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AN EXPLORATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF  
BAHAMIAN STUDENTS AT TAYLOR UNIVERSITY

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A thesis

Presented to

The School of Social Sciences, Education & Business

Department of Higher Education and Student Development

Taylor University

Upland, Indiana

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Higher Education and Student Development

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by

Dominic Justin Cartwright

May 2018

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**Higher Education and Student Development  
Taylor University  
Upland, Indiana**

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
MASTER'S THESIS  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that the Thesis of

Dominic Justin Cartwright

entitled

An Exploration of the Educational Experiences of  
Bahamian Students at Taylor University

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the

Master of Arts degree  
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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Bahamian alumni during their undergraduate years at Taylor University. Thirteen participants who graduated between the years 1980 and 2016 were interviewed. All responses were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed to discover various themes. Participants shared how they experienced Taylor as a Bahamian during their time. The results of this research provide clarity to what Bahamian students have experienced and what Bahamian students may continue to experience in the future.

## Acknowledgements

Here are the people and things that I want to acknowledge:

- “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Jesus Christ.” – Colossians 3:23
- My wife has been my main support in this project. She has helped me process my thoughts, proofread my writing, and transcribed my interviews. She has encouraged and praised me every step through this process. I love her and would not have been able to complete this without her.
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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The Bahamas, an archipelago approximately 50 miles southeast of the state of Florida, was first inhabited by a people known as the Arawaks, sometimes referred to as Lucayans. The Bahamas, derived from the Spanish phrase *bajamar*, meaning “shallow sea,” was given its name by the Spanish after they destroyed the Lucayans (Harris, Saunders, & Albury, 2017; McQueen, 1983; Rogoziński, 1992). Under the sponsorship of King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I, Christopher Columbus discovered the Bahamas in 1492 (Flint, 2018; McQueen, 1983; Waugh, 1964). The Bahamas later became known for piracy, and New Providence became the central hub for British pirates (Rogoziński, 1992). In 1684, the Spanish attacked the main settlement on New Providence, called Nassau. However, the attempt to completely drive out the pirates failed; by 1686, Nassau was again a pirate haven (Rogoziński, 1992).

Eventually, the British colonized the Bahamas, and Governor Woodes Rogers, under the order of King George I, brought order to the islands. After the pirates were eradicated, governors appointed by the English crown ruled the Bahamas. In 1948, a new government known as the United Bahamian Party (UBP) was formed. This government operated as a democracy, and the UBP was made up of white men. The Bahamas achieved majority rule (when black Bahamians made up a majority of the government) in 1968 under the leadership of Primer<sup>1</sup> Pindling, the leader of the Progressive Liberal Party

(PLP) (Craton, 1986). The Bahamas was then exposed to ideas and practices from North American countries (Urwick, 2002).

The United States and Canada have served as major providers of higher education for Bahamian students since the 1960s due to the close proximity of the Bahamas to the United States (Bethel, 1999; Urwick, 2002). The number of students studying in North American schools significantly increased under the PLP in 1967 (Urwick, 2002). The PLP moved toward obtaining independence from Great Britain in 1973, which made them the first government of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas (Bethel, 1999; Harris et al., 2017). In 1975, the Bahamas founded its own college, College of the Bahamas, a two-year institution that only awarded Associate degrees (McQueen, 1983; Urwick, 2002). However, this effort did not replace the desire for Bahamian students to study abroad; instead, it focused more on preparing students to enter Bachelor degree programs provided by North American institutions (Urwick, 2002).

Bahamian students, like other international students, experience challenges when attending college in the United States (Araujo, 2011; Leong, 2015). Some challenges consist of the immigrant and visa process, culture shock, homesickness, and academic pressures (Araujo, 2011; Leong, 2015). Though attending college in the US is not uncommon for Bahamian students, any adjustments made as students transition to the new culture is inevitable (Araujo, 2011; Bethel, 1999; Urwick, 2002).

With all the social educational adjustments, Bahamian students also encounter academic challenges, such as teaching styles, class dynamics, relationships with teachers, and pressure to succeed (Abel, 2002; Araujo, 2011; Kadison & Digeronimo, 2004).

Bahamian students must learn how best to adapt to the new culture and educational environment in order to excel in the American higher education system (Abel, 2002).

Bahamians have attended Taylor University since 1980. However, because of the relationship LaRita Boren built with the Lyford Cay Scholarship Committee, Taylor became known to the Bahamas (Taylor University, 1987). The number of Bahamians attending Taylor began to grow, which led to Bahamians comprising one of the biggest groups of international students currently represented on Taylor's campus (Ringenberg, 1996).

For the purpose of this research, exploring the challenges that require the Bahamian students to adjust leads to the following questions: How do Bahamian students bridge the pedagogical gap between their high school/senior high school experiences and their experiences as students at Taylor? What role do the faculty and staff at Taylor play in assisting Bahamian students in this transition?

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Adjustment Issues of International Students

International students face many challenges when adjusting to a new environment. These challenges include legal processes, culture shock, pressure to perform academically, and racial tension. Looking at these challenges, one acquires an overview of what international students experience as a result of studying in the US.

**Visa process.** The U.S. visa process is a long, demanding procedure all international students must endure to study in the United States (Hegarty, 2014). The visa process ensures that only selected students are granted the opportunity to study in the US. The visa is issued by the embassy or consulate located in the country of residency. International students have the option to choose from a few different types of visas depending on the type of student or the purpose of his or her study. These types of visas include F1, J1, and M1 visas; the most common of the three is the F1 visa. An F1 visa is given a student who plans to attend academic institutions. This visa requires recipients to maintain a full course of study and allows for part-time, on-campus employment not exceeding 20 hours per week. F1 students have the option to work up to one year after graduation through the optional practical training (OPT) program (Envisage International Corporation, 2017).

The timeframe for international students to obtain a visa varies. However, the process contains specific steps international students must complete (Fish, 2017; Haidar, 2016). Listed below is a summary of the full process:

1. Receive I-20 form from the institution;
2. Pay SEVIS fees (\$200) and schedule interview with U.S. embassy or consulate;
3. Apply for the nonimmigrant visa (DS-160 form) – fee required; and
4. Attend interview (further instructions will be given)

During the visa process, students receive an I-20, usually generated by the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System or SEVIS (Fish, 2017; Haidar, 2016). SEVIS is a web-based system that maintains information on F1-visa students in the US (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017a). The Designed School Official (DSO) has 30 days to report each active student at the beginning of each term or semester (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017b). Therefore, each student is required to visit the DSO at the beginning of each semester.

The visa process has become more difficult since the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Hegarty, 2014). Therefore, the number of international students attending institutions in the United States has declined (Hegarty, 2014). International students became frustrated and began attending other institutions in countries with much easier immigration processes, such as Australia, Canada, England, China, and India (Hegarty, 2014).

**Culture shock.** Another area in which international students face challenges is culture shock. International students may experience homesickness, loss of social status, fear, and a sense of insignificance (Hegarty, 2014). These feelings often result from domestic students misunderstanding various actions of international students (Leong,

2015). International students also have to adjust to the change in food. Some students may love American food, while others may not be fond of it (Leong, 2015).

International students can minimize the effect of culture shock by preparing to study in the US. The preparation might involve auditing classes, visiting the campus and active organizations, and speaking to American students to gain an understanding of what to expect from an American college environment. Unfortunately, not all international students are able to participate in such activities and therefore must work harder to achieve academic success (Abel, 2002).

**Academic challenges.** International students experience many academic challenges while studying in the United States. When referring to academics, international students experience “learning shock.” Learning shock alludes to feelings of frustration and confusion as a result of new teaching and learning environments with unfamiliar academic expectations (Griffiths, Winstanley, & Gabriel, 2005). Many international students indicated being stressed or overwhelmed due to the differences they encountered in the classroom. The differences are described as teaching styles; fast-paced classes; and more reading, writing, and speech-oriented assignments (Zhai, 2002). Another contributor to learning shock is faculty being unprepared to engage international students (Gopal, 2011; Xu, 2015). Though this idea stresses the importance for faculty to include different cultural pedagogy in the curriculum, international students still must adjust to the academic expectations of the American education system (Xu, 2015).

**Pressures.** International students are pressured to perform well academically because they are spending large sums of money to study in the United States (Hegarty, 2014). However, performing academically proves difficult for most international

students because of the different cultural learning styles. For many international students, a professor or teacher is the authority in the classroom; thus, students are not allowed to express opinions openly in class or disagree with the instructor. Open discussions are not regularly practiced, and in some countries, discussions are not practiced at all (Kadison & Digeronimo, 2004). The course structure and content can serve as a hindrance to international students and their pursuit of academic success (Eddy, 1978; Herbet, 1981).

***Stress.*** On top of the pressure to perform well academically, international students experience other forms of academic stress. Countries in close proximity to the US are expected to have lower levels of stress than students from countries further away (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). However, the level of stress also depends of students' level of social support and competency present, which include their academic, problem-solving, language skills and knowledge of the U.S. educational environment (Abel, 2002; Wan et al., 1992). Nevertheless, the academic challenges do not seem to deter international students in their pursuit to complete their degrees (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

**Optional Practical Training (OPT).** During the student's final semester of senior year, he or she has the option to apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT). The OPT program is a temporary work permit that gives F1 visa students permission—upon recommendation from the DSO and the academic institution attended—to gain work experience in the US related to the student's field of study. The typical length of time allotted for international students to use the OPT is 12 months. However, students who obtained a degree in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) can apply for a 24-month extension (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2017).



The application process usually takes about three months before receiving the OPT. Students are encouraged to begin the application process within three months of graduation so the 12-month period is fully utilized. However, allowing international students to work only for a year is unfair to both the employers and the students. Employers are not fond of the one-year restriction because they cannot receive sufficient value from the student they employ. One year is also not enough time for the student to receive reasonable work experience (Hegarty, 2014). The OPT in the US is less attractive to many potential students because other countries encourage the students to work in their countries for a minimum of 2 years (Hegarty, 2014).

**Racial tension.** International students encounter racial tension, which causes the development of feelings such as discomfort and hostility when attending university in the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007). Due to the long history of racial tension, international students of color often experience racial discrimination and prejudice that American minorities experience (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). However, international students experience a different kind of racism that relates more toward their culture or country of origin. This kind of racism is referred to as neo-racism (Glass, Wongtrirat, et al., 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007; Spears, 1999). International students of color can develop feelings of inferiority when American students speak negatively about their home country. Students can also feel confused when encountering discrimination in the United States, especially because this reality is not present in their country (Lee & Rice, 2007).

### **International Student Support**

With these adjustments that international students undergo, international students need support when living and studying in the United States. Many American colleges

and universities already have programs and services as well as resources allotted to provide necessary support to the international population on their campuses. Some resources that international students use frequently are the institution's international office, faculty, and other international students (Bhochhibhoya, Dong, & Branscum, 2017; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Zhai, 2002). The international office should provide services such as health insurance, which is highly important; however, social support such as recreational programs help students to engage with their community (NAFSA, 2013). Faculty can demonstrate support to the international student population by integrating the class curriculum to include international students (Glass, Kociolek, et al., 2015). International students also look to and find support within the international community because they understand each other; therefore, the international community is able to care for its members (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

### **History of Taylor University**

In particular, Taylor University and students from the Bahamas have shared a unique relationship for several decades. Taylor University was originally Fort Wayne Female College, founded in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 1846. Fort Wayne Female College was a typical church-affiliated institution founded by the Methodist church to educate their young women. The college became a coeducational institution in 1855 and changed its name to Fort Wayne College (Ringenberg, 1996).

Fort Wayne College was purchased by the National Association of Local Preachers (NALP) in 1890, who changed the name to Taylor University in honor of Bishop William Taylor, a well-known Methodist missionary. During this transition, Thaddeus Reade became the first president of the newly named Taylor University and

moved the campus from Fort Wayne to Upland, Indiana. Over the years, the campus continued to grow in resources and student population. In the 1980s, the board of trustees set a goal to increase the population of minority students (Ringenberg, 1996).

### **International and Minority Student Services at Taylor University**

As a result of desiring to increase the number of international and American minority students on Taylor's campus, local philanthropist Leland Boren and the university president at the time, Gregg O. Lehman, worked on a program to support such students. In particular, Lehman proposed the International and Minority Student Services Program on November 20, 1984 (Lehman, 1984; Ringenberg, 1996).

**The proposal<sup>2</sup>.** The proposal's objectives were to accommodate the international students and assist them in orientating to American customs (Lehman, 1984). In particular, the proposal included a number of efforts designed to help students make the transition to life on the Upland campus.

***Parental care.*** The university was to provide parental concern for international students in case they experienced homesickness, had any emergencies, needed places to stay during holidays, vacations and school shut downs; and other needs. The university was also to provide a framework for good first impressions. This would usually be during the students' initial arrival to Indiana and Taylor. The university would provide transportation from any airport within a 300-mile radius of Upland. Airports included were in cities such as Chicago, Indianapolis, and Detroit (Lehman, 1984).

***Orientation.*** The university would organize assistance to orient international students to locate their dorms, facilities to eat, churches to attend, and places to shop, as well as how to shop, navigate class schedules and classroom locations, acquire their

books, contact emergency personnel, locate help for academic problems and questions, and more. From these objectives, one can anticipate the amount of work required to welcome international students to Taylor University (Lehman, 1984).

*Job description: Director of international/minority student services.* Like every program, a need existed for an individual to undertake the work. This position was called the Director of International and Minority Student Services (Lehman, 1984).

*Requirements.* The requirements for this position were as follows:

1. Preferably minority;
2. Be an evangelical Christian;
3. Be physically fit;
4. Have a pleasant personality and be able to get along with students and other people;
5. Be dedicated to accomplishing the International and Minority Student program; and
6. Be able to present ideas and sell them to Taylor administration.

*Recruitment and admissions.* The position required the individual to communicate regularly with overseas scholarship agencies, missionary organizations, mission schools, and churches to locate and recruit admissible international and minority candidates. The individual would also recommend potential students to the Office of Admissions and make arrangements for the student to come to campus (Lehman, 1984).

*Financial arrangements.* The individual hired for this position would have been paid \$20,480 when the program started. The allotted program budget for about 40 students totaled \$33,498, that is, \$325.45 per student (Lehman, 1984). This total does not include the director's salary.

*The program's relationship to Taylor University.* Taylor University had a committee that dealt with minority issues on campus, and this group was initially known as the Multicultural Steering Committee. The Chair of the Multicultural Steering Committee was involved with the International and Minority Student program. The Director of International and Minority Student Services served as an advisor to the committee and requested permission from the committee to use funds for programming. However, the committee would make the final decisions. If the director needed financial help beyond the budget, the director would inquire of the university for help. If the university was unable to provide assistance, the director would then submit requests to the Multicultural Steering Committee, who would grant the funds necessary if reasons were sound (Lehman, 1984).

*The proposal conclusion.* The proposal's conclusion was to have the program implemented properly to give international and minority students a fair chance to succeed at Taylor, to improve student relationships on campus, to project Taylor's image globally, and to increase internationals' and minorities' desire to attend Taylor (Lehman, 1984).

### **History of Bahamian Students at Taylor University**

The history of Bahamian students at Taylor University is unique and interesting. Regardless, very few Bahamian students know the events that led to their ability to attend Taylor University. In addition, many Bahamians are unaware of the individuals who worked together to create the opportunity for today's Bahamian students to study at Taylor. The only people many Bahamian students know of are Mr. Leland and Mrs. LaRita Boren. Though the Borens played a significant role in assisting Bahamian students financially, multiple other people and organizations also contributed.

**Background to Mr. Leland Boren.** Mr. Leland Boren is a highly accomplished businessman who traveled frequently to the Bahamas. One reason Mr. Boren traveled back and forth was because he was hired to facilitate the purchase of a sugar mill in Abaco, Bahamas, for the International Bank (Boren, 2016; J. Kesler, personal communication, May 10, 2017). The purchase entailed the sugar mill company and 50,000 acres of sugar. Mr. Boren, along with a hired lawyer, met with the Prime Minister of the Bahamas, the Right Honorable Sir Lynden Pindling, on behalf of International Bank to finalize the deal.

However, when Mr. Boren and the lawyer accompanying him came to close the deal, the Bahamian Prime Minister would not authorize the purchase of the sugar mill company by the International Bank. Mr. Boren and the lawyer negotiated the deal for 18 months but were unsuccessful in getting the purchase approved. The lawyer then told Mr. Boren that he did not think the Bahamian government would sign and therefore advised he withdraw from the agreement. This business agreement was Mr. Boren's first encounter with Bahamians (Boren, 2016).

In 1969, Mr. Boren became President of Avis Industrial Corporation and moved the company near Taylor University, as requested by former Taylor president Don Odle. Since this move, the Borens have been major donors to Taylor. Mr. Boren and his wife, LaRita, had a heart for international students and helped to increase diversity at Taylor.

**Building a relationship with the Bahamas.** Though the desire to have more international students at Taylor was evident, the Borens had a heart for the Bahamian people. The Borens, already sponsoring Bahamian students to come to Taylor, wanted to see the campus Bahamian population increase (J. Kesler, personal communication, May

10, 2017). Thus, they pursued relationships with the Bahamas and Bahamian organizations in an attempt to create more opportunities for more Bahamians to attend Taylor University (Boren, 2016).

***Lyford Cay Foundation.*** During his visits to the Bahamas, Mr. Boren gained a business partner named Royal Little. Mr. Little partnered with Mr. Boren for over 10 years and was part of the Lyford Cay Foundation. Mr. Little introduced the Borens to the Lyford Cay Club and insisted they become members. Usually, this process takes a while, as current members consider potential members before interviewing them (Boren, 2016; J. Kesler, personal communication, May 10, 2017). However, Mr. Little wanted the Borens to be members that day. He called the members of the club to meet with the Borens. By the end of the meeting, the Borens were members of the Lyford Cay Club. Mrs. LaRita Boren was drafted into the Lyford Cay Scholarship Committee not long after, where she discovered the committee only gave scholarships to Bahamians students to attend Ivy League schools. She worked with the committee and eventually persuaded them to give scholarships to students attending Taylor University (J. Kesler, personal communication, May 10, 2017; Taylor University, 1987).

**The relationship between Taylor and Lyford Cay.** The Borens made a special trip to the Bahamas with the intent to strengthen and assess the relationship between Taylor University and Lyford Cay Foundation. The Borens' desire was to have Bahamians, who were educated at Taylor, return to the Bahamas to make significant contributions to the country and its people. This trip took place on January 13-15, 1987. Mr. Little invited the Borens to come to the Bahamas, and he planned their itinerary for the whole trip (Taylor University, 1987).

The meeting took place on January 14, 1987, attended by the following people: Sheila Hailey, Lucea Greenway, Oakley Bidwell, Harry Moore, Royal Little, Dr. Keva Bethel, and Leland and LaRita Boren, all of whom were members of the Lyford Cay Scholarship Committee. During the meeting, Mr. Boren requested Dr. Bethel visit Taylor University herself to evaluate the institution, meet with approximately 20 current Bahamian students and with other minority students, and meet with the academic dean.

The agreement also included Dr. Bethel visiting Beloit College in Wisconsin for the same purpose. Mrs. LaRita Boren, a board member of Taylor at the time, made the arrangements for the visit at Taylor University, and Mr. Boren's company, Avis Industrial Corporation, paid for the trip (J. Kesler, personal communication, May 10, 2017; Taylor University, 1987). Twelve students at the time had received scholarships from Lyford Cay Foundation while the other eight covered tuition payments for school on their own. The Borens wanted Dr. Bethel to see that many students from the Bahamas were already studying at Taylor (Taylor University, 1987).

In response to the proposal, the committee raised the total number of granted scholarships from 68 to 80. They also began the approval for scholarships specifically for graduate school<sup>3</sup>. Mr. Little offered to contribute \$100,000.00 if the committee would agree to match it (Taylor University, 1987).

***Dr. Keva Bethel.*** Dr. Bethel's trip was planned for April 29–30, 1987, by Mrs. Boren but was unfortunately canceled due to Dr. Bethel's husband being admitted to the hospital for a kidney transplant after years spent on a kidney dialysis machine. Dr. Bethel was the advisor to the Lyford Cay Scholarship Committee, head of the Selection Committee on behalf of the Lyford Cay Foundation, and the principal<sup>4</sup> of the College of



the Bahamas. Her credentials made her the ideal person to conduct the evaluation of Taylor University (Taylor University, 1987).

***The Bahamian student scholarship.*** Outside of the Lyford Cay Scholarship, another scholarship was created specifically to help the Bahamian population on campus. The Bahamian scholarship was first awarded to five students in the 1984-1985 academic year. It started as a matching challenge to the Lyford Cay Foundation and became a scholarship solely funded by the Borens. Since first awarded, approximately 150 Bahamians have received the scholarship. The only qualification for this scholarship was that one had to be a Bahamian.

***The international student scholarship.*** The International Student Scholarship was proposed on May 22, 1990, and had more requirements than the Bahamian Scholarship. This scholarship was also started as a matching challenge to Lyford Cay Foundation and was awarded to any international student attending Taylor. However, the only stipulation was that the student would be encouraged to return home to contribute to the Bahamas (Taylor University, 1990).

**Maintaining the relationship with the Bahamas.** Institutional records show that Bahamian organizations have partnered with Taylor University since 1972, about 12 years before the Bahamian Student Scholarship was first granted. The relationship between the Bahamas and Taylor continues to grow, and the number of Bahamian students attending Taylor grows steadily as well. The first Bahamian student at Taylor was believed to be Randy Thompson, who graduated in 1980 (D. Carpenter, personal communication, November 21, 2016; K. Moss, personal communication, April 23, 2018).

*Dr. Eugene Habecker.* As this relationship grew, former Taylor University president Dr. Eugene Habecker desired to nurture that relationship. In 2008, Dr. Habecker and Dr. Janyne Hodder, president of the College of the Bahamas at the time, signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This memorandum provided a basis to explore a wide variety of partnerships between Taylor University and the College of the Bahamas<sup>5</sup> (Taylor University, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

After exploring the history of Bahamian students at Taylor, one can see that there is a love for Bahamian students at Taylor. Being a Bahamian student, one can only be grateful to those who made it possible for Bahamians to attend the university. This unique story should be known by all Bahamians who have studied and will study at Taylor.

Notably, the goal to see Taylor more diverse with more international students has been successful. The percentage of international students was 4% in 2008. In 2016, Taylor's international population reached 7%, with almost one-third of those being Bahamian students (Taylor University, 2009).

One can also see what was expected of the Director of International and Minority Students Services when the position was first created compared to what is expected of that position now. This material can encourage learning from the past as well as obtaining ideas for how to improve current practices. However, improvement starts with understanding the experiences of Bahamian Students at Taylor. Exploration of how Bahamian students handle the transition they undergo can offer valuable insight as to where assistance is needed.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Having discussed relevant literature about international students' transition to studying in the US and at Taylor University, the present study's methodology is described below. Specifically, this chapter discusses the chosen approach, gives context for the research, explains participant information and the research procedure, overviews the data analysis, and shares the benefits derived from conducting this research.

#### **Approach**

A qualitative, phenomenological design was used to better understand the challenges Bahamian students face in transitioning to Taylor. This design provides an exploration of the lived experiences of a group of individuals and finds common meaning within a phenomenon they share (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The type of phenomenological approach used was hermeneutical, as this research explored the lived experiences of Bahamian students. Hermeneutical phenomenology allows interpretation of the information received from the participants about their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Since the researcher is a Bahamian student, the experiences shared by the participants were interpreted through the lens of a Bahamian.

#### **Context**

The research was conducted at Taylor University. As previously noted, the university is a coeducational, non-denominational, small, Christian liberal arts institution.

In the academic year that this study was conducted (2016-2017), Taylor University had 1,890 students, of whom 7% were international students and 22 specifically from the Bahamas. Recently, the Bahamas has had a significant student representation on Taylor's campus (Ringenberg, 1996). The student-to-faculty ratio at Taylor is 13:1.

### **Participants**

For the purpose of this research, Bahamian alumni of Taylor were interviewed to determine how they adjusted to the American education system and Taylor. Bahamian students experience a cultural shift in education, as their education system has some British influence through colonization (Urwick, 2002). This adjustment may have been more or less difficult for the participants depending on the time they studied at Taylor.

The participants are Bahamian alumni who have attended high school in the Bahamas, and some the College of the Bahamas. Bahamian alumni were chosen as participants because they had completed their degrees at Taylor University and had had time to reflect on their experiences during their undergraduate studies. The goal was to interview at least 20 participants in order to have a range of alumni from multiple graduating classes to obtain a spectrum of experiential similarities and differences. However, the actual number who participated was 13.

### **Procedure**

An email (see Appendix A) was sent out to Bahamian alumni to determine alumni interested in participating. The email contained a link to a small questionnaire asking the participants for their name, email address, and the year they graduated from Taylor. This research required a flight to the Bahamas and accommodations to stay for one and a half weeks to conduct these interviews in person. After receiving emails from individuals

interested in participating, another email was sent only to the interested participants to schedule one-on-one interviews. A list of 16 questions (see Appendix B) was used to gain an understanding of their experiences as they transitioned from a Bahamian high school education system to studying in an American higher education system.

The interviews were recorded during these meetings and were kept where only the researcher could access them. The link in Appendix A served as the consent to participate in the research interviews. The recorded audio was transcribed with the help of a research assistant. The assistant understood the confidentiality of the information transcribed and only helped with the transcribing.

### **Data Analysis**

After transcription, codes were formed to make sense of the information collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The common themes and unique differences some alumni experienced were noted, which helped provide more understanding of this educational phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). From these themes, the areas of most concern for Bahamian students studying at Taylor are discussed in the Chapter 4.

After finding the common themes, the knowledge and familiarity with Bahamian culture was used to interpret participants' shared experiences and give clear explanation of the results to individuals reading. The larger meaning of the data as highlighted by the codes and themes are described in Chapter 5 (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Benefits**

One benefit of this study is that it offers faculty members at Taylor University a better understanding of the adjustments in the classroom that Bahamian students undergo as a result of studying in the United States. With this knowledge, faculty can understand

how to interact better with students from the Bahamas. This knowledge can also raise faculty awareness of how Bahamians students interact with their teachers and schoolwork, potentially leading to more effective engagement with Bahamian students.

Another benefit is that Bahamian students who study the United States can gain a clearer picture of adjustments they will experience in the classroom. This knowledge might then help incoming students prepare themselves for the new experience, equipping them to perform better in the classroom setting.

Student development educators can use this study to shed light on areas not necessarily obvious to everyone. This study can provide context in conversations for how better to help Bahamian students obtain the best educational experience possible at Taylor, both inside and outside the classroom.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

As stated in Chapter 1, international students studying in the United States experience many challenges (Araujo, 2011; Leong, 2015). The current study focused specifically on the experiences of Bahamian students who graduated from Taylor University. Though Bahamian student experiences are in many ways similar to the experiences of other international students, their experiences at Taylor are also unique. The following chapter outlines themes that emerged from the interviews conducted. Themes do not correlate with specific questions asked, but rather emerged out of ideas communicated consistently by various participants throughout the interviews. As such, the themes bring clarity in understanding how Bahamian students either positively or negatively experienced Taylor and how they adjusted to the culture.

#### **Social Adjustment**

The social adjustment of Bahamian students is probably the most prominent theme that arose from the interviews. Community is a particularly important aspect of the participants' experience, whether that community was found within Taylor, the Upland community, or small subsets of the Taylor community such as the international community. Whatever community participants were part of helped them navigate their experiences. Though alluded to by others, three participants explicitly stated that Taylor is not for everyone, that is, Taylor calls for a specific type of person or personality.

**Culture shock.** Not surprisingly, all participants talked about dealing with culture shock coming to Taylor. One prominent theme of culture shock mentioned by nine participants was the institutional location. These participants described the location as rural, secluded, and away from a lot of things. They described feeling a need to get away from campus while lacking sufficient access to the transportation needed to actually get away. A 1990 graduate noted, “I just thought like I had a very balanced sort of a life, you know. And I think what helped, too, was being able to get away from campus, having access to transportation thanks to Mr. Boren and those.” While this support and access to transportation was evident among participants who graduated in the 1980s and 1990s, the desire to have access to transportation was also present in conversations with alumni who graduated in the 2000s.

Additionally, participants experienced culture shock in personal interactions. Examples involved food and eating times, worship styles, and dorm life. A participant from the class of 2010 shared the following:

Culture shock [is present] in so many different ways. Food is one and then also I think what is a culture shock to many, not all, but many of the Bahamian students is church, worship, you know. You come to chapel and it’s a culture shock because we come from a background where we’re used to, you know, afro influenced music. So, you know, we come from a culture where it’s heavy in our native music or rake ‘n’ scrape and junkanoo and then you have other Caribbean infusions like soca and reggae and then some infusions of hip-hop. But you come here and then everything is contemporary Christian.



A female participant mentioned encounters in the residence hall when she learned to deal with what Bahamians would classify as indecent exposure. A female participant who graduated in 2015 shared,

Dormitory life—I guess I didn't really have an issue with it, but there were some things I was a little uncomfortable with, whereas, being in the Bahamas . . . yeah, we are friendly and warm and accepting and all that, really loveable kind of a people. However, there are certain boundaries that we don't want to be crossed, but I guess understanding . . . we had to understand how their culture is.

A male participant also shared an experience in the dorm:

So, I mean, transitioning to a dorm where sometimes you would see . . . not saying that they were not . . . not saying that they did not like women, but it's just where, you know, you would see a man hugging and embracing differently than you would back home in the Bahamas. So, I mean, that was a little different, a social difference there compared . . . you know, Bahamian men, we tend to shake hands or do a little certain handshake or whatever. American guys, you know, I even saw one jump on another like, you know, I don't know if that was appropriate . . .

Participants also experienced culture shock when it came to spirituality. A 2010 graduate articulated her concerns:

This is what I really, ugh, I mean I don't even know if I can even blame Taylor for it or if it's an American thing or whatever, but at Taylor, nobody knows anything except for like their own culture . . . and they don't realize that their

Christianity is a sub-sect of their own culture. It's not necessarily Christianity.

It's what they have created within their own culture.

Participants quickly realized the Christianity they knew was different, and the struggle in connecting to it came from its Americanization. However, participants also shared how their experiences at Taylor, whether pleasant or not, grew their faiths.

**Support.** All participants shared experiences of feeling supported and unsupported. Participants disclosed some outlets in which they found support and areas they felt the absence of needed support.

The participants shared ways they found support in other areas such as residence hall wings, church involvement outside of Taylor, and student leadership opportunities. One participant spoke of serving at Upland Community Church with the youth program. Another participant mentioned that, after attending Friends Church and participating in the Sunday school program, the Sunday school teacher at the time "adopted" her and provided support. Two other participants led Sunday school at a church in Muncie called Agape Ministries after they were invited to the church by one of the housekeepers from the Nussbaum Science Building. One participant mentioned that her involvement with TSO was one of the reasons that she stayed at Taylor, despite the fact that, initially, she did not feel a sense of belonging.

With the location as a challenge, airport transportation emerged as one struggle Bahamian students experienced, three of whom spoke negatively about experiences with ground transportation to and from the airport. The six participants who brought up airport transportation all discussed how they expected help to come from the international student office. According to one participant who graduated in 2015,

I can't remember if it was sophomore or junior year now, but it might have been my first year there—a lot of students would come and bring their complaints or, you know, come in feeling super homesick or needed something; but in this case, someone needed something—I think they needed to get dropped to the airport—and it was like immediate dismissal. Like, that's not their problem—type thing. Though participants identified with this experience, they also talked about finding other means to get to and from the airport. A participant who graduated in 1988 recalled, “When I arrived at the airport in Indianapolis and then took a small plane from Indianapolis to Muncie and then got a taxi cab from Muncie to Taylor . . .” Similarly, another participant offered the following experience:

Well, you know, I was always told—well, not always—but during like the first few years they [other Bahamians] said, you know, make friends because your friends are going to be the ones you rely on for transportation. But for me, I didn't necessarily want to make friends just so I could use them for their transportation, you know?

A participant from the class of 1988 explained the culture shock of airport transportation by stating, “The airport ride, the ride from the airport to anybody's house, that's very short [back in the Bahamas].”

**Racial tension.** Nine participants felt some form of prejudice when coming to the United States. However, eight talked about encountering racial tension. Arriving in the United States, the participants remembered understanding themselves as foreigners and therefore expected certain challenges. However, they did not expect to be grouped and seen as African Americans. Such challenges include resisting African American

stereotypes, feeling isolated by other black students, and experiencing criticism for the actions of one's country.

Many of the black participants shared frustrations in dealing with stereotypes associated with African Americans. One participant specifically mentioned realizing he was “a minority for one of the first times in [his] life.” Another participant shared a similar experience:

My freshman year, I transitioned from that to, I don't know . . . I was trying to fit in. Being a foreigner and not living up to stereotypes of African Americans even though I wasn't African American . . . I can remember one of the first times I came to Taylor and one of my—we became “friends” —but she's going off and on about affirmative action, how she didn't get into one school. Me, I'm like crap, what the heck is affirmative action. I don't even really remember what it does and I had to go back and Google it. I was like, does this even apply to me because I'm not African American? Ugh. I remember stuff like that and not wanting to join any sports team because all the black people at Taylor were athletes. So, I was like, I'm not running, I'm not joining any sports team, because that's what a lot of people, you know, a lot of them expected the athletes, black people to be like.

Black Bahamians must face the challenge of learning and experiencing the racial climate in the United States. One participant mentioned she was in the US during the election of Obama and was shocked at the responses people displayed. Another participant from the class of 1988 described her experience of feeling isolated:

I was called an Oreo . . . because I hung with white people. Like, I just wasn't into that. I wasn't into the . . . what I found with some African Americans, who I was friends with, that would say to me "Why you talking to her?" and I'm just like "because she's a human being" . . . I couldn't think of "you know she only saying hi to you because you're black." Like, well that's her problem, not mine. I'm not taking that on.

Many Bahamians sought an identity separate of African Americans because, while they may share the same skin color and African roots, both cultures are different and have two different histories.

Some of the participants talked about having to educate white Americans about their culture. Feeling as though she had to defend her country and culture from questions that displayed the ignorance of some Americans, a 1990 graduate shared an incident she encountered due to a media release:

There was a reporter who was really biased to me against the Bahamas but he, Sir Lynden Pindling had interviewed with him and—this was when we had a lot of problems with drug trafficking throughout the Bahamas . . . it was just the Bahamas was wrong, drugs being in the Bahamas was our fault, I mean like we make drugs here . . . feeling as though you were going to be judged because what was going on in your country at the time was, was a little unsettling . . . We still had to defend the Bahamas. That was our country. That was our home. We wasn't going to let anybody say anything bad about it.

An interviewee said she became tired of explaining and, instead, played into the ignorance of those she met. She then said she did not think she should have done so.

### **Relationship with Faculty and Staff**

Faculty and staff both played major roles in Bahamian students' experiences at Taylor University. All participants said faculty and staff impacted their experiences through personal interactions inside and outside the classroom. Within Taylor's context, it is important to note that some staff—such as those in student development—are considered faculty. Therefore, the term *staff* refers to student development, administration, and maintenance employees. Alternatively, *faculty* refers to teaching faculty members who work primarily in the classrooms.

**Faculty.** All participants expressed having good rapport with most of the faculty. Participants described faculty as personable, hospitable, approachable, and intentional in their interactions with Bahamian students. Such descriptions of faculty preceded stories in which Bahamian students similarly described and positively affirmed relationships with faculty. When asked how they would describe Taylor to a first-year student, six participants brought up faculty members, expressing a willingness to support and intentionally get to know international students. A participant who graduated in 2015 stated, “You’re not a statistic. You’re not just a random number. You are an individual. They know you by name. You could go to them at any time and ask them for help . . .” All but one participant acknowledged having personal relationships with many faculty members at Taylor. Participants shared examples of faculty inviting them over to their homes for breaks or dinners and even assisting students with shopping for much-needed items such as winter clothes.

In contrast to their experiences with teachers in the Bahamas, participants shared that faculty at Taylor were committed to helping students succeed in the classroom. A

2015 graduate noted, “At Taylor, you know, most of the professors there, they’re not there for the money. They’re there for their love of teaching and their love of God, for the most part.” All participants believed institutional and faculty academic instruction was excellent. Though participants felt that classes were academically challenging, they affirmed that faculty were helpful when it came to course work and assignments.

**Staff.** All but two participants mentioned staff helping with their transition to Taylor. Interestingly, these staff members’ functional areas were diverse, including hall directors, international student services personnel, admissions counselors, academic support staff, housekeeping staff, bursar office staff, and grounds staff. Though all of these positions have specific roles according to their job descriptions, the participants noted how individual staff members went out of their way to help ease students’ transitions. Participants also shared about developing personal relationships with staff, which resulted in being invited to staff members’ homes and to church with them.

### **Respect**

Not only did respect emerge indirectly as a theme in the interviews, but seven participants actually used the word *respect* when describing responses to teachers and professors. Participants recalled referring to teachers and professors by title and last name, a concept instilled in Bahamians at a young age during elementary school. A 2010 graduate explained, “When I was growing up, teachers were always viewed as nation builders so, you know, there was a great respect for teachers back, you know, when I was in high school and elementary school.” Similarly, a 2015 graduate said, “At school too, in the Bahamas, the teaching style is very formal, I think is what I meant to say. It’s a very formal style. It’s ‘Mrs.’ ‘Mr.’, ‘Miss,’ whatever. And don’t dare call somebody by

their first name.” Bahamians are taught not to refer to an adult by first name because it is viewed as disrespectful. However, Bahamian students’ desires to communicate high levels of respect are not limited to using titles. As a result of their Bahamian schooling, students also show respect by physically responding to and addressing teachers in formal ways in class. In the Bahamas, when a teacher enters the room, students stand and in unison say, for example, “Good morning, Mrs. Rolle.” This action was a way to help teach students that teachers were to be respected. As an example, a 1988 graduate shared, “I remember the first time we were all in a classroom and a teacher came in and I stood and . . . it’s like, ‘Do you need to go somewhere?’ I’m like, okay, sit back down because nobody else is standing.”

As a consequence of a more respect-driven approach to classroom interactions, teachers in the Bahamas also teach from a more authoritarian standpoint. Doing so draws clearer lines between teacher and student in the Bahamas than are commonly drawn in the United States. Respect is so important in the Bahamas that disrespecting teachers results in disciplinary action more quickly than is often the case in the United States.

Furthermore, eight participants talked about respect in relation to the way that they responded to professors at Taylor. Participants explained how professors at Taylor requested students be less formal in their interactions. As one might expect given a deeply engrained culture of respect among Bahamian students, requests for informality made some students uncomfortable. Some participants even remembered feeling confused as to why Taylor faculty would not want to receive students’ respect. While several participants recalled refusing to call professors by their first names, others alluded



to the fact that they hesitated but eventually gave in because of the pressure they received from faculty members. To this end, a 2010 graduate shared,

But in college, I could still remember to this day . . . I kept calling them Mr. and Mrs. [last name] and everybody else would call them by their first name and I just thought that was so disrespectful until one time [the professor] had—he sat there and spoke to me—gave me a 15-minute spiel on why I should call him [first name] and after that I called him [first name].

Such experiences are common for many Bahamian students upon transitioning to Taylor.

### **Academic Challenges**

All participants mentioned feeling as though they gained much from their academic experience as a result of Taylor's academic rigor. Even though participants appreciated the intensity of the academics, many reflected on challenges faced while at Taylor and how they dealt with those challenges. Most of the examples participants shared were related to reading assignments, course work, and/or examinations. Seven participants shared how their Taylor experience encouraged them to take ownership of their learning. Some mentioned doing so by taking advantage of tutoring services and study tables to get help with reading assignments and other course work.

**Reading assignments.** When participants talked about reading, they always referred the amount of reading assigned as part of class preparation. Seven participants claimed they were not prepared for the “ridiculous amount of reading,” and adjusting to the quantity of reading was challenging. Some participants found ways to get by without having to read, while others tried their best keep up with the reading for classes.

**Course work.** Five participants noted trouble with math classes, and two of the five talked about not having the opportunity to take pre-calculus or calculus courses before coming to Taylor. As a result, they felt academically disadvantaged because their chosen majors had calculus one as a requirement for course completion.

Four participants referred to struggling with language when they first arrived on campus. The term *language* refers to the way Bahamian students spell words, write, and speak publicly, which includes an accent. A 1988 graduate shared the following story:

As a student, I was always told that I was a very good writer. And then I got my first English paper back from a professor and it was inked up. I think it had more red than black ink that I used and I was highly offended. Spelling difference was a big thing because we spell the British way. Our tendency in our writing is to be a little more flowery, if I may use that term, or beat around the bush a little bit more as opposed to coming to the point . . .

The British spelling of words often differs from spelling in the United States. For example, the word *color* is spelled with two vowels, but the British spelling has three: *colour*. Though such an example shows only a small difference, marking it as wrong communicates that what the student learned in the Bahamas was wrong and that the only correct spelling is the one used in the United States.

Though most participants discussed challenges with writing, one participant also mentioned similar challenges occurring during a speech class due to his accent and intonations. He noted, in particular, that despite his efforts, the professor even marked him down because she claimed he had not enunciated his *t*'s.

**Examinations.** Six participants mentioned adjusting to multiple-choice examinations, more popular in the US than in the Bahamas. Bahamian students are accustomed to longer, essay-based examinations that often take up three hours and must be completed in one sitting. Five of these six participants expressed disliking multiple-choice exams, instead preferring exams in which they could give reasons and support for answer choices as a means of best demonstrating mastery of the subject. Studying for the multiple-choice exams did not help students grasp the material because they were more focused on passing the test rather than learning the material.

The Bahamian high school system does not really prepare students for higher education, much less for American higher education. According to a 1987 graduate and current professor at the University of the Bahamas, the Bahamian high school education has a relatively “narrow focus. Most schools maintain a narrow focus. Even in private schools the focus is very narrow, almost to the point where we are just BGCSE focused and not globally focused.” BGCSE stands for the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education. The BGCSE is a series of examinations designed for students in grades 10-12, serving as a requirement to attend university and as a prerequisite to professional qualifications. The BGCSE exams, created by the Ministry of Education, are Bahamian-tailored and derived from the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) models (The Government of the Bahamas, 2011a). As such, the exams are internationally recognized and commissioned by the University of Cambridge. The participant stated,

Basically, to be honest with you, once an American student hits ninth grade, they are being prepared for college. In the Bahamas, when you hit ninth grade, you are

preparing for BJC. And for 12th grade, you are trying to get 5 or 6 BGCSEs with Math and English with C or above.

The BJC exam is similar to the BGCSEs but is for grades 7-9 and is not international in terms of its scope because it only serves as a government standardized examination (The Government of the Bahamas, 2011b).

**Ownership of learning.** All of the participants talked about having to take ownership of their learning inside and outside the classroom. Seven participants noted the reason for the adjustment was that many Bahamian high schools spoon-feed students the information they are taught. The students' job is to be the best sponge possible and soak up as much knowledge as they can before regurgitating that information on an examination. A 2013 graduate said the following about school in the Bahamas:

Over here, all the classes were "I am going to tell you this stuff in class." Some of them were "I am going to dictate it to you and you are going to write it down." And what you do outside of the class is pretty much review.

This experience was true, at times, even at the College of the Bahamas (COB). A participant who graduated in 2002 agreed with the previous participant:

At Taylor. Right. Like you could talk and discuss and rebut and get into it with them. Like, they said something that didn't agree with you, you're free to make your case . . . what I can remember from COB, because that was even longer ago - it didn't feel the same way. It was . . . "I'm a teacher. This is what I'm giving you. Take it and give it back to me in an exam."

Further confirming the lack of ownership within the Bahamian education system, two participants, currently faculty members at the University of the Bahamas (UB), spoke of

students coming to the university needing to be taught to take ownership of their learning. According to the participants, such a lack of ownership is the result of the high school system not training students that way. One participant even suggested such lessons be covered in international orientation.

### **Conclusion**

The participants, having had time to think since their graduation and reflect on their experiences, shared both positive and negative experiences from their times at Taylor. Additionally, participants shared various ways of adjusting to differences and tackling challenges. Significant themes include relationships with faculty and staff, respect, academic challenges, and social adjustment. When thinking through ways of improving institutional engagement with and support of Bahamian students, Taylor University should consider the above themes.

These themes emphasize the essence of the Bahamian student experience. Bahamians studying at Taylor need support—academically and socially—to convert their potential for excellence into academic success. The support should come from the institution as well as faculty and staff because Bahamian students' sense of belonging is directly affected by the institution's inclusivity of other cultures, both inside and outside of the classroom. If Taylor understands how to support students from other cultures, the institution will achieve its purpose of providing all students with the chance to succeed.

Chapter 5 discusses the positives and negatives of what the themes communicate, along with recommendations of how Taylor can improve the experiences of current and future Bahamian students. Furthermore, the chapter explores and describes best practices for serving a Bahamian population on campus.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion**

The study sought to explore the transition experiences of Bahamians who attended Taylor University. This chapter discusses themes that emerged from participants' responses to the research questions: How do Bahamian students bridge the pedagogical gap between their high school experiences and their experiences as students at Taylor? What role do the faculty and staff at Taylor play in assisting Bahamian students in this transition?

### **Findings**

The themes reported in Chapter 4 reveal the challenges Bahamian students experience, alluding to how they adjusted to the Taylor environment in the past and the impact of the Taylor faculty and staff on their experiences. The following discussion considers these themes in light of relevant literature.

Interestingly, participants only shared experiences centering on support. International orientation—a compilation of programming and support services for international students—was the one program participants specifically mentioned. As they reflected, all participants raised issues and concerns, as well as examples of positive experiences, with institutional support for Bahamian students. Thus, the conclusion that support is the most important aspect of the Bahamian student experience is reasonable.

This theme aligns with the study by Bhochohibhoya et al. (2017), which examined different sources of support that international students seek out. In addition, Zhai (2002) emphasized the need for support because of cultural differences in such areas as the education system, academic challenges, language, food, and social interactions. The act of providing support for the students strongly communicates a sense of genuine care. University employees demonstrate investment in students' success when a staff member goes out of his or her way to help with needed shopping, when housekeepers offer to open their homes over break, or when one offers a ride to the airport. Such efforts increase international students' sense of belonging and therefore their desire to be at Taylor. Without such intentional support, Bahamians' sense of belonging deteriorates.

According to the participants, relationships with faculty and staff are one of the main reasons they value their experiences at Taylor. Likewise, the literature affirms the importance of such relationships. Glass, Kociolek, and colleagues (2015) directly correlated students' relationships and their sense of belonging. Participants repeatedly shared stories of faculty not treating them like statistics in the classroom, taking personal interest in international students as individuals, and even displaying hospitality by opening their homes to students. Such actions strongly communicate faculty members' interests in the success of Bahamian students. Though the staff members are not always involved directly with academics, they also communicated care toward the Bahamian students. Due to the nature of Bahamian culture, hospitality and displays of genuine care speak volumes to Bahamians. International students find comfort in knowing who to confide in and receive support from, especially when struggling and in need of help. The relationships built foster good rapport and respect with students.

As stated, respect is of great importance to Bahamians, an idea not readily discussed in the literature. Thus, these unique findings fill a significant void within the scholarly discussion concerning building and nurturing relationships with Bahamian students. Building respect with Bahamian students is not difficult. Once lost, respect is difficult to regain. Because Bahamians are taught to respect individuals older than themselves, respect for teachers and professors is a given.

However, respect given because of a position differs from respect given personally. Bahamians may demonstrate respect to a professor because of his or her position of authority without respecting the professor as an individual. Pursuing respect from Bahamian students on a personal level proves far more valuable than title recognition. For example, some participants described the impact housekeeping and grounds crew had on their transition into the university. If Bahamians respect an individual personally, that person's title only adds to that level of respect. Moreover, Bahamian students more likely open up in relation to issues, concerns, joys, and achievements with individuals they respect. Therefore, understanding the Bahamian economy of respect proves important as respect directly ties to Bahamian students feeling personally supported.

Bahamians students recognize they are studying in the United States. However, Bahamians may not recognize the difference between Taylor's culture and other American institutional cultures. Bahamian students simultaneously learn to adjust to both America's and Taylor's cultures. Such an abrupt and overwhelming adjustment causes Bahamian students to experience culture shock in various ways due to American cultural differences and unique cultural differences stemming from an American Christian higher



educational experience. The literature confirms the presence and impact of this culture shock. For instance, Hegarty (2014) and Leong (2015) described challenges international students experience such as homesickness, cultural customs, loss of social status, fear, and sense of insignificance—often resulting from host students' misconception of international student actions.

Concerning Bahamian students' adjustments to Taylor's distinct culture, several examples prove helpful. One example is praise and worship at Taylor. While Bahamian students do not dislike contemporary Christian music, hearing the same style of music repeatedly becomes tiresome. Residence life also provides an interesting example. Bahamians maintain certain personal boundaries; intentionally or unintentionally crossing those limits can negatively impact a Bahamian student's sense of belonging at Taylor.

In addition, the majority of Bahamians are black, which requires additional help in thinking through and understanding what it means to be "black" in the United States. Due to the unresolved history of racism in the United States as discussed by Glass, Wongtrirat, and Buus (2015), Bahamian students must contemplate their identities in new and difficult ways. The literature confirms the experiences of Bahamians encountering racial tension—either racism or neo-racism—in the United States (Glass, Wongtrirat, et al., 2015; Lee & Rice, 2007; Spears, 1999). Because Bahamian culture views race differently than does the United States, Bahamians often face internal conflict as they study in a culture with a long history of grouping and categorizing individuals in ways incongruent with Bahamians' understandings of racial and ethnic identity.

To many Bahamians, Taylor is the first place in which they are considered and experience life as members of a minority group. Because racism is not as prominent in

the Bahamas as in the US and with the majority Bahamian population being majority black, many black Bahamians do not experience racism before coming to the US. Therefore, each black Bahamian experiences a variation of black or multiracial identity development.

### **Implications for Practice**

An in-depth understanding of the results leads to several important implications concerning how best to help Bahamian students transition well into Taylor. Ultimately, the support or lack of support Bahamian students receive, especially when transitioning to a new environment, has an enduring impact on students' sense of belonging and their perceptions of their overall Taylor experience. Consequently, suggestions for improving Bahamian students' experiences are examined below.

As suggested by one participant, international orientation should include communication to students about ownership of learning. Bahamian students, coming from a system influenced by the British, previously encountered learning environments more dependent on the teacher imparting knowledge to students. American higher education encourages students to take ownership of their own learning. Professors at American universities expect students to complete all course requirements in a timely manner, a reality Bahamians should be made aware of prior to failing several classes (NAFSA, 2013). Currently, international orientation simply covers academic support, that is, where students can seek learning and course assistance. Therefore, explaining academic expectations in American higher education is a more proactive means of support, allowing students to begin to prepare themselves as a result of knowing what to expect in the classroom.

Similarly, educating faculty concerning relevant cultural influences and educational differences between the United States and the Bahamas will help faculty communicate more effectively with Bahamian students (Gopal, 2011). Consequently, faculty will be able to identify what cultural differences hinder a student's learning, thus increasing student learning by knowing how to assist students effectively in understanding course materials and concepts. With a better understanding of students' contexts, faculty will become better equipped to advise and coach students to success in ways rewarding for both them as faculty and the students they serve.

Though Bahamian students may encounter academic hurdles when coming to Taylor, they prove persistent and desire to succeed (Mamiseishvili, 2012). However, understanding how to correct a Bahamian student academically is crucial. If a student is struggling in a math course, stating that an answer is incorrect is acceptable. However, stating the way a student is working through a problem is incorrect is not acceptable as it demotivates students. Such logic also applies to writing and speaking. While explaining to students that writing in the United States differs from writing in the Bahamas, claiming that the way a student previously learned to write is incorrect proves to be offensive.

Alternatively, professors can work productively with Bahamian students by teaching them how to address their audience, which, in this case, is an American audience. In any case, American educators need to understand that the American academic system differs culturally from the Bahamian academic system, a reality requiring Bahamian students to adjust as part of their educational experience. When Bahamian students are told the way they learned was wrong, they do not hear educators communicating an understanding of a cultural difference. Rather, Bahamian students

hear educators say the United States' way is the only correct way. Educators should consider affirming that, though Bahamians must overcome many hurdles, their previous academic experiences proved sufficient for obtaining the opportunity to study in the United States.

### **Implications for Future Research**

The current qualitative study reveals areas for further exploration of the educational experiences of Bahamians students at Taylor University. The study examined Bahamian student experiences in a broad sense, but the emerging themes give direction for more in-depth research.

The themes disclose the impact that faculty at Taylor have on Bahamian students. The relationships built during the students' four-year experiences seem to encourage and challenge Bahamians to pursue excellence. Therefore, further exploratory research could address the following question: How do relationships with faculty at Taylor impact the learning of the Bahamian students?

The topic of preparedness for college at Taylor seems also to be a concern of the participants. Whether referring to being underprepared for American-style mathematics or English, such foundational areas of study pose challenges for Bahamian students. Additional research exploring various ways Taylor could help prepare Bahamian students for academic success would prove helpful.

Third, many participants shared about struggles with examinations in classes. Specifically, participants expressed concern with the overuse of multiple-choice examinations, which Bahamian students perceive as hindering their abilities to demonstrate knowledge and mastery of a subject. Future studies could aim to

determine—or at least examine—whether examinations successfully assess the learning of Bahamian students.

Finally, participants shared many social challenges impacting their experiences at Taylor. Though the identified social challenges existed mostly as a result of studying in the US, such issues still occurred at Taylor and impacted students' experiences. As a result, Taylor has a responsibility to help cultivate an environment that welcomes Bahamian students into the overall community. Further research should seek to answer the following questions: How do social challenges affect Bahamian students sense of belonging at Taylor? How can Taylor create a more welcoming environment for Bahamian students?

### **Limitations**

Though the research comes with many recommendations of in terms of how better to address Bahamian students' educational needs, the process of research is also accompanied by limitations. These limitations do not decrease the value of the research but can prove challenging as progress is made. The limitations shared below disclose the three main challenges encountered during the research process.

The first limitation involves the amount of time available to collect the data needed. Data collection, as stated in Chapter 3, took place in the Bahamas. However, the plan to travel to more than one island to interview alumni was not feasible within the research timeline. The lack of time to travel to multiple islands resultantly limited interviews to only alumni on the island of New Providence. New Providence was chosen because it is the island on which the greatest number of Bahamian Taylor alumni reside. Moreover, because of the size of the island, scheduling meetings with participants within

a week and a half was easier. However, more time would have allowed for additional interviews, which would have added to the study's richness and the certainty of the essence of the Bahamian student experience at Taylor University.

The second limitation highlights participant availability. Though the first limitation played a role, only 13 of the 19 alumni who desired to participate were available during the week and a half allotted for data collection. Despite the effort made in traveling to the Bahamas when most of the interested alumni could participate, some alumni already made plans during that time. Some participants adjusted their schedules and made themselves available, but not all participants had the option of doing so.

Lastly, phenomenological studies often involve researcher bias, a significant limitation in which the researcher's opinions and experiences can inappropriately skew the researcher's ability to accurately identify the essence of participants' shared experience. The fact that the principal investigator of this study is Bahamian warrants concern about researcher bias. Because the chosen research design permits interpretation, a hermeneutic approach allows space for the researcher to include his or her own experience within the process of interpreting the data. However, the researcher of the current study did so cautiously so as not to introduce new and personal information not supported by the collective voice of the Bahamian sample interviewed. However, given the researcher's proximity to the research topic, bias may be a present—though relatively insignificant—limitation.

## **Conclusion**

Bahamian students have attended Taylor University for over 30 years. The experiences of Bahamian students have changed throughout the decades, though the

needs remain consistent. Exploring the needs of Bahamian students yields an understanding of how Bahamian students have bridged the pedagogical gap between their experiences in high school in the Bahamas and their Taylor experiences. Some of the ways Bahamian graduates bridged this gap while at Taylor were through building genuine relationships with the faculty and staff, joining a community, finding necessary support both academically and socially, and bravely engaging American culture. In doing so, graduated and current Bahamian students gain knowledge of the surrounding culture, navigating through and creating paths for themselves and subsequent Bahamian students to be successful at Taylor University.

As international students, adjusting to various social challenges—such as culture shock and homesickness— and academic challenges—such as relationships with teachers and academic expectations—are expected. Bahamian students have to learn to adapt to both American culture and the Taylor culture in order to grow socially and educationally. Given the important role faculty and staff play in the development of Bahamian students, Taylor University’s leadership must consider leveraging institutional strengths to find ways to further improve and enhance the educational experience of Bahamian students.

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### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> The position of Primer was changed to Prime Minister after the Bahamian Independence.

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the proposal discussed is the most recent proposal found and is believed to be the final proposal instituted upon the creation of this position. There were a few revisions that went back and forth between President Lehman and Mr. Boren.

<sup>3</sup> Lyford Cay Scholarship Committee did not offer graduate scholarships before this point.

<sup>4</sup> Principal is believed to be the position equivalent to a President when the college was a 2-year institution.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that the College of the Bahamas moved to university status in 2016 and is now known as the University of the Bahamas.

**Appendix A**  
**Request for Participation**

Dear [Name],

Hello. My name is Dominic (Nick) Cartwright. I am a graduate student at Taylor University working on obtaining a master's degree in Higher Education and Student Development. I am a graduate assistant for the Office of Intercultural Programs (OIP) and I work specifically with international students.

I would like to know if you would be interested in participating in a study that I am conducting on Bahamian students' experiences while studying at Taylor University. This study will explore the experiences of Bahamian alumni during their high school and college years. The goal is to get a better understanding of the educational challenges that Bahamian students face while studying in an American higher education system.

I would need about 1 hour for each interview that will be conducted within focus groups. These groups will comprise of 5 people per group. I will be traveling to the Bahamas in July and I will be recording these interviews for research purposes only. Your information is confidential and will not be shared with anyone other than for the purpose of reporting my results. If you have any questions concerning this, please contact me. Your participation will be greatly appreciated.

If you are interested in participating in my research, please fill out this short questionnaire. <https://goo.gl/t7hQaR>

Thank you for considering.

Dominic (Nick) Cartwright

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Protocol**

1. How would you describe Taylor to a freshman student that is starting this fall?
2. What differences did you see between the education system in the Bahamas and the education system in the United States?
3. How did the teaching style of your teachers in high school differ from that of your professors at Taylor?
4. Were there any significant challenges academically that you experienced during your studies at Taylor?
5. What was your relationship with your teachers in high school?
6. What was your relationship with your professors at Taylor?
7. How do you view teachers in the Bahamas? How has Bahamian culture influenced this view?
8. How did you respond to your teachers in high school?
9. How did your high school teachers expect you to interact with them?
10. How did your college professors expect you to interact with them?
11. How has the faculty helped with your adjustment?
12. How has the staff helped with your adjustment?
13. What helped you make the transition from the Bahamas to Taylor University?
14. What have you initiated to make you transition easier?
15. What are some of the challenges that you experience in coming to Taylor?
16. What advice would you give new incoming Bahamian students going to Taylor?



