA

Note: M = male; F = female; R = resident; NR = non-resident; MC = middle class; RA = resident assistant

Betty

Betty was from Colombia. She was one of the students who immediately responded to my introductory email to junior- and senior-year international students at the beginning of the research. In the response she expressed her desire to participate in the study and we finally set date and time for the first interview.

The first interview was on September 18, 2014 where I shared objectives of the study and volunteer's rights, including issues of confidentiality with Betty. She was given time to ask questions on the study and on her rights. After questions were answered, she signed the consent form. I also signed it and a copy was later given to Betty.

Betty's profile

Betty told me she was 21 years old and from Colombia where she was born and raised. She has lived there all her life, until she came to the United States to study. At the time of the interview, she was in her final year majoring in Economics and Finance. She spoke Spanish and English. Betty said, "I'm an only child, but in a very big, big family. My family is all Columbian, but both my mom and my dad are Palestinian descent, so my family's very Arab, in that sense." She came from a big extended family and so never felt alone like some only children say they do instead she was very familiar with her cousins. Family was of utmost importance to Betty. She told me that leaving her family was something that made her doubt if she made the right choice coming to America to study because she knew she would miss them a lot.

According to Betty, her dad was an engineer and an entrepreneur with an engineering business, again, something Betty had to leave behind to pursue a business career. When asked to describe herself, Betty said she was very religious, a perfectionist, an introvert but not shy, not competitive and not an attention seeker. She liked to be behind the scenes. Her religious attribute was evident in the course of the interviews with her saying, "... That's how, thank God, I found an internship last summer ...," "In my case, thank God, everything's good I met good people."

Her schooling, both elementary and secondary education happened in Colombia where she attended an American school. She took Advance Placement (AP) courses in high school. They were tough, but thankfully they prepared her for the rigors of Falcon's undergraduate courses. English was not her strength, although she could speak it fluently, writing in English was difficult. She struggled quite a bit as a freshman with writing. Betty said, "Personally, at the beginning, especially, I wasn't that comfortable speaking

English because it's different to speak English 24/7 than to only speak it once in a while.” So she self-selected the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) English writing courses in her first year of enrollment and that was helpful. She reported that her ESOL professor was fantastic.

Betty explained that her experience of the American culture was different as a student from those times when she visited the country on family vacations. However she came to the United States as a student with open-mind, hoping to experience the culture, the people, and the academic programs she said. She made friends who happened to be international students. The relationships were so strong that they all visited one another's countries and the experiences were fun, she recounted with a smile. She had many Latin American friends who she considered “closed-minded” because they just wanted to be with their co-nationals, speaking Spanish all day long. At the same time, as if Betty felt their inadequacies she said that for many, communication was not easy, “they had to push out the English words.”

She was proud however to have been a student leader, an International Peer Advisor (IPA) for the International Office for three years. As an IPA, Betty was expected to be a resource to incoming international students. As a returning upperclassman, she was assigned a group of new international students to answer their questions and provide them necessary information to facilitate their college integration. She worked to build relationships with her advisees. The IPA positions were highly competitive at Falcon. Students interviewed for them and successful candidates who could be international and domestic students were trained to know how to perform their duties effectively. These

were paid positions. Each year the office picked about 20 IPAs who could also be graduate or undergraduate students.

Looking back, Betty felt maybe she should have put more effort into making friends with American students.

I would have liked to have more of an American experience because all my friends are international right now. We've gone to each other's countries. It's a lot of fun. I'm very happy about it. But I would also have liked to have at least one – live some American traditions, like go to an American house on

Thanksgiving, stuff like that - Betty

Her mom encouraged her in the senior year to still make the effort to be friends with American students but Betty still felt it was too difficult. Fortunately she and her friends had an American “friend” who was very much into Latin American culture. He had a Latin American girlfriend, so he kept up with them and spoke a little bit of Spanish. They visited his house in Cape Cod, and it was so nice. For the first time in the senior year, Betty stepped inside an American home and learned so much she reported.

Choice of U.S. College

Betty told me she chose to study in the United States for two main reasons. First, the United States was closer to home than Great Britain, Asia or Australia. Second, the United States was a more popular destination for international students, including Latin American students because it had the best educational system in the world. The teachers and counselors at the American School in Colombia also encouraged students to choose to study in the United States of America, Betty said. She applied to a diversity of schools in the United States in Washington D.C., Texas, New York, and another school in New

England. Her parents hired a paid “college tutor” who worked with Kaplan, someone to guide her as she navigated the pathway of college choices. Her high school counselor advised her about American colleges to an extent but the college tutor was more familiar with the American college system. The same college tutor had guided friends before her and many at the same time with her. Although not a widespread practice in Colombia due to cost, hiring a “college” tutor was becoming known.

Betty said initially she was not going to attend Falcon because she thought Economics was not offered there. But at the beginning of her senior year, the tutor informed her that Falcon offered Economics. After researching and asking graduates from her high school for confirmation, she realized that Economics was offered at Falcon. She also chose Falcon University because she knew at least one person from her high school who was a student there. She liaised with her and received more feedback on the university. The one-on-one insight from her made a difference in Betty’s choice of Falcon University because they differentiated the university from others on Betty’s list. It was one of the top Business schools in the country, plus, the ranking was high – though ranking was not as important to Betty as the fact that the school offered Economics.

She knew she did not want business management after studying it in high school; she wanted a fresh and exciting major like Economics, Betty said. However, having the business background from high school helped a lot in the first year at Falcon. She later modified her major choosing Economics-Finance.

With further research Betty even liked the university more because of its small size, small class size and suburban location she said. Though she was warned about the

rigor of Falcon's curriculum, she felt it would complement her academic strength. With the Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, she was able to transfer credits to Falcon.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

Betty arrived at Falcon University in Fall 2011 and reported for orientation. There was no way back, she did not know the campus, and she really did not know anyone except for her former high school alumna studying at Falcon. Much to her surprise, she found an environment that embraced her with open arms, "Everyone was friendly and welcoming" she recalled. Even her parents were impressed with the environment and people's friendliness. Looking back, she affirmed she still felt the university was a good fit for her. She said she believed the mindset [mentality] and the self-confidence a student possesses will propel him or her to seek out new friends. According to her, some people, such as, students from Latin America, usually hang out with fellow "Latins" according to Betty. They mostly interacted with their co-nationals outside of the classroom which has become a common trend on campus but she said there were opportunities through campus activities for international students to bond with domestic and other international students during new student orientation. Such activities included: a welcome dinner, leadership academy, distribution of university computers to freshmen, ice cream social, among others. Her parents departed about five days into the Orientation Program but the activities kept her busy.

Betty said the International Office played a big role in her initial campus adjustment. She rated their programs and services as "100% effective" Even her parents had fond memories of the office she said. The Center supported her and others during

freshman days and still do till today. They planned a lot of activities then but she felt they had scaled back their program offerings to new students at orientation not knowing why.

Hindrances to Social Integration

At the beginning of freshman year, Betty recalled feeling out of place as if she did not belong on the campus even though the campus was welcoming. Trying to make friends was very difficult and sometimes she felt alienated from discussions. “Everyone is – I’ve found everyone is very nice, but to find good friends was very hard” Betty recounted.

Cultural differences played a role in her inability to adjust well initially. She was unaccustomed to some social activities such as fraternity parties on campus, Betty said. They ran contrary to the cultural practices in Latin America where people do not generally drink to get drunk. They drink to socialize with friends. It seemed to her that American students lost control when drinking and tended to get drunk often because they were denied of drinking till 21, according to Betty. Consequently, many who were minors broke the rule and committed under-age drinking, and those who were at the legal age drank and became drunk. That was strange and she did not want to be a part of it.

Cultural difference was responsible for the conflict she had with my first roommate in the first semester. Betty recalled she was placed in a room upon arrival with an American student. She really did not understand the American culture to know that their ways of greeting were different. “Even simple stuff, like the ways to say hi, was very different. So that was a really – stepping out with the wrong foot from the beginning” Betty said.

They [American students in the dorm] all spoke of events Betty could not relate to, such as prom or homecoming and would just not be able to join in the conversations not knowing what to add. Other international students were in separate halls called the “Global Living Centers” such as Miller. “There was just one more international student on my floor” Betty said. They met during hall activities and of course, they quickly bonded because they had a lot in common. They were new, homesick and trying to adjust to Falcon.

Coincidentally, her friend, the other international student had no roommate and the Resident Assistant (RA) had a roommate who was an American which should not have been since RAs live alone. So to sort things out, her international friend chose Betty to be her roommate and Betty’s roommate, who too had bonded with the RA’s roommate, chose the other American. That worked out perfectly because Betty’s American roommate did not get along with her. For both, living in the room was a real challenge at first. Her new international roommate was from India; they were roommates for three and a half years and still best friends.

Betty sometimes doubted in the first semester if she made the right decision to study at Falcon University. Unfamiliarity with the new environment was also overwhelming. She got lost everywhere. She felt out of place because everything was different and she did not have many friends yet. After her parents’ departure, she felt so lonely and homesick but the activities kept her busy, thereby refocusing her attention on the new campus environment she said. The few friends she had supported her; her new roommate especially, who was also an international student, while she did the same for her. The two talked through many of their worries, challenges and concerns.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

In retrospect Betty said the academic preparation she had in high school prepared her for the rigors of college academics. At the American school, she was exposed to Advance Placement (AP) courses. These were courses that really tested your knowledge.. The courses were taught with more depth, not just scratching the surface, said Betty.

I took a lot of AP courses. So compared to other people I spoke to that was a big plus because at the beginning, most of the stuff I already knew because I had to learn it the hard way in high school for AP exams - Betty

So business classes such as accounting, economics and others were like revisions of the tough high school curriculum in the first semester but as the semesters went by, the courses became harder but the tougher they became the more effort Betty said she put into her academics because she was determined to excel in college.

She said personal motivation played a big role in her college attendance. She wanted to study further, so she chose to go to college. She was not forced, her parents only encouraged her. It just felt like the next step after high school and so she was interested, though she also perceived some pressure from her family. Her father was an engineer and so she came from an educated background. They had set the stage for her interest in attending college by sending her to an American school from the beginning. Education was just the way to go for her and so she chose to attend college. "Family pressure also drove me to want to excel and stay in college to make her family proud" Betty said. The fact that she performed well in high school set hers and her parents' expectations for college academics high.

Knowing where to find resources for academic challenges was very helpful. The ESOL Center helped Betty with English writing. She felt comfortable in the class with other international students who were facing similar issues like her she said. She began to feel she was not alone in this struggle and that helped a lot. The ESOL class helped to improve their communication skills, both speaking and writing skills. They role played a lot in class, including how to give presentations. In later years she became a regular visitor to the ESOL Center, though according to her, she did not use the resource well in the first year. She gradually became aware of its importance. The faculty tutors helped to proofread her papers, correct her grammar, practice presentations with her, in short they did a lot for international students according to Betty and also confirmed by Michelle [pseudonym], one of the administrators. Plus, Betty loved her ESOL English Writing professor, Mitchell. “She was just awesome – very helpful and understanding” Betty said. She taught both of Betty’s writing classes in the first year. She always encouraged her to do the best. “When you have a professor like that, you say okay I can do it” Betty said. Michelle was one of her best professors, Betty confirmed.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

English language was a barrier to her academic integration but the ESOL center helped a lot Betty recounted. Instead of opting for the normal English writing class that was tough for non-native speakers, it was better to choose the ESOL courses She observed that a lot of international students struggled with academics in the first semester due to many adjustment issues. She said she did not struggle much due to her experience in an American school. She struggled because the American educational system was just different in terms of expectations.

Personally at the beginning, classes were not that difficult but Betty recalled they became tough in the second year. Falcon curriculum can be rigorous. Although she was not comfortable speaking English 24/7 compared to speaking it once in a while like when she was in high school, her academic performance was still descent in the first year. Her ESOL class was very helpful; mathematics was numbers and she liked it; General Business 110 (business law) was straight business and she knew it; politics would have been tough but the professor made the difference, he was super accepting of international students; but her IT class was awful Betty recalled. The professor was not receptive to other accents and so he gave international students hard time in class. The class was fast-paced and interactive and she did not have the IT background from high school. She, along with other international students, had difficulty participating in that class. That was the only difficult class in the first year, she recalled.

The grading system was tough to adjust to because in Colombia the grade point average was not out of four but five. That threw her off at the beginning; it was significant adjustment. It was a mess at the beginning, but then she adapted. Betty also said American classroom etiquette affected her, it was different.

The concept of teamwork, for example, was not new because we practiced it back home but teamwork in high school was quite different from college. In high school, it involved students' chatting all through in Spanish building relationships, it was not taken serious but in college, it was real teamwork. We were expected to make meaningful contributions to the discussions or talk about serious issues –

Betty

So the pressure was on her not to let the team down and not be labeled as lazy or dumb. That way, teamwork in college was more rigorous than high school.

Betty talked of “academic shock” in general. These were shocks she received from everything “academic” being different from what she had known and as a result she had to learn new ways of coping. Not that they were in anyway bad, they were just different ways of doing things which were quite different from what she had always done. Take for example her perception of American professors compared to her high school teachers in Colombia, even the ones who were Americans living in Colombia.

Professors in Colombia were younger, jovial, and informal in the classroom. If she ran into a teacher at home, she would kiss him on the cheeks being the general way of greeting in Latin America. Here, she found professors rather distant and very formal with no contact at all. You would not address an American professor on a first name basis, it was professor this, professor that. The classroom rules were stricter in America than Colombia. The professors said something and they meant it and the deadline was the deadline.

Class participation being a part of your grade was new and she struggled with it from the beginning said Betty. Not so much in the first year but it became an issue from the second when more peer team interactions and class participations occurred. Speaking English 24/7 was not her strength, so class participation was tough. Left to her she would have just listened and not be heard but was compelled to speak to boost her grade in the course. In classes where she had to elaborate or provide explanations, yes, expressing herself in English was definitely difficult.

According to Betty the issue of self-confidence and the ability to make sense to others when speaking came into play. It seriously affected her from the beginning, though the pressure lessened as time went on. In the second year when classes were tougher, she constantly worried about not sounding stupid or childish to her professors and classmates because when she thought of the answer to a question, it made sense in your head but when expressing it, it sounded different. She said it was intimidating and terrifying to be laughed at by her peers.

Also she was afraid to raise my hand to ask professors for clarifications when she did not understand something that the professor assumed everyone knew, for fear of being ridiculed by classmates who she thought could say “Really you did not know that” or “You are asking that?” So there were times she left the class not understanding what was taught and had to study longer researching the topic she recalled. With her facial expression it seemed as if she was still experiencing the pain of that time.

While many of her professors were wonderful and encouraged her to do her best, she reported that very few were not. The first year computer professor was generally unprofessional toward international students. Betty said she once asked a computer question, something not so hard about her Mac computer. He was so demeaning that for the first time she felt like skipping his class. She felt professors make a big difference. Shaming an international student in class in front of peers was humiliating.

Facilitators of Persistence

Betty said self-pride and self-motivation were her major factors for persistence. She never dreamed of a time when she could have told her parents she was quitting school and returning home. Even if she was having a problem, she would have found a

way around it, rather than telling her parents she was quitting. She said at the beginning she did not show any sign of vulnerability to her parents so as not to give them the impression that she wanted to quit school. That would have been devastating to them because of the expectation they had for her. After proving herself, she was not afraid to let her mom know how much she missed her especially each time she returned to college she said. Plus, as an international student, her parents expected her to excel in college. That was why they spent so much on tuition and other expenses. She could not afford to waste all that she said. So that added to the self-pride.

Family pride too was roped in self-pride; “I did not want to disappoint my parents and cause disgrace for my family”. “Back home, changing majors or dropping out of school is very bad. You will be looked at as a failure” she said. For her, it was not that she liked everything about being away from her family, “It was hard doing laundry or starving because I did not like the food, all I told myself was to just hang in there.”

Betty said she received merit scholarship from the university. The scholarship made her know that the university had set high expectations for her due to the terms of the award. That made her more determined to excel academically so she could keep her scholarship.

Friends were also very important. They formed her network and family in America. Betty said she always looked forward to seeing her friends again whenever she traveled home. Friends made college a fun place to be, according to Betty, “They quickly become your family on campus”. Her friends were international students but they were not all from Latin America. One, for example, was from India, but born and raised in

Hong Kong. She was glad that she did not just hang out with Latin Americans only. She ventured out of her nationality circle and made friends from different countries.

Hindrances to persistence

Issues of self-doubt could play a role in college dropout especially those overwhelming instances when one was still new in a new environment. Those were overwhelming for her. That was when she felt the pressure most. She felt international students were vulnerable to this situation in the freshman year.

Betty affirmed that for international students, loneliness was very real. They were vulnerable to college dropout in the freshman year if they had no friends. During times of despondency, she received comfort and support from friends. Usually someone would say, “don’t worry it happened to me too” or something to that effect. That type of encouragement went a long way. Friends were there for her. She said her real family being thousands of miles away could not come to her aid when she was sick for example. Her friends took care of her. So not having friends could have left a student feeling empty, lonely, alienated and abandoned and it could have easily spiraled into other emotional problems.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

Betty’s advice to a new international student was to come with an open-mind and not with preconceived notions about people. She wanted them to get involved with dorm and campus activities. They should not be lazy to attend campus events; go and try to make friends. If other international students try to influence them not to attend, they should just say no. International students would be making a mistake if they do not launch out and make friends of American students. They would end up hanging out with

only international students. It is important to get involved in clubs and maximize the Falcon experience, Betty said. Looking back she wondered if she would have made friends among domestic students had she tried harder.

Academically she advised new international students need not be shy to participate in class due to English language skills being not up to par. Help could be found all over Falcon just for the asking. For example if given an essay to write and starting is difficult, she advised students to visit the ESOL Center. For some reason she discovered many people did not know that such resource existed on campus. Written essays could be corrected and critiqued there. In addition, a student could practice how to present the work using the members of the center as the audience. “I feel you grow up – you grow, as a person, a lot, more than anything. You learn to become independent. You become an adult, I would say” said Betty.

Future Plans

Betty said she had enjoyed her undergraduate experience which had enhanced her personal and professional maturity. At the end of that semester she would graduate with the bachelor’s degree. She had come to appreciate this university with its rigorous academic curriculum, no wonder it is a top business school and its graduates are readily recruited by employers. Consequently, she had decided to seek admission into the graduate program. She knew the Masters of Business Administration program would be rigorous also but it was the best for her, plus, she needed to hunker down and get the job done. Her belief was that the tough curriculum would drive her to achieve more and in the end make her very confident on her future job. The thought of staying two more years at Falcon was exciting, Betty said.

Rosalynn

Rosalynn was a Chinese female international student. She was officially a junior but would graduate a semester early. She was one of the first three students to respond to my introductory email to juniors and seniors. In her reply, she expressed enthusiasm in wanting to be a part of the study. She said she had always wanted a study of this nature to be conducted. Rosalynn was supportive and willing to introduce more students to the study. In fact, she assisted in recruiting Jimmy to the study. Rosalynn was friendly and did not get easily flustered about things; in fact, her common phrase was “don’t worry about it.” I really enjoyed interviewing her. She was fluent in Spanish, Chinese Mandarin and English.

The first interview was on September 18, 2014 and there I shared the objectives of the study and volunteer’s rights, including issues of confidentiality with her. Rosalynn was given time to ask questions on the study and her rights. After answering her questions, I gave her the consent form to sign. I also signed it and a copy was later given to her.

Rosalynn’s Profile

Rosalynn told me she was born outside of China in Peru, moved to Venezuela and at the time of the interview, her family had moved back to Peru. She was 19 years old. Her parents were 100% Chinese from mainland China, Rosalynn said. She attended a private, national school in Venezuela. It was not British or American, and so they followed the national curriculum she said. After graduation from high school, she traveled to the United States to Falcon University for college education. Due to the political situation in Venezuela, her parents moved back to Peru. Her mom’s frequent

work transfers made the family move to Venezuela in the first place she said.

Coincidentally her promotion sent her back to the company's headquarters in Peru.

Rosalynn's dad stayed in Venezuela a couple more years until her sister graduated from high school before moving to Peru. Her dad was an entrepreneur, and so it was easy for him to move with the family Rosalynn said.

Rosalynn was the first child. According to her, she was a perfectionist, very outgoing, social, and loud. Although outgoing, she was selective about choosing close friends. If she liked someone, she would do anything for them. She would sacrifice for them and invest a lot of herself in the friendship but if the friendship did not succeed she would be deeply disappointed she said.

Choice of U.S. College

According to Rosalynn, her parents wanted her to study in the United States. They felt that American education was the best in the world and the country had good employment opportunities after graduation. They told her when she was young that the plan was for her to graduate high school and then attend college in the United States. They had no specific school in mind; it was just that she must study in the United States she said. To them, Europe was outdated and now behind the United States educationally. "And Asia, they were like – you can't go there because I'm from there, right? You can go there to work afterwards ... but ... study in the United States because they give you the best opportunities."

In high school because the curriculum was national, Rosalynn said she could not select her classes, or take International Baccalaureate (IB) courses, or focus on improving her English skills; the courses were pre-chosen for her, there was no IB program and

classes were taught in Spanish. So when she began the college search, her parents hired an advisor to guide her in the search and application process.

Rosalynn told me she changed her mind many times on what to study between wanting to be a lawyer to fashion design to marketing. She had a flare for dressing and so wanted to be a fashion designer but was not creative enough. Her advisor suggested studying fashion marketing but her parents objected to that. They felt it was too narrow and future jobs may be hard to secure. They wanted her to look into something broader.

Her advisor finally advised her to pick business since it was broad enough to accommodate a lot of options. But Rosalynn thought “business was the major people picked when they were undecided or not passionate about school” but being very wide, she settled for marketing since she could work in Public Relations or related fields. She began looking into Business schools in the United States where she could study marketing and work with brands and brand image.

Rosalynn said she and her advisor were strategic with her choice of business schools. She looked into the top 50 undergraduate business schools and narrowed down the choices by location. Being an international student, location was important to her. She did not want predominantly white areas because it could be awkward. She said she heard many white people were not open to receiving foreigners into their areas she said. She did not want to go to a boring place either. She picked New England, New York City, and Washington D.C. In New England she applied to a couple of schools including Falcon University.

She reported that her interview with a Falcon recruiter swayed her completely over to choosing Falcon University. She had interviews with college recruiters but the

lady recruiter for Falcon appealed to her most. Before meeting her, Rosalynn had never heard of Falcon and so her counselor encouraged her to research the university and their marketing program before the appointment. She did not expect much from the interview but it turned out to be the best interview ever. The recruiter was vivacious and just fun to discuss with. She thought if this recruiter was this fun to be around, then Falcon must be a fun place. She was also knowledgeable, providing Rosalynn with many examples of what she could study and directed me to more information on the website. It turned out that Falcon had strong business and marketing programs, plus she liked everything she saw and read about Falcon. From then, she began to dream of attending Falcon University. That was how she made her choice.

Rosalynn said most Latin American countries were not exposed to other cultures. So as a Chinese born and raised in the region where she sometimes stuck out due to my heritage, she was worried about studying in America. Thoughts like “What if I don’t fit in?”, “What if I don’t have friends?” were streaming into her mind she said and so she checked students’ comments on Falcon student life at a particular website. She reported her shock to comments about international students such as “They are very stuck up, very rich kids”, “They hang out with one another”, “Falcon is very cliquey” and so on. She was nervous upon arrival on campus but over time, she made friends she said smiling.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

Rosalynn recalled that when she first came to Falcon University, even though she did not have close friends immediately, she did not feel like she did not belong there. Although she had many acquaintances, close friends were few. Friendship meant a lot to her and so she poured her heart into it. That was why she would be crushed if a close

friend disappointed her. In her first semester at Falcon, thankfully she was able to make friends. “My friends are my support base, and they are international students from different countries.” She leaned on them for advice and they depended on her too. They when places together, they even studied together. They were like their own support group she said.

Rosalynn said she found strength in her friends because they understood her perfectly because they too faced similar issues as international students. So it was easy for them to use their experiences to comfort or encourage her. Many of them still remained her friends even in junior year. She said “My friends did not judge me, rather I felt accepted by them. I love Falcon [pseudonym] because of my friends.”

Rosalynn said for the most part, everyone was nice and really helpful to international students and “having the International Office here is brilliant because they understand international students and how we feel. They try hard to help us with whatever we need, you know.” When she sent them questions through emails, they promptly reached out to her and answered her questions. They sent notices [emails] to international students on important immigration workshops such as Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT), which were for employment in the United States, and other updates on F-1 regulations to keep them in compliance. They did not bother the students with unimportant issues; they selected and contacted them on essential matters. Even during emergencies (when she left things to the last minute), they did their best to reach out she said.

Hindrances to Social Integration

Although she wanted an international roommate at the beginning, somehow she was placed in the room with an American student. Most international students lived in Miller Hall, a global living center but she was placed among American students. Rosalynn said she reached out to her roommate via Facebook and tried to be friendly. “She seemed fine with me” Rosalynn said, but after living together for a while it was obvious they were very culturally different. She complained about Rosalynn to people, including the Resident Assistant (RA) that she was worried about her. Rosalynn said she used to leave on weekends for lack of things to do on campus to be with her friends who lived off-campus.

According to Rosalynn, she and her friends did not enjoy bars and fraternity parties where people just drank beer all day, usually from Thursday till Sunday. “These are activities American students enjoy, but for international students, it is more of going out, grabbing dinner, going to someone’s apartment, talking, chilling, go clubbing, and stuff like that” said Rosalynn. So as not to be bored, she went to the city a lot to be with her friends. Sometimes she missed classes and stayed out but she always completed my homework, she said. So her roommate complained that she was worried about her for these reasons. Rosalynn said she knew her concern came from a good place but she could have talked to her directly instead of going to the RA.

Rosalynn said she was also very sensitive to her comments about the things she bought or did not buy. The roommate complained about how expensive they were, how much money she spent, making comments like: “Oh, I wish I was as lucky as you to have as much money ...” according to Rosalynn. Her comments sounded envious with tints of resentment and Rosalynn said she did not like them. All her life she had lived in warm

places, never been to a cold place like New England before. So obviously she needed warm clothes and jackets and buying brand names even brought more ridiculous comments Rosalynn said. Where she came from there were no such brands and so she wanted to have them. “I did not understand how that was her problem” she said.

Rosalynn tried to be nice but according to her, the roommate was rude whenever she reached out so she gave up and stopped being nice. She barely spent time in the dorm anymore because she did not feel comfortable sharing the space with the roommate, instead she visited her friends, many of who had similar issues with their roommates, Rosalynn said. They found support in their friendships.

The first semester at Falcon was the toughest, Rosalynn recalled because she did not get along with her roommate due to cultural differences, along with other challenges. To her, the roommate had no clue about who she was as an international student; instead she viewed her through her American lenses.

Rosalynn also recalled that after her parents departed from campus, she felt alone. That was the time she felt most vulnerable because she was in a totally new environment. The weather was different from the tropical weather she was used to. The campus culture of fraternity drinking was not her style, campus was boring during weekends and on top of that she and her roommate did not get along. All these set the stage for off-campus living after the first semester, Rosalynn said. It was unusual because international students move off-campus after the first year to avoid penalties for breaking dining and on-campus residency contracts but she was overwhelmed and so frustrated with her roommate that she had to move out after one semester she said.

Early in the first semester there were activities for international students but Rosalynn said she felt awkward attending them. She also did not bother attending because she had found a group of friends she liked and they were not attending either. However she still joined some student clubs, such as Asian Student Association but "...I left the club because it required too much time." It was not just attending events only, there were responsibilities meted out to members and since these clashed with class work, and time with her friends, Rosalynn quit the club. She reported her friends kept her grounded in school for these years.

Moving from her country to a completely new city in a new culture had its own inherent challenges. Rosalynn expressed that college adjustment was harder for international than domestic students.

Many domestic students at Falcon come from the area so they are close to home and their support base. For international students it is different. They have no family or friends here, therefore no support base. They have to build everything from scratch – Rosalynn

She further expressed that domestic students could visit home over the weekends while they [international students] were stuck on campus.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

Academic work at Falcon was really difficult for Rosalynn she said, and continued "I have always been a good student with decent grades, never struggled before with schoolwork ... in high school, classes were taught in Spanish and the curriculum was different." She never once took business courses; they were placed in either science or humanities and had one English class twice a week in high school. She was fluent in

speaking English because she attended a British school from pre-kindergarten to third grade. So she could speak the language but writing was very difficult she said. She self-selected the ESOL courses where she learned the basics of English writing.

Rosalynn said she owed her academic success to her friends. They kept her going, even when she was severely overwhelmed with the General Business (GB) courses. They stuck by her during the difficult times and understood everyone went through hard times when first enrolled. They all stayed together, went everywhere together, and studied together. They formed a support group for her she said.

In her opinion, professors were empathetic to the plight of international students. Rosalynn said they were nice; they understood how tough it was for international students to settle into a new environment, especially in the first year. Whenever she met professors after class for help, they assisted and recommended what to study further and where to find such materials. They also pointed out where on campus she could find academic help such as peer tutoring and other academic labs for accounting and finance among others. “That is the good thing about this university, there is help everywhere you turn to” she said.

Rosalynn said she noticed that while professors would excuse some things being a freshman, the same were stricter with upper class students. She felt they understood the problems inherent in the first year of college but they expected students to have adapted to college and to have understood classroom etiquettes and the basics of each course after the first year and so would not accept excuses from upper class students. Her viewpoint was that there was more accountability after the freshman year.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

According to Rosalynn, language barrier was the biggest challenge she faced as a freshman. She was taught in Spanish from third grade till she graduated high school. So every day was framed around Spanish, at school and at home. She thought and reflected in Spanish and to suddenly switch to English 24/7 was hard to do.

... It was really hard for me, at first, because it's a new language. I never took class in this language. Just speaking it to friends or when you travel is different than taking class and having to read books and technical terms. So I struggled in the first semester because of how long it took me – how hard it was for me to grasp some topics.

The language barrier was a huge problem. Rosalynn did not understand her courses and first year was overwhelming. “I was having meltdowns ... crying. Sometimes I used to cry; I cannot get this; I’m gonna do horrible. Things like that” she recalled.

The American curriculum was different from what she was used to. She was not academically prepared for the required courses such as the General Business (GB) courses at Falcon University which were business courses. These were prerequisites every Falcon student must take irrespective of the major. GB 110 was the Law class and GB 112 was accounting and finance combined. She never took business, law, accounting or finance in high school, she did not have the basics in these courses and suddenly she was thrust into these classes she said sadly. She said she had the worse grades then.

The professors taught as if everyone had the basic knowledge of the courses and while her peers did, she did not understand a thing in those classes. Technical terminologies such as Return on Investment (ROI) or Future Value of Money (FVM) in the finance class among others which were used a lot did not make sense to her initially.

Her classmates did not understand why she had difficulty with the classes, especially the terminologies because to them, those were simple concepts and that added her frustration she said. According to Rosalynn, the thing about classes was this, once you are lost in the beginning, you are lost the whole way.

To study and comprehend technical materials did not come easy in her freshman year due to language barrier. Abnormal psychology and law courses were the hardest for her. There were lots of reading with different terminologies. It took her so long to read a chapter, among all the chapters assigned in class for each week she said. It was commonly known that for every hour of class, a student should dedicate one to two hours to studying the class material, but according to Rosalynn, it sometimes took her two hours to read five pages. Even after reading the pages, she still would not understand the concepts. She would not remember what she had just read; she was not assimilating. So she spent time reading, re-reading, and re-reading the texts she said. She tried to be a diligent student but was struggling. Studying took her longer than she envisaged and that was frustrating. Language barrier also affected her test taking ability. She spent more time than usual on finals due to lack of comprehension of the questions and their requirements.

In her struggle to balance the time between academic and socials, Rosalynn admitted that at the beginning she concentrated on making friends and devoted time to social stuff just to know her new friends. So the time allotted to studying began to encroach on her social life because she felt she needed to spend more time than initially envisaged to understand the course contents. She had to dedicate time to both social and academic issues because both were important to her. At some point out of frustration, she

gave up studying the chapters on her own and asked for help. She asked friends to explain the homework and specific class exercises especially with GB 112 (combination of accounting and finance). Although that limited her understanding of the entire course, she was able to complete assignments.

She admitted that peer pressure affected her academic performance. One of her regrets for freshman year was that she did not study more for GB 112. She gave up on studying the course due to lack of comprehension and frustration. Also as a freshman she desperately wanted to make friends and if her friends were not studying, she too was not. She was more focused on making friends and adapting sometimes to the detriment of her academics.

Rosalynn said the ESOL class was instituted to help students like her who come from other cultures where English was not the primary language and class was too difficult, at least initially. The ESOL professor asked students to summarize a passage and Rosalynn gave it her best but it fell short. Class participation was tough as a freshman due to her inadequate English language skills. She could barely follow the professors' teachings in class, let alone contribute to the discussions. She said, "My mind was blank for the most part, with no thoughts in my head and yet my classmates have these amazing contributions to make in class" and admitted it was humiliating. Not only did she not understand the subject matter, she did not know how to craft her words so they would make sense to the class. "So for fear of sounding stupid or unintelligent, I kept quiet in classes at the beginning" she said. As time went on and she felt more comfortable with the American system and Falcon curriculum, things began to change. She gradually became more involved and participated in class.

Rosalynn observed that Americans were very punctual, even to class. Sometimes class started earlier than planned, like two minutes early. No matter how much she tried, she would still arrive late to class. She guessed it was due to her Latin American background. To complicate matters, she lost her way around campus a lot at the beginning. Even when she prepared early and determined to arrive in class on time, she still got lost she said. With her unfamiliarity with the campus layout, she ended up mixing the classrooms and arriving late. Most times she was frazzled when she arrived in the classroom, setting her up for a bad or difficult classroom experience.

Facilitators of persistence

Rosalynn told me that although she had numerous problems as a freshman, it never crossed her mind to quit college. Call it family pressure or family pride, she would never quit she admitted. Also she liked to complete whatever she started that was why she still looked for ways of dealing with her problems at that time and even every day. “I can’t leave; first of all, my parents would kill me. I’ve been raised very strictly ...” said Rosalynn. The phrase “my parents will kill me” should not be taken literally according to Rosalynn; it was a figurative expression meaning that her parents would be devastated and so disappointed with her. She attributed her college persistence even in the face of serious academic and social problems to her upbringing.

Rosalynn came from a strict family. Her parents felt that during a child’s critical developmental stage, parents must be hands on, infusing values into the child. These were years when a child was forming his or her personality and attitude to obligations. So her mom in particular was strict with her from age three to five. She taught her to acquire that sense of responsibility. Rosalynn admitted to panicking if she did not complete her

homework because in that case she was being irresponsible. However, because she grew up in Latin America where people are laid back, she procrastinated a lot.

The fear of disappointing her parents gradually changed to a personal desire to be responsible, to be an achiever because she realized it was the right thing to do she said. So she began executing her obligations with diligence because of the self-fulfillment and sense of accomplishment she derived from completing tasks.

Also, her ambition of finding a good job in the United States did not allow her to quit college. To achieve her future ambitions Rosalynn needed strong college education. Plus she came from a generation of educators; her grandparents were teachers and so to her family education meant a lot. "Education to a Chinese is the most important for a good life" she said. So for her, quitting college was not an option, she must persist and graduate no matter what. She put the pressure on herself to perform. So in the face of difficulty, she dedicated her time and just pushed for success.

She spoke highly of her friends that they were her support for the most part. Without them she said she would not have survived college. They make college experience worthwhile for her.

Hindrances to persistence

Speaking from personal experience, Rosalynn told me the inability to make friends was number one factor that could cause a student to drop out of college. In addition, she volunteered other factors such as language barrier, lack of academic preparedness, homesickness, alienation and pure frustration. She felt these caused distractions from academic focus. Every international student felt homesick at some point she said but they compensated for this by making new friends who provided support.

She believed strongly that friends matter, without them an international student would be alienated and may not feel they belonged on campus. She said the problem could snowball into other serious psychological problems, thereby complicating the student's college integration. Without her friends, she did not know how she would have survived. Her friends made Falcon University a place worth living in. They helped her in the first year when she had series of challenges academically and socially. They studied together and so they were able to explain areas of difficulty to her in her courses. They provided advice and encouragement to her when she was down and she did the same for them at their lowest points.

She was with them when campus was boring and had the roommate problem. If she did not have a place to go at that time, life would have been unbearable and miserable. That in itself could have snowballed out of control into loneliness, despair and inability to function in school. For sure, she explained, she would not have made it academically; she could have flunked out of college in the first year. A lot of things could have gone wrong. A combination of homesickness and inability to make friends could prove disastrous for an international student in a new environment. Noone overcomes homesickness, they get used to it; and are able to manage it from semester to semester.

Language barrier too was tough to handle in the first year. The ESOL and her friends helped mostly in this area. Without support from friends, faculty, parents, the institution and many other places, Rosalynn acknowledged she would not have made it through the first year of college.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

These were Rosalynn's advice to new international students. Firstly, she would

advise a new student to find a good group of friends. Since all freshmen have similar course schedules, these friends will make a good study group. They can always go to their friends with academic problems that a tutor in the tutoring lab may not understand because the question may be specific to something that happened in class that day. Their friends would get it because they attended the class with them.

Secondly, socially, do not stress yourself about making friends; just get involved with campus activities. You will make friends. The kind of friends you make now depends on you. How you present yourself is how people will perceive you. Be open-minded and you would make a friend somewhere inside Falcon.

Thirdly, it is important for the new student to choose professors wisely. The “good” professors are not necessarily easy; they just understand the plight of international students or students in general in the first year. They will cut you some slacks, especially if you approach them early in the semester with your questions making use of the professors’ office hours.

Fourthly, Rosalynn advised the student to take things in strides. They do not need to get frustrated over English language barrier. All her friends struggled and she did too. As time goes on the new student would adjust and get used to the language. It just takes some time.

Lastly, about class participation, she recommended, “Do not be afraid about sounding stupid, do not be intimidated – just say it. Make a comment and participate since your grade is at stake.”

Future Plans

During the spring semester, Rosalynn said she would travel to Shanghai, China

for study abroad program. She was excited and looked forward to living in China for four to five months as an adult. She has not been there for some time and so living and studying there will be different from America but she could not wait to be there. At Falcon she has had a great experience and looked forward to graduating a semester earlier than normal. She said her last semester would be awesome since she would have a light workload of courses. Maybe she would take up an internship, meaning that she would work closely with the Center for International Students and Scholars to navigate those immigration regulations that are complex to deal with. She was glad they were there to figure these things out for international students. An internship would help her gain experience in her field of study, preparing her for the workplace.

After graduation, she would like to find a good job in the United States. But if that did not happen, she explained that she could always find one in China, where her study abroad experience would be helpful.

Eleanor

Eleanor was an international student from Jamaica. I obtained her contact information from her response to the introductory email to international students at the inception of the study. She volunteered to participate in the research stating her interest to be interviewed as a response to the introductory email. After a couple of correspondence, the first interview was set and confirmed. She was punctual to the first and other interviews. Two regular interviews and a follow up were conducted with Eleanor. She was very fluent in English.

At the first interview on September 20, 2014, I shared study objectives and volunteer's rights, including issues of confidentiality with her. Eleanor was given time to

ask questions on the study and her rights. After her questions were answered, she signed the consent form. I also signed it and a copy was later given to her.

Eleanor's Profile

Eleanor told me she was 20 years old, a junior at Falcon University, and she came from Jamaica. She spoke fluent English and was pursuing a business major with concentration and minor. Her parents were from Jamaica. According to Eleanor, Jamaica had a diversity of ethnicities from over the years and for a Jamaican, s/he did not really identify by ethnicities, they were plainly Jamaicans. In Jamaica there were English, Irish, Jewish, Africans, Arabs, Indians, Chinese, Germans and a lot more residing in Jamaica. Consequently, Jamaica was currently a melting pot and so people did not bother about breaking down their ethnicities any more. But they all looked different.

In reality, Eleanor said she was mixed with a lot of ethnicities. On her father's side, his mother was Costa Rican and Panamanian. His father's side was Lebanese. On her mom's side, they were completely mixed also but she was not sure of the ethnicity breakdown. At the time of the study, her parents had been married for 25 years. She had two siblings; an older brother who was 23, and a younger sister who was 11. They were very family-oriented. She had both sets of grandparents, something she was grateful for. Both of them have been married for 50 years.

Eleanor came from an upper middle class family in Jamaica. Her dad was the CEO of Grace – a multinational company. My mom worked there too and the company was owned by her mom's family. Her grandfather was one of the founding-owners of the company which was not only in Jamaica but all over the Caribbean, United States in New England, Florida and New York, Canada, United Kingdom and parts of Africa. Grace

was a conglomerate with grocery section, financial section and more. The First Global Bank was owned by Grace.

She had family support, explaining “My family is my biggest support network. I am constantly in communication with them ... over the phone everyday and FaceTime once in a while.” She was able to visit home often during Thanksgiving, Christmas, spring break and summer. So in as much as she missed them and was homesick, she was very fortunate to be able to go home frequently.

She said she grew up speaking English, so was fluent in the written and spoken aspects of the language. Plus, she attended same private school in Jamaica from age three completing elementary, middle and high school education and graduated at the age of 18. So she grew up knowing the people around her with lots of friends from elementary to high school.

Speaking about her campus involvements, Eleanor said she was an active leader in the African American, Latin American, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial American Association (ALANA) and a coordinator in the ALANA Student Advancement Program (ASAP), in a mentoring program where ALANA students mentored freshmen and sophomore students. She was the social and personal development coordinator for the group. It was a campus paid position, and Eleanor enjoyed it very much. She became vice president for Recognizing Everyone’s Attributes and Lifestyles (REAL). This was an umbrella organization where they brought people who would not have ordinarily met in college together. They organized campus events and partnered with Latinos / Latinas Association and Chinese students; people that would not mix on campus since people tend to gravitate towards people like them. She loved

that organization because they made things happen and has been a member since first semester freshman year.

Although the ALANA operated under the Multicultural Center (MCC), it was a community of mostly second generation immigrants and ASAP was one of the outreach programs under the group. REAL was not under the MCC; it was a standalone student organization. Eleanor said she loved to be busy and involved with campus activities. Not only were they good for the resume, they gave her the opportunity of knowing people and forming new friends across campus.

After living in the Falcon community for some time, she felt her experience was different from a typical international student's she said. In her opinion, international students who came from non-English speaking countries had a very different experience. Since they spoke the same languages like Spanish or Chinese Mandarin or Cantonese, they stuck together and did not integrate much she said. Those who came from English speaking countries were able to integrate because they were not intimidated by the language. They were able to reach out to Americans, including ALANA students, communicate with them and make friends.

She acknowledged there were differences between international and domestic students. It was common to hear domestic students stereotyping international students as "those rich kids" or "students with nice cars always going to ... (the city).." For her, because she was from the Caribbean, she said she fitted in here because she came from a diversity of cultures which was similar to New England in that regard. Also many Americans, especially ALANA students, understand the Jamaican culture. International students from Jamaica and many Anglophone African countries, such as, Ghana and

Nigeria, really interacted conveniently with American students unlike other international students. However to her, Caucasian American students were a bit different. They did not seem to mesh with international students, even those from English speaking countries. She guessed it was because cultures differed, and they [American students] socialized differently too. She had been exposed to many cultural differences between hers and the American culture since her arrival here she said.

One difference she confirmed observing was around drinking. In Jamaica the legal drinking age was 18 but it was not strictly enforced. So it was not uncommon to see 16 year-olds clubbing and drinking. Drinking for fun was not strange to her but when she arrived at Falcon, she was shocked to see more Caucasian students getting drunk, blacking out and throwing up. She later came to understand they were not allowed to legally drink until 21 but on campus where they had freedom, they went crazy with alcohol - that surprised and made her feel uncomfortable.

I wouldn't want to hang out with them on a Friday night when they're doing that.

They're more likely to experiment with drugs and stuff, and I'm not into that kind of stuff at all. It's not something I'd want to start on myself - Eleanor

Also according to Eleanor, "In the American culture ... there is less respect from younger individuals to those who are older. For students to call their professors and adults in general by their first names make me uncomfortable, it is absurd." Even when professors requested students to call them by name, she still called them Professor X or Y. After a while they came to accept it because she was an international student she said. Even adults who were not her teachers, such as her best friend's mom, she still called them "Auntie" this or "Uncle" that, as a sign of respect when they were not related to her.

Another cultural difference for Eleanor was asking for permission to go to the bathroom during class. In the United States students just got up and exited the class. She felt weird doing it; she felt it was disrespectful to the professor and the class. Although she had done it occasionally, it still felt weird.

Lastly, she was surprised that everywhere she went people were shocked that she was Jamaican. The stereotype was that Jamaicans were dark skinned with dreadlocks and they smoked weed [marijuana]. They had heard about Bob Marley and Reggae music but did not know much about Jamaica. She have never smoked weed in her life, but Americans found it hard to believe. “At first it was annoying to me but I later determined to use such conversations as educational opportunities since many Americans did not know about world geography and other cultures” and so she educated them about her culture. “They had never been to Jamaica, yet they propound these baseless stereotypes” she said.

Eleanor told me she resided in the Global Living Center (GLC), a dorm that housed a cross-section of international and domestic students. Students voluntarily chose to live here and residence was on first-come-first-serve basis. As a junior, she had four international freshmen mentees “it was a way of giving back to make the experiences of the new students better than mine” she said.

Choice of U. S. College

Eleanor explained that most Jamaicans who could afford it sent their children abroad to college. She chose the United States due to its closeness to Jamaica. She did not want to study in England due to distance, the flight there from Jamaica was eight hours. For her, that was too far to travel to for four years. She did not want to be so far from

home. She also wanted the experience of a real college life, to be away from home and being mature.

She chose to study in New England specifically because she wanted to be adventurous she said. Most Jamaicans choose to study in Miami, Florida because it is very close to home. They could visit home often, the weather was the same as Jamaica's and there were many Jamaicans residing in Florida. She wanted something different and this city being an intellectual hub fascinated her. She wanted to experience winter for the first time, coming from a tropical environment.

Eleanor confirmed that she had always known she wanted to study Business. Many American universities visited her high school to present their institutions and recruit from there and Falcon University was one of those. That was how she knew about Falcon, more than other universities in the city. A popular Admissions Counselor, Julie [pseudonym] was the one that visited her high school. Eleanor had her one-on-one interview with the recruiter and she was won over. She was awesome. Later Eleanor visited Falcon campus in her senior-year and was further convinced that Falcon was the right place for her she recounted. She was impressed with the academic programs specifically because it was a prestigious business school, its small size and class size more than any other school. That the flight to the university location was four hours from Jamaica also endeared her to Falcon. It was literally a "hop" away. She applied and was accepted to study here she said.

Eleanor liked Falcon University. The institution did a really good job of recruiting international students by sending Admissions Counselors all over the world to recruit students. This made international students feel wanted on campus she said. She knew

Julie [pseudonym] went all over the Caribbean, and another lady traveled to Asia, spent four weeks in places like India and China while other counselors visited other regions.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

Many times she even forgot she was an international student on the campus she said. She felt very comfortable here and it was so because she connected to Americans and shared the same language with them. The ability to communicate fluently in English had broken a barrier that sometimes existed between domestic and some international students. Those who were from non-English speaking countries, she believed had that obstacle to overcome and that may have been partly due to why such students mostly befriended their co-nationals so they could speak the common language Eleanor said.

She had a Jamaican friend who was a year ahead of her in school. This friend told her about the ALANA program and advised her to join that it would be fun. So Eleanor did and made really great friends in the freshman year. They all were able to relate because ALANA students were from cultures similar to hers. She was still friends with them as a junior and never felt isolated at Falcon. The ALANA program gave her opportunities to meet new people, to make friends and to develop into a strong student leader on campus.

Eleanor mentioned that her friends supported her when she was severely homesick after her parents' departure as she was trying to adjust to the changes that confronted her in college. She had good friends and so she did not need people whose values were in tangent to hers especially when it came to drinking or use of illicit drugs. She personally thought she had a great freshman year because of great friends who stuck by her and definitely made dealing with homesickness and being away from home a lot

easier she said. To also manage occasional homesickness, she said she called home and spoke with her parents every day and would FaceTime once a while too.

Both MCC and the International Office were places she could go for anything and would be helped. The staff members in both centers were friendly, accessible and helpful. She got to know the office pretty fast. The workshops they organized for first year students enlightened her of her immigration responsibilities as an international student. This showed her that there were people at Falcon who knew exactly what she was going through. Being an international student in the United States could be complicated with issues like the F-1 student status, visa, employment and immigration regulations she recounted. It was great having a center that catered to the needs of international students and kept them in compliance to government regulations, Eleanor said.

Getting involved in campus activities had brought her in contact with many people and good, lasting friends. Her involvements with MCC, International Office, ASAP, REAL and GLC helped her to grow. Being an introvert, she said she knew she needed to break out of that mold and make friends. She said that campus involvement has definitely transformed her personality; as a junior, she was now more out-going and responsible. She felt she had matured a lot since the freshman year.

Hindrances to Social Integration

Eleanor did not like the general June orientation program at all. She said she was surrounded by pretty much all White students and parents, that she felt alone among them and of course, she did not make any meaningful friendships there. "I felt people's smiles and everything there was very fake" she recalled. That was why she was so happy when introduced to the ALANA program shortly after and there she actually made real friends

she said. She did not even remember what happened at orientation; she just remembered overall not feeling like it was helpful in any way apart from the issuance of her Identification Card.

The new environment was different from what she had always known. It was hard to not be with her parents. It was different having to do laundry. According to Eleanor, in Jamaica they had helpers who did all household chores. She was not domesticated in that way because of how she was raised with no laundry, no cooking or making your bed at home. That was cultural she said. It felt weird coming to campus and having to do all those by herself. She literally had to learn them all just before traveling to the United States at 18. Even her mom did not cook at home; the house helper did it all. She confirmed she had learned a lot and was more self-reliant. She battled with these changes and homesickness at the beginning. Homesickness was something that decreased with time to a manageable level. It was intense in her freshman days but now she has learned how to cope especially with friends around.

Eleanor recalled the bad experience she had in the first semester with her roommate. Her room had always been hers only since she was young and was not used to sharing it with someone else. Her roommate was Caucasian American, and they just did not get along due to many cultural differences.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

The Academic Services office was helpful with course selection especially in the first year. So she was not confused about what classes to take and in what sequence she said. She liked the office because it was very easy to schedule appointments with them. Falcon had strong academic support for students by providing resources to assist students

with academic issues. Eleanor mentioned that the university had a tutoring lab, and many other subject specific labs like the math lab and economics lab among others. The tutoring program was helpful to countless number of students. Although she did not use the service much in the first year, she made use of the math lab. Students could just walk in and ask the tutors questions. The statistics and economics labs helped a lot if one had an assignment to complete. Whenever she needed help with academics she had sought it such out.

Eleanor said she was self-motivated and pushed herself to work hard and sought assistance for academic challenges because she wanted to succeed in college. She would like to graduate and make her family proud; they have been there for her. Their unwavering support and belief in her abilities to be successful gave her the motivation to continue even in the face of challenges believing that she could do it. Also her family's support gave her the peace of mind she needed to focus on her studies.

Starting the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in high school helped to develop skills needed for college academic success. Falcon University's curriculum was rigorous but college work was not difficult for her in the first year due to her college preparation in high school.

Academically, no, I wouldn't say I had any problems ... I did the IB program ... which is an amazing preparation for college because it's so hard to do in high school. So I think that rigorous preparation for college made it a much easier transition coming into college - Eleanor

She was used to writing multiple-page papers and having all the tough assignments she said. So she attributed the ease of transition from high school to college to the IB

program and prior knowledge of accounting, finance, and other business courses. As time progressed, the subjects became tougher but she was still able to cope.

Other factors that contributed to her academic integration were the professors' accessibilities for questions and her ability to communicate and write effectively in English she confirmed. The professors had been helpful. Students could approach them during office hours to seek help and clarifications on topics taught in class. Most professors honored the office hours given in class. They were available at such times and provided guidance to students.

Eleanor expressed again that in her opinion the comprehension of English language positioned her for academic success since day one of enrollment at Falcon. She could not imagine coming here and not be fully confident to communicate in English when the textbooks, journals, teaching, everything was in English. That was a big hurdle to overcome she said. She could not imagine going to a Spanish university and having to figure things out with basic knowledge of Spanish. She never used the ESOL center but could imagine how hard it was for students from non-English speaking countries because on top of the language barrier, Falcon curriculum was not easy. She said she had a freshman Chinese mentee who was currently grappling with these issues. She asked Eleanor how to make appointment with the ESOL center to proofread her essay.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

In the freshman year Eleanor felt she did not use the academic resources as well as she should due to ignorance on their operations. She did not understand one could schedule a one-on-one tutoring in GB 112 [accounting and finance] for example. She did not know it existed and of course, she did not perform well in the course. GB 112 and

212 were both accounting / finance courses, GB 112 being the prerequisite to GB 212.

Both courses were the toughest general business courses for Falcon students right out of high school and they affected grade point averages (GPA) a lot Eleanor said. Freshmen needed to be made aware of academic resources available on campus and where to find them early enough so they could benefit immensely she said.

The only time she had seen students drop out of Falcon or take a semester off was because of low grades when they could not keep up with the work especially as freshmen. “I agree it can be stressful because the work is not easy at all,” for such, academic integration was difficult and so stressful that they fell behind. Some were even suspended she said.

Facilitators of Persistence

To the question about persistence, Eleanor replied that she owed her college persistence to family support.

I think my family would definitely play a big part. They want the best for me, and I want the best myself. I feel like I’m a very self-motivated person.

Dropping out or anything like that has never really crossed my mind because I want my education, and I know I need to get it - Eleanor

Knowing that she could communicate and unburden her heart to them gave her the much needed peace of mind and stability in college. In spite of homesickness she knew she could visit home four times in a year. These costly trips, plus, her tuition and housing charges were paid for every semester by her parents so she did not need to worry.

She was self-motivated to graduate from college because she needed the degree to be successful in future. She said she was a goal-oriented person and was bent on

completing her education. Her involvement in student organizations also kept her busy and focused in college. As a student leader and a mentor to students, she was determined to do her best academically to be a role model to those she mentored. Call it preservation of self-dignity or self-pride, she was grateful that her student leadership position and campus involvement had positively affected her attitude to academics, desire for excellence and maturity she said. She puts pressure on herself to remain a positive example to the four mentees in the Global Living Center (GLC) and others who were watching her.

Her friends had made life bearable for her at Falcon. Without them, homesickness could have gotten the best of her she recalled. They made a huge impact on my education because they made life comfortable for her. She added that being an introvert and having people who you know genuinely care and who enjoy your company, makes you feel at ease on campus. Friends provided the much needed support network in school. Through them she had learned many new things which have made her a better person. Meeting ALANAns who were Mexicans, Dominicans, Trinidadians, Africans and so on, who were second generation Americans and to have learned to do the different Spanish dances like bachata and meringue and salsa was a blessing she recounted. She loved the fact that even though she came from a different region, she could educate people about her culture and learn theirs.

Also she had made many friends through classes and different student organizations she was involved in. Getting involved on campus was very important. This part of college life could potentially affect other aspects, including academics positively

when managed well. However she mentioned that time management was important here, that way she did not become too involved in activities at the expense of her academics.

Lastly, living on campus exposed her to many opportunities and to become a student leader. She did not understand why international students felt they needed to move off campus. To her, they were not maximizing the Falcon experience. She was a tour guide at some point and knew the institutional statistics. About 80% of Falcon undergraduates live on campus she reported. Falcon was definitely a fun campus school with lots of activities, no wonder students lived, studied, had fun and worked here.

Hindrances to Persistence

According to Eleanor, most students dropped out of Falcon after falling behind in their grades. They were unable to cope with the academic work. Falcon University with its general business courses which were required from first semester had very difficult curriculum. It could easily become too stressful for new students especially those who did not have adequate pre-college academic preparation in business courses. GB 112 and GB 212, both accounting and finance courses were the toughest and students failed often. That was the reason why a student must be well-prepared academically and focused to succeed here. Some freshmen have taken a semester off to recover from the stress because the work was tough.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

She advised new students to get involved on campus. For her it is the fastest way to integrate, feeling at home and knowing she had a place here. Getting involved in one or two student organizations would put them in contact with other likeminded students

from which bonds of friendship would begin to form. “New students need good friends as support system” she said.

International students should reach out and not stick to co-nationals who speak the same language as theirs Eleanor stressed. The exposure to others would improve their English speaking skills for those who are no-native speakers. They may as well do so because academic success depends on strong language skills.

Eleanor strongly advised new students to resist the temptation to move off-campus with friends. “Stay on campus and maximize your Falcon experience” she said. Moving off-campus could be robbing them of great college experience.

Future Plans

Eleanor affirmed that from the onset she knew she wanted to chart a career pathway in business, so she set out to accomplish that by attending a strong business school. Ultimately, she would want to start her own business, so she pursued a concentration in entrepreneurship. She came from a family of entrepreneurs who started the Grace conglomerate. Her parents worked there; both were business people. Her dad was the CEO but Grace was owned by her mom’s family; her great grandfather was one of the founders of the company. So business acumen ran in the family. They wanted her to graduate and work for them. Eleanor really wanted to chart her own course in life but if she did not find job in the United States as expected, she would work for them for some time before launching out on her own.

Jackie

Jackie was an international student from Brazil. She was a senior-year student when interviewed, with one semester left to graduate. She was one of those who

responded to my introductory email, expressing her interest to volunteer and be interviewed for the study. After obtaining her contact information the first interview was set. This took place on Saturday, September 20, 2014. Altogether I had two regular interviews and one follow-up with Jackie. She spoke Portuguese and English fluently.

At the first interview, I shared objectives of the study and volunteer's rights, including issues of confidentiality with interviewee. Jackie was given time to ask questions on the information given and after questions were answered the consent form was signed by her and me. A copy of signed consent form was given to interviewee.

Jackie considered herself a "loud speaker"; her excitement to be a part of the study was evident in the way she raised her voice when responding to questions. Our first interview which took place in one of Falcon's library meeting rooms was interrupted; a librarian requested we toned it down. Jackie immediately took responsibility for that with a smile. Subsequent interviews were conducted outside of the library, in places where she could express herself without inhibition or interruption.

Jackie's profile

Jackie told me her story. She was an ardent sports fan. She said the walls in her room were decorated with sports memorabilia such as pictures from the 2014 World Cup, where she volunteered. She was the only child on her mom's side. She had an adorable stepbrother who just turned four in August 2014; she was his godmother. Her parents divorced when she was five years old. They married very early when her mom was 19 and dad was 23 but the pressure of marriage made them drift apart.

Jackie had two maternal uncles and an aunt. Her mom's family was from southern Brazil and among her siblings, Jackie had eleven cousins. Her father's side had ties to

Italy, and she was the only grandchild of her paternal grandparents for 14 years. They were quick to disclose that she was their favorite grandchild; they kept a room for her in their home even when they had six grandchildren. Her dad earned both law and accounting degrees and worked with an accounting firm; he was very hardworking she said. He had two younger brothers who earned law and accounting degrees too. Jackie reiterated that she came from a pretty big family with many cousins.

Jackie was a senior with academic major in marketing and double minors in sports management and law. Her family, specifically her grandparents, always wanted her to study law back home, but she resisted. She liked it at Falcon and after settling in she decided to minor in law after all. Her dream job was to work with an American sports team or with a company in the corporate sponsorship area. She claimed to be hard working, highly organized, and someone who did not joke with her academics. Since sophomore year she had been taking 18 credits per semester. Her organizational skills kicked in when she customized her courses for her major and minors sequentially for four years, being mindful of those rare courses that were not offered every semester she said. She also carefully researched professors to know who to take each semester. The course-load has been heavy but she was comfortable with it because she was always busy and loved it she said. Now she had six credits left to graduate. She added that when she wanted something, she went right after it intentionally.

She considered herself a shy person especially when it came to appearance in pictures and videos. She had good friends at Falcon University. In fact, she tended to be the youngest within her circle of friends all the time but the most caring. Her friends too said so. Most of her close friends already graduated but very much in touch. When she

first enrolled most of her friends were international students and now that they had graduated, she had a mixture of American and international students as friends. Her friends formed her support system in college.

Jackie remembered early at Falcon, she purposely enlisted as a volunteer for a professional basketball team with her friends' support. That was a way to launch out and learn to be more out-going. The program required meeting people constantly trying to sell them tickets among other sports' items. Through it she learned to start conversations with people she had never met before, promote the team's games and convince them to buy tickets. She learned how to take "no" for an answer and move on, overlook people who ignore her, cope with rejection, and celebrate when people were receptive to her pitch. It was all part of sales. She felt this was a good practice for her since she hoped to one day work with an American sports team. She learned a lot about sales, plus, she was able to break away from her shy mold. Her friends had been fantastic, and many of them happened to be male students, mostly in fraternities. "I am usually closer to guys than girls" she said.

Jackie said she was a clumsy person. She fell, hurt herself, and ran into people often. Her friends [mostly Americans now] usually used their experiences as their frames of reference and she would complain because they were foreign to her. They talked about their proms, homecoming events and other traditions. So in her senior year they sponsored a campaign and nominated Jackie for the homecoming queen contest saying that it would be an opportunity for her to be a "princess" and to participate in an American tradition she said. She was asked to submit a "Who am I" video and that had been very hard for her to compile because she did not like to be the center of attention.

She turned red easily when attention was on her though it has gotten better since she enrolled at Falcon.

Her mom was her confidant. Although they do not agree all the time , she listened to her advice. Jackie knew she really cared about her because she wanted the best for her and wanted her to call and talk with her all the time. When Jackie was not able, her mom called her “cold” meaning she did not care. She was highly adaptable and so she quickly adjusted to her new environment in America. She did not think she really experienced homesickness like other international students but missed Brazilian food and her young stepbrother so much. Sometimes she did not call her mom because she was busy with schoolwork. When her friends enlisted her in the homecoming queen contest, she was intimidated and quickly turned to her mom who calmed her down. She encouraged her to give it a try and have fun, and so she did.

Her mom’s side of the family manages a diversity of businesses, franchises of a known brand, and they would want her to return home to work with them but she said she has determined not to. It was too much headache; too many squabbles. Her mom already wanted an exit from it all she said.

Jackie said her paternal grandparents wanted her home too. They were always looking to introduce her to someone like a “prince charming” to get her back to Brazil. She has told them it was not likely to happen because she loved the United States and hoped to live and work here after graduation. At the same time she loved Brazil and soccer. If she did not secure a job in the United States, she would definitely return home, most likely to southern Brazil, which is cold. She loved the food, the weather there and

her family. She also loved Falcon that she called it home. She was also obsessed about Belgium she said. She did not know why but would like to visit one day.

Choice of U. S. College

When she was three and a half, Jackie was placed in the American School of Brasilia because her mom never learned English, so she wanted her to learn the language. She decided on an American school because she considered it the best place to learn. Jackie recalled loving the school. She had friends from all over the world, including the United States. That created a longing since she was young to travel outside of Brazil someday and explore the world. After third grade she left the American school and attended the School of the Nations, from where she graduated after high school she said.

The American School had American curriculum. The School of the Nations was an international school that did not follow the American system but many classes were taught in English. In high school students decided to follow the national or the international program she said. The international program had all classes taught in English for students who eventually studied overseas. The national program was for those who stayed in Brazil for college and classes were taught in both English and Portuguese.

As she grew, the determination to study outside of Brazil grew stronger. Her mom did not take it seriously at first, but after a while she realized how determined Jackie was and that there was nothing she could do to stop it from happening Jackie said. She narrowed my choices to the United States and United Kingdom (UK), mainly because of language, since she spoke Portuguese and English. From the comparison between the two destinations, she found that although college was more expensive in the United

States, living condition was generally cheaper than the United Kingdom. Thinking about it, she said she picked the United States over United Kingdom for college.

In Brazil each student knew what to study in college before the entrance examination which was major-specific. Since high school she wanted to study marketing, so she needed acceptance into a business school. Being an ardent sports fan that liked New England teams, she wanted to study there. She wanted to be close enough to the main city so she could go there whenever she wanted to watch a game, for example. She knew she could not choose a big school because she attended a small high school; my graduating class consisted of 20 people. Big schools like some in New England were off the list because she did not want to be reduced to a number in college. She said she longed for a small school, with small class size.

A Falcon recruiter visited her high school when she was a junior and gave a presentation about the university. Jackie remembered that she loved it and fell in love with the campus immediately. Her best friend sitting next to her encouraged her to apply because the school in her own opinion was suitable for Jackie, “That’s so you” she said. At a point during the presentation the recruiter hinted that every new student was allocated a personal computer and she could tell everyone liked that. She ended up applying to Falcon University and was accepted.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

The fear of the unknown gripped her before arrival on campus after acceptance to Falcon University partly because her father did not allow her to attend the early orientation program in June. The accountant in him considered it a waste of money to attend, return to Brazil and then travel back about 40 days after. Jackie was afraid she

would not have friends. Fortunately she made great friends immediately in the first semester, “My friends were from my dorm and my classes. They are my support network; they’re just like my family away from home.”

Jackie was thankful her International Peer Advisor (IPA) helped her to connect with Falcon even before arrival she said. The IPA answered her questions prior to and upon arrival. When she had problems setting up her email, the IPA helped her out. Being adaptive, Jackie was able to quickly adjust to life on Falcon campus. She considered herself an optimist, always willing to put herself out there and to meet people she said.

Jackie soon became a part of the International Buddy Network. Members of the student club mentored new exchange students every semester. Each member was assigned a mentee for a semester which was usually the entire stay of the exchange student at Falcon. The buddy assisted the new student with adjustment issues, answering questions, providing guidance and being a friend. She said that was rewarding because the organization also introduced her to new people within the group. Exchange students were those visiting and studying at Falcon from the university’s study abroad partners overseas. The students usually spent one to two semesters studying at Falcon, immersed in the American culture and gained global perspectives.

The ability to speak English fluently helped her to communication and to make friends. Although sometimes when Jackie translated directly from Portuguese to English she mixed up the grammar causing her friends to chuckle, but she was not embarrassed by those mistakes rather she took them in strides. For example, instead of “skipping” meals, she said “jumping” meals. Her friends continued to joke about that she said.

It was easy for her to find her place at Falcon University because resources were in place for students. The Counseling Center, Academic Advising Center, the International Office helped international students a lot, First Year Seminar for new students to learn practical things about college life and Study Abroad office for exchange students among others. Those offices supported students by answering their questions and guiding them as they navigated college thereby reducing the stress inherent in integration into a new environment Jackie mentioned.

Her personality as a highly adaptable, optimistic and friendly person also helped her to make friends. She felt that freshmen send out feelers to find people who are like-minded with whom they can bond. A new student must be willing to make the moves and be friendly by communicating and interacting with people as opposed to staying away and not mixing. Not everyone you introduce yourself to will be a friend, but some, which may be the exact people you need, will gravitate to you she said. This was where she felt her personality really worked for her.

She always called wherever she lived “home” because she was used to having more than one home since her parents divorced. Her father’s place was home, her grandparents’ place was home, and her mom’s house was her home too. Since she moved to Falcon, she already felt like this was home for the next four years. Above all, she loved Falcon University; it was a good fit for her. According to Jackie, her expectations have been met and exceeded. Never at any point since her enrollment did she feel she did not belong on this campus. On the contrary, she considered Falcon home. She said she loved college because of the freedom she had there. She was not bounded by rules like home; she could go downtown and other places if she was bored; she had her freedom.

Hindrances to Social Integration

Inability to make friends upon arrival on campus could adversely affect an international student who was already homesick and was feeling vulnerable on campus Jackie said. She recounted that she was fortunate to make friends quickly and so she did not feel alienated socially. Looking back, she felt she should have been more involved in campus activities. That would have exposed her to more people. But she was content with her friends and as freshman she did not feel the need for more.

As a freshman she felt the burden of figuring out her classes and their requirements. In addition she had just made these new friends who she needed to hang out with. The goal then was to balance her time between new classes and friends. So joining clubs was not a priority since that would take away the free time she needed to spend knowing her friends, Jackie said. Being with other people who were not her friends did not feel great at that time, being with her friends was everything she wanted.

On the social aspect ... I never felt the need of joining any clubs or any sororities ... because I always had good friends that I was always so close to. They were never part of it, and they became my family here.

There was no doubt that international students with language barriers devoted more time to studying because the rate of comprehension may be lower than that of a domestic student who was already used to the American system. Jackie said she did not experience this burden but she was not confident in participating in the classroom due to her Portuguese background. She was afraid she could mix her grammar and tenses, sounding funny or illogical to her peers.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

Jackie's father was a firm believer in education and getting good grades. He repeated often that getting good grades was not an option, it was Jackie's job. Anytime she earned bad grades he gave her an ear full and when they were good, he said that was her duty as a student. So in a way, his expectation for her mounted the pressure on her to earn good grades every time. Jackie was happy with her college choice in Falcon and her academic major of marketing combined with sport management and law. She believed the satisfaction inherent in her choices has further endeared her to Falcon.

"My family has been very supportive" and she understood her father's viewpoint because it was not cheap sending a child to study in the United States and at Falcon University. Paying for tuition, accommodation and other expenses was a lot to invest on a child. She felt the pressure many times and so she was motivated to do her best academically because "I want my family to be proud of me" she said.

Falcon's curriculum was very tough especially with the general business (GB) courses that were required for graduation. GB 112 and 212 were the toughest for freshmen, especially those without prior knowledge of accounting and finance. However, the university had resources in place to provide academic support to students. The tutoring, writing and other subject-specific labs provided the much needed assistance to students at different stages of their educational careers. The Academic Services Center was staffed with accessible counselors who were student-oriented. They assisted students with all academic questions ranging from course registration each semester to customizing a four-year academic plan for students. All these Jackie recalled. She was

happy that every student was assigned a counselor who guided them, especially during the freshman year on academic issues.

The First Year Seminar was helpful she said. She made some friends there, though not immediately. Although she qualified for the ESOL writing classes being from a non-English speaking country of Brazil, she did not self-select them because her Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores were high and she was able to get by in the courses. She soon learned how to select relevant classes and student-oriented professors on her own and that was helpful she said. She picked classes that really appealed to her considering who the professors were, and at those times of the day that worked for her. For example, some people could not deal with “night bombs.” These were classes offered in the evening once a week for straight two and a half hours. They worked for her and so she chose them often.

Jackie said she had great professors who inspired her and made her want to do her best. Professor John [pseudonym], she had him twice for sports marketing. “He was amazing!” she said. She enjoyed talking with him; he was very knowledgeable about marketing and knew so many people.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

Jackie recalled that one of her biggest problems as freshman was asking for help. Falcon students were very competitive, and so she had a hard time asking for help because although she was shy, she did not want people to think she was not smart. That was so childish she said. Falcon provided assistance to students at every turn but if one did not seek it when needed, then the opportunity would have been squandered she further added. That was the case. As freshman she saw flyers everywhere inviting

students to presentations about the general business courses. She did not attend because she had not realized their importance. She wished someone had mentioned it to her personally in the first semester.

Jackie did not understand why she had to wait 'till sophomore year to declare her major which was the general policy at Falcon. She knew from the beginning that she wanted to major in marketing. Being required to take GB 112 and 212 in the first year was strange and so she did not want people to know she did not know accounting and finance. But after declaring her major she felt she had an excuse to inform people she was struggling with GBs because they were not relevant to her major.

The American educational system was different. In particular, she did not understand that a grade point average (GPA) actually made a difference until my second semester. The concept was foreign and so she did not care about it in the first semester. Back home in Brazil, that a student graduated from college was all that mattered, no one cared about GPA she said.

Facilitators of persistence

Jackie said that education was very important to her. She wanted to graduate and have a career working with an American sports team. Earning a degree was therefore a big deal for her. Second, what kept her at Falcon was that she loved the school. It was a good fit for her socially and academically. There were no regrets in making the choice. It was like my home away from home she said. Third, her friends were amazing. She was lucky to have come across them at the time she did. Her friends were like “my second family and I would not trade them for anything” she said. Those who had graduated were still in touch. They all wanted to work in a New England city, except for Maria

[pseudonym] who was currently in Kuwait. They were very supportive. They understood Jackie; when she was down, they made her feel better; they had her back all the time.

Fourth, she loved this New England city. It had been her dream to study there. In fact, she was living her dream and hoped that she found a job there after graduation.

Fifth, Falcon had ample resources for students at every turn. Though she did not use a lot of them, she interacted with the International Office since they worked directly with international students. The IPA program helped her a lot. It was a good program and she recommended that it continues. In retrospect she shared that many new students need serious help prior to campus arrival especially because they imagine things worse than they are. So having a mentor before arrival would help allay some of those fears she said.

Last, her family's support had contributed to her persistence. They have invested in her education and she hoped to continue to make them proud. Her father's saying was always in focus for her she said.

Hindrances to persistence

Since she was persisting, she could only share possible factors of college dropout based on what she had heard and seen among her peers. Jackie said friends and finance would be the most possible factors that could affect a student's college persistence. She could not imagine not having friends in the first semester with all the pressure and vulnerability she was confronted with. It would have been a miserable place and hard to deal with. Fortunately, her story was the opposite. Her friends made Falcon worthwhile she said.

To study in the United States and at Falcon University was not cheap at all. If an international student was not able to pay for tuition and other expenses, she believed the student would eventually drop out of Falcon.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

The following were Jackie's advice to new students:

First, new international students need not be afraid to get out of their comfort zone to try new things. Sometimes the things they may not like at first may be the ones they would eventually love. Her first experience of a fraternity party was negative. It had too many people, drinks were spilled everywhere, and she wanted to get out as fast as she could. In her senior year, many of her friends were in fraternities and she enjoyed being invited to their fraternity houses.

Second, be open to meeting new people. Many times she felt freshmen were scared of meeting new people; they need not dread the meetings but rather enjoy them because that person or those people may end up becoming close friends.

Third was to take time to enjoy their college experiences. She asked them to make the best of the four years because they go fast.

Fourth, take academics seriously and not attend parties alone. She advised that they set time aside to actually study and even if their friends discouraged them from doing so, they needed to stand their ground and insist on studying. Those friends may not need much time to study but an international student may need longer study time to grasp the concepts.

Fifth, was for international students to connect with their professors, even when they feel they would fail the course. The professor would advise on how to improve their

grades. She said professors at Falcon were empathetic; they listened to their students and she appreciated their help.

Sixth was for them to take advantage of the support services and not be like her who failed to seek them due to shyness or what others would say.

Lastly she wanted them not to be discouraged about the general comments students make. Many have anonymously commented on international students on social media and made fun of them. For example, they commented that international students smoke so much that their cigarette smoke formed a curtain outside the library. They generalized forgetting that not all international students smoke. Jackie said she never smoked and many of her friends too. She advised new students not to succumb to the stereotypes but learn to ignore ignorant comments.

Future Plans

Jackie was excited about graduating from Falcon and the future. She hoped to apply for the optional practical training (OPT), work in the United States as the government had authorized, and to gain experience in the field of marketing. She hoped her dream of working with an American sports team in New England area would happen. That way she would still be with her friends from Falcon. But if she does not find a suitable job in the United States, she would return to Brazil she said.

She was adamant about not working for her mom's family. It was too much trouble she said. Since she loved south Brazil, she would most likely work and live there. Then her paternal grandparents' wish would have come true. They had always wanted her back in Brazil. She would like to work with a multinational company in Brazil where her Portuguese and English language skills would be assets to the company.

Jimmy

Jimmy was an international student from Ghana. One of the participants, Rosalyn [pseudonym] introduced him to me. After email exchanges between Rosalyn and Jimmy, and Jimmy and me, the first interview date of October 8, 2014 was scheduled. Altogether, I had two regular interviews and a follow up with him. Jimmy spoke Russian, English and Akan languages fluently.

At the first interview I shared objectives of the study and volunteer's rights, including issues of confidentiality with interviewee. Jimmy was given time to ask questions on the study and his rights and after questions were answered, he signed the consent form and I signed too. A copy of signed consent form was given to him later.

Jimmy's Profile

Jimmy was born in Ukraine. He told me he was 21 years old; the oldest child and the first son in his family. He had parents who loved him; unfortunately they divorced when he was young though both have remarried other people. His father was from the Asante tribe in Ghana, his mom was Ukrainian, and so he was naturally bi-racial. He made it clear that although he was tall, he did not play basketball. He was not an outdoor person. He loved to stay indoors playing video games with friends, something he said he could do all day, all weekend. He was smart, open-minded, curious, adventurous, and a little introverted – not quiet – but laid back he said firmly. He still liked to go out with friends; he just maintained a good work-play balance and was interested in other cultures and religions. He had very interesting conversations with international students from other religions many times.

When he was six, his parents moved to Ghana from Ukraine. Moving to Ghana was very difficult because he did not speak English, the official language in Ghana. Not knowing how to communicate with people, except his parents, kept him in his own world for some time he said. As a child, “I remember how hot Ghana was when we moved back and I wanted to take off my clothes all the time to cool down.” Also he remembered school was hard. So his parents hired a tutor to teach him English. Before long he was able to catch up with elementary schoolwork and even made great friends. He began speaking English, however, his parents did not allow him to lose his Russian language skills; they continued to speak Russian to him.

From middle to high school, his parents did not push him academically. For example if he did not complete his homework or if he did not attend class, it was never a big deal with his dad. So he got away with it because he liked to think he was smart. Maybe it did not really show because he did not earn bad grades in school ever or anything close. Soon his parents moved him to a private international school. His interactions with peers in the private international school developed a yearning in him that one day he would travel abroad for his studies.

Well, I went to international school, so most of the kids there, definitely more than half would go to study internationally into university. So it was mostly between England and here. But ... I felt more attracted here ... ‘cause like well, I mean, I see it in TV shows and the movies, but I have to experience America for myself.

When he arrived at Falcon he was surprised by the number of international students on campus. He had researched Falcon in the past and thought the number was less.

Initially it was hard getting used to a few things, one of which was waking up early for classes and so he overslept through a couple of classes. Jimmy said he was not a “morning person” and would not have chosen early classes for the first semester but the classes were picked for him. Consequently his grade suffered a bit. But once he got used to college life and began registering for classes on his own, the problem was solved by picking later classes. He remembered being homesick for local food which were rare in the New England city. The good thing was that he was able to visit home twice a year – during summer and winter breaks he said.

He has lived on campus since freshman year. He loved the campus and never felt he did not belong there he said. He was a junior studying Economics- Finance. Being in the Honors Program from first year has kept him grounded in college he said. He expressed his love for the group because he knew he was smart and was able to compete academically.

Choice of U. S. College

From Jimmy’s story, he attended an international school where most of the students, definitely more than half were admitted into universities overseas mostly in England. Somehow he was attracted to the United States; he wanted to see what it was like living there because of what he had watched over the television in shows and movies. So he did not apply to any school in England, all applications were to American universities he said.

Falcon was a good business school Jimmy said. He heard about it from one of my high school graduates. His high school had an event where graduates were invited to give presentations on their new higher education institutions to the entire school. This was

very successful because students who were choosing colleges could gain insight into schools abroad through the eyes of these high school graduates. One day, a graduate presented on Falcon University, Jimmy was fascinated and that was how he decided to attend Falcon University. He liked it because of its prestige and top ranking, plus, it was a great business school, and of course, he knew he would not be alone there because he already knew someone from his high school at the university. He said he discussed it with his high school counselor who agreed with him and put Falcon and another college on a map for him.

Falcon was the only school he applied to in New England mainly because of its strong business focus in economics, finance and accounting. In the end Falcon accepted him and placed him in the Honors Program, plus, he was awarded substantial scholarship. With this, it was easy to convince his parents that he needed to travel and study at Falcon University. His parents wanted him to study at home but with the scholarship, they reluctantly agreed. Though the scholarship was their main attraction to the university, for Jimmy, he said he liked the school with or without scholarship because of the strong business focus. So his parents gave their consent.

At the time of interview, Jimmy confirmed he was still in the honors program and still excited about Falcon University. He had been living on campus since freshman year. Friends had invited him to move and live off-campus with them but he was just not interested. He liked it on-campus but it was different from home in Ghana in many ways. First, everyone here had an accent that was different from what he was used to in Ghana, “so it was a bit hard for me to understand people at first but I caught up quickly. Also they spoke fast and so I had to listen attentively.” Second, the professors were unlike the

teachers back home who were very much like your uncles, aunts or grandparents. Here, they were more formal in their interactions with students. At home, teachers were more informal than formal he said.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

Jimmy recalled that pre-arrival on campus was filled with anxiety. He did not know how his new adventure would turn out but upon arrival, he realized he liked the campus. People were warm and friendly. He liked the Welcome Program organized for new international students by the International Office he said. The program invited international students to arrive about a day or two earlier than the rest. The program introduced him to other students. He was pleasantly surprised to see many students from many countries. He met a lot of them and became friends with them from the beginning he said.

Jimmy had an International Peer Advisor (IPA) who coincidentally was from Ghana and that was really nice he said smiling. "I did not know him before but he felt like a familiar face because we could connect on so many levels." The IPA contacted him before arrival and tried to give him some information about what to pack and what to expect. Upon arrival, he took Jimmy under his wings and helped with acclimatization to the university. He took him everywhere and introduced him to people. With that he was able to make more friends among international and American students.

Jimmy really liked the IPA program because he expressed that it helped new students. It should continue because with an IPA, a new student automatically has one friend waiting for him or her at Falcon. It was intimidating coming to a new environment not knowing anyone but the IPA lessened the anxiety associated with being new on

campus, Jimmy said. Most of the people he knew then were still friends with him in junior year. By the way, his high school buddy did not really care he said but the IPA was good enough he admitted.

At orientation there were lots of ice-breakers and Jimmy liked them because they forced everyone to talk and share their backgrounds – talking about their high schools, nationality, and all those random stuff. He enjoyed those programs with the Resident Assistants (RAs) and IPAs. Aside from meeting one-on-one with their advisees, the IPAs were required to hold group meetings with their advisees. Each IPA was assigned a group of new students to work with before and after arrival on campus. Jimmy enjoyed those meetings because they were not too big and less intimidating. He remained grateful to his IPA for helping him settle at Falcon.

As a freshman Jimmy did not attend a lot of campus activities like clubs but he pledged for a fraternity and that helped him to know more American students, he said. Although it was fun, he soon left the frat. “I quit; because my dad actually did not want me to be a part of it ... he thought there was ... too much concentration on drinking and partying” he said. Plus, “I needed to devote time to my studies.”

The Honors program organized dinners each semester in celebration of new students which returning students must attend. Jimmy enjoyed his freshman dinner because he met more people and made friends. As sophomore he became serious with the Christian fellowship group and made more Christian friends that way which helped him. Jimmy admitted he enjoyed college, he knew this was the only time he could be free to do what he wanted, when he could make his own decisions. He said he knew that once these four years were over and he started to work, his schedule would be hectic, so he

was maximizing his college experience. This was the only time he can pick his classes by himself and decided not to take Friday classes or wake up after noon and then started his classes. Plus, he was glad he had good friends who supported him. He could have been more socially involved but he believed in work-play balance and he thought he had the right balance, Jimmy said.

Hindrances to Social Integration

Aside from homesickness once in a while, Jimmy said his college life was great. He loved the campus, his friends and the curriculum. He was hoping the IPA program would last till the end of the academic year but his actively ended after the fall semester. Maybe because his IPA felt he was well adjusted, or his workload became heavy and he needed more time for academics, or the program itself was designed to end in fall. Jimmy felt the program should have lasted the entire first year for new students.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

Jimmy told me Honors program kept him focused in college. For sure it is a prestigious program and he liked it. So in a way, he felt the Honors program validated his thought of being a smart kid. There was healthy pressure that came with being in the program. You did not want to let yourself or parents down by not performing well academically. Honors students were expected to take honors courses, maintain a minimum GPA of 3.3, declare a major and complete the capstone project as a senior. Jimmy almost slipped as freshman but quickly regrouped, worked hard and he since pulled his GPA up even above the minimum for Honors program. Being in the program was extra work but he really liked it. At the right time, each student would be assigned an advisor who would supervise the capstone project. “Just being in the honors program

exposes me to honors students. So you kind of try to keep up with your studies, to kind of be able to compete on that level as well” he said.

The thought of not doing well and flunking out of college was extreme for Jimmy and he did not want to be there. For one, his family had supported him from day one. His parents paid the rest of his tuition and living expenses in the United States and that was not cheap for an international student. They expected him to perform well academically and so wanted to meet and exceed their expectations. It would be shameful to have to drop out of school. According to Jimmy, one factor for academic success for him was his family’s expectation that he should do well in college and with that comes some pressure to want to succeed. It was more of the sense that “if you do not get good grades, we will kill you” [not figuratively, it meant you must do well] he said.

The ability to set his own academic schedule every semester helped him. He was able to register by himself picking suitable classes for his biological clock. These were classes that began after noon. He could then wake up and have time to study for a test or complete homework before classes started he said. He definitely had to study more in college than high school but that was expected. College was more serious than high school he admitted.

Jimmy said his roommates were great and very smart too. One of them was also in the Honors program, so there was healthy competition going on and that naturally made him more determined to succeed academically.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

In the first semester of college he said he quickly learned that the high school mindset would not work for college academics. There were deadlines for assignments

and professors would not chase or beg you to submit your homework. They just gave gentle reminders and students lost points for not meeting deadlines. He eventually learned that he was accountable for his actions and that was how it was in the business world.

His inability to choose his courses in the first semester resulted in class times that were not conducive to his biological clock. Later on he felt he needed to adjust to fit into future workforce. Unfortunately then due to early morning classes he either overslept and not attend classes or went late. His GPA was around 3.32 which shocked him because he did not quite meet the Honors minimum requirement of 3.33. The thought that if he was not careful he could be out of the program jolted him back to reality he said. The following semester when he began picking his classes, he selected afternoon and evening classes and his GPA soared to 3.5 and had been even higher since.

Looking back, Jimmy also said he could have achieved more as a freshman if he had studied more and not be a procrastinator. He could have spotted his problems early enough to have visited with his professors seeking assistance. He did not seek help as much as he should. He was never in the writing lab since coming on campus but was once in the ACE lab and it was not of much help. Freshman year was rough because of his involvement with the fraternity which was pretty much drinking and partying. He said his dad's advice to quit the group helped him to reset his college academic experience.

Facilitators of persistence

Jimmy said he had never thought of quitting school because he liked his freedom at Falcon. But there were times he was really frustrated. One in particular was in the regular expository writing class which was pretty much based on your opinion on things.

He felt this professor was steering them to push her opinions and if you wanted to do well you had to write about what she wanted. He resented it and that created problems for him. He ended not getting a good grade in the course. He felt cheated of a good experience in that class but he had excellent grades in others and has since moved on he said.

For him, homesickness which could have negatively affected him like many international students was manageable because he visited home twice a year in summer and during winter break. He said family support has helped him to persist in college. His parents supported him. They were there when he needed guidance and advice that pointed him in the right direction. Example was his exit from the frat. That was such a good and timely advice from his dad he said. He knew they loved him and their advice always came from the heart. They also set high expectations for him and he was learning to rise to and exceed them to make them proud of him.

Jimmy said his friends formed a support system for him at Falcon. They were pretty nice people, mostly international students and so they were able to relate on many levels. Many of the professors were nice and decent people who truly wanted you to succeed. He really liked a few and he wanted to succeed so they would be proud of him he said.

The Honors program definitely kept him grounded. It exposed him to really smart students, like an elite group on campus he remarked. The healthy competition among them kept him wanting to achieve more academically.

Hindrances to persistence

Jimmy said, good friends would carry you far in college. Many international students have left due to bad influences which ultimately wrecked their academics. Lack

of financial and moral support could lead to college dropout also he said. If tuition was not paid or it was suddenly cut that could be a serious problem. Moral support also in form of getting the right counsel at the appropriate time could affect academics. His dad was there for him and gave him timely and right advice to drop out of the fraternity.

Homesickness for international students could spin out of control if not managed well, especially if the student was alienated and without friends in a new environment he added. Also the fact that some international students could not visit home as often as he did could be a factor. They sometimes stayed on campus for a whole year or even longer before seeing their families. Those circumstances were tricky and could lead to other serious issues.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

Jimmy advised new students to attend and participate in campus events such as the activities fair to meet people. He wanted them to see if anyone was interested in the same clubs that they would like to join. The fraternities and sororities were pretty nice he said. They had rush events for freshmen and sophomores at the beginning. So they could just attend the events, and maybe just eat chicken wings and get to know people since those were pretty open. If they put themselves out there, they would definitely meet people and make good friends Jimmy said.

He advised them to get involved with Falcon events. There were comedy shows and club recruitment activities. He thought they should attend those as new students. He met most of his friends by attending random events. His advice was for them to go there and talk to people.

Academically, he advised that they take classes that interest them instead of just classes that were maybe easy, or just at a time that they liked because the classes he performed well in were those where the material interested him. He wanted them to try as much as possible to participate in class as well but not too much because people did not like “teachers’ pets”. It may alienate you from your peers; you would be friends with the professors but not your classmates.

Future Plans

He looked forward to his senior year when he would work on the capstone project. He had an idea of what he would like to study and hoped to do a very good job on it. He wanted to finish with very high GPA. Since the government has given F-1 international students the opportunity to work post-graduation in the United States, he hoped to take advantage of the 12-month optional practical training (OPT) and eventually secure an excellent job in his field of study. He wanted to make his family proud.

Bill

Bill was a Chinese international student who I recruited for the study. He too mentioned that he wanted to volunteer but as time went on he became too busy and did not reply to the email but was glad to have been invited eventually. After a few emails back and forth we scheduled the first interview for Saturday, October 19, 2014. We met in the Café located in Falcon library, a place he chose for venue. The location was quiet at first but as time went on traffic picked up and the environment became fairly noisy, almost distracting. There, I advised that our next interview should not occur there but rather in a relatively quiet location. Bill was forthcoming with his responses; he seemed excited to be a part of the study.

At the first interview I shared objectives of the study and volunteer's rights, including issues of confidentiality with him. Bill was given time to ask questions on the study and his rights and after questions were answered, the consent form was signed by him and me; a copy of signed consent form was given to him.

Bill's Profile

Bill told me his parents were Chinese who had lived long in El Salvador. He was the first in the family to be born outside of China. He was born in El Salvador; his brother was born after he was nine or ten years old. He said according to Myers-Briggs, he was an introvert, sensing, feeling and judgmental person. While he did not agree with all of the characterization, he knew he was very individualistic, the type of person that had opinions and was not afraid to say "no" to some things and "yes" to things that agree with his values. He said his philosophy in life was "What goes around comes around". He always tried to improve himself, trying to be successful by taking advantage of opportunities that came his way, he said. He always liked to have a plan, though life could be unpredictable and some things were unpreventable. In such cases he was flexible, trying to improvise and just hoped for the best results. He loved quotes of famous people such as Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and other cultural proverbial sayings.

Although his parents tried hard to preserve and teach their children the Chinese culture, it was totally different because as Chinese living in El Salvador, most of his friends were from El Salvador. He was brought up in the Salvadorian culture; El Salvador was "home." After graduation from high school, Bill narrated his traveled to China to visit his cousins and family members for one year. He actually liked China too, the

people, their culture, their mannerisms, their traditions, it just felt like home for him though he did not experience it till then. He liked everything about it, and it felt so natural for him to be feeling that way. So it was weird because after the visit he could not actually say where home was. He said he was working on it, and he said if someone were to give him a choice between going to El Salvador or China now, he would not know where to go.

He learned so much of the American culture through television shows or sitcoms such as, Friends or How I Met Your Mother. He saw them on T.V. and imagined the lifestyle he wanted when he travelled to the United States where he wanted to have a job with this type of lifestyle. Unfortunately these shows did not include college student examples. They were all about the corporate world, pretty much life after graduation.

Choice of U. S. College

Bill told his story. He studied in a British school in El Salvador. One day a Falcon recruiter visited this school to present on the institution. He really liked how Falcon sought his school and marketed the university to them. Other American universities visited but they never had visits from Europe or South America or Asia. These presentations were fascinating and they made him want to study in America he said. Some of his friends headed to Europe after taking the International Baccalaureate (IB) examinations. His school being British, he also took the IB exams which were basically like the SAT and the Advance Placement program. They were also like the entrance programs exam that opened the door to studying in Europe. But for Bill, he was determined to study in the United States he reiterated.

The United States was his parents' preference too. They felt the country was closer home, or closer to El Salvador. Also they had family members in New York and Miami. So that even endeared the United States to them. They thought that being close to family members was important in case of emergency, or he required immediate assistance. They explained that if he was in Europe it would be harder for them to reach him. His parents were always concerned about his safety he said. So he applied to Falcon University and was accepted and had persisted till junior year.

Since enrollment at Falcon, he had taken the position of an International Peer Advisor (IPA) working with new international students helping them with pre-arrival and on arrival on campus to facilitate college adjustment. This was his second year in this position. It was fun and gratifying to use his skills to make some other lives better he admitted. His role was not only to communicate with students during the summer and give them information about Falcon overall, but to serve as their support system. He reached out to them through emails and told them he was there to assist; he just wanted to be a friend while navigating college he told them. That year, he also became a Resident Assistant (RA), another important position and a teaching assistant for the IT Center.

The International Office did a good job of implementing the IPA program as a way of giving feedback or looking for red flags among new international students, and also as a way of polling their needs Bill said.

Factors Responsible for Social Integration

When Bill arrived at Falcon he thought it would be easy to adapt to life without his parents, after all he lived in China by himself for one year. Thanks to his first friends who were actually people from his floor in the dorm. Without them the transition would

not have been easy and then through his classes he began meeting new people. The First Year Seminar also helped him to make more friends since all of them were new. That class helped him understand college life he admitted.

He said at Falcon it was not hard for him to fit in. The people on campus were welcoming and he had friends among domestic and international students. While he had a core group of friends, he could blend in with any other group on campus. Being from a different culture, Bill tried to embrace the American culture. But his impression was that generally Americans found it hard to appreciate other cultures.

He was the kind of person who would not compromise on his values. It was important for him to know when to say “yes” and when to say “no.” His friends acted as his support group. When he was down they helped him back up. So far his experiences at Falcon had been good.

He recounted that he had a close friend or more of a mentor. They both had similar experiences as far as place of birth and nationalities were concerned. He understood Bill very well and he would share these deep issues with him and the mentor would counsel him. The mentor was a good person and great student. It was important to be surrounded by the right group of friends who were there for you Bill said.

Bill would say lifestyle-wise, integrating into college life were a totally different experience. You were coming to a situation in life where you were not around your parents anymore. You were either living with people that do not have same values as you or your cultural views were different.

He thought that his trip to China really helped him and according to him, he matured quickly. Not being with his family helped him to put his goals and vision into

perspective he said. Bill was not too homesick after arrival at Falcon. He always handled homesickness by talking with his parents weekly. They wanted to be sure he was comfortable on campus and that was what he did. He assured them that everything was going on well and they trusted him he said.

He did not attend campus events as he should have from freshman year but tried to maintain connection with the International Student Association (ISA), where he was an active member. Through the ISA he bonded with more people and would say the ISA served as support system for him. The ISA was not about drinking and getting drunk, it was about understanding and embracing other cultures and leadership on campus he said..

Bill said his level of engagement from elementary school and wherever he found himself was always high. He said he was taught to always participate and speak his mind and this had been his pattern. Growing up he was class presidents at different times because his peers believed in him. He was not surprised that he became TA, RA, an IPA, an active member of the ISA and still helped other organizations on campus with events planning. It was a lot but he enjoyed staying busy he said.

Hindrances to Social Integration

As a freshman he was only engaged in the International Student Association (ISA) because his friends were part of other organizations. He knew there were other clubs such as the Southeast Asian Student Association, SASA. They had the Chinese association. All those associations he did not join as a freshman because none of his friends was attending and sadly that discouraged him from going. But as he grew on campus, he found his voice and finally launched out he said.

As a sophomore he was on the executive-board (e-board) of ISA so he was more involved. As a member it was optional to attend activities but as an e-board member it was a matter of responsibility to attend every single event and connect with other associations.

As someone in a new environment he experienced self-doubt, thinking did he make the right decision. He believed that was common when people have just made significant decisions that could change the trajectory of their lives. He was overly self-conscious at that time but everywhere he went, people were welcoming.

He experienced culture shock due to cultural differences and would say it also held him back from being socially involved as a freshman, so he was more of an onlooker. "I know that a lot of students have this philosophy that college is to party, or to get drunk or stuff during the weekends, to relieve stress ... But like I say, it's a different culture; and it's just about embracing people's differences."

The drinking age in America was quite different from El Salvador's and in many countries. However, he was shocked at what he saw when he arrived. It seemed people did not have control especially when it came to things like alcohol consumption. Back home he would go out maybe once a week or during the weekend with friends, play games, drink a little and have fun. Drinking for them was a social engagement unlike campus where people called it "wasted" or being drunk, it was totally different. There were parties every single weekend, mostly starting from Thursday and ending on Sunday with so much alcohol around. Bill was shocked and disgusted and so he picked his friends carefully he said.

His roommates' dynamics were not the best. Many double occupancy rooms were modified to triple because enrollment grew. He was in a triple occupancy room. One roommate was from California, the other was from Vietnam but he completed high school in the United States. Their personalities did not mesh and so the Vietnamese student was seldom in the room while the Californian was always in the room. He was more of an onlooker watching the dynamics. He pretty much could adapt easily to any situation or personality but overall it was not the best. Unfortunately the RAs were not really engaged with their residents.

Factors Responsible for Academic Integration

Bill said he set personal goals which he worked towards. Academic integration was easy and his grades were descent as a freshman. He had remained on either president or dean's list; so that was good. Self-motivation played a pivotal role because he really wanted to succeed; he wanted to find a job after graduation. He also knew that academics had to do with it. For example, some job postings required certain minimum GPA and if you were above the minimum the better for you. For this reason he did not want to slack off, he wanted to be above average. His GPA was 3.8 or so; and he hoped to possibly improve on that but not go lower he reported.

His parents were always supportive always; they believed in him. They struggled in life and he wanted them to be proud of him. For that reason he worked hard to achieve academically. Since he tested high in TOEFL, he did not self-select the ESOL expository courses in the first year. He said his ability to speak English language so well helped academically. He was able to understand class teachings and discussions and confidently participate in class discussions.

Bill said he attributed his academic integration to high school preparation. He participated in the two-year international baccalaureate (IB) program in junior and senior years. This was a prestigious program, based in Cambridge U.K. It was common to complete extensive writings where each student wrote very long essays. The IB paid off because it served as preparation for the rigors of college. He found everything to be easier at Falcon than his high school. There was ample time for studies. International students were very competitive with their academics, they would always ask one another “how did you do on the exam or something like that”. A lot of them come from that same background as Bill. They took either APs or IBs, and that was why they were very competitive.

A lot of students did not appreciate what their professors did, neither did they like their professors. He knew professors were essential to his learning and academic success, they also served as good support system. When Bill needed references for the IPA and RA positions, he approached his professors. He actually enjoyed their classes; and they enjoyed how much he participated too. When in class, he actually really cared and participated. He would try to talk to professors during office hours. Reaching out to them not only created that professor-student relationship, it was also good to know their experiences, and how one could use those in life as well.

According to Bill, he was a curious person who wanted to learn and that was his reason for coming to Falcon. Not only did he want to get a good job, he wanted to be sure his education was worth it. Bill knew that American education was very expensive but for him, it was more of a personal gain because education was for his benefit and not just for a grade.

Hindrances to Academic Integration

Bill recalled he earned higher grades as freshman because he faced his studies being only active in the ISA. Even then time management was still very important. For freshmen, they juggled time with friends because it was part of building that network to carry them through college and academics. But there was need for balance between academics which was a student's primary focus and other social activities like hanging out with friends and club activities.

The problem then was that as students progressed in college they added more responsibilities such as campus employment and more club activities which were not there in the first year. This was his predicament he said. Bill was RA, TA and IPA by junior year and all these took time away from studying or meeting with professors. But thanks to time management, his GPA was around 3.8.

Facilitators of persistence

Bill confirmed that he had personal goals and expectations. When he started something, he finished it he said. He was always conscious of the time and resources already invested in a project which would go to waste if he gave up. He did not give up his goals, he came to the United States to study, graduate, and get a good job, and that was what he hoped to accomplish.

But the reason why I'm always here – like you said from freshman ... to junior, and hopefully to senior – is because I really have my parents' faith and my parents' confidence. And I know that me being here is an investment for them. And I wanna make sure their investment is worth it.

Growing up, he observed his parents work very hard. They had their own restaurant and he remembered his dad barely sleeping because he had to go to the market the next morning. He had to cook every day, sometimes without enough food during the day, and fighting exhaustion. His mom too, she took care of the boys and home. Seeing those things actually made him feel that if he did not study hard right now he was taking them for granted. So he worked very hard.

Bill attributed his persistence to his family because he knew it was their sacrifice that kept him in an American school. His dad actually did not want him to come to the United States. He wanted him to stay back in El Salvador, help with the company and study at a local university but he knew that Bill wanted to come to the United States so he gave him the opportunity for which he was thankful he said. While he was grateful for his opportunities, he realized he grew up in a developing country where he saw poverty on a daily basis. He would see homeless people walk by their house every single day asking for money. He derived his motivation from this knowing that he wanted a better life for himself he said.

His parents being from Chinese background taught him that the younger generation should take care of the older. It was different in the United States where there was social security and people had something substantial to live on after retirement. For Chinese, it was different. The children took care of their parents, and he actually liked that philosophy. He wanted to succeed academically and secure a good job so he could take care of his parents in their old age. That was his motivation to stay in school and be the best he could be he added.

Hindrances to persistence

The only time he was close to giving up school was not due to academic issues he said. It was more of an emotional issue. He had a bad experience during sophomore year and was frustrated at that point. Even his parents agreed he could return home if he felt so strongly about leaving. They could have used his help then that they have their wholesale and retail company. They were supportive nonetheless. After much thinking, Bill decided to stay he recalled. The incident had pushed him into some depression. He stopped attending classes for a while and got into playing videogames to numb the heartache. His grades plummeted as a result.

Although he did not reveal the real problem to his parents, they gently reminded him that education was the best thing right now and he agreed. Somehow he was able to snap out of it after it hit him that he was now on a dangerous path to the destruction of everything he ever dreamed of said Bill. He took up the RA and TA positions, so he could be engaged doing something worthwhile, things that benefit others and him. Being busy helped him to gain back his purpose. Unfortunately his friends were not supportive at this time, they made things worse. They were mad at him because he was not hanging out with them. So the following semester Bill made new friends he said.

Advice to new students on college integration and persistence

Academically, he would tell them not to be intimidated by the curriculum. It was okay to feel pressure or to feel they were not doing as well as they wanted to. He would tell them that sometimes people adapt to things differently and would encourage them to step back and take a breather. Sometimes pressuring themselves to be the best they can be may be counter-productive. So they should not put pressure on themselves, he said.

Also as an international student, challenges would arise but just take them in strides and not stress about them because everything, including academics, would work out if there is a purpose, he said. He advised them to get involved because it helps to adapt quickly; to see what is out there and take advantage of all the different support systems from the academic center to IPA and their friends. Shake off the feeling of loneliness, be sure to talk to someone such as the RA or IPA if they feel lonely, he said.

Bill continued and said students should not feel overwhelmed if they are rejected. They should remember there are people in the same situation and the goal is to reach out to others. He said they should not be afraid to say no to things outside your values, and they should not be afraid of the different cultures that are out here, understanding them will only make the new student more enlightened.

Future Plans

Bill's goal was to complete his degree in high honors. As an international student given the opportunity to gain work experience in the United States after graduation, he would apply for the 12-month optional practical training (OPT) and do very well on the job. After OPT, he hoped to find a good paying job in the country that would allow him a good lifestyle.

He repeated that his parents have worked hard all their lives taking care of the family business. They have been devoted to taking care of his brother and him; he hoped to take care of them financially and in their old age to provide them with good retirement plan they would be happy about. That would be a "dream come true" for him he said.

Analysis

In the qualitative study, data analysis was done alongside data collection (Andrade 2005, 2007, 2008; Creswell, 2007). The research data were evaluated and organized together under categories as established in interview protocols using Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) ethnographic fieldwork strategies. The open-ended interview questions were designed to build a framework for the exploration as captured by the research questions while giving each participant the freedom to tell a story. Interview responses were studied and significant findings were categorized and clustered (Creswell, 1998; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011; Seidman, 2012; Yin, 2009). From student participant responses, there were nine categories, namely: personal background, choice of American college, social integration (facilitators and hindrances), academic integration (facilitators and hindrances), college persistence (facilitators and hindrances), advice to new international students, recommendations to the International Office, recommendations to the university, and future plans.

Table 7 represented a summary of the categories and the common factors under each category.

Table 7: Categories for student participant responses

Categories	Commonalities within Student Responses
Personal Background	Country of origin; country of birth / residence; family background; age; perception of America; Culture Shock (Roommates, Drinking ...)
Choice of U. S. College	Family; socioeconomic status; quality of education / college prestige; falcon recruiter; college advising
Social Integration	Making friends; campus engagement; personality; ability to adapt; institutional support (International Office, MCC, IPAs ...)
➤ Factors responsible for social integration	
➤ Hindrances to social integration	Homesickness; cultural differences; lack of self-confidence; language barrier; feeling overwhelmed
Academic Integration	High school preparation; parental pressure; friends; self-motivation; time management; institutional support (ESOL, Academic Services ...); First Year Seminar course; faculty support
➤ Factors responsible for academic integration	
➤ Hindrances to academic integration	Lack of high school preparation; language barrier; lack of self-confidence (no class participation); extended study/ test-taking time; new classroom etiquette
College Persistence	Self-motivation; personal goals; pride; parental / family support; friends; institutional influences / support; future career
➤ Facilitators of college persistence	
➤ Hindrances to college persistence	Homesickness; academic issues; health problems; financial challenges
Advice to new International Students	Get involved; Study hard; Do not be afraid to meet new people on campus; Connect with professors; Use campus resources to your academic advantage
Recommendations to the International Office	Expand IPA program; increase program options to students such as ice cream socials
Recommendations to the University	Cultural training for domestic students; more GLCs for international students; educate new students about campus resources; expand orientation program; any need for GB courses?
Future Plans	Make family proud; Optional Practical Training (OPT); dream jobs; sense of accomplishment

The emergence of the categories were results of in-depth study and organization of interview transcripts, documents obtained from the International Office, field notes and journals which documented information on the site of study and how international students socialized on campus, and reflections on the participant's and my feeling as the researcher. Each category was further analyzed to describe the information embedded within. Table 8 further analyzed the categories of personal background, choice of U.S. college and social integration.

Table 8: Analysis of personal background, college choice and social integration

Participants	Personal	Choice of college	Social Integration (facilitators)	Social Integration (hindrances)
Betty	Parents married; My dad has an engineering company	Paid college coach, HS alumna / Falcon student advice; personal research; scholarship	Friends; on-campus residence; new roommate – international student; campus activities; university fit	Roommate issue; cultural differences; homesickness; self-doubt; culture shock
Rosalynn	Parents married; My mom is an executive for a multinational company; My dad is an entrepreneur	Paid college coach; Falcon recruiter; personal online research	Diverse group of friends; off-campus apartment after first semester	Roommate issue; homesickness; feeling vulnerable; culture shock
Eleanor	Parents married; My dad is a CEO, my mom works in the same family company	Falcon recruiter; personal research; campus visit	On-campus residence; campus engagement; friends – ALANA experience	Roommate issue; homesickness; culture shock
Jackie	My parents are divorced; my dad has law and accounting degrees; works in an accounting firm	Falcon recruiter; personal research; love for New England sports teams (ardent sports fan)	Welcoming campus; Open-minded; ardent sports fan	Cultural differences; misses step-brother and Brazilian dishes
Jimmy	My parents are divorced; mom is Ukrainian, dad is Ghanaian	HS alumnus / Falcon student presentation; HS counselor; scholarship	Welcoming campus; friends; fraternity; video games; IPA, RA	Homesickness; misses Ghanaian food; too much freedom
Bill	Parents married; my parents own their wholesale business	Falcon recruiter; personal research	Open-minded; IPA, mentor; friends; active on campus	Roommates dynamics

Note: HS = high school

Personal Background

The goal of the first interview was to establish a relationship between me [as researcher] and the interviewees. The interview questions were carefully constructed to elicit the participant's personal information before discussing issues that were pertinent to college integration and persistence. The following information was collected from student participants: countries of origin, countries of birth and residence, family background, age, perceptions of America and culture shock.

Country of Origin / Country of Birth / Residence

These three factors were intertwined and were better discussed together for clarity. The six student participants came from Africa (1), Asia (2), Caribbean (1), and Latin America (2). The countries of origin were: Brazil, China, Colombia, Ghana and Jamaica. However, three were born outside of their home countries, and two still resided in their countries of birth.

Betty and Jackie were born in Latin American countries of Colombia and Brazil respectively. In Colombia, Spanish was the official language and so Betty spoke Spanish fluently. She learned English while attending an American school in Colombia. She lived in Colombia all her life till she traveled to Falcon University, although there were occasional family vacations in the United States.

Jackie was born and raised in Brazil. She was an ardent sports fan and lived all her life in Brazil until she traveled to the United States for college. Her early exposure to an American School in Brazil helped in her acquisition of English language skills. She grew up speaking Portuguese and English.

Eleanor was born and raised in Jamaica. She had her elementary and high school education in Jamaica before traveling to the United States for undergraduate studies. She learned to speak English in her home country, Jamaica being an English-speaking country. She, just like Betty and Jackie left home and traveled to the United States for studies.

Rosalynn, Jimmy and Bill were exposed to other cultures at an early age. Although Rosalynn and Bill were Chinese, they were born and have lived outside of China all their lives in Latin American countries of Peru / Venezuela for Rosalynn and El Salvador for Bill. Both grew up speaking Chinese and Spanish. While Rosalynn attended an American School, Bill went to a British School where both were taught in English.

Jimmy on the other hand was born in Ukraine where he learned and spoke only the Russian language. He lived there until he was six, then his parents moved back to Ghana. It was in Ghana that he learned to speak in English.

Family Background

Even though each of the international student participants was foreign-born, their families were also culturally diverse. Jimmy's mom was from Ukraine while dad was from the Ashanti tribe in Ghana. Bill's parents were 100% Chinese but have lived outside of China in El Salvador for so long.

Except for Betty and Jackie where each one was the only child of their biological parents, the others had siblings. Also all the parents were still married except for Jimmy and Jackie, whose parents were divorced. But family meant a lot to all of them.

Although the student participants were international students, each one came from culturally diverse family background. They had lived and experienced different cultures before traveling to Falcon University and being immersed in the American culture.

Age

The six student participants were between the ages of 19 and 22. Although age was not specifically asked for during the interviews, some of the participants readily volunteered the information and the others I obtained from documents given to me by the International Office which showed international student demographic characteristics, including, age, program of study and country of birth / residence / citizenship. The information from the office corroborated the demographic information volunteered by participants during the interviews. They were all millennials having been born between 1981 and present.

Pre-Arrival Perception of America and Americans

All the participants were undergraduate students who had lived three to four years in the United States studying at Falcon University. They were all international students on the F-1 student visa status. Betty and Jackie who were seniors had lived the longest in the United States; the rest were juniors who had spent about three years in the country. Of the six, only Rosalynn had some concerns about Americans prior to arrival after checking a website that had anonymous postings about international students and Falcon University. The posting portrayed Falcon as a campus with cliques, especially among international students. This and other comments made Rosalynn apprehensive about her decision to study in the United States.

Because I am international right, so location is very important to us. Like you don't wanna go to a city [in the United States] or like a state that's very how they say it; predominantly white. Because it gets uncomfortable, honestly, right? -

Rosalynn

Rosalynn's experience as an Asian growing up in Latin America provided the lens through which she viewed her future experience in America and Falcon University. Moving from Peru where there was a bigger Asian population to Venezuela which had less, made her self-conscious, and "sticking out" of the crowd. The others did not report any anxiety about their new environment; instead they were excited about studying in the United States. Jimmy and Bill learned about the American culture through television and movies.

But I don't know, I felt more attracted here [United States]. I wanted to see what it's like here 'cause like well, I mean, I see it in TV shows and the movies, but I have to experience America for myself – Jimmy

... my only experience of the American culture was just actually through TV shows or those sitcoms that you would watch like Friends or How I Met Your Mother ... But in college it's so different because there's no actual college example in those shows – Bill

These forms of media – website, TV shows and movies, in some ways shaped the students' expectations of America and its culture and their personal goals. Betty also mentioned that she had been on vacations with family in America prior to studying here and those visits helped her to appreciate the American culture. Overall the participants'

impressions of America and the American culture were positive prior to arrival at Falcon University.

Culture Shock

Overall as juniors and seniors, the students were happy to have chosen Falcon University. As freshmen, they reported that the university community was welcoming with statements such as “everyone was nice”, “people were friendly.” The orientation programs were great; they were able to meet new people and make friends. However, they also expressed some disappointments and challenges after arrival on campus. Living at Falcon was the first experience of life in America for all of them except Betty who had visited on family vacations prior to enrollment. They were experiencing the American culture for the first time through the lenses of their knowledge of the Falcon campus, especially in their interactions with domestic [American] students.

Culture shock according to Lysgaard’s (1955) U-curve hypothesis occurs in stage two after the “Honeymoon phase” when a “foreigner’ is fully immersed in the new culture. The shock comes when confronted with the realities and stress of day-to-day adjustment issues which brings the clash between the known home culture and the dominant culture in the new environment. For the participants, the shocks were in different forms, but they were mainly experienced in: interpersonal communication, sharing space with room-mates, reactions to underage drinking and dealing with stereotypes among others. Although Rosalynn did not report having a construct of Americans prior to arrival at Falcon, as a freshman she received strong opinions about Americans from international students [friends] who were already at Falcon.

I never had pictures [constructs] of American people. But my friends ... were very vocal about dislike for American people, right? And it was maybe based on their personalities. I find it weird that ... my friends from ... around the world ... have a common understanding, regardless of our backgrounds, right? ... they [Americans] have a very specific way of being; they're very individualistic ... selfish in a way ... capitalist ... consumer oriented ... care a lot about how people see them; their image ... mean, I would say not specifically towards you, I don't know. That's what they [my friends] told me; Americans are horrible. Like don't even bother chilling with them, you know... – Rosalynn

All except Jackie and Jimmy had challenging experiences with American roommates. Jackie and Jimmy liked their roommates as freshmen and were able to build lasting friendships with them. Bill reported that he being adaptable did not internalize his experiences with the first roommates, nonetheless they were challenging. Betty, Rosalynn and Eleanor had very difficult experiences due to cultural differences. In fact for Rosalynn, the experience hastened the decision to move off-campus after first semester which was unusual among Falcon international students. Usually, international students spent the first year on-campus before moving off-campus.

To move out in the middle of an academic year results to paying high penalty fees for breaking meal plan and dormitory agreements. However, Rosalynn was frustrated enough to have agreed to the penalties in order to move off-campus after securing her parents' approval. Of all the participants, only Rosalynn lived off-campus in a rented apartment, others lived on-campus, and they advised students against moving off-campus because they would not maximize their college experiences.

Roommate issues

Interactions with American roommates with each coming from a different cultural background were fraught with misunderstandings. They saw the world around them through different lenses, or different “ways of knowing”.

Betty heard in passing in Colombia that Americans value their personal space. She did not understand the information until she experienced it with her roommate. Meeting her roommate for the first time in the company of her parents and the roommate’s parents, Betty with excitement reached out to greet the Latin American way with a kiss on the cheek.

I honestly didn’t have an idea that you shouldn’t go straight ahead and kiss the person on the cheek, so I did it with her mom, and she was fine. The adult was fine ... But with my roommate, she backed off ... and looked at me like what are you doing? It was very awkward. So with her, at the beginning I learned – Betty

According to Betty, that incident set off series of cultural misunderstandings between her and the roommate; and between her and other American students living on her dormitory floor. Betty and another were the only international students living on that floor. Other international students lived together in dormitories designated as Global Living Centers. She reported feeling out of place in many dormitory discussions because she had nothing to contribute when domestic students referred to their proms or homecomings in discussions with excitement.

Rosalynn and Eleanor too had “not so good” experiences with their roommates. Eleanor did not elaborate on the specifics of the experience but referred to the “irritating” experience at least twice in the course of the interviews. Rosalynn was most affected of

all by roommate issues. Despite reaching out to her roommate on Facebook prior to arrival, she discovered “... We were very different...I realized later on it wasn’t just her, it’s like culture-wise” – Rosalynn. Of all the interviewees, Rosalynn was the only one that moved off-campus, the rest lived on campus.

Drinking / partying on campus

All the participants except Jimmy expressed shock and disgust at the excessive on-campus partying and alcohol consumption among students, especially at Fraternity parties. The shock was specifically about the pattern of “drinking to get drunk” that was pervasive on campus. Jimmy liked frat parties, as freshman he pledged and became a “frat” member but quit in the second year on his dad’s advice. His dad did not approve of the “... concentration on drinking and partying” that went on in the fraternities.

No other participant was a frat member; they were observers. For them under-age drinking was ubiquitous in their countries and unlike the United States where legal drinking age is 21, in African, Asian, Caribbean or Latin American countries, under-age drinking was not a punishable offense according to the law. The students reported going out to clubs from the age of 16 with friends but they drank responsibly, to be “social” with friends, not to get drunk like their American peers.

I wasn’t used to frat parties ... Just going to a room and hanging out with people and maybe drinking or something, everything in a room, because the legal age is 21. I wasn’t used to that. At home, in Colombia, you’re used to going out ... since you’re 16. You go out with your friends, drinking in the house but it’s not like you drink every day ... That’s very common ... and not a big deal - Betty

But it's the whole weekend experience for Americans ... we always talk about this, the internationals. We were surprised that there were ambulances here for people who drank too much on Thursday at 6:00 PM. Most of us ... learn how to drink when we're younger. ... For me, I started drinking really young. I went to parties; I went clubbing. My parents knew; they were okay. ... So even as a freshman, I didn't believe in getting that drunk that I would need an ambulance to come get me, that early, or binge drinking. I would just drink to have fun with my friends ... – Rosalynn

All the participants had experienced underage drinking prior to coming to the United States. However, according to them, their culture of alcohol consumption was mild when compared to the campus culture of “binging” or “drinking to get drunk.” This was a major culture shock as reported by all except Jimmy.

Choice of U.S. College

In this category, I sought to understand the factors that influenced the students' choice of Falcon University. Why did they not choose a university in Australia, Asia, Europe, or other parts of the world or even pick one from their countries of origin, instead of America? The students presented many reasons for their American college choice ranging from family expectations, socioeconomic status, quality of education, prospects for future jobs, proximity to home, Falcon recruiting, college advising, college prestige, college location (city location), college size, class size, to personal ambition / adventure. However the common thread that ran through all or most of the students' stories were: family, socioeconomic status, quality of education / college prestige, Falcon recruiting and college advising.

Family

All the students except Jimmy were influenced by their parents in one way or the other to pursue university education in the United States. Jimmy's parents were at first not in agreement with his goal to travel abroad for education. They wanted him nearby. Perhaps, culturally, being the first son they did not want him out of their sight, but the substantial scholarship award for Honors program swayed them. Rosalynn's parents preferred American to European education for their student. Their perception was that America had the best education in the world. Bill's parents preferred America to Europe because they had family members in New York and Miami to take care of him and in case of emergency he could turn to them for assistance. Jackie's mother sent her daughter to an American school in Brazil to learn English since she could not speak it. Jackie grew to love America and wanted to study there. Betty had travelled on vacation with family to the United States and so naturally loved to return and study in the country.

Socioeconomic Status

International students normally paid full tuition at Falcon University except for students like Jimmy who received scholarship for Honors program and Betty with some merit scholarship award. These were the only times when college tuition was decreased. The average tuition plus living expenses at Falcon was over \$61,000. Therefore paying the full freight for an international student was pricey and so affordability depended on socioeconomic status. All the participants considered themselves to be in the middle or upper middle class of the socioeconomic stratum in their countries.

Their parents were either entrepreneurs managing family businesses or highly placed on their jobs such as: Eleanor whose parents managed (father was CEO) and

partly own a multi-national company in Jamaica; Betty whose father owned an Engineering firm in Colombia; Rosalynn whose father was an entrepreneur in Peru and mother was an executive in a multinational company; Jackie's mother's family owned several businesses in Brazil and father, who had law and accounting degrees was highly placed in an accounting firm; Bill's parents were business owners in El Salvador, they owned their wholesale and retail company which housed a restaurant, and Jimmy who although parents were in the upper middle class in Ghana, obtained substantial scholarship award from Falcon.

Well, I think it's more common for people who can afford to go away to college in Jamaica at least to go the United States 'cause there are just so many different options here [United States] versus other countries ... It's a very expensive thing to do. And Jamaica – well, economically I guess is not in the best state and the disparity in Jamaica is huge – Eleanor

I guess as an international student, you can see that for your parents spend a lot to send you here ... It's a big investment. It's a big effort that my parents are doing. Think about that ... just like in terms of money ... also spare money for you to spend. It's not the same spending dollars than spending pesos ... in terms of tuition and everything ... – Betty

When Rosalynn checked a popular website on student life at Falcon University, she found these stereotypes of international students posted: “international students are very stuck up”, “very rich kids”, “they always hang out together”, “Falcon's very cliquey”, “if you're not a part of their group, they won't talk to you” and so on. While these international students did not consider themselves to be “rich kids” from affluent homes,

the general perception on campus among domestic students was that they were. The perception had resulted into stereotyping of international students by local students who lived with them, observed their spending habits, and continued to wonder how their parents were able to pay full tuition and still afforded to accommodate the students' lavish lifestyles in the United States when they [international students] did not work on-campus or off-campus like them [American students].

Most international students, by the nature of the F-1 visa status were prohibited by the government from off-campus employment unless the job was curricular in nature, such as internships. Being a small university, Falcon had minimum on-campus employment and by law, preference was given to American citizens on Financial Aid. Most American parents could not afford to pay fully for Falcon's education and so the students applied for loans and / or Financial Aid from the government to supplement tuition payment and in addition sometimes worked off-campus after school hours and on weekends. So there was a general disparity on campus between international students and domestic students in terms of funding for Falcon education.

Quality of Education / College Prestige

The students and most parents felt that the quality of college education in the United States was second to none in the world. Plus, these students, according to the information volunteered during the interviews, knew in high school that they wanted to study business or related programs. Betty knew she wanted to study Economics; Jimmy wanted Finance; Rosalynn chose Marketing after discussions with her parents and the college tutor; Eleanor, who came from a family of entrepreneurs knew she would like to start her business someday majored in Marketing / Entrepreneurship; and Bill who was

majoring in Computer and Information Systems loved the infusion of business, technology and liberal arts which was Falcon University's signature model.

They believed that the quality of education in the United States at Falcon would earn them good jobs in the country after graduation. Jackie wanted to work with an American sports team in the New England region; Bill and Jimmy wanted to finish and find good-paying jobs in the United States. Eleanor, Betty and Rosalyn also looked forward to the future with similar ambitions.

Falcon Recruiting

Each student expressed satisfaction and feeling of importance that a Falcon University recruiter visited their high schools to present on the university. For many, that was the first time they ever heard about Falcon. However they all recalled the name of their recruiter or gave a description of the person to me. The fact that they vividly remembered the event showed how much impact it had on them. Not only did they receive a presentation, many of them met one-on-one with the recruiter to discuss their personal ambitions in terms of future career and the recruiter gave them more tips on the university, supplied links to them for further research on their proposed fields of study. They were impressed by their recruiters' patience, wealth of knowledge and outgoing personality. All the students, except Jimmy who was from Africa, had contacts with a Falcon recruiter.

A lot of universities gave presentations at my school in Jamaica; like they come from the United States; the international admissions counselors come to Jamaica. So Falcon was one of the schools that came and they gave a very in-depth

presentation on their school. So I got to know a lot about Falcon ... much more than ... any of the others that I just did my own research on ... – Eleanor

Falcon went to my high school when I was a junior, I believe, to talk about the campus. I remember that I loved it – seeing the presentation, I fell in love with the campus immediately. My best friend was watching next to me. She's like see, that's where you need to apply. That's so you. That's how I ended up coming to Falcon ...”– Jackie

And I met with this ... Greek lady from Falcon ... I never heard about Falcon before I came to this appointment ... and it was like the best interview of my life. Her personality was very similar to mine, but she was very lively; like outgoing; she was just very fun to talk to. ... And I had a feeling like if she was this way, right, then Falcon must be awesome too ... – Rosalynn

For Jimmy, Falcon was the only school he applied to in the New England region and the only business school of the few applications he sent and it happened that Falcon gave him scholarship and invitation into a prestigious program and according to him “It was an attraction. Definitely for my parents, it was an attraction ...” (Jimmy). Betty also knew someone from her high school colleague had gained admission into Falcon. That person gave her valuable information about the university which she found intriguing. She did her research online and the more she researched the more she liked the university and when she after application she was awarded some merit scholarship to Falcon. The scholarship was a factor for Betty in her decision to attend Falcon, “I also have a merit scholarship ... they give you because they're recognizing your academic excellence ...” (Betty).

College Advising

The students had some coaching or assistance with college applications. Many of the high schools had counselors who assisted with the process. They were counseled them based on their desired fields of study or the region of choice, helping the student to find the right institution within the chosen region of the United States that fitted the choice of study. They all reported some help to navigate this process from a counselor or coach. Jimmy reported his intent to apply to Falcon after listening to the high school graduate's presentation on Falcon University and his counselor put it on the map to show him its location. He subsequently took up the responsibility of giving Jimmy advice through the college application process.

Some of the students reported that their parents hired college tutors or coaches to guide them through the college application phase providing advising and structure to the process. Betty and Rosalynn's parents hired and paid the coach for this purpose. The coach may be local, as they were in both cases, and they were very knowledgeable about American colleges and universities. For Betty, the coach happened to have worked for Kaplan for many years and was the high school counselor for years before her replacement. When Betty was confused about Falcon University not offering Economics, it was her coach who guided her in the research and they later found that indeed Economics was offered by the university.

In Rosalynn's case the coach helped her to settle on a specific college major. Rosalynn alluded to the fact that she was someone who changed her mind often and so her choice changed rapidly from law, to fashion design, to marketing, and to fashion marketing. It was the college counselor who helped her to understand her parents' stance

of not studying fashion marketing because it was too narrow a program and jobs may have been hard to find after graduation. She then advised her to look into business because it is very wide and almost connected to everything. From the top 50 undergraduate business schools, the choices were narrowed down to three cities in the United States namely: a New England city, New York, and Washington D.C. When she met with Falcon University recruiter that was when it clicked that she really liked the university.

The students were able to further research schools with the guidance of their high school counselors or coaches. In essence, guidance through the college application process was either paid or voluntary.

Other Factors for U. S. College Choice

Other factors that influenced students' choice of university in the United States and Falcon University specifically included: personal goal, college size, campus location (city location) and proximity to home and personal adventure.

Social Integration

In this category I sought to understand how the students were able to integrate into the social life of college especially in the first year when they were new to the Falcon community. The interview questions were constructed to elicit the students' stories of how they integrated and became adjusted to the campus, including those factors that could have derailed their integration and how they were able to pull through. Wrapped in this category were issues of success, adjustment, challenges and coping mechanisms for different situations. From the students' experiences, the following factors were discussed to have affected their social integration to college: homesickness, ability to make friends,

language, campus engagement, time management, personality, self-confidence, cultural differences, accessing support, self-doubt, willingness to adapt, breaking away from co-nationals and isolation. Since research questions were structured in a way to understand the factors that facilitated and hindered social integration, the results of data analysis will be discussed under two sub-categories of facilitators of and hindrances to social integration.

Facilitators of Social Integration

International students form a diverse group based on their different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, their reactions to events in the new environment while interacting with the dominant culture may be different or at times similar. Coming into a new environment [United States] for international students could have been unnerving. Betty, Rosalynn, Jackie, and Jimmy experienced some anxiety and self-doubt prior to and upon arrival on campus. Betty's parents stayed with her for one week before departing and when they left Betty was frightened and began to second guess her decision to study in the United States - "... then they left, and then you feel like oh, my God, did I make the correct decision? Where am I? ... I felt out of place at the beginning ..." (Betty). Rosalynn was apprehensive prior to arrival and said "... I was like what if I don't make friends and everything. And when I got here, I was very nervous about that ... then I felt like what if I don't fit in, right?" Jackie said "... I'm gonna be the only one without a roommate. I'm gonna be the loser ... so I was very scared, but luckily, I didn't - it was fine." Jimmy said "... I was probably pretty anxious before I arrived. Once I came here, and I met a few people, it was very welcoming ..."

Bill and Eleanor did not express any apprehension about coming to a new environment during the interviews. However, of all the students, Eleanor was the only one who came for campus visit in the final year of high school and she liked the university. Bill took a year off after high school graduation, travelled to China alone to visit with extended family before traveling to Falcon. According to him, the visit to China alone for one year changed his orientation to a new environment and prepared him for easy transition to the new Falcon environment.

Making friends

The process of making friends was different for all the students. Rosalynn and Betty before arrival wondered if they would have friends, and although they felt vulnerable at the beginning, soon they made friends and began to adjust to college life. Looking back Rosalynn felt she fussed too much about making friends in the beginning. Betty complained at the onset that good friends were hard to come by because although she had acquaintances among American students, none of them translated into close friendships. Rosalynn and Betty did not hang out with co-nationals; their friends were international students from different countries.

Jackie made friends quickly and most of her friends too were international students. Although some have graduated, those remaining were still close friends with her in the senior year. Jimmy joined a fraternity as freshman and so he had many friends, both American and international students. Eleanor made friends quickly because she affiliated with the African American, Latin American, Asian American, Native American, and multiracial Americans (ALANA) program under the auspices of the Multicultural Center (MCC). The group consists mainly of second or third generation

immigrant students on campus. She became an active member of the group and established her presence at Falcon. Bill said “I’d say that it wasn’t hard for me to fit in. I actually had friends that were both domestic and international ...” They all expressed that their friends gave them stability at Falcon; friends were their support networks.

Campus social engagement

Many attributed their social integration to being active on campus. To them getting involved in clubs and organizations gave them focus and purpose while living on campus where there was so much freedom. They had varying involvement with campus organizations at the beginning. The level of involvement changed overtime due to academic loads. At some point Jackie was involved with the “Buddy” group under the Study Abroad Office. These students become buddies to exchange students who are at Falcon for a semester or two, very similar to the International Peer Advisers (IPA) program.

Rosalynn was once on the executive board of the Asian Students’ Association (ASA) but dropped out to devote more time to friends and academics. Jimmy was a frat member but was advised to drop out by dad due to the focus of the group on partying and drinking. He became very active in his prestigious academic program. Betty has since sophomore year been an IPA working with the International Office and new international students. Eleanor was active in ALANA from day one and continued to be. She was the vice president of Recognizing Everyone’s Attributes and Lifestyles (REAL) and very active in ALANA Student Advancement Program (ASAP) among others. Bill as freshman was active in the International Student Association (ISA) and continued to be, and in addition he was an IPA, Resident Assistant (RA) and Teaching Assistant (TA).

Personality / willingness to adapt

Each student's personality came into play in their social integration. Betty, Bill, Jackie, Rosalynn and Eleanor each mentioned they came with "open mind" and the willingness to adapt to a new culture. Jimmy said he was willing to try new things. The open mindedness reflected in their personalities that they were flexible, willing to change a few things to integrate into the new environment. All these students were able to break away from co-nationals. Some had a mixture of friends who were Americans and internationals; even those with mainly international friends, had friends from a variety of countries. Betty's friends were from Pakistan, India, and Hong Kong among others while she was from Colombia. These friends according to Betty have even organized trips to one another's countries signifying the depth of their friendships.

Every one of the students made few cultural changes to integrate successfully and what they could not change, they have devised ways of coping with. Rosalynn talked about lateness which was not a big issue in Latin America but she learned to be on time in the United States because it was the norm. Even though many of the participants were born in Latin America where greeting is a kiss on the cheek, they learned that in the United States greeting is done differently, mostly with handshakes, and so they have adapted. Eleanor, who never cooked, never did laundry, made her bed, washed dishes and so on because in her culture there were paid workers to perform these functions at home, has learned to do these in the United States. She began to make her bed, clean her space and has taken up many activities that demonstrated self-reliance in America. The students claimed they have grown significantly since moving to the United States. They viewed the changes they have made as positive steps toward maturity.

Institutional support

Institutional support has been strong on campus, said the students and echoed by the administrators. Many offices render services that assist new international students with social integration. The International Office is a center that advocates for international students on campus while the Multicultural Center (MCC) supports minority American students, including those in ALANA. According to the students, the ability to make friends, whether international or domestic, eased their social integration. The International Office IPA program has helped to facilitate the social integration of new students to college. The first friend new students could count on was their IPA. The students spoke highly of the IPA program.

The IPAs reached out to their assigned group of new international students prior to their arrivals to establish relationships with them, answer their questions and continued these after arrivals on campus. Jimmy recounted “When I arrived, probably the first person I met was my international peer advisor, who also happened to be from Ghana ...;” Jackie said, “... peer advisors is a good way to connect with the students. I know that mine helped me so much ... I had so many questions and I would e-mail her all the time ...;” Bill said “... the IPAs are a very good support system for international students ...;” The IPAs were “buddies” who showed new international students how to navigate campus life.

Hindrances to Social Integration

The issues of cultural misunderstanding, homesickness, feelings of isolation, self-doubt, culture shock, language barriers, lack of self confidence [feeling of vulnerability] and being overwhelmed, if allowed to fester, could have derailed the students' social integration to college life. For some, they developed coping systems to handle the potentially negative feelings. Jackie for example in her effort to communicate would think in Portuguese and speak her thoughts in English making mistakes or switching words. Her friends would laugh and say "What did you just say?" She learned to take it in strides by jokingly explaining herself to them.

Homesickness

All the students agreed that they were not able to rid themselves of homesickness but have found ways of coping. Betty said each time she returned to school from holidays, homesickness would hit her but she thought of the next visit and immediately got busy on campus. Being busy was a coping mechanism according to many of the students. Eleanor said being busy with activities and friends took her mind off home and centered it on other noteworthy activities. She, Betty and Jimmy said that being able to visit home often in the year also alleviated the pressure of homesickness.

Based on interview responses, students felt homesick being in an unknown, new environment. They all felt it at different times but each found coping mechanism to mitigate the feeling. Eleanor and the rest reported calling or using Facetime or Skype regularly to communicate with family members. They all reported that their friends were their "support systems", "second families" or "networks" on campus.

The administrators too echoed the same issues about homesickness for new international students. However, in their years of interactions with students, they found that it is a phase that soon passes once the student bonds with other students, faculty or staff on campus. This was the reason why their offices continued to offer services to international students, especially new students because the feeling of homesickness tends to be highest in the first year but with adequate support, the same students adapt and flourish on campus. Michelle mentioned that the ESOL Center would not hesitate to refer students to the Counseling Center, if they are not coping well and if any trace of depression is detected in them.

Culture

Cultural misunderstanding and culture shock affected many of the students in the beginning. Many had tough times with their roommates based on cultural differences that led to misunderstandings. Some relationships were salvaged, others resulted in major actions. An example was Rosalynn's cultural differences with her roommate that eventually led her to move off-campus into an apartment at the end of the first semester.

They all experienced culture shock but in different ways particularly in the area of underage drinking. They (except Jimmy) were surprised at what they saw happening on campus because their experiences with alcoholic beverages were totally different. While they adapted by tweaking their cultural orientations to align with the American culture, many of their cultural values were still intact. Bill referred to not changing "my values" many times in the second interview.

Hillary (administrator) when interviewed empathized with new international students as they face culture shock in general and said:

It's hard, I could not imagine what it could be like to be someone moving thousands of miles away from their family, from what has been familiar to them for the past 16 or 17 years and to be dropped off with a suitcase or two and say this is your home for the next 4 or 5 years, you'll come home for a month or two and then you'll go back. I am assuming it is a huge culture shock and so providing the ability to have these students well adjusted, and well-adjusted early, is important (Hillary).

Lack of self-confidence

For many international students, lack of self-confidence was camouflaged at the beginning of enrollment by shyness, quietness, self-isolation, or being withdrawn. These facades could also camouflage lack of fluency in English language. Eleanor stated at some point during the first interview that she noticed there were two sets of international students: those who speak English as a second language and those who come from English-speaking countries. She felt that those who come from non-English-speaking countries have a very different experience at Falcon because they tend to stick together and continue to speak their language. In her view, they do not fully integrate into college life, and they cling to co-nationals and speak their languages continually because they are uncomfortable speaking English language 24/7 while those who are able to speak English integrate and make new friends easily.

To her, the ability to communicate exudes self-confidence and along comes the ability to cross cultures on campus and make friends. According to Eleanor, the better the

student's English language skills, the greater the ability to communicate and the higher the probability of making friends quickly, even with domestic students.

Communication / language barrier

The ability to speak in English generally produces confidence in international students to carry on conversations with different people and the freedom to explore and mix with other national groups. Eleanor attributed part of her ability to make friends quickly to her fluency in English language. She was from the Caribbean and was able to mix with ALANA American students who were second generation Mexicans, Asians and Trinidadians and so on. She observed that the Africans who were from Anglophone countries were able to interact easily with American students too. Many Ghanaian and Nigerian students were friends with her, and other Caribbean and American students including ALANAns. To this end she concluded that co-nationals, especially students from Spanish- or Chinese-speaking countries, may be sticking together because speaking their languages may be their comfort level. They constantly spoke their languages for fear of making mistakes and being embarrassed when speaking in English.

Feeling overwhelmed

The students reported feeling overwhelmed especially in the freshman year for different reasons. Betty and Rosalynn were overwhelmed by the size of the campus, which they considered relatively small as time went on. Bill was overwhelmed with friends when he felt they did not support him enough when he battled mild depression as a sophomore. Rosalynn was overwhelmed with school work due to language barrier and would breakdown crying many times. Jimmy was frustrated with a class where he felt his voice was suppressed by the professor. Eleanor, Betty and Rosalynn were frustrated with

their roommates at the beginning. Jackie would feel overwhelmed and sad for parting with her little stepbrother each time she travelled to school. She missed him a lot. Each one of the students has felt overwhelmed at different times for different reasons especially in the first year but have been able to cope with the support of friends. Even Bill who was disappointed with his friends, left them and found new ones.

Analysis of Student Participant Academic Integration and Persistence

The categories of academic integration and persistence were further analyzed to reveal the commonalities among the students' stories. Table 9 represented an overview of these categories and common threads.

Table 9: Analysis of academic integration and persistence

Participants	Academic Integration (Facilitators)	Academic Integration (Hindrances)	Persistence (Facilitators)	Persistence (Hindrances)
Betty	Friends, ESOL center, faculty support, institutional expectation, strong college preparation	Language barrier, lack of self-confidence	Family pride, friends, parental support, self-motivation, institutional influences (merit scholarship)	Loss of: academic focus, values (excessive drinking / use of illicit drugs)
Rosalynn	Friends, personal determination, faculty support, ESOL center	Language barrier, lack of business background, academic difficulty, extended study time / test taking, lack of self confidence, procrastination	Sense of responsibility/ accomplishment, values, self-motivation, personal goals; job, friends	Academic failure
Eleanor	Friends, institutional support, strong college preparation	New classroom etiquettes	Family support, self-motivation, personal goal, friends, campus engagement	Academic problems
Jackie	Friends, organizational skills', values	Language barrier, new educational system	Personal goal, university fit, friends, New England city, values, job	Friends; Financial problems
Jimmy	Friends, institutional expectation, strong college preparation	Procrastination, imbalance of work / play	Parental support, university fit, self – motivation, job, personality, friends, institutional influences	Academic failure, financial issues, homesickness
Bill	Friends, personality, values, self-confidence, college preparation, time management skills	Lack of time management skills	Parental support, self-motivation, personal goals, values, job, parents' retirement	Loss of values and academic focus, health issues

Academic Integration

In this category I sought to understand how academically adjusted the students were at Falcon University. The interview questions were: (1) Tell me how you have been adjusting to Falcon University academically? What factors have helped you so far to be academically adjusted [integrated]? (2) In what ways could you have been more academically involved and what were those things that held you back? The in-depth interview questions meant to provoke some deep thinking about the factors that aided their academic integration and those that were hindrances. From the students' stories, the following factors emerged as stimulators of academic integration: High school preparation; personal motivation; friends and peer-competition; parental pressure; time management; and institutional support. While language barrier; lack of self-confidence; unfamiliarity with the American system, new classroom etiquette; unfamiliarity with technical terminologies, extended studying time and freedom were potential inhibitors.

Facilitators of Academic Integration

High school preparation

The students attributed their academic integration to high school college preparation. Bill attributed his academic success to taking the two-year international baccalaureate (IB) program in high school. Aside from the advanced course materials, equivalent to college courses, taught in these classes, the program according to Bill taught him other softer skills such as time management and organizational skills which he needed to cope with the heavy workload, and which were applicable to college.

Betty participated in the Advanced Program (AP) and took the courses. She recalled the days of long essays and rigorous course contents which like Bill, had

conditioned her for college academics. Eleanor too enrolled in the IB program just like Bill. Jimmy too remembered the hard work he put into the West African School Certificate (WASC) examinations paid off because he could cope with college-level courses. In addition, these students transferred IB, AP and WASC credits to the university because many of these courses were college-level courses.

Therefore high school preparation positively affected international student college academic integration.

Parental pressure

Some admitted their parents put pressure on them to perform well in college and so they worked hard to make their families proud of them. Jackie said, “My father always told me that getting good grades is not an option; it’s my job. Whenever I got a bad grade, I wouldn’t hear the end of it ...” and Jimmy echoed the same thing.

I think probably more there was definitely family support; but more in the sense that if you don’t get good grades, we’ll kill you [be on your case] ... You should do well. [Laughter] But it’s fine. My parents are my parents. They’ve been a little bit strict sometimes; but it’s fine ... – Jimmy

Friends

Friends contributed to the students’ academic integration because for some, they studied together and so any difficult topic could be explained by someone within the group. Rosalynn reported that her friends encouraged her many times when she felt like giving up. Jimmy and Bill reported that among their friends there was healthy competition that motivated them to perform better than the rest.

... I happen to like my roommates ... they're pretty smart kids. So we're all a little competitive on that level ... So that naturally gives me more determination to do better ... Jimmy

... and actually I'd say that international students are very competitive ... with their academics so we would always be asking how did you do on the exam or something like that ... international students come from that same background taking either APs or IBs and that's why we're very competitive ... – Bill

Self-motivation

I found that the students were determined to succeed in college and so they were motivated to integrate academically through personal motivation or self-motivation or self-determination. Even in the face of difficulties, they did everything they could to pull through.

I think maybe I'm just self-motivated; I've just kept up with it. And I know if I need to, I've definitely been to the Ace Lab. I've been to the Econ Lab for help; it hasn't just been like oh, I'll just figure it all myself ... – Eleanor

Now, it's not that easy, but I'm not as scared about it as much ... I think I got through it through determination, self-motivation. I can't fail ... Doing bad is not an option. I just push myself through it ... – Rosalynn

Personal motivation, I would also say ... But then as time goes by, it gets harder, so that's when you realize oh, it's not a breeze or anything. So you have to put a lot – from your part, I would say ... – Betty

... Self-motivation because I really want to succeed, I really want to find a job after I graduate and ... I know that academics actually helps you a lot ... – Bill

Time management and organizational skills

Time management and organizational skills according to the participants have facilitated their academic integration. Jimmy, Eleanor and Jackie said their abilities to organize their class schedules and pick classes suitable for their needs have resulted in their academic success. Jimmy did not perform as well as he expected in the first semester partly because early morning classes were picked for him. He admitted to not being a “morning” person and so he missed classes because he overslept. But since taking over the responsibility of choosing his own classes, he has adjusted better academically. Having the tendency to procrastinate, Jimmy learned to maintain a “healthy balance” between academics and socials.

Jackie was so organized; she constructed a personalized four-year plan and placed required courses for her major and two minors in the sequence of offering to guide her registration from one semester to another.

Bill admitted that in the first year, his time was just for studying and a measure of social activities. Also taking the AP, IB or equivalents in high school has taught the students time management and to be better organized.

Institutional support

Falcon University’s institutional support was praised by the students and administrators. They all agreed that Falcon has put support for everything in place for international students, including the ESOL Center for non-native English language speakers. As upperclassmen, the students were aware of campus resources but some admitted that as freshmen they did not know where to find them. Out of those who knew, some sought help from these offices when needed, others knowingly did not.

Jackie for example reported she did not seek help out of shyness, plus, she was afraid of being labeled “not smart” and so she struggled on her own. Betty sought help in the beginning but now she does not use it much because “Right now, maybe you are just used to doing everything by yourself. But at the beginning I did.” Jimmy too felt he should have used the support services more than he did as a freshman. Eleanor, Bill and Rosalynn used the services, especially tutoring, to an extent.

The administrators confirmed that support at Falcon included: tutoring lab, other labs for math, accounting, finance, computer and other required courses at Falcon, the Writing Center and ESOL Center, Academic Services Center for undergraduates, Graduate Services for graduate students, Career Center, International Office, Health and Wellness Center, Counseling Center and the First Year Seminar course that was created specifically for freshmen among others.

The ESOL, I took both classes for second-language students. It was of great help because the professor understood where you’re coming from ... Actually, I keep thinking about that class because it’s the one class at Falcon that I didn’t want to finish. It was such a nice thing. She’s an amazing person, herself ... – Betty

I used the tutoring of the accounting tutoring for GBs. At the beginning, I went to a math tutor. I went a lot to the sandbox for the computer, for IT and all of that ...

I feel like there are so many resources at Falcon that you can use. Most people don’t. Most internationals, I feel, don’t use it enough, but there are the resources, if you ask me ... – Betty

First Year Seminar course

The course was created specifically for first time freshmen to teach all the nuances of college life, the social and academic aspects. Being classes of first year students, there are opportunities for bonding between students. The course also helps them to understand that the anxiety of college life is not peculiar to the student alone, but that it is shared by the entire new student population.

Students were encouraged to share their feelings regarding integration in class and this has been an eye opener to many first year students that everyone goes through the pain of integration. The course also brought practical discussions on the differences between college and high school in so the students could begin to re-orient their minds and to begin to college as it is.

As students and administrators have confirmed, Falcon has adequate assistance for every academic issue. In addition, the International Office, as they all reported was available for their immigration and other advising needs. So they did not need to worry about not being in compliance with the law.

Support from faculty

Professors posted their office hours on syllabi and often talked about this in class to students. Faculty support as reported was always available at Falcon. Many used it, some did not. Even those who did not use it confirmed there was ample support from faculty. Rosalynn said, "... one thing I like about my Falcon teachers, most of them, 99% let's say, they're very helpful. They're open, they're very approachable ...," Bill said, "... the professors are very nice" and a kind of "support system." Betty said,

“There are some professors that encourage you to always do your best ...

Professor Michelle [pseudonym], I took her for both of my writing classes ... She always encouraged you to be the best you can be ... When you have a professor like that, you say okay, I can do it ...” – Betty

Hindrances to Academic Integration

Lack of college preparation from high school, language barrier, unfamiliarity with the American educational system, extended study time, unfamiliarity with technical terms, new classroom etiquette, freedom, procrastination and lack of self-confidence among others were the reasons students gave as barriers to academic integration.

Lack of high school college preparation

While most of the students reported excellent high school preparation for college, Rosalynn’s case was different; she had minimal prior exposure to business courses and so academics were tough in the first year.

It was really hard. I’ve never struggled much with schoolwork; I’ve always been good at doing what I do. I’m like – in a certain way like a good student; like I used to get good grades. But my school, like I said, it was in Spanish. All my classes were in Spanish. Our curriculum is different. I never took a business class before college. Like we didn’t have the option of picking business; you were either science or humanities ... – Rosalynn

Rosalynn characterized academics in the first year as “hard”, “frustrating”, “just too overwhelming”, plus, she had constant “melt-downs” just crying because of the serious challenges.

Difficulty with English language

Betty, Jackie and Rosalynn of all the interviewees reported difficulty with English language as freshmen. Jackie was able to cope with classes and did not need to register for the two ESOL Writing courses. Betty and Rosalynn were enrolled in the ESOL courses with other international students from non-English speaking countries who needed help with writing. There they were taught not only the rudiments of writing but also interpersonal communication, how to present, public speaking, and cultural communication.

Betty and Jackie soon caught up, moved on to become academically successful but Rosalynn's case was unique. Not only did she struggle with lack of high school preparation and unfamiliarity with business courses, her language barrier further compounded her problem. She admitted that it took one year of not giving up to be

Lack of self-confidence: no class participation

Betty, Rosalynn, and Jackie [from Asia / Latin America] the same students who expressed difficulty with English language, reported feeling intimidated in class. They cited lack of confidence in their language skills and so did not participate much in classes as freshmen. They were afraid they would make mistakes, sound funny to peers, or that their contributions may not make sense. As a result, they kept quiet in classes.

From the students, English language barrier led to lack of self-confidence, which led to intimidation and no class participation for these students. Eleanor, Jim and Bill with strong language skills were able to adjust to college academics quickly.

Extended study hours with no comprehension

Rosalynn of all the students had a hard time studying and comprehending the materials due to serious language barrier which was more severe than what Betty and Jackie reported. Consequently it took her long hours to cover reading assignments.

I had - an abnormal psychology class; it was one of the hardest apparently. It was as lot of reading. And it bothered me that it took me so long to read a chapter; they assign you chapters of books that you're supposed to read. You dedicate two hours of studying to one hour of class. It took me two hours to go through five pages of the book because I can read it, but I won't remember what it is saying. Because the language, right? It doesn't like sink on me what they're trying to convey; the meaning of what I'm reading. So I have to like re-read it again; one paragraph, like read, read, read ... what these words means. And that was very hard. It took me a very long time ... I was having meltdowns" – Rosalynn

Rosalynn also reported difficulties with test taking and new terminologies in courses such as Finance due to language barrier and no exposure to business courses prior to college. Consequently, terminologies such as Return on Investment (ROI) or Future Value of Money (FVM) which professors assumed were part of basic knowledge and did not need to teach, were new to her and many times she left class very confused. Also at the beginning she did not understand test questions, so she read the questions over and over which usually led to extended test taking time and in the end she still would not perform well. She reported often meltdowns, just breaking down crying that she was not going to make it.

While grappling with language barrier and its consequences, they [Betty, Jackie and Rosalynn] also reported unfamiliarity with American educational system. The concept of grade point average (GPA) calculation was new to them. Maybe not completely new to Betty, but in her American high school, GPA was based on five [5] not four [4]. It took her and her parents time to adapt to the new grading system. For Jackie, in her culture people did not care about GPA, they only cared about the student graduating from college. So the emphasis on grades in the American system was new to her. Jackie said, “For me understanding that a GPA actually makes a difference was such a hard idea; like a hard concept because back home, no one cares what grade you had in college ... You graduated; that’s what matters.”

New classroom etiquette

Coming to America meant getting used to a new culture, including new classroom etiquettes. Examples of the practices international students found uncomfortable were:

- a) Professors asking students to address them using their first names:

“... one thing I realized immediately coming to America is that ... my culture ... other cultures as well are much more respectful cultures than American culture. American culture is much more casual so calling a professor by their first name is absurd to me. It makes me feel very uncomfortable ...” - Eleanor

- b) Not requesting permission to leave the classroom was new to many of the students, including Eleanor, Jimmy and Rosalynn. Eleanor said, “... you’d ask to go to the bathroom and here you just get up and walk out. And I still feel weird doing it; I just feel like it’s almost disrespectful ...” - Eleanor

Jimmy also said, “You didn’t have to raise your hand to go to the bathroom anymore. You were freer ...”

c) Professors were more formal than high school teachers. Plus, professors were stricter than high school teachers and deadlines were upheld.

The professors also were very unlike the teachers at home ... teachers at home were more personal; they were kind of like your uncle or your grandma. ... here it’s more of a professional setting ... less casual and more formal, especially with the professor ... – Jimmy

If you didn’t do your homework, your professor wouldn’t chase you and beg you to bring it in next week. They would just kind of tell you that you didn’t hand in your homework. This was the deadline. You have two more days, but you lose points. ... I think is better; because it holds you accountable for your actions ...

Just the way it is in the business world – Jimmy

Class participation was new to some but not to the others. However, those who had challenges with the language, specifically, Jackie, Rosalynn and Betty, reported they did not participate much at the beginning due to the fear of not sounding “not smart” before their peers. Basically lack of confidence in their communication abilities held them back until they became more comfortable, plus, non participation was costing them good grades in their courses.

Persistence

The main goal of this category was to understand what kept the international students in school in spite of the serious challenges they faced in the new environment in the early years of enrollment when some had dropped out of college for various reasons.

These in-depth interview questions to them: (a) Was there any time as a freshman or sophomore you were frustrated with college and you felt like leaving? Tell me why you felt that way? What changed your mind and made you continue? (b) What kept you grounded (made you stay) in college then and all these years? (c) Have you gained support from anyone or anywhere that has helped you this far in college?

The issue of persistence was real among these students because they had persisted from freshman year to junior and senior years. The interview questions were structured based on the fourth research question which asked: What factors facilitate or hinder an international student's persistence in college? The students' responses were grouped under facilitators of and hindrances to persistence.

None of the students reported ever coming close to dropping out of Falcon University. They agreed there were times of difficulties and frustrations, even meltdowns but nothing close to packing up and leaving. However, some of them knew students who had dropped out and they shared reasons for their departures with me. These reasons were discussed under hindrances to persistence. Below are the students' responses to the question on the factors that facilitated their persistence in college

Facilitators of Persistence

When asked about the factors that were facilitators to college persistence for the students, their responses included the following: sense of responsibility, family pride, parental support, friends, self-motivation, sense of responsibility, future accomplishment, personal goals, university fit, institutional influences, personality, personal mantra, adaptability, career, giving back, family expectations, campus engagement, upbringing and values. The factors which were common to all the participants were: self-motivation

and personal goals, pride, parental support, friends, institutional influences / support and future career (vision of the future).

Self-motivation and personal goals

All the participants mentioned to me that they were self-motivated to stay in college even when they were confronted with serious integration challenges. They all had goals of what they wanted the future to be. Self-motivation was the force that kept them focused on the goals they had outlined for themselves. The ability to be self-motivated hinges on the longing for something (goals) to be attained. For the students they longed for their personal goals, such as, to excel academically, earn good grades and GPAs, to be good stewards of their parents' investments on their education, to have that sense of accomplishment that they completed what had been started, graduation, to secure good American jobs, to care for parents' retirement, and so on. The students had different personal goals, though many were similar.

They all were motivated and did not succumb to pressures that would have derailed them in college. Even when the going was tough, they remained focused on their personal goals, including building successful careers in the United States. This was part of the student's personal or parental goals for wanting to study in the United States. Rosalynn put it this way, "It's ... your main purpose in life, but academically, that's your goal - to get into a good college ... to get good grades to get a good job." Eleanor said, "...I'm a very self-motivated person. Dropping out ... has never really crossed my mind because I want my education, I know I need to get it." The students were committed to finishing their education and knew how essential it was for the future.

Pride

Many expressed that pride, be it family pride or personal-pride was responsible for not dropping out of college. Betty said “I never reached the point to be Mom and Dad, I want to come back, but I think it’s also pride – family pride”. She also said, “Family pride ... that’s a big part because you don’t wanna fail your parents”. Jimmy said, “... I definitely had a few professors that I really liked, and maybe would have wanted to make them proud, or impress them. So that helped ...” He wanted to impress those professors he liked and looked up to.

The others too expressed pride in different ways. Jackie would not want to let her father down and she said, “My father always told me that getting good grades is not an option; it’s my job” For many, pulling out of school without earning a degree and returning home would have been an embarrassment for their families because their societies would have frowned on such. Jackie once said that in Brazil, GPAs did not matter; people cared more about the student finishing school and earning the degree. Similarly in other Latin American and African cultures as expressed by the students, parents and students take pride in completing their degrees. Therefore doing otherwise would have been negatively perceived.

The students also expressed that having determined their personal goals and were self-motivated to accomplish these goals, they wanted to feel proud of themselves that they preserved through all the challenges and made it by earning their degrees. To them, leaving college was not an option.

Parental support

They all acknowledged coming this far had been largely due to their family or parental support. They expressed that paying for Falcon expenses and their spending were not cheap and by their parents making the payments without failing gave them peace of mind to concentrate on their studies. They also expressed the understanding that these payments were like “investments,” their parents were investing on them. Maybe because they were business students they talked about such investments paying off by them finishing college and making their families proud. Betty said,

Parents send you here ... more than anything ... to academically excel. It's a big investment. It's a big effort ... think about that. I can't just be changing majors or taking a semester off. I don't know. I think a lot about my parents, in that sense” – Betty

Eleanor said, “... My family would definitely play a big part. They want the best for me, and I want the best myself” Jimmy, in spite of his scholarship award still understood the magnitude of his parents' expenses on his education and their expectations for him to complete college and he expressed it like this, “It's expected of me for one by my parents. They've already paid this far; like I'm not gonna just drop out and not get a degree ...” Bill stated the factor responsible for his persistence succinctly,

But the reason why I'm always here ... is because I really have my parents' faith and ... confidence. And I know that me being here is an investment for them.

And I wanna make sure that their investment is worth it” – Bill

Friends

Just as friends was a factor in social and academic integrations, the students also stated that their friends' network, support and expectations helped them to persist in college. Jackie expressed how each time she visited home, she looked forward to returning to campus to be with her friends again. Betty, Eleanor and Rosalynn were grateful that they had friends who were there for them throughout college.

Jimmy and Bill spoke of their friends in terms of the on-going academic competition they had and not only were they motivated through those to excel academically, they enjoyed them. Both acknowledged that their persistence were partly due to these "good, smart and highly competitive" friends. Although Bill had to change friends as a sophomore, he had a core of close friends made up of international students.

Institutional support

Jimmy and Betty expressed this factor as the institutional scholarship awards they received throughout college. The high GPA expectations for their programs, they said were partly responsible for their persistence. Being that the awards were substantial and they eased their family expenses on Falcon education, they were determined not to lose them. Even when Jimmy came close to losing it as a freshman, he quickly regrouped and pulled his GPA up the following semester. These awards also were sources of pride to them and their families. Their motivation to want to excel for the awards, kept them in college all through.

The institutional support for international students was superb. Both students and administrators stated this in their interviews. Hillary mentioned,

I think we do a good job ... for all the work that we all do [I think there is always room for improvement] ... definitely I have seen the changes in the last two or three years of sort of getting international students more ingrained to American customs and traditions and sort of getting them to understand how it does feel to work and operate in U.S. culture and what that education looks like – Hillary

The students acknowledged that they had ample support on campus. Support for academics, including support to overcome language barrier was provided by the ESOL Center, supportive faculty, Academic Services, Peer Tutoring and so on; emotional support was provided by the Counseling Center, MCC, Health and Wellness Center and so on; and immigration services by the International Office which in addition served as a “safe haven” for them.

Future Career (vision of the future)

Bearing in mind that these students and their parents planned from the beginning to stay competitive by studying in America and securing good jobs after graduation, they did not waiver from their goal of building future careers in the United States. They were laser focused on it and that kept them going. Even when faced with challenges, they sort help to overcome the difficulties in order to finish and secure good jobs. American jobs were number one on the list of the students, although some such as Jackie expressed that not getting an American job would be disappointing, she would return home and find a multinational company that would value her bilingual skills in Portuguese and English, and her American degree, and work with them.

The students unanimously felt that their American degrees were premium and with them, they could maintain the competitive edge in finding jobs the United States and

anywhere in the world. Becoming employed in the United States was number one on their wish lists. Bill expressed that he worked hard on his GPA to make him attractive to employers because certain jobs he had seen had posted preferred GPAs and they were high GPAs. By maintaining high GPA he wanted to position himself above the rest for such jobs. His desire was to secure a good-paying job in America so he could afford to take care of his parents when they retire.

Part of their family pride as they stated was the ability to secure good jobs in America. They felt by then all their efforts and their parents or family support would have paid off. Just as Rosalynn stated and was echoed by others in different ways, they knew what they wanted to achieve in life and college education was the means of getting there.

Hindrances to Persistence

Being persisters, the international student participants could not volunteer personal experiences of college dropout; however, they had observed peers who had quit college for various reasons. Therefore this section on hindrances to persistence was based on third-party experiences volunteered by the students and confirmed by the administrator participants. The factors that hindered persistence were homesickness, loss of academic focus, health problems and financial challenges. All the other sections of this study were based on first-hand experiences of the six student participants and two administrators.

Homesickness

Homesickness is a strong, natural, recurring, negative feeling for international students and was part of the common factors under social integration. In fact, Rosalynn in her interviews referred to it as a “distraction” to academic integration because when a

student is homesick, he or she is not able to focus on the essentials but just thinking about home. Homesickness, as confirmed by the administrators also, was commonplace among international students. Being a stressor, in an attempt to alleviate its effects, an international student could overcompensate by clinging to new friends or by self-alienating to the detriment of academics. Whichever it is, homesickness is a distraction because those times used to socialize or hid from people could have been spent concentrating on studies. Homesickness was inevitable, as expressed by the students but instead of self-alienation, the students employed constructive activities to control it.

As the participants have expressed, one way of reducing homesickness is by making friends, the second is by getting busy, becoming involved in campus activities, as mentioned by Eleanor and Bill who were actively engaged in campus organizations. In her advice to new students, Eleanor recommended campus engagement as a sure way of meeting and making new friends. Making friends obviously helped the students to curb homesickness by reducing it to an inconsequential level.

Academic issues

International students usually come with strong motivation and personal goals of excelling in college and eventually graduating. Such focus could be lost due to many reasons. According to the students' accounts, some have lost focus due to excessive freedom, partying, mixing with the wrong crowd, and experimentations with alcohol and drugs in college among others. The gross imbalance between socials and academics, where it weighs more on socials, has resulted in academic probation, suspensions and eventually dismissal for some international students. In some cases, severe homesickness and inability to cope with daily stresses have resulted in absences from classes and

subsequent academic problems. These students failed to integrate academically, and so have failed to academically succeed in college.

Betty recalled an international student who ran with the wrong group on campus. The peer pressure led him down the path of excessive drinking and use of drugs. She remembered him to be a decent and gifted student initially but as time went on, he could not cope with schoolwork. His parents eventually came and withdrew him out of Falcon. She recalled this is a sad tone, as if grieving for the student, In the end she said, “it’s a shame.”

Health problems

Students have been incapacitated from attending classes and integrating academically due to health problems. Some were sudden, as in the case of an international student who developed brain aneurysm. He had to abandon his studies to give room to series of surgeries. Some other health issues were chronic and existed before enrollment at Falcon. International students with pre-existing conditions or some neurological diseases have had to abandon their studies due to the stress of college especially in early enrollment.

Financial challenges

Being a Falcon student is not cheap. It is a huge investment for parents who are generally the sponsors of international students’ education. The students shared knowledge of students who had dropped out of Falcon due to family financial constraints and tuition payment from one semester to the other ensued. Such set-backs must have weighed heavily on the student’s mind. The peace of mind that he or she once enjoyed

that augured well for academic focus and concentration was suddenly taken away. In such cases, the students were recalled home to continue studies in their home countries.

The discussed hindrances to persistence hinged on students' academic performance most of the time. Even those that began as health, adjustment, or financial issues, escalated to withdrawal from college once they significantly affected academic integration. If students had been able to keep these issues from adversely affecting their class attendance, grades and GPAs, then the problems would not have risen to status academic probation, suspension or dismissal from the university. This shows the importance of academic integration above all other issues. The categories of advice to new students and future plans were further analyzed to reveal common factors among the responses of the participants. These were represented in Table 10.

Table 10: Analysis of advice to new students and future plans

Participants	Advice to new students	Future plans
Betty	Research the university; there is help for everything, including academics at Falcon; seek help when needed be open-minded and ready to adapt; stop whining about living in a dorm.	I want to proceed to graduate school and earn my masters in Business Administration degree; engage in OPT and hopefully work in the United States.
Rosalynn	Get involved on campus; use office hours posted by professors'; study hard; force yourself to participate in class; you will make friends, don't stress.	The plan is to finally get a job in the United States after OPT.
Eleanor	Get involved on campus; if you are from a non-English speaking country, don't just stick to your co-nationals, reach out to other groups on campus and don't move off campus.	It will be OPT first and then I hope to work in the United States. If not, then I will return to work with my family in Jamaica.
Jackie	Don't be afraid to get out of your comfort zone; study hard; have an open-mind, talk to your professors.	I hope to eventually land a job with an American sports team in New England. If not, I will return to Brazil but not work for my mom's family.
Jimmy	Attend events and meet new people; take classes that interest you; participate in class.	I believe I will find a good job in the United States in Financial Services industry.
Bill	Be active on campus, meet new people; there will be challenges but don't be afraid be open-minded; be ready to adapt to new things; use support system – IPA, RA, Academic Services.	My goal is to secure a good-paying job in the United States to be able to take care of my parents and brother.

Note: OPT = optional practical training

Advice to New International Students

The students volunteered advice to new international students based on their experiences, including warnings to them not to repeat the mistakes they made as freshmen and sophomores. There was a resounding reference to “Get involved on campus” and other advice included: do not be afraid to meet new people; do not stick to your co-nationals; seek help when needed, there is help for everything at Falcon; keep an open-mind; use faculty’s office hours; study hard; force yourself to participate in class; do not move off-campus; be ready to adapt to new things; and use support system – IPA, RA, Academic Services and others.

Future Plans

All the students looked forward to graduating and securing good jobs in the United States. Those goals when finally fulfilled would be “dreams come true” for them. For these reasons, they remained focused on their academics in college. Bill went a step further by saying he worked hard on his GPA because he felt securing a really good job would sometimes come down to who had the best GPA.

Analysis of Student Participant Recommendations to the Institution and International Office

The categories representing the students’ recommendations to Falcon University and the International Office were further analyzed to reveal the common factors contained therein. Table 11 showed an overview of the common factors.

Table 11: Analysis of recommendations to the institution and International Office

Participants	Recommendations to Institution	Recommendations to the International Office
Betty	There is a need for cultural sensitivity training and workshop on traditions across the globe for domestic students.	Re-introduce events such as “ice cream socials” for more interactions. Thank you.
Rosalynn	Please place all new international students in the Global Living Centers – Miller, Orchard North.	Encourage new students to join clubs. It will help them to adjust faster.
Eleanor	While it is true that there are resources for new students at Falcon for almost everything, it is important to assist new students to understand the functions and locations of these offices.	Monthly meeting between IPAs, their students and International Office staff will help new students with transition issues.
Jackie	Are all the general business requirements really necessary for non-business majors?	The IPA program is wonderful. Please continue to offer it to new students.
Jimmy	I enjoyed the August Welcome Programs by the International Office and Honors program.	Could you extend the role of IPAs to cover one year?
Bill	It will be nice for the university to offer diversity training to domestic students or encourage them more to go on study abroad programs.	More meetings for IPAs and International Office staff. IPAs need more opportunities to bring their students to meetings for more interactions.

Recommendations to the International Office

While many expressed their gratitude to Falcon for creating the International Office to assist them in college with many things especially their immigration compliance, they noticed a few things could be tweaked for better performance. Betty advocated for more programs like the ice cream socials to increase interactions between international and domestic students. Rosalynn wanted the office to encourage new students to join clubs because such would help them to adjust fast. Eleanor and Bill wanted to see monthly meetings between IPAs, their students and the International Office staff. That way the new students would begin to bond with staff on campus. All the students liked the IPA program. Jackie wanted the office to continue to offer it to new students and Jimmy wanted the program extended to cover the first year of enrollment and not just the fall semester.

Recommendations to the University

The general consensus among the students was that domestic students needed to be more tolerance to other cultures on campus. The problems most of them had with roommates could be traced to lack of cultural misunderstandings on the part of American students who had not engaged in study abroad programs. The students were able to separate study abroad participants from those who had not engaged in such because study abroad participants were more sensitive to cultural differences.

They therefore advocated that the university provide cultural or diversity training to its domestic students as a way of preparing them for the 21st century workplace where real diversity exists. Perhaps one of the ways to educate domestic students on cultures would be to send them on study abroad programs. Bill was very emphatic that study

abroad participants were very different from the regular domestic students in that they are more accepting of other cultures, they were open-minded.

International students wanted to see more interactions between them and domestic students hoping that such would aid cultural understanding and breaking down of stereotypes. But they also wanted to live with other international students especially in the first year when they are new because they have commonalities. After the first year, they could be allowed to choose their roommates. This they felt would allow first year international students to settle in without those roommate problems, and once they have settled and found their voice on campus, and then they could begin to live with domestic students.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the profiles of the six student participants. Nine categories, mainly personal background, choice of American college, social integration (facilitators and hindrances), academic integration (facilitators and hindrances), college persistence (facilitators and hindrances), future plans, advice to new students and recommendations for the International Office and the university were developed. The development of categories as established in the interview protocols and the common factors contained therein were results of in-depth study and organization of students' and administrators' interview transcripts, documents obtained from the International Office, field notes on international student observations and journals which documented information on the site of study and some reflections on the study.

Chapter 5 presents a rich discussion of analyzed data, while drawing conclusions and making recommendations for future studies based on existing literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 1 gave a snapshot of international student mobility trends worldwide. It explained the effects of globalization on the internationalization of higher education, how institutions position themselves more than ever before to capture the best and brightest international students, scholars and faculty to remain competitive (Altbach, 2004a; Altbach & Knight, 2007). The chapter delved into the population of international students in the United States and the institutional and national benefits of these students. The chapter included a statement of the problem; reviewed past studies on international student persistence, need and purpose for the proposed study, theoretical framework, purpose and research questions, research design, parameters, assumptions, definitions, organization of the study and summary.

Chapter 2 was a review of existing literature on international student mobility and enrollment trends, differences between retention and persistence, the theoretical framework guiding the research, challenges international students face in the United States higher education, past studies on international student persistence, the need for a study on international student persistence, and summary.

In Chapter 3, there was a restatement of researcher problems, an explanation of what a qualitative inquiry is; an explanation of the theoretical framework, research purpose, questions, design, site and participants. It described the methods of data collection and analysis, my subjectivity statement [as the researcher], justification and

summary. Chapter 4 presented findings of the study in the form of participant profiles followed by analysis, discussion of the results and summary.

Overview

Student mobility worldwide is at its all-time high. In the age of globalization where there is swift movement of people, goods and services, the internationalization of higher education has become a tool that institutions of higher education have adopted to remain competitive (Altbach, 2004a; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Therefore more universities now expend funding to recruit the brightest and best students from different parts of the world. Records show that the United States continues to be the top choice of international students and the number continues to grow annually (Marmolejo, 2012; Open Doors, 2013). In 2011-2012, enrollment increased to 764,495 students; an increase of 39.5% in the last decade (Open Doors, 2011). The United States continued to be the number one destination for Chinese students at both graduate and undergraduate levels (Chen, 2013).

While China and India represent the first two countries that consistently send students to the United States, they are followed by others such as South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Mexico and Brazil to make up the top ten sending countries of international students to the United States (Open Doors, 2013). Among these countries are emerging economies such as Saudi Arabia and Brazil with steadily increasing student populations in the United States (Open Doors, 2014). Most of these Saudi students were recipients of the King Abdullah Overseas Scholarship Program which began in 2005 with the goal of educating 50,000 Saudis in prestigious institutions of higher learning worldwide by 2020 (*Saudi Gazette*, 2012).

The same with Brazil, the growth was largely due to the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program which was launched in 2011; these students headed to the research universities in the United States (Open Doors, 2014). Many governments in order to remain competitive globally are taking the development of their human capital seriously. They send their students to the United States, and this has accounted for the uptick in the growth of international student enrollments from many emerging economies in American institutions. While many international students are enrolled in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) academic programs, a lot of them continue to pursue business and management at the masters and undergraduate levels (Open Doors, 2012).

Among the top sector exports in the United States is higher education because international students generate significant revenue for the economy (Chin, 2002; Open Doors, 2012). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, over \$27 million was contributed by international students into the United States economy in 2014 (Open Doors, 2014). Aside from the contribution to the economy, many international students further benefit the country by staying back and becoming part of the intellectual capital in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007). While these students are valuable to the United States, due to lack of adequate research, their diverse needs have not been completely understood by higher education administrators and faculty to increase their retention in colleges and universities. Obviously there is a gap in literature on international students on American campuses. The findings from this study on the integration of international students in a U.S. four-year institution, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their

persistence will equip higher education institutions to better serve and assist this student population in their social and academic integration processes in college.

The international student population is not a homogenous group. They are diverse, and so are their needs. Their needs being influenced by their ethnic and cultural diversity and demographic factors, such as age, gender, parents' education level, level of support, length of stay in the United States, as well as social and psychological dimensions including social connectedness and anxiety (Russell, Rosenthal, & Thomson, 2010). The combination of their demographic, academic, ethnic and psychosocial attributes affects their integration into American colleges and universities (Andrade, 2008). While they are like American first year students who are confronted with the initial college adjustment issues, international students, especially those who are from non-English speaking countries, tend to battle with more issues by virtue of their languages and cultural backgrounds. International students experience countless challenges in the United States, especially in their early years of enrollment, and these factors could impact their integration and the decision to persist or drop out of college (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008).

Such challenges include: financial difficulties (Eviwie, 2009); cultural challenges (Andrade, 2008; Constantine et al., 2005), racial discrimination and stereotypes on- and off-campus (Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007); unfamiliarity with American educational system (Haiwen, Harlow, Maddux, & Smaby, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Zhou, Knotte, & Sakamoto, 2005); immigration problems (Lee, 2010); loneliness and homesickness (Andrade, 2007; Lee, 2005; 2010); alienation by peers (Klomegah, 2006); lack of social support (Hayes & Lin, 1994); climate and health problems (Huang,

1977); language difficulties (Lin & Yi, 1997; Sumer et al., 2008); and lack of comprehension of study materials and lecture notes among others (Lin & Yi, 1997; McClure, 2007; Thompson & Ku, 2005).

Although many pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test, or have completed the English Language Training Institutes (ELTI) programs (or intensive English language programs), many international students still struggle with English language academically and socially, being second language speakers (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008). Studies also show that international students from developing countries face greater adjustment difficulties than those from developed countries in the areas of language, finances, housing accommodation, socialization, and homesickness, all of which tend to hinder their integration into the campus and academic achievement (Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Olaniran, 1993; Ren & Hagedorn, 2012; Rienties et al., 2012).

Discussion

Six undergraduate international students from non-Western cultures who attended Falcon University were interviewed in-depth two to three times. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand from their viewpoints the essence of their social and academic integration into college and the factors they deem hindrances to and facilitators of their college persistence. In addition, two administrators who had interactions with international students were interviewed in-depth to determine from their perspectives the factors that aid international students' college adjustment and what challenges confront these students during the transition process. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2011)

and Seidman (1998), it was imperative to listen to the student and administrator participants' stories through in-depth interviews, to understand how they made meanings of their experiences and interactions.

The following were the research questions that guided the study.

1. How does an international student decide on the U.S. four-year institution to attend? Specifically what factors influence the student's institutional choice?
2. What helps or hinders an international student's social integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?
3. What helps or hinders an international student's academic integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?
4. What factors facilitate or hinder an international student's persistence in college?

Using information from the literature and methodology, below is a discussion of the findings in response to the research questions.

How does an international student decide on the U.S. four-year institution to attend?
Specifically what factors influence the student's institutional choice?

All the student-participants were from non-Western cultures of Africa (Ghana), Asia (China), Caribbean (Jamaica) and Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Peru and Venezuela) all developing countries. Of the six, three were born outside of their counties of origin: Rosalynn, a Chinese was born in Peru, lived in Venezuela but family returned to Peru; Jimmy was born in Ukraine but family moved back to Ghana when he was six years old and Bill who was also Chinese was born in El Salvador and lived there with family. All three born outside of the countries of origin were trilingual: Rosalynn and Bill spoke Chinese Mandarin, Spanish and English while Jimmy spoke English,

Akan and Ukrainian languages. The other three: Betty (Colombia), Jackie (Brazil) and Eleanor (Jamaica) were bilingual: Betty spoke English and Spanish; Jackie spoke English and Portuguese and Eleanor spoke English and the Caribbean language.

The other three, Betty, Eleanor and Jackie, each had mixed heritage. While Betty's family was all Colombian, her parents were Palestinian descent. On Eleanor's father's side, his mother was Costa Rican and Panamanian and his father's side was Lebanese. On her mother's side, they were completely mixed. On Jackie's father side, they were originally from Italy. All the participants were exposed to other cultures prior to college enrollment and so it was safe to assume they were sensitive to other cultures and adaptive.

Family socioeconomic status / family expectations

All the students came from middle or upper middle class homes by American standard. They all had parents who were married and educated, except Jimmy and Jackie whose parents were divorced. The parents all wanted their children to pursue college education in the United States. Some as reported had parents with college degrees, who were highly placed in their countries or who were entrepreneurs. So as far as socioeconomic status and at least one parent's educational level were concerned, they all came from affluent homes with highly educated parents. From Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) interactional model of persistence, socioeconomic status (SES) and parents' educational level are major factors in student persistence in college; the higher the SES and parents' educational level the higher the probability of student persistence. Based on the socioeconomic status, their parents could afford to send them to college in the United States.

All the students wanted to pursue business-related degrees. Even though their peers had traveled to study in Britain, these students wanted to desperately study in the United States. Their parents being aware of global competition also wanted them to have a competitive edge in life. They wanted their students to study in the United States which was perceived to have the best educational institutions and degree programs in the world and to eventually secure jobs and live in the country. This is the general perception of international students and their parents; hence the United States has become the world's number one destination for college students (Altbach, 1989, 1991, 1998, 2004a, 2004b).

Although Jimmy's parents initially did not want him out of his home country, they changed their minds when he was awarded substantial academic scholarship by Falcon University. Also two of the parents showed their seriousness by hiring college tutors to guide their students [Betty and Rosalynn] in their college searches, a practice that was becoming popular in Latin America.

For these students, based on their parents' socioeconomic statuses, they could afford to pay the educational expenses which were substantial at Falcon University being a prestigious business institution. Parents understood this to be an "investment" that would pay off after their students have secured good jobs in the United States, plus, they had positioned their students for future successes. Financial challenges remain major upheaval for international students from developing countries where currency exchange rates between the United States dollar and their national currencies are steep (Eviwie, 2009).

Falcon recruiter

It has become commonplace for universities to send recruiters to different regions worldwide to recruit the best and brightest students for their institutions. Falcon being a business school has adopted a smart business model of increasing its diversity to remain competitive. American universities now welcome international students on their campuses to increase diversity and mirror the 21st century workplace for their students (Pope, 2012).

Falcon University sends its Admissions officers to different regions to build relationships with foreign high schools, give presentations on the university and meeting with interested students and families one-on-one to further inform them about the university. I found in the course of this study that Admissions officers visit all the world regions, except Africa due to skepticism of finding a steady stream of students whose families could afford the financial expenses at Falcon University. The financial obligations were over \$60,000 per year for four years excluding personal expenses and round trips home which were fully shouldered by the parents.

The students did their personal online search for schools that offered their proposed programs of study in the United States some had a list of interesting universities. But after interacting with Falcon recruiters, they were convinced that Falcon was the right university for them. So in a sense Falcon's strategy of aggressive international student recruiting has been highly successful. The goal of attracting many international students to the campus to maintain a strong international student base, thereby increasing campus diversity was working. This was part of the university's internationalization efforts of exposing domestic students to different cultures. Of the

6,000 plus students on campus, international students made up about 15-16% (Falcon International Office website, n. d). International students were surprised and happy to find a high number of countries represented on campus upon arrival.

One thing the students were happy about was that Falcon University sought them out and recruited them to the campus. They felt they “matter” to the university environment. Dixon and Chung (2008) found that “mattering” to the university as defined as “the experience of others depending on us, being interested in us, and being concerned with our fate” was directly related to persistence (p.22). Mattering ends up boosting international students’ sense of belonging.

Other factors that influenced the choice of the United States were: proximity to home, family members residing in the country, adventure such as wanting to experience the winter; and the factors for choosing the New England city were: being a great intellectual town and love for sports teams.

What helps or hinders an international student’s social integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?

From the interviews, students reported that homesickness, self-doubt, lack of friends, language barrier, disorientation, cultural differences, culture shock, isolation, alienation and lack of self-confidence were among those factors that stalled their social integration at the beginning. The findings from this study agreed with findings in past research on hindrances to on-campus integration (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Braxton et al., 1997; Hanassab, 2006; Mori, 2000; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Zhao et al., 2005). In Andrade (2005) the students’ experiences were categorized into “experiences in the

classroom” and “experiences outside the classroom.” The first year being the toughest, was identified with negative reactions (Andrade, 2005).

As soon as they made friends the students began to fit in and adjust to the new environment. Not that some of these emotional and adjustment challenges disappeared, for many, the problems persisted but they had the support system, people they trusted and shared their concerns with. These friends, who were mostly international students at the beginning and facing similar issues too, were able to encourage one another to persevere. Mori (2000) found that establishing a support network of friends is good for the well-being of international students and will mitigate the effects of homesickness.

Of all the factors expressed as hindrances to social integration, homesickness, lack of friends and language barrier seemed to be the most severe. While homesickness and lack of friends were controlled when students made friends, language barrier had a more lasting effect on the students. As reported, this made some international students stay within the circle of their co-nationals with who they spoke their home languages when not in class. Finding their co-nationals was their comfort zone and a way of coping with the stress associated with language barrier being for the first time in an environment where English was predominantly spoken (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008). Mori (2000) cautioned that hanging out with co-nationals may be detrimental because they are usually few in number on campus and as such students’ interactions may be curtailed.

Most students with language barrier reported lack of self-confidence and self-doubt when forced to communicate with non co-nationals in English and it robbed them of friendships with domestic students. These were the ones who sometimes self-isolated when not with co-nationals. Unwillingness to interact due to fear of making mistakes

detracted from their campus engagement and did not allow them to maximize the Falcon college experience. Astin (1993, 1999) reported that campus involvement is essential for college integration.

Making friends seemed to be the main factor that facilitated international student social integration. While some reported that activities in clubs and other campus activities helped them, many reported they did not actively participate in campus activities because their friends were not interested. They were more focused on making friends and strengthening those relationships than attending campus activities. Consequently, they went where their friends went and found stability in being with these friends. Therefore those who had friends, who were actively involved in campus activities, usually became active too. Looking at both groups of those who participated in campus activities and those who did not, one could say they were both socially engaged, though in different ways. Either way, they were actively bonding with peers.

Above all, these students were highly adaptive. Each one described themselves as having come with “open-mind”, “willing to adapt”, “willing to observe before deciding”, and “right mindset” among others. Each one described having the personality that was flexible and adaptive to new environments. Their personalities coupled with optimism helped them to surmount their problems, viewing them as challenges.

What helps or hinders an international student’s academic integration into four-year higher education environment in the United States?

As far as academic integration was concerned, students reported the following factors helped them to integrate: high school college preparation, parental pressure, friends, self-motivation, time management, organizational skills, institutional support, the

First Year Seminar course, and faculty support while the following served as hindrances to their academic integration: lack of high school preparation, new classroom etiquette, language barrier, lack of comprehension of academic materials, lack of self-confidence which led in most cases to inability to participate in grade dependent class discussions and extended study and test hours resulting in feeling overwhelmed.

Academic integration is pertinent to college academic success and persistence and according to Tinto (1993, 1997), and a strong predictor of academic integration is high school preparation. All the students, except Rosalynn reported high school preparation for college. They were all exposed to business classes prior to college enrollment. Only Rosalynn had not taken business classes before and predictably, first semester was very difficult for her. In addition to that, she had language barrier. All her life she had been taught in Spanish only to start college and be taught in English. The situation was grim and spelt double disaster in her battle with two major setbacks – poor high school college preparation and language barrier. She felt like giving up but could not because she was self-motivated to finish whatever she started. She said she was not about to give up and so she “pushed” her way through.

This type of determination was observed time and time again among the students each time they were confronted with challenges. The self-determination or motivation sustained them. They persevered and sought help on campus till breakthroughs came. The same attributes in international students were confirmed by the two administrators who had interacted with them extensively.

Language barrier and poor high school college preparation seemed to be the most devastating hindrances to international student academic integration. The synergistic

effects of both factors snowballed into other problems namely: lack of self-confidence, inability to contribute to classroom discussions, lack of comprehension of course materials and class teachings, prolonged study time, prolonged test-taking time, frustration, anger, feeling of low self-worth, and the list goes on. Past researchers have shown that difficulty with English language has profound effects on international student college social and academic integrations (Andrade, 2005,2007, 2008; Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Isibor, 2008; Klomegah, 2006; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 197; Nora, 2002). Even Betty, who had sound knowledge of business courses and strong high school preparation, had tough time with writing and class participation in the first year due to language barrier.

Hillary and Michelle (the interviewed administrators) confirmed they had observed international students struggle with English language in the first year and had internally doubted if they would survive academically, but given few semesters when they would have adjusted to the new culture and the American educational system, they were transformed and flourishing. To Michelle's surprise, being one of those faculty tutors who helped them during their visits to the ESOL Center when they were struggling with the language, given few semesters, these students were able to engage in conversations with confidence; the confidence they lacked initially. To the administrators this showed that the struggle with English language at the inception was more of an environmental than cognitive issue; an example of adjustment issue due to cultural differences.

It is important to point out the resilience of international students in general. They were able to bounce back after about a year or two, flourishing academically and socially

after they had mastered the new environment they were in. For many it was not a matter of brilliance or knowledge of the subject matter, language barrier handicapped them for a while. Persisting international students were able to bounce back after they were faced with serious challenges. They seemed to have the resilience that would not allow them to quit, rather they weathered the storms, pull through, continued with their studies and eventually graduated. In the article: *Mind Matters: Resilience*, there is something to be unpacked about why some people succeed when others fall and disappear after facing similar obstacles. This drive is what a growing body of literature, research and experiences now accredit to personal resilience (Levine, 2011).

During their challenges, the interview participants consulted appropriate institutional resources such as the ESOL Center, peer tutoring or subject specific tutoring labs, Academic Services or their professors for help with writing or academic problems, or the International Office on immigration-related problems, or the Health and Wellness or Counseling Center for medical or psychological issues.

Most academic problems for international students are usually not academic-content related but mostly adjustment related. Students with language difficulty have no way out since the medium of communication in America is English. However, once they acquire enough communication skills to function well within the system, they flourish academically.

Overall, some degree of academic and social integration is considered necessary in college for persistence through graduation to occur (Tinto, 1993). Consequently social and academic integrations have become central to academic achievement and persistence

theories (Astin, 1977, 1984, 1993, 1999; Bean & Eaton, 2002; Berger & Milem, 1999; Nora, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 2005; Spady, 1970; Stage & Rushkin, 1993).

What factors facilitate or hinder an international student's persistence in college?

The students volunteered explanations on why they were able to persist in college in spite of challenges they faced at the beginning. The common factors that occurred in the study showed that self-motivation and personal goals, pride (pride in themselves and family pride), parental or family support, friends, institutional support and future career (vision) were factors that facilitated student persistence in college from first year to graduation. The common factors for hindrances to persistence as expressed by the students were homesickness, loss of academic focus, health problems and financial challenges.

Tinto's interactional model of persistence assumes students possess a variety of educational experiences, characteristics, values and abilities in addition to family and community backgrounds before college enrollment (Rienties et al., 2012). These characteristics such as: family background (family social economic status (SES), parental educational level, and parental expectations), individual attributes (race, gender and region of origin), and pre-college schooling experiences (characteristics of student's secondary school and high school achievements) constitute the student's pre-college characteristics (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's stance is that the pre-college attributes will interact with (1) initial commitment to an institution, (2) goal of college graduation, and (3) level of academic and social integration into the new college environment (Tinto, 1993). Tinto also stated that a student's academic and social integration into college increases the

student's probability of academic success, persistence to graduation and loyalty to the institution (Andrade, 2007; Rienties et al., 2012; Tinto, 1993).

The findings from this study support some of the findings of Tinto's seminal persistence model. These students had most of the pre-college attributes outlined by Tinto (1993, 1997). In terms of family background, they came from homes with high socioeconomic status; the parents had high educational levels and high expectations for the students. As for individual traits, the students were all from developing countries of non-Western cultures, making the sample as homogeneous as possible. They all possessed adaptive personalities. As far as pre-college schooling experiences were concerned, there were variations because some attended British schools, others American schools, and Rosalynn was the only one that attended a national school where she was taught mainly non-business courses in Spanish, with minimal English. The rest were taught in English and had exposure to business courses prior to Falcon enrollment. All the students were committed to the goal of completing studies and graduating from college, a major factor for persistence (Tinto, 1993).

These students had all the attributes described afore-hand except for differences in high school preparation and language skills. It would then be safe to say that the students in spite of their challenging beginnings at Falcon became socially and academically integrated but their integrations varied per individual per attributes per length of time. From the student accounts, Rosalynn's academic integration was the longest due to serious difficulties. Therefore to learn the rudiments of writing in English by attending ESOL courses and mastering the business courses especially the tough general business courses took Rosalynn a minimum of one year to adjust to.

Bill, Eleanor and Jimmy had easy first semesters because of the strong language skills and high school preparations. Although Jimmy said he struggled in the first semester that was relative to his peers in the prestigious academic program. His first year GPA was 3.2 which was not exactly a minimum of 3.3 as required for the program. Betty and Jackie would have had relatively easy first semesters too but for their language barriers. However their difficulties were not as severe as Rosalynn's.

Judging from their accounts too, they all made friends early in their first semesters despite the anxiety some had over not knowing if they would have friends. For these students, it would be safe to say that their college integration (social and academic) took them between one and two semesters. The strong internal and external support they all had helped them to overcome their challenges. Swail (2004) as cited in Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) stated that the factors that influence student integration are making friends on campus, finding mentors, and connecting with professors. In addition, to enhance the integration of students from underrepresented populations into the campus community, all cultural barriers should be removed (Tinto, 2005). "The act of socially integrating into a campus community has been shown to be a cumulative process, so it is essential for students to connect to the campus culture early on in their academic experience" (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011, p. 5).

Advice to New International Students

The students volunteered advice to new international students based on their experiences, including warnings to them not to repeat their mistakes as freshmen and sophomores. There were resounding references to "Get involved on campus" and other advice included: "don't be afraid to meet new people"; "don't stick to your co-nationals";

“seek help when needed, there is help for everything at Falcon”; “keep an open-mind”; “use faculty’s office hours”; “study hard”; “force yourself to participate in class”; “don’t move off-campus”; “be ready to adapt to new things”; and “use support system – IPA, RA, Academic Services and others.”

Recommendations to the International Office

While many expressed their gratitude to Falcon for creating the International Office to assist them in college with their immigration compliance in particular, they noticed that a few things could be tweaked for better. Betty advocated for more programs like the ice cream socials to increase interactions between international and domestic students. Rosalynn wanted the International Office to encourage new students to join clubs because such would help them adjust faster. Eleanor and Bill wanted to see monthly meetings between IPAs, their students and the International Office staff. That way the new students would begin to bond with staff on campus. All the students liked the IPA program. Jackie wanted the office to continue to offer it to new students and Jimmy wanted the program extended to cover the first year of enrollment and not just the fall semester.

Recommendations to the University

The general consensus among the students was that there is serious need for domestic students to be more tolerance to other cultures on campus. The problems most of them had with roommates could be traced to lack of cultural misunderstandings on the part of American students who had not experienced other cultures nor engaged in study abroad programs. The students were able to separate study abroad participants from those who had not because study abroad participants were more open to cultural differences.

Therefore they advocated that the university provide cultural or diversity training to its domestic students as a way of preparing them for the 21st century workplace where diversity exists. Perhaps one of the ways to educate domestic students on cultures would be to send them on study abroad programs. Bill was very emphatic that study abroad participants were very different from the regular domestic students in that they were more accepting of other cultures, they were open-minded.

International students wanted to see more interactions between them and domestic students hoping that such would aid cultural understanding and break down stereotypes. But they also would like to live with other international students especially in the first year because they have commonalities. Then after the first year, they could be allowed to choose their roommates. This they felt would allow first year international students to settle in without those roommate problems. Once they have settled and found their voice on campus, then they could experiment with living with domestic students.

Conclusions

The effect of globalization on the higher education system is the internationalization of campuses (Altbach, 2004a; Altbach & Knight, 2007). Consequently, universities are building and strengthening their international student population base. They now engage in aggressive recruiting on the “brightest and best,” attracting them to their institutions. Falcon University in its engagement in active international student recruiting worldwide, has built a solid population of over 1,200 international students representing over 80 countries at any given semester within its approximately 6,000 student population in total. These students were recruited from all the regions of the world by Falcon recruiters, except Africa. Falcon University continues

to make its mark in this area with international students representing between 15 – 20% of the total student population, whereas in many institutions the average is about 10% (Open Doors, 2013).

The recruited students were happy to belong to a community with strong international student presence. The fact that Falcon sought them, recruited them, brought them to campus and continued to support them through the provision of campus resources, made the students feel they “mattered” to the community. Using Schlossberg’s (1989) theory of college students mattering to others, Dixon and Chung (2007) found that “mattering” to the university as defined as “the experience of others depending on us, being interested in us, and being concerned with our fate” was directly related to persistence (p.22).

Falcon international students faced similar challenges of anxiety, loneliness, homesickness, culture shock, stereotypes, language barrier, financial troubles, lack of self-confidence, poor high school preparation, self-doubt and so on as reported in past studies (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Evivie, 2009; Hanassab, 2006; Isibor, 2008; Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b; Kegel, 2009; Klomegah, 2006; Kwai, 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 197; Nora, 2002). Since Tinto (1993) reported that some degree of social and academic integration is necessary for college persistence to happen, this exploratory case study was designed to better understand the integration and persistence of international students in four-year U.S. institutions.

The research found homesickness, lack of friendships and language barrier to be the hindrances to social integration among Falcon international students, and lack of high

school preparation, language barrier and the new American educational system, including new classroom etiquette to be significant hindrances to academic integration. The students reported that even though they were faced with these challenges, once they made friends, they were able to manage the challenges. They all reported that their friends were their “support systems”, “second families” “good group” “buddies” or “networks” on campus.

Having friends to them served as the support system and stability they needed. This was in agreement with Mori (2000) which affirmed that for international students, the support system of friends who are co-nationals or other international students is vital for their well-being. The flipside as reported by other researchers, including Mori (2000) was that students who bonded with co-nationals or other international students alone reported higher acculturative stress (more homesickness) and less social interactions (Kegel, 2009; Mori, 2000; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007) but those who interacted with host-nationals had significantly reported less homesickness (Poyrazli, et al., 2004). When these students had academic challenges, their friends’ encouraged and helped them, sometimes through tutoring, to gain a sense of optimism that they could succeed. Making friends was vital to the students’ social and academic integration because they had a sense of connectedness to the community.

A combination of lack of high school preparation and language barrier made academic integration significantly harder for Rosalynn than others. English language runs a thread through the American educational system being the main language of communication. Therefore to have little or no language skills for communication (in writing and speaking) is a fundamental challenge to international students like Rosalynn.

Even those with strong high school preparation like Betty and Jackie, language barrier still had negative impacts on their academics in the first year. Such students lacked self-confidence to engage others in conversations in and outside of the classroom. For those courses where class participations were required, the students' grades were lower than what they should have been without the requirement because they could not participate confidently. Lack of adequate language skills affected comprehension of course materials resulting in extended study periods and stressful test-taking time.

Language barrier could affect students in social integration. Some as reported by the students chose to self-isolate for fear of embarrassment from mistakes, which in turn increased homesickness, resulted in low social engagement and lack of connectedness.

According to the students, the interventions of support services such as the English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Center, Multicultural Center and International Office have made the difference in the integration of Falcon international students. These findings were affirmed by Hillary and Michelle, the administrator participants who had interacted with international students for 11 and 18 years respectively. They have seen international students struggle at the beginning with so many problems, but given time to adjust, they have seen them succeeding academically and socially.

According to the students, the integration challenges varied from first semester to first year. This was in accordance with past research that the first year of college is usually the toughest for college students (Andrade, 2005, 2007, 2008; Evivie, 2009; Hannassab, 2006; Isibor, 2008; Jamelske, 2009; Mamiseishvili, 2012a, 2012b; Klomegah, 2006; Kwai, 2009; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lin & Yi, 197; Nora, 2002).

The ability of these students to rebound from serious challenges which could have derailed their college aspirations was noteworthy. Wang (2003) as cited in Levine (2011), studied the concept of personal resilience among doctoral international students and reported that resilient students are most likely to be those with family support, who are religious, with personal goals or purpose, with mentors during their studies, who view obstacles as challenges, and who give back to others and their communities (campus engagement).

After a careful examination of students' interview transcripts in triangulation with the administrators' transcripts and my fieldnotes and journals on international students and the campus environment, it seemed these students persisted after they had integrated into the social and academic facets of Falcon University. They were resilient in the face of challenges, sought help and gradually overcame their potential college-derailments. They persisted because they had personal goals and visions of the future, they were self-motivated, they had ample support from friends, parents, faculty and the institution and they wanted to preserve their self-worth by making their families proud of them. The study's findings of facilitators of college persistence agreed with Wang (2003)'s report on personal resilience (as cited in Levine, 2011), Lysgaard (1955) U-curve hypothesis of cultural adjustment, Astin (1993) model of college student involvement, and part of Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993, 1997)'s model of persistence especially the commitment to graduate from college.

The international students in a new environment experienced culture shock, homesickness and other adjustment problems (Lysgaard, 1955). The duration of the second phase of Lysgaard's cultural adjustment hypothesis varied per individual. The

students were faced with challenges but they rebounded because they had both external (family and friends) and internal (peers, faculty, institutional) support. In addition they were socially connected with peers and campus activities and academically engaged with faculty in agreement with Astin (1977, 1993) involvement theory. Involvement defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy and time students invest in their academic life on campus, plays a key role in student persistence (Astin, 1993). The author suggested that student-student and student-faculty interactions produce positive correlations with student outcomes; and that when students become involved in college, the level of their commitment to the institution increases and spurs them on to persist year to year (Astin, 1993). Something could be said for those students such as Jackie and Rosalynn who did not seem to be “actively” involved with campus organizations, that they compensated for the “lack” by being connected to professors, friends and staff members who were like “mentors.”

According to Tinto’s model of persistence, these students exemplified the findings that to persist in college, a student should be academically and socially integrated into the community (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993, 1997). These students had the necessary pre-entry characteristics for college success, namely: high family socioeconomic status, highly educated parents, high parental expectations, good British and American private / national public high schools, strong high school preparation for college, strong initial commitment to Falcon University and the goal of college graduation. Tinto (1993) further states that a student’s academic and social integration strengthens the student’s academic achievements, determination to persist to graduation and commitment to the institution. The study found that not only did the students possess

the needed pre-entry characteristics for college success; they also persevered through their adjustment challenges to be socially and academically integrated into the campus community.

Tinto's seminal theory while laying the groundwork for other models of college student persistence, based on the study of traditional, White, college students but other researchers have tested his findings on other college student subgroups (Attinasi, 1989; Bean, 1980; Berger & Milen, 1999; Castillo et al., 2006; Elkins et al., 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980, 1983, 2005; Tierney, 1992).

Despite much research on college student populations, few studies have reported to date on the college integration and persistence of international students as a subgroup.

Biculturalism or multiculturalism

The findings were in agreement with Tinto's model of persistence with exception to the rites of passage theory in college integration that posits that students must separate from home culture and old contacts such as family, friends and mentors in order to transition into the new environment. This theory has been revised by other researchers who found that international students and other minority groups need support from home culture in order to transition properly into the dominant Caucasian culture on their campuses.

The students did not abandon their cultures in order to integrate into the community; they modified them to accommodate the new culture. Betty modified her style of greeting from the Latin American kiss on the cheek style to handshakes and distant hugs that honor people's personal spaces; Rosalynn tweaked her laid-back culture of lateness to events to being punctual, and so on. The preservation of one's culture but

tweaking some aspects in order to adjust to a new environment according to Andrade (2007) was bi-culturalism. “Bi-culturalism’ is the ability of an individual to function well in two cultures simultaneously. To ease international student integration to college, it is beneficial for institutions to remove cultural challenges so students can quickly integrate into the campus community to encourage their persistence (Tinto, 2004).

Multiculturalism

Although this study did not set out to study identity issues, these came up in the course of the study based on the type of convenience sample that was constituted. The participants were all studying in the United States for the first time but most of them were not exposed to the issues of cultural integration for the first time. What happens then when an international student is trying to function in more than two cultures simultaneously? Take for example Bill, Rosalynn and Jimmy who were born and raised in countries other than their countries of origin. Although Chinese citizens, Bill was born and raised in El Salvador while Rosalynn was born in Peru and lived in both Peru and Venezuela. Jimmy too was born in Ukraine, lived there till he was six, and then moved back to Ghana where he lived till he traveled to the United States.

Even Betty, Jackie, and Eleanor who did not live outside of the countries of origin had mixed ethnicities within their families. Betty was exposed to Colombian, Palestinian and Arab cultures; Eleanor was exposed to Costa Rican, Panamanian, and many other cultures due her parents’ mixed lineage; and Jackie too had ties on her father’s side to Italy.

In a way, these students were exposed to multiple cultural identities prior to their enrollment at Falcon and were functioning in more than two cultures simultaneously. Bill

and Rosalynn were functioning in American, Latin American and Chinese cultures; Betty in American, Latin American and Palestinian; Jimmy in American, African and Ukrainian cultures simultaneously. Their previous predispositions to cultural integration could have affected their integration into the new American culture. Who knows if they had developed coping mechanisms for integration into new environments prior to Falcon which could have influenced their integration into Falcon? This is an area that should be probed further. In light of this information, it would be appropriate to say that these students had more than two cultural identities, that they exhibited multiculturalism, a step above biculturalism that was proposed by Andrade (2007).

Students of privilege

Each of the student participants seemed to have come from family backgrounds with high socioeconomic status. This has to be so for them to have been able to afford Falcon's over \$60,000 per year for undergraduate tuition and housing expenses, excluding student's personal spending and round trips home at least twice a year. They seemed to have been *students of privilege*. These backgrounds brought to focus the issues of college affordability and access in higher education. Why were these families investing so much on their students in the United States and why were they sent to Falcon University? At the end of an undergraduate degree, a student would have spent over \$250,000 on tuition and boarding alone excluding other expenses.

These students were different from other international students who may have chosen to attend community colleges first before transferring to four-year institutions due to financial challenges; or those who chose public institutions versus private; or less expensive private institutions versus very expensive such as Falcon. Aside from funding,

which seems to be the primary reason for college choices, what other factors may be responsible for such decisions? Do these students integrate into their environments differently? A comparative study of international students in these college settings may be necessary to elucidate the on-going discussion on funding, college affordability and access. How are international students at Falcon University different from those attending community colleges or public universities?

Recruitment Efforts

It is noteworthy that out of approximately 6,000 students at Falcon University, 1,200 of them were enrolled international students per semester. To capture a large population of international students within the small entire university population could mean that the Falcon's recruitment efforts were working and other institutions could learn from their strategies to improve theirs. Also, Falcon has created an environment with a critical mass of international students, making them feel wanted by the institution. This made the students feel they mattered to the university. Could this critical mass and issue of "mattering" to the university have affected new international students' integration to college? Could the integration process have been different if the students were admitted into a school with fewer international students or where international students did not feel they mattered to the university?

Insight into Qualitative Inquiry

As it is with qualitative case studies, the results of this study cannot be generalized. The study was conducted in one small, specialized private Northeastern university in the United States. Although students from non-Western cultures of Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Latin America were interviewed, the results cannot be generalized to

international students across campuses in the United States. The findings were peculiar to the experiences of the six interviewed international students which in turn were influenced by their personal traits.

In carrying out this research I learned that qualitative research can be very involving, time consuming and in-depth. It cannot be rushed, otherwise biases could be introduced; therefore it should be approached with purpose and attention. Qualitative methodology was the best for this study because for an exploratory case study, where I needed to better understand human experiences, I needed to listen to participant's stories told firsthand in order to generate rich data. When dealing with human participants, a study cannot be rushed because they are engaged in deep thoughts, trying to make meaning of their experiences and reaching for right responses to the questions. Sometimes they stop and ponder before responding, sometimes there is silence for some time before a participant speaks and so on. The success of an interview depends largely on the investigator to know when to speak and when to refrain from speaking to allow for serious introspection. Only qualitative methodology could have captured all the nuances of the study beginning with recruitment of participants, data gathering using in-depth interviews for example and data analysis. My data analysis followed the progression of categories already established under the interview protocols.

Qualitative research is always based on the rapport between the researcher and interviewee. That was the purpose for multiple interviews. I spent time in the first interview to get to know the participants and to help them feel comfortable with me because the degree to which a participant is comfortable with the researcher will affect the quality of generated data. Then, in subsequent interviews the participants were more

relaxed in their conversations with me. They felt like talking to a friend or colleague. I noticed that the second interviews and follow ups were richer in depth than the firsts.

Recommendations for Practice

Today, institutions of higher education are investing significant capital to recruit and grow their international student population to further internationalize their college environments. By doing so, they maintain a competitive edge but it is important to retain these students to gain the fullest financial, educational and global perspectives they bring to campuses. Considering the importance of this group to higher education institutions, the issues of international student integration and persistence in college should now be front and center, unfortunately, few studies have focused on the issues of international student integration and persistence in college till date. Against this backdrop, the context of this study was formed which was to research the factors that facilitate international students' integration in college and to understand the facilitators of and hindrances to their college persistence.

The study will not only bridge the gap in literature on international student integration and persistence, it would help institutional administrators better understand this diverse population that they desperately want to retain. They will be able to execute targeted programs to meet the needs of these students during the integration period. Understanding the profiles of international students that are attracted to the institution should help Falcon recruiters to go after them.

Faculty could be given the insight into ways they could assist international students in their college transition process. This would increase faculty sensitivity to the plight of international students in their classes, especially during early enrollment when

international students are still transitioning into the college environment and are vulnerable to college dropout. To achieve this objective, the International Students and Scholars Services (ISSS) being the advocate for international students should find ways to encourage faculty to want to assist the new students in their classes. The International Office could work with those faculty members who are sympathetic to international students to disseminate information to colleagues on how to work with new international students. Or, the International Office could develop informational flyers to be included in new faculty members' packet at Falcon University.

The institution could use the results to customize new programs and services or tweak existing ones to support new international students in their integration. Some of these recommendations were suggestions shared by participants in the course of this research. The Welcome Program organized by the International Office was well received by the students. They also appreciated the campus-wide orientation program, though one of the students was dissatisfied with the lack of diversity among presenters and new students during early orientation program in June. Generally international students do not attend the June orientation. Attending the program, returning to their countries and turning around to travel back to start school in August or September was not cost-effective for them. To increase the diversity, Falcon University could thoughtfully invite diverse speakers to present to new students and their parents. This should help new minority students feel comfortable on campus knowing that the institution embraced diversity.

The students indicated that orientation programs, including the International Office Welcome Program where immigration presentations were given, were

“information overload”. There has to be a way of helping new students to internalize the resources on campus and how to access them when needed. The recommendation was to use the First Year Seminar course to actively consolidate the knowledge of resources around campus within these classes. The International Office too could organize meeting with new international students early in the semester, may call it *Open Dialogue* or something like that to reinforce this knowledge and use the opportunity to know how the students are adjusting, answer questions and help them know they are not alone.

The students appreciate the International Peer Advisers (IPA) program where the IPAs reach out to new international students to answer their questions and allay their anxieties prior to arrival on campus and receive them upon arrival and help them with adjustment. The recommendations to the International Office were to continue to offer the IPA program and extend it to one year instead of a semester. Also, the IPA meetings with office staff should be increased and at some of the meetings, IPAs should bring their advisees to meet other advisees to increase the students’ network of friends. The office has been asked to re-introduce events such as “Ice Cream” socials to increase international students’ interactions with domestic students. This could be organized in collaborations with the Multicultural Center (MCC) where international students could bond with domestic, second or third immigrant students in the ALANA program.

The students unanimously agreed on the need for cultural sensitivity among domestic students. There is a need for diversity training or cultural sensitivity workshop for all Falcon students to begin to re-orient the domestic students’ mindset in preparation for success in the 21st Century workplace. The Study Abroad Office should work to increase study abroad participation among domestic students. The international students

confirmed that among domestic students, those who had studied abroad stood out as more culturally sensitive than those who had not.

Increasing international students' opportunities for friendships and domestic students' cultural sensitivity would reduce the new students' acculturative stress including the feeling of homesickness, loneliness, alienation, stress and lack of social support system. On the other hand, the students acknowledged they never felt they "did not belong" on campus. The international students said that when they arrived, Falcon campus was welcoming and the faculty members were highly supportive. They were grateful that there were institutional resources to assist them as they integrated. The ESOL Center has been of great assistance to students who struggled with language barrier with assistance from the faculty tutors and the offerings of two ESOL courses in the first year.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since qualitative case studies cannot be generalized, I recommend the replication of this study with international students from non-Western cultures in four-year institutions in the United States. The current study focused on international students and a handful of administrators. It would be interesting to involve faculty members in another study to know their perceptions on integration and persistence of international students.

To further explore the issues of bi-culturalism among international students as proposed by Andrade (2007), or multiculturalism as discussed about the student participants, more research is needed to better understand the cultural identity or identities international students have while living in the United States. How are they able to switch from one to the other, and are they happy with them?

Since it seemed international students at Falcon were students of privilege to be able to afford the college expenses there, how are they different from international students in community colleges or public universities? How similar or different are the integration processes of international students in these settings?

Could the critical mass of international students at Falcon University and issue of “mattering” to the university have affected new international students’ integration to college there? Could the integration process have been different if the students were admitted into an institution with fewer international students or where international students did not feel they mattered to the university?

Personal resilience as discussed by Wang (2003) as cited in Levine (2011) shone the spotlight on the perseverance of persisting international students. A research on personal resilience of international students that could calibrate “resilience threshold” for persistence to predict who would persevere and persist and who would not. This would help universities to identify likely non-persisters at the freshman level and begin to target them with programs that would promote integration into college early. This would reduce dropout rate on many campuses.

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APPENDIX A: RETENTION TABLE BY INSTITUTIONAL TYPE

Freshman to Sophomore Year Retention Rates by Type of Institution

Institution Type	2004 - 2012		Current (%)
	Highest (%)	Lowest (%)	
Two-year public	55.7 ('10)	51.3 ('04)	55
BA.BS public	70.0 ('04)	65.2 ('12)	64.9
MA Public	71.6 ('06)	67.3 ('10)	68.9
PhD public	78.6 ('10)	72.9 ('08)	77.7
Two-year private	61.9 ('04)	55.5 ('08;'09; '12)	58
BA/BS private	71.1 ('04)	67.3 ('12)	67.3
MA private	75.8 ('05)	70.3 ('12)	69.5
PhD private	82.9 ('04)	80.2 ('12)	81.3
National	68.7 ('06)	65.7 ('08)	65.8

Note. Source: ACT Report: 2004 – 2013.

<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/reports/graduation.html>

APPENDIX B: THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHARLOTTE
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL



UNC CHARLOTTE

Research and Economic Development

Office of Research Compliance

4201 University City Blvd., Charlotte, NC 28223-0301

704.617.1070 / 704.617.5880 <http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics>

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects

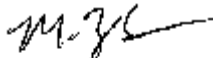
Certificate of Approval

Protocol #	14-06-22		
Protocol Type:	Expedited 7		
Title:	Integration and Persistence of International Students in U.S. Four-Year Universities: A Qualitative Case Study		
Initial Approval:	7/8/2014		
Responsible Faculty	Dr. Mark	D'Amico	Educational Leadership
Research Assistant	Mr. Bill	Morris	Educational Leadership
Investigator	Ms. Tifilola	Adewale	Educational Leadership
Co-investigator	Dr. Spencer	Salas	Middle, Secondary, K12 Educ
Co-investigator	Dr. Sandra	Dika	Educational Leadership

After careful review, the protocol listed above was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Research with Human Subjects under 45 CFR 46.111. This approval will expire one year from the date of this letter. In order to continue conducting research under this protocol after one year, the "Annual Protocol Renewal Form" must be submitted to the IRB. This form can be obtained from the Office of Research Compliance web page <http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects>.

Please note that it is the investigator's responsibility to promptly inform the committee of any changes in the proposed research prior to implementing the changes, and of any adverse events or unanticipated risks to subjects or others.

Amendment and Event Reporting forms are available on our web page at:
<http://research.uncc.edu/compliance-ethics/human-subjects/amending-your-protocol>.


Dr. M. Lynn Exum, IRB Chair

7/8/14
Date

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS



You are being invited to participate in a project study titled: **Integration and Persistence of International Students in Four Year Institutions: A Qualitative Case Study**. I will be interviewing currently enrolled undergraduate international students in the junior or senior year of study about their college experiences.

This study is being completed by doctoral student Titi Adewale, in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, and Dr. Mark D'Amico (Dissertation Committee Chair and Supervising Faculty).

I would like to conduct 2 – 3 digitally recorded, one-on-one interviews with you to talk about your experiences as an international student in the United States; how you integrated socially and academically into the new college life and the factors you attribute to your college persistence.

Each interview will take between 45 – 60 minutes. There are no known risks to participating in this project. You are a volunteer and the decision to participate is yours. You may choose not to answer any of the questions or to stop the interview at any time without any consequence to you.

The recordings will be transcribed professionally. After transcription, the recordings will be erased and only the investigator will have access to the transcripts. To further ensure confidentiality, your real name and any identification material will be removed from the transcripts and written reports before the data are shared with the two research assistants for data analyses.

Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your participation is not tied to grades or services received from the International Office or any relationship with the office.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact the investigator: Titi Adewale, XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at xxxxx@xxxx.xxx or Dr. Mark D'Amico at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at xxx@xxxx.xxx

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte wants to ensure you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Please contact the university's Research Compliance Office at (704-687-1871) or email xxx@xxxx.xxx if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant.

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on Month, Day, Year for use for one year.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the researcher conducting the interview.

Participant Name (PRINT)

Participant Signature

DATE

Investigator Signature

DATE

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM FOR ADMINISTRATOR
PARTICIPANTS



You are being invited to participate in a project study titled: **Integration and Persistence of International Students in A U.S. Private Four Year Institution: A Qualitative Case Study**. I will be interviewing administrators who work directly with international students about the phenomena of integration and persistence, how these affect international students and what the institution is doing to increase retention of this student population..

This study is being completed by doctoral student Titi Adewale, in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership, and Dr. Mark D'Amico (Dissertation Committee Chair and Supervising Faculty).

I would like to conduct one digitally recorded, one-on-one interview with you to talk about your experiences working with international students in the United States; how they integrate socially and academically into the new college life and the factors you attribute to their college persistence.

The interview will take between 45 – 60 minutes. There are no known risks to participating in this project. You are a volunteer and the decision to participate is yours. You may choose not to answer any of the questions or to stop the interview at any time without any consequence to you.

The recordings will be transcribed professionally. After transcription, the recordings will be erased and only the investigator will have access to the transcripts. To further ensure confidentiality, your real name and any identification material will be removed from the transcripts and written reports before the data are shared with the two research assistants for data analyses.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact the investigator: Titi Adewale, XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at xxxxx@xxxx.xxx or Dr. Mark D'Amico at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at xxx@xxxx.xxx

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte wants to ensure you are treated in a fair and respectful manner. Please contact the university's Research Compliance Office at (704-687-1871) or email xxx@xxxx.xxx if you have questions about how you are treated as a study participant.

Approval Date: This form was approved for use on Month, Day, Year for use for one year.

Participant Consent

I have read the information in this consent form. I have had the chance to ask questions about this study, and those questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I am at least 18 years of age, and I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form after it has been signed by me and the researcher conducting the interview.

Participant Name (PRINT)

Participant Signature

DATE

Investigator Signature

DATE

APPENDIX E: COUNTRIES OF THE WORLD BY REGIONS

Africa (1)	Asia (2)	Europe (3)
Burundi	Bangladesh	Finland
Cameroon	Cambodia	France
Congo/ Zaire (former)	China	Germany
Cote d'Ivoire / Ivory Coast	Hong Kong	Greece
Ethiopia	India	Macedonia
Gabon	Indonesia	Moldova
Gambia	Japan	Netherlands
Ghana	Kazakhstan	Norway
Guinea-Bissau	Macau	Poland
Kenya	Malaysia	Russia
Mali	Nepal	Serbia
Morocco	Pakistan	Sweden
Nigeria	Singapore	Switzerland
Rwanda	South Korea	United Kingdom
Senegal	Sri Lanka	Yugoslavia (Former)
Tanzania	Taiwan	
Togo	Thailand	
Zambia	Vietnam	
Zimbabwe		
Latin America (4)	Middle East (5)	North America (6)
Bahamas	Bahrain	Canada
Brazil	Israel	
Colombia	Lebanon	
Jamaica	Saudi Arabia	
Mexico	Syria	Oceania (7)
Navassa Island	United Arab Emirates	Australia
Peru		New Zealand
Trinidad & Tobago		

APPENDIX F: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO THE OFFICE OF DEAN OF
STUDENTS



Date

Ms. XYZ ABC
Associate Dean of Students
Falcon University

Dear Ms. ABC,

My name is Titi Adewale and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am currently working on my dissertation research which is on the academic and social integration of international students into college, and the factors that are facilitators of or hindrances to their persistence through college.

The findings of this study will provide the International Office an insight into the specific needs of international students and how best to meet these needs. It will also be of value to faculty who teach and mentor international students. The information will also provide new international students with information on what to expect during their integration into college and how to persist through graduation.

I am requesting your permission to recruit four to six undergraduate international students from non-Western cultures, in the junior or senior year of study to participate in two to three, 45 – 60 minutes, one-to-one interviews for this research. I will appreciate your assistance in approving that the attached invitation email to the targeted group of international students be sent to international students by the International Office.

Thank you so much for your cooperation and assistance in this study.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

Cc: Staff of the International Office

APPENDIX G: INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS SENT
BY THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE



Date

Dear International Student,

My name is Titi Adewale and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I graduated from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, West Africa with both undergraduate ('83) and Master of Science degrees in Zoology ('85), Master of Business Administration degree from Robert Morris University ('00) and Master of Education degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 2010.

In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am currently working on my dissertation research on **the experiences of international students regarding their academic and social integration into college, and the factors they attribute to their college persistence**. The purpose of this study is to understand international students' needs and how support systems can be better customized to meet these needs.

Being an international student who has persisted in college, I will like to invite you to participate in this study. You will be interviewed twice for 45 to 60 minutes each on your experiences as you integrated into the new college environment. If needed, with your permission a follow-up interview may be conducted at a later time. Your experiences will give us a better understanding of international students and how to better assist them in college.

All the information shared in the interview will be kept confidential and used for the purposes of this research only. *Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your participation is not tied to grades or services received from the International Office or any relationship with the International Office.* Contact me at XXX@XXXX.XXX or xxx-xxx-2299 if you will like to participate in this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.
Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX H: SECOND INVITATION EMAIL TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
SENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE



Date

Dear International Student,

This is a reminder to the email that was sent on my behalf last week by the International Office. My name is Titi Adewale and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I graduated from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, West Africa with both undergraduate ('83) and Master of Science degrees in Zoology ('85), a Master of Business Administration degree from Robert Morris University in 2000 and a Master of Education degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 2010.

In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am currently working on my dissertation research on **the experiences of international students regarding their academic and social integration into college, and the factors they attribute to their college persistence**. The purpose of this study is to understand international students' needs and how support systems can be better customized to meet these needs.

Being an international student who has persisted in college, I will like to invite you to participate in this study. You will be interviewed twice (or thrice if needed) for 45 to 60 minutes about your experiences as you integrated into the new college environment. Your experiences will help us to better understand international students and how to better assist them in college.

All the information shared in the interview will be kept strictly confidential and used for the purposes of this research only. *Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your participation is not tied to grades or services received from the International Office or any relationship with the International Office.* Contact me today at XXX@XXXXX.XXX or xxx-xxx-2299 if you will like to participate in this study. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX I: EMAIL TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WHO HAVE
VOLUNTEERED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY



Dear International Student:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research titled: **Integration and Persistence of International Students in U.S. Four-Year Institutions: A Qualitative Case Study**. Your participation means a lot to me!

Our first 45 - 60 minutes interview has been slated for:

Date: XXX, 2014

Time: XX p.m.

Location: XYZ Center

Please feel free to offer alternative interview date, time or / and venue, if any of these does not mesh with your schedule.

Our discussions will center on your experiences as an international student on campus and the information you volunteer will be kept strictly confidential. I will appreciate your reply to this email to let me know if you agree with the suggested date, time and location. If you will like to change any of them, please contact me immediately with your alternative/s.

Once again, thank you. I look forward to your email reply.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX J: EMAIL TO INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS TWO DAYS BEFORE
INTERVIEW DATE



Dear International Student:

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the study titled:

Integration and Persistence of International Students in U.S. Four-Year

Institutions. This is to remind you that the interview is in two days:

Date: XXX, 2014

Time: XX p.m.

Location: XXX Hall

I will be there waiting for you. Please note that the interview will be for 45- 60 minutes and I will be respectful of your time. Our discussions will be digitally recorded and any information you volunteer will be kept strictly confidential. All information will be used for this study alone. If for any reason you will not be able to make this appointment, please contact me so we can re-schedule the interview. Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your participation is not tied to grades or services received from the International Office or any relationship with the International Office.

I look forward to meeting you in 2 days.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX K: INVITATION E-MAIL TO ADMINISTRATORS



Dear Mr. / Mrs. XXX:

My name is Titi Adewale. I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. In partial fulfillment of my doctoral degree, I am currently working on my dissertation research on **the experiences of international students regarding their academic and social integration into college, and the factors they attribute to their college persistence**. The purpose of this study is to understand international students' integration needs and how support systems can be better customized to meet these needs.

I am requesting your permission to be interviewed for this research. Because the study is centered on international students' college experiences, we would like to understand the integration needs of international students from an administrator's perspective and to know the institutional efforts geared towards the retention of these students on campus. Because you work closely with international students, I would like to interview you once for 45-60 minutes at a date, time, and place of your choosing.

All the information shared in the interview will be kept strictly confidential and used for the purposes of this research only. Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your participation is not tied to any relationship with the International Office. Please contact me at XXX@XXXXX.XXX or xxx-xxx-2299 if you would like to participate in this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX L: REMINDER EMAIL TO ADMINISTRATORS TWO DAYS BEFORE
INTERVIEW DATE



Dear Mr. / Mrs. XXX:

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the study titled:
**Integration and Persistence of International Students in U.S. Four-Year
Institutions.** This is to remind you that the interview is in 2 days. Based on the
information you supplied, the details of the interview are listed below:

Date: XXX, 2014

Time: XX p.m.

Location: XXX Hall

I will be there waiting for you. Please note that the interview will last 45-60
minutes, and I will be respectful of your time. Our discussions will be digitally recorded
and any information you volunteer will be kept strictly confidential and used only for this
study alone. Please do not feel obligated or pressured to participate in this study. Your
participation is not tied to any relationship with the International Office. If for any reason
you will not be able to make this appointment, please contact me so we can re-schedule
the interview. I look forward to meeting you in 2 days.

Sincerely,

Titilola O. Adewale

APPENDIX M: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS



Interview 1

Warm-up Questions

- Tell me why you chose to study in the United States. Why not Great Britain or some other country? What is your country of nationality?
- How did you come about choosing Falcon University for your undergraduate study? What attracted you to Falcon University?

Student profile

- Tell me about yourself? How would you describe yourself?
- How would you describe Falcon University in terms of its accommodation (care for) of international students? Is it a good fit for you?
- Did you at any time feel you did not belong on this campus? How did you handle that?

Student Support

- How easy or difficult was it for you to fit (integrate) into the college life?
- How much support have you received on this campus? From who or where?
- Are there programs that helped you to fit (integrate) into the campus?

Closing Question/s

- To what or who do you attribute your college persistence? Who or what helped you to continue in college and not drop out?

Interview 2

Warm-up Questions

- How do you feel as an international student studying at Falcon University? How did you feel when you first enrolled? Did the university feel like home?
- How would you rate (assess) Falcon University's accommodation (care for) of international students then and now?
- How about the International Office, how would you rate (assess) their services and programs then and now?

Academic Integration

- Tell me about how you have been adjusting to Falcon University academically? What factors have helped you so far to be academically involved (integrated or fit)? **Prompts** – personal motivations, determination, faculty support, family support ...
- In what ways could you have been more academically involved and what were those things that hindered or held you back? **Prompts** - Language difficulties, American educational system, classroom etiquette, alienation, loneliness, homesickness, did not understand the professors ...

Social Integration

- Tell me about your social life. Are you really socially involved? What factors have helped you to be socially involved (integrated) in college? **Prompts** – faculty / staff contacts, study groups, attendance at club meetings ...
- Do you think you could have been more socially involved than you are now? Help me understand why you have not been very socially involved on campus?

Prompts – language difficulties, cultural differences, isolation, inability to make friends ...

Persistence

- Was there any time as a freshman or sophomore you were frustrated with college and you felt like leaving? Tell me why you felt that way? What made you change your mind?
- What made you continue your studies here or what kept you in college then and all these years? **Prompts:** family pride, family support, accountability to a faculty or staff member
- Have you gained support from anyone or anywhere that has helped you this far in college? **Prompts:** institutional, family, or others

Closing Questions

- What could the university have done to make the campus home for you when you were new in the United States? What about the International Office?
- What advice would you give to a new international student coming to this university on how he or she could fit (integrate) in academically? How about fitting in socially?
- Do you have anything else to share with me today?

APPENDIX N: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATORS

Warm-up Questions

- How long have you worked in this university? How long have you been working or interacting with international students?
- What are the programs and services your office offers to international students?

Support for International Students

- What support does the university offer to international students to assist them as they integrate academically and socially into the new college environment?
- Are there programs or services this office offers to international students as they integrate academically and/or socially in the new college environment?

Retention of International Students

- What is the institutional retention rate for international students?
- What are the common reasons international students give for withdrawal?
- How is this office helping to improve the persistence of international students on campus?

Closing Question

- Is there any information you would like to add to our interview?