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# Does Access Equal Retention?: The Experiences of Long-term English Learners in Higher Education

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Does Access Equal Retention?:

The Experiences of Long-term English Learners in Higher Education

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Kelly Wonder

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2011

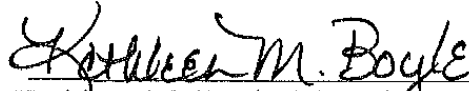
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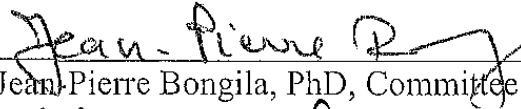
The Experiences of Long Term English Learners in Higher Education

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

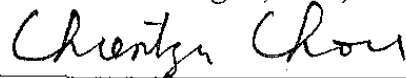
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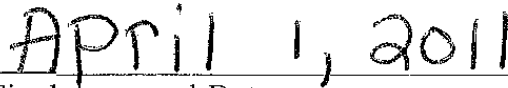
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### ABSTRACT

Through this longitudinal, phenomenological study, I examined the experiences of (H)Mong Long Term English Learners (LTEL) conditionally admitted to Midwest State University through the English for Academic Success Program (EAP). Over the course of six years, I interviewed participants regarding their academic and social experiences during college. Their experiences primarily fit within Tinto's (1993) framework of departure. The participants' pre-entry attributes, experiences within the EAP, and experiences after their year in the EAP contributed to their decision to depart or persist. None of the participants had typical connections to campus; they lived off-campus, had significant external obligations, and were not active members of the campus community. Three of the four departers, left MSU because of incongruence, suggesting that MSU was not a good fit for the participant. The fourth departer left MSU because of external obligations. The departures prior to degree were greatly influenced by the pre-entry attributes of the participants (ACT scores nine points below the University average), indicating MSU may have been their only choice in a four-year institution of higher education. Choice appears to have a significant influence on persistence. The persisters chose MSU and had strong academic role-models, either parents or siblings, that helped them negotiate the college experience. Participation in the EAP provided a sheltered environment to improve academic English and college learning strategies, but flaws within the program made it difficult for participants to transition out of the sheltered environment, both academically and socially. As the participants progressed through college, both positive and negative experiences influenced their ways of knowing and self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2008). A holistic approach to higher education is necessary to retain at-risk and diverse populations, particularly those who are LTELs. Success begins by effectively targeting participants during the admissions process, providing access programs that are academically rigorous, and by long-term retention efforts to improve persistence.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In 1954, the Supreme Court took initial steps to equality in education in *Brown vs. the Board of Education* by ruling that racial segregation "violates the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees all citizens equal protection of the laws" (§ 6). Ten years later, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included a further provision that "no person in the U.S. shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Title VI, Sec. 601). In 1974, *Lau vs. Nichols*, a class suit brought against officials of the San Francisco Unified School District by non-English speaking Chinese students found "[t]here is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" (p.3).

In recent history government, educators, and individuals have taken several crucial steps to ensure quality education for all. However, the face of education continues to change and requires ongoing assessment of educational policy.

From 1979 to 2003, the population of school aged children increased by 19 percent. In contrast, during this period, the number of student who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 160 percent, and the number of students who spoke a language other than English at home and who spoke English with difficulty increased by 124 percent. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2005, p. 34)

As with the increase in the number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in compulsory schooling, the number of ELLs entering institutions of higher education is also increasing. According to the U. S. Department of Education, growth in the nation's 18-24 year old population will result in a college enrollment increase of 1.6 million by 2015. Of that 1.6

million, 80 percent will be non-White, and 50 percent will be Hispanic (Roach, 2001). Although difficult to predict exactly what percent of the population will speak a language other than English at home, it seems reasonable to conclude that ELLs will be part of this group. An increase in ELLs will have a dramatic impact on institutions of higher education.

English language instruction has been a part of education since non-English speakers began immigrating to the U.S. Since this time, theoretical approaches to language learning, descriptions of learners, and instructional programs have evolved to meet changing needs of the population (Brown, 2007). The line between theorists and practitioners has blurred; pedagogy has become more authentic and student centered (Brown, 2007). Although the field has evolved significantly, the changing needs of population and society require practitioners to assess practices continually.

This study looks specifically at one segment of ELLs; ELLs frequently defined as Long Term English Language Learners (LTELs). I identified participants for this study through a specific higher education access program at Midwest State University (MSU) entitled the English for Academic Success Program (EAP). I used pseudonyms for the university, program, and participants to protect the confidentiality of participants. Pseudonyms are also used for individuals and universities identified by participants in the data. Following the definition of key terms, I describe how my experiences led to this study and introduce the research question guiding my research.



### **Definitions**

I have provided below definitions of terms used, which may be unfamiliar to the reader in this context. The definitions will assist in understanding the terminology used in the field prior to providing a full study description. Definitions of particular importance include Generation 1.5, LTEL, EAP, and at-risk.

#### **Generation 1.5**

The term Generation 1.5 originated in Rumbaut and Ima's (1988) Southeast Asian Refugee Youth Study (Rumbaut & Ima) aimed at identifying the success and problems of refugee youth in terms of education work force development. Rumbaut and Ima originally identified this group as the "1.5 Generation" because youth were not part of their parents' generation. For some of the 1.5 generation, their parents' decided to leave their homeland as refugees; others were part of the second generation of youth born in the U.S. Now termed Generation 1.5, the concept entered education through the fields of Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL), composition, and high school language arts in the 1990s (Roberge, 2009).

In the field of education, professionals interpret Generation 1.5 differently (Roberge, 2009). Learners maintain many of the characteristics of Rumbaut and Ima's initial classification: immigrated to a new country early in life and maintained characteristics from their home country but also assimilated to the new country (Forrest, 2006). At MSU, Generation 1.5 students also maintain characteristics from their home country and new country; however, home country characteristics are often the result of family and cultural-community influences, not immigration. Uribe (2008) described cultural characteristics as social and cultural norms, beliefs, values, attitudes, motivations, interests, behaviors, practices, and habits.

Today, more of MSU's Generation 1.5 students are children of immigrants rather than immigrants themselves. For example, of the ten Generation 1.5 students enrolled in my Introduction to College Writing course, only four were born outside of the U.S. The term, Generation 1.5, describes the cultural characteristics of learners in addition to the student's immigration status. While the participants of this study are better defined as Long-term English Learners, much of the literature refers to this population as Generation 1.5 learners.

### **Long-term English Language Learner**

In addition to the cultural characteristics incorporated into the definition of Generation 1.5 learners, language characteristics are also distinct in the participants in this study. Freeman and Freeman (2002) defined Long-term English Language Learners (LTELs) as students with seven or more years in the U.S. school system; however, LTELs could have attended school in the U.S. since kindergarten. Schooling for LTELs has generally been inconsistent in terms of ESL or bilingual education support, which in turn has an impact on language development.

In LTELs, inconsistent schooling often manifests itself through social language fluency but limited academic English abilities, particularly reading and writing in academic contexts (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Goen, Porter, Swanson, & Van Dommelen, 2002; Harklau, 2003; Uribe, 2008). Uribe suggested academic language not only "includes several dimensions of knowledge, but it also emphasizes the context where learning takes place" (¶5). These academic dimensions are linguistic (phonological, lexical, grammatical, sociolinguistics, and discourse) and cognitive (knowledge, higher order thinking [critical literacy], cognitive, and metalinguistic strategies; Uribe, 2008). Academically, LTELs possess below grade level reading and writing skills. Proficiency in conversational English often gives a false perception of academic English skills visible through adequate grades but low test scores (Freeman & Freeman, 2002).

### **The English for Academic Success Program**

As Generation 1.5 LTELs graduate from high school, the length of time these students spent in the U.S., how much formal schooling they had, and how well academic English developed during the compulsory school years greatly influences their chances of being accepted to a four-year college and success in college, should they be accepted. Some institutions of higher education recognized this need and use academic support programs to grant access and retain Generation 1.5 LTELs.

The EAP serves as a collaborative access and academic support program aimed at helping resident bicultural students develop academic, language, and social skills to the level required for academic success at MSU. Students admitted into the year-long (two semester) EAP are non-native speakers of English, score below 17 on the ACT English or Reading subsections, score below 375 on the MSU System English exam composite or reading subsections, and are not admissible to the University under the traditional criteria. Admission to MSU is conditional upon enrollment in the EAP.

### **At-Risk**

According to Donnelly (1987), at-risk students were “not experiencing success in school and are potential drop-outs” (¶ 2). The lack of success may be a result of either education or socio-economic status. I have seen researchers and educators refer to students not only as at-risk but also as developmental learners or under prepared learners. For the purpose of this discussion, I use the term at-risk because it encompasses both the academic and socioeconomic characteristics of the participants: ethnic minorities, academically disadvantaged, disabled, of low socioeconomic status, and probationary students (Jones & Watson, 1990; Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

The terms “developmental learners” and “under prepared learners” only account for academic characteristics of the student. MSU considers these participants at-risk because they can be classified in one or more of the categories identified by Heisserer and Parette and Jones and Watson (1990) and are LTELs. While at-risk is the most inclusive term available in the field at this time, there are negative connotations associated with the term at-risk. I hope researchers will find a more empowering term to define the population of students who possess the academic and social characteristics termed at-risk.

### **Personal Journey**

According to Scarcella (2003), academic English is “needed to challenge the tenets of those in power who use it ... without knowledge of academic English, individuals may be excluded from participation in educated society and prevented from transforming it” (p.1). As a developmental English instructor in higher education and former coordinator of the EAP, I am particularly concerned about how the increasing number of LTELs in four-year institutions of higher education will influence classroom instruction and student achievement.

I joined the summer English as a Second Language (ESL) program at MSU during the summer of 2001 after completing my Master’s degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Applied Linguistics. In contrast to the EAP, which is an access and support program for ELLs who are U.S. residents, the ESL program is a language program for international students, most of whom plan to return to their home country upon completion of their studies. During the fall semester, I accepted an instructional academic staff position in the English Department. Because of my ESL background, I was assigned to teach Composition Fundamentals. Composition Fundamentals provides developmental writing instruction to students admitted to the University who do not place into the required composition course typically

because of low test scores or years away from school. I taught a section of the course reserved for EAP students. The experiences described below introduced me to the unique experiences LTELs have in the EAP program.

During my first college teaching experience at MUS during fall 2001, I was not quite sure what to expect. That semester, there were 19 EAP students in my course. All of the students were (H)Mong; (H)Mong is inclusive of the cultural and linguistic differences of the (H)Mong Leng and (H)Mong Der populations (Lemoine, 2005; Thao, 2010). While the cultural and linguistic distinctions of the (H)Mong Leng and (H)Mong Der are accepted, the use of (H)Mong is a relatively new way to express inclusivity of the two groups (Thao, 2010). Five of the nineteen students were male. All were traditional aged first year students, but many of the women were married; one began the semester after giving birth to her first child. During the semester, three more of the women had babies.

Beginning the semester, I knew these were EAP students, but I had no idea what the program was about, I had no role on the committee, and I had never taught Generation 1.5 LTELs in a college classroom. All of my prior ESL experience had been teaching international students. Some students were motivated, and some were not. All of the students brought something dynamic to the classroom. Unfortunately, less than half of the group graduated from college. Amazingly, all of the new mothers graduated.

As I began searching for a dissertation topic, I remembered experiences of some of my former students. Shu married during high school and had her first child before starting college. By the time she graduated, she had four children. She became a local television reporter before returning to college to pursue her Master's degree. Mai was married before starting college but went through a difficult divorce her sophomore year. She graduated with a double major in

human resource management and psychology. Ka gave birth to her first child during finals week of her first year. During her program of study, she had another baby. After graduation, Ka became a social worker. PaKou struggled her first year and had to repeat most of the courses the next year. During her second year, PaKou gave birth to her first child. Her husband bounced back and forth between jobs, and her in-laws were not supportive of her pursuing a degree. PaKou eventually took some time off but returned to college a year later. Now she has two children and a degree in management information systems. The stories of these four women have remained with me from my first college teaching experience.

Approximately 100 EAP students have gone through my class since then. Not all of the students experienced the success of Shu, Mai, Ka, and Pa Kou. However, their experiences continued to stand out as unique among most first year students I encountered. Mahmoud's family came to the U.S. from Somalia via a refugee camp in Kenya. He only lived in the U.S. four years before attending college. He left the University after his second year. Mee, who was born in Laos and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of nine, won a prestigious scholarship, which paid tuition and fees for one year for minority business students. Ping's parents separated mid-school year and left her as guardian of her eight younger siblings. Facing pressure from her husband and his family to maintain a more traditional lifestyle and be a stay-at-home mom, See succumbed to the pressure and left school after her second year. Students' non-traditional life experiences during the college years continued to intrigue me and strongly influenced my research.

In addition to the stories of my former students, I have also found that the amount of literature on this population of students is quite limited. Although researchers have examined LTELs in compulsory schooling, the implications of linguistic and cultural differences on

academic success, identity development, and ways of knowing, most researchers investigated independent notions rather than a holistic examination of meeting students' needs. The growth of the number of LTELs in higher education and the lack of research on this population suggests an emerging field of study in need of interdisciplinary research.

### **Research Question**

My educational training and experience with Generation 1.5 LTELs, as well as the limited research on this growing population, led me to this study. I sought to understand Generation 1.5 LTEL EAP student experiences. I specifically addressed, why these particular students LTELs departed or persisted at MSU. I also considered their participation in an access program designed specifically to meet their academic and cultural needs. Because the EAP is an access program for Generation 1.5 LTELs, I have used this program to identify potential participants. The program allowed me to identify a group of students with traditional at-risk characteristics who also faced English Language Learner challenges. I did not intend for this study to be an evaluation of the EAP program, rather an examination of LTEL student experiences in college.

### **Dissertation Overview**

In the following chapters, I explore the literature influencing my research and the methodology behind this longitudinal study. Specifically, the literature review in Chapter Two examines the history of the (H)Mong population: access, departure, and persistence of long-term English language learners in higher education. I also review student development in college. In Chapter Three, I identify my methods of study. Chapters Four through Seven present the findings of the study. In Chapter Eight, I analyze the findings. Finally, in Chapter Nine, I discuss the conclusions and implications of the study on practice and for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

When the (H)Mong began arriving in the U.S. in the late 1970s, they were looking for a better life. Almost forty years later, children of (H)Mong refugees are still looking for a better life (Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, & Yang, 2004). In the introductory chapter, I addressed my motivation for researching the experiences of LTELs in the EAP program at MSU. As Generation 1.5 students, today's (H)Mong youth are at a turning point (Hodne, 1997). The purpose of this chapter is to relate this study to previous scholarly attempts to describe, analyze, and explain how grappling with cultural heritage while pursuing higher education has an impact on how individuals fit into traditional (H)Mong culture and 21<sup>st</sup> century U.S. culture. My goal is to evaluate critically the established academic context, which serves as a basis for the findings of my study.

The relevant literature that informs researchers on LTELs in higher education access programs comes from various fields: refugee studies, higher education theorists, and ESL specialists. I concentrated on applying general theories of access to, departure from, and persistence in higher education and examined student identity development of diverse populations (both LTELs and students of color) to better understand this new generation of college students. This chapter begins with an exploration of (H)Mong history before discussing theories of access, departure, and persistence in higher education and the role language and culture play in intellectual and identity development during the college years.



### **(H)Mong History**

Several theories exist regarding the origination of the (H)Mong people.

Hmong folktales, which describe an ancient homeland of ice and snow, darkness and light, have led some to speculate that the Hmong originated in central Siberia, although there is no independent evidence for this theory. Because the (H)Mong retain cultural traces of the earliest forms of Chinese social organizations, however, other specialists have considered them to be among the aboriginal inhabitants of China. (Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, & Yang, 2004, p. 3)

Thao (2006) summarized two additional origination theories: The Theory of Mesopotamian Origin, in which the (H)Mong migrated from Iran to China, and The Theory of Ultimate Southern Origin, where the (H)Mong migrated from what is now India and Myanmar to China.

In the early 1800s, the (H)Mong began migrating to the Southeast Asian countries of Laos and Vietnam (Thao, 2010). There, the (H)Mong experienced social and economic oppression under French colonial rule. According to Thao (2010), the Hmong wanted to maintain their cultural identity and moved, so they would not have to assimilate to the host culture, or face persecution for not doing so.

In the 1960s, the U.S. sought the assistance of the (H)Mong to gather intelligence information on the North Vietnamese movements in Laos. By the mid-1960s, the role of the (H)Mong secret army expanded to rescue and combat efforts. Supporting the U.S. had severe consequences for the (H)Mong. “An estimated 30,000 people, more than 10% of the Hmong population in Laos were killed in the war. Another 30%—about 100,000 Hmong men, women, and children—became refugees inside Laos, settling into already-existing towns or in resettlement centers” (Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, & Yang, 2004, p. 6).

Following the war, many (H)Mong fled to Thailand and relocated to refugee camps. In 1975, “the first groups of Hmong refugees began arriving in the U.S. By the mid-1990s more than 100,000 Hmong had been admitted to the U.S.” (Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, & Yang,

2004, p. 29). According to the 2000 Census (as cited in Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, & Yang, 2004), “there are more than 186,000 Hmong Americans in the U.S.,” a number (H)Mong community members dispute as low. The largest concentration of (H)Mong people in the U.S. are found in “California (71,741), Minnesota (45,443), Wisconsin (36,809), North Carolina (7,982), and Michigan (5,998)” (p. 29).

Immigration to the U.S. contrasts significantly with life in Southeast Asia. Yang (1993), reported that in some provinces of Laos in the 1970s, the rate of (H)Mong who did not read or write was as high as 99%. According to Green and Reder (1986) of the 20 (H)Mong refugee families in the U.S. surveyed, 80% could not read or write Lao, and 70% could not read (H)Mong. Contradictory to these reports, Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, and Yang (2004), suggested a misconception exists proposing (H)Mong as an oral or “preliterate” people, lacking an alphabet and knowledge of basic literacy processes. This is true for some (H)Mong, but evidence also suggests other (H)Mong “were exposed to literacy in several languages and in different writing systems” (p. 29). The idea the (H)Mong were pre-literate is based on the value the U.S. places on a print culture at the detriment to cultures that maintain an oral tradition (Thao, 2006). The term pre-literate presumes a lack of education or literacy rather than recognizing that education occurs in many forms (Thao, 2010).

Duffy, Harmon, Ranard, Thao, and Yang (2004) proposed two groups are responsible for improving literacy in the (H)Mong culture: The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and Western missionaries. USAID financed a school building project in the 1960s that lead to the schooling of 10,000 students by 1969. The second push came from Western missionaries who created the Romanized Popular Alphabet (RPA). Initially, researchers used

this western alphabet to translate religious documents, but later the alphabet helped (H)Mong refugees in Thailand communicate with relatives.

Even though the (H)Mong currently have a written mode of communication, the culture is grounded in the oral tradition.

The phrase “oral tradition” conceals similar ambiguities, with the apparently more specific “oral” in fact complicating it even further. The addition of “oral” often implies that the tradition in question is in some way 1) verbal or 2) non-written (not necessarily the same thing), sometime also or alternatively, 3) belonging to the “people” or the “folk,” usually with the connotation of non-educated, non-elite, and/or 4) fundamental and valued, often supposedly transmitted over generations, perhaps by the community or “folk” rather than by conscious individual action. (Finnegan, 1992, p. 7)

As generations of (H)Mong transition from an oral to written culture, additional complications arise in relation to formal schooling for Generation 1.5 students. Parents and elders speak the native language, while formal education takes place in a written tradition. Tensions occur between parents and elders in the (H)Mong community as the Generation 1.5 youth struggle to determine what role traditional language and culture play in life in the U.S. (Thao, 2006).

This abbreviated background of (H)Mong history is included to give the reader an idea of how the (H)Mong experiences with language, literacy, and education may contribute to access to higher education, identify development in the U.S., and retention in higher education. Different waves of immigrants learn differently and, therefore, adapt differently to school culture, especially when a predominantly oral culture moves into a print society (Thao, 2010).

### **Access to, Departure from, and Persistence in Higher Education**

Modern history has seen the (H)Mong population shift from oral culture to a written culture. This shift can create additional barriers to higher education as students bridge traditional cultural values with the expectations of U.S. society. In higher education, minority and low-income students remain under-represented in U.S. colleges and universities. By creating post-

secondary opportunity and by examining the influences on student departure and persistence in higher education, traditional barriers to higher education can be overcome.

### **Access to Higher Education**

At-risk students face many barriers to higher education (Allen, 1971). These barriers result in reduced access to higher education and limit educational attainment. As researchers and institutions acknowledge these barriers and the limitations they present to students, college becomes more accessible (Allen, 1971).

Allen (1971) identified six barriers to college attendance and suggests intervention methods for increasing enrollment and completing college. Allen's taxonomy of barriers and interventions categorized the needs as academic, financial, aspirational (the stigma of being "college incapable"), physiological-psychological, geographic, and sociological and was designed to create awareness and serve as a spring board for discussion amongst community members and higher education professionals on how to reduce barriers to higher education. Minority and low income students found these barriers impossible for a student to overcome alone and intervention by an institution or individual was necessary (Allen, 1971). Allen also found access interventions alone are not sufficient and students "must be helped in a consistent, systematic follow-through way to complete college" (p. 360).

Programs like the EAP arose and put access to technical, two-year, and four-year public and private universities and colleges within reach (Allen, 1971). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reported, "Of the 3.2 million youth who graduated from high school from October 2007 to October 2008, 2.2 million (68.6 percent) were attending college in October 2008" (¶1). In fact "education levels are at an all time high" with more than 80% of those 25 and over with a high

school diploma and 24% of the same age group with a least a bachelors degree (Bauman & Graf, 2003, p. 1).

However, post-secondary enrollment rates for students of color continue to lag behind that of White students.

In 2000, the population of people aged 25 and over who had completed high school or more education ranged from 84% of those who reported they were white (and no other race) to 47% of people who reported some other race. (Bauman & Graf, p.5)

With the steady increase in racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity within the population of the U.S. and growing importance of a college degree, the variance in educational opportunity for minority students cannot be neglected. “Even among the students most likely to succeed,” Carey (2004) added, “only six out of every ten of them, on average, get a B.A. degree within six years” (p. 1). While the graduation gap between White and African American students is over 10 percent, the typical graduation gap for White and Latino students is around 7 percentage points (Carey, 2004). A distinct difference between African American and Latino groups, that the literature does not account for, is language.

With the growing Latino/a population in the U.S., as well as an increasing minority population in general, the demands of higher education are changing.

Higher education has an enormous responsibility for our society’s well being...Education determines not only earning capacity but also the very quality of human life. Even longevity is correlated with educational achievement. In the broad sense of how well we live our lives – both individually and collectively – higher education is a public health issue. (Davies, 2001, p. B16)

Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) noted a bachelor’s degree brings economic and societal benefits as well as access to advanced degrees and careers. Those without a bachelor’s degree see lower pay, less security and fewer opportunities. According to the U.S. Census, those with a bachelor’s degree earn 1/3 more than those who did not finish college and nearly double of those with only

a high school diploma (Cheeseman Day & Newburger, 2002). Educational attainment of non-Whites continues to lag behind those of Whites, which places minority groups at a disadvantage (Cheeseman Day & Newburger, 2002).

Minority students face four critical junctures in creating postsecondary opportunities: academic preparation for college, graduation from high school, enrollment in college, and persistence in college to the completion of a bachelor's degree (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Postsecondary opportunity is created through four-step process: a rigorous high school curriculum, graduation from high school with a good grade point average and rank in class, enrollment in college with in the first two years of graduation as well as the racial and ethnic composition of the college attended, and persistence in college to degree obtainment. The impact of degree attainment on society economically and non-economically raises concern at the bachelor's degree level (Swail et al., 2003). Swail, et al. saw access as an important piece of the college attainment puzzle, but it is not the only piece and suggested that success should be the focus of institutions.

Like other researchers, Swail et al. (2003) also neglected the role language plays in access and college success. The work of researchers using educational statistics failed to distinguish amongst the range of Asian Americans in the U.S., allowing the Asian as the "model minority" image to persist. The idea of the model minority creates a distorted image of groups such as the (H)Mong who have not achieved the academic and economic success of their Japanese and South Korean counterparts (Chang, 2001). Seventy three percent of Asians qualified to attend a four-year college or university (Swail et al, 2003). Such groupings may lead to the statistically supported assumption, that Asian Americans are accessing and completing

higher education a rate near to White students. However, this is not true of all Asian American groups (Swail et al, 2003).

For Generation 1.5 LTELs, who are (H)Mong transitioning from an oral to print culture, accessing higher education is challenging. When presented with a program like the EAP, access becomes more attainable. However, when students access higher education with less academic and language preparation than their peers, departure and persistence become an issue (Goldschmidt, 2005; Harklau, 1998; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Zamel, 1995).

### **Departure Theory and Student Persistence**

Tinto (1993) described student departure and persistence through an interactionist model where the background of the student influences the goals of the student. The goals of the student determine how well the student integrates into the social and academic environment of the institutions. Throughout the higher education experience, goals are continually refined based on student experiences. Positive and negative experiences during college influence whether or not a student departs or persists from the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) model distinguished between involuntary dismissals based on the students' ability to meet academic rigors of the university and voluntary dismissals, where students choose to leave an institution for reasons other than grades. Tinto also distinguished between institutional departure where the student leaves the current institution of higher education and system departure, where a student leaves higher education all together. According to Tinto, students who voluntarily leave institutions have individual and institutional reasons for departing. These reasons include individual dispositions toward education, which look at internal and external reasons for departure. Internal reasons include intention and commitment.

Intention is the individual's attitude toward college, which stems from education and occupational goals. Commitment is the individual's willingness to work toward his/her goals.

External factors include obligations outside of the university and finances. Institutional factors in departure stem from the interactional experience of the student and the institution. Tinto categorized these reasons as adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. Departure due to adjustment is based on how well and how quickly the student is able to adjust socially and intellectually to the new environment. A student may encounter adjustment difficulties because of academic difficulty, socially isolation, and bewilderment (Tinto, 1993). Difficulty is rooted in on how well the student meets the academic standards set by the institution and may be the result of both academic preparation and ability. Incongruence is the lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preference of the student and what the institution has to offer (Tinto, 1993). A student may face academic or social incongruence, which may be attributed to haphazard college choice. Finally, departure from isolation is a result of the lack of contact between individual, social, and academic communities of the institution.

Tinto's (1993) theory provided a strong foundation for examining student departure and persistence; however, there are limitations to Tinto's theory when it comes to LTELs. LTELs often have multiple risk factors when entering college: first generation, low income, non-White, and LTELs. A willingness to work hard may not be enough to persist, and the more risk factors a student possesses, the more challenging it is for a student to persist toward a college degree. Tinto (1993) stated, "In many respects, departure is a highly idiosyncratic event, one that can be fully understood only by referring to the understanding and experiences of each and every person who departs" (p. 37). Tinto (1993) did not examine language as an individual factor for departure, but language was generally included in the broad category of academic preparation.



While language is a factor in preparation, language continues to be a factor in higher education, and may contribute to how well a student assimilates and achieves academically and socially.

Tinto (1993) advocated for support programs, however, he does not go into the quality, depth, and rigor such support programs need to possess in order to be successful. Several studies suggested support programs, where developmental coursework is a component, do not lead to successful degree completion (Atwell, Lavin, Domina, and Levey, 2006; Boylan and Bonham, 2007; Schmidt, 2008; Strong American Schools, 2008). First generation, minority, and low-income students are more likely to need developmental coursework, and all EAP students take a series of developmental courses during their first year. According to Strong American Schools (2008), only 29% of students taking one or two developmental courses and 19% taking three to four developmental courses graduated with a bachelor's degree. These multiple risk factors make persistence in higher education even more intriguing to study, and several researchers have added a cultural dimension to Tinto's work.

### **Linguistic and Cultural Influences on Academic Success**

Immigrant college students face a multitude of linguistic challenges and cultural expectations. While significant research based on Tinto's departure theory (1975, 1987, 1993) has been done on the departure and persistence of students in higher education, researchers, specifically Tierney (1992), Attinasi (1989), and Kraemer (1997) questioned the validity of Tinto's model for non-White students. Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (1999) noted that the key to the interactionist view, which Tinto's model is identified with, is "persistence is contingent on the extent students have become incorporated (integrated) into the social and academic communities of college" (¶3). Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (1999) identified three conceptual problems with Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student departure model: a focus on individual

responsibility as opposed to institutional responsibility, problems associated with the concept of student involvement, and a focus on the negative impact of the external community. Because of the family influence in the (H)Mong culture, many (H)Mong students live off-campus with family in non-English speaking cultural communities limiting the connection to the academic and social life of the institution.

Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) introduced “a geometric model of student persistence and achievement that focuses on students’ attributes and institutional practice” (p. 75). Because of the complex relationship between student persistence and achievement, the geometric model places the student at the center of the equation to show how the cognitive and social factors related to the student interact with the institutional elements to have an impact on the student’s experience in college. The institutional element looks at student services and academic services in combination whereas collaboration between the faculty and student services professionals at institutions is often limited. Swail, et al. claimed that their model makes the student a more centralized figure amongst the cognitive, social, and institutional factors than the more linear, procedural models of other theorists.

Similar to Tinto (1993), Swail et al’s (2003) model allowed these factors to change over time as the student’s “goals, aspirations, and abilities” changed. Swail et al. believed the strength of the geometric model “is in its ability to help intuitions work proactively to support student persistence and achievement” (p.87). Ultimately, the student and the institution must work together to get to know each other and “assess the fit between them” (p.88). Swail et al. criticized Tinto’s idea that students need to leave their home community and fully join the university community to be successful. Swail et al. believed that students needed to maintain his/her connection to his/her cultural community, which is consistent with ESL, and bilingual

education practices that encourage students to embrace the home language and culture. This is especially important to (H)Mong students who are strongly tied to family. Expecting students to disassociate with their language and culture would further disenfranchise the student with the university.

### **Ways of Knowing and Self-Authorship during the College Experience**

College years are critical in shaping identity development, but are also essential in shaping intellectual identity simultaneously (Phinney, 2004). With so many students negotiating their identity at the same time, conflict is bound to arise. Conflict arises in those ideas or amongst individuals that challenge perceived norms. Issues of race, ethnicity, and privilege challenge ways of knowing by creating conflict, and potentially leading to change and growth.

Baxter Magolda (1992) examined how gender influences student learning. Guiding her work are six assumptions: “ways of knowing and patterns within them are socially constructed; ways of knowing can best be understood through principals of naturalistic inquiry; students’ use of reasoning patterns is fluid; patterns are related to, but not dictated by, gender; student stories are context based; and ways of knowing and reasoning patterns within them are presented in Frye’s terms,” stating bias and avoiding generalization (pp. 20-22). Baxter Magolda found learners make meaning in four stages: absolute, transitional, independent, and contextual. In each stage, their interaction with peers, the instructor, the evaluation procedure, and the nature of learning influences how meaning is made and the decision-making process. As ways of knowing evolve, learners move from one stage to another. While classroom experiences are significant, the most significant experiences are co-curricular (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

Baxter Magolda’s study takes place at Miami University of Ohio and used a sample of 101 participants that were primarily middle to upper class, Caucasians (97% White) whose

parents attended college (87% of fathers and 78% of mothers). In addition, participants were well prepared for college, highly involved on campus and achieved above average grades. These characteristics significantly contrast the population of this study which includes at-risk, primarily first generation minority students whose first language is not English. While the contrasts may seem significant, Baxter Magolda took a gender-based approach in looking at ways of knowing, and five of the six participants in this study are female.

In addition to students' ways of knowing, college aged students begin to encounter self-authorship. Baxter Magolda (2008) defined self-authorship as the "internal capacity to define one's beliefs, identity, and social relationships...that helps meet the challenges of adult life" (p. 269). Self-authorship illustrates how the internal voice develops in three stages: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). As individuals learn to trust their own voice, they learn to distinguish between reality and their reaction to reality. The internal foundation forms as individuals begin to trust their internal voice as a guide. Once the internal foundation is established, individuals moving from "understanding their lived experiences to accepting them" (Baxter Magolda, 2008, pp. 280-281). Baxter Magolda stated, "research evidence suggests that adults who experience oppression and marginalization develop self-authorship prior to or during their 20s" (p. 271). As an ethnic group, the (H)Mong can trace oppression and marginalization to their origins. This history of oppression and marginalization is part of which places (H)Mong colleges students at-risk, placing greater emphasis on self-authorship and ways of knowing development occurring simultaneously.

More students face the possibility of unfilled academic goals when they fail to graduate. As the number of high risk-students in higher education continues to grow, student attrition

affects U.S. colleges and universities. A combination of academic, both student based and institutional, and non-academic factors play a role in attrition. Building on Tinto (1993) and Swail et al's (2003) ideas, a number of studies look more specifically at the language and cultural factors influencing the departure and persistence of Generation 1.5 LTELs.

### **Generation 1.5 LTELs**

Researchers and educators categorize many Generation 1.5 students as high-risk students. According to Jones and Watson (1990), "high risk students are minorities, the academically disadvantaged, the disabled, and those of low socioeconomic status" (p. 2). These groups face years of discrimination based on class, race, and gender beginning with elementary school. Reyes and Stanic (1985) noted school curriculum tends to favor White males and students of high socioeconomic status. Throughout compulsory school years, high-risk students face many prejudices in curriculum and treatment that compound into self-esteem and behavioral issues. In higher education, these characteristics can manifest in achieving lower grade point averages, selecting less academically rigorous majors and engaging in high-risk behaviors (Jones & Watson). The impact of high-risk students extends from higher education into society by creating students who are less prepared for their future responsibilities (Bauman & Graf).

Academic preparation, campus climate, commitment to education goals and the institution, social and academic integration, and financial aid greatly impacted student success (Goldschmidt, 2005; Harklau, 1998; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Zamel, 1995). Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) stated, "questions of identity for diverse populations must begin with the reality of living in a dominant culture that has a history of oppression in the U.S." (p. 17). The dominant culture, in which institutions of higher education were founded, affects an immigrant's identity development through academic instructional

methods, including group projects and class discussions, which are characteristics unique to U.S. institutions of higher education and, essentially, the dominant culture. Students connect f such activities to their personal identity development (Torres et al., 2003).

Relationships with peers play a key role in personal development. Leki (2001) followed the experiences of two students in course sponsored group work during their entire academic career. Leki found group dynamics might keep non-native speakers from contributing to group projects through either their own hesitation or the hesitation of their native English speaking group members who ignored or limited the non-native speakers' contributions to the group project. Hesitations lead the participants to have negative experiences with their peers. Leki noted these findings were contrary with the previous research of Cohen (1994), Ford (1991), and Holt (1994). These researchers identified benefits to non-native English speaking students in terms of language development and cultural exposure. Although Leki's (2001) findings only followed two students, both participants experienced very few of the expected benefits of group work.

Like group work, class participation is a characteristic unique to U.S. college classrooms. Hodne (1997) reported native and non-native English speakers appear to be on parallel tracks during their first two years of university study since interaction between the two groups of individuals is limited to nonexistent. This distance lead to dissatisfaction with the college experience due to the stress of adjusting to academics, language difficulties, cultural differences, value conflicts, and subtle and overt racism (Hodne, 1997). While these factors may exist, Hodne suggested easing oral communication is an important step in improving immigrant students' comfort level in the classroom. Hodne cautioned, improvement in oral communication

amongst classmates may create personal relationships on campus, though it can also lead to alienation within their home communities.

Torres et al. (2003) supported this finding. In most classrooms, textbooks, the media, and classroom models to reinforce cultural heritage of the dominant culture. Classes focusing on non-dominant cultural awareness help immigrant students feel more comfortable with who they are. In contrast, when students struggle to connect with classmates and faculty, grades suffer and identity development falters (Torres et al., 2003). Students may become “psychologically battered” when constantly subjected to racially biased courses and curricula to the point of dropping out of college (Torres et al., 2003).

To understand the disillusionment many immigrant students experienced because of limited background knowledge and underdeveloped skills necessary for college success, Goldschmidt (2005) studied eighteen freshman immigrant students through a series of focus groups, one on one interviews, and written tasks. Goldschmidt found by addressing students’ affective needs, students’ effective outcomes would be enhanced. Gaining an understanding of the educational system as well as an academic and social sense of self were necessary skills that were undeveloped in the participants at the beginning of the study. Students needed support of an on campus center in order to feel comfortable participating in extracurricular campus events (Goldschmidt, 2005).

Attinasi (1989) found consistent results while studying Mexican American college students. By interviewing eighteen current and former students in the months following their first year, Attinasi determined their perceptions of their college going behavior during their first year of study. Mentoring and sharing of peer knowledge and social integration in terms of

negotiating the campus environment were important factors in keeping Mexican – American freshmen in college (Attinasi, 1989).

In addition to interactions with students, faculty interaction also had an impact on identity development (Zamel, 1995). Immigrant students notice the feedback, whether direct or indirect, positive or negative, given by faculty members. Zamel found, when surveying 325 students over a two-year period students sought patience, tolerance, and encouragement as key factors in their learning. Some participants also added that when faculty members did not acknowledge their struggles, they often felt resented by the instructor resulting in student-faculty tension.

Faculty interaction, in combination with the role and perceptions of the institution, also influences Generation 1.5 college students (Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996; Harklau, 1998). Harklau argued that based on the number of newcomers in higher education, gaps exist in faculty and administrator awareness of immigrant educational issues, issues of language and remediation, and issues of institutional enculturation. A 1996 survey of fourteen postsecondary institutions across the nation by Gray et al. found faculty and administrators had minimal awareness of immigrant educational issues. None of the educators surveyed collected data on immigrant experiences or achievements, but they believed that immigrant students were doing well and generally opposed any attention to immigrants at their institutions (Gray et al., 1996). Harklau (1998) added the lack of recognition was contributing to the invisibility of immigrants in higher education. Before any serious consideration of immigrant issues could take place, acknowledgement of these groups was needed before the barriers to admission and the barriers within the institution could be addressed (Harklau, 1998).



Not only are administrators avoiding diversity discussions, opportunities for immigrants to develop an adequate level of English proficiency to progress and achieve in higher education is subject of concern within institutions of higher education (Gray et al., 1996; Harklau, 1998). Harklau argued limited English proficiency caused an achievement gap between native and non-native English speakers in the classroom. Because mastering the language required for American classrooms takes five to seven years, students who arrive in the U.S. in elementary school may still not be at the proficiency level of their native English-speaking classmates by the time they attend college (Harklau, 1998).

Faculty members varied their responses' to newcomers English language proficiency in classroom (Zamel, 1995). Zamel found some faculty members acknowledge the cross-cultural expertise of immigrant students. However, the majority of faculty members found that students' written language skills were deficient and inadequate. Gray et al.'s (1996) survey found consistent results citing inadequate language skills as the most significant barrier to immigrants in college. Limited English proficiency appears to pose significant restrictions on how immigrants fare in college.

However, Harklau (1998) suggested immigrants placed into English as a Second Language (ESL) or academic language support programs may not lead to more successful immigrant students in higher education. Questions arise as to whether or not such programs actually lead to attaining a degree. Smoke (1998) found students believed ESL coursework improved their English language skills; however, few students identified ESL coursework to be helpful in their program of study. Students continued to avoid writing intense courses even after completing ESL coursework (Harklau, 1998; Smoke, 1998).

Lastly, culmination of faculty and administrator awareness that immigrant educational issues and issues of language and remediation are issues of institutional enculturation (Gibson, 1997; Harklau, 1998; Richardson & Skinner, 1991; Weingartner, 1992). As noted earlier, researchers agreed that college is a key place for shaping the identity of all students (Goldschmidt, 2005; Harklau, 1998; Torres et al., 2003; Zamel, 1995). Students and educators constantly reproduce, resist, and change sociocultural values and norms about academic achievement, life chances, and ethnicity (Davidson, 1996).

Although college is a place to “find yourself,” it is also a place to identify yourself as an educated person who is about to become part of society. Harklau (1998) categorized problems with college enculturation as “ways of knowing – epistemic stances” and “ways of being – attitudes, affiliations, and identities” (pp. 643-644). The “ways of knowing” connect with how students develop intellectually, while the “ways of being” regard how students position themselves in society (Harklau, 1998).

Weingartner (1992) described one of the goals of higher education is to develop the “intellectual virtues” of students. “Such virtues are presented as self-evident, culturally neutral, and superior modes of thought and logic” (Harklau, 1998, p. 643). However, when newcomers socialized in other cultures, come into the classroom, they bring with them different assumptions about instructors and instructional methods (Harklau, 1998). Values held in high regard of the host culture may not be held in the same regard in the home culture causing students to accept more than just the academic rules of the institution but also the values of the home culture (Weingartner, 1992; Harklau, 1998).

Harklau (1998) also argued college enculturation changes how students position themselves in U.S. society. To do this, newcomers must also adapt to the social climate within

the institution in order to carry those values into society upon graduation. However, newcomers are less active in the social foundations of the institution because of different parental and community expectations (Harklau, 1998). The collectivist nature of many societies, but not that of the U.S., has the potential for both motivation and anxiety. Immigrants with more off-campus responsibilities are less likely to spend time on campus for reasons other than to attend classes (Harklau, 1998; Richardson & Skinner, 1991). Richardson and Skinner suggested students in non-traditional focuses of attending college have a significantly enhanced risk of leaving school before completion.

While a non-traditional approach may increase dropout rates, individuals using this approach may also serve as a support system (Gibson, 1997). Gibson argued strong ethnic ties enabled some immigrant students to be successful. In a review of several international and U.S. cases, Gibson concluded immigrant students do better in school when they are strongly connected to the identities of their family, communities, and peers and feel supported in the acculturation process. In addition to the institutional role in personal identity development, varying societal influences have had an impact on the way the traditional theoretical context applies to immigrant college students. Gibson (1997) stated cultural identity formation is not a matter of preserving a cultural tradition handed down from one's parents or a response to institutionally defined status, but it is a dynamic process influenced by life in school as well as life out of school.

Language and culture play a significant role in the intellectual development and academic success of Generation 1.5 LTELs. To persist, all aspects of higher education need to be aware of the implications of language and culture on the intellectual development of the student. However, intellectual development is not the only element of student development. Language

and culture also has an impact on identity during the college years. Intellectual and identity development occur simultaneously.

### **Identity Development in College**

Further complicating departure and persistence is the development of the individual. College is a critical juncture for identity and intellectual development (Erikson, 1964). Looking at how identity develops and how students learn to make meaning, provided me with multiple perspectives on how students negotiate the college experience.

The theoretical context surrounding identity development is grounded in the work of Erikson (1964). Erikson's work introduced identity development theory research by defining the search for identity as who we are as well as who are not (Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003). According to Erikson (1968), as students entered college, they are in various stages of adolescence. During this time, students already face "uncertainty in their adult roles" as they search for "continuity and sameness" (p. 128). Going to college further compound this search for self as students leave behind family, who have been responsible for setting rules and establishing guidelines to being responsible, testing the limits of unsupervised freedom, while leaving behind friends and searching for new peer groups (Erikson, 1968). Conflict in the personal lives of students can greatly influence the students' ability to interact with the new environment. Positive interaction in the university environment, as seen in both the Tinto's (1993) and Swail, Redd, and Perna (2003) models, played a significant role in student persistence.

Marcia (1965) furthered Erikson's (1968) theories by establishing an Identity Development Model, which discusses the process through which identity is developed. Marcia's (1965) work, looked at the presence of crisis and commitment to evaluate the development of

ego identity. Marcia placed students on a continuum between identity achievement and identity diffusion. Identity has been achieved following a crisis period that leads to a career and ideology commitment as a result of a decision making process. In contrast, the identity-diffusion subject may or may not have experienced crisis, is not committed to an occupation, and is likely to sample from a variety of choices. Marcia categorized students falling between these two points as either in moratorium or foreclosure. The moratorium subject is actively in crisis and attempting to reconcile parental wishes with his/her own. Students in foreclosure, “have not experienced crisis, yet express commitment” (Marcia, 1965, p. 552). College faculty, staff, and administrators who help students perform at their skill level lay the groundwork for developing intellectual, social, and physical competence (Torres et al., 2003). This groundwork takes place as a student moves from his/her parents expectations and goals to developing his/her own expectations and goals.

Chickering’s (1969) theory of education and development included seven developmental tasks: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy to interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (revised with Reisser in 1993). According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), colleges lay the foundation for identity development by providing experiences that contribute to developing each of the seven tasks. The theoretical context surrounding immigrant identity development is an important starting point because college students develop their identity in different ways (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1964; Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966). The college years are a critical time for development and researchers readily accept that the college years play a key role in personal identity develops (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Erikson, 1964; Josselson, 1987; Marcia, 1966).

Torres et al. (2003) believed traditional theories have limited application to students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and can cause misunderstanding and miscommunication. More recent studies based on multigroup ethnic and racial identity models have led to a diverse approach to identity development in immigrant college students (Torres et al., 2003). Studies focusing on African Americans suggested, “fundamental theories do not encompass the developmental tasks of diverse students” (Torres et al., 2003, p. 16).

Torres et al. (2003) provided an overview of the multi-group and racial identity models of several researchers. Atkinson, Morten, and Sue (as cited in Torres et al., 2003) developed the minority identity development model that has been widely accepted as applicable for many groups of people. This model breaks identity development into five stages from conformity to integrative awareness.

Phinney (as cited in Torres et al., 2003) found ethnic identity development to be closely related to the process of conflict resolution, primarily between the level of prejudice and stereotyping from the majority cultures and the difference of values between the majority and minority culture. According to Phinney, individuals must go through the stages of unexamined ethnic identity, ethnic identity search/moratorium, and ethnic identity achievement before they can be comfortable with whom they are in society. This model suggested immigrant students move through a personal identity struggle, strongly tied to ethnic identity development (Phinney, in Torres et al, 2003). In college, the process of identity development may be just beginning or a continued occurrence, which implies that the institution, including faculty members, must be aware of in order to provide a safe environment for growth. Students of color move from communities of racial, ethnic, and/or linguistic heritage to predominately White universities,

which can impact the sense of belonging to the academic and social community of the university (Torres et al., 2003).

Torres (2003) investigated the influences of ethnic identity development of 10 college-age Latino/a students during their first two years of college. Torres' model, which is based on Phinney's work (as cited in Torres et al., 2003), found "Situating Identity" and "Influences on Change" in identity development emerged during the first two years of college life (p. 536). "Situating Identity" examines conditions including environments where they grew up, family influence and generational status, and self-perception of status in society, while "Influences on Change" considers sub-processes of conflict with culture and the change in relationship to the environment. Phinney examined both categories to determine the possible outcomes that may arise depending on the dimension of each condition (as cited in Torres et al., 2003).

Like the large variation in Latino groups, Asian immigrants also come from very diverse backgrounds. Because of this, Asian immigrants not only experience the effects of college life but also individualized reactions to cultural influences and characteristics (Torres et al., 2003). Torres et al (2003) also suggested that relationships and external forces play a significant role in Asian-Americans identity development. Additionally, shared ethnic characteristics, social context, community support, and English language proficiency play a key role in the identity development of Asian immigrant students on campus (Torres et al., 2003).

Whereas personal identity theory has evolved since the time of Erikson (1964), additional research must be done to support more recent multigroup ethnic and racial identity models and personal identity models targeting specific immigrant groups, especially given the increased diversity of immigrant groups in the U.S. today. Immigrant students not only face a multitude of issues in school, but they are also affected by cultural differences in their community life that

may have an impact on how their personal identity develops. Family, environment, and social status are just some of the conditions that influence identity development. Immigrant students often have very complex lives out of school (Goldschmidt, 2005). This complexity leads to an ongoing process which Harklau (1998) called “readjustment, identity formation, and acculturation.” Several studies have found consistencies with Harklau’s 1998 findings (Allen, 1992; Canniff, 2000; Matzen, 1996; Offoh, 2003; Pari, 1992).

Canniff (2000) followed three generations of Cambodian families over a three-year period. Through a series of participant observations and interviews, Canniff examined dynamics of culture, spirituality, and success. While each generation had spent a different amount of time in U.S. culture, the most important indicator of a successful life across generations was maintaining a family bond. Although the youngest generation indicated higher education was an important personal goal, making the family proud was a higher standard to achieve (Canniff, 2000).

Thai female immigrants illustrated the dynamics of acculturation through a case study used to determine the impact of Freire’s educational methods on Thai and other Asian groups (Matzen, 1996). Matzen worried that in imposing Freire’s methods, the cultural identity of Asian students might be oppressed and lost rather than reinforced. Because the Thai education system is based on Buddhist philosophy with a focus on enlightenment, Freire’s belief that traditional education is oppressive is contradictory to Buddhist practices. Matzen identified Thai people in the U.S. will use their native filters of language, culture, and Buddhism to process American culture and language. Some distinct differences included mistaking signs of individualism for signs of status and being unprepared for the critical thinking skills necessary to succeed in higher education. Matzen concluded that educators and researchers must consider all



aspects of a person as part of their identity adjustment, rather than merely focusing on individual linguistic ability.

Pari (1992) added college is where most students first question their identities and become uncomfortable. In some cases, the further removed students are from their cultural heritage, the more likely they are to function in multi-ethnic societies (Pari, 1992). “While some students are engaged in acts of empowerment through their heightened sensitivity of ethnic and racial identities and the intrusion of the dominant culture, others feel a lack of empowerment and exhibit a profound quest for identity” (p.5).

Mehan, Hubbard, and Villaneuava (1994) found students, especially those from linguistic and ethnic minority backgrounds and low income families, needed to develop strategies for managing dual identities, which is consistent with Pari’s (1992) work. Participants needed to find a way to maintain grades to be academically successful in the dominant culture but also to maintain friendships to be socially successful within his/her immigrant culture. Allen (1992) termed this phenomenon as “border crossings” because immigrants belong to more than one community and must adapt their identity according to the setting.

Offoh (2003) researched identity issues in a small sample of Black African college students considered voluntary immigrants. Offoh’s focus was to examine identity in relation to African American counterparts, acculturation and assimilation within education, and academic perception. Most participants drew clear distinctions between themselves and their African American counterparts in part because of the negative image African Americans have in the U.S. and in their native countries. A parental push to distinguish themselves also played a role for some of the participants (Offoh, 2003).

Additionally, some participants initially assimilated into the dominant culture while at school, even though their families practiced strong African beliefs at home (Offoh, 2003). Many went so far as to learn the cultural practices and ideology, change their physical appearance and dress, disguise their name and forget their language. However, after some time, many participants went back to their traditional cultural values when they became more comfortable with their identity. Offoh found some participants who had less of a struggle with identity issues and chose not to change any aspects of who they are.

Offoh's (2003) participants also expressed their perceptions of the educational system. Academically, the African immigrants studied believed that they could be successful in the American education system. Parental attainment of a college degree also provided a positive role model for the participants. Many continued to draw distinctions between themselves and African Americans to remove themselves from the stereotypical perceptions U.S. culture has toward African Americans.

Students begin by accepting the roles prescribed by teachers, parents, and others before conforming to the characteristics of the dominant society (Torres et al., 2003). Eventually, students began to question the common experiences set by the dominant culture and worked to redefine their identity and accepted themselves for who they are (Torres et al.). According to Mehan et al. (1994), many minority students saw accepting academic achievement as accepting the dominant culture.

Both university and community life play roles in immigrant identity development. The situation has multiple dimensions and has an impact on each student differently depending on how the students process the change. Where the students are in their search for self must be considered in combination with how change might have an impact on the possible outcomes in

identity development. This may also determine how significant experiences are to individual students (Allen, 1992; Canniff, 2000; Harklau, 1998; Matzen, 1996; Offoh, 2003; Pari, 1992; Torres et al. 2003).

“Assessing the level of readiness and providing a safe environmental setting provide the best balance of challenge and support to promote growth and learning among students” (Torres et al., 2003, p. 38). However, researchers need to determine the role cultural identity and language play in departure and persistence and conduct additional research, especially longitudinal studies of LTELs experiences. In a time where an increased number of LTELs are present in higher education, immigrant issues go beyond race and extend to language and culture and must be taken seriously if institutions want to create places where diversity is accepted and appreciated. The theoretical foundation provides a starting point for institutions of higher education to examine when looking at their own institutional practices. By examining the institution and the immigrant students involved, a more supportive environment for developing personal identity can be established.

Generation 1.5 students from the (H)Mong culture are often torn between maintaining their cultural identity and assimilating into the dominate culture. Maintaining cultural identity may mean failure in a White society, while assimilation may mean sacrificing cultural heritage. Because the (H)Mong are an ethnic group without a homeland, there is no country actively preserving (H)Mong traditions, artifacts, or language. Bearing the responsibility for cultural proliferation while trying to be successful in the dominant culture can wreck havoc on an individual’s identity, which may influence whether or not one succeeds in higher education.

### **Summary**

Baxter Magolda (2009) stated, "... the future of student development theorizing depends on dialectic. It requires bring multiple perspectives into dialogue, maintaining a context in which to next and integrate these perspectives, and conducting developmental research in ways that enlighten holistic development" (p. 633). For (H)Mong students with multiple risk factors, both traditional (low-income, first generation) and non-traditional (linguistic, cultural, and racial), a more holistic approach is needed to look at how meaning is made in the college experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1992; 2009; Jones & Watson, 1990; Heisserer & Parette, 2002). In the next chapter, I will explore the methodological foundations for this study by beginning with an overview of phenomenology followed by data collection and analysis procedures.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This study set out to gain a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of the experiences of a group of Generation 1.5 LTELs. Although a growing body of literature is available on Generation 1.5 students, much of this research is limited to compulsory schooling and only follows students beyond high school in a limited capacity. I sought to understand each student's journey of self-discovery as he/she negotiates the college experience. I was particularly interested in learning the stories of each student as they negotiate their way through higher education while balancing cultural tradition. The question that guided this study was, "Which experiences contribute to the departure and persistence of EAP students at MSU." Though this question was the starting point, I was open to discovering phenomena throughout the longitudinal study. This longitudinal study followed a homogenous sampling of six students from the 2005-2006 cohort of EAP students throughout their university career. All participants were interviewed at least once a year until departure or graduation. I interviewed the persisters over the course of five to five and a half years. In this chapter, I describe the methodological tradition, the structure of the study, the context of the inquiry, and the limitations of the study.

#### **Methodological Tradition**

In doing research, we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act; we want to know that which is most essential to being. To care is to serve and to share our being with the one we love. We desire to truly know our loved one's very nature. And if our love is strong enough, we not only will learn much about life, we also will come face to face with its mystery. (Van Manen, 1990, pp. 5-6)

Phenomenology understands reason as ordered toward truth. Phenomenological researchers see the human mind as geared toward evidence, toward manifesting the way things are (Sokolowski, 2000). Furthermore, researchers validate this vision of reason and the mind by describing, in

convincing detail, the activities by which the mind achieves truth, along with limitations and obscurities that accompany such achievement (Sokolowski, 2000).

Using descriptions of how people experience and perceive their experience, phenomenological researchers try to understand what events and interactions mean to the individual (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Glesne, 1999). “A phenomenological perspective includes a focus of the life world, an openness to the experiences of subjects, a primacy of precise descriptions, attempts to bracket foreknowledge, and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 39). Taking a phenomenological approach allowed for an examination of each EAP participants’ individual experience in college.

Students may not realize the intentionality of their actions, thoughts, behaviors as they arise or how these actions, thoughts, behaviors contribute to the development of their identity and their college experience. Reflectively, through story, intentionality may be distinguishable. The public nature of experiences provides evidence of existence. Even if the individual does not recall the experience, the experience has left an imprint on his/her existence. Others should know that these experiences exist individually, culturally, and institutionally to validate the (H)Mong/minority experience.

I grounded my approach to the methodology of this study partially in the work of Robert Sokolowski (2000) and Max Van Manen (1990). Sokolowski’s approach “offers the possibility of philosophical thinking at a time when such thinking is seriously called into question or largely ignored” (p.2). Van Manen’s pedagogical approach considered language and expression of the participants lived experience in the reflection and interpretation. For this study, phenomenology allows the opportunity to understand how Generation 1.5 LTELs experience higher education and how they express those experiences through a longitudinal series of semi-

structured interviews. Through a longitudinal look at the participants' experiences, I began to understand the participants' relationship with the university academically, socially, and culturally and how this relationship influenced relationships within and outside of the institution.

Researchers can present facts in many ways and reflecting presents a different perspective from observing; each player perceives the experience differently even though they share a common background. "Identity belongs to what is given in an experience, and the recognition belongs to the intentional structure of experience...this identity itself can be intended in absence as well as in presence, and we can be mistaken about it" (Sokolowski, 2000, p.21). Identity is dynamic and a culmination of all experiences rather than being defined by one specific moment. When working with at-risk students and Generation 1.5 LTELs, educators know there is more having an impact on the educational experiences than knowledge. There are linguistic and cultural implications assigned to the meaning given to the experience. Phenomenology is an attempt "to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 18). As an educator, I saw students experience through one perspective and needed to understand the participants to see the experience more precisely.

### **Structure of the Study**

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described the process of qualitative research design as one based on "theoretical assumptions, data collection traditions, and generally stated substantive questions" (p. 50). In the spirit of Bogdan and Biklen, I designed this study through the influence of the critical literature review and the phenomenological tradition to establish a foundation for this research, yet I allowed the design to evolve throughout the course of the

study. Below I describe my approach to the participant selection, the data collection process, the confidentiality of the data, and the analysis of the collected data guided.

### **Selection**

Using Patton's idea of purposeful sampling (Glesne, 1999), I selected participants that fit within the parameters of my research question. Through homogenous sampling, I selected participants within a particular subgroup in order to describe the group experiences in-depth. Once selected, I conducted my research within the parameters of human subjects' guidelines.

My homogenous sample arose through participants I identified as undergraduate students conditionally admitted to MSU through the EAP. The EAP is a program designed to create postsecondary opportunity for multicultural students who are LTELs. According to Upton (1989) former director of ESL at the time the EAP was developed, MSU formed the EAP in response to the growing number of LTELs at the university who were facing academic difficulties. Upton states that the university "was in an ethical dilemma of admitting students who were academically at-risk, but not providing them with the support they needed to be successful" (p. 181). The EAP offers access to a four-year degree and a freshman year experience that aims to build the academic skills necessary for success. Because I designed my research question to look at the experiences of Generation 1.5 LTELs in higher education, the EAP offered a pool of prospective participants that fit the parameters of my study.

I conducted this research project in accordance with the ethical guidelines for the treatment of human subjects established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at MSU and the University of St. Thomas. Once both IRBs approved the study was, I emailed the twelve members of the 2005-2006 cohort of EAP students. Because the EAP profile already narrows down the potential participant pool and the 2005-2006 cohort was limited in size, I targeted all



members of the cohort for participation and used self-selection to determine participants. An email announced an informational meeting to the prospective participants. I held two interest meetings on the MSU campus during spring 2006. At the interest meeting, I provided the potential participants with a cover letter (Appendix A) describing the project and gave the attendees the opportunity to ask questions regarding his/her involvement in the project. Willing participants signed the informed consent (Appendix B) form and were given copies for his/her records.

I compensated all participants for their participation. Students received up to \$50.00 for participating in the study. 1) Twenty dollars was paid to the participant after completing the second year of the study or upon withdrawal from the MSU. 2) The participant received ten dollars a year for each additional year of participation in the study. A maximum of thirty dollars was paid to the participant upon exit from the study. (i.e. All participants received \$20.00 at the end of the second year of participation. The remaining funds were distributed based on the number of years, above two, for participating in the study. For example, a student participating in the study for four years received \$20.00 at the end of the second year and \$20.00 at the end of the fourth year. A student participating in the study for five years will receive \$20.00 at the end of the second year and \$30.00 at the end of the fourth year.)

I chose to compensate participants for two reasons. The first reason was the age of the participants. Initially, I felt it may be difficult to convince 18 year old college students to participate in the study. At a time where identity formation is taking place, students may not realize that they have a story to tell or that their story is interesting to others. The second reason, and main reason, for compensation is the duration of the study. I planned to interview participants twice a year for the duration of their time at MSU. College students often balance

school, work, family, and social life, and fitting participation in this study over a number of years into an already busy and unpredictable schedule was potentially challenging. I wanted to show my appreciation for their commitment to the study.

Using a homogenous sampling strategy, I selected participants conditionally admitted to MSU through the EAP for participation. Homogenous sampling allowed me with the ability to limit research participants to those who were Generation 1.5 LTELs with an at-risk profile. Individual participants were identified and selected in accordance with human subject's guidelines.

### **Data Collection**

To collect data for this longitudinal study, I wanted to get to know my participants in-depth over an extended period. In order to understand the experiences of my homogenous sample of participants and improve the quality and reliability of my data, I used multiple data collection methods for this study (Glesne, 1999). I collected data through three phases: a background questionnaire, a document review, and a series of semi-structured interviews.

I gave a background questionnaire (see Appendix C) to each participant to get to know students prior to their first interview. The background questionnaire documented demographic information including gender, age, ethnic origin, socioeconomic status (as described by student), frequency English is used at home, other primary languages spoken, country of birth, and documented disability (if any); information on academic preparation including years of school in the U.S., high school GPA upon graduation, and ESL coursework taken prior to attending MSU; and family history information including education preparation of parents (or guardians) and number of siblings to attend and graduate from college.

In addition to the background questionnaire, I conducted a review of the participants' entrance documents to develop a profile of the participants. Entrance information, provided by the EAP, contained ACT scores and high school GPA and rank-in-class. Through the entrance information, I confirmed the at-risk profile of the participants and the conditional admission to the EAP. I used EAP committee meeting notes to formulate questions for participants based on recommendations made to students by the committee during their first year. I also reviewed email correspondence between the participants and me.

The primary form of data collection was a series of audio recorded, semi-structured interviews. In phenomenology, interviewing is additive because it provides multiple profiles of the thing in question (Sokolowski, 2000). In this study, the thing, in question is the university experience and in-depth interviewing allowed me to gain insight into the participants' lived-experience. As the interviewer, I felt semi-structured interviews were necessary to avoid the limitations of yes/no questions, to develop an organized structure to the interview process, to allow the participant an opportunity to elaborate on his/her experience, and to provide an opportunity to explore new avenues the participant may present over the years. Overall, semi structured interviews also offered benefits of both structured and unstructured interviews with fewer limitations. I developed interview questions (Appendix D) with the guidance of the critical literature review.

The interviews were divided into three categories. The first interview, which took place at the end of the participant's first year, was an introductory interview designed to get to know the participant and make them comfortable with the process. I was concerned that an 18-year-old first year college student would not feel like they had a story to tell or would be hesitant to share information with me. To alleviate hesitations, I designed the interviews to be more

conversational where I offered some of my own story and allowed students to ask questions of me. Throughout the interview process, it was also important for me to be a good listener and to communicate my interest in the participants' responses through non-verbal and verbal responses. Keeping in mind the age of the participant and the identity and intellectual development stages analyzed in the literature review, I expected some of the initial interviews to be more informative and more important for developing rapport rather than producing high quality data. In a longitudinal study, such as this one, the cumulative nature of the data was more important than one individual interview. This meant, though, that some of the participants departing earlier in his/her educational experience did not present as rich of interviews as those persisting further at the university.

The second category of interviews was the end of semester interview. The end of semester interviews were designed to find out about semester experiences and explore one or two bigger topics (i.e. what is it like to be a (H)Mong woman/man in college?). I did not want to overwhelm the student with too many bigger questions in one interview. This approach also allowed me to control the length of the interview and to build on ideas presented previously. Initially I interviewed participants at the end of each semester for approximately 30 minutes each. Due to scheduling conflicts with some participants, I adjusted the interview schedule and conducted interviews with some participants once a year. Interviews conducted annually typically averaged one hour in length.

At the end of the student's academic experience, I conducted an exit interview to try to determine why a student was leaving the university early or what they planned to do upon graduation and how the student felt about this transition. The exit interview also allowed the student to reflect on their university experiences and for us to review key themes that had

developed over the years. Two of the six participants persisted at the university to graduation. Four participants departed at various times in their university experience. One participant left the university unexpectedly, and I was unable to collect an exit interview from her. I learned two participants were leaving the university at a regularly scheduled semester interview and had to modify interview questions during the interview process.

Throughout the duration of data collection, I built a sense of trust between participants and myself. As we built trust and sensitive information was collected, raw data was stored in protected files and only shared with the dissertation chair (who was also ethically bound by the same level of confidentiality). To maintain confidentiality the name of the university and program was changed. In addition, I assigned each participant a pseudonym. I describe how I selected pseudonyms in the Context section of this chapter when the participants are introduced.

I used multiple methods of data collection in this study for the purpose of triangulation. Triangulation gave me the opportunity to offset potential threats to the validity of the data (Glesne, 1999). The background questionnaire, document review, and series of semi-structured interviews provided me with a greater breadth of data to analyze.

### **Data Analysis**

In phenomenology, researchers “look at what we normally look through” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 50). I began to analyze the data following each interview and used open coding to look at the data through its parts and wholes. To maintain the integrity of the participants, I preserved the voice of the participants in the data, and I addressed the validity of the data through a multifaceted approach.

Data analysis began immediately following each interview with reflective comments and notes regarding follow-up points for future interviews. Then I transcribed each of the interviews

using Dragon Naturally Speaking 9 voice recognition software. Throughout the transcription process, I recorded observer comments as each interview was transcribed and at the end of each interview. Because the voice recognition software was not 100% accurate, I revised the original drafts and added a second layer of observer comments to the initial notes. These notes were color-coded to distinguish between the initial and secondary reflections.

Because the participants were LTELs, I made the decision not to correct grammar, vocabulary, or usage errors during transcription. Van Manen (1999) suggested language plays an important role in describing the lived experience, so it was important to me to maintain the language used by the participants. Although data was not edited for grammatical correctness, vocabulary, or usage, filled pauses (um, like, and unnecessary repetition of phrases) were removed to improve readability. When clarification was necessary, my understanding of the data, as verified through follow-up questions, has been provided. Combined, these methods maintain the integrity of the data through the language and mode of expression presented by the participant as suggested by Van Manen while maximizing readability for the reader.

In the next phase of analysis, open coding, I analyzed each interview separately. I divided the transcribed data into units of meaning identified from the participants' own words. I examined these concepts looking for alternate interpretations and aspects that had not originally been considered. Through presence and absence, researchers contemplate themes in past experiences, suspend beliefs, and bracket (code). I compared coding units until categories that contained identified concepts emerged.

The phenomenological idea of parts and wholes suggests that subjects and objects have multiple roles (Sokolowski, 2000). Pieces function independently as well as part of something. University students function as individuals as well as part of the university community.

Moments do not exist apart from the whole. Similar to the rustling of leaves, a dialogue with an instructor exists in the moment only. In the final phase of my analysis, I examined data in two threads: a) chronologically across each individual participant's time at MSU and b) in comparison to other participants'. This analysis provided context and helped distinguish moments from pieces.

To address validity, I used several verification procedures (Glesne, 1999). First, the longitudinal nature of the study allowed me to conduct several interviews with each participant over a prolonged period. I used multiple data collection methods in the forms of a background questionnaire, document review, and a series of semi-structured interviews to triangulate data. While my lens as former EAP coordinator and years of experience working with Generation 1.5 LTELs as an educator in higher education allowed me insight into the validity of the data, it also poses some limitations. I discuss later in this chapter the limitations to the study as well as clarify my bias as a researcher. As a final measure of validity, a colleague, familiar with the experiences of this sampling of participants conducted an external audit of the findings to verify that I had accurately reflected the perspectives of the participants. Because I often learned participants were departing from the University during an interview and my attempts to contact participants once they were no longer on campus, were not successful, I was unable to use member checking as a means of verifying findings. However, during the data collection process, we re-visited topics and themes in multiple interviews during the years the participants participated in the study.

To preserve the integrity of the analysis, data drives the analysis of the study. Data derived from the analysis of the background questionnaire, document review, and interviews. Themes emerged and were supported with evidence found in the students' words, and were

verified by multiple data collection methods, multiple session interviews, acknowledgment of limitations and bias, and confirmed through an external audit.

### **Context of the Inquiry**

Methodological Tradition looked at the role phenomenology plays in this study. The Structure of the Study examined the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis process. This section looks more specifically at the university where the study took place, the participants selected, and me as the researcher.

#### **University**

MSU is located in a city of approximately 65,000 residents with the total population of the metropolitan area estimated at 151,000. In 2010, campus enrollment was approximately 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Of this population, 1% were international students and 6% were multicultural students. At MSU, the average first year student entered the university with an ACT composite score of 24.5 and a class rank of 74%.

#### **Participants**

I selected participants from a homogenous sample. First, I describe the participant generally in terms of the homogenous sampling. Then I describe each participant individually.

All participants derived from the 2005-2006 cohort of EAP students. I referred to participants with pseudonyms, which I chose intentionally to reflect the (H)Mong identity of the participants. While the names are (H)Mong, they do not represent any student from the cohort or potential participants, but I selected these pseudonyms because they reflect names that are common in the (H)Mong culture. I felt that choosing less common names would make it easier for a reader to falsely identify the participant, whereas using common (H)Mong names adds to the anonymity of the participant. As a population, EAP students are some of the most at-risk on



campus. The students are all long-term English learners who were not admissible to the MSU under traditional admissions criteria. Some EAP students have limited formal schooling in the U.S., are first generation college students, and from low-income families. Table 1 illustrates the admissions information collected during the document review process. The participants rank in class and ACT test scores provide insight into how the participants in this study compared to the first year students at MSU who were not conditionally admitted through the EAP.

All of the participants are (H)Mong, attended U.S. schools for all of their compulsory, K-12 schooling, and MSU considered all of the participants traditional students (they entered the university immediately following graduation from high school). Five participants qualified for the Student Support Services (TRIO) program, which, identifies and provides services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds including, low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education online, n.d.). Participants conditionally admitted to MSU through the EAP are required to enroll in developmental composition as well as a series of academic support courses. Some students, based on test scores, also place into developmental math. Two of the women were married when they enrolled in college, and one married during college. In the (H)Mong culture, there are two types of marriages: cultural and legal. Some students were married culturally, although not legally recognized unions, while some were married in both senses. I have not distinguished between the two. Following is a detailed description of each participant.

*Table 1:* high school rank, percentile, composite ACT scores, familial educational status, income status (as indicated by TRIO participation), and departure/persistence status of participants

Name	High School		ACT Composite	Familial Education	Income Status	Departure or Persistence
	Rank	Percentile				
Soua	157/428	63%	17	<b>Mother:</b> Not high school graduate <b>Father:</b> Technical training/certificate	TRIO participant	Depart
Tou	60/140	57%	17	<b>Mother and Father:</b> Not high school graduates	TRIO participant	Depart
Bao	181/400	54%	16	<b>Mother and Father:</b> Not high school graduates	TRIO participant	Depart
Choua	93/251	62%	15	<b>Mother:</b> Not high school graduate <b>Father:</b> Technical training/certificate <b>Siblings:</b> 10 high school graduates; 3 of which completed college and 1 currently attending college	TRIO participant	Depart
Houa	202/425	52%	16	<b>Mother:</b> Not reported <b>Father:</b> Technical training/certificate <b>Siblings:</b> 8 high school graduates; 2 which completed college and 6 currently attending college	TRIO participant	Persist
Yer	253/602	57%	18	<b>Mother:</b> Enrolled in college; completes degree <b>Father:</b> Master's degree	Not TRIO participant	Persist

Soua is from a lower-middle income family that speaks more English than (H)Mong at home. She was born in the U.S., reported a high school GPA of 3.3, and had not enrolled in ESL classes since kindergarten. Her mother did not complete high school and her father has technical training/certificate. Although four siblings have graduated from high school, none had attended college. Soua planned to major in business but had not chosen a specific business major. Soua was married and lived off-campus. Soua left MSU after her first year and transferred to the local technical college.

Tou is the only male participant. He is from a lower-middle income family that speaks English and (H)Mong at home on an equal basis. Tou was born in the U.S., and reported never taking ESL course work and a high school GPA of 2.9 upon graduation. Neither his mother or father completed high school. No siblings have graduated from high school, and none were attending or had completed college. Tou reported a documented disability, partial hearing loss and wore hearing aids in both ears. Based on my experiences with Tou in the classroom and in interviewing him, his hearing loss appeared to negatively impact his speech. In addition to enrolling in developmental composition at MSU, Tou was also required to enroll in developmental math. Tou planned to major in business. He lived on campus his first year and lived off campus at the start of his second. Tou left MSU following his third semester and transferred to a technical college in his hometown.

Bao was from a low-income family that speaks English and (H)Mong at home on an equal basis. Bao was the only participant born outside of the U.S., in Thailand. She reported a high school GPA estimated at 3.0 and took ESL coursework during grades nine to eleven. Neither her mother nor father completed high school. No siblings had graduated from high school, and none were attending or have completed college. In addition to enrolling in developmental

composition at MSU, Bao was also required to enroll in developmental math. Bao initially sought a degree in nursing. She was married and living off-campus. Bao left MSU following her second year. After a one-year hiatus from the university to have a child, Bao returned to MSU.

Choua was from a lower-middle income family that speaks English and (H)Mong at home on an equal basis. Choua was born in the U.S., reported taking ESL coursework in elementary school and a cumulative high school GPA of 3.2. Although her mother did not complete high school, she has technical training or a certificate. Her father also has technical training or a certificate. Ten siblings have graduated from high school; one is attending college, and three have completed college. She sought a degree in nursing and lived on-campus. Choua left MSU following her third year.

Houa did not report socio-economic status but reports qualifying for the TRIO program. Her family speaks English and (H)Mong at home on an equal basis. Houa was born in the U.S. and reported taking ESL coursework in elementary school and a cumulative high school GPA of 3.3. Houa did not report educational background for her mother, but indicated that her father had technical training or a certificate. Eight of Houa's siblings have graduated from high school, six of which are currently attending college while two had already earned a college degree. Houa majored in communication and journalism and lived at home with her parents throughout college. Houa graduated during spring 2010.

Yer reported being from an upper middle-income family and is the only participant who did not qualify for the TRIO program. Yer was born in the U.S. and reported taking ESL coursework in fifth and sixth grade. She graduated from high school with a 3.23 GPA. Her family speaks English and (H)Mong at home on an equal basis. Yer's mother was concurrently

enrolled in a bachelor's degree program, and her father has a master's degree. Yer's younger brother, and only sibling, was still in high school at the time the background questionnaire was completed. Yer married during college and lived off-campus during college. Yer majored in kinesiology and graduated in December 2010.

To understand the population of the participants, both a description of the sampling and the individual participants is necessary. The sample is a unique group of MSU students with common academic, social, and linguistic characteristics. While the participants had much in common, they also had unique individual differences.

### **Researcher**

As a researcher, I bring many predispositions to this study. These predispositions provided both an advantage and disadvantage to my work. Below I discuss my background in relationship to this study and the field as well as my relationship with these participants.

I was the EAP coordinator from fall 2002 through spring 2005 and was a committee member until spring 2009. I taught developmental English for EAP and non-EAP students for eight years until spring 2009. Through my experiences as EAP coordinator and teaching this unique group of students, I became very interested in whether or not these students were successful in college. What was it like being an EAP student? Did they graduate? How did their experiences both on and off campus contribute to their experience? These students faced so many challenges, that earning a degree would take something special. Then again, I wondered, what did it really mean to be successful? Is getting one student that would not have gone to college without the EAP to graduate a success? Is success earning the degree or merely taking some college coursework? Is it enough to complete some college coursework?

The definition of success varies from student to teacher and amongst members of the EAP Committee and the University. As a developmental English specialist in higher education and former coordinator of the EAP, I am particularly concerned about how the increasing number of LTELs in four-year institutions of higher education has an impact on classroom instruction and student achievement. While I may experience a personal impact as an instructor, the impact on Generation 1.5 LTELs is much greater. Not only must LTELs worry about getting in to college and graduating, they must be concerned about how attending a four-year institution of higher education will affect their identity.

Prior to conducting this study, all of the participants were enrolled in my developmental English course. As I met with the participants over time, I found that I was able to establish a rapport with the students and was naturally concerned about their persistence and college experiences. This growing relationship had the potential to affect the study positively and negatively. The limitations to the study follow. From a positive perspective, establishing rapport suggests students may be more willing to tell me information, however, limitations could occur if I over sympathized with the student or failed to ask tough questions.

My history with the EAP influenced this study, particularly my professional expertise, and experiences with the participants. My history presented me with a strong interest in this population and their experiences in higher education. However, my history also provided limitations to my work, which I discuss next.

### **Limitations**

“In a picture, we see something that seems to be something else; but in remembering, we seem to be seeing something else” (Sokolowski, 2000, p.68). As with all studies, limitations to this study exist in several areas. Limitations exist in the memory of the participant, the sampling strategy used, and my position as a researcher.

When taking a phenomenological approach that relies on in-depth interviewing as the primary method of data collection, limitations arise through the natural limitations to memory. You remember experiences from your perspective and errors are possible. Sometimes participants project what they want to remember or think memories should be. “New dimensions of the object arise through memory, but new dimensions of the self arise as well” (Sokolowski, 2000, p. 70). Biannual and annual meetings with participants limited the length of time between experience and recollection of the experience and, hopefully, reduced some of the distortion of the lived experience.

In addition to the method of collection data, using participants with a particular profile from a single ethnic group also presents limitations. All of the participants are (H)Mong, LTEs, and primarily women. Approximately half of the 2005-2006 EAP cohort agreed to participate in the study: six participants, only two of whom persisted to graduation. The experience of these students is potentially quite different from other MSU students as well as other (H)Mong MSU students.

My position as the researcher presented potential limitations as well. As non-(H)Mong, my knowledge of the (H)Mong experience was based on my informed assumptions. These assumptions are absence rather than presence since I cannot experience the (H)Mong perspective and must rely on the participant to establish presence. By learning the (H)Mong story absence

blends to presence. However, my perspective of the experience will be different from the participant perspective. This may lead to questions like, is the White interpretation of the (H)Mong experience accurate? Can a White researcher ever be in a position to understand the (H)Mong experience?

In addition to cultural, racial, and ethnic considerations, my position as researcher, as adjunct faculty member, and EAP committee member during some of the years of the study had the potential to create a power-distance relationship between the participant and myself. Having a relationship with the participants as their former teacher, had potential to create rapport, as we were able to build our researcher-participant relationship from a teacher-student relationship. However, participants may also view me as a gatekeeper. My prior relationship with the participants may have limited the self-selection of participants; those who perceived me as unapproachable or were dissatisfied with the relationship established in the classroom would not have chosen to participate in this study.

Finally, I am conducting this research as a member of the MSU community. While MSU is one of only a few institutions offering access programming to Generation 1.5 LTELs with an at-risk profile, site selection places my research in my own backyard (Glesne, 1999). Backyard research can create “ethical and political dilemmas” and uncover “dangerous knowledge” that has the potential to persist even upon completion of this study.

Weighing access and interest with bias and limitations plays an important role in the researcher’s decision-making process. Limitations exist in the participants and the sample, and in my role as the researcher. As I approach the upcoming chapters, my attachment to this field of study may lead me to support my own conclusions, and I must continually evaluate my findings for validity.



### Summary

This longitudinal study, ground in a phenomenological tradition, follows a sampling of EAP students through their university career. While I primarily collected data through a series of semi-structured interviews, a background questionnaire and document review also contributed to the data. Together, these data sources were used drive an analysis of the experiences these EAP have in college and the meaning their individual experiences have in their lives. While phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalizations, what is learned from the experiences of these students has implications for many facets of higher education as “theory enlightens practice” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 15). In the remaining chapters, I will discuss and analyze the findings of this study and draw conclusions based on what I learned.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COLLEGE CHOICE AND THE FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE**

Tinto (1993) examined student persistence and departure in higher education. However, his theory did not consider several key characteristics of MSU's EAP students: language, culture, and developmental education needs. In addition, Tinto did not examine the likelihood of departure and persistence of students entering college with multiple risk factors. Multiple risk factors, as defined in Chapter One not only include the language, culture, and academic preparation of the learner, but also learners who are first generation college students from low-income families. The following chapters are the accounts of the participants' experiences at MSU, which examine the educational opportunity provided to LTELs through the EAP, the departure, and persistence of EAP participants and the role education plays in the participants' cultural identity development. I begin this chapter with how the participants chose MSU and follow their experiences in college choice with the participants' accounts of their college experiences in their first year spent in the EAP.

#### **MSU and College Choice**

The reason for choosing an institution plays an important role in departure and persistence. Accurate academic and social expectations can help a student avoid disappointment with the institution (Tinto, 1993). The institution needs to fit with the individuals' initial goals, and in the case of the EAP students, both family and academics present themselves as the strongest influences on college choice.

Traditionally family and clan play a significant role in the (H)Mong culture. "Mong society centers around a kinship system and operates through communal lifestyles" (Thao, 2006,

p. 31). For Houa attending a school in a community she knows allowed her to be close to her family and created a sense of security.

I came here because I wanted to be close to my family, and I thought that my parents are here, and my sisters are here. If I need help, I know where to go to. I know...some of...the professors here. So it's nice to see a connection between you and your family and the professors and just everything. I like that it's convenient. I didn't want to go to a school where I was going to have to learn (the campus). I didn't want to have to go to a school where I was going to have to just get myself involved, when I'm already involved (here)...

Houa explained the decision to attend MSU was comfortable and familiar and did not push her outside of her comfort zone.

For Yer, family was also part of the consideration although the security came from parental support to attend a school further away from home. Yer was admitted to MSU and another school comparable in size and program offerings to MSU and was denied admission to a larger university, characterized as a tier 1 research institution. However, Yer chose MSU with the conditional admission through the EAP despite being fully admitted to another school. The decision, influenced by her parents' cultural and academic insight, allowed her to be closer to home. "There's too many Asian people down there and... anybody could get in there, so I submitted myself to MSU. It's closer to home...So then after like getting accepted, I was pretty happy with it." Choosing MSU was a conscious decision that integrated the advice of her parents with admission to the EAP. "...then...I had to go through the EAP because the ACT scores. (I was) kind of a little iffy about it because you're going into college, but you're taking courses that doesn't actually go into your major..." Despite her concerns, a discussion with her dad helped her realize that the program may help develop academic English skills necessary for college success. Family played an important role in the decision making process and having the support of her family built Yer's confidence in the decision to attend MSU.

Tou's first choice was a college closer to home, "Because ... at first I wanted to go to (another state school), but it was kind of a big school. And I kinda wanted to be in a smaller environment, so it would be easier for me to get to know more people." Tou did not indicate whether he applied to or was accepted to the institution closer to home or any other schools. While Tinto (1993) stated students must disassociate to some degree with the external community in order to integrate more effectively internally, Tou's experience reflects more closely the findings of Hurtado and Carter (1997) where students "become interdependent with their families during college, not completely independent" (p. 339). Tou's interest in being close to home reinforces the importance of family, although academically, he was not able to secure his first choice.

Secondary to family influence was academic program. EAP students are encouraged to remain undeclared during their first year. Although Yer did not initially declare a major, she had a strong interest in biology.

I'm hoping to go the biology route, and then hopefully, what I'm really interested in doing it is the whole DNA extracting... or like in vitro fertilization...I took this human sexual biology class, and they were talking about the whole fertilization here and there and I'm like hey that's really interesting.

Houa also had an academic interest but was less confident that her preliminary academic choice would be her major.

I'm still business right now, but I don't know if I want to go into business. It's a little rough, like I was telling my sisters that I want to go into like counseling or like school counselor. Just helping some kids or just whatever. It's very nice like working with little kids at the children's center was a great experience... I'm not sure I'm heading towards that way, but I have to take a business class to see if I like business.

Despite varying degrees of commitment to a field of study, both Yer and Houa identified academic interests, and their academic interests were consistent with the offerings at MSU.

Commitment, according to Tinto (1993), is a necessary component of persistence.

Commitment began with academic offerings consistent amongst the participants and MSU. Reputation of degree programs offered at MSU also played a role in the decision making process. For Soua, reputation of the program and the family input influenced her decision, despite not visiting the MSU campus during the decision making process.

I basically came to Eau Claire, because I heard it was a good business school. I wanted to do something in business. I didn't know what - planning on trying business finance first. If that doesn't work out then I don't know; somewhere in business, I think...I'm actually married now, and my husband's parents live in Eau Claire, so I came to Eau Claire, because it would be a little easier.

While her husband's family lived in Eau Claire, Soua also had an aunt who attended MSU.

While Bao only applied to MSU, reputation was a factor. "I heard like it was a great college and had a great nursing system. That's why I came here." Bao did not mention that her husband already attended MSU.

Choua chose MSU because of the nursing program although it was not her first choice and most of her friends chose another institution.

Well the reason why I came to Eau Claire was because first of all the nursing school. I want to become a nurse, and Eau Claire has a good nursing school; but I also applied for Oshkosh, and I was hoping to go to Oshkosh... because a lot of people are going there, but I came to Eau Claire because of my dad. He was like you're older brothers' (are) there. You might be able to live with them and save more money that way. At first I didn't like it. Oh now I don't want to go to Eau Claire, but I ended up here, and I liked it a lot.

Both Bao and Choua were interested in MSU's most competitive major – nursing. Although MSU offered the program Bao and Choua hoped to pursue, the nursing program is in high demand, which increased the level of competition for the program. Competition makes it more difficult for students to be accepted into the program. While the student may be committed to the program, they may not know what level of commitment is necessary on their behalf to persist. Therefore, it is important to know the academic expectations of the nursing major early

in one's academic career in order to have an opportunity for admission. Not having an adequate understanding of expectations may cause students to become discouraged and experience additional disillusionment regarding their level of success (Tinto, 1993).

While all of the students were able to attribute their reasons for choosing MSU as family, academics, or a combination of the two, it was unclear whether admission into the EAP played a role in college choice. For some participants MSU was not their first choice, but family persuaded them to attend MSU. It is also unclear, with the exception of Yer, whether or not the participants truly had the option of attending another four-year institution. The academic profile of the participants limits their post-secondary opportunity. If the participants were able to choose a college from several options, they are able to make a more informed decision about the college they would attend and, therefore, be more likely to fit with the institution's academic and social climate. However, if MSU is the participants' only option because of their academic profile and the availability of the EAP, then a new question arises. Does the EAP encourage students to attend a school that is not a good fit academically and socially because that is the only school, they can get into?

### **LTEs and Educational Opportunity**

MSU developed the EAP to provide educational opportunity to LTEs by offering access to a university that students, based on an academic profile, would not normally be admitted. This section explores the participants' experiences in the EAP by looking at their initial reflections on the EAP experience, their year in the EAP, and their long-term reflections on the program.

### **Initial Reflections on the EAP Experience**

For many high school seniors, being accepted to college is a major milestone, but for EAP students that acceptance comes in the form of conditional admissions to MSU. I began by asking each participant about his or her experiences in the EAP. While it is unclear the role the EAP played in most of the participants' decisions to attend MSU, all of the participants were required to participate in the EAP based on their academic profile. However notification of this conditional admission to MSU was made after the student applied to the university and may not have been a consideration in the decision making process. According to Tinto (1993), one factor in the decision making process is having the necessary information to make an informed decision. "Inaccurate information obtained during the process of the application may lead some individuals to enter an institution even though they may be at odds with, that is incongruent to, the existing social and academic communities of the college" (p. 155). The participants' initial reactions to the EAP suggest a lack of information about the program into which they were admitted.

The participants' initial reflections to the conditional admission and placement into the EAP suggest feelings of disillusionment. Many participants described the program as an ESL program, but with the exception of Bao, most of the students had not taken any ESL course work since elementary school. All of the women described negative first impressions of their conditional admission through the EAP.

Well when I first heard about it...I was like, okay, because I thought it was going to be like ESL and all of this crap. I'm like, oh no...(Soua)

Yep, at first I was like oh god, I feel so stupid. Why do I have to be in this program? (Choua)

(I) heard rumors saying that oh it's so dumb, and it doesn't get you anywhere.(Houa)

The first feeling of it like after learning that I had to go through the program, I felt kind of like I felt like I was stupid or something, because you had to go through a program

because you're not like an American; I guess you're like Hmong, so you felt like you were out of place. (Yer)

The idea of earning a college degree was tainted by feelings of educational inferiority.

For the most part, students struggled with a mix of positive and negative feelings. Choua described the general sentiment towards the EAP. "I think that at first like a lot of us...we had a little talk like that, oh like, we feel so stupid, and they treat us like little kids..." When asked more specifically whether or not he found the EAP helpful, Tou initially comments that "The teachers and the mentors.....got me...into the transition into college a little bit easier," but he added "I think it would have been easier on me if I would have chosen my own classes instead of being assigned to classes". Tou's experience suggests reflects Tinto's (1993) suggestion that college be viewed as a discovery. While Tou looked to discover, the EAP provided concreteness in a way Tou found restrictive. The EAP committee directs students to take specific classes to fulfill general education requirements rather than classes the participant chose that could also fulfill the same requirements. In this regard, EAP students are treated very differently than the general population.

When I came into the EAP as the coordinator, one of the main concerns students expressed was that they did not know why MSU placed them into the EAP. Even after completing the EAP and having a husband who also went through the program, Bao never really understood the purpose of the program. At the end of our year one interview, she posed a several questions to me regarding the EAP.

I've a question, you know how if you're, you can only be in the EAP for two years right? So you do pay for the tutors right? So, I have a question about (the coordinator). Is she like a counselor or leader of the EAP? So when you're out of the EAP, you don't gather around with (the coordinator) and the professors and talk about our grades?



Bao did not have a clear understanding of the fundamental aspects of the program or the role of the individuals on the committee. Similar questions arose at the end of every interview with Bao. The EAP committee should consider Bao an “ideal” candidate for the EAP as a first generation college student from a low-income family who took ESL in high school, yet her questions suggest she was disconnected from the services available to her through the EAP.

Despite these negative initial reactions, impressions of the EAP started to change by the end of the first year. For Soua the experience was positive

...I didn't really know anything, so that kind of gave me a heads up on what it was ... (the coordinator) went over with us where everything was and all that stuff, so it's like cool ...it was actually very helpful, because ... some of the classes were like, okay, why am I doing this, but then after I thought about it, like yeah, it really helped me.

Bao added, “I thought it was great...I strongly recommend it for new (first year) students”.

Although there was no initial elaboration why, follow-up questions determined “the tutoring and the professors are really nice.” Choua mentioned service learning and finding tutors and suggested the EAP deserved respect because it will help keep a student’s GPA up during their first year. In addition, Choua situated her experience in perspective of her friends who attended another university within the state.

...but now when it all comes down to it, well I'm really thankful. I don't think I would've made it through... lot of my friends that went to (another school)...didn't have (a program like the EAP), and they were struggling through with ... school and everything. I'm like well get yourself a tutor because you know the EAP finds me tutors, and I find it really easy.

Her friends’ lack of free support made her more appreciative of what the EAP had to offer.

Some students were able to identify positive experiences of the program. By the end of the first year, the positive reactions were generally interspersed with feelings of disillusionment and inferiority. Most reactions suggest a misunderstanding of the program’s goals.

## **A Year in the EAP**

Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure takes into account the role academic and social interaction play in persistence. "Persistence in college requires individuals to adjust, both socially and intellectually, to the new and sometimes quite strange world of college" (p. 45).

**Connection to campus resources.** During the year in the EAP, students explored campus resources through the Introduction to the University course. This course is required course for EAP students and paired with the EAP section of Developmental Composition. Introduction to the University was also designated by MSU as a First Year Experience (FYE) course. The majority of MSU students enroll in some type of FYE course, but very few students, take the Introduction to the University course.

As part of the Introduction to the University course, all EAP students are required to work with a tutor on improving their mechanics of the English language. Students spend one hour per work working on grammar exercises. In addition, the EAP uses the practice of prescriptive advising (Crookston, 1972) which monitors student grades and targets students for content area tutoring.

Yer started seeing a tutor during her EAP year and continued to use tutoring throughout her entire college experience.

Since I was in EAP I think I learned so much in that year to just go to college and just to give you steps to...help yourself. Like the career center and finding tutors and think that if I wasn't in EAP but would know how to find all that stuff. I think that, as I've gotten older, and it's helped me a lot, because now (when) ... I need a tutor for this class, (I am able to find one).

Yer's placement in the EAP provided access to more tutoring services than a non-EAP student would receive. Her socioeconomic status kept her from qualifying for the Student Support Services (TRIO) funded tutoring.

Additionally, the Student Support Services program extended additional support to EAP students. Soua stated "...we took...(the MTBI) and that really helped me to (know) ... what I like, cause I don't really know. I mean, I do know, but I just don't really know what I should major in." Student Support Services also provided students with inside information on course registration to help students get the courses they needed. Soua indicated that Student Support Services emailed her when student additional seats may become available in courses (due to the process of student suspensions removing ineligible students from courses). In addition, Student Support Services offered additional programming to students, but none of the participants mentioned using any of the programming. "I've never been to any of the workshops, which I wish I would have gone to the workshops because they seem really interesting..."(Choua). While Choua did not take advantage of the SSS workshops, she continued to use tutoring services throughout every semester at MSU.

Bao also commented that she used tutoring but still found the adjustment from high school to college difficult, "you're like on your own; there is no one there to like push you, to compel you to do your homework and stuff". In our second interview and our exit interview, Bao continued to pose questions about campus resources and did not seem to pursue tutoring beyond the EAP year.

Houa's negative experiences in the EAP kept her from using campus resources and made her more determined to succeed without EAP assistance.

I've never gone back to see the Tutoring Center to get extra tutoring...and I still managed to get all my grades up to. I'm proud of myself because I'm a B student...but after that incident I was like, I won't go back to Tutoring Center. I just hate tutoring, and I tell myself every day...you must pull your grades up; you must do this for yourself. And so I managed to pull myself up ... to get myself B's.... I guess its people like her who make people like me a stronger person. Like they don't believe in you, so you have to believe in yourself and prove to them like hey, you know what, I don't need you; I have myself.

Even though one of the goals of the EAP is to connect students with campus resources, the negative experience described in the example above distanced Houa from campus tutoring, a primary resource for at-risk students.

In addition to the connection to campus resources, the EAP targets faculty especially interested in, but not necessarily trained for, working with at-risk students to teach in the EAP. The idea is that interested faculty will have an additional skill set and be able to form a stronger relationship with the students, which would then contribute to their persistence. However, the relationships developed with EAP faculty and staff did not seem to persist beyond the first year. While most memories of EAP faculty and staff were positive, long-term interactions were coincidental.

In year four when Choua mentioned she was having difficulty getting information from her academic advisor, I suggested she use EAP resources, but this had not occurred to her as an option. Houa talked to former EAP professors and maintained a connection with her EAP academic advisor. After her first year, Houa stopped using tutoring services on campus although she did bring her College Writing papers to me on occasion.

The EAP introduced participants to tutoring and advising resources on campus through the EAP. Although exposed to other campus resources like Student Support Services, students did not use these services outside of the EAP experience. Only tutoring played an on-going role in the students' academic experiences. Finally, participants did not maintain long-term connections to EAP faculty and staff.

**Academic preparation.** In addition to building campus connections, the EAP was designed to bring the academic skills of the students to the same level as their non-EAP counterparts. EAP students enter the University with lower than average ACT scores and are required to enroll in some type of developmental coursework. The EAP integrated tutoring services, general college success courses, and developmental English courses into the program to accomplish this goal; however, with the exception of one course offered during the spring of the EAP students' first year, the university offered all of the courses and services to native English speakers as well. The services and courses are not unique to the needs of LTELs with the exception of a prescriptive approach to academic advising.

EAP students offered mixed impressions of the academic preparation provided by the EAP. For Soua,

Actually, I think all the EAP classes were actually helpful for me, like every single one of them. Like English, I was like okay, I really suck at writing, so it's like I really need this...The coordinator's classes were helpful because we did the (grammar)lab work ... I had totally forgotten about this.

When students recognized their own strengths and weaknesses and realized the need for skills such as writing in college course work, they were more likely to find the course beneficial. The drill and practice grammar instruction described by Soua has been widely accepted in the field of second language acquisition as an outdated practice that does not transfer to the student's own work (Brown, 2007). While Soua may have found the work able to remind her of the rules of English grammar, it is unclear if the grammar work transferred to her academic writing.

Despite the coursework offered by the EAP, not all students are ready for mainstream coursework in their weakest areas at the end of the program. The EAP advised Tou to take an additional reading class before taking college writing because of difficulty with reading comprehension. At our interview, he asked me for advice. "But then...I (was) thinking I kind of

want to take college writing, so it would be more of a challenge for me. And critical reading might not get me to think as much because I heard it is kind of a lower level class.” Ultimately, Tou decided to enroll in college writing.

The EAP also helped the participants enroll in the smaller First Year Experience sections of college writing and identified instructors with experience and/or interest in working with LTELs. Tou commented that he picked his section based on ratemyprofessor.com comments rather than on the advice of the EAP, stating, “There was only two teachers in there that was rated. One was rated a D and one was rated a B so I went with the B one.” There are approximately 40 sections of English 110 offered during the fall semester, and Tou based his decision on the feedback on two professors through comments made by fellow students.

For the most part, participants only attributed academic preparation to non-EAP courses. Bao stated, “Yeah somewhat, you know, because I found like human geography really helpful. And like psychology, but like the GEN classes with the coordinator” (lowers voice and changes her facial expression as if I already know what she is going to say and is uncomfortable verbalizing comments). “It was alright though” (Bao). Geography and psychology are part of the EAP curriculum because they fulfill general education requirements and are taught by EAP “friendly” faculty.

Students positively commented on academic classes they would have taken despite the EAP. Geography and psychology are standard general education courses. Developmental composition would have been required of EAP students because of the low ACT English scores. Students mentioned the general college classes tied to the EAP as something missed because of how easy the courses were. These accounts suggest the EAP lacks the rigor necessary for academic success.

**Social connections.** As part of the program, I have always felt that the social connections had been one of the strongest benefits of the EAP. Tinto (1993) identified the social integration into the university as an important aspect of persistence. Students need a variety of social communities to support them during the college experiences.

Several of the students commented on how strong EAP relationships with their EAP peers were during their first year, likening this peer community to a family.

I think I'm going to feel weird walking around like not with everyone in a group anymore because we used to walk to classes like in a whole group we used to walk out and everybody used to be like, okay, why are they are walking out like all (H)Mong people and stuff, but it was cool (Soua).

The EAP students had a unique bond enhanced by taking most of their courses together. Not only were the EAP students able to connect with each other through the common experience of the EAP, but they also had language and cultural elements in common that connected them to each other.

In addition to the familial support, EAP peers offered academic support. For Choua, the friendships and natural study groups associated with the EAP were some of her strongest memories.

It was helpful to how we did group studying with like the whole. We got to the library and studied together. That was fun, distracting sometimes, but fun; and like we learned a lot. Sometimes I do know more about the subject than the other person and like when you talk it explain it to each other.

Consistent with Tinto (1993), the social connections extended outside of the classroom and enhanced academic experiences.

However, while EAP students built strong friendships within the cohort during the year in the EAP, the relationships did not persist. Despite close initial bonds, the relationships devolved

from family to acquaintances. Like a family, students kept in touch enough to know what is going on with each other, but no longer maintained close academic or social relationships.

Choua traveled to Thailand on a study abroad program with two former EAP classmates. “I was really close with Houa and Ying, and like when we got there we were learned so much about each other that I am kind of iffy about her you know; you just get to know a lot of people better.” Choua did maintain a long distance relationship with former EAP Bao who stopped out of school. She shared with me news of Bao’s baby girl and of her husband’s stroke. In her exit interview (p. 6), Choua mentioned seeing some former students on occasion or in passing, but the sustained friendships were no longer present.

For Houa the experience was similar. The friendships were an important social connection that she maintained through the first two years of college. However, as some EAP classmates departed, and others moved into different majors, the connections faded. “It's like right after (first) year, everyone went their own ways.” However, Houa seemed to know what happened to everyone. Her social nature allowed kept her updated during a chance encounter on campus or in town, even though they did not really keep in touch; they shared the EAP bond.

Yer described her friends as “EAP students or pretty much it's just like the other people who are (H)Mong.” By interview three, she only was in touch with a few CEP classmates because “...some of them are gone to different places or like dropped out.” The departure of classmates made it difficult to maintain friendships.

While many students reported feeling “stupid” or “babied” in the EAP, the benefits of the social connections made the lack of academic rigor and lack of equitable treatment tolerable. Despite negative feelings toward the EAP, Mai stated “...if it wasn't for the EAP, I wouldn't



have met like Choua and them” suggesting that the social connections outweighed any negative academic experiences.

Tinto (1993) suggested, “the greater number of memberships, the greater likelihood of persistence and the greater benefits accruing from persistence” (p. 122). The participants formed close connections with members of the EAP community during their first year. However, they only seem to become members of the EAP community, and this sense of community diminished beyond the first year.

### **Long-term Reflections**

It has been my experience that students are not always able to see the benefits of developmental coursework until they have progressed to other courses requiring these skills. Throughout the duration of this study, I wanted to follow-up with students to see if they reflected differently on the EAP once they left the program. In later interviews, students reflected on both the academic and social experiences provided by the EAP.

Students reiterated their initial perceptions of the program. “I heard some rumors with some people saying how it's so dumb, and it doesn't get you anywhere... I was just hoping that the other people didn't treat us with limited English” (Houa). The reputation of the EAP introduced students to the program with a negative impression established by peers, and these impressions were passed on to future EAP cohorts.

Academically, students suggested the EAP eased the transition from high school to college.

It is just like a prep for us helped us get to know the real college life...It opened up my eyes to see that like English isn't this easy. They expect more, so you have to put more in and stuff. It was nice, just like start with a small little group than to go big because like it's a huge difference. It's not high school. (Houa)

However, this account suggested that the EAP was not an accurate reflection of the academic expectations of college. The smaller class size and general courses were not typical of her experience outside of the EAP suggesting that the rigors of the EAP fell somewhere between high school and college.

Houa, however, likened the experience to that of an international student.

I thought that was a waste of our time, because I know that at one point in English 100 that you weren't teaching us... I like got kind of offended when she brought out the TOEFL stuff. I was like seriously...I get kind of offended; she's like here's a test. Take this test; it's like a TOEFL test... I felt like... I was back in ESL when I was in the fifth grade, or when I was in elementary school. It's like I'm in college, and I don't need to do these things. I'm like yeah, I was put in the EAP, but that's why we have English classes. That's why we have English 099 and English 100 to improve our writing skills or grammar and all that stuff, and then he/she comes with the TOEFL exam, and I'm like, what is this. This is what foreign exchange students take to come to Eau Claire.

The limited research on Generation 1.5 LTELs in higher education often results in trained professionals using techniques for international students to assess language needs. While pedagogy can overlap, there are distinct differences in populations that go unaccounted for and often results in frustrated students and inaccurate assessment of abilities.

Another aspect of transitioning is learning the expectations of instructors. Relationships with high school teachers differed significantly from relationships with college professors. “(College professors) don't know who you are. You have to go up to them and say hey. I'm Houa. I need help because I can't write” (Houa). Students learned to take initiative to build relationships with professors.

Not only are relationships with faculty different but expectations of classroom participation also required adjustment.

... being in EAP made me talk more, and I communicated more and stuff, and I'm not so shy, because like in high school I was like okay whatever. But like when I was in EAP, I was talking and interacting and stuff. I guess it helped me to start this year and interact and just say, I don't want to be shy, because I was, if I don't reach out to whoever I need

help with, then they're not going to help me; they're not going to know I'm this Hmong girl who doesn't need help or anything. (Houa).

Consistent with Tinto (1993), the small class size helped Houa adjust to college. For Houa, this atmosphere built self-confidence during her first year.

Despite identifying academic adjustments to the rigor of college coursework, establishing relationships with professors, and participating in the classroom were one aspect of the EAP, EAP participants did not forget feeling substandard.

I don't really know. I'm just really thankful that there is a program like that, but sometimes I felt really stupid...Just because like you know, sometimes like the coordinator, she's a nice lady and everything, but sometimes she just makes me make you feel like you're dumb; it's like I know that (coordinator). Thank you very much. You know, and it's like I felt really babied. (Choua)

Students struggled with their overall impressions of the program, weighing the opportunity with feelings of inferiority.

Students missed the ease of the program rather than its ability to prepare them for college life after the EAP.

...Sometimes I'm like, this semester, oh my gosh. I wish I was back in EAP. Just because you know, the classes were like so much easier compared to like what were taking now...I guess just having the coordinator saying you've got to do this then go see your tutor. You've got to having everyone just telling you to do this and that and the classes were more like you knew people in there so it made it like I'll let study together with human anatomy. I knew nobody was a large class like about a hundred or less and like yeah, you knew nobody. It's just like okay I have nobody to study with. I would've made new friends, but you know, I think that's why I'm in the EAP because you knew everybody was your own little family, and we had classes with people who you knew well. (Choua)

Choua suggested she missed the EAP despite feeling stupid at times; however, this examples showed her reasons were tied more closely to her social experiences and the EAP being an easier program than what she was experiencing once on her own. In the EAP, Choua indicated she did

not have make her own decisions regarding course selection, take responsibility for her own schedule, or work to make friends because the EAP did everything for her.

Much of what students missed revolved around their classmates.

And I think just because with a lot of the classes you are with the same people. It was so much easier because you could have a study partner. Whereas now are now you have to study by yourself unless you have a friend who's in that class and you guys can study together... (Choua)

Students missed the friendships although they did not maintain the connection with their former classmates outside of the program.

Some EAP students had extremely negative experiences with the EAP, which contributed to the internal struggle over the value of the program. By our third interview, Houa opened up about her experience in the EAP, and her tone towards the EAP changed.

I'm like okay, whatever I'm going to get through this...I was so mad she made me cry. I was just like whatever, because like I didn't do (well in) math 020...she took me in to do the testing on that stuff. And she was like, do you have a learning disability? Do your brothers and sisters have learning disabilities, or are you just a little slow...excuse me, just because I'm in the EAP doesn't mean she can talk to me like that. I'm not a math genius and I know that. That's why I'm here. You say you want to help me, but if you're going to give me this kind of stuff, I don't want your help.

The EAP committee required Houa to retake her math class even though she earned a passing grade. As a result, Houa approached her math who overturned the EAP committee's decision.

Not only did the confrontation regarding her abilities upset Houa, an EAP committee member took the discussion to one of Houa's siblings who worked at the university.

You know the one thing that made me really mad was that she went to talk to my sister. She told my sister that I should consider early childhood education at style because I'm not good at math, and maybe MSU is not for me. You know, who are you to go talk to my sister about my math skills...The whole EAP thing I really disliked.

This experience was so emotionally challenging for Houa that it resurfaced in multiple interviews.

She asked me, do you have a learning disorder, and I'm like no I don't. My family, my brothers and them are all really good at math...just because I'm not good at math and science doesn't mean that I'm a stupid person...after that, I just hated her, and hate is a really strong word, but I absolutely hate her.

She used her own experience to assist another student in a similar situation.

She did that to my boyfriend's brother too. He placed into math 110 or something and she told him to go take math 020. I'm like no you're not going to do that, because you placed into math 110 you're going to go and take math 110. Don't let them belittle you like that. (It) breaks my heart that she does that because she is this adviser. And you would think that she should be like, you know what, if you need help we will find you tutoring in this class...Because you're not good enough to take that math class, and it makes me really mad.

While students were always able to find some positive aspects of the program, this feeling of inferiority left a lasting impression.

Despite negative feelings toward the EAP, several students attributed access to MSU to the EAP.

I think it was actually good opportunity because if I didn't take that class I did get into that program and that it would even be here in Eau Claire. And I don't think I would've known how to use any of the resources at all on campus (Yer).

But does access equal retention?

I'm really thankful for it because if it wasn't for the program, I don't think I would have been admitted to Eau Claire. I'd would've gone to probably Oshkosh or a tech school or something (Choua).

While Choua attributed access to the EAP, she did not persist at MSU. These contradictory accounts suggest other experiences are involved.

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the participants' reasons for choosing MSU and their experiences in the EAP. Participants chose MSU because it was consistent with family and academic needs. Student goals aligned with the academic offerings of the university. During the EAP the participants had both positive and negative academic experiences and built a community with

their EAP peers. Chapter Five explores the participants' academic experiences, and Chapter Six looks at the social experiences beyond the first year in the EAP. Chapter Seven examines the participants experiences that do not fit within Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **THE ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE**

While internal and external forces play a role in student departure and persistence, Tinto's (1993) work primarily looked at the experiences, both academic and social, students have within the institution. Chapter 3 examined the pre-entry attributes of the student, and Chapter 4 examined why the students chose an institution and their experiences within the institution during their year in the EAP. From the background questionnaire and review of the admissions documentation discussed in Chapter Three, the participants did not meet the traditional requirements for full acceptance at MSU and, therefore, were conditionally admitted through the EAP.

The participants in this study began college with so much in common: language, ethnicity, cultural expectations, and academic background. They began their first year in the same program with almost identical academic schedules, yet only two persist. Few students enter a university intending to depart, and I wanted to learn how departure and persistence manifested itself in the participants in this study to uncover where the experiences differ, leading some students to departure and others to persistence. I organized the next two chapters around Tinto's (1993) theory of departure, which looked at the students' integration into the institution, and ongoing revision of goals on a longitudinal scale. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the institutional experiences, as "the impact of individual attributes cannot be understood without reference to the social and intellectual context within which individuals find themselves" (Tinto, 1993, p. 113). As participant began his/her academic career, academic and social experiences at the institution begin to show how well the student integrated into the institution as he/she decided whether or not the institution is a good fit for his/her evolving career goals.

I explored the experiences in the first year, while part of the EAP, in Chapter Four. Chapter Five examines the ongoing academic experiences, and Chapter Six examines the social experiences at MSU. With the exception of Soua, all participants persisted beyond the first year. As students left the sheltered environment of the EAP, the participants began to realize that college is academically very different from high school. This chapter explores how the academic experiences the participants have taught academic survival skills, learned the implications of academic performance, negotiated a career path, and interacted with university faculty and staff.

### **Academic Survival Skills**

Within the EAP, adjusting academically is often quite challenging. Once the students leave the sheltered environment of the EAP, they must learn to negotiate academic survival on their own to meet the rigor of university expectations. Students are overwhelmed and must come to this realization and adjust their habits accordingly.

Initially students are overwhelmed with the differences between high school and college.

Classes, oh my goodness, psychology 100...that's like the first class with the first college tests. That was a big surprise. I didn't think that I would have to study a week or two before the real test comes because...back in high school, you just had to study like a day before the tests, and you actually do really well. This is like totally a whole different story (Soua).

While all students struggle with the transition from high school to college, for Bao the transition from high school to college is even more daunting. "You're like on your own; there is no one there to like push you - compel you to do your homework and stuff." Throughout the course of our interviews, my questions of Bao yielded little information; what was telling was the type and number of questions Bao poses to me. On average, my interviews with Bao last 20 minutes, but Bao consistently spent an additional 30 to 40 minutes asking questions of me on subjects ranging from academics to personal experiences such as marriage and children.



The duration a student struggles to make the transition to college varies from student to student. The amount of time these participants struggled to transition also varies but is visible in many of their academic experiences. In their first and second year, the participants negotiated moving from the concrete expectations provided by high school instructors to the abstract expectations of college. Houa discussed her experience in the freshman composition course, which she takes during the fall of her sophomore year.

...the materials that she does and stuff are similar to (developmental composition)...but it is our responsibility to turn it in, and it's kind of hard...it's not really hard, I mean how she grades and stuff, it's exactly like (developmental composition)...but if she doesn't like it, then you have to revise and revise until she likes it. My big thing is you don't know what the perfect paper is...

To account for more ambiguous instructor expectations, participants took personal responsibility for their study habits. In our second interview after completing the course, Houa compared her expectations to reality and learned the value of being self-sufficient.

...I did so much work in English 110. I did all these readings and stuff and I'm like never going to read again for another semester. It was horrible. I thought it was going to be easy, I came in and I had confidence is like yeah I was going to be good. I was going to have fun semester. I can do this, but they kicked me right in the butt...Just like three weeks in three weeks you could fall behind because I turned in my paper... I had a whole month to start my second paper, but ...No one was sure of what topics we wanted to write about how we wanted to do our paper and stuff until after Thanksgiving break, and the beginning of December everyone just started cramming everything and it was pretty horrible.

Houa's academic experience was consistent with her peers and with Baxter-Magolda's (1992) definition of the absolute learner who looks for the instructor to communicate expectations directly, while in contrast, the instructor is looking to promote independent later in the college years.

In addition to more ambiguous instructor expectations, students found the coursework to be harder than anticipated, "I thought (my Asian history class) was going to be a little easier, but

is actually pretty hard. At first I didn't really study at all...and I'm like oh my gosh. I really got to start working hard” (Soua). Students realized that they must adjust their study habits if they wished to achieve their educational goals.

To achieve educational goals, students used peers to help build content knowledge. Peer support came in two forms: student initiated study groups and peer tutors. Yer took initiative to organize group study sessions; however, she found commitment to goals amongst the group was not always consistent with hers; many wanted to socialize, which often resulted in her studying alone. Despite her need to study with a group, Yer did not connect easily with her classmates. “I think because usually when I go to class, I just go and sit, take my notes, listen and just go. I don't really converse and talk to people around me.” Within the EAP, study groups were easy to form. Once students left the sheltered EAP environment, it was difficult to find peers from the EAP with the same commitment to education and difficult to connect with classmates outside of the program.

While peers were not always a reliable source of content knowledge, tutoring was another resource available to students. Choua and Yer used the tutoring services offered on campus to negotiate coursework. Yer described how she determined if a tutor is necessary for a course. “I think like (after) the first week and trying to do a couple of like the questions and stuff like that. It's like okay; I don't get it, so go get a tutor.” After withdrawing from biochemistry the previous semester, Choua found a good tutor, “Yes, it was really good to have the bio major so...She (the tutor) knew her stuff, and she explained it well. It was kind of like difficult to because she was tutoring me and two other girls; it was not like a one-on-one. It was like a one on three.” This independent view of knowledge shows peers as a source of knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

For both Choua and Yer having a tutor did not guarantee success. “For sure accounting, I needed a tutor, but it still didn't work. Just wasn't quite getting it up there.” (Yer). Sometimes getting tutoring assistance was not enough, and the tutor/tutee relationship played a role. Choua also had a tutor for human anatomy but ended up dropping the course.

For human anatomy, I did, but she did not help. She just sat there, like okay, what do you need help with...She would explain and say did you understand it, and it's like no...This is how I would do it, and she would just tell me how she would study for it...Basically it was just sitting there staring at her until I have a question.

Despite the mixed experiences with tutoring, Choua stated not having a tutor was “not worth the risk.” Where a student is in their intellectual development can prevent students from knowing how to approach peer tutoring. Absolute knowers, a common descriptor of first year students, “share materials and explain what they have learned to each other” but active exchanges and using peers as a source of knowledge are characteristics of more evolved intellectual development (Baxter Magolda, 1992, p. 30). In a peer-tutoring situation, the intellectual development of both the tutor and tutee influence the effectiveness of the session.

The transition to college occurred simultaneously with ways of knowing. Learning what it took externally to achieve in the classroom was a necessary step in acclimating to the university’s academic environment. This acclimation occurred throughout the college experience and the rate of acclimation contributed to the academic performance of the student.

### **Implications of Academic Performance**

The participants are impacted by academic performance in many ways. As absolute knowers, the participants were often unable to think through problems like the implications poor grades have on academic performance (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Some students retook courses; others withdrew and put their academic standing in question. Academic performance also had

implications for entering the major. As the participants experienced negative implications of their academic performance, they learned more about their own needs as a student.

Throughout their college experiences, all of the participants, with the exception of Souza who is the first participant to depart, experienced the need to retake and/or withdraw from courses. “I’m retaking it...It was horrible. I went from a three-point something to a two-point whatever” (Houa). The impact of poor grades on GPA was one implication of academic performance.

In addition to retaking courses because of poor grades, participants also experienced the need to withdraw from courses mid-semester. While withdrawing can salvage a GPA, students who withdraw mid-semester run the risk of shifting from a full-time to a part-time student. Withdrawing, therefore, has implications on academic standing as well as financial aid.

During her second year, Bao withdrew from her statistics class mid-semester. When I clarified whether or not she was still a full time student, Bao indicated that she still had 14 credits. This suggests that Bao originally enrolled in 17 credits. Despite withdrawing from statistics, she was still unable to salvage her grades in most of her other courses and reported retaking the five credit freshman composition course. She stated, “(I) didn’t even really care about that class. Actually I wasn’t learning anything” and explains that she is “such a bad procrastinator.” While every student tends to have his/her own academic strengths and weaknesses, Bao also declared she was “not a chemistry person” and did not like the course despite having a good professor. Bao was unable to articulate why she was not doing well or why she was taking particular classes. She appeared to be doing as told and either lacked motivation or was not challenged. Tinto (1993) described this lack of commitment as “a critical part of the departure process” (p. 42).

Choua withdrew from human anatomy during the first semester of her second year. While the withdrawal still allowed Bao to remain a full-time student, for Choua the mid-semester withdrawal resulted in becoming a part-time student. In addition, the biochemistry course she withdrew from was one of the required science courses necessary for the nursing major. To apply for the nursing program, students must complete the course and pass with a specific grade and overall GPA. Choua indicated that she is not able to apply to the school of nursing on schedule because she had to withdraw from human anatomy.

Because human anatomy is a required course for the nursing major and application to the nursing program, Choua must retake the course until she earns a specific grade. She took anatomy again the following spring

I think this is my second time taking it because I withdrew last semester and then I retook it in the first half of the semester; I was like wow I did awesome, and I got an A...I'm like, this is so easy. But his tests get harder and harder, and it's like you really have to understand the whole concept of everything...I thought I did really good on the first (lumbar system), and I don't think I needed to study that much. I lied to myself.

Withdrawing and retaking courses can have more serious consequences such as being placed on academic probation or suspension. While none of the students experienced academic consequences to this extreme, they did experience impact on GPA, academic standing, and delays in progression toward their program of study.

Despite real negative consequences of retaking and withdrawing from courses, many students learned what worked for them academically as they progressed through the ways of knowing domains (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Some students were motivated by a realized or perceived fear of failure. Several positive realizations resulted from the negative experiences of retaking and withdrawing from courses: the importance of understanding content knowledge, the

relationship between learning style and approach to teaching, the need to develop an academic support network.

One of the first realizations was the importance of content knowledge. This example showed Houa shifting from an absolute knower, where the role of the learner is to obtain knowledge, to a transitional knower, where the learner understands knowledge.

I'd rather retake that course and have the grade and compare the two grades and say that I did better in the class rather than taking the D and...just move on to a different level. I mean, why go into a class if you don't understand the material...It's dumb. It's like, what are you thinking. (Houa)

The understanding of knowledge was visible in making a connection between a sequence of courses.

For Yer the coursework came together as she persisted.

Probably in the beginning, it was more of a 'I guess I'll take these courses... I don't really like this course, and this course doesn't really pertain to what I wanted to do, and then after finally getting into my major... they're all tying in together ...okay I actually understand that all these courses come up to the end and where you want to be.

Recognizing the connections between courses was an important realization where Yer began to contextualize knowledge.

Students also became more familiar with how they learn. During the spring of her second year, Choua enrolled in an online class. While many MSU faculty members have resisted online learning over the years, Choua enjoyed the experience. "I like it, especially when we had discussion group. It was so easy to like share your thoughts and everything, and you don't have to look at somebody's face or feel stupid, like why is she saying that...I hate sitting there thinking of what to say..." Choua's self-confidence was bolstered in the online format as the pressure to interact face-to-face was eliminated through the electronic platform. Yer, though, found the online platform had both positive and negatives.

The good part is that you can do whatever you want and then you don't have to be there. But then it's like it's constantly like you have to be online every day, checking up on your stuff and making sure you get your homework done on time, and all that. But... I think I prefer to be in class.

While online learning worked better for some students than others, the participants learned what worked for their learning style. Effective online learning often requires students to be transitional or independent learners, so they can actively engage with peers in the learning process (Baxter Magolda, 1993).

Yer took her understanding of how she learns and tailored study habits to meet her own needs.

I think I'm more of a visual and vocal learner...I go to class, and I'll take all the notes down, and then I come home...and then read it and read it out loud and try to memorize it...This past semester trying to apply it to my daily life and trying to make it...as real as possible so that I can actually ... learn from it not just memorizing it.

The ability to apply material to daily life was a sign of contextualization (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

As the participants better understood how they learned, they began to select professors accordingly. "I don't want the (same) professor because I had her the first time...her tests were easier... but her teaching is just... lectures, and then sometimes she'll put notes here; she'll just throw an (unrelated) word out there." In comparison, teacher two "is like more like he has a course textbook in the notes are (online), and you know, he tells you what he wants, but his exams are just like wow. When did we learn that... kind of like you really have to read and actually understand the whole concept"? By year three, our conversations suggested Choua struggled with knowing what worked for her and how to apply information in different contexts.

This example showed how Yer connected her role as the learner with the role of the instructor.

Plus with this teacher, he does PowerPoint so that he actually has an example. He has them done for you so you can just follow through. I need to see how he gets from point A to point B. Instead of starting a point A and then missing all of these other steps. (Yer)

Yer found the instructors who help her understand the knowledge, characteristic of transitional knowing, to be more effective (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

With intellectual development, connections that were more academic were built with peers and professors. Yer's need to withdraw taught her the importance of asking questions in class "instead of wondering by myself in the corner."

I have a tutor that helps me. But before, I didn't have a tutor. But then like I only had a tutor for half the semester, and then it wasn't all that good. But then like I actually talk to the people that surround me, and I asked him for help. If I don't get a question or whatnot, and they're like, oh it's like this.

Success was a multi-step process. Yer realized she must also ask questions of the professor, find a tutor, and interact with classmates.

In addition, Choua modified her study habits to improve grades. "I went to class every day so, and he gives like a bonus or something like that, if you go to class every day, so I didn't skip a class at all. Hopefully...and I talked to him here and there, so and I'm doing okay in the lab part". Although she put forth this additional effort, Choua only hoped for a C.

Despite academic struggles, the use of academic support services was inconsistent amongst participants. Houa's negative experiences in the EAP kept her from using tutoring during her academic career. The EAP advised Tou to take critical reading prior freshman composition. Like Houa, he resisted the advice of the EAP "I thinking I kind of want to take English 110, so it would be more of a challenge for me. And English 140 might not get me to think as much because I heard it is kind of a lower level class." As someone who has taught both



courses, Tou seemed to have inaccurate information regarding the rigors of the courses and the skills necessary to be successful.

As participants recognized their own strengths and weaknesses, their intellectual development evolved. When asked to describe her worries, a fear of failure tops Houa's list.

I'm just scared like and try my best. I really do. I really want to ... keep my GPA up and not go below that suspension or whatever...that's the only thing I fear, just getting suspended, and so I try my best to just like do everything. Just show up in class and whatever.

As Houa persisted, she began to recognize her own strengths and weaknesses. This self-realization materialized into a study routine.

For me, I study I study math. Two hours every day, (H)Mong, I studied two hours every day and English, because we watched movies and stuff and I didn't really get my papers and stuff. I spent two hours too if we had assignments due. So, I mean, I split the time out real easily. I get home from school; I eat dinner; I do my homework.

The fear of failure created an intense need to study which caused stress yet produced positive results, building self-confidence.

In contrast, Bao's fears seemed to be self-defeating as she expressed the intimidation she felt in relation to her classmates. "I was looking at all those smart people up there and competing against them...." This view did not change during her duration at MSU.

Choua also appeared to let her worries and own self-doubt get the better of her. Choua had a fear of failure similar to Bao, but rather than her fear of failure manifesting as a positive self-motivator, it loomed as a dark shadow. By our second interview near the end of the fall semester of her second year, Choua was overwhelmed. "At the beginning of the semester I was really motivated like doing homework and I was really organized until, like Thanksgiving...I do not have time...I kind of just stop studying and homework." Similar to Bao, Choua's experience implied that failure is self-fulfilled.

Despite entering MSU through an academic support program and spending their first year in the EAP, many participants had to withdraw or repeat courses throughout their academic career. Withdrawing and repeating courses had both positive and negative consequences on the students' academic experiences. The response of student and ability to modify behavior often depended on where the student was in their ways of knowing development.

### **Emerging Academic Goals**

Tinto's (1993) interactionist model of departure shed light on how academic goals emerge through student experiences. Experiences taught the participants about their individual interests resulting in a questioning or re-affirmation of academic goals. The level of certainty regarding academic goals influenced the ability to negotiate the expectations of the career path.

Tinto (1993) stated "for many, if not most, young adults, the college years are an important growing period in which new social and intellectual experiences are sought as a means of coming to grips with the issue of adult careers" (p. 40). Some students entering the university know their interests, intended career path and need to explore options within that field of study. Others have ideas related to career goals but need to explore their options, and there are students who have no idea at all what their career interests will be. All of the participants in this study entered MSU with an intended career path consistent with the offerings at MSU. As the participants refined their academic goals, the length of the decision-making process and expectations of the program of study played a role in persistence.

The level of certainty in the decision making process was influenced by the students' skills, advisor, and family. Houa entered MSU thinking about a business major, but explored a variety of career paths before deciding on communication and journalism.

I'm still business right now, but I don't know if I want to go into business. It's a little rough, like I was telling my sisters that I want to go into like counseling or like school

counselor. Just helping some kids are just whatever. It's very nice like working with little kids at the children's center was a great experience..., but I have to take a business class to see if I like business. Like I didn't know they had a marketing major, , because I was intentionally going towards marketing. So I just declared business, but I like marketing/international. So I don't know.

Houa determined her interests, with input from her family, work experiences, and exploratory course work.

In addition to her siblings, Houa's academic advisor played a significant role in the decision making process.

Because math isn't my best subject...we were thinking about communication disorders ... or something like that, and so the highest math that (I) have to take is 106 and the highest English classes just 110 so it's that... but from ... all the other majors...they require you to take a lot of math classes and a lot of English classes ...It's going to be a challenge because college isn't going to be easy...I'm just going to have to live up to it.

Houa's advisor helped determine which majors fit her interests and skills to minimize coursework in weaker content areas. However, sibling rivalry also played a role in the evolution of career goals, and Houa made an early decision based on what siblings were studying.

(My sister) is a communication major, and I don't want to be a communication major because there's 10 of us, and we all want to go into different little things...I thought I wanted to go into business, but I had to take all these math classes and all these everything. I'm not a math genius. So if I don't know math, I can't do business even though business math and math are totally different.

By her third year, Houa decided on major with the support of her academic advisor. Houa chose a career path that fit with institutional goals, took individual strengths and weaknesses into consideration, and respected family boundaries.

...I want to be a news anchor. I want to be like a Katie Couric. I don't know if I was telling you, I'm such a bubbly person., and I love talking, and I love getting out there...I was business, but I was like, I don't know if I'm a business person, but I'm giving communications a shot.

Although Houa needed her sister to change majors and almost three years of exploration to declare a major, she seemed confident in her decision and could work toward graduation.

Bao thought about majoring in nursing. “I was thinking about nursing and going to try it out and if I like it (will) probably stick to it.” She seemed to lack the understanding that nursing is not a major students are able to “try out” through course work. At MSU, nursing is the most competitive major. Students need a near perfect GPA; for an EAP student, the chance of being accepted was almost zero. At this point Bao was unaware of the requirements and had no backup plan. In interview 2, Bao toyed with a change in major from nursing to business. Similar to Houa, competition from family ruled out the change. “I was (thinking about majoring in business), but (my husband is)...switching his major (to business), and I don't want to (major in business) anymore”. By our third interview, Bao began to identify some academic strengths and indicated liking chemistry, but she still struggled with self-confidence by indicating more of what she cannot do rather than can do.

Choua entered MSU planning to major in nursing. Contrary to Bao, Choua had a clearer understanding of the expectations and expressed her worries about getting into the nursing program at the end of her first year.

Yes, I am, you know, because they expect so much of you especially the GPA they look at the GPA at its like while right now I'm at like a 3.3 so that means I have to do really good in the summer class... I'm really worried because if I don't get in, like the first time I apply that I'll try a second time, but if the second time, I don't then I am going to go and switch majors, but we'll see.

At this point, her backup plan was an education major, but she doubted herself her as well.

Well, I do want it to be a teacher, but I don't guess I am creative enough to make lesson plans. As I watched my brother's fiancé to her plans but she's always staying up until two and three in the morning, and she's buying little toys. It's fun to watch her work and do things like that but I don't know if I'm going to be that creative.

Similar to Bao, Choua thought she must possess the skills prior to learning the material.

While her academic struggles within the nursing major caused Choua to question the nursing major, Choua decided to study abroad in Thailand the summer following her second year.

I'm not sure if I'm going into nursing yet but maybe if I go to study abroad program. Maybe I can find something else other than nursing... This (the coursework) is tough; this is tougher than what I thought it would be. Like I work at a nursing home for like half of the students (working) there are like nursing students, and they go to the university, and I heard stories of many girls applying two or three times before getting in, and it's like oh, don't make me scared and like this one girl she like worked until she finally got in and she's only taking one class, and she's like, oh. It takes a lot of your time this three-credit class. So it's like wow.

She was disheartened at the difficulty of the nursing program and overwhelmed by the experiences of others. Now, though, her second choice was biology, rather than education.

Choua articulated the idea of changing to a related major as practical since most of the credits would apply.

By the end of her second year and despite her struggle to complete required coursework, Choua committed to the nursing major and even decided on a specialty. "I want to go in to gynecology, a nurse in gynecology, because I feel like in our (H)Mong culture we don't really know much about it. And sometimes we see it as a taboo for somebody to like open our legs and look there." Her decision was both personally and culturally oriented.

I visited a gynecologist, not long ago ... and my mom was just like Oh. Why?...because I can just boil some herb for you, and you can have it, and I'm like, I know but it could be some other factors to with the ovary system and everything. And she's like okay, and then I told her I was going to go on birth control pills, and she's like, don't do that. And I'm like mom it's only for year just to make sure the period comes regularly, because they see it as like a taboo or whatever. I just want to educate them more. That's why I really want to become a nurse, because of that and I still want to go in that direction.

Though she had a concrete vision for the future, admission to the program continued to be an obstacle. This time the deterrent was negotiating the application process.

I was supposed to apply this fall, but I didn't declare my major until I think March or something like that and they're like applications are due May 1 or something, and I didn't get the application until three weeks before it, and then I filled it out and everything and then I'm like oh I've got to get my CPR (certification). And I called Red Cross, and they're like we've already begun our last class and we're not going to do it again until May.

Choua must wait another year to re-apply.

By her third year, Choua began to negotiate alternative routes into the nursing program.

“If I don't then I'm going to take my microbiology and one of the labs, because I just need another lab to apply to the school of nursing. I already applied for it for this January, but we'll see them going part-time next semester.” In addition to MSU's nursing program, Choua looked into the partnership MSU had with a local technical college. To gain admission to the Associate's Degree program, MSU must deny admission to the nursing program twice.

However, the pressure was taking an emotional toll.

Yeah, so I'm really upset this whole semester. I'm just worried about not getting into the nursing school because the whole pressure from your family about when are you (going to) graduate, and it's like I can't yet. I'm not even in the school of nursing... You have to have a 3.0 to apply and then yet you have to take to science classes with the lab and have an average of like a 2.5. And yeah I guess that's about it. Not too bad, but then again they start looking at GPA from like 4.0. Last semester's cut off was like a 3.7.

Choua indicated her GPA is around a 3.0. She was to the point of reconsidering her major despite her commitment to nursing.

Yer knew early in her college career where her academic interests were. By spring 2007, she declared kinesiology as her major, which fit both her academic interests in biology and hands-on learning style. “I don't think I really want to be a researcher kind of person I'd rather actually do things more of the hands-on. Rather than just go do some research and write it down.” She decided to attend graduate school, so she could become a physical therapist with the ultimate goal of opening her own practice.

By spring 2008, Yer regularly consulted with her academic advisor regarding her career goals and became more active in the major. She began observing another student's research in a community fitness program and applied to the major's primary internship program. Yer could articulate a clear understanding the expectations of her major and had a timeline in place for graduating and applying to graduate schools.

Despite having a clear career path, Yer had to negotiate a detour when she could not get into her major's primary internship program.

When I was in the (kinesiology) program, they're like you take a couple of courses, and then they try to put you in a human performance program. But...there are only like 20 seats open, and the rest can't get in, and I was one of those who didn't get in...They said you could still go on at the (kinesiology) major, but then you have to pick a minor, so I chose that (business administration) route.

However a minor in business administration while suitable to her career goals of running her own business, presented new challenges.

The second semester I actually had to with draw from accounting, I don't like accounting. I have to take accounting, because I have a major in (kinesiology) a minor in business (administration). So I have to take the business courses this year now; it is going to be tough.

Yer also began to question her career path and had mixed feelings about the direction this area of study would take her.

Let's just say that if this ever comes true, I would become an occupational therapist, and then what was I going to partner with the physical therapist and opened up our own practice. That would be something I like to do. We will see if it happens... I think this track will probably benefit me more because ... even though I had (kinesiology) here, I still have the whole business area...my husband he is an auto mechanic, and he wants to open up like his own shop too...so it's like I'll help him...from my learnings.

For Choua not being admitted to the nursing program created a roadblock in her academic goals.

For Yer, not being accepted into the internship program did not influence her ability to attain a degree in her major of choice.

After a one-year detour through the business administration minor, Yer was able to streamline her career goals with the help of her advisor. Yer felt this path better fit her talents.

I took all my economics class and I like that class and all that. My information system, and I love that class, but then I took accounting, and I was like I can't do this. Maybe I'll just give up on this, and I'll go talk to my advisor (who) said that we'll figure something out, and then...we came up with a topical minor in wellness, so now I'm just more ... of nursing courses and then like things that relates more like the wellness concepts and stuff of ... kinesiology.

Houa faced a different type of roadblock during her third year when she declared a major. While declaring a major may not appear as a roadblock, because the declaration came so late in her academic career, Houa learned it would take an additional three years of coursework before she could graduate.

Um, I was a little shocked super shocked. I was like my God; are you kidding me? I want to get out of here, but the thing is that the adviser that I go to, to declare my major (said) I'm going to have to have an overload like 15 plus credits...I'd rather stay at 12, and if I have to stay another year, you know, I can do it. It's not going to be bad.

Despite the time frame, Houa was excited about being immersed in the major and even discussed graduate school.

Even with strong ideas of what they would like to study, EAP students were encouraged to remain undeclared and took a prescribed program of study during their first year. EAP students found it difficult to negotiate the application process alone which seemed to result in an inability to meet admissions requirements, delayed entrance into the program, and for those who persist, longer than average time to degree.



### **Faculty-Staff Interactions**

Tinto (1993) stated that the formal interaction with faculty in the classroom could serve as a gateway to equally significant interactions with faculty outside of the classroom, which stimulated academic development and integration into the university. In addition, “the absences of student-faculty interactions and/or unrewarding interactions outside of the classroom may lead to academic boredom and thus to voluntary withdrawal or to lower levels of academic performance which may in turn lead to dismissal” (p. 118). Every interaction with faculty and staff cannot be expected to be positive; however, as at-risk, first generation, LTELs, EAP students may be in greater need of academic connections with faculty in order to achieve academic success and make a cultural connection.

Academic experiences were built on both in-class and out-of-class connections with faculty, staff, and university resources. One aspect of building connections with faculty hinged on the student faculty relationship. For many students there was a hierarchical distance between faculty and students that often made a collegial relationship difficult to establish. Houa was comfortable with her professors and recognized the value of asking for assistance

...If I could go back into time, I wish I could...go up to their offices and just like have a conversation like we're having...just to get to know them better...everyone's busy; you can't always fit their schedule to yours, and they can't always fit their schedule to...mine...so, I mean, I knew them to the point where they knew me... There is nothing to be shy about because if you really need help, and you're a struggling American, I have to go see them because just to visit really matters. My thing is, if you go in and see someone, if you need help, they'll just help you, and they'll think that the person is really trying...For me as an Asian-American. It's really hard because I was brought up speaking Hmong and... It's just really hard, and I'm talking about English right now, because I hate papers; I can't write papers.

Since Houa was not using EAP defined tutoring services, her interaction with the faculty teaching the courses she took served as an outlet for academic assistance. Houa suggested that

she was comfortable enough with her professors to ask for help when she needed it, which she found especially important as a LTEL.

Yer found a connection to her professors through teaching style.

Last year was good. I liked...all of my classes...the teachers were great...I learned a lot during the semester...because we had at least one class with this one teacher (and I) like the way how he taught and his way of teaching and the way we studied pretty much turned my whole perspective like this. You know it's something I should have been doing the whole time that I've been here the last four years... (He would tell us) you guys want to go to graduate school and this is what you guys got to do...always putting that...in the back of our minds...Make sure you guys study every day, and at the same time he's always like oh pop quizzes or don't forget like your tests are next week. And don't forget, you need to do this and this and this before the test and all that. So I thought it was pretty cool how he actually tried to motivate us to learn...it's, it's something I would actually do as an (occupational therapist) because...it's more...cognitive...and emotions in the body motions from...childhood... that connects to what I'll be doing later on. I'll need this information.

When the instructor was enthusiastic about the subject matter and could connect course content to career goals, Yer felt a similar enthusiasm. The relationships strengthened as Yer persisted in her academic career, paralleling the development of her ways of knowing.

While connecting with faculty was important for academic success, there was an intimidation factor that students needed to overcome. At one point Choua compared her interactions with the biology lecture professor and the biology lab professor. While she talked with the lecture professor "once or twice," she "talked to (her) lab professor more because she is just more easy-going, and I'm not really like intimidated by her." Choua had mixed reactions when describing the experience in her Asian history class, where the professor is an Asian-American.

She would come and talk to us once in a while, but the first day of class was so funny because we were all sitting in the back row, and it was a bunch of (H)Mong students, and she's like oh it's so (H)Mong -ish over here. And it's like whoa, did you just say, (H)Mong -ish. She's so funny...Sometimes I feel really weird because I remember when one of the guys was talking to her about Senator Mee Moua and politics, and she comes up to us, and she's like oh he has a question to ask...us. Because we were (H)Mong, she

thought we would know (The Senator is from Minnesota, and Choua is from Wisconsin)...The professor brought the student over and was like because you guys are (H)Mong, you can tell him more about (the senator)...I'm like, I don't know anything about that subject. I've met Senator Mee Moua, but I can't tell you anything more...she's like oh, I just (thought) because you guys are (H)Mong. That was kind of offended, but I was also like I understand where she's coming from. But yeah, she's funny.

While Choua described the experience and the professor as funny, she seemed somewhat insulted and uncomfortable by the lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity. Choua displayed respect of her elders as appropriate of her as a (H)Mong female; however, this cultural respect created additional barriers to her faculty/staff interactions.

Yer indicated varying relationships with faculty. "When I have questions, I'll go over and asked them; and sometimes I go over like my tests (and) how I did on them." However, Yer felt her instructors knew her "because I'm the only Asian in there."

In addition to traditional faculty and staff, the Office of Multicultural Affairs employed a (H)Mong student advisor, Walter, to serve as a cultural liaison between students and the university. While most EAP students worked with Walter through the EAP, students often enrolled in the (H)Mong language course he teaches. Experiences with Walter as an instructor and advisor could potentially create a stronger connection to the university. For Choua, though, this experience put Walter in an area that was not his strength. Walter does not have a degree in the (H)Mong language although he is a native speaker.

And Walter gave us practically the answers to the exam already. The thing is that I was kind of like really disappointed in him because this Caucasian girl... was...telling Walter that the exam was going to be too hard because Walter wanted us to write a little paragraph about like why we took (H)Mong 101... in (H)Mong, and she said that it was too hard. And I know that since I'm (H)Mong speaker that I find it easy, but you know in French 101, we had to write big paragraphs. If we can do that in French, and we're not a French native speaker, we can do that in (H)Mong too, but I guess it's not fair because most of the class is (H)Mong. Yeah, but then like if you don't get challenged. You will never learn, you know, sometimes it's too easy that you don't even want to study and you don't really put effort in there because it's like you know Walter, this is like little kid stuff.

A failure to challenge students with academic rigor was both a negative student-faculty interaction as well as de-motivator for the student.

In addition to the cultural distance between faculty members, there was a disconnect with Choua's faculty advisor as well. When negotiating options for getting into the nursing program, Choua consulted with her faculty advisor, "she said she would like get back to me" (but has not)... "I don't know where else I could probably take it; at the tech (technical college) and transfer it in, but I don't know". When I suggested talking with one of the EAP advisors, it is clear that Choua had not considered this as an option. Her frustration with the academic advisor resurfaced later in the conversation when we talked about courses for the next semester. Half way through her third year, Choua completed most of her general education courses and debated whether to take on a minor. When I suggested that she spend some time with her advisor on this issue, Choua suggested that the advisor "wants me to come over and cook for her again, so hopefully...(they can talk about academic concerns then). It seemed the advisor had established a personal relationship, however, Choua found the professional relationship was disappointing.

This disappointment was further illustrated as Choua consulted with her advisor during a defining moment in her academic career.

I was talking to (my advisor), and she's like, I don't know if you should take a semester off, but you can if you want, but why don't we call (multicultural affairs). (I knew he would say) no; that I have to stay in school, and yep, that's what happened. So we call Walter, and we're talking on the phone, and he is giving me this big lecture...I'm like okay, I'll take...two...three credit classes, and he's like okay. He just gave me a like this whole big thing about, you know you don't even get financial aid, so if you go and take a semester off to work and you're probably going to make a lot of money and aid won't help you the next year...and you might not want to come back to school after that. I'm like, I know I want to come back to school. I don't want to be getting paid eight dollars an hour.

Choua looked to the academic expert to give her advising advice. When the advisor was unable to give advice to an underrepresented population, she turned to Walter in Multicultural Affairs. Choua expressed frustration in the experience as she looked for advice without cultural pressure. While Choua's experiences seemed counter-productive, Yer found her advisor to provide reliable information and could consult her advisor on both academic issues and in relationship to career goals. "...she is so helpful and gives you more information than I need."

Houa relied on her academic advisors when negotiating career paths. However, Houa's reliance was more of a dependence on someone else to make decisions rather than making decisions for herself.

I went in and talk to (my advisor), and we were just looking at classes...I was thinking about psychology, and we were just thinking...if I minor in psychology that I'm going to have to take math 246 or psych 246 or something on stats. So I was like um if I'm struggling now with my abilities already, and I don't know if I can do it – stats...we decided global studies

Houa's positive relationship with her general academic advisor helped her establish a positive relationship with her major advisor later.

When I went to see the CJ advisor to declare my major, she was like, well, you will probably be done in 2011. Like oh my gosh, That's like a long time...Then I looked over all of my classes...everything I really did need and what I didn't need ...and... I figured I'll be done this semester, so I'm really excited...I was so scared that I was going to be here for six years, but I'm here for five so it's pretty reasonable.

Relying so heavily on the advice of her advisor kept Houa from developing her own plan. When her major advisor suggested she would need more time than expected to graduate, Houa seemed to reach a turning point and started to take initiative in her decision making process.

Relationships with faculty and staff play an important role in persistence. Students need to be comfortable enough with their advisor to seek help but also learn how to make independent decisions. This is especially important for first generation college students who have no one at

home to seek advice from on the college experience. However, there are cultural boundaries visible in the experiences of the relationships EAP students form. If the faculty or staff member crosses the cultural boundaries, the relationship with the faculty or staff member may be compromised.

### **Summary**

Tinto (1993) described the root of persistence as educational. However, “colleges are systematic enterprises comprised of a variety of linking interactive, reciprocal parts, formal and informal, academic and social” (p. 118). This chapter looked at the academic experiences of EAP students and how they contributed to teaching academic survival skills, learning the implications of academic performance, negotiating a career path, and interacting with university faculty and staff. The next chapter looks at the social experiences, both internal and external, of these EAP students.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOCIAL EXPERIENCES: INSIDER OR OUTSIDER

While “the importance of student involvement (is) more evident than in and around the classroom” (Tinto, 1993, p. 132), the academic and social experiences are clearly linked, encouraging students to engage with faculty and peers outside of class. However, the social experiences are more than just academic in nature but also serve as a means of connecting students to campus and developing a sense of community. Tinto’s model suggests that the more involved students are on campus, the more likely students are to persist. While Chapter Five looked at the academic experiences on campus, Chapter Six examines at the social experiences. This chapter looks specifically at the internal and external communities these EAP students develop.

#### Internal Communities

Within the university, MSU provides a broad range of formal experiences (intramurals, clubs and organizations, theater groups, student government, etc) designed to link students with the campus. “Student participation in extracurricular activities often leads to friendships that extend well beyond those formal social activities (Tinto, 1993, p. 108). Because integration to campus includes more than academics, the social relationships developed on campus help students integrate and may lead to persistence. The EAP students engaged in two types of internal communities as MSU: extracurricular activities and peer groups.

**Extracurricular activities**

Extracurricular activities offer a way for students to interact with their peers on campus. These extracurricular activities may be related to individual interests or have academic undertones. Regardless, all offer an opportunity for students to connect with peers with similar interests.

Initially two trends seem to emerge in EAP students' extracurricular pursuits. Students either join a student organization based on their ethnic identity or choose not to participate in extracurricular activities. Participation in the (H)Mong Student Association offered the students an opportunity to connect with peers and assist others but does not guarantee success.

Many EAP students joined the (H)Mong Student Association. "It's good as you can find out different people. Even though most the people are made up of Hmong people. It's still a good like connecting experience, I guess" (Yer). Bao expressed wanting to join the Hmong Student Association but not for the same reasons as Yer. Bao indicated, "all of her friends are in (H)Mong Student Association." The (H)Mong Student Association presented the opportunity to interact with peers of the same ethnic group. Tatum (1997) suggested that connection with peers of the same race is an important step in the identity development process (p. 69).

In addition to connecting with peers, the (H)Mong Student Association offered opportunities to engage in the external community. Yer mentored a local (H)Mong high school student. Mentoring provided the opportunity to develop academic and cultural connections.

Not all students viewed associating with peers of the same ethnicity positively. Choua's viewed of the (H)Mong student organization negatively. "Sometimes I feel like they don't really contribute too much to the society or the school." This view initially kept her from participating in the organization. By her second year, Choua joined the (H)Mong Student Association but did



not actively participate because the meetings conflicted with her work schedule. She expressed guilt “for not showing up for meetings.” By the end of her second year, though, she regretted becoming part of the organization.

I feel bad. I'm an (H)Mong Student Association member, but ... like I help them. ... I just didn't like it because I remember I came and help them, but it was just like ...It was just me and my friend and Tou and the president getting everything prepared, even though some people signed up to come and help prepare...only like 10 of the 30 members were there... and then they did another fund-raising...(and) the same thing happened. It was me and most of the board members like four of them, and we were making 500 egg rolls, and nobody came and helped us.

Despite taking an active role, Choua continued to express guilt despite being unhappy with the organization and feeling the (H)Mong Student Association took advantage of her. This sentiment ultimately reinforced her initial negative impressions and hesitancy to associate with the organization in the first place. In addition to the negative views of the organization, Choua learned that her peers were unreliable.

Houa was the only student to join a campus organization that was not tied to cultural identity. As a campus ambassador, Houa gave tours, participated in photo shoots and served as a campus liaison for invited guests. Campus Ambassadors is not a typical campus organization, as it is not student run, and participants must be nominated by a faculty or staff member and go through a rigorous interview process before being selected. The campus ambassadors program did allow Houa to share her enthusiasm for MSU with prospective students and the community.

While there were benefits to participating in extracurricular activities, becoming overly involved in campus activities can have a negative impact. Tou was an active member of campus organizations; however, he was so involved that his grades fell and the EAP Committee recommended he reduce participation. At the end of his first year, Tou indicated that now he was only active in the (H)Mong Student Association and Student Support Services. I have since

learned that Student Support Services is not a student run organization but offers programming to students that qualify. Tou also indicated that he was elected the new social coordinator for the (H)Mong Student Association. Tinto stated that “academic failure may arise not from the absence of skills but from the debilitating impact of social isolation upon a person’s ability to carry out academic work” (p. 109).

Not all students understood the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities. Soua chose to focus on studies over building social connections. When asked if she joined any clubs or organizations, she stated, “no not really, and probably not even going to start next year because I just am busy doing homework.” Soua did not see the interplay between the social and academic systems of college

Neither Soua nor Choua saw the connection between the social and academic realms of campus. For Choua, not joining a campus organization was one of her many regrets at the end of her first year. “I was...so worried about fitting in and not being able to finish my homework and being too caught up with a club...(I will) probably try my sophomore year where I actually like know how to manage time and everything”. Choua suggested that social involvement actually interfered with her academic success.

While the participants were familiar with the purpose of the (H)Mong Student Association, many students did not engage in extracurricular activities connected to their field of study. Yer was encouraged to join clubs in her major by her academic advisor, but she did not know what the major related clubs did. Although more involved in extracurricular activities than other EAP students, Yer failed to take her advisor’s advice. Not joining major related clubs became one of the factors that kept Yer from being accepted into the main internship program in her major. She felt

I know for sure like I haven't been to like any of the club meetings. I think it is because every time they have club meetings I work that day. Then it is like okay great. You know but then like I've been going and doing volunteer work. You know like how we did Special Olympics and stuff. I put that kind of stuff on my resume and did like (H)Mong Student Association. With like mentor mentee stuff. (Yer)

Extracurricular activities necessary for career advancement were not prioritized over work obligations and justifications were made that activities done several years prior to her application were sufficient.

Extracurricular activities provided a formal opportunity for students to engage socially on campus. Some participants joined the (H)Mong Student Association as a way to build relationships internally. The level of participation, though, varied from highly involved to not actively involved. Not all participants found internal participation contributed to academic success.

### **Peer Groups**

While participating in extracurricular activities was one way to create peer groups, peer groups tended to be limited to EAP classmates, other (H)Mong students, and family members. Branching outside of this comfort zone was challenging. However, peers serve an important social and academic role in their college experience.

Having a social support network can help students cope with the transition to and demands of college (Tinto, 1993, p. 122). For these participants, friendships were primarily other EAP, other (H)Mong, and family. In her advice to future EAP students, Soua indicated that making friends was important; however she relied on the connections to her EAP classmates rather than branching outside of her comfort zone.

While Choua indicated her friends were a mix of (H)Mong and non-(H)Mong students, she stated

I do hang out with more of the (H)Mong students... I don't know (why). I just do. It's more comfortable, but I do have a really good white friend. We always hang out like twice a week. But...I grew up with her...and she goes to school here now, and she's in the same situation that I am to do with the whole nursing program...so (we) kind of understand each other.

This example shows the need for someone to understand our experience whether it is ethnically or academically tied.

For most students, those who best understand their experience is a peer. Houa, in contrast, defined her peer group as her sisters and contrasted her experience during her sophomore year to that in high school.

I mean like in high school, you have like little cliques or whatever, but when you're in college, your only clique are your siblings. You can go to lunch with your siblings; you can talk to your siblings. You can text your siblings and say hey, where are you, you want to go to lunch... it's really good at like you're bonding with your family. If you need anything, they can help you, or if you need help, they can address you to a person to help you.

Tatum (1997) stated, "having a place to be rejuvenated and to feel anchored in one's cultural community increases the possibility that one will have the energy to achieve academically..." (p. 80). Even though Choua and Houa belong to different peer groups, both students were looking for a comfortable place to fit in.

Not all students connected with peers as easily as others. Despite being quite involved on campus, Tou struggled to make connections with other students. While two EAP classmates are enrolled in his freshman composition course, he stated that he "basically works with new people" in class. He also added

It gets lonely because I don't go out anymore with my friends from last year. I decided this semester I am going to stay in and concentrate on my work instead of going out" and blames his friends for his poor grades. I regretted hanging out with them the night before my exam, so then I didn't do as good at that exam. I think that if I didn't hang out with them the night before the exam, I could have done better.

However, the only reason he made it to the exam at all was because of a friend “I would’ve (missed the exam) if Simon didn’t call me. Simon called me to ask where I was.” As Tou elaborated, though, Simon only called because “he didn’t know where the classroom was.” This experience suggests that his peers see Tou as an outsider.

Bao also struggled to make friendships post EAP. When asked about making new friends, “I met one that transferred from (a neighboring university), and some other ones (Hmong) that go here. I just don't talk to them.” She expressed having friends in the (H)Mong language class she took, and was also the only class in which she expressed being academically successful.

For first generation college students, friendships are not only a means of social connections but also a place for academic advice. Bao, who lacked a faculty role model, turned to her friends. “I was talking to one of my friends...(who said) you know, it's okay. You have like two (or) three years to boost up your grades, because she started out like a 2.2, and it took him three years to boost up her grades.” Relying on friends for academic input does not always result in accurate advice. This train of thought will keep Bao from meeting the competitive requirements for admission to the nursing program.

Choua also consulted with friends regarding course work and the nursing program; however, it is difficult to determine if these friends are truly friends or merely acquaintances. She toyed with joining a nursing organization, “I need to meet new people, especially in the nursing program, so I will know people in the nursing school” and no longer connected with former EAP students. “I just like to come to school, do my thing and go home and do my thing and come back to school.” She seemed to struggle connecting socially on campus. “My kins (kinesiology) class was nice because I was working out, and I had class with Houa, and like the

people in that class was really nice. I just wish that (in) human anatomy, I would have met more people.” The struggle to connect socially impacted her comfort level academically, and Choua struggled to find balance between the academic and social experiences of college.

Because all week I'm like I have to study because I need my GPA to be good...I feel really sad because I don't know a lot of people, I think it would be nice to know a lot of people earlier before I came here. (When) walking along down the river (with a friend visiting from out of town),he's like do you know that person and I'm like no. He's like you know that person, and I'm like no is like do you know that person and I am like, she's in my biology class, but I don't know her... sometimes I do wish I would have joined more clubs and just get to...be more involved with people.

Although Choua previously mentioned choosing MSU because none of her friends were going to school here, she later regretted this decision because of the difficulty she had developing new friendships.

Having friends does not indicate a social community. The quality of the friendships is also important. In Thailand, Choua realized the depth of her friendships. “I was really close with Houa and Ying like when we got there. We learned so much about each other that I am kind of iffy about her. You just get to know a lot of people better.” Despite this experience, she still held on to the friendship.

None of the EAP students have a traditional social life on campus. Once married, Yer's social life changed further. When asked if she still socialized with people on campus, she stated, “Not much anymore. I used to like freshman year, but (you) go into your degree; I'm married now, so it's kind of like going out with other people that your husband don't know is not a good idea.” She clarified the cultural implications “since you're a wife now you shouldn't be going out and partying with people that's not your husband and pretty much all my friends are his brothers and friends' wives and girlfriends.” Interactions with others on campus were now purely for academic purposes.

Tinto (1993) stated “presumably, the greater number of memberships, the greater likelihood of persistence and the greater benefits accruing from persistence” (p. 122). In these EAP students, I see a very limited number of friendships, which are mostly cultural and familial. While having friendships with those in your cultural group is significant, it can also be challenging if those friendships are superficial.

### **External Communities**

Internal communities are not the only communities, which shape persistence. “To the degree that the individual participates in communities external to the college...the model argues, events in those communities may also shape persistence in college” (Tinto, 1993, p. 116). For these students, where they live and the need to work also shaped persistence.

### **Housing**

At MSU, the majority of first year students live on campus. Of these participants only Tou lived on campus. Houa lived at home with her family. Soua and Bao lived with their husbands. Choua lived with relatives, and Yer lived with relatives until she married. While Tou lived on-campus his first year, by his second year, he prepared to move off-campus. For these participants, although living off campus may hinder and social connections, other considerations such as costs and privacy had a greater priority.

Houa rationalized living with her family as she described how living off-campus impacted her social connections.

I really don't interact much. I just go to my classes, go to work, go home to my homework and now with some friends outside of class... I don't think I'm missing much...I guess dorm life would be a lot more convenient for me, so I don't have to drive... but I mean why pull out loans when you have your own bedroom at home...free food. Why would you share a bathroom with a group of girls...when I was a freshman I was like maybe I should have lived up in the dorms, but as I get older, I guess I don't need to live in the dorms I mean.

Choua and Yer expressed regret in living off-campus their first year. While Choua was not able to articulate why, Yer found the pros outweigh the cons.

A little part of me wishes I had lived in the dorms, because they new actually knew more people. If the people had stuff on campus, you could just go instead of trying to find your way to campus or find a parking spot, but then, overall I think living off campus is better for me. I like the isolation of being by myself, easier studying too.

By her second year, doubts about living off-campus disappeared.

Once married Yer, moved in with her husband's parents, who presented a new set of challenges; they later moved out and become responsible for their own home.

No, we are actually living in their old house...it's me and my husband and his older brother and his wife, so there's like four of us in his old house because their mom and dad like didn't want to get rid of it because it's on a five acre land or whatever and they didn't want to like lose the land or something like that. So we just took it from them. So they gave us like the whole like equity year and all that stuff, so we have like our own house now.

The responsibility of home ownership required more fiscal management and personal responsibility while creating a unique living situation with relatives.

Living off-campus limited student interaction on-campus and may have contributed to the limited involvement EAP students have with their peers. "Commuting students may face especially difficult problems in attempting to make contact with faculty and other students" (Tinto, p. 64). Paying rent or a mortgage also necessitated a means of income leading to another pull factor – employment.

### **Employment**

With tuition costs rising, more students find a need for employment. In addition to tuition costs, students living off campus must contribute to living expenses, transportation to and from campus, as well as personal costs. Bao, Yer, and Choua all had part-time jobs off campus. While work-study and some career-related positions may contribute to persistence, the number



of hours worked and the location of employment may negatively impact degree attainment (Tinto, 1993). While these students had a financial need for employment, they also had to negotiate the contributions work life had on academics as well as discrimination from employers.

For all of the participants, working part time was a necessity. During her second year at MSU, Bao worked about 24 hours a week off-campus. Financial reasons necessitated work, “I had to pay off my insurance and the house rent and everything too” (Bao). Participants seemed to be aware of the negative impact working could have on their academics. While Yer felt able to balance her academic and work responsibilities, she noted, “sometimes I’m getting kind of pooped out at the end of the week.” Ultimately financial obligations outweighed academic achievement.

As students persisted the need for employment began to connect with career goals. In her first year, Yer worked 15-20 hours per week off-campus and continued to work off-campus throughout college.

...I think about putting (a shoe store) as maybe like a work related experience. It involves (foot)mechanics. We talk about impact and how it affects peoples life... like impact and...maybe that can help...good shoes, you know, it will be better for your foot and better on your back...I have a lot of customers that come in and complain about their back and have feet problems, and we can point them in the directions like this shoe is good for your problems even though we’re not doctors.

Yer discussed how she applied her work experiences to her major. While Bao, Choua, and Yer all hold jobs with some career relevance, only Yer was able to articulate the connection in terms of a resume.

Working off-campus also presented challenges of discrimination. Choua had a significant work life off-campus; however, a very negative experience with her employer forced her to resign. Choua gave notice to her employer that she would be studying abroad in the summer, approximately six months later. Her employer stated she would need to find someone

to work during a holiday and over the weekend of the music festival - dates she would miss while she was gone. While Choua initially accepted this demand, she eventually decided to resign prior to her departure once she realized the demands were unreasonable. At the time she delivered her two weeks' notice, management accused her of stealing a soda from a resident.

... I get there, and they set me down and...say...one of the residents is accusing you of drinking her soda. And I was like, really, are you kidding me. I'm like no... She asked me to go get her soda, and I got it. She asked me to open it. I opened it and set it on her tray table. Maybe it was my fault because I had a cup of water in my hand...maybe that's why she thought...I drank her soda, but I did not.

Choua's initial reaction was to explain what happened; however, management did not believe her.

...I'm like, I'm not that poor; it's \$.50, you guys, and...I don't think they believed me...how can you not believe me. I pick up what I need to pick up. I do a good job, and you know, the residents like me...And I was like, whatever, I got really mad. And I just got my two week notice in, yeah, but they never really resolved what they were going to do about that, you know, they just told me well right now, if you said this, and she said that...then later on, I was supposed to work at five... but they called me in the morning, and the manager is like Choua I'm so disappointed in you; I can believe it. You're putting in your two weeks' notice. After this incident, you know, I just don't understand you. I feel that we've been really dishonest with each other, so you might as well not come back to work anymore. Take your two week notice early.

While Choua did not say specifically how this affected her mentally, her word choice suggested she was hurt and concerned about her reputation and ability to regain employment. She also assumed responsibility and expressed guilt for a problem, which was potentially discriminatory on behalf of the employer.

Tinto's model argued, "external events may influence departure indirectly via their impact upon student social and academic integration and or directly via their effect on commitments – being pulled away" (p.116). However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) found Latino students felt more at home when they were able to connect with both internal and external communities. The data suggested that these EAP students are not integrating socially in a way

more traditional student populations do, leading me to wonder if these students are social insiders or outsiders and how this relationship impacted the decision to stay or depart.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EDUCATION AND CULTURAL EMPOWERMENT

As students persist in higher education, they encounter a multitude of challenges. Not only do they face intellectual challenges, but their individual identity also comes into question. These EAP students are no exception. While many of these examples were discussed previously in terms of departure and persistence, in this chapter, the student experiences are reframed through race, ethnicity, language, and culture. As these EAP students negotiate the college experience, they are also negotiating their racial and ethnic identity and the expectations of the (H)Mong language and culture as they become more comfortable with themselves.

#### **Race and the Learning Experience**

Phinney (2004) stated, “ethnic identity development is an aspect of becoming an adult. Becoming an adult involves figuring out who you are , finding a sense of direction and purpose in life, making decisions regarding career, life styles, beliefs, gender roles, political orientation, and finding a niche, or a comfort zone ” (p. 1). (H)Mong LTELs face all of these challenges as well as determining the role ethnicity and language will play in their lives in the face of their own culture and the ideals of society around them. The role of race in the learning experience for these EAP students is based on where the student is in terms of racial identity development and the racial awareness of those who interact with multicultural students, particularly MSU faculty and staff but also employers.

As the students entered MSU, they are already aware that race plays a role in the learning experience. Tatum (1997), using Marcia’s identity “statuses” and Cross’s theory of racial identity development, explained, “that the search for identity intensifies in adolescence” (p. 53).

The participants show a realization of race and the role race and ethnicity play in society through their admission to the EAP, their relationship with peers, and their relationship with faculty.

Upon admission to MSU, students questioned the role race and ethnicity played in their placement in the EAP. “I felt kind of ... like I was stupid or something, because you had to go through a program because you're not like an American; I guess you're like Hmong, so you felt like you were out of place” (Soua). Tatum (1997) said that Black youth think of themselves in terms of race because society does (p. 54). Similar to the exploration of identity of Black youth, (H)Mong students also view themselves in terms of race and ethnicity.

The construct of race is visible to the students in the admissions process and as they form relationships with peers. “I do hang out with more of the (H)Mong students... I don't know (why). I just do. It's more comfortable” (Choua). While associating with peers of the same ethnic group is comfortable for the students, they are also aware that non-(H)Mong may stigmatize this behavior. “We used to walk to classes like in a whole group we used to walk out and everybody used to be like, okay, why are they are walking out like all (H)Mong people and stuff” (Soua). While Soua did not suggest that she was ever confronted by her non-(H)Mong peers, she felt this behavior was questioned. The social significance of race is real (Tatum, 1997).

Not only were the realities of race visible in peer relationships, they were also visible in the participants viewed themselves in the classroom and through their interaction with faculty and staff. MSU is a predominantly White university. Yer felt her instructors know her “because I'm the only Asian in there,” equating her existence with race. While Yer suggested that race made her to stand out, Houa suggested race caused her to blend in “they're not going to know I'm

this (H)Mong girl who doesn't need help or anything.” In both examples, the women felt identified by race rather than who they are as individuals.

While the participants have a perception of how others view their race in class, they also realized experiences that further illustrate the role race played in their interactions with faculty. “We were all sitting in the back row, and it was a bunch of (H)Mong students, and she’s like oh, it's so (H)Mong -ish over here. And it's like whoa, did you just say, (H)Mong -ish” (Choua)? For the students, sitting together offered a level of comfort knowing they are surrounded by peers with similar language and cultural experiences, but the professor called attention to this interaction and projected a negative connotation on a positive interaction.

Sitting together may also be a way for students to protect themselves from intentional or unintentional racial messages.

Sometimes I feel really weird because I remember when one of the guys was talking to (the professor) about Senator Mee Moua and politics, and she comes up to us, and she's like oh he has a question to ask...us. Because we were (H)Mong, she thought we would know... That was kind of offended, but I was also like I understand where she's coming from... (Choua)

Choua reacted with mixed feelings, unsure of the message the faculty member projected in her comments. Students encountered a sort of groupthink, that just because you are (H)Mong, you must know all (H)Mong.

Not all racial encounters were as direct. Subtle references were visible to the students. Choua’s encounter with her academic advisor suggested a barter - food for information. “(She) wants me to come over and cook for her again, so hopefully... (they can talk about academic concerns then)”. While the advisor’s intentions may have been to develop a personal connection with the student, the message was mixed.

Subtle racial encounters also occurred off-campus and in the community. Two participants felt they were mistreated in the work place: Houa faced an unbalanced workload in relation to her colleagues, and Choua faced accusations of stealing by her employer.

... I get there, and they set me down and...say...one of the residents is accusing you of drinking her soda. And I was like, really, are you kidding me. I'm like no... She asked me to go get her soda, and I got it. She asked me to open it. I opened it and set it on her tray table. Maybe it was my fault because I had a cup of water in my hand...maybe that's why she thought...I drank her soda, but I did not. (Choua)

While neither student directly associated the experience with race, both felt a sense of discrimination and were concerned with how such an encounter would reflect upon their reputation.

Whether intentional or not, the participants encountered situations impacting their racial identity. Admission and placement into the EAP projected a segregation of the population to the students. The participants recognized that associating with peers of the same ethnicity, while providing support, was perceived differently by outsiders. Interactions with faculty, staff, and employers also provided negative racial experiences for the students. These encounters allowed racism to persist.

### **Language and Culture**

Not only are the participants perceived differently by the visible characteristic of race, language and culture but they also influenced how the participants perceive and interact at MSU. Tatum (1997) stated, "language is inextricably bound to identity" (p. 139). For these participants the (H)Mong language was an intricate part of their identity as many (H)Mong elders speak only (H)Mong, and many youth speak primarily English (Thao, 2006). Language created an internal struggle for the participants illustrated in their oral communication and challenged MSU to meet learner needs without marginalizing the individual.

Participants struggled with the idea that they may be conversationally fluent in English but struggle with academic language. “For me as an Asian-American, it's really hard because I was brought up speaking Hmong and... It's just really hard” (Houa). While it was difficult for Houa to articulate the challenges, the strain was recognizable in her voice and emotions. Yer explained how living her private life in (H)Mong impacted her education.

I think it's difficult I think, because I don't know how would you put it. It's hard to like sometimes comprehend some of the English that they try to teach you in your class, and then you go home, and you like ask your mom and dad or you ask your other friends, do you understand what this means, and they have to go and reroute it, and they tell you in a simpler term. Even though English is already simple enough, you still have to go back and mentally rethink what they actually mean. And then you can, I guess, I know what they mean. (Yer)

Yer relied heavily on others to fully comprehend academic concepts. While Yer may have been able to work with family and friends outside of class, in-class and in high stakes situations, that assistance is not available.

Difficulties with academic English are also a characteristic of developmental learners; however there are clear linguistic markers that persist in our interviews. Examples of subject-verb agreement “courses that **doesn't** count toward your major” (Yer) and word endings “so it's like I'll help him...from my **learnings**” (Soua) are more than just mistakes common of native speakers. While age, type and amount of formal instruction and a variety of other factors influence a learners ability to acquire English (Ellis, 1994) such errors are often stigmatizing and influence the perception faculty have on a student's work.

For the participants and for faculty and staff at MSU, the challenge is in knowing how to develop academic language skills without marginalizing the learner. In one EAP course, language skills were evaluated by what students perceive is a test for the international students at MSU who study the English language. “Take this test; it's like a TOEFL test... I felt like... I



was back in ESL when I was in the fifth grade, or when I was in elementary school. It's like I'm in college, and I don't need to do these thing” (Houa). With the exception of Bao, the participants had not taken ESL since middle or elementary school. Testing their English in this manner was viewed as an insult to their identity.

The participants also faced marginalization by MSU faculty who lacked training to assess language ability. Houa felt accused of have learning disability when her difficulties in math caused her to struggle. She described the encounter as hostile, “Do you have a learning disability? Do your brothers and sisters have learning disabilities, or are you just a little slow?” The inability to differentiate between elements of second language acquisition and cognitive disabilities is not uncommon in the field and often results in an overrepresentation of ELLs in special education programs (Esparza Brown, 2010). The participants experienced the negative implications of this lack of tact and professionalism, which resulted in a lasting negative experience recounted during three different interviews with Houa.

“Language is not only an instrumental tool for communication, but also the carrier of cultural values and attitudes” (Tatum, 1997, p. 139). In the (H)Mong culture a respect for elders and authority is an important cultural value. One way respect is shown is through the concept of saving face. “Face-saving methods of communication may lead them to give indirect answers to straightforward questions” (Samovar and Porter, 1995, p. 230). This concept of saving face, is visible in many of the interviews. Comments like “feeling stupid or babied” (Bao; Houa; Choua) in reference to the EAP were often followed with complementary and sometimes contradictory comments like “I thought it was great... I strongly recommend it for new freshmen” (Bao). The university and the EAP represented authority, and the participants were hesitant to criticize the university, program or staff members despite their feelings and experiences. Van Manen (1990)

might equate the idea of saving face with an epistemological silence. Epistemological silence “is the kind of silence we are confronted with when we face the unspeakable” (p. 113). While Western cultures may not see a loss of face as unspeakable, for many Asian cultures the loss of face is the “equivalent of physical assault” (Samovar and Porter, 1995, p. 230).

In addition to saving face when speaking about the university and the EAP, the participants expected the same courtesy when interacting with faculty and staff.

You know the one thing that made me really mad was that she went to talk to my sister. She told my sister that I should consider early childhood education at (another state university) because I'm not good at math, and maybe MSU is not for me. You know, who are you to go talk to my sister about my math skills... (Houa)

In this example Houa took offense when EAP committee members involved her sister, an employee at MSU, in her private academic affairs as if she is unable to take responsibility for her own actions. Not only did the experience represent a lost of face, but engaging family in an adult student's educational experience violated The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which protects the privacy of student education records (U.S. Department of Education).

The EAP participants also showed concern of losing face in front of members of their ethnic group.

I was talking to (my advisor), and she's like, I don't know if you should take a semester off, but you can if you want, but why don't we call (multicultural affairs). (I knew he would say) no; that I have to stay in school, and yep, that's what happened. So we call Walter, and we're talking on the phone, and he is giving me this big lecture...(Choua)

Choua was embarrassed to have her academic advisor consult the (H)Mong multicultural affairs advisor thus causing her to lose face in front of a (H)Mong.

Face saving was apparent in classroom situations too. When Walter, a (H)Mong staff member at MSU conceded to a White student's complaint in the (H)Mong language class, Choua expressed “I was kind of like really disappointed in him” as if he is a cultural embarrassment.

With few (H)Mong faculty and staff at MSU, those who are there serve as cultural role models to students. Students were let down when their role models did not live up to their expectations and felt showing weaknesses reflected negatively on the entire culture.

In these participants, language was closely bound to identity. Language created an internal struggle for the participants, which was illustrated in their oral communication. MSU faculty and staff appeared challenged to meet learner needs without marginalizing the individual.

### **Self-Authorship**

The participants faced an internal struggle as they came to terms with whom they were as individuals and who they were as (H)Mong. (H)Mong “elders believe that the purpose of cultural identity is to pass on language, culture and ritualistic values from their nuclear family to the younger generation. If one does not have a cultural identity, one does not have a sense of his/her culture” (Thao, 2006, p.40). For these students, there was a struggle to identify with traditional (H)Mong culture and Americanization. For students bridging two or more cultures, the process of self-authorship can be quite intense. Baxter Magolda (2008) described a three-step process of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and securing internal commitments. Throughout the participants’ educational experience, they simultaneously negotiated the complex process of self-authorship and cultural identity.

Early in their college careers, the participants faced self-doubt while in the early stages of self-authorship. They negotiated forming an individual identity within the family and constantly questioned individual decisions. The role of family is culturally significant as “Mong society centers around a kinship system and operates through communal lifestyles” (Thao, 2006, p. 31). As participants struggled to find their internal voice, they placed family over self. “(My sister) is a communication major, and I don't want to be a communication major because there's 10 of us,

and we all want to go into different little things...”(Houa). Despite a personal interest in communications, Houa avoided the major out of fear of causing conflict in the family and expressed concern about being seen as an individual.

As the participants learned who they were as individuals, they often questioned decisions and expressed regret. This is most visible examples were in Choua who regularly expressed remorse for her actions through statements like “I should have studied more” or “I feel so stupid” when explaining her actions. Choua seemed to waiver on her own identity and lacked self-confidence. Houa’s experience negotiating majors and Choua’s self doubt illustrated how the participants response to situations presented a sense of self-doubt.

As participants began to trust themselves, they began to distinguish “between reality and one’s reaction to it” which the first element of self-authorship, trusting the internal voice, requires (Baxter Magolda, 2008, p. 279). As participants began to trust their internal voice, they were able to make decisions that accounted for themselves personally despite cultural pressures.

I visited a gynecologist, not long ago ... and my mom was just like Oh. Why? ... because I can just boil some herb for you, and you can have it, and I'm like, I know but it could be some other factors to with the ovary system and everything. And she's like okay and then I told her I was going to go on birth control pills and she's like don't do that. And I'm like mom is only for year ... because they see it as like a taboo or whatever. I just want to educate them more. That's why I really want to become a nurse, because of that and I still want to go in that direction. (Choua)

Even though Western medical practices are viewed as unconventional, Choua saw a way to benefit her community by pursuing a field she was personally passionate about.

The second stage of self-authorship is building an internal foundation. In this stage, participants used their internal framework to guide reactions to reality, refined themselves in relationship to beliefs, identity and others, began to align their life with their internal voice, and integrated themselves as part of their life (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

Houa illustrated how she began to trust her internal voice as she prepared to study abroad.

I'm a little scared actually because I'm so materialistic. Everything has to be perfect for me, but I'm going to a country that is still developing. So I'm going to just be like oh my gosh. I'm going to get dirty and all that stuff. Oh my God, and I'm really excited... (Houa)

Houa recognized her materialism and despite parental worries committed to traveling to Thailand.

Several participants began to build their internal foundations by exploring their cultural identity. For Choua and Houa a turning point in their cultural identity was studying abroad. "It was just really good to experience something that your parents once experienced" (Choua). The study abroad experience helped the participants begin to integrate cultural identity into their lives.

I'm like hearing ... stories about young girls getting married ... I guess like before I went to Thailand, and after I went to Thailand that like your friends who got married before, they envy me. They're like you're in school; you got to go visit Thailand, and doing this and that. Things I wish I would've done instead of getting married and having a family, and my husband not letting me go to school and whatnot... (Choua)

For Choua an element of self-confidence emerged as she was able to put her experiences into perspective of culture and peers.

Choua also began to refute cultural stereotypes with the support of her family and her education.

... I'm just really thankful to have parents like mine...considering my age right now that probably a lot of (H)Mong people would think that I am an old maid and I should be married and having kids now, but my parents are like over my dead body. You are not going to get married and have kids now. You have to have an education. I think that because of the whole struggle back in Laos and Thailand that they had and with the opportunity that we have now, they really want us to go to school and everything. And like my uncles and aunts are really supportive of that whereas some distant uncles and aunts are like why aren't you married yet you know. By the time your twenty-five your uterus won't be able to have kids. I am like oh that is not true. Maybe like when I get thirty something, then it is a little bit pushing it, but whatever, you know (Choua)

Having the support of family helped Choua build her internal foundation. She could not change the cultural expectations but could adapt her own actions.

Many of the participants encountered distinct turning points that led to a period of questioning. Eventually they were able to anchor their internal voice and build their internal foundations. While each participant encountered a different turning point in their lives, there was a distinct realization of acceptance.

Acceptance is a signal of the third element of self-authorship, securing internal commitments. Here participants moved from a sense of understanding values, beliefs and identity to living with themselves at the core of their being resulting in increased certainty and an ability to move forward because they are no longer constrained by fear (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Once the participant felt able to secure internal commitments they became more comfortable in their cultural identity and found balance between traditional (H)Mong culture and U.S. culture.

This security was most visible as both Houa and Yer discussed their relationships with their partners. While Houa's family practices Shamanism, her fiancé who is also (H)Mong was from a Lutheran family. For Yer, the roles are reversed. Yer is from a Christian family, and her husband's family practices Shamanism.

That's hard. Me and him always have like small arguments about that because I'm a Christian, and inside deep down I still wear my cross and everything; but then my to be a good wife, you know, you have to go along with your in-laws to show them respect, which is why wear this one (shows me a bracelet on her ankle). ...This is like a blessing from your grandma and grandpa, and they give it to you to protect you from evil spirits and bad things... so even though I'm actually on the Christian side, I still try to make sure I also follow their rules even if it's kind of contradicting...for me. I don't care as long as I know what I believe, that's all that matters. And then for baby I'm more thinking that with my in-laws should be more like a traditional way, and then we go to my mom and dad of the be more like the Christian ... But as long as it doesn't cause like a big chaos in the family that it doesn't really matter.

Yer was now secure enough in her religious practices that she is able to accept the practices of his family into her identity as well. She recognized there could be balance and acceptance without conflict.

Religion is not the only the only aspect of culture requiring balance. Language is another element of cultural identity that stabilizes with secure internal commitments. Yer described the role language played in their family dynamics.

With my husband (it) is more a half and half...with my in-laws and with like my family, I try to speak (H)Mong because now I married, so it's like more of a you must now because you're an adult now, because you're married, and you should. Plus they're the elder, and they don't really speak American, so it's easier to communicate with them...Baby she will probably be bilingual more likely she'll probably learn how to speak (H)Mong, and then probably American or English cause much the only people that will be watching her will probably be grandma and grandpa in a be speaking (H)Mong. Plus I'd rather have it like that; rather have them know their language and then learn English. It should be a tradition. You should know your culture. (Yer)

Even though Yer recognized the struggle growing up with two languages presented to her, she wanted her child to speak (H)Mong and English. She emphasized that her child should know “*their* language” and “you should know *your* culture.”

The participants began their educational experience relying on others and questioning self. Through their educational experiences, they began to understand who they were as individuals. As they moved through the elements of self-authorship, the participants were better able to articulate the role ethnic identity plays in their lives.

The educational experience coincided with the identity development of the participants. As students struggled with the significance of race and language, they moved through the elements of self-authorship and eventually emerged with a more concrete idea of their ethnic identity. Chapters Four through Seven explored the participants’ experiences in higher education. Chapter Eight will analyze these findings in relationship to departure and persistence.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **TINTO AND BEYOND: AN ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

Of the six participants in this study, only two persist through graduation (see Table 1, p. 57). This rate falls significantly below the rate of departure at MSU; however, it is anecdotally consistent with other EAP students; no statistics are maintained by either MSU or the EAP regarding the departure and persistence of this particular group of students. As I analyzed the findings, I looked more closely at the student experiences to see how these experiences may contribute to the decision to depart and the ability to persist in relationship to Tinto's theoretical framework. While I found many consistencies with Tinto's departure theory, some of these participants' experiences fell outside of his framework.

#### **The Decision to Depart**

Four of the six participants in this student depart MSU prior to earning a degree. The first participant departed following her first year. Two departed during year two, and the fourth departed following year three. Tinto's (1992) descriptions of incongruence and external obligations seem consistent with the participants' reasons to depart.

#### **Incongruence**

Three of the four departers, leave MSU for what Tinto (1993) identifies as incongruence which results when the goals of the student, either academic, social, etc, do not fit with the goals of the institutions. "The phenomenon of incongruence as a source of departure leads to the practical question of how individuals go about choosing an institution of higher education" (Tinto, 1993, p. 54). In Chapter Four, I discussed the participants' decision to attend MSU and their first year as part of the EAP and found that these participants have little choice in institutions of higher education because of their academic profile. In conjunction with the role



family plays in (H)Mong culture, many students choose to live with or near family, both immediate and/or extended, when going to college. Therefore, most of the participants had only one college choice: MSU. When a student has only one option, the idea of choice is really a myth.

**Soua.** Soua was first to depart. After taking a summer course, the five-credit introduction to college writing course, Soua decided to transfer to the local technical college. Soua's departure surprised everyone on the EAP committee and me. She was achieving very well academically despite being a first generation college student, LTEL, enrolled in several developmental courses. I suspect incongruence for one main reason: the choice of a technical college allows for degree completion on a much faster scale. Soua remained in the community, close to family. Although I cannot be certain because her sudden departure kept me from conducting an exit interview. I speculate that the need to be in the workforce earning an income sooner made the technical college a better fit than MSU's four or five year time frame to degree. Despite unfamiliarity with of the college life, Soua was very engrossed in the college experience and did everything possible to gain an advantage. Nothing in her experiences (in relation to other EAP; certainly not the experience of a traditional student) suggested that she would withdraw. Yer reported in her exit interview that she bumped into Soua and learned that Soua completed her degree program at the technical college and was working locally. Soua also expressed to Yer that seeing her classmates complete their degree made her wish she would have stayed at MSU.

**Tou.** In addition to a lack of choice, MSU only offered the participants conditional admission contingent upon participation in the EAP, which resulted in overall feelings of disillusionment and dissatisfaction in their first year. Disillusionment and dissatisfaction

presented itself academically through participants' experiences in the EAP. Social disillusionment is less visible in the EAP cohort, but becomes more prevalent in later years as the relationships developed within the EAP dissolved.

After the fall semester of his second year, Tou informed me that he was going to transfer to a technical college closer to home upon completion of the semester. Initially Tou suggested "expenses and personal/family problems" are the reason, but a few minutes further into our interview, he stated "the biggest reason biggest reason why I am transferring is because my grandma is turning 90." When I asked if he was happy with the decision to transfer, Tou stated, "I think it's better that way. It saves money for me, and I don't have to worry about all of my living expenses. Up here I have to buy food by myself. I have to pay for my apartment." This reason alone does not seem compelling enough to transfer; the decision to live off-campus was his choice, and he could easily return to campus housing to reduce costs. While Tou is elusive with his reasons to leave I suspect MSU was not a good fit. His academic profile, like that of all EAP students, limited his choice in institutions of higher education despite personal preference and individual needs. It is unlikely that he was able to gain admission to the four year college closer to home.

Throughout our conversations, Tou hinted at difficulty making social connections.

I knew that I was having trouble in late October but then I didn't expect to leave. But I was actually searching for a roommate. Nobody wanted to be a roommate, so then I had no choice but to leave. I made my decision after I came back from Thanksgiving break.

He was positioned as an outsider, despite being actively involved on campus. The people who he thought were his friends, seemed to take advantage of his need for social connections. When classmates needed something, they could call on Tou but did not return the favor. This is most vivid in the experience Tou had of nearly missing his final exam. While a classmate's call

allowed him to get to the exam in time, the call was not made out of concern for Tou missing the final but coincidentally that the classmate could not find the classroom. I have the impression Tou's need for friendship could lead to easy manipulation. His so-called friends knew Tou would do the work, as social coordinator etc, but they were superficial, not true, friendships.

In addition, Tou did not seem to accept responsibility for experiences at MSU. He liked the freedom of living off campus but missed the social connection on campus living provided. He blamed friends and campus organizations for poor academic performance. "If I wasn't the social coordinator for the (H)Mong Student Association this semester, I would have done better in that class. I had to study for that class too, and I also had to plan activities for it...social coordinator. Made it hard to study." Tou was so immersed socially, perhaps as a need to overcompensate for the social isolation he felt, that his social involvement had a negative impact. His need to fit in, as suggested by his campus involvement and the role friends play in his college life, compounded by being far away from home, suggested incongruence. Although MSU was not a good fit, Tou did not regret his decision to attend college so far away from home.

I want to experience life living on my own...living without my parent's help. It gave me a jump-start on what life's gonna be after I graduate college. I think I am starting to realize when I just came from high school here, well, I had my parents. If I got in trouble, I could just go to them. And this year I kind of realized that I need to start doing things on my own 'cause I'm getting older, and my parents are not going to be there forever.

Sometimes students need to experience difficulty and face challenges for themselves before knowing what they truly want. This seems to be the case with Tou. Although he struggled socially and academically at MSU, he was able to reflect on the value of the experience.

**Choua.** Choua announced her decision to transfer at the end of her third year. Choua regularly expressed incongruence in terms of regrets: "I should have lived on campus; I wish I would have joined more clubs...knew more people...studied harder". She often described her

college experience negatively and expressed guilt for not fitting in socially or doing more academically. While Choua suggested that she did not study enough, she appeared to study more than the other participants and found tutors for her more challenging courses. Choua did not see the positive end results, she thought this additional effort should provide and always felt she could have done more. Her regrets appear to have lead to self-fulfilled disappointment.

Ultimately, the inability to get into the nursing program necessitated the transfer. During our final interview, Choua explained her transfer to the associate's degree program at the technical program

I talked to some of the counselors there and they said that if I go there or whatever I have to take my anatomy one and two in my microbiology, and the speech class. And that's all the generals and I have left and then hopefully within a year I should get into the program. And after that I can always come back to the university here and get the bachelors degree.

This scenario is a long process to the final destination: three years at MSU, two years in the Associate's degree program and then transferring back to MSU to complete the Bachelor's degree, potentially another two years. Choua had also been toying with the idea of getting a Masters degree in order to become a nurse practitioner; however, this goal seems quite unachievable as she exits MSU unable to gain admission into the Bachelor's degree program.

Choua's experience begs the question, can students who enter MSU through an access program like the EAP actually gain admission into highly competitive programs like nursing? If the likelihood is minimal, does the EAP contribute to the incongruence the student is experiencing by knowingly admitting a student into a university where the academic goals of the student cannot be achieved? The EAP committee could argue that all EAP students enter MSU undeclared and the likelihood a student will change majors a number of times is high; yet one of the problems with access programs is retention.

The EAP struggles with effective recruiting and student retention. Requiring students to maintain an undeclared status for their first year and take prescribed set of courses may offer a false sense of academic achievement and success. If a student is successful in courses that are not rigorous, then the program is not a realistic academic experience even though it may support the student academically. Could Choua have found greater success starting with the technical college degree and then transferring to MSU? Did the EAP offer access to a university that was academically incongruent and mislead the student into thinking that earning a nursing degree from MSU was attainable?

**In conclusion.** Tinto (1993) stated, “whether there are objective grounds for mismatch is not necessarily of direct importance to the issue of individual departure...what matters is where the individuals perceive themselves as being incongruent with the life of the institutions, not whether other observers would agree with that assessment” (p. 51). It does not matter how MSU or the EAP would respond to the experiences of Soua, Tou, or Choua described above. To these three participants, MSU was not a good a fit.

### **External Obligations**

The departures of Soua, Tou, and Choua suggests incongruence as a primary reason. Bao, departed because of external obligations. According to Tinto (1993) departure due to external obligations occurs when external obligations limit participation in college.

**Bao.** At the end of her second year, Bao found out that she was pregnant. When I extend my congratulations, her response was “I was really nervous at first, but it yeah, it happens” suggesting they did not plan her pregnancy. She shared the next step she and her husband discussed

Yeah I know, why don't you (meaning her husband) go back to school and finish your two years, so you only have two years left. So he's coming back this fall, and I'm gonna

take like a year or so off, and then I might transfer to a tech, because I don't know really what I want to do.

At this point, Bao appeared to realize that she and her husband were no longer kids and needed to grow up quickly. This was the first time I heard her talk about any type of long-term plan. Academically, Bao mentally withdrew from her course work when she learned she was pregnant. She missed class for extended periods of time and did little studying or homework. She clearly did not realize the impact grades may have on her ability to continue her education after taking a year off. Cultural connections may have also perpetuated this mental withdrawal. The (H)Mong culture is patriarchal and traditionally places the wife and mother in the home as a caregiver.

Although I was initially skeptical about Bao returning after her year hiatus and venture into motherhood, I wondered if this was the turning point she needed in her life. Prior to her pregnancy, Bao lacked direction and motivation, "I was looking at all those smart people up there and competing against them...". This comment suggested she may be heading toward a departure because of incongruence. This attitude did not change during her duration at MSU. Similar to Choua, her destiny appeared self-fulfilled.

**In conclusion.** I was surprised to hear from classmates that Bao returned to campus one year after giving birth. As a mother, she will need to assume more responsibility. Tinto's (1997) stated "family responsibilities may sometimes hinder persistence but may do so more for females than for males" (p. 64). In Bao's case, her departure for external obligations was consistent with a stopout and has not yet lead to permanent departure. The cultural expectations of Bao as a (H)Mong woman, wife, and expecting mother created circumstances where pursuing a degree at this point in her life was not a top priority. Whether or not Bao will complete her degree remains unknown.

Tinto (1997) stated “A person strongly tied to a marginal community, like a satellite about a distant plant, though affiliated locally, may have only weak tangential bonds to the center of institutional life” (p. 123). For these EAP students, the association with a marginal community (The EAP) only weakly ties the participants to campus. The idea the participants chose MSU is a myth and sets the participants up for incongruence with the institution and early departure.

### **Persistence**

Even though conditionally admitted into the EAP, only two of the participants persisted. Both Yer and Houa share common admissions characteristics with the departers, and both showed some characteristics of academic and social incongruence. However both possessed distinct characteristics amongst this group of participants that led to the ability to persist.

### **Commonalities with “Departers”**

Houa and Yer have two key characteristics in common with the departers: background and potential for incongruence. The participants’ background influences academic ability and college choice, thus increasing the potential for incongruence. The likelihood of incongruence increases when students experience pull-factors that disconnect them to campus life (Tinto, 1993).

All participants have a common background. Both Yer and Houa are Generation 1.5 LTELs conditionally admitted to MSU. They are (H)Mong and speak English as their second language. The EAP committee believes the linguistic challenges LTELs face contributes to their low ACT scores, which would otherwise make the participants inadmissible to MSU (Upton, 1999). In the spirit of access, conditional admission into the EAP provided academic and linguistic support to build academic fluency. Similar to the “departers”, Yer and Houa entered

MSU with academic goals consistent with MSU's program offerings. Yer hoped "to go the biology route," and Houa began with an interest in business.

This academic and linguistic background placed all of the participants at-risk of departure and increased the potential for incongruence. Both Houa and Yer experienced the same disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the EAP during their first year. While Yer seemed to take the program in stride, Houa's experiences were confrontational. Houa recounted an instance in several interviews where an EAP committee member suggested she had a learning disability. Houa's responded, "just because I'm in the EAP doesn't mean she can talk to me like that." By our exit interview, Houa's anger grew to the point where she "hated her (the committee member)". This disillusionment and dissatisfaction had the potential to create incongruence in Houa and Yer, but did not. In addition to the experiences within the EAP, the lack of social connections established by all participants also had potential to create incongruence, but did not.

The experiences within the EAP, the lack of social connections established also had the potential to create incongruence. Neither Houa nor Yer was actively involved in on campus or had close social ties to peers. Although the EAP provided a strong social connection during the EAP year for all students, the friendship did not necessarily persist despite the common bond the cohort members shared. Both Houa and Yer commented on how everyone "seemed to go their own way" after the EAP year. Houa and Yer routinely described close friends as family members.

Study participants had more external obligations than traditional first year students. All participants lived off-campus and were more closely connected to their external communities than the campus community. Cultural obligations were an overarching commonality with a



strong connection to family. “Since you’re a wife now you shouldn’t be going out and partying with people that’s not your husband” (Yer). Cultural responsibilities and gender-related expectations to a spouse or in-laws compounded familial obligations.

The experiences in the social realm of college life are more telling in terms of what is not seen in the EAP participants than in what I do see. With the college years playing a significant role in the development of ways of knowing, identity, and self-authorship, researchers often discuss how important the social factors of college are to student success: living in the dorms, meeting new friends, getting involved in campus organizations, etc. However, for the EAP students, these defined social experiences play a limited or non-existent role. In the case of these participants, there seemed to be a stronger social connection to the external community than the internal community.

Participants’ backgrounds, potential for incongruence, and external obligations put all of them at-risk of departure. Cultural obligations could support education or detract. Despite these experiences, both Houa and Yer persisted.

### **Ability to persist**

Despite the commonalities in background and the potential for incongruence the persisters have with the departers, two students persist. Houa and Yer chose MSU, possessed an understanding of the college experience, and had a strong familial support network unique from the other participants. Houa and Yer also shared an understanding of self, while different, that is reflected through their goal orientation and decision making process.

**Commonalities.** For Yer and Houa, one of the first indicators of their ability to persist is that they both chose MSU. Yer’s academic background offers her legitimate college choice. She was the only participant who applied to and was accepted to another institution, but chose

MSU despite the conditional admission into the EAP. While it is not clear whether Houa applied to other colleges or universities, it is clear that Houa wanted to attend MSU. Houa's family relationships are very important to her, and attending MSU offered her the opportunity to remain at home with her siblings while attending college.

In addition to choosing MSU, Yer and Houa were at a distinct advantage over the other participants from the initial admission experience to MSU because of their understanding of the expectations of college. Their understanding of college came from academic role models. Both Yer's parents and Houa's siblings play an important role in how each participant negotiates the college experience.

Yer looked for an institution which would best fit her family and her needs and based her decision to attend MSU on that criterion. Yer was initially, "iffy about the EAP" because she would be "taking courses that doesn't actually go to the major". Having a college-educated parents helped Yer understand the potential benefits of a program like the EAP better as well as the overall collegiate experience.

As a first generation college student, Houa had several older siblings with college degrees. Her siblings offered another type of support system. Houa had two older sisters attend MSU. A third sister who went through the EAP was concurrently enrolled at MSU. She frequently framed her experiences to me using the phrase "like I was telling my sisters." The relationship Houa had with her older siblings and their level of academic achievement, perpetuated a level of comfort with the institution.

Both Houa and Yer had obvious familial support. Family relationships as well as the role family played in the decision making process was visible as the participants recounted their experiences. Houa and Yer indicated that family members were their closest friends. This may

in part be due to a cultural expectation. Yer indicated that once she was married it was inappropriate for her to be out socially with single friends without her husband.

Family also played an important part in the decision making process. Yer's parents were her first resource when she had questions about college. Houa regularly identified conversations with siblings and parents when making decisions about her education. When choosing a major, Houa considered her sisters' career paths, as well as her own interests. Family support for education appeared to play an important role in both Houa's and Yer's persistence.

**Differences.** While Houa and Yer have more in common with each other than the other participants, some distinct differences existed with regard to their feelings about the EAP, goal orientation, and decision-making process. Both expressed initial disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the EAP. For Houa this disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the EAP evolved into anger. For Yer, the disillusionment and dissatisfaction faded through reflection.

Houa and Yer also differed in terms of goal orientation and decision-making. Houa's long-term goals consistently evolved and were generally unfocused. Houa considered a variety of majors in a variety of unrelated disciplines in her first three years of college. She decided on broadcast journalism, a decision that took three and a half years to make. She relied heavily on others when making decisions, suggesting a sense of dependence on others. Houa did not expect others to make decisions for her, yet she consulted with family and academic advisors on almost every decision she faced. This dependence suggested that she lacked self-confidence despite her ability and will power. Challenges faced while she was in the EAP may have contributed to this wavering.

In contrast, Yer had focused goals and an ability to make informed decisions on her own. Yer entered the university with an interest in the biology. Although she did not pursue a biology

degree, she identified a major in a related field more consistent with her learning style. A test of her determination became evident in our exit interview. At this point, Yer was 8 months pregnant and expecting within a week or two after the start of her final semester. Her family members questioned her decision to continue in school and encouraged her to sit out a semester. Her family was concerned that once she gave birth, Yer would have difficulty balancing studies and a newborn. While this discussion seemed to be the first indication of a potential lack of support from her family, Yer made the decision to continue.

**In conclusion.** Houa and Yer had a clearer understanding of the collegiate experience because of a strong family support system, yet they were very different individuals. Differences begin with their feelings about the EAP. Their goal orientation and their decision-making process also offered insight into their individuality.

For departers, academic, social, cultural, and linguistic differences may have been too much for students to overcome during the first few years of college. Unlike persisters, the familial support network did not seem to be as strong for this group. Thus each individual potentially carried more stress. Some participants may have viewed higher education's challenges to their identity and cultural relationships as too great to overcome without the support of family. Persisters, with the support of family, felt more comfortable negotiating the process of identify and intellectual development. They appeared to find the path to self-authorship.

### **Beyond Tinto**

Participants in this study held many consistencies with Tinto's theory of student departure. Yet some of the participants' experiences did not fit in this framework. Participants did not actively engage in campus life, either academically or socially. External obligations

played a much more significant role in these participants' lives than Tinto's theory suggested. Beyond Tinto's framework for departure, I needed to examine the role of the EAP in the participants' experiences and made other considerations to account for discriminatory experiences that seemed to fall outside of these lenses. Finally, I considered the participants' ways of knowing, identity, and self-authorship.

### **The Role of the EAP**

Colleges and universities use developmental education to provide access to students. Developmental education is also an approach used to, ideally, close the achievement gap between White students and students of color who are statistically more likely to be underprepared academically and at-risk for departure than their White classmates (Burley, 2007). However, the effectiveness of developmental education programs has been questioned (Atwell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Boylan & Bonham, 2007; Schmidt, 2008; and Strong American Schools, 2008). Although this study did not plan to evaluate the EAP, the EAP plays a very significant role in the participants' experiences at MSU. They were accepted to MSU because of the EAP, and the EAP provided the foundation for their first year experience. Since the EAP is a developmental education access program especially designed for LTELs, the participants' experiences raised many questions to me. I re-examined the participants' experiences within the framework of the program.

According to Busey (2007), "A good developmental professional knows that the same pedagogical approaches do not work equally well in all circumstances" (p. 19). In addition to building campus connections, the design of the EAP was intentional: to bring the academic skills of EAP learners to the same level as their non-EAP counterparts. Tutoring services, general student success courses, and developmental English courses are intended to accomplish

this goal. With the exception of one spring course, native English speakers also have access to all of the courses and services.

Services and courses are not unique to the needs of LTELs, with the exception of more intensive monitoring of academic progress and more prescriptive academic advising. However, while many participants attribute a connection to career services, for example, to EAP programming, acquainting students to career services is a common aspect of First Year Experience courses. These services are also available to other students at the university through targeted areas such as multicultural affairs and student support services (TRIO) as well as other developmental education programs and even athletics for student athletes. The only element of the program targeting the language needs of this population of LTELs is the grammar translation approach to tutoring, which Brown (2007) described as ineffective.

The EAP promotes itself as an access, ESL, and retention program, but in reality, only serves an access program for developmental learners. The EAP contains essentially no ESL components although comprised entirely of English language learners. As a retention program, an identity crisis develops. At the end of the first year, students go from being highly monitored to receiving minimal if any ongoing services through the EAP. Several participants' expressed this when discussing their experiences within the EAP. Houa stated, "I never went back to the Tutoring Center to get extra tutoring and I still managed to get all my grades up". Bao, the only participant to take ESL in high school, did not understand the purpose of the program and how the EAP was designed to assist her. This questioning suggested to me that Bao, as a first generation college student, needed ongoing reassurance about college and a mentor. When a student is not familiar with the opportunities available, they are less likely to take advantage of services designed to meet their needs.

With the flaws in the EAP's identity and components, there appears to be more of a negative impact on students' experience than a positive one. Participants indicated their general sentiments toward the program with their comments of "feeling stupid" or "dumb" (Bao; Choua; Houa). Experiences within the program were those of being "babied"(Choua) and "because you weren't American" (Yer). These comments indicated feelings of deflation rather than empowerment.

In later interviews, Houa reflected the program "helped us get to know the real college life" (Houa). However, she also suggested that the EAP was not an accurate reflection of the academic expectations of college. The smaller class size and general courses were not typical of her experience outside of the EAP. She indicated the rigors of the EAP fell somewhere between high school and college.

The EAP's own identity crisis and over-protectiveness of students is visible in participant reflections and transcends into their experience. The EAP committee may be afraid that if students do not persist, then the program will be seen as ineffective and could potentially be eliminated. This view, though, does not help student become self-sufficient once they exit the EAP.

Baxter Magolda (1992) suggested the dominant subordinate relationship between educator and student, the objectivist and social constructivist perspectives, and majority and minority parties as a possible explanation. The EAP encompassed all three elements in the first year of programming the participants encountered. The EAP appeared to be take a positivist approach to education characterized by the authoritative, dominant/subordinate relationship between the EAP committee members and the EAP students. The participants described

experiences within the EAP similar to that of the banking concept of education where they have little co-authorship in learning.

Tou ignored the advice of the EAP committee as if he was trying to break free of the program. Choua wanted someone to remind her get a tutor and needed reminders to get her CPR certification to apply for the nursing program. Houa struggled to make independent decisions and declare a major. Until the participant learned self-sufficiency, they struggled. For some, the struggles were insurmountable resulting in departure. For the two persisters, the struggles resulted in a longer time to degree and difficulties accessing academic experiences like Yer's inability to get into her majors internship program.

The primary goals of the EAP were to aide adjustment to college by building a connection to campus resources and enhancing academic preparation. A secondary effect, although not a goal of the program, is the development of social connections with peers enrolled in the EAP. Several participants expressed how much they appreciated their EAP cohort members. "If it wasn't for the EAP, I wouldn't have met Choua and them" (Bao). They seemed to value the EAP friendships over any negative experiences in the EAP. However, EAP friendships appeared to be a matter of convenience that provided necessary support during the EAP. Outside of the EAP, students have connected with peers. Seeing their EAP friends depart may also be discouraging and make it difficult for persisters to find support as fewer students with similar backgrounds remain on campus.

In addition to the academic and social adjustments, participants maintained strong linguistic markers characteristic of LTELs in our interviews. As indicated in Chapter Seven, grammatical functions such as word endings and sentence structure were just of few of the stigmatizing linguistic indicators that were noticeable in the participants' oral language during



our interviews. Although accented English is difficult to reduce, the persistence of such strong stigmatizing grammatical errors signals weakness in the EAP curriculum. Zamel (1995) found some faculty members acknowledge the cross-cultural expertise of immigrant students.

However, the majority of faculty members found that students' written language skills were deficient and inadequate. Gray et al.'s (1996) survey found consistent results citing inadequate language skills as the most significant barrier to immigrants in college.

Tinto (1993) suggested "pre-entry expectations influence the character of early experiences with the institution, they also affect retention following entry" (p. 155). However Tinto does not delve into how negative experiences as a result of a contradicting support program complicates the student experience. In this case, the program appears to have created hurdles the participants would not have encountered without the influence of the EAP. Not only are the EAP students at-risk, the program that is supposed to be closing the achievement gap is not living up to its expectations.

### **Other Considerations**

The participants in this study have experiences that fit within Tinto's (1993) framework of student departure. Within the framework, the participants' academic and social experiences were influenced by their pre-entry attributes, which are significantly different from the majority of MSU students. These pre-entry attributes placed the participants in the sheltered environment of the EAP during their first year. Beyond the first year, the participants' pre-entry attributes and experiences in the EAP continued to influence their experiences. Several participants encountered what appeared to be discriminatory experiences both off and on campus during their collegiate years.

The most prevalent experience is that of Choua. Choua's off-campus employer accused her of theft "... I get there, and they set me down and...say...one of the residents is accusing you of drinking her soda. And I was like, really, are you kidding me"(Choua). There are two underlying situations illustrated in this example. The first is the external obligation of employment. Tinto suggested that employers that value the connection between education and employment would see Choua's study abroad experience as a positive contribution to the professional development of their employee. In this instance, forcing Choua to find someone to cover her shifts while she studying abroad suggests that is not the case. Secondly, the notion of firing someone for possibly stealing a \$0.50 soda as they prepared to study abroad suggested the possibility of discrimination. While Choua did not state specifically that her employer discriminated against her, the actions of the employer are suspicious. The financial need for employment necessitated work and impacted studies by reducing study time, limiting time on campus, and taking time away from on-campus participation. Similarly, negative experiences off-campus contributed to the creation of a hostile environment, which disconnected the student from the larger community.

In these participants, I saw similar relationships primarily within the relationships formed between the EAP and the student. Outside of the EAP, there were indicators of the dominant subordinate relationship between the faculty and participant illustrated through Choua's experience in her Asian history class and her experience with her academic advisor. Combined the student voice is stifled by the EAP and relationships with authority that were created by elements of dominant subordinate relationships. Rather than becoming empowered by an access and support program, the program was another factor to overcome.

### **Ways of Knowing, Identity, and Self-Authorship**

In addition to the experiences with developmental education program as LTELs, multicultural students face additional aspects of identity development that emerge parallel to their intellectual development and ways of knowing. The participants who persisted became more comfortable with their ethnic and cultural identity, which lead to a greater sense of self-authorship.

Only Yer, Houa, and Choua persisted in the longitudinal study long enough for me to gain insight into the role of culture and language play in their identity development. Yet, these experiences appeared to be a significant part of their college experience. Early in our interviews I asked what it meant to the participants to be a (H)Mong woman in college. Initially, respondents said, “I don’t know” (Yer) or offered similar answers. In my exit interviews with Yer and Houa and when I followed Choua’s study abroad experience, the participants could articulated their feelings toward their ethnic and cultural identity more clearly. Both Yer and Houa stated the importance of their cultural identity in their lives. In each case, they intended to preserve their cultural identity with their spouses and future children. Each of these women needed to negotiate a cultural identity that was contrary to the beliefs of her spouse.

That's hard. Me and him always have like small arguments about that because I'm a Christian. And inside deep down, I still wear my cross and everything; but then be a good wife, you know, you have to go along with your in-laws to show them respect, which is why wear this one (shows me a bracelet on her ankle). This is where this is like a blessing from your grandma, grandpa and they give it to you to protect you from evil spirits and bad things so that. So even though I'm actually on the Christian side, I still try to make sure I also follow their rules to even if (it's) kind of contradicting...for me.  
(Yer)

They both discussed how they negotiated this process symbolic of the idea of securing internal commitments element of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

The development of the participants' cultural identity described above seems to occur simultaneously with the progression through their ways of knowing. Baxter Magolda (1992) identified three underlying storylines present in collective student stories as they develop ways of knowing: development and emergence of voice, changing relationship with authority, and changing relationship with peers. The emergence of voice as expressed in their cultural identity suggested elements of security. Yer and Houa were not only more aware of their cultural identity as they moved through their ways of knowing, they also became more aware of their learning style and academic needs as illustrated in their descriptions of study habits and experiences in the classroom. Initially Houa expressed wanting to be told how to earn an A in a class characteristic of absolute knower (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Later, Houa and Yer applied knowledge learned through class projects in relationship to career goals, characteristic of a contextual knower (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

The rate of progression through their ways of knowing varied, yet Yer and Houa articulated their strengths and weaknesses more clearly throughout their academic career and adjusted their academic routine accordingly. Their relationships with faculty reflected this progression, as did their decision making process. Yer described how she transitioned from a business minor to a wellness minor.

I took all my economics class, and I like that class and all that. My information system (class), and I love that class. But then I took accounting, and I was like I can't do this. Maybe I'll just give up on this, and I'll go talk to my advisor... (She) said that we'll we could like figure something out, and then we did, and we came up with a topical minor in wellness.

Yer and Houa moved away from relying on university faculty and staff and family to make decisions for them and moved toward making decisions on their own. The self-doubt of Bao and Choua is not evident in Yer and Houa who are both highly motivated for success, although in

different ways. Houa's motivation stems from an ability to prove others wrong and a fear of failure in that process. Yer consistently showed self-discipline and described her self-discipline in her study habits and personal life as well as how she felt they contributed to her success.

Changes in peer relationships were also evident in the storylines of these participants although with subtle differences. According to Baxter Magolda (1992), "the peers role in knowing increases in importance during absolute to contextual knowledge" (pp. 198-199). Relationships formed within the EAP, during the absolute stage of knowing, are those of convenience between peers with cultural, linguistic, and academic similarities. As the students persisted, they realized the initial similarities were not fulfilling enough to become legitimate sources of knowledge. While Baxter Magolda's participants turned toward peers, these participants turned toward family to fulfill the traditional peer role.

I mean like in high school, you have like little cliques or whatever, but when you're in college, your only clique are your siblings. You can go to lunch with your siblings; you can talk to your siblings. You can text your siblings and say hey, where are you, you want to go to lunch... it's really good at like you're bonding with your family. If you need anything, they can help you, or if you need help, they can address you to a person to help you. (Houa)

This is consistent with the role family plays in (H)Mong culture. Viewing family as peers is consistent with the third element of self-authorship, secure internal commitment, visible in the participants' increased cultural awareness (Baxter Magolda).

Both Yer and Houa were most confident and were able to best express their own voice in our exit interview. For the participants who departed earlier in their academic career, interviews reflect early stages of ways of knowing and initial stages of self-authorship. Consistent with Baxter Magolda (1992), "it took a long time for students to claim to speak with their own voices" (p. 201). I saw the greatest evidence of student voice in the exit interviews of Choua, Yer, and Houa, the three participants persisting the longest at MSU. Voice was evident in breadth of topics discussed and depth of response.

### **Summary**

Many of the experiences of these participants were consistent with Tinto's departure theory. There were other elements of their experiences that were either unexplained or fell outside of Tinto's theoretical realm. Considerations regarding the role of the EAP, as well as the experiences related to identity and intellectual identity of the participants were significant. I feel the analysis of these findings suggests a tendency toward incongruence. The EAP provides conditional admission to MSU to students with such a significantly different academic profile than the main student population. Therefore, MSU admitted students only because of the EAP. If MSU was the participants only choice, due to academic profile and the EAP, then the idea that the participants chose a college that was a good fit for them is potentially a myth.

Once admitted to MSU the propensity for incongruence continues through the year in the EAP. Because of the flaws within the program, participants did not appear to be prepared academically for the rigors of the University. This is evident in the regular withdrawal from and repetition of courses all participants experienced. In addition to contributing to academic incongruence, the EAP contributed to social incongruence as well since EAP students are generally isolated from their peers. Following the year in the EAP, few of the close friendships formed persisted and participants struggled to form new social support communities. Additionally, seeing their EAP depart prior to earning a degree could be discouraging for the participants who remained. The final chapter provides a summary of the study, discusses the implications of these findings on students, support programs, and institutions, and offers direction for future research.

## CHAPTER NINE

### FINAL CONCLUSIONS

In his autobiography, Rodriguez (1982) described growing up as a “minority” student, a LTEL who struggled to balance academic success and cultural heritage. The experiences of the participants in this study remind me of Rodriguez. Like Rodriguez these participants faced an important struggle determining the role their language and culture would play in their own identity. While not the “scholarship boy” Rodriguez was who achieved great academic success, participants from this study encountered change and growth during their college experience. They developed ways of knowing and journeyed through stages of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2008).

This chapter begins with a review of methods used in this study. Next, I review the major findings of this study related to departure and persistence, ways of knowing, and self-authorship. Based on the findings, I found participants’ experiences fall within Tinto’s (1993) general framework of departure. However, several key differences exist in the participants’ experience based on their pre-entry attributes (see Table 1, p. 57), year in the EAP, and (H)Mong ethnicity. With these differences in mind, I explore the implications the findings have for practitioners and researchers.

#### Methodology

As access programs for LTELs in higher education develop, colleges and universities will see the number of ELLs increase. Through this study, I sought to explore this phenomenon by learning about the experiences EAP students at MSU have during their university career and how their experiences contributed to their departure or persistence. As an access program for at-risk



LTEs, the EAP provided the parameters I sought for identifying students with multiple risk factors that could lead to departure from college.

To understand experiences of these participants better, I used a longitudinal, phenomenological approach. I grounded my approach to the methodology of this study partially in the work of Robert Sokolowski (2000) and Max Van Manen (1990). Sokolowski's approach "offers the possibility of philosophical thinking at a time when such thinking is seriously called into question or largely ignored" (p.2). Van Manen's pedagogical approach considered language and expression of the participants lived experience in the reflection and interpretation.

For this study, phenomenology allowed the opportunity to understand how LTEs experienced higher education and how they expressed those experiences through a longitudinal series of semi-structured interviews. Through a longitudinal look at the participants' experiences, I began to understand participants' relationship with the university academically, socially, and culturally. I was also able to explore how this relationship influenced relationships within and outside of the institution.

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to identify participants from the 2005-2006 cohort of EAP students. Because the cohort consisted of twelve members, I used self-selection to identify participants from within the cohort. All participants were compensated for their participation, and participants received up to \$50.00 for participating in the study. Six students agreed to participate: Bao, Tou, Yer, Soua, Choua, and Houa. All of the participants were (H)Mong LTEs conditionally admitted to MSU through the EAP who entered college upon graduation from high school.

LTEs, by definition (Freeman & Freeman, 2002) spend seven or more years in the U.S. They have below grade level reading and writing proficiency although they are orally fluent,

which often results in a false perceptions of academic achievement due to adequate grades but low test scores. LTELs often had ESL or bilingual instruction, but not consistently (Freeman & Freeman, 2002). These participants spent all of their compulsory education years in U.S. public schools. Only Bao took ESL coursework in high school. The remaining five participants had not taken ESL classes since elementary school. Collectively, participants averaged an ACT composite score of 16.5 whereas the average ACT score at MSU was 25. Tou was the only male participant; Yer was the only participant who was not a first generation college student. Bao and Soua were married; Yer married during college.

In order to understand the experiences of my homogenous sample of participants and improve the quality and reliability of my data, I used multiple data collection methods for this study (Glesne, 1999). I collected data through three phases: a background questionnaire, a document review, and a series of semi-structured interviews. I conducted interviews on an annual or biannual basis depending on the availability of the participants. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. Over the course of approximately five years of data collection, four of the six participants departed from MSU prior to degree completion. Soua departed at the end of year one. Tou departed during year two; Bao departed at the end of her second year. Choua departed following year three. Houa completed a degree in Communication and Journalism after five years of study. Yer graduated with a degree in Exercise Science after five and a half years.

While language alone was not, and is not, a precursor of departure, English proficiency attributed to the academic readiness of the participants. Participants' experiences in the EAP, their academic and social experiences, and their emerging ways of knowing and self-authorship

influenced how they interacted within Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure leading to their decision to depart or persist. Next, I review the findings of the study.

### **Review of Findings**

Participants' in this study experienced the academic and social parameters of college within the general realm of Tinto's (1993) interaction model. However, as (H)Mong LTELs who were primarily first generation college student from low-income families, their experiences within the framework was affected by these characteristics upon acceptance to MSU and influenced how the participants interacted with MSU's academic and social environment. To understand the experiences of these participants better, I also examined their experiences in terms of "ways of knowing" (Baxter Magolda, 1992) and "self-authorship" (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

### **Departure and Persistence**

Tinto's (1993) interactionist model of student departure and persistence examined how the student and the university coexist. As the student refined his/her academic and social goals, he or she made an ongoing decision as to whether or not the university continued to fit with his or her individual needs. Students considered experiences on campus with peers and faculty, academics and social organizations as well as off-campus experiences in relationship to external obligations in their decision to depart or persist. Tinto's theory, however, was a general look at student departure and persistence. His theory did not consider, for example, the implications of facing multiple at-risk factors such as those participants of this study faced (i.e. being (H)Mong LTELs admitted conditionally through a college access program). Despite that, participants in this study faced much in common with Tinto's theory of student departure and persistence.

Each of these participants essentially fits in Tinto's (1993) theory on student departure and persistence. The participants' skills and abilities, family, and prior schooling influenced their pre-entry attributes. The participants' balanced commitment to education and the institution with external commitments. Within the institution, formal and informal academic and social systems were developed and revised as goals and commitments evolved. There were elements of social and academic integration that led to a decision to depart or persist. While the overarching theoretical framework reflects the experiences of these participants, the participants' experiences within the framework reflect the participants' academic and cultural differences (Tinto, 1993).

**Pre-entry attributes.** Similar to Tinto (1993), when I examined participants' pre-entry attributes, one of the key considerations was the specific details of their family background, prior schooling, and skills and abilities. Five of the six participants were first generation college students. All of the participants are LTELs whose academic English proficiency had an impact on their prior schooling as indicated by the participants' rank in class and composite ACT score. As a result, participants faced limited college choice and conditional admission through a college access program.

The academic profile of the participants changed the idea of choice when they pursued access to higher education. Considering ACT scores, high school GPA, and rank-in-class upon graduation from high school, MSU would not have accepted any of these participants without the assistance of the EAP. The conditional admission to MSU changed the reality of the participants' initial goals and commitments. It was unclear if the participants had any other college choice. If the participant can only attend MSU because of the EAP, then they may not be choosing MSU for any reason other than this is the only four year college they are able to attend..

Only Yer had a choice between MSU and another four-year college, and Yer chose MSU even with the conditional admission through the EAP. I also believe MSU was Houa's first choice as well even though it is not clear whether she applied to any other schools. Based on Houa's expressions of the importance of family and that she reported several siblings attending MSU before her, I concluded that MSU was her target school. If participants did not have real college choice, this may have an impact on the commitment participants had to the institution from the onset of admission.

Although pre-entry attributes may have limited the number of choices most of the participants had, MSU appeared to fit all of the participants' initial career goals. All of the participants indicated MSU offered majors that fit with their initial interests. Participants who changed or modified their programs of study were able to find other degree programs that fit their revised goals. In Bao and Choua's case, who were considering nursing, I felt they were unlikely, as conditional admits to MSU, to gain admission to the university's most competitive program. At the pre-entry stage, these two participants face the decision of changing majors or transferring to another institution if they could not fulfill the pre-requisite requirements for the nursing program.

Prior to starting college, these participants faced several differences from their peers. Their pre-entry attributes resulted in a conditional admission to MSU and likely limited their college choice. Even though MSU offered programs of study consistent with the participants' interests, MSU may not have been a good fit academically or socially because most of the participants did not have other options to consider.

**The year in the EAP.** As a result of their conditional admission to MSU, participants begin their first year of college in the EAP. As a college access program, MSU established the

EAP to provide academic and social support to non-native speakers of English who score below 17 on the ACT English or Reading subsections, score below 375 on the MSU System English exam composite or reading subsections, and are not admissible to the University under the traditional criteria. Participants began expressing disillusionment with the EAP prior to beginning their first year. Yer felt that she had to go through the EAP “because you’re not like an American; I guess you’re like (H)Mong, so you felt out of place.” Nearly all of the participants expressed similar sentiments when they discussed learning about the conditional admit through the EAP and in their follow-up interviews after completing the program. While thankful to be in college, participants felt they were “different.”

Although this study was not an examination of the EAP, the EAP was a significant part of the participants first year and contributed greatly to their academic and social experiences on campus. Problems within the EAP, participants overestimating their academic abilities, and difficulty transitioning from high school to college (despite the assistance of the EAP) likely contributed to this disillusionment. Many participants never understood the role of the EAP. Bao’s questions about the program best illustrated this lack of understanding and suggested a lack of transparency within the EAP. Other EAP practices, such as not keeping persistence statistics of EAP participants along with discrepancies between promotional materials and the actual program also suggest a lack of transparency. Participants seemed to be unclear of how different their academic preparation as an EAP conditional admit is from MSU students not conditionally admitted to the university.

Follow-up interviews as participants persisted at MSU suggested experiences in the EAP had long-term effects on academic and social experiences of the participants. Academically, participants conveyed experiences related to an introduction to campus resources but also to a

lack of academic rigor. Outside of the EAP, participants struggled to negotiate academic life. Classes were harder and expectations of professors required more studying and different study habits. All of the participants who persisted beyond the first year needed to repeat or withdraw from courses on a regular basis.

Socially, the EAP helped establish relationships amongst peers. Initially, relationships with cohort members were very strong, and these positive relationships often overshadowed any disillusionment the EAP curriculum and committee members. However, these peer relationships did not persist beyond the first years. The EAP provided social relationships by creating a smaller sub-community that limited connections to the broader campus community. Participants struggled to develop connections with peers without the assistance of the EAP. Because close social relationships made during the EAP experience did not continue, many participants struggled to connect with peers within their area of study. Living off campus heightened the social distance.

Not only do pre-entry attributes of the participants suggest MSU may have been several participants' only choice for attending college, participants' experiences within the EAP are academically and socially different from their peers attending MSU without the assistance of the EAP. The EAP provided the foundation for the rest of the college experience. The academic and social difficulty participants experienced transitioning out of the EAP suggest there are likely problems within the EAP requiring further examination.

**Beyond the EAP.** Following the first year experiences in the EAP, participants experienced the academic and social life of college; however, their interactions with faculty, staff, and peers were different and changed the connection the participants made to campus. During the EAP year, academic relationships were part of the EAP curriculum. Courses were

pre-assigned. Advisors and EAP committee members initiated conversations about grades and tutoring. Faculty members teaching courses within the EAP curriculum were aware of the academic needs the participants in the classroom. Outside of the EAP, participants were responsible for choosing their own classes, contacting advisors, and finding tutors. While participants longed for this freedom during the EAP year, many participants struggled to adapt to this new sense of responsibility once they left the sheltered EAP environment. As a result, participants seemed unaware of how to proceed on their own. Souza withdrew from the university suddenly without consulting with academic advisors or the EAP. Tou made academic decisions based on feedback from a website ([ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com)). Bao appeared to disconnect with college. Choua struggled to get the advice about her major from advisors. All of the participants regularly withdrew and repeated required academic courses.

The shift in social responsibility was similar to the changes academically. As EAP classmates went in different directions academically or departed, participants lost touch with their support network. Family often replaced peers and became a stronger social network than classmates provided. Although common to have more or stronger friendships with those who are racially, ethnically, or linguistically similar (Tatum, 1997), the strong familial ties is more closely related to cultural expectations (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Thao, 2006). Most of the participants joined the (H)Mong Student Association, yet few participants participated actively in this organization. By the second year, all of the participants were living off-campus and many were working, further distancing them from the social community of campus.

As participants faced the departure decision, reason for student departure fit with Tinto's (1993) idea of incongruence and external obligations. Incongruence suggests the university was not a good fit for the student from the onset of admission. Tou, Houa, and Yer's experiences



suggested MSU was not a good fit. Tou departed to be closer to family and because of limited social connections. Houa was not able access into her major of choice. Yer sought a faster time to degree completion. Bao's pregnancy and the cultural expectations of being a wife and mother were consistent with external obligations.

The high rate of incongruence raises a series of questions: Is the EAP the only reason students come to MSU? Or because MSU was the only school they could get into (also because of the EAP)? Just because a student is accepted to MSU does not mean the student and university are a good fit especially if choices are limited. When persistence numbers are so low, would those students who do persist do so without the EAP? I also wonder what role the EAP plays in the incongruence. The EAP sees students who are interested in highly competitive majors such as nursing and education. Is MSU misleading students to think they can get into these programs with the help of the EAP? Can an at-risk student with a developmental profile consistent with the EAP student realistically access the most competitive programs or is the institution setting students up for departure when target programs are unattainable?

### **Ways of Knowing**

During the participants' college experiences, their ways of knowing also develop (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Participants entered MSU as absolute learners. For those who persisted longer, the development through the transitional, independent, and transitional models became evident.

As absolute learners, participants expected MSU faculty and staff to provide knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992). In the first year, participants expected to be the receiver of knowledge. They also looked to faculty and staff to provide academic and experiential expertise. The EAP staff and curriculum supported the framework of absolute knowing by pre-selecting courses and initiating conversations related to tutoring and academic advising. However, once the first year

within the EAP ended, participants struggled to transition into the general academic community of MSU and indicated missing the EAP committee making decisions on their behalf.

In the second year, participants struggled to become transitional knowers. Houa indicated wanting to know exactly how to earn an A in a class. Eventually, Houa began to see the connection of courses and the importance of understanding the material even if it meant repeating a course. This example showed Houa shifting from an absolute knower, where the role of the learner is to obtain knowledge, to a transitional knower, where the learner understands knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 1992). As Houa and Choua made the decision to study abroad, the pair began to show signs of thinking for themselves and developing their own perspective. As the participants came closer to degree completion, their experiences showed signs of contextualizing knowledge. Yer began to apply knowledge in the classroom to her own life and career goals.

Baxter Magolda (1992) stated “knowing in complex forms was possible when students’ genuine relationship with authority replaced detached or apprenticeship ones. In their first year, the EAP relationships support absolute knowing. Participants followed the direction of the EAP and had little co-authorship in their EAP experience. As they began to experience college life independent of the EAP, participants initially struggled, and half did not persist beyond year two. For those who persisted to degree, their relationship with their ways of knowing became more collaborative socially and academically.

### **Self-Authorship**

As the participants persisted, not only were they developing their ways of knowing, but they were also beginning to develop their own voice. Baxter Magolda (2008) described a three-step process of self-authorship: trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation, and

securing internal commitments. Throughout the participants' educational experience, they simultaneously negotiated the complex process of self-authorship and cultural identity.

Within the social experiences, participants' self-authorship experiences emerged through their ethnic identity. Family and cultural expectations greatly influenced the participants' integration into the campus community. In the (H)Mong culture, family, and clan are essential elements of the individual life (Thao, 2006). The decision by most participants to live off-campus, often with family members, and to consult family members in the decision-making process rather than academic advisors and faculty showed the influence family and culture. Both Houa and Yer regularly consulted family when making decisions and only turn to university faculty and staff as a secondary influence.

As students progressed through self-authorship, they began to recognize both subtle and overt discriminatory practices of faculty and staff. While participants did not exclaim racism, they struggled to understand the experiences. This was indicated by hedging such as, "I was kind offended, but she's funny" which is a mixed response of anger and face saving. Early in their academic career, participants' did not know how to respond to this type comment suggesting they did not yet trust their internal voice. As participants became more self-assured, they revisited racial experiences with more concrete assertions as they were building their internal foundations.

Both Yer and Houa, the two participants who persisted to degree, indicated or demonstrated in our final interviews that they were becoming secure in their internal commitments. Yer was expecting her first child and described how she would instill (H)Mong language and culture in her daughter. Houa was planning to marry in the months following graduation. She practiced Shamanism and her husband –to-be practiced Christianity. Houa

described how she would maintain her cultural practices while respecting the values of her future husband and in-laws. Here participants moved from a sense of understanding values, beliefs, and identity to living with themselves at the core of their being resulting in increased certainty and an ability to move forward because they are no longer constrained by fear (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Once participants felt able to secure internal commitments, they became more comfortable in their cultural identity and found balance between traditional (H)Mong culture and U.S. culture.

As students struggled with the significance of race and culture, they moved through elements of self-authorship and eventually emerged with a more concrete idea of their ethnic identity. Baxter Magolda (1992) suggested meaning making surfaces in many aspects of student development. In these participants, the decision to depart or persist in college coincides with the development of their ways of knowing and their self-authorship experiences.

### **Summary**

In examining participants' experiences at MSU Tinto's (1993) overall framework for student departure generally applied. Other considerations within the interactionist framework such as being conditionally admitted to MSU because of multiple risk factors, experiences within the EAP are also significant in the participants' experiences. Simultaneously, students developed their ways of knowing beginning as absolute learners and, for those who completed their degree, evolving to contextual knowers. During the multifaceted experience college is, participants also became more comfortable with their own identity and self-authorship.

### **Implications for Practitioners and Researchers**

In order to retain at-risk populations, effective programs are essential. In review of my findings and analysis, there are several implications for higher education to consider. Institutions of higher education need to understand the role language plays in developmental learners better. A holistic approach to teaching and learning is necessary to meet the needs of students that possess multiple risk factors but also empowers their intellectual development and encourages self-authorship. An examination of the effectiveness of access and retention programs is necessary to provide educational opportunity to at-risk populations and retain students with an at-risk profile.

### **Understanding the Role of Language in Developmental Learners**

Stating what role language plays is difficult because many of the characteristics of LTELs are also characteristics of underprepared, inexperienced, and developmental learners. Research also has difficulty making this distinction. As I started this study, my experiences suggested that language must play a role in the students' academic achievement. However, in analyzing the data, language experiences were difficult to isolate. Entering the university, language was a consideration in the participants' conditional admission. Language likely affected high school GPA, individual rank in class, and ACT scores, yet I cannot conclude with any degree of certainty the role language played. Participants attended U.S. public schools from elementary school through high school graduation. They were educated in English, yet developed social fluency rather than academic fluency.

Most studies look at one risk factor, not multiple risk factors within a student. I did see some EAP students who made ELL errors particularly related to word endings, but I observed this characteristic in their oral language, as I did not conduct a written language assessment as

part of this study. Underprepared, inexperienced, and developmental learners experience problems with an underdeveloped academic vocabulary and simpler sentence structure as well as difficulty with basic essay structure or critical reading regardless of being an ELL or not . These characteristics suggest further study is needed regarding the role language plays in developmental learners.

### **Retention of LTELs in Higher Education**

Institutions of higher education must also increase measures to retain students once admitted. Freeman and Freeman (2002) suggested a culturally sensitive pedagogy that delivers an academically challenging curriculum and utilizes cognitive learning strategies. In higher education, these principals present themselves differently than in a K-12 setting because of minimum standard of academic achievement. However, they may be more important principles to practice at this stage of education in order to retain Generation 1.5 long term ELLs.

The first method institutions of higher education should employ in their efforts to retain Generation 1.5 ELLs is a culturally sensitive pedagogy. Noonan (2007) defined a culturally sensitive pedagogy as

the aim of culturally sensitive pedagogy is to ensure that we: (1) see others and ourselves as unique and culturally-complex human beings; (2) authentically express and interact with others in meaningful ways; (3) recognize the limitations of our worldview based on our knowledge and “position of experience” (Jensen, 2005, p. 41); (4) increase our awareness of “cultural” interpretations, assumptions and biases, which influence our perspectives, judgments, and actions (McDaniel, Samovar, & Porter, 2006); and (5) develop a sense of agency, authorship and activism(Greene, 1988) to be more socially just. (p.10)

In the classroom, a culturally sensitive pedagogy can take many forms including “experiential learning and investigations of self and other” (Noonan, p. 16). Activities that allow students to reflect on their personal experiences contribute to identity development and augment global lens heightening awareness of diverse perspective (Noonan, 2007).

However, a culturally sensitive pedagogy should not be limited to the classroom. Banks suggested, “multiculturalism should pervade the curriculum, including the general life of schools” (as cited in Spring, 2005, p. 443). On college campuses, multiculturalism should not only be infused into the perspective from which the course is taught and through cultural representation of the materials selected, but also through diverse faculty, extracurricular activities, and campus climate. Greene added, “that life is fuller for all of us when we live it among different people, all respecting and identifying with each other in that difference, becomes the thought that no one ever thinks” (as cited in Goodlad, 2001, p. 185). A culturally sensitive pedagogy can help engage students in the course material and build a sense of community.

Another consideration regarding the academic success of LTELs is continued development of academic language. “Academic language is both context-reduced and cognitively demanding” which poses a great challenge to long term ELLs who are often only socially proficient (Freeman & Freeman, 2002, p. 35). One way to develop academic language is to subject LTELs to the same academically rigorous content as traditional students. Greene distinguished between two different types of identity: one “leads in the direction of solidarity,” and the other which “leads to some special noteworthiness” (as cited in Goodlad, 2001, p. 186). Further discrimination and isolation in the curriculum and in the workplace can result from individuals’ underdeveloped academic language. Eliminating oppressive acts can build confidence and empower ELLs to assert their cultural identity.

Although results are mixed regarding college remediation and developmental programs (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006; Schmidt, 2008; Strong American Schools, 2008), developmental programs can be a great benefit to Generation 1.5 long term ELLs provided they

are academically rigorous, use content based instructional methods and authentic assessment techniques. McClenney added some remedial programs are operating successfully, “showing that it can be done, which takes away the excuses for all others” (as cited in Schmidt, 2008, p. A18).

The experiences of these participants raise many questions regarding the rigor and success of the EAP. The program conditionally admits students who average nine points less than their peers on the ACT class with the understanding that one year in the EAP will bring participants to the level of their peers. However if the departure rate of the participants of this study is consistent with other cohorts, something is leading to a high rate of departure. A re-evaluation of the pre-entry attributes of the target students and the program curriculum is necessary to understand better the success of the program.

In addition to a culturally sensitive pedagogy and maintaining academic rigor, learning strategy instruction is also essential to the success of LTELs. “The fundamental task of education in a democracy is the apprenticeship of liberty – learning to be free” (Barber as cited in Goodlad, 2002, p. 12). Brown (2000) argued a fundamental element of creating learner autonomy is strategy instruction. Brown presented four methods of strategy-based instruction, which are practiced in language classrooms and can be applied to any classroom setting.

“Teachers can embed strategy awareness and practice into their pedagogy” while consciously and subconsciously helping students practice successful strategies (Brown, 2000). A third model credited to Omoggio, used diagnostic methods to determine weaknesses and provides specific techniques to compensate for weaknesses. Minimally, “textbooks should include strategy instruction as part of a content-centered approach” (Omoggio as cited in Brown,



2000, p. 131). Regardless of content, strategy instruction can be incorporated into any curriculum to help improve the academic achievement of students in higher education.

Baxter Magolda (2009) called for a holistic view of student development. Students experience academic, social, cultural, and linguistic development in their college years. In this group, pre-entry attributes placed participants at-risk for departure from MSU. Participants entered with multiple risk factors to navigate during their college experience. Proceeding through college, participants also faced development of their ways of knowing while simultaneously negotiating their self-authorship. Faculty and staff can combine cultural sensitive pedagogy with academically rigorous instruction, and direct instruction in how to learn across the curriculum and thus provide more opportunities for LTELs.

### **Generalizability and Higher Education**

Some members of the MSU community argue that the population of English language learners will dissolve, and support services like the EAP will no longer be necessary. While the immigrant groups that fit the profile of the EAP student may change, I do not believe the need will ever disappear. In this region, the next generation of EAP students is the growing Somalia population, while outside of this area, the origination of Generation 1.5 LTELs may differ, higher education will continue to see the number of groups from other conflict ridden countries grow. As long as the conditions of underdevelopment persist in the world, we will have immigrant groups in need of support. That being said, research related to the academic, social and linguistic needs of Generation 1.5 LTELs in higher education needs to continue.

From this study, I feel researchers should begin by looking more closely at access programs like the EAP. Evaluation of access programs should begin by looking at how support programs balance academic, social, and linguistic needs. Students need support in all three

areas, but over-emphasizing one aspect over another can negatively influence a student's transition out of the program. Special attention should be given to academic rigor that parallels university expectations, social support that encourages engagement in the university environment without isolating students from the greater community, and attention to linguistic that differentiates instruction for the LTEL. In turn, support programs need to go beyond providing access and examine long-term retention practices of this at-risk population which includes consistent on-going support throughout the entire college experience to provide academic role models that can help students negotiate the college experience. Universities need to hold programs like the EAP accountable for retention as well as access if such extensive resources are used.

### **Summary**

Through this longitudinal, phenomenological study, I spent over five years examining experiences (H)Mong LTELs who are conditionally admitted through the EAP here at MSU. Although only two of the six participants persisted to degree, I found their experiences as (H)Mong LTELs and within the EAP influenced their college experiences. Most importantly, I learned that to understand this group of participants, a holistic approach to higher education is necessary to provide access to at-risk and diverse populations for retention to be successful effectively. Admissions must effectively target participants for access programs. Access programs must be academically rigorous to prepare students for academic and social life outside of the program, and retention efforts must include both student services professionals and academics across disciplines. Higher education professionals must look more closely at the entire student experience. Despite this, researchers need to explore further the academic and social needs of LTELs in higher education.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**COVER LETTER**

(Printed on University Letterhead)

Dear Research Participant:

I am asking for your help and cooperation in a qualitative research project investigating the experiences of English for Academic Success programs that contribute to retention.

The project contains four parts. As a participant, you will first be asked to complete a questionnaire describing your cultural and academic background. Then, an interview will be completed to regarding preconceptions toward education and the university. Subsequent interviews will be completed at the end of each semester during your Midwest State University career. A final interview will completed upon exit of Midwest State University. In addition to the interviews, the researcher will assess your academic progress at the end of each semester by reviewing your semester and cumulative Grade Point Average, number of credits attempted and completed, and your academic standing.

For participating in this research project, I understand that I will be compensated for my time. Students will receive \$50.00 for participating in the study. 1)Twenty dollars will be paid to the participant after completing the second year of the study or upon withdrawal from the Midwest State University. 2)The participant will receive ten dollars a year for each additional year of participation in the study. A maximum of thirty dollars will be paid to the participant upon exit from the study. (i.e. All participants will receive \$20.00 at the end of the second year of participation. The remaining funds will be distributed based on the number of years, above two, participating in the study. For example, a student participating in the study for four years will receive \$20.00 at the end of the second year and \$20.00 at the end of the fourth year. A student participating in the study for five years will receive \$20.00 at the end of the second year and \$30.00 at the end of the fourth year.)

The student's decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. Students are not required to participate and declining to participate in no way jeopardizes your enrollment at Midwest State University. Participation is not a condition for being the recipient of any benefits or services provided by the University.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of data, names of students will be changed. The investigators will not make unauthorized disclosure of identifying information and/or data that have been obtained from a respondent.

In this educational research project, there are no known economic, legal, physical, psychological, or social risks to participants in either immediate or long-range outcomes. I understand that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in an experimental procedure, but I believe that

reasonable safeguards have been taken to minimize both the known and the potential, but unknown risks. Students may withdraw consent and discontinue participation at any time.

Attached, you will find an informed consent form, which we need to have completed if choosing to participate. If there are any questions about participating in this research project, please ask them before signing the consent form.

If there are any questions or concerns about the nature of this study, please contact Kelly Wonder. If there are any questions about your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects Midwest State University. Thank you for cooperating in this research. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

---

Ms. Kelly Wonder

**APPENDIX B**  
**CONSENT FORM**

Title of Investigation: Does access = retention? A qualitative look at the experiences of the 2005-2006 cohort of English for Academic Success Program students throughout their university career at the Midwest State University

Name(s) of Principal Investigator(s): Ms. Kelly Wonder

This document is to certify that I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby freely agree to (or give permission to have my child or subject) participate as a volunteer in an investigation (experiment, program, study) as an authorized part of the educational and research program of the Midwest State University under the supervision of Ms. Kelly Wonder.

- The research project and my (subject's) role in the research project have been fully explained to me by Ms. Kelly Wonder and I understand her/his explanation as well as what will be expected of me by virtue of my participation in this research project. A copy of the procedures of this investigation and a description of any risks, discomforts and benefits associated with my participation has been provided and discussed in detail with me.
- I have been given an opportunity to ask questions, and all such questions and inquiries have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that I am free to decline to answer any specific items or questions in interviews or questionnaires.
- I understand that all data will remain confidential with regard to my identity (the child's/subject's identity).
- I understand that participation in this research project is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from the Midwest State University or any other organization sponsoring the research project.
- I understand that the approximate length of time required for participation in this research project is 10 – 12 hours over the course of 4 – 5 years.
- I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human subjects in this study, I may call or write:

Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Midwest State University

I may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

Although this person will ask my name, I understand that all inquiries will be kept in the strictest confidence.

- Furthermore, I understand that if I have any questions concerning the purposes or the procedures associated with this research project, I may call or write:

Ms. Kelly Wonder  
Midwest State University

- I also understand that it will not be necessary to reveal my name in order to obtain additional information about this research project from the principal investigator(s).
- I FURTHER UNDERSTAND THAT I AM FREE TO WITHDRAW MY CONSENT AND DISCONTINUE MY (OR THE CHILD'S/SUBJECT'S) PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

**APPENDIX C****BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE****Part 1: Demographics**

Please indicate the response that best describes you.

1. Gender: Circle one.      Male      Female

2. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your ancestry or ethnic origin? (For example: Italian, Jamaican, African American, Cambodian, and so on.) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How would you describe the socioeconomic status of your family? Circle one.

Low income

Lower Middle Income

Upper Middle Income

Upper Income

4b. Do you qualify for the Student Support Services (TRIO) program?      Yes      No

5. How frequently do you speak a language other than English at home? Circle one.

English Only

Mostly English

½ English, ½ Other

Mostly Other

Other Only

5b. What is this language? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Which country were you born in?: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you have a documented disability? Circle one.      Yes      No

Over →

**Part 2: Academic Preparation**

1. How many years have you attended school in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was your cumulate high school GPA upon graduation? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Did you take any ESL coursework in the public school system? Circle one. Yes No

3b. If yes, during which grade(s)? \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 3: Family History**

1. Mark the response that best describes your parent’s or legal guardian’s highest educational attainment.

2. Have any of your siblings attended college? Circle one. Yes No

	Mother	Father	Guardian
a. Did not complete high school			
b. High school diploma			
c. Technical training/certificate			
d. Some college coursework, but does not have a degree			
e. Associate’s degree			
f. Bachelor’s degree			
f. Master’s degree or higher			
g. Unknown			

Please specify:

2b. How many siblings have graduated from high school? \_\_\_\_\_

2c. How many siblings are attending college? \_\_\_\_\_

2d. How many siblings have completed college? \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX D****INTERVIEW QUESTIONS****II. Introduction (Semi Structured Interview)**

- A. Describe your cultural heritage.
- B. How does your culture feel about education?
- C. What expectations does your culture have for you as a man? A woman? How does that make you feel?
- D. How does your family feel about education? How has their feelings about education impacted you?
- E. How do you feel about attending college?
- F. How do you feel about attending Midwest State University?
- G. What are your reasons for attending college?
- H. Do you feel prepared for college?
- I. Do you have any concerns or worries?
- J. Why did you choose Midwest State University?
- K. How do you feel about participating in the English for Academic Success Program?

**III. End of Semester (Semi Structured Interview)**

- A. Tell me about your semester.
- B. How did your classes go? Were there any courses that went well for you? Worse than expected? Did you use any tutoring services? If so, for which classes? Was it helpful? How well do you know your classmates? How well do you know your teachers?
- C. Did you have any experiences on or off campus that may have contributed to the grades you received this semester?
- D. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities? Why or Why not? If yes, which ones? Why did you choose it?
- E. Did you participate in any social events on campus? If yes, which ones? Why did you choose it?
- F. Did you have job? Was it on or off campus? How many hours a week did you work? How do you think your job impacted your college experiences?
- G. Did you live on or off campus? With your family? With other students? How did where you lived affect your college experience?
- H. What role has the English for Academic Success Program played in your studies? Has it helped you or hindered you?
- I. What did you like best about this semester? What did you like least?
- J. What do you like best about campus? What do you like least?
- K. Have you had any particularly negative or positive experiences this semester?
- L. What advice would you give to other students in your position?
- M. What plans do you have for the next semester?

## IV. Exit (Semi Structured Interview)

- A. Why are you leaving Midwest State University?
- B. What are you planning to do next?
- C. How did you make that decision? (Did your advisor help? Departmental connections?)
- D. How does your family feel about your decision?
- E. Do you feel well-prepared for your chosen career? (Did you ...gain a large knowledge base? ...gain appropriate and useful technical skills? ...go to an adequate number of conferences? ...meet the eminent people in your field? ...learn about proposals and other real world issues?)
- F. If you had to choose a school again, would you choose to go to Midwest State University and Why?
- G. How would you rate the social environment of the university? (Do you know your neighbors?)
- H. How would you rate the interaction between yourself and faculty members?
- I. Was the time to get a degree reasonable?
- J. Did you get a good breadth of education?
- K. Think back throughout your university career. What are your most memorable experiences both in and out of the classroom?
- L. What has had the most significant impact on your university career?
- M. What are the best things college has done to prepare you for life after college? Have you learned things in courses you have taken that you've used outside of the academic environment?
- N. How are you different, that is, how have you grown by attending Midwest State University? Identify the university related experiences that have changed you.
- O. What would you tell a first year student (or a student considering Midwest State University) asking for advice?
- P. Do you have any other comments about Midwest State University?