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What to Expect?
An Exploration of International Student Experience Using Expectancy Violations Theory

Meagan Rachelle Mullen

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Masters of Education

Educational Leadership and Counseling

April 2018

Acknowledgements

In writing this Master's thesis, I have been supported whole-heartedly by a wonderful group of people who deserve recognition. First, I would like to thank Dr. Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury, my thesis Chair, who has been a fantastic sounding board and huge support in this research study. I also want to thank Dr. Karyn Rabourn and Dr. Laura O'Hara, who both served on my thesis committee and provided me with amazing and constructive feedback in my research. Along this journey, I have had some trying times, and I want to thank my cohort members and friends Kenya Shakir and Ky Simmons for holding me accountable when needed and letting me vent about all things thesis-related. I want to thank my fellow thesis writers Chase Dolan and Chelse Hawkins for understanding the struggle, and finally I want to thank former cohort member Nicki Rombach for checking in on me and helping me understand that I am capable of whatever I set out to accomplish.

Without the support of my friends, family, and cohort members, I do not believe I would have accomplished such a high-achieving goal. I am a better writer, a better researcher, and a better person because of those who support me and lift me to higher standards.

Meagan Mullen

Abstract

International students face particular barriers when attending higher education in the United States, some of which could be due to misguided expectations of their experiences. This research study used Expectancy Violations Theory to explore the expectations of international students in their first semester in the United States. Using semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study found that participants create expectations for academics, relationships, culture, and lifestyle, and that these expectations are either met or violated, which results in differing experiences. These expectations were created both consciously and unconsciously and were sometimes a result of information found online or learned from other people. The violations of these expectations influence the experiences participants had in the United States.

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What to Expect? An Exploration of International Student Experience

Using Expectancy Violations Theory

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

International students attending an institution in the United States for the first time face specific barriers to success on top of the obstacles they face alongside their domestic counterparts. These additional barriers could be related to their expectations of American college life and the possible violations of said expectations. Expectancy Violation Theory (1978), a communication studies theory first introduced by Judee Burgoon, has not yet been applied to the area of international students and their relationships with institutions in the United States. Using this theory, this study hopes to explore the expectations international students create for their experiences in the United States, and then analyze how these expectations could impact their experiences—and possibly the barriers they typically face.

Importance of the Problem and Rationale for the Study

The presence of international students on U.S. college campuses benefit these institutions. First, they add diversity to the student population and contribute to the intercultural growth of students, faculty, and staff. This is supported by Sato and Hodge (2015) who state, “[International students] contribute new perspectives to discussion and enhance student and faculty awareness of appreciation for other national origins and cultures” (p. 78). International students also benefit culturally because they overcome challenges of living in a different culture and immerse themselves wholly. Secondly, international students contribute to the finances of an institution (Özurgot & Murphy,

2009). International students pay out-of-state tuition and are unable to use federal financial aid, which means the institution profits more from these students overall. There is also a benefit to the student's home nation when the student returns from being abroad in the United States. The education they receive in the United States is beneficial to the economy back home. Overall, benefits from international students are significant, making retention of these students by U.S. institutions of higher education crucial. Not understanding the nature of the struggles these students face makes it more likely that universities could lose numbers of international students, causing harm to students and the institution.

This study is significant because it explores areas of Expectancy Violations Theory (Burgoon, 1978) that have yet to be expanded upon, such as using the theory to describe a relationship between a person and an institution. This study also adds to the growing pool of literature regarding international students and the struggles they face. It is clear these students face different issues when at college, but they have never been investigated using Expectancy Violations Theory as a theoretical framework. International students and their expectations of U.S. institutions is a gap in the literature; this study seeks to begin filling that gap in our knowledge. The audience for this research study consists of both higher education professionals and scholars of communication studies, since aspects of both areas are being explored.

Background of the Problem

Expectancy Violations Theory

Expectancy Violations Theory was first introduced by Burgoon (1978) and later explored furthermore by Burgoon with the help of other communication scholars.

According to Burgoon and Hale (1988), the theory consists of five key elements: expectancy violations, arousal, communicator reward valence, behavior interpretation and evaluation, and violation valence. First, it is assumed that expectations are created for all interactions. These may be based on previous knowledge of the communicator or societal norms and standards. Second, violations may or may not occur. If a violation occurs, Burgoon and Hale (1988) state that arousal will then be heightened, and a valence is assigned to the violation: negative or positive. If the violation is ambiguous, meaning the action itself does not have a negative or positive connotation, attention will be diverted from the purpose of the interaction and focused on the communicating party who performed the violation. Then, reward value of the violating party and interpretation of the violation is taken into consideration, and a valence is assigned to the violation: negative or positive (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Chapter 2 will discuss the theoretical framework in greater detail.

International Student Challenges

International students face many of the same challenges as do domestic students when entering an American university. However, they also have obstacles that are unique to their population. Özürgüt and Murphy (2009) found that international students are affected by language barriers and cultural differences; Pathirage, Morrow, Walpitige, and Skoltis (2014) found that language proficiency is the “most significant problematic aspect” (p. 26) of international students’ experiences abroad. Sato and Hodge (2015) also state that language and cultural differences are issues faced by international students, along with being positioned as outsiders compared to domestic students; they found that

Asian international students in particular feel marginalized by their American counterparts.

The issues international students face can hinder their success at U.S. postsecondary institutions. Researchers have made suggestions for how to improve these students' experiences, such as English conversation partners, cultural workshops, English as a second language (ESL) courses, and hiring qualified administrators in international offices (Özurgot & Murphy, 2009; Pathirage et al., 2014; Sato & Hodge, 2015). Expectations of American college life set by international students could be one reason for the existence of these barriers. Expectations can also influence decisions made by international students. Further investigation into how expectations can affect the experience of an international student at an American institution is necessary to determine how to best serve this population.

Statement of Purpose

Expectancy Violations Theory, in general, is used to investigate the expectations of interpersonal interactions; however, in this study specifically, the interaction is between international students and an American institution of higher education. The study collects qualitative data regarding the expectations of international students, how those expectations were or were not met when attending an American institution, and how the violations—or lack thereof—affect the experiences of these students. Face-to-face interviews with international students in their first semester at a mid-size, Midwestern institution in the United States provide personal experiences that will be coded, producing themes to be further explored. The questions in the interviews include those regarding international students' expectations before attending the American

institution, whether or not they were met, and the effects they have experienced. The findings of the study uncover how some violations have affected the experiences of international students at an institution in the United States.

This study adds to two growing bodies of research: literature regarding Expectancy Violations Theory in communication studies as well as research about international students at American institutions within the field of higher education. The audience for this research study consists of both higher education professionals and scholars of communication studies, since both areas are being explored. The purpose of this study is to understand international student expectations of American higher education and how those expectations may be violated, as well as deciphering how these violations can affect their experiences. This addresses the lack of literature on this topic as well as help higher education professionals improve techniques for recruiting and retaining international students.

Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What expectations are international students creating for their experience at an institution of higher education in the United States?

RQ2: How are international students' expectations violated when attending an American institution for the first time?

RQ3: How do these violations—or lack thereof—influence their experiences at the institution?

Qualitative Propositions

From the literature on Expectancy Violations Theory, it is proposed that international students will face violations of their expectations. The violations may be positively or negatively valenced, but the valence of the violation will most likely directly relate to the experience of the student. If a violation is positively valenced (meaning it is more rewarding than the expectation), the student will appear to have a more positive experience. If a violation is negatively valenced (meaning it is less rewarding than the expectation), the student will appear to have a negative experience. After gathering data from the literature on international students, this study proposes that violations will occur in language, culture, and social experiences.

Design, Data Collection, and Analysis

Using Expectancy Violations Theory, this study explores the experiences of international students at an American university. It is proposed that international students will have expectations for their experience, and they will face violations of these expectations. Through face-to-face interviews with these students, data about the experiences of international students and expectation violations was collected and analyzed for emergent themes. The themes that emerge inform the interpretations regarding the effects of expectation violations on international student experiences.

Methods

Design. This research study is qualitative in nature and will involve a series of interviews conducted by the researcher. The interviews were approximately 30-60 minutes in length and were conducted early in the first semester and again in mid-December. Participants were asked to participate in two interviews (1st interview = 30

minutes; 2nd interview = 30 minutes), which brings their total participation time to 60 minutes. The interview protocol is included in Appendices B and C. The interviews were semi-structured; questions were planned and prepared, but the researcher had the freedom to ask tangential/probative questions as necessary.

Data collected reflected the expectations of international students, how those expectations were or were not met when attending an American institution, and how the violations—or lack thereof—affect the experiences of these students. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, then analyzed using initial coding followed by focused coding to uncover emergent themes, patterns, and trends.

Participants. A convenience sample was convened. The number of participants was 6 international students studying in the United States for the first time. They are current students at a mid-size, Midwestern institution in which the research is being conducted and it is expected that they are between 18-20 years old, but this is not a criterion for participation. The study has a diverse sample. Because of the nature of the study, the findings are not meant to be generalizable, but rather serve as a foundation for more research in the future.

Participants were recruited with the help of the University International Center (UIC). UIC communicates with incoming international students via email, and they agreed to include a small informational blurb for this study (see Appendix A). Students were given the researcher's information and told to contact the researcher directly to volunteer for the study. The researcher then determined 6 participants from the pool of possible candidates. A guiding principle for choosing participants was first-come first-serve, those who reach out to the researcher first will be invited to the study. However,

the researcher wanted the sample to reflect the research institution's international student population as best as possible. Therefore, the researcher consulted with the thesis Chair to select a population that varies in gender, age, and geographic characteristics. The participants were not be compensated for their participation in the research study.

Consent. Consent was gained from each participant through a signed Informed Consent Form (see Appendix D). Because the document is in English and could pose issues with comprehension, the researcher also read the consent form and explained orally the process of the study to each participant. To give participants ample time to read and make note of any questions for discussion and/or clarification, the researcher emailed a copy of the Informed Consent Form to each participant once the interview had been scheduled. On the day of the interview, the researcher orally discussed the Consent Form and explain participants' rights. Participants who gave consent were asked to sign the Consent Form. Students were given a blank copy of the Consent Form to keep for their records.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal was made explicit, orally and written on the Consent Form. The researcher orally discussed voluntary participation and withdrawal. The Consent Form included a statement that declares students exercising their rights to decline or withdraw from further participation will not face penalty nor will their decision change any present or future relationship with the university or its affiliates, or other services the student is entitled to receive. Students were encouraged to ask questions.

Instruments. The main instrument in this study was the researcher. All interviews were conducted by the researcher; these interviews were conducted in English. The interview protocols are included in Appendices B and C.

Data collection and analysis. A medium-sized Midwestern university served as the research site. The interviews took place in a rented space in the university library. There are study rooms available for students to use and the researcher secured the locations prior to the interviews. This space was chosen due to the ability to rent the space, the comfort, and intimacy and privacy in the small, six-seater conference-style room. Interviewees were asked to give a pseudonym at the start of the interview to protect privacy.

Data was collected using the two interview protocols. The first protocol consists of seven questions and was administered early in the first semester. The second protocol consists of eight questions and was administered at near the end of the second semester. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. After transcription, each interview was coded and analyzed for themes or patterns. The coding process moved from initial (open) coding to focused coding. Focus coding led to theme generation. The themes from the data produced the research results.

Definition of Terms

- *Communicator reward valence* is a variable that is often times discussed in studies surrounding Expectancy Violations Theory and is defined by Burgoon (2016) as the “net evaluation of how rewarding it is to interact” (p. 3) with a person or party. This is determined by a vast number of criteria, including positive and negative characteristics of the communicator, attractiveness, and setting

(Burgoon, 2016; Burgoon & Hale, 1998; Burgoon, Newton, Walther, & Baesler, 1989). Communicators, who are the ones who violate the expectation, can be seen as rewarding, which would make them desirable interaction partners, or non-rewarding, which would make them undesirable.

- Expectations are defined by Frisby and Sidelinger (2013) as “preconceived notions of how an interaction should be performed and how others should behave and communicate” (p. 242). Cohen (2010) agrees that there are set norms for how people behave in certain interactions, therefore defining expectations. Societal norms are just one aspect of the creation of expectations, as described by Burgoon and Hale (1988). The other pertains to how the known information about the communicator will influence the expectations of the interaction. Societal norms are relied upon much more heavily in interactions with strangers than with known individuals (Burgoon & Hale, 1988).
- Expectancy violations are defined by Burgoon and Hale (1988) as deviations from expectations, but the deviation has to be recognized and must heighten arousal of the interaction. Burgoon (2016) simply defined expectancy violations as “unmet expectations” (p. 3).
- International students are students who attend university at an institution in a country that is not their home country. For the purposes of this study, international students are considered non-American students.
- Violation valence is an added evaluation (either positive or negative) of the violation and is determined by a number of contributing factors. Setting, societal norms, communicator reward valence, and the nature of the interaction all help

determine the valence of the violation (Fife, Nelson, & Zhang, 2012; Frisby & Sidelinger, 2013).

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

In this study there are many boundaries being imposed for the purpose of the research. The interviews were conducted in English, the researcher's first language. It was assumed that language barriers will cause minimal limitations due to the required English proficiency of the institution's international students. Due to the nature of the topic, it was necessary to schedule two interviews with each participant. One interview must occur early enough in the semester so that the information captured reflects the newness of the student's experience. The second interview occurred toward the end of the semester. The time that lapsed between the first and second interview may not be optimal.

Some limitations include the possibility for miscommunication and misrepresentation. Because the interviews were conducted in English, participants were expected to answer in English, which could have limited their answers. Nonetheless, the English proficiency requirement to attend the institution may lessen the impact of this limitation. Also, there were a small percentage of countries represented in the participant sample. This could limit the transferability of the findings from this sample to the expansive international student population, although that is not the purpose of this study in particular.

Organization of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the experiences of international students at a higher education institution in the United States using Expectancy Violations Theory.

Immediately following this chapter is the review of literature which will a) discuss Expectancy Violations Theory and explain why this theoretical framework is relevant to the research, b) provide background and history of international students, and c) the issues international students commonly face during their studies in the United States. This will serve as the knowledge base for the thesis.

After the review of literature is chapter 3, the study methodology. This chapter will include a description of the participants, instruments, and analytical process for the research study. Chapter 4 will present the results from the research. Lastly, chapter 5 concludes the thesis by discussing the findings and presenting the recommendations for practice and directions for further research. The thesis is appended with additional details and artifacts related to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

People inherently create expectations for all interactions in their life, but these expectations are not always met. Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), first introduced by Judee Burgoon in 1978, explores expectations created by people and the violations of these expectations. Burgoon initially used this theory to explore proxemics—the study of how much space people place between one another in certain circumstances—but the theory has grown to include many other interactions (Burgoon, 2016). This study uses EVT to explore the challenges of international students studying in the United States. It is believed by the researcher that international students create expectations for their first time studying in the United States, but these expectations are not always met. Using EVT as a guide, this study explores the violations international students may face and decipher how these violations, or lack thereof, have affected their higher education experience in the United States. After a review of the EVT theoretical framework, literature about international students and the challenges they face coming to college in the United States will be presented. This will guide the research questions regarding international students' expectations and the violations they may experience.

Theoretical Framework

The Development of EVT

EVT was created by Burgoon (1978) as a model to explain proxemics in interpersonal interactions. This model came about from an abundance of research surrounding proxemics and included 13 propositions. Burgoon (2016) defines proxemics as the “organization, use, and interpretation of space and distance” (p. 1). EVT explained

why people put specific amounts of space between themselves and others during social interactions such as conversation. The theory has evolved over the years to move beyond just proxemics and include other nonverbal behaviors and other areas of communication studies. EVT has been used in studies regarding nonverbal communication (Burgoon, 2016), interpersonal communication (Burgoon & Hale, 1988; Burgoon, Newton, Walther, & Baesler, 1989; Frisby & Sidelinger, 2013), computer-mediated communication (Fife, Nelson, & Zhang, 2012), and communication with media figures (Cohen, 2010). For the context of international students, EVT could be expanded from just interpersonal interactions between two individuals to interactions between an individual and an institution.

EVT premises. The basic premise of EVT is that people have expectations for how interactions will occur based on social norms and knowledge of a person, if applicable. These expectations may or may not be consciously known, but they exist nonetheless. During an interaction, expectations may or may not be met; unmet expectations therefore create an expectancy violation. These violations are valenced, which means they can be evaluated and given a positive or negative connotation (Burgoon, 2016; Burgoon et al., 1989). An example of a violation of expectations could be as follows: A person expects a friend to be supportive and reach out to the person after the person experiences a recent break up. Instead, the friend is distant and does not reach out to the person to interact in regard to the break up. While there may be reasons for this difference in reaction, the fact that the expectation was not met created an expectancy violation.

The main point of EVT is the notion that expectations *do* guide the behavior of a person. Burgoon et al. (1989) found that communication outcomes are dependent on the valence of the expectancy violation. Positively valenced violations “produce more favorable communication outcome” (for example, a smile from an attractive person might make the individual smile back) and negatively valenced violations “produce more unfavorable ones” (for example, a person with a strong body odor sitting next to an individual on the subway might cause that individual to get up and move; Burgoon et al., 1989, p. 109). Burgoon (2016) has reiterated this fact in many subsequent studies stating, “Expectancies do guide behavior” (p. 6). However, even though expectations guide the behavior of a person, many things can influence how the overall valence is determined. Burgoon (2016) summarized this information to expand the premises of EVT to say, “When violations are ambiguous or have multiple meanings, their valence is affected by the violator’s reward valence; when they have fairly consensual social meanings, reward valence does not matter” (p. 6). Basically, if there is not a preconceived norm for a specific interaction, the second tier of EVT then falls to the person committing the violation; if they are found to be favorable, the interaction will be seen as favorable, and vice versa.

Media-formed relationships, such as those with celebrities on TV, can be valenced differently than those with close friends. Cohen (2010) used EVT to explore the difference between these two types of relationships. Because media-formed relationships are not as high in commitment as in-person friendships, Cohen suggests that these relationships can be more “vulnerable to the adverse effects of some expectancy violations” (p. 106) than relationships created face-to-face. Cohen found that people were

more likely to make excuses for friends' violations than for media figures' violations which might be a result of the ability for fluctuation in commitment (Cohen, 2010). This difference in commitment may be translated to the commitment between an international student and an institution; because the student likely isn't as highly committed to the institution as they would be to a friend, they might be less likely to make excuses for the institution and perhaps more impacted by changes in expectations.

Even though the act itself or the communicator can completely dominate the valence of the overall violation, usually it is a combination of the two. Burgoon and Hale (1988) found that even communicators who are positively valenced can commit a violation that is considered negative. Burgoon et al. (1989) found that increasing involvement—eye contact, attentiveness, etc.—in an interaction can help communicators, no matter the valence, improve the overall valence of the violation. The valence of the violation is determined by a number of factors and matters greatly in the context of the interaction.

How EVT Frames the Thesis

EVT is based on how interactions between two individuals are valenced after one or more of the individuals has violated expectations. This study assumes that individuals can have a similar relationship with an institution; due to Cohen's (2010) idea that media-formed relationships are also able to apply EVT, it is assumed that institutions may also apply EVT to their interactions with international students. Individuals will create expectations about their experiences with an institution, and their experiences with the institution and those associated with the institution could violate these expectations. After violations occur, the interaction will either be negatively or positively valenced, thus

influencing the perception of the individual's perception of the institution, as well as their experiences within that institution and within the United States.

Synthesis of Research Literature

International Students on U.S. Campuses

Benefits of studying in the U.S. International students have been coming to the United States to study for many years and for a multitude of reasons. According to the Institute of International Education's 2015/2016 Open Doors data, 1.04 million international students attended college in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2016). Of those, 300,743 were newly arrived international students (Institute of International Education, 2016). Turner (2015) states that American higher education has been well-known as a high-quality system of education, making it a tempting option for those outside of the United States. Turner (2015) also explains that many other countries have exam-based systems, where one exam determines a student's ability to continue in a field; this is unattractive to many students and makes the United States a more viable option. One website dedicated to international students lists a host of reasons for studying in the United States, including variety of opportunities, academic excellence, and campus life experience (International Student, 2017). An empirical study conducted by Sánchez, Fornerino, and Zhang (2006) found motivations and barriers to international study among Chinese, American, and French students. It was found that many students have similar motivations to study abroad: new experiences, liberty/pleasure, and a desire to improve their social situation (Sánchez et al., 2006). In summary, international students have many reasons for coming to school in the United States because of the benefits it may provide to them as individuals.

Benefits international students provide. International students are beneficial to U.S. institutions of higher education for many reasons. First, they bring an aspect of diversity with them; increased diversity in the classroom and on campus in general can add new perspectives to discussion. Barnes (1991) indicates that international students enhance the academic atmosphere of campus as well. This can lead to raised awareness of international experiences among student, faculty, and staff, as well as appreciation of difference of culture (Bevis, 2002). In a discussion about the internationalization of education, Altbach and Knight (2007) state that international students are recruited because they increase cultural understanding.

Also, international students bring financial benefits to U.S. institutions; according to NAFSA's economic value tool, international students have contributed \$32.8 billion to the US economy in the 2015-2016 academic year (NAFSA, 2017). International students not only pay full tuition, usually financed personally because of lack of financial aid, but they also purchase necessities throughout their time living here, contributing to the economy (Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner, & Nelson, 1999). Altbach and Knight (2007) state that an added benefit to having international students is their willingness to take on research assistant positions for modest compensation on campuses in the United States. Peterson et al. (1999) agree that international students provide a pool of teaching assistants on college campuses because many domestic students find work elsewhere, outside of the college/university. Peterson et al. (1999) also stated that these students usually return home and do well for themselves, becoming "political and economic leaders, with fond memories of Americans and their alma maters" (p. 68). These are just a few of the benefits of having international students on American college campuses.

Universities want international students to continue to attend their institutions. Therefore, it is important to understand the challenges this population faces when transitioning to and attending school here in the United States.

Challenges International Students Face

International students face many of the same struggles as any of their domestic counterparts, such as time management, adjusting to college academic work, and living in a new environment. However, international students also have added obstacles when attending school in a new country, such as language and cultural barriers, which contribute to and multiply these typical obstacles university students face. Universities should understand what challenges these particular students face to better support international student experience at the institution.

Language barriers. For many international students, English is not their native or first language (Pathirage et al., 2014). Because of this, adjusting to a new language can be difficult. Many studies have shown that language is one of the largest barriers for international students studying in the United States. Hartshorne and Baucom (2007) conducted interviews with international graduate students to more fully understand their experiences at an institution in the United States and found that communication was an initial barrier that slowly improved but continued throughout their experiences. More specifically, “characteristics such as tone, context, and sense of humor often led to misunderstandings” (Hartshorne & Baucom, 2007, p. 82). Gartman (2016), in a study interviewing international students to determine the common challenges facing this population, also found that communication was an issue for international students. Students reported feeling as if they were unable to express themselves fully in certain

situations which made social interactions awkward and hindered their academic work. After interviewing international students to learn the experiences of Asian exchange students and how they interpret these experiences, Sato and Hodge (2015) found that language was one of three themes that these students struggled with most. Many of them expected to improve their English through friendships with students in the United States, and then in reality felt very “academically frustrated from mastering the academic contents using the limited English they learned” (Sato & Hodge, 2015, p. 82).

Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) conducted a survey of international students to determine the causes and coping mechanisms of academic stress and found that students who felt they had strong English skills had fewer academic stressors and could learn to cope more effectively than those with weaker English skills. In a study conducted to examine the experiences of international students and the challenges they face, Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) found that students had more struggles with spoken English over written English when studying in the United States. Lee and Rice (2007) conducted a survey of international students to assess goals, experiences, and satisfaction and found discrimination and hostility was more often directed at non-English speaking students. Many students who never experienced this type of discrimination before struggled with this different treatment in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007). Overall, the lack of confidence and proficiency in the English language is a huge barrier for international students because it can create difficulties in social interactions and stifles students in their ability to communicate.

Cultural barriers. Outside of language, many cultural barriers exist for international students that can hinder their experience in the United States. Culture shock

is something many students face when moving from one culture to another. Oberg (1960) describes culture shock as being in a strange culture where all “familiar cues are removed” (p. 177). Sato and Hodge (2015) also found that academic struggles were commonly related to cultural differences. Another cultural difference found was the way in which professors teach (Sato & Hodge, 2015). Using qualitative research to learn from the perspectives of international students, Gebhard (2012) found through interviews that international students struggled to switch from one culture to the next, which took an emotional toll on them. Many said daily activities had different rules in the United States and it was hard to keep up. This caused feelings of depression and homesickness. Similarly, Hartshorne and Baucom (2007) found that cultural differences lead to homesickness and made it difficult to interact because social cues were often different than those found in the student’s home country.

Gartman’s (2016) study, also based on student interviews, found that in addition to language barriers, cultural differences also caused obstacles for international students. International students found Americans to be “individualistic and distant” (Gartman, 2016, p. 3), making it hard to connect. In their survey, Sherry et al. (2010) found that learning a new culture was difficult but being misunderstood by American students was also an unexpected barrier. Many indicated that their friends were “limited to other international students” (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 40), meaning that the sharing of knowledge and interaction was not dispersed to domestic students in a social setting.

Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) conducted focus groups to determine what international student needs were not being met at institutions in the United States and found that a lack of connection with American students acted as a barrier to a positive

experience and suggested institutions work to create stronger bonds between the two populations. After a review of the literature and current practices, Özturgut and Murphy (2009) stated that the root issue within these cultural barriers is the lack of understanding between the cultures and they suggest creating a “deeper understanding of the particularities” (p. 382). If institutions and domestic students were to create stronger bonds with international students, many of the cultural differences would no longer serve as barriers, but rather as connected experiences to be shared with one another.

Expectations of International Students

International students have expectations for their experiences before they come to school in the United States. However, many of these expectations are unmet, creating violations. Minchew and Couvillion (2005) conducted a study asking international and domestic students about their home and university experiences. They then asked about the expectations each group had about the other group and found that “[international students] are unfamiliar with both American customs and American university life” (para. 1). It was found that expectations were explicitly created for maturity and independence, academic preparedness, and friendliness (Minchew & Couvillion, 2005). However, it could be suggested that expectations were created for other areas of home and university life—these were just the most consciously recognized expectations. Minchew and Couvillion (2005) suggest that cultural knowledge should be given to students planning to study in the United States as to properly prepare them for their experience. If students are more adequately prepared for university life in the United States, they will have a better understanding of the culture when they arrive. This study hopes to expand on these

findings, therefore improving the tactics of recruitment and retention of international students.

Summary

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT) is a lens in which researchers can analyze the experiences of international students at American institutions. EVT was first introduced by Burgoon in 1978 to analyze proxemics in communication. This study is using EVT to explore the expectations international students have of their experiences in the United States. International students study abroad in the United States for a variety of reasons such as academic prestige or campus life (International Student, 2017; Sánchez et al., 2006; Turner, 2015; Vioreanu, 2016). They are beneficial to institutions of higher education because of their academic endeavors, diverse perspectives, and financial additions (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Barnes, 1991; Bevis, 2002; Peterson et al., 1999). In addition to the traditional issues college students face, international students also face additional obstacles compared to their domestic counterparts. Two of the most common barriers are language and cultural differences. Gartman (2016) discussed in detail the barriers due to language and cultural differences for international students. Hartshorne and Baucom (2007) discussed how language and cultural barriers can be initial obstacles that continue throughout the duration of the experience, while Sato and Hodge (2015) found themes related to language and culture that can hinder international students academically.

These barriers should be carefully considered, and universities should work to improve the experience for international students. Some of these barriers are due to miscalculated expectations related to language, culture, and social interactions for the

experience international students receive in the United States. Regarding expectations, international students create expectations for their experience prior to coming to the United States. Minchew and Couvillion (2005) determined many expectations created by international students through a self-reported survey about university and home life, and they suggest that international students would benefit from being more culturally educated. More cultural education would allow international students to more accurately understand the reality of life in the United States. Understanding the expectations international students create for their experience could help universities better support international students and improve their overall experience.

Conclusion

Expectancy Violations Theory is an interpersonal communication theory that explores the expectations of an interaction, the violations that may occur, and how those violations can affect the outcome of the interaction (Burgoon, 2016). International students matter immensely to universities; however, they face special challenges that need to be addressed. Some of these challenges relate to their expectations of university life and what they will experience when attending school in the United States.

Currently, there is very little literature about international students' expectations of their experiences in the United States. There is also a lack of literature in the field of communication studies on international students as related to Expectancy Violations Theory. This study begins to fill that gap by exploring the expectations international students had before coming to a university in the United States, whether or not these expectations were met, and how the violations have affected their experience. Although

EVT is an interpersonal theory, this study's assumption is that an institution can interact with an international student like media-formed interactions between individuals.

Chapter 3: Research Design

Introduction

Using Expectancy Violations Theory, this study explores the experiences of international students at an American university. It is proposed that international students have expectations for their experience and that they face violations of these expectations. This research study is qualitative in nature and involves a series of interviews conducted by the researcher. Through one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with these students, data was collected about expectation violations and the experience of international students. In this chapter, a description of the participants and instruments is given, followed by the methods utilized for collecting and analyzing data.

Participants

A convenience sample was convened. A convenience sample is a type of purposive sampling technique which is defined by its accessibility (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015). The potential participants are easily accessible to the researcher. The number of participants was 6 international students studying in the United States for the first time. They are current students at the research institution and are between 18-20 years old, but this was not a criterion for participation. The study has a diverse sample. Due to the in-depth, detail-oriented nature of qualitative research, a smaller sample is ideal for conducting face-to-face, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), small sample sizes are best for in-depth research that includes building relationships with participants. Also, because this research is qualitative, the data will not be generalizable and therefore a large sample is not required. This qualitative research may serve as a foundation for more research in the future.

Lastly, the small sample size allows the researcher to interview each participant twice within one semester.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited via email. An initial email was sent from the University International Center (UIC) as an addition to other announcements being made prior to the students arriving. The UIC communicates with international students all the way up to their arrival and throughout their time in the United States. The blurb included in the UIC's email briefly described the research study and provided contact information for the researcher (see Appendix A). Those who reached out to the researcher were considered for the research study; communication following this initial email came directly from the researcher.

The researcher determined 6 participants from the pool of volunteers. The initial principle for choosing participants was first-come-first-serve, meaning the first international students to reach out to the researcher were invited to participate in the study.

Research Site and Consent Process

A medium-sized Midwestern university served as the research site. The interviews took place in a rented space in the university library. There are study rooms available for students to use, and the researcher secured the locations prior to the interviews. This space was chosen due to the ability to rent the space, the comfort, intimacy, and privacy in the small, six-seater conference-style room. Interviewees were asked to give a pseudonym at the start of the interview to protect privacy.

Consent was gained from each participant through a signed Informed Consent Forms (see Appendix D). Because the document is in English and could have pose issues with comprehension, the researcher also read the consent form and explained the process of the study orally to each participant. To give participants ample time to read and make note of any questions for discussion and/or clarification, the researcher emailed a copy of the Consent Form once the interview had been scheduled. On the day of the interview, the researcher orally discussed the Consent Form and explain participants' rights. Participants who gave consent were asked to sign the Consent Form. Students were given a blank copy of the Consent Form to keep for their records.

Voluntary participation and withdrawal was made explicit, orally and written on the Consent Form. The researcher orally discussed voluntary participation and withdrawal. The Consent Form included a statement that declares students exercising their rights to decline or withdraw further participation will not face penalty nor will their decision change any present or future relationship with the University or its affiliates, or other services the student is entitled to receive. Students were encouraged to ask questions.

Potential Risks and Benefits

There was low or minimal risk, meaning the research would not harm participants more than everyday activities could. There were no immediate benefits to participants. The benefits to society include increased knowledge on the international student population and improved practice in the field of student affairs as it relates to international students.

Instrumentation

The main instrument in this study was the researcher. This study included face-to-face interviews with participants. Interviewing was the chosen method because this study is meant to understand the experiences of international students more deeply, and face-to-face, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to guide the conversation. In a comparison of four types of interviews, Opdenakker (2006) said face-to-face interviews are synchronous, making them the most advantageous to social cues. According to Gill et al. (2008), semi-structured interviews differ from both structured and unstructured because the researcher has a list of main points they would like to focus on—therefore allowing for some structure in case the participant is not talkative—but the flexibility to pursue an idea allows for the discovery of information that would not necessarily have been exposed with structured questions.

Two thirty-minute interviews were conducted; having two interviews is due to the differing nature of questions asked in both interviews. The first interview consisted of questions about the participant's expectations for their experience—what they expected before arriving, how they created those expectations, etc. The second interview took place later in the semester and consisted of questions about the participant's experience, violations of expectations, and how these violations have impacted their experience. All interviews were conducted by the researcher in English. The interview protocols are included as Appendices B and C and have been reviewed by experts in the field to ensure their validity.

Data Collection

The interviews were approximately 30-60 minutes in length and were conducted in early in the first semester and again in mid-December. Participants were asked to participate in two interviews (1st interview = 30 minutes; 2nd interview = 30 minutes), which brings their total participation time to 60 minutes. The interview protocols are included in Appendices B and C. The interviews were semi-structured; questions had been planned and prepared, but the researcher was able to ask tangential/probative questions as necessary.

Data Security

Data in this research study was treated as confidential and only the researcher and thesis Chair had access to confidential information. Once all interviews had been completed, any identifying information such as contact information was destroyed. From the administration of the first interview, it was estimated that the final interview would be completed in 10 weeks. Data was stored on a university issued computer, encrypted and saved to a departmental drive as it is the most secure method of data storage for sensitive data. Interviews were conducted in a safe, private campus facility conducive to audio-recording. Participants were addressed by pseudonym. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The files were password protected, encrypted, and downloaded to a password protected university secure computer used by the researcher at the conclusion of each interview. Only the researcher and thesis Chair knew the passwords necessary to access the files. All collected data was stored in an encrypted, password-locked file on the researcher's password-protected computer. Only the researcher had access to the data. Transcripts generated were kept on a password-protected computer to

which only the researcher had access. The only data collected in the form of a hard copy was the Informed Consent forms. These were immediately scanned and uploaded to the password-protected computer. The originals were kept in a separate location and maintained for the mandated length of three years. The researcher complied with all federal requirements for safeguarding data and human subjects' protection.

Data Analysis

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. After transcription, each interview was coded and analyzed for themes or patterns. The data collected allowed the researcher to answer how international students' expectations are violated when attending an American institution for the first time and how these violations—or lack thereof—affect the experiences of these students. Data collected reflected the expectations of international students and how those expectations were or were not met when attending an American institution. After the audio-recorded interviews were conducted, they were transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were summarized and then analyzed first for broad and then narrower themes, patterns, and trends. According to Charmaz (2006), coding is the process of labeling a fragment of data in order to categorize, and it is the first step in the analysis. Charmaz (2006) describes the coding process as two phases: initial coding, and focused coding. In the initial coding stage, the researcher will name each segment of data with the goal of “remaining open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the readings” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 61). In focused coding, initial codes are combined to organize the large amount of data to a simple few themes. Typically, frequency and importance of initial codes lends towards the categories in focused coding (Charmaz, 2006). Fraenkel et al. (2015) also describes the coding process

as defining relevant patterns and screening the data for these patterns, then combining these patterns into larger themes that will be discussed. Then the researcher can then count the frequency of each pattern and theme. The researcher used member checking to ensure validity by asking participants to review the themes found in the data. Validity was also established by situating the data within the Expectancy Violations Theory framework and the extant literature regarding the experiences of international students.

Summary

The research study consisted of two, thirty-minute interviews conducted by the researcher in a private room. Participants were first asked about their expectations coming into their first semester in the United States, and then later were asked to share about their experiences. The researcher transcribed the interviews and analyzed for patterns among the expectations and experiences of the international students.

Chapter Four: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of this study are presented and analyzed. The three (3) research questions this study sought to answer are as follows:

RQ1: What expectations are international students creating for their experience at an institution of higher education?

RQ2: How are international students' expectations violated when attending an American institution for the first time?

RQ3: How do these violations—or lack thereof—influence their experiences at an institution?

This chapter will discuss the demographic information of the participants, as well as the context in which the study was conducted. The results from the study are presented and then analyzed.

Context

This study was conducted at a predominantly White institution in the Midwestern region of the United States. This institution hosts over 300 international students a year from a plethora of countries. A total of six (6) international students responded to the invitation to participate in the study. Of the participants, two (2) participated in only one interview due to scheduling. During the interview, demographic information was asked such as pseudonym, home country, and length of stay. Demographic information is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Profile

<i>Demographic Information</i>		
<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Home Country</i>	<i>Length of Stay</i>
Alex	Mexico	Duration of Undergraduate Program
Gabrielle	France	One Semester
Hope*	Algeria	One Semester
James	China	Duration of Graduate Program
Mark	Romania	One Year
Victoria*	India	Duration of Graduate Program

*Indicates this international student only participated in one interview due to scheduling

Participants were asked to attend two, 30-minute long, semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were centered around students' expectations prior to arriving to the United States, and how those expectations affected their experiences. In the first interview, participants were asked about their perception of the institution and American higher education before arriving to the United States, why they wanted to attend school in the United States, and their expectations prior to arriving versus their expectations for the rest of the semester. In the second interview, participants were asked about their successes and challenges in their first semester, and then the experiences from their first interview were discussed. Participants were then asked how they would rate their overall experience, with positive and negative being the two options. Interview protocols can be found in Appendix B and C.

Participants were very different from one another, and their experiences showed that throughout the interviews, although many of them shared similarities. Alex is a first-year student at the institution and attended a boarding school in the United States prior to college. He moved from Mexico as a sophomore in high school by himself but is well connected to the international office because he is not a citizen of the United States. Gabrielle is in her third year of university and attends an institution back home in France. She is required by her institution to study abroad in her third year. Hope has always wanted to study in the United States and has been engulfed in American culture for some time now. She has many American friends from social media and is hoping to come back to do her graduate studies. James studied English at the institution for a bit of time and then decided to do his graduate studies in the United States because it requires him to practice his language skills, especially in speaking. He is in the second semester of his graduate program. Mark is a business major studying in the United States for a year but would like to come back eventually to complete his MBA. He has been interested in American culture, especially surrounding business, since he was a child. Finally, Victoria is in her first semester as a graduate student in the United States; she completed her Bachelor's degree in her home country, India, and wanted to study in the US because of the advanced academics in her field. These students, each on a different path in their education, participated in the study and provided valuable information about expectations and experiences as international students in the United States.

Findings

Expectations Created by International Students

The first research question addressed in this study was: What expectations are international students creating for their experience at an institution of higher education? It was found that participants did in fact have expectations for their experience at an institution of higher education in the United States. There were four themes found that provide an overview of the expectations created for their experiences: (1) academics, (2) relationships, (3) culture, and (4) lifestyle. These themes were developed by grouping together common codes found from each individual interview. These codes were created when shared experiences were found between participants, and these shared experiences were then grouped together to arrive at the main themes.

Some of the expectations created by participants were conscious and known to them, others were unconscious and were only realized after having been in the United States and been surprised by something. Either way, these expectations were proven to have been generated prior to arrival; frequently, it was noticed that an expectation was created based on the experience the student had at home. In other words, these expectations most often reflected comparisons to the ways of their home country. The following sections will dive further into analyzing each of these themes regarding expectations created by participants.

Academic expectations. All the participants mentioned their expectations for academics in the United States during their interviews. During the first interview, expectations varied: participants mentioned the increased difficulty of their workload, alluded to the difference in teaching styles between their country and the United States,

and discussed the amount of work they had to complete compared to at home. Most, if not all, participants mentioned wanting “good grades” at the end of their first semester.

Desire for “good” grades. Even though participants at the beginning of the semester said they wanted good grades, this does not mean they expected to receive good grades. The desire for something does not mean the expectation for it to happen exists. However, those who had a second interview towards the end of the semester suggested that they *did* expect good grades after most of the semester had passed. James began his second interview stating that he didn’t know the exact status of his grades, but that he felt good about them. He stated, “So far so good, I have finished my first semester, according to my feeling, I, I think the final grade will be good so I think it’s good, it’s good for me.” Gabrielle also started her second interview stating that she has good grades, and that she expects all of her grades to come out high. She was unsure of the exact grades, but felt confident:

I have good grades; in one of my class[es], I have very good grades. No, I mean, like in two of my classes I don’t have the grade for the moment. Weird but, so I don’t really, I think I will be—it will be great. And I don’t—I’m not sure what to expect. But in my two other classes I, [expect] good grades to happen.

This shows the expectation for good grades that James and Gabrielle created after experiencing most of the semester.

Not all participants felt as if they had succeeded academically during their semester in the United States. Mark admitted to not attending all of his classes and missing points based on in-class assignments, which caused his grades to suffer:

That's pretty much because I—like, the computer science, which I didn't go to so, like I skipped classes because I thought it was super easy, and then I didn't—I didn't, I knew there were supposed to be some points for participation and like the attendance, apparently like 75 points or so—80 points.

During Mark's first interview, he stated that he expected to have more success in classes; but by his second interview he realized that he had poorer grades than he expected because he didn't put in the effort to succeed:

I actually was expecting to do much better in class, like results. Because every single class I go to it seems like I'm the best in there. Like I know the answer and stuff like that, it's just I'm not diligent enough with my work. Like, I had Finance and I didn't go to Finance because I don't know why.

Well academically, I guess, I—I didn't, I per—I performed not so poorly for my standards but like, I guess, like medium-level or something for like regular, I don't know. But I didn't actually like—put in the effort.

Mark's expectation to do well was violated, but he realized he could have put in more effort and met those expectations. The unconscious expectation was either that Mark could get good grades without putting in much effort, or that Mark would desire to put more effort into the class. The violation seems negatively valenced, due to Mark's dissatisfaction with his grade, but he understands and takes responsibility for the violation, making it less effective on his overall experience. The desire for good grades was shared by many participants, but not all expectations were met in this area.

Difficulty of the workload. When it came to increased difficulty of their work, Alex cited his major as the biggest challenge he faced. He also clearly stated in his first

interview that he expected the semester to get harder. Alex shared, "... it gets harder, gradually, so I expect to be—get harder every year, but also my level of understanding will be greater as time goes on. So, it will be challenging up to a point and then I'll get the hang of it." In his second interview, Alex revisited the difficulty of this semester, with some surprise:

It was a lot harder than I thought it would be... Yeah, I mean, they did get easier to a point. I did a lot better in the classes that I put the most effort into, but at the same time they got easier the harder I studied, I guess. Studying takes a lot, but it does pay off.

Alex learned to cope with the difficulty of the workload, but it was a violation of his expectations.

Differences from home. Most of the participants mentioned a difference in teaching or learning style from their home country. Gabrielle said classes here are structured more similarly to high school classes in France rather than higher education:

So in France, we have only midterms and final exams. So midterms are usually 40% of the grade and finals 60% of the grade, so we don't have a lot of homework, like a lot of stuff to submit, usually it's like we have to work on our own, so we come to class usually the teacher talks about the PowerPoint, we have to take—to write what he says. And after we have really to work on our own, and here, like, it's like when I was in high school we had homework to do every week, most of my classes I had like, one chapter to read every week.

Other participants mentioned ways in which classes were different than back home.

James said there is more discussion that occurs during class in the United States than in

China, “but it’s a little bit different, there’s a lot of discussing in the classroom, that’s a difference.” Victoria mentioned the style of education being different and how it was a barrier to change from one system to another after a lifetime of learning:

The pattern of education I must say, not the level, but the pattern of education—which is quite different where I come from so—it’s like I have studied in the different kind of setting for 24 years and now I’m here in a completely different setting.

The frequency of comparing school in the United States to school back home makes it seem like the expectation was for school to be similar in both countries, but actually most participants understood that the style of education would be different than classes at home.

Although it’s not the same, Gabrielle stated that she likes the way classes are taught here more because it’s more efficient. She commented that “[her] low class was one of my favorite because I think that when you read it when you learn, like you learn on your own, and after, when you go to class, you can discuss with teacher and it’s like more constructive.” Another difference Gabrielle identified is the amount of stress relieved from not basing the semester’s grade on two exams. She feels less stressed about her grades in the United States because of the structure of courses:

We have only a midterm exam and final exam in France so it’s like 30% and 70% something like that, so it’s really stressful. And here, like, since I’m here I feel very, like, relaxed. Because I have a lot of work but it’s, like...so it’s okay and you have—when you have a grade it’s like 10% or 7% so if you fail to something, like it’s okay. Yeah, so I think, like, the school system here is less stressful.

The comparison to home was found in many interviews with participants, but most seemed to adapt to the style of education in the United States, and some preferred it to their home institution.

Reasons for attending. Participants often referred to academic expectations before listing any other forms of expectations. It can be inferred that international students find their academics to be their priority when studying in the United States, which is why they mentioned these expectations first. When listing reasons for attending school in the United States, most of the participants referred to America as producing the best in a given field of study or having the best system of education. James knew America had the best to offer in his field. He remarked, “I’m in Computer Information but I’d like to be a Data Scientist, so in this field of science, America is the best, so that’s why I come to here.” Victoria echoed this sentiment:

The main reason was since my major was biotechnology, and I had decided to study biostatistics—which is like the hard or integral part of any biological sciences—and the United States is known for its advanced academic learning in the field of science and technology, on par with other, um, countries, so that’s the reason I chose.

Some of the participants had known they wanted to come to the United States for school for some time prior to arriving. Hope mentioned how academics steered her towards the United States and that she’s always known she would come to America:

I wanted to come here because I knew the education, like, education was really way better here than other countries, so I just wanted to come here so I can like,

improve—improve and increase my knowledge, and I’ve been wanting this since forever.

All of the participants mentioned academic expectations of their experience in the United States, and the expectations varied between participants. It can be assumed that the initial purpose of attending an institution of higher education in the United States is to obtain an education, which might be a justification for the frequency of academic expectations.

Relationship expectations. All of the participants discussed interactions with others and relationships while in the United States. Some participants had conscious expectations for their relationships in the United States, while others were surprised by the types of their interactions, perhaps reflecting unconscious expectations for relationships. One expectation some of the participants carried was one of false politeness or insincerity from Americans.

False politeness. Gabrielle developed this belief of false politeness from her mother, and experienced it firsthand:

[My mother] told me that, like her feeling that American people are very nice, but it’s like, um, I don’t know, it’s [a] superficial relationship. Like usually they are very nice, but you don’t, like, keep in touch. People were very nice with me, but it was only like, they talked to me during like five minutes and after that’s over.

I feel like it’s really superficial but it’s more like they, they say a lot of stuff, but they don’t do it.

Mark had also learned of this perceived American habit prior to coming to the United States and found that this expectation was indeed met. He read about an example of this “false politeness” in an article:

I read in an article about Chrysler—the failed partnership between Daimler and Chrysler—saying that it—so when they actually merged, like the Germans did some trainings—like cultural training for American and vice versa, and they were—the Germans were—told that Americans, so if you go to America and someone says that, “Okay, you can come over sometimes,” it doesn’t actually mean that you go there.

Gabrielle said this insincerity made it difficult to make friends because she had to put in more effort:

I think like, you have to make a lot of effort because for example, my manager at the beginning she told me, “Oh we can see each other during [the] weekend” but she just say that, and if I wasn’t like, “Okay, we should be like, let’s plan something” so that’s what I did and finally we saw—like we organized something but otherwise it’s just like telling, “We should see each other” but nothing happens.

This phenomenon was found in some participants’ experiences, but not all participants encountered this false politeness. It seemed to hinder relationship building, but it did not make it impossible to make friends.

Difficulty making friends. Gabrielle also mentioned it was difficult to make friends in classes because everybody is quiet in class and they don’t all have class together:

People were very quiet compared to France, so nobody talked, and I was like, “Okay, I’m not going to make friends.” I think that the three first weeks were

quite difficult because I didn't know anybody...[classmates] don't speak, and they leave and, that's over, and so it's harder to have a more contact with them.

Other participants also expressed having a difficult time making friends. Victoria, at the time of her interview, was still struggling with making friends and creating connections. She commented that, “[she] still find it really tough to like approach people and make good friends. [That attitude] is kind of pulling me down, um, yeah, but I'm trying.”

Victoria also mentioned having conscious expectations of making friends in the United States:

I did think that I'd make really good friends here. I did think that people would be really good—I mean, they are good but, I really thought they would be much more warmer and much more, um, uh, what do you say, because I come from a country where people are really united and bonded together, so I kind of expected the same, but that really didn't work.

This expectation was a comparison from her home country, India, meaning she thought people would be more like they are at home, so making friends would not be difficult.

This correlates to Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Dimensions, specifically individualism versus collectivism. India is a collectivistic culture, meaning the group is seen as priority rather than the individual, which is the priority in the United States, an individualistic culture. This expectation was violated, and it seems to have a negative valence due to Victoria's continued concern with making friends.

Mark didn't think it was necessary to make friends, but he tried anyway at the beginning of the semester. He started by dating an American girl. Mark said, “I don't have this urge to like, have a lot of friends... so when I got here the first two things I did,

a girl—an American girl—I don't know if you guys would call it dating I just told her we should hang out and stuff like that.” He later said he made friends, but he stopped hanging out with them because they all became busy. “I didn't actually dump them, but I, because everyone was, like they were, I don't know everybody was focused on their academic stuff and we stopped actually hanging out.” Making friends seemed to be a task many participants attempted, but some were less successful than they expected, creating a violation.

Making friends. During Mark's second interview, he mentioned that he made another friend, but this time the friend was another international student:

Now I like befriended this, this international guy I told you about...I didn't actually message him, we just, we just met like regularly in the past few like in the past two months...so that is how we ended up friends.

Other participants also stated that they had befriended other international students. Hope claims that most of her friends are international students and that “I have more international friends because we spend orientation weeks together, so I know everyone, but only internationals know everyone—we all know each other....” She added, “but I do have a lot of American friends as well.” James also made friends with both international students and domestic students. He met these friends in class, stating, “There are some international students, and two, uh, three of [them are] international students and two [are] American native speakers...All of them are very friendly and we know each other in the classroom.” Alex seemed very successful in making friends, both in and out of class, and he says they help one another when classes become difficult:

If you ask any of—whatever in my building, they'll tell you I know every single person in the building or around...I have a couple neighbors on my hallway that are in the same class I am, and we'll comment on classes and stuff and how everything is going, and we answer each other's questions and so on.

It seems as if having a relationship with peers is an expectation of international students, but some didn't consciously create this expectations prior to arriving. After interacting with Americans, some participants were surprised at the effort it took to make friends while others were quite successful.

Faculty and staff relationships. Relationship expectations were not just created for peers, however. Participants mentioned their faculty and staff relationships and the interactions they had. Mark was surprised by the faculty in his program because they were much more supportive than professors in Romania, which suggests that he had an expectation that U.S. faculty were similar to professors at home:

I even think that I had like the, the like some of the best professors...all of them have been really cool and supportive with what I—what I do in the future, and my ideas...I'm really impressed like they were really—for example in Romania I deal with bad professors all the time.

Gabrielle also compared her faculty members to the ones in France. She commented that, "...teachers here are really nice, like in France they are nice, but I think here they are more open to talk to. If you have problems you can send an email [and] they will be, like, they will respond very quickly and it's good. She even addressed the hierarchical differences in language in the United States as compared to France:

I don't know, in France we have a lot more of hierarchy I think, so like here when you address to people you say "you" to everybody, in France we have two ways to say "you." When it's teacher, we use the formal "you." And you are like, it's very different and there is more like distance between people [in France].

This difference in formality surprised Gabrielle, meaning she did not expect for it to occur. This may be due to the difference in another one of Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Dimensions—power distance. As Gabrielle describes her classroom setting, it is told that there is a power difference between students and professors. The United States is a low-power distanced culture, meaning hierarchy is not seen as formally as other countries. In this situation the expectation was positively violated. Other participants also felt very supported by their faculty. Victoria said her professor helped her obtain a graduate assistantship:

My professors are really helpful, and being an international student *and* a graduate student, I did apply for a few graduate assistantship positions, um, through which my professor has helped me like, like way ahead of my semesters to get into, uh, like, where I could get an opportunity to work and earn and support myself here. So, that was very encouraging.

Even though Victoria claimed she still struggles with interactions with peers, her professors have been very supportive, which is beneficial to her overall morale.

Staff members were also recognized as being supportive, even when that wasn't the expectation. Hope mentioned staff members in the international center as being kind and guiding when she remarked that, "[Staff member in the international center] is a

wonderful human being... She is, yeah, she is amazing.” Alex also gave the international center staff credit for his support and success:

Especially for international students, the international center, and they’ve been pretty helpful. They really help me at getting my social security card and being able to apply for a job here at [this institution], [it] has been really helpful from their side. And also, [a staff member in the international center], the international coordinator I think...[he’s] been pretty helpful. I talked to the international director...we created a relationship.

These relationships with faculty and staff may not have been expected, but most of the relationships with faculty and staff were described as positive and absolutely affected the experiences of the participants. This is an example of an expectation violation that is positively valenced: The expectation is that relationships with faculty and staff would not be outstanding or much different than at home, but the violation was that they were very supportive and caring, and this produced a positive valence because it was appreciated by participants.

All participants recognized their relationships with peers, faculty, and staff, and some had conscious expectations for these relationships. Some participants were surprised by these relationships, which suggests the creation of unconscious of expectations. It was found that some participants expected their relationships, specifically with faculty, to be similar to the faculty-students relationships that exist in their home country, which was not always the case.

Culture expectations. Most participants mentioned cultural differences in their interviews. The expectations for culture in the United States were both consciously and

unconsciously created. Some participants made broad statements concerning their cultural experiences in the United States. Victoria claimed the differences in culture created an added obstacle for international students:

I mean it's like, us international students, we are making the maximum effort to leave our country, to leave our homes, to leave our everything, and come here for a better life... There will be some consequences, there will be some problems that I just told you about, like the cultural differences or like making friends.

James realized that the differences in culture matter because we can't understand one another:

Everything we talk about is based on different experience[s], so that is different. So, I talk to you based on my experience, [and] the assumption is you know my background [and] then I know your background [when we don't], it seems different.

Difference in culture was a shared expectation among many participants, but some had more specific examples to share.

Communication. Participants were able to provide specific examples of differences in culture. Victoria stated that the United States seemed more individualistic than India. She commented that, "It's more of an individual approach here, where everybody is just bothered about themselves rather than, uh, you know, a combined thing." James shared that he thought other people considered his communication approach to be too abrasive:

Like my language, [when I discuss] with others I will point out what I want that—like um, how do you say? Eval—when I'm discussing. I will clearly say what I

want, directly, very directly, so sometimes people will feel [I am being] rude I guess.

Incidents with language were mentioned by participants. Gabrielle shared how her language affected her homework and the time it took to complete it. She stated, “It takes like more time because it’s not my [first] language...like at the beginning I was translating [words] that I didn’t understand, and at the end I was like, “Okay that’s fine I’m going to try to understand.” Gabrielle seemed surprised by the amount of time it took to complete homework, which perhaps reflects that she had created an expectation that homework would take the same amount of time even though it was not in her native language. James also had negative violations of his language expectations. He shared “It’s not as fast as I thought, I mean the language improvement, it’s still very slow...I think it was [going to happen naturally], but I’m wrong. I should take more time. It seems as if he expected his English would improve quickly as he was living in the United States, but it is not going as quickly as he expected, therefore creating a violation. It is clear that this is negatively valenced because he is unhappy about the results of his language improvement.

Food. Another expectation rooted in cultural differences that half of the participants mentioned was food. Victoria had conscious expectations concerning American food:

Food aspect, I’m not really disappointed because that varies from place to place, and I love to try different kinds of food so, it’s okay for me. I mean, I can try different food, but I do manage to buy Indian groceries, so I can cook myself. So

that's how I'm doing it but, um... Yeah that is the only concern, I mean food is never a concern for me.

She expected the food to be different, but she knew she could continue to cook familiar foods by buying groceries. James also claimed, during his second interview, that he used cooking as a way to cope with the difference in food, but his reaction in his first interview was negative as demonstrated when he stated, "I don't like food... It's too sweet.

I can cook, it's easy so, I, so that's why I adapted to it, it's very soon to finish dinner or lunch."

Gabrielle was very surprised by the food in the United States. She described food as an important factor in France, and that many interactions are centered around food. Her surprise was centered on Americans not eating with one another and rushing meals:

You have to experience how we see the eating moment in France, because it's really...it takes a lot of time and it's like, we spend a lot of time...It's like everything is around like food!

Even for like Thanksgiving—so I did two different Thanksgiving[s]. I went to my American-French family, and it was like traditional with the turkey and it was very good, and I went to my manager's house—it was also really good, it was like everyone brought different stuff...we put it on like a bar...like we ate in like 20 minutes. I mean like, wow it was so fast! And they were like, they just finished their place—their plates, and they were like...like at the end of the dinner, they really wanted to have dessert now and I was like, "Whoa," [because I was surprised].

The surprise in Gabrielle’s interview demonstrated that she had unconscious expectations that food and the experience of consuming it would be equally as important to Americans as it is to the French, but based upon her experiences, she determined that it was not.

Most of the participants had similar experiences with cultural differences and the expectations they carried. The expectations for culture were typically unconsciously created, and while many of the participants knew the culture of the United States would not be the exact same as their home culture, they were often surprised by the extent to which their experiences differed—the degree to which their expectations were violated.

Lifestyle expectations. Outside of academic, relationship, and cultural expectations, participants shared a number of expectations and experiences that related to their lifestyle in the United States. These expectations, like many of the others, were not always consciously created prior to arrival.

Employment and finances. One category of expectations that multiple participants mentioned was that of employment or finances. Participants mentioned wanting a job or graduate assistantship. James said he wasn’t allowed to apply for paid positions until after his first semester:

I take—because this is my first year, my—how do you say? My advisor didn’t allow me to work around outside, so I’m still taking the unpaid internship in downtown. Yeah, it’s not paid because our international student[s] [are] not allowed to work outside in first semester.

However, Victoria was allowed to get a graduate assistantship “work[ing] at the data inquiry lab as a graduate assistant.” Alex also received an on-campus job, but he had not expected to apply for it, let alone actually obtain the position. However, Alex said he

needed the job because he was struggling to pay for school. Other participants mentioned that they actually wouldn't be able to pay for school if it hadn't been for the program that sent them to the United States. Hope was one of these students:

I knew that this was going to be a one in a lifetime experience, because since it's fully funded, then I might never be able to actually afford it, in the near future, maybe even in the far future, but um, I thought it was going to be a lifetime experience and I just—I didn't want to, I didn't want to miss out on it.

Mark also participated in a program that paid for everything, stating “[My program] paid the entire tuition and they also paid, they also gave me like uh, €650 a month, which is like \$800—almost \$800 a month I guess. So, it was like the perfect opportunity.”

While not all of the participants mentioned expectations related to finances or jobs, a few did discuss it as being an issue. Alex was the only one surprised at getting a job, which suggested he had the expectation that he would not receive a job. Others didn't express clear expectations, conscious or unconscious, about their finances.

However, Hope did mention her surprise at the cost of housing:

Plus, here it's really expensive, so I was really shocked because I thought that dorms might be free or less expensive—yeah, but I found out it's like really, really expensive especially with my roommates talking about next year and all that, that was—that was pretty surprising.

Financial struggles were shared among some participants, and the expectations were found to be typically violated, whether positively or negatively.

Weather and sleep. Other lifestyle expectations were mentioned by participants throughout their interviews. Both Gabrielle and Mark mentioned weather, with Mark expecting the weather to be similar to the weather in Romania:

I was expecting the climate exactly the way it is home, back home. It's like uh, continental temperate climate and stuff like that.

So we have like the same...temperate, like continental, which means we're mainla—inland or something, or not at a coast.

Alex discussed another expectation related to lifestyle, that of getting up in the morning:

I was more of a morning person in high school. College is a little harder to wake up to.

When I had my orientation, I mean, when I had my orientation...I was making my schedule I was like, "Oh yeah I'm going to go with all the morning classes," and I still do think that morning classes and getting done by 3, 4pm is great, I mean, you get the whole afternoon for yourself, I thought—I still think it's a good schedule but it's just hard.

The expectation Alex carried was that he could still wake up in the morning like he did in high school, but his actual experience was different than that and therefore this expectation was violated. It is clear this violation is negative because it is harder than he expected.

Transportation. There were also many comments made about travel or transportation by many participants. James said it is hard for international students to get around without a car, stating "I have to drive to—I have to buy a car to drive to

everywhere. I can't walk or take the public [transportation]." Gabrielle also mentioned it being difficult to get around without a car:

I think it's quite difficult here when you don't have a car, especially for—like for example like when I'll have to take my plane in December, like I was, like I don't know how—I think I will have to take an Uber. But usually it's like difficult to go to one place to another. I think everybody is so far from everything... Like everything is really far and it's—it's hard for international student without car to go to another place than this.

Alex also mentioned transportation, but he had a different than those of James and Gabrielle:

It's fun that the school offers the shuttle systems, so that makes it a lot easier not having a car whereas in high school if I wanted to go anywhere I had to just suppress myself to work with someone else... I mean I've kind of just learned how to learn to live without it... it's a very expensive method of transportation, whereas in this case [the institution's] bus is free.

While it wasn't explicitly stated, each of these students had expectations for transportation in the United States. James and Gabrielle were expecting to be able to get around more easily, and when it was hard to get around, their expectations were negatively violated. Alex, on the other hand, already knew what life without a car was like, and therefore his expectations were more positively violated by the school shuttle system because it was better than expected.

There were many expectations related to lifestyle. These expectations were usually more unconsciously created, and therefore only mentioned when violated.

Lifestyle expectations were typically centered around salient topics in the student's day-to-day life such as making money, getting up in the morning, and transportation.

Creation of Expectations Prior to Arrival

The second research question this study aimed to answer was how are international students' expectations violated when attending an American institution for the first time? Before addressing the ways in which expectations were violated, ways in which expectations were created must first be explored. During their interviews, participants shared what research they did—if any—prior to their arrival. These typically fell within two categories: online research and information provided by other people.

Using the internet to create expectations. When doing their research on the United States and their specific institution, most of the participants did some form of online research. Gabrielle stated that her home institution had a profile for other schools that is a "...wall page about like [the institution], like each university they explain what we have to do and everything, so I also had to look at that and that's all." James did his own online researching, although he admits to not researching deeply. Victoria also did her own online researching because she was so far away and couldn't use any other form of information:

It was all on my own research that I got to know about [the institution], through Google, and um, yes that is how I came to know, because being so far from the country from the other part of the world there is no other way that I come to know about this university.

While Mark said he didn't conduct any formal research on the institution, he had been following American culture for quite some time before coming to school in the United States:

You know I've always been like, you know, super interested by the American culture. Like I know every American state and its capital and its largest cities...I mean actually my first encounter with the, with like, the American culture was when I actually read the Forbes magazine when I was, uh, 7 years old.

These early exposures to American culture helped create expectations for Mark. Another participant that loves American culture and used the internet to learn about it is Hope. Hope followed American culture on social media, as well as in print and on TV. She remarked that she's "...been following up through social media, through TV shows, and like, I have a—I had a lot of American friends online, uh, through social media before I came here.

Using the knowledge of others to create expectations. Hope's expectations were often established through social media, but more specifically by the relationships she created online. The other format of receiving information about the United States was gathering that information from other people. Hope's online friends gave her an inside perspective of American culture so that "It wasn't really a shock to me because I already knew what I was coming into, because my friends told me." Hope's expectations were more accurate than others because she was told what to expect, making it less likely that her expectations were violated. Gabrielle also obtained information from other people:

Some people told me that it was much personal work, but like easier to have good grades than France. My mother came in the United States for her study also but it

was in San Francisco... She told me that, like her feeling that American people are very nice, but it's like, um, I don't know, it's superficial relationship.

People already told me that it was very different the relationship with teachers, so I knew that it was different from my country.

This information provided by other people gave—more often than not—a more accurate representation than information found online, which allowed for expectations to be met rather than violated. Not all information provided by people was accurate, however. Alex was surprised by his relationship with his roommate because it turned out *differently* than how people warned him it would:

Something that I am surprised about is I was able to get along with my roommate... a lot of people say don't room with someone you know because you're going to end up hating them, but in my case my roommate and I are very close, so we've gotten along very, very well.

Expectations based on information gathered via online research or being told by others were typically the expectations that were met. Expectations that were violated were usually not based on prior research of the institution or learned from other people, but rather created otherwise. To answer the research question, participants' expectations were violated differently based on their experiences. Participants typically had many violations of expectations, but it was unclear how to determine these violations prior to them occurring. The data suggests that international students attending a U.S. post-secondary institution cannot fully generate their expectations because they can't predict the experience they will have.

Violations Influence on International Student Experience

The third research question asked how do these violations—or lack thereof— influence international students' experiences at an institution? The violations experienced by participants were both positively and negatively valenced, influencing their experiences appropriately. An example of a situation that was valenced differently for different participants is transportation in the United States. Some participants expected to have an easier time getting around outside of the institution, but they found it was much more difficult to get around than expected. However, another participant already knew what life was like without a vehicle, so when the institution provided a free shuttle from school, his expectations were violated, but they were positively valenced.

The overall experience by all participants in their second interview was rated as positive. Unfortunately, two participants were only able to participate in one interview but Hope in her initial interview described her experiences as overall positive. Victoria didn't give much indication as to whether her overall experience has been positive or negative. This means that even though participants experienced negative violations of their expectations, these negative experiences did not tarnish their overall experience.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study were presented and analyzed. The research questions were addressed. It was found that there are four themes of expectations created by international students: 1) academics, 2) relationship, 3) culture, and 4) lifestyle. In the academic expectations, many students expected good grades and experienced violations in the area of classroom dynamics. It is assumed that these expectations were mentioned first because the main purpose for attending school in the

United States is to receive a degree. A salient topic in relationship expectations was that of false politeness, in which international students found that Americans portray a false politeness that makes initiating friendships difficult. Culture and lifestyle expectations varied from participant to participant.

These expectations were either consciously or unconsciously formed, and they were either met or violated. The violations found depended on the participants' experiences but were either positively or negatively valenced. The overall experience of most participants was positive, even though all participants experienced negative violations of expectations at some point.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Summary of Study

International students face particular barriers to success in their first semester in the United States, in addition to the obstacles facing all first-year students in higher education. This study posed that these additional barriers could be related to international students' expectations of their experiences in the United States and the possible violations of said expectations. After reviewing Burgoon's (1978) Expectancy Violations Theory, a theory in the field of communication studies that views expectations in interpersonal relationships, it was proposed that international students face similar experiences in their relationships at an institution of higher education in the United States. This study sought to determine the expectations that international students create, how these expectations have been met or violated, and how these expectations affect their experiences in their first semester at an institution in the United States. The research questions of this study are as follows:

RQ1: What expectations are international students creating for their experience at an institution of higher education in the United States?

RQ2: How are international students' expectations violated when attending an American institution for the first time?

RQ3: How do these violations—or lack thereof—influence their experiences at the institution?

Based on the Expectancy Violations Theory literature, it is proposed that international students will face violations of their expectations. For expectations that are positively violated—meaning the violation is better than what was expected—it is proposed that the

experience will be labeled as positive. In the same fashion, expectations that are negatively violated—meaning the violation is worse than what was expected—it is proposed that the experience will be labeled as negative. The literature on international students suggests that violations will occur in language, culture, and social experiences.

The research study consisted of two, thirty-minute interviews; these interviews were semi-structured and were positioned a little over one month apart from one another. In the first interview, participants were asked to describe the expectations they had for their first semester in the United States. In the second interview, participants were asked to provide more details about their experiences and how their expectations played out in their first semester in the United States. Participants were then asked to rate their overall experience as positive or negative.

There were six participants that took part in the first-round interview. Four participants took part in the second-round interview; two participants could not partake in the second interview due to scheduling issues. Four themes were generated regarding participants' expectations: 1) academics, 2) relationships, 3) culture, and 4) lifestyle. These themes were found after coding the interviews and combining similar experiences. It was noted that the participants did not consciously create all expectations. Many expectations were not realized until they were violated, causing the participant to be surprised. These unconscious expectations were still created nonetheless, but they were not explicitly described until a violation occurred.

It was found that participants often researched the United States and the institution prior to arrival, and there were two common themes: 1) online research and 2) information provided by other people. Participants' expectations were less likely to be

violated if they had previous knowledge from online research and other people, or if they were violated they were typically positively valenced violations. When discussing the influence of expectations on their experiences, most participants faced both positively and negatively valenced violations. Overall, the participants—when asked—rated their entire experience as being positive. It was found that although three research questions were meant to be answered, the findings led to answering RQ1 but left little for RQ2 or RQ3. This could be due to the inexperience of the researcher and the lack of depth in the interview protocol, as well as short interview periods.

Discussion

In the literature review, it was found that international students face added obstacles to their college experience, on top of the obstacles all college students face. Barriers included language and culture: Gartman (2007) discussed how these barriers exist for international students while Hartshorne and Baucom (2007) argued that language and culture barriers continue throughout the student's experience in the United States; and Sato and Hodge (2015) related these additional barriers to international students' academic struggles. In the study, it was found that expectations for culture as well as language were created, and often these expectations were violated. Many of the participants knew the United States would not be exactly like their home country, nonetheless they were surprised by the differences. These findings speak to the growing literature that supports these barriers as additional obstacles for international students and demonstrates that these miscalculated expectations serve as a hindrance to their experiences. It could be useful for international centers at institutions of higher education

in the United States to be aware of these additional barriers and address some of the concerns of these students, to make their experiences more positive.

Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT), created by Judee Burgoon (1978), is based on the fact that people have created expectations for interactions with others. These expectations are based on social norms and prior knowledge of the communicator, if applicable. Unmet expectations create an expectancy violation; these can be valenced either positively or negatively. Communication outcomes are dependent on the valences of expectancy violations (Burgoon et al., 1989). This was seen in the interviews with participants; expectations were sometimes consciously made, and these expectations informed the experiences of each participant. Some expectations were unconsciously made, and it was only found that the expectation existed once it was violated.

In EVT, expectancy violations are valenced; Burgoon (2016) states that violations usually have a “fairly consensual” (p. 6) meaning, but when they don’t, and their meaning is ambiguous or could be taken multiple ways, the valence of the violation is determined by the communicator reward value. In the interviews, violations were created by many different communicators. For academic violations, the communicator was the institution, and the communicator value determined by prior research of the institution. Sometimes, the United States served as the communicator; for example, Hope, who had wanted to come to the United States for quite some time, seemed to have a more positive outlook on all experiences because the United States was an overall positive communicator for her. The communicator’s reward value typically only matters when expectancy violations are ambiguous, but sometimes the communicator’s reward value is placed higher than the valence of the violation, as proven by Cohen (2010) with media-

formed relationships. Cohen (2010) stated that real-life friendships often receive more of a buffer to violations than those that are formed via media, because there is a stronger connection to real-life friends.

Conclusions

While it is obvious that international students create expectations for their experience in the United States, it is not so obvious what these expectations will be. All of the participants mentioned being surprised by something in the United States, and it can be concluded that these moments of surprise were violations of their expectations. Often, the surprise moments came from activities or experiences for which the participants didn't even realize they had preconceived expectations.

Academic Expectations

All participants mentioned academic expectations; most of them desired good grades at the beginning of their semester, and many of them felt comfortable about their academic achievement by the end of the semester. Academic concerns and expectations were often the first to be brought up by participants, suggesting that these were the most prioritized concerns or expectations in their minds. Understanding the academic expectations of students could help international centers prepare their orientation programs for these students. Knowing what students expect compared to their home countries makes providing academic help more intentional and effective.

The participants shared some reasons for wanting to study in the United States, and one common reason for coming is that the United States has advanced and leading fields of study, so this provides evidence for academics being the most important aspect for these students. Students often discussed academics in terms of how it is different in

the United States than in their home country, which could be because they are constantly comparing the two systems of education as they're learning. International centers at institutions of higher education should be aware of the educational systems in students' home countries so they may understand to what these students are comparing.

Relationship Expectations

The second-most common expectation discussed was regarding relationships. All of the participants mentioned their interactions with others. Some participants were successful in forming relationships with new peers, while others had a more difficult time in this area. One thing that multiple participants brought up was this sense of false politeness that Americans have. It was often an expectation created from learning information from other people. It can be difficult for an international student to overcome this so-called façade put on by Americans, especially if it was not a conscious expectation. Even participants who had a conscious expectation about this false politeness struggled to push past it. Knowing this expectation exists, as well as the knowledge of the phenomenon happening, can better prepare international centers for their preliminary conversations with international students, especially during orientation programs. This could also be combatted by further education of the outside student population on international student experience.

Outside of relationships with peers, relationships with faculty and staff were also discussed heavily during interviews. Many participants compared their professors in the United States to those back home, which is similar to how they view their academic expectations. Some participants were surprised by their relationships with professors due to cultural differences; the power differential between a professor and a student in the

United States is unlike that found in other countries. Some participants, however, already knew of these differences and expected relationships to be different. Many participants appreciated how approachable and supportive their professors were, as well as the staff members of the institution. When talking about staff members, most participants were referring to the international center, and they felt a great sense of support from this particular office. It can be assumed that because academics are such a high priority for these students, that positive relationships with professors and staff members is beneficial for their overall experience. Even if they aren't doing well in a class, a positive experience with a professor can create a positive academic experience overall. This is something the international center does well, but further outreach and relationship building could benefit students who are particularly struggling to acclimate.

Relationships with others was a large topic, and it is possible that this is because of the support international students feel they need. Some participants mentioned barriers they face, but then immediately said that they could get through it with someone to lean on or someone to support them. When relationship expectations are negatively violated, this can cause distress in international students because they are already facing many of the obstacles domestic students face, compounded by unique obstacles that are specific to international students. Most of the participants discussed having both international and American friends. It might be that international students tend to become friends with other international students because they can relate to the obstacles they're facing. American students don't often have the ability to empathize with international students, unless they have also studied abroad. Support for international students is especially important because of these added obstacles.

Culture & Lifestyle Expectations

Some of those obstacles were explored in the literature review of this study, and many of those included cultural differences for international students. The cultural expectations discussed were often already expected; at least, participants expected for the culture to be different than their own. Many participants still experienced some sort of culture shock. Language was often a barrier to other areas, such as academics or relationships. Because English is their second language, many participants struggled with how long it took to do homework, communicate with others, and simply understand everything around them. One participant seemed to be struggling with language more than others. This information is in congruence with the literature, which helps support the need for international centers and other support mechanisms on campuses.

Half of the participants mentioned food in their interview: one expected the difference and found ways to still cook familiar foods; one started to like American food over the course of the semester; and one was shocked by the way Americans enjoy meals. Gabrielle said French people hold food very close to their identities and almost ritualize eating meals together, so when she arrived in the United States and she realized how often Americans eat on their own or rush their meals together, she was surprised. Expectations were negatively violated, and it might be so deeply negative because of the importance food is in her culture. It can be assumed that something closely related to the culture and identity of an international student would hold more weight when being violated. This is something that could be further analyzed to understand the impact it could have in higher education and international centers on campuses.

Expectations were both consciously and unconsciously created, but unconsciously created expectations could only be discussed if a violation had occurred. This means there could have been many other expectations that were created unconsciously by participants that were not violated or were less memorable violations than the ones discussed.

Recommendations

There are many recommendations for both practice and future research. When analyzing the findings of this study, it is noted that support from the international office benefitted international students greatly. Continued support from international offices is suggested, as well as creating some sort of check-up system for international students. Participants mentioned the decline in communication with the international office; one wonders if continued meetings with someone from the international office would benefit students who continue to struggle with their experience in the United States. The international office reaching out and offering these meetings mid-way through the semester might bring in students who are afraid to ask for the help themselves. It's possible they might also conduct exit interviews with international students to determine recommendations for the future. Due to limited resources, maybe having peer mentors conduct these exit interviews would be best for institutions. The expectation found in this study could be helpful in determining what information should be included in orientation programs, as well as other information learned from exit interviews.

The findings in this study also call for many recommendations for future research. A possible limitation discussed prior to the study was that interviews were conducted in English. While this didn't seem to be an issue in the interviews, it is possible that students

would be able to more accurately describe their experience in their own language. As language is often an obstacle for these students, it would be worth considering for future studies. The students in this study were from a variety of countries, so there was no way to truly distinguish culture-specific themes. Interviewing larger numbers of students from one specific country would be enlightening to identify culture-specific differences and expectations expressed by these students. Because of the lack of depth in findings for RQ2 and RQ3, future research should focus on more intentional and structured interviews to learn more about students' expectations, how they are violated, and how these violations influence their experiences in the United States.

For future research, diving deeper into academic and relationship expectations would be beneficial; there were many questions left unasked that could point towards better practices in these areas. Another recommendation is to somehow measure the degree of importance of specific violations to a student and explore the effect of the violations on the student. For example, Gabrielle held food very close to her identity as a French person, so the violation may have weighed much more heavily on her than for other participants. These recommendations for practice and future research are based on the findings and limitations of the study.

Appendix A

Hey friends!

My name is Meagan and I'm a graduate student completing a Master's Thesis. My research study explores the expectations of international students before studying in the US and how these expectations affect their experience. I'm looking for some students to partake in my research for Fall 2017. All you'll need to do is participate in two 30-minute interviews (one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end). This means you will have participated in 60 minutes of interviews, total, after everything is complete. You are eligible to participate in this research study if this is your first semester studying in the United States. If you're interested, please email me at mullemea@gvsu.edu or call me at 765-490-8369. Thank you and have a great day!

-Meagan Mullen, College Student Affairs Leadership Graduate Student

Appendix B

Interview One Protocol

1. What is your name?
2. Where are you from?
3. How did you learn about Grand Valley State University?
4. What was your perception of Grand Valley before coming here?
5. What was your perception of American higher education before coming here?
6. Why did you choose to come to the United States to study?
7. What expectations did you have before coming to the United States?
8. What expectations do you have for the rest of the semester?

Appendix C

Interview Two Protocol

1. What has been successful thus far in your semester at Grand Valley?
2. What has been a challenge?
3. Here is a summary of your experiences from our first interview. Can you go into more detail for these? (ask for examples)
4. Here are some of your expectations, have these come to fruition this semester?
5. Has anything else happened this semester that has surprised you?
6. ****if they're here next semester**** How has this semester shaped how you'll do things differently next semester?
7. Do you think your experience has been positive or negative overall?

Appendix D



Research Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: *What to Expect? An Exploration of International Student Experience with Expectancy Violations Theory*

Principal Investigator (PI): Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury, Ph.D
College of Education, Grand Valley State
University
616-331-6485

Co-PI: Meagan Mullen, CSAL Graduate Student
College of Education, Grand Valley State
University
765-490-8369

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of international students in the United States using Expectancy Violations Theory. This will help inform practitioners about the expectations of international students and how these expectations can influence their experience at an institution. This study is being conducted at Grand Valley State University. The estimated number of study participants to be enrolled is about 10. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

Reason for Invitation

You are invited to participate in this study because you meet the necessary criteria of being an international student studying for the first time in the United States.

Selection Process

Participants in this study are recruited through Padnos International Center emails. Participants in this study are selected based on these criteria:

- Identify as an international student
- Are currently enrolled at Grand Valley State University

- Have not studied in the United States prior to this semester

Purpose of Consent Form

This consent form gives you the information you will need to help you decide whether you would like to participate in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. The co-PI will read the form to you orally and explain the process. You may ask any questions about the research, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else that is unclear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you would like to participate in this study. If you choose to participate, I will need verbal consent as well as your signature at the bottom of this document. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.**

Study Procedures

This study will consist of two, 30-minute long interviews. The first interview will take place during the beginning of your first semester at Grand Valley State University. You will be asked questions regarding your decision to study in the United States and your expectations for the semester. The second interview will take place towards the end of your first semester at Grand Valley State University. By the end of the second interview you will have been interviewed a total of 60 minutes (1st interview = 30 minutes; 2nd interview = 30 minutes). During the second interview you will be asked questions regarding your experiences during your first semester and whether these experiences were positive or negative overall.

Benefits

There may be no direct benefits to you as a participant. The information in this study may provide insight and improve practices in the field of student affairs surrounding the international student population.

Risks

Participants should not experience any risks during this study that are uncommon during everyday activities.

Study Costs

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research study.

Payment

There will be no compensation for participating in this research study.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during this research study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the records by a pseudonym and there will be no master list that links your identity to this pseudonym. However, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Grand Valley State University or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight may review your records. When the results of this study are published, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right not to participate in this study. If you decide to agree to participate, you can change your mind at any time throughout the study and withdraw from the study. You have the right to refuse answers to any questions asked of you during the study. Your decisions will not change any present or future relationship with Grand Valley State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

Research Study Results

If you wish to learn about the results of this research study, you may request that information by contacting Meagan Mullen at mullemea@gvsu.edu.

Questions

If you have any questions regarding this research study now or in the future, you may contact Meagan Mullen at mullemea@gvsu.edu or 765-490-8369. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Human Research Review Committee can be contacted at 616-331-3197. If you are unable to contact the research staff or want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also contact 616-331-2281 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to participate in this study, you must sign on the line below. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read this entire document or had the entire document read to you. It also indicates that all of your questions have been answered. You will be provided a copy of this consent form. By signing this form you are stating the following:

- The details of this research study have been explained to me including what is being asked of me and the anticipated risks or benefits;
- I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered;
- I am voluntarily agreeing to participate in the research described on this form;
- I may ask more questions or decide to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty.

_____ I have been given a copy of this document for my records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Appendix E



DATE: September 13, 2017

TO: Chasity Bailey-Fakhoury, Ph. D.
FROM: Grand Valley State University Human Research Review
Committee

STUDY TITLE: [1100337-3] What to Expect? An Exploration of International
Student Experience Using Expectancy Violations Theory

REFERENCE #: 18-006-H
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 13, 2017
APPROVAL
EXPIRATION: September 13, 2018
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of materials for this research study. The Human Research Review Committee has approved your research plan application as compliant with all applicable sections of the federal regulations, Michigan law, GVSU policies and HRRC procedures. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Please insert the following sentence into your information/consent documents as appropriate. All project materials produced for participants or the public must contain this information.

This research protocol has been approved by the Human Research Review Committee at Grand Valley State University. File No. 18-006-H Expiration: September 13, 2018.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and assurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

This approval is based on the HRRC determination that no greater than minimal risk is posed to research participants. This study has received expedited review, 45 CFR 46.110 category [enter category], based on the Office of Human Research Protections 1998 Guidance on Expedited Review Categories.

Please note the following in order to comply with federal regulations and HRRC policy:

1. Any major change to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the Change in Approved Protocol form for this submission. This includes, but is not limited to, changes in key personnel, study location, participant selection process, etc. See HRRC policy 1010, Modifications to approved protocols.

2. All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS and SERIOUS ADVERSE EVENTS to participants or other parties affected by the research must be reported to this office within 7 days of the event - 2 - Generated on IRBNet occurrence, using the UP/SAE Report form. If the adverse event includes a fatality, hospitalization, or security breach of sensitive information immediately notify the Human Research Review Committee Chair, Dr. Steve Glass, (616)331-8563 AND Human Research Protections Administrator, Dr. Jeffrey Potteiger, Office of Graduate Studies (616)331-7207. See HRRC policy 1020, unanticipated problems and adverse events.

3. All instances of non-compliance or complaints regarding this study must be reported to this office in a timely manner. There are no specific forms for this report type. See HRRC policy 1030, Research non-compliance.

4. All required research records must be securely retained in either paper or electronic format for a minimum of 3 years following the closure of the approved study. This includes original or digitized copies of signed consent documents. Research studies subject to the privacy protections under HIPAA are required to maintain selected research records for a period of at least 6 years after the close of the study.

5. At least 60 days prior to current approval expiration, please submit a Continuing Review form:

- Protocols that are active and open for enrollment require both the Principal Investigator and Authorizing Official to electronically sign the Continuing Review submission in IRBNet.
- Protocols that are active for data analysis or long term follow-up ONLY require the Principal Investigator's signature but do not need to be further authorized.
- A copy of the informed consent/assent form currently in use in the study must accompany the submission unless the study has been closed to enrollment, and active only for data analysis, for more than 1 year.

If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at (616) 331-3197 or rci@gvsu.edu. The office observes all university holidays, and does not process applications during exam week or between academic terms. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with our office.

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