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An interactive website to aid the academic and social transition of Chinese international students to Pepperdine University

Yushuang Wu

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AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE TO AID THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL

TRANSITION OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Communication Division

Pepperdine University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Yushuang Wu

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ii

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Under the guidance of a faculty committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Faculty Committee

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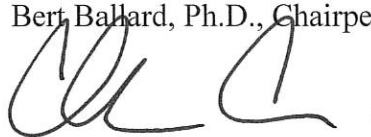Under the guidance of a faculty committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
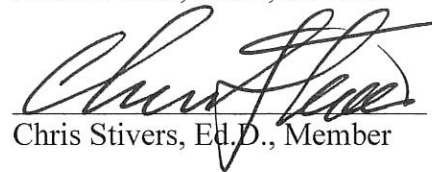
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FIGURES

TABLES

AN INTERACTIVE WEBSITE TO AID THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSITION OF CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS TO PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

By

Yushuang Wu
December 2017
Dr. Bert Ballard, Chairperson

ABSTRACT

As the number of Chinese international students studying in American universities has increased dramatically in recent years, more attention has been paid to the challenges these students face both academically and socially. To address problems Chinese international students face in their acculturation to U.S. culture generally, and Pepperdine University specifically, this strategic communication non-thesis project involved the development of an interactive website specifically designed for Chinese international students at Pepperdine University. Its aim is to help them better understand the American culture and find solutions when they encounter cultural difficulties and challenges in their academic and social life. The website not only elaborated on American culture such as slang and plagiarism rules, but also introduced campus resources and how to use them. In addition, the website included a Connect section facilitating opportunities for students to interact with other students.

The development of the website involved both primary and secondary research to gain insights on Chinese international students' college experience and how to help them make the transition to and their experience at Pepperdine University more smooth. Specifically, face-to-face interviews were conducted with different professors, an employee of Office of International Student Services, and the Chinese Student Association student chair. A focus group with Chinese international students was also conducted in order to explore their campus experience both academically and socially.

A beta-test survey of Chinese international students revealed that the website was helpful in the transition process to American culture and adapting to campus. There were also indicators of attitude and behavior changes in terms of using campus resources, approaching professors, and views on plagiarism. Further development and improvements to the website, such as creating a Chinese counterpart website and adding more content on nearby restaurant guide and visa applications, will be completed by Pepperdine CSA members during summer 2017; the website could be relaunched as early as August 2017.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The increasing trend of studying abroad has resulted in a huge influx of culturally diverse students at international universities. In the past decade, Chinese reforms have allowed Chinese students to connect to other countries. According to a report by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the total number of the Chinese students studying at international universities was 523,700 in 2015. Notably, there are 328,547 Chinese international students (CISs) studying in the United States. These students went abroad to pursue education opportunities outside of China. The average term of study of overseas students is about 2 years. Further, due to the mobility of Chinese students to international universities, China is considered a major driver of international economic growth. Around 53% of all students studying abroad are from Asia, with one out of six international students hailing from China (ICEF Monitor, 2016). The recent demand for post-graduate studies has highly influenced the mobility of Chinese students to other countries. Their mobility to other countries promotes economic growth because these students spend money on education along with other services, which boosts a country's economy. For example, in the 2014-2015 academic year, CISs pumped $9.8 billion into the U.S. economy through tuition and fees (Institute of International Education, 2016).

Many Chinese students come from middle-class backgrounds and are pursuing an education in American universities because they want to escape a flawed Chinese education system. The low standard of Chinese universities is leaving many graduates ill prepared. Government statistics show the average monthly salary for college graduates

half a year after leaving school was 3,487 Yuan ($539), less than a construction worker makes on average. This is because, besides a few highly ranked universities like Beijing University, which are very hard to get into, most Chinese colleges are poor quality and it is very easy to get a degree from them. As a result, Chinese people believe that their home universities are useless, as they offer no career or earning potential. Likewise, since the Chinese education system is based on memorization rather than developing creative skills among students, the global incompatibility of the learning style of Chinese educational institutions forces Chinese families to send their children abroad for educational purposes (Chen & Jordan, 2016). Chinese parents prefer American universities because they believe the American education system enhances students' creativity so their children can acquire better career opportunities after pursuing higher education in the U.S.

Although the number of Chinese students in international universities has increased in recent years, CISs are facing challenges adjusting to a foreign culture. Particularly in American universities, CISs face issues related to communication and academics due to cultural differences. For instance, culture shock in the initial year and loneliness restrict the social life of CISs. Moreover, language difference also creates a communication barrier between American students and CISs. The differences between Chinese and American cultural norms lead to adjustment problems for CISs. They are uncomfortable raising their hands and participating in class discussions out of respect for the professor. Indeed, from a Chinese perspective, challenging professors is viewed as a sign of disrespect, instead of initiative and independent thinking. Additionally, CISs are

not confident, and they believe that they do not have good English language skills, which limits their communication with university lecturers and American students because they don't want to lose face in public.

Pepperdine University is a private Christian university located in Malibu, California, preparing students for lives of "purpose, service, and leadership" (Pepperdine University, n.d.). It has a total of 128 CISs in Seaver College, the undergraduate school (C. Socquet, personal communication, September 29, 2016). CISs make up almost 37% of all international students at Pepperdine; they are the largest group of international students, and the number continues to increase. As a CIS myself, I came to America in 2011 with the goal of pursuing a better and higher education from Pepperdine University. I attended Seaver College with a major in interpersonal communication and a minor in multi-media design. After that, I was admitted to the Master's program in strategic communication and continued my studies at Pepperdine University. As a CIS, I have faced many challenges during my initial years at Pepperdine University. Since English is not my native language, I spend more time than English speaking students reading and writing essays for different classes. Moreover, language barriers and cultural differences prevented me from interacting with American students. For example, when doing group projects with other American students, I can barely join in their conversations beyond the project itself because I am not familiar with the subjects they talk about, nor do I have adequate English skills to fully understand their dialogue. The religion and humanities classes were also hard for me because I did not have the relevant background for these subjects. Through observations and conversations with other CISs, I have concluded that

they face the same difficulty adapting to American culture. They also face the challenge of socializing with American students, communicating with professors, and participating in class discussions. Participation in class discussions is also hard for us as we were taught not to speak during class lessons in our home country (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2002). Adapting to a whole new environment and lifestyle can be accompanied by alienation and loneliness, and this is certainly challenging for a new student from China.

To address both problems faced by CIS in their general acculturation to U.S. culture specifically at Pepperdine, this thesis presents a strategic communication project that involves an interactive website to help CISs better understand American culture and offer solutions when facing difficulties in their academic and social life. The website is divided into two parts: an academic part and a social part. The academic part will help CISs understand the university culture and university rules that differ from the Chinese experience, such as plagiarism. The academic part will also help students communicate with their professors and provide answers to their academic queries and problems. The social part will allow CIS to learn about American culture, make friends with other Chinese and American students, and encourage participation in various campus activities. Although the university offers various resources like academic centers and introduction to culture classes to enhance communication among diverse students, this website can act as a bridge between existing resources. It will illustrate to students where, when, and how to use these resources under different situations.

The audience for the website project is CISs. CISs have different communication characteristics than American students because they come from a collectivistic culture

(Piper, 2009). The literature review presents a cross-national comparison regarding values and communication patterns. The most fitting conceptualization for this project is Hofstede's (1980) concept of cultural dimensions and Chinese facework because they explain broad cultural communication patterns of CISs. However, this project only focused on individualism-collectivism and power distance, which is most directly applicable to the context of international students studying abroad experience because Chinese culture is generally collectivistic and high power distance, whereas American culture is generally individualistic and low power distance. It will help in the understanding of a foreigner studying in another country especially related to classroom interactions and learning styles. Individualism explains how people in a society integrate themselves in groups of similarities, whereas power distance explains how people accept and have an expectation of power being unequally distributed. Reviewing Chinese facework is also important in this project. It is fundamental to the Chinese communication style and explains barriers to socialization between Americans and CISs.

The thesis will first present a literature review on Chinese facework, individualism-collectivism, and different communication styles of Chinese and Americans. Power distance and its influences on students in the context of a classroom will also be explored. Second, the thesis will report on a series of interviews and one focus group conducted to gather information about the difficulties and concerns of CISs at Pepperdine University. The interviews and focus group were conducted with the assistant director in the Office of International Student Services (OISS), faculty members at Pepperdine University, and the student chair of the Chinese Student Association

(CSA). Additionally, a focus group discussion with CISs yielded information about their challenges and experiences at Pepperdine University. Finally, the website project is elaborated on as a strategic communication tool, followed by its usability evaluation result analysis and suggestions for future implementation.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review provides a conceptual and theoretical basis for understanding how and why CIS face difficulty in adjusting in American universities because of cultural disparities between Chinese and American culture. It is important to review the dimension of individualism-collectivism because it helps to understand the differences between Chinese and American communication styles, their core cultural values, and the motivations behind different communication behaviors. Individualism-collectivism represents fundamental values toward the self and the group, as well as consideration for others. It also leads to differences in communication styles. For example, American students are individualists, and they tend to be more inner-directed, open-minded, and competitive compared with CISs, who have been labeled as more collectivistic and respectful (Shi, 2011). Power distance is another important factor when considering communication with professors and participation in the class. Coming from a high power distance country, CISs hold high respect for the professor, which could prevent them from expressing personal opinions in class and communicating with the professor after class (Hofstede, 2003). Lastly, facework is a fundamental concept in Chinese communication style (Gao &Ting-Toomey, 1998). Reviewing these concepts will help understand CISs' behavior and decisions as well as help to develop effective communication strategies that will enable them to better adapt to American culture.

Individualism-collectivism

According to Merkin (2006) and Oetzel et al. (2001), collectivism and individualism, otherwise known as individualism-collectivism, remain highly prominent aspects of culture. Individualism-collectivism affects communication in all aspects via cultural norms (Martínez Mateo, Cabanis, Stenmanns, & Krach, 2013). In individualistic societies, "people prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups" (Hofstede, 1984, p.6). However, in collectivistic cultures "people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225).

Individualism and collectivism have been used to account for styles of conveying information among sets of collectivistic and individualistic cultures (McMullan, 2015). As noted by McMullan (2015), individualism-collectivism has a correlation with conflict styles, as individualists and collectivists deal with conflicts differently. On the one hand, individualists tend to avoid conflicts or view it as competition, and on the other hand, collectivists are more group-oriented and value compromising. Individualists are more concerned about themselves, whereas collectivists think about the welfare of others, and will try to find a selfless resolution to a conflict. Consequently, this dynamic has an impact on multiethnic mediation processes. In ambivalent scenarios, collectivists and individualists naturally react in differing communication styles. McMullan noted, cultural tendencies toward direct or indirect conflict management often display a direct reflection on culture's individualistic or collectivistic styles. As such, these tendencies can be seen in one's mannerisms. The way an individual handles a situation tells a lot about that

person's personality and the type of culture that was instilled in him or her while growing up. As a result, reviewing this concept helps to understand why CISs tend to remain quiet when they have different opinions in class or with other American students.

The classification of individualism or collectivism can also be differentiated based on the extent to which a culture places emphasis on vertical or horizontal social relationships. Vertical relationships emphasize hierarchy whereas horizontal relationships value equality (Triandis, 2001; Yang, Wu, Zhu, & Southwell, 2004; Yan & Berliner, 2009). Therefore, the predilection of individuals or a group to the vertical or horizontal dimension of individualism or collectivism determines how they interact, and thus, how information flows.

Both vertical and horizontal relationships occur in both individualism and collectivism. Typically, vertical individualists concern themselves with hierarchy, with an objective to achieve higher status by competing with members of a group. As such, their value for self-service and self-enhancement trumps group affiliation. In contrast, horizontal individualists have a predilection for being unique and distinct from others in their group (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). Such people emphasize self-reliance and like to seek out personal goals. Vertical collectivists focus on complying with authority and on enhancing the cohesion and status of their community (Campbel & Zeng, 2006). For this reason, they tend to give higher priority to interests of a group and, in most cases, sacrifice their personal goals. Horizontal collectivists share mutual goals and believe in interdependence with groups (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000).

Although they desire similarity with other members, they do not subordinate themselves to group norms because they value equality.

Individualism-collectivism can serve as a "starting point to understand some of the fundamental differences and similarities in individualistic-based or group-based cultures" (McMullan, 2015, p. 12). For this reason, this concept is fundamental in research related to CISs studying in American. From this perspective, culture is "the collective programming of the mind distinguishing the members of one group or category of people from others" (p. 14). Consequently, individualism signifies a prejudice to a social structure that is loosely joined whereas collectivism inclines more in the direction of a tightly joined shared configuration.

In societies such as the U.K. and the U.S., which are individualistic, people concentrate more on personal achievements and individual rights (Ng, Koh, Ang, Kennedy, & Chan, 2011; Zhou & Todman, 2008; Zhao, 2006). Group work might be performed here, but the value of personal opinions and rights is still exercised highly. It means that one must be self-reliant because the people in these societies are taught self-reliance and, therefore, loose relationships between individuals emerge. Alternatively, in nations such as Iraq and China, the majorities are collectivists. That is, persons are interdependent and linked to others in their group, who watch over and care for them in exchange for reliability and connection (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It means that people have strong ties to the collective, such as family, country, and work. Self is defined in terms of others and strong distinctions are made between the in-group and out-group.

Furthermore, Americans emphasize autonomy and individuality. Individuals' personal motives and objectives are ranked higher than public ones. Consequently, the culture inspires citizens to be more ambitious and to foster personal accomplishment (Hofstede, 2001; Yun, 2014). However, Chinese people base their judgments on how those around them will perceive them after their actions. As a result, they consider the potential effect of their decision on their friends, colleagues, and family. That is, unlike Americans, the Chinese make decisions based on the greater good as opposed to individual gain. Similarly, in China, authority is dictated by hierarchy; therefore, only those with the highest rank in society have a final say, and others are likely to listen and obey (Martínez Mateo et al., 2013). Americans, on the other hand, possess greater fluidity between children and their parents, and employees and managers, as they collectively make decisions together.

In brief, individualists have a preference for self-sufficiency and personal autonomy, while collectivists lean toward an unquestionable loyalty to a group; thus, they are primarily centered on interdependence (Hofstede, 1984, 2001). The communication style of choice, especially when addressing conflicts, depends greatly on whether a person is a collectivist or individualist (McMullan, 2015). Given that various cultures present a plethora of discrepancies and differences, the dimension of individualism-collectivism offers an understanding of the interrelation between civilizations (Martínez Mateo et al., 2013).

Individualism-collectivism was important when designing the strategic communication project because it reveals the internalized communication values and

norms of CISs, such as the fact that they do not like to confront conflict or disagree in person. Thus, a website provides an optimum environment for CISs to learn because they do not need to confront conflict or cultural differences but instead can gain information through website postings and emails. Through the website, CISs can learn how Americans behave in their society and thus act accordingly. The website also sought to present multiple voices and perspectives including professors, CISs, and American students. Doing so helped demonstrate community and create connections in a non-hierarchal method, which CISs, who are collectivists, relate to most strongly.

In contrast, according to Hsu (2011), many young Chinese citizens are developing individualistic tendencies. Since most CISs are youths studying in western regions such as America, a website is an effective tool because people access it separately and do not need to consider other users' needs. Therefore, the concept of individualism and collectivism is important for this project as it not only provides an explanation of how CISs act in different situations, but also is a non-threatening approach for collectivists that is customizable to individualists. Moreover, it can create a comfortable learning environment and builds a community for CISs.

Power Distance

Power distance is another aspect of Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. Drawing from past research, power distance (PD) is defined as the extent to which a society expects and accepts inequality in power and personal authority. Although inequity and authority exist within any culture, PD manifests in the degree to which the disparity is allowed (Hofstede, 1984). A society with high PD culture practices high regard for

authority, whereas one with a low PD culture tends to exercise personal responsibility and autonomy (Hofstede, 2001). A general view holds that China belongs to a *high PD* category, while English-speaking countries like the U.S. belong to *low PD* countries.

Researchers reveal that every culture possesses its particular degree of tolerance of distribution of power. Moreover, in an attempt to explain the dissimilarities existing among values related to power distribution, the concept of PD has been introduced. Hofstede (2003) maintained, "Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between Boss B and Subordinates S as perceived by the less powerful of the two" (pp. 69-72). However, Carl, Gupta, and Javidan (2004) defined PD as "the degree to which members of an organization or society expect and agree that power should be shared unequally" (p. 517). Certain cultures place more emphasis on the expertise and credibility of individuals, impartial punishments, and rewards depending on performance, equal relations and rights, and democratic decision-making measures. In contrast, other cultures utilize seniority, title, rank, age, and status as the basis of administering penalties and rewards (McMullan, 2015). In such beliefs, processes linked to decision-making are dictatorial. For instance, in a family, the parents are most likely to make all the decisions for all family members without asking for or considering opinions from children.

Hofstede (2003) further discussed the manifestation of PD in educational settings. In high PD circumstances, tutors are treated with respect, and learners may have to stand up when a teacher enters the room. In the classroom, there is a strict order and the teacher initiates all communication. Students are not allowed to speak until they are invited to. However, in low PD situations like the U.S., educators and students are more equal, and

the education process is student-centered. Students are encouraged to think independently, speak up, and ask questions. Therefore, it is permissible to argue or express disagreement with one's teacher. Regarding PD between faculty and students, Spencer-Oaten (1997) conducted a survey study of students and their tutors in Great Britain (low-PD) and China (high-PD), exploring their mutual relationships. Chinese respondents (learners and instructors) defined the relationship as more unequal than did the British respondents.

Research conducted by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel (2002) compared the culture of China and New Zealand, finding that China has high PD whereas New Zealand has low PD. New Zealand's norm positions individuals as more or less the same with the behavior of diminishing status and dispensing power more uniformly than Chinese. Chinese emphasize rank and accept uneven power distribution. For example, an instructor giving orders to students in a high PD culture expects them to comply without question due to protocols (Oetzel et al., 2010). Due to huge power differences experienced in Chinese culture, it is very likely that CISs find it difficult to engage in low PD classroom interactions. They will be hesitant to express opinions, question authority, and build personal relationships with professors, who they perceive as having higher status.

Another factor PD influences in the educational setting is plagiarism. In the Chinese education system, students are not allowed to question authoritative texts, and memorization, repetition, and imitation of authoritative text are valued as legitimate learning strategies (Bloch & Chi, 1995). As a result, this practice causes differences in

the conceptualization of plagiarism compared with how it is viewed in U.S., whose culture values independent thinking and views memorization of other ideas as an ethical violation of intellectual property (Hu & Lei, 2012). In Hu and Lei's (2012) study, only a minority of Chinese students identified unattributed verbatim copying and unacknowledged paraphrasing as plagiarism. Some even considered it acceptable to memorize and reproduce other people's writing in exams.

PD is useful to this project because it is key to understanding the reason behind CISs' low participation in class and hesitation in approaching their professors. Also, it helps explain America's education process, which focuses on the student and values independent thinking and students' initiative and desire to learn and share their intellectual experience. The strategic communication project focuses on a website because it offers a lower PD environment for CISs to learn about American culture. On the website, there is no physical presence of higher status authorities and as collectivists, CISs would feel more comfortable using the website to express their problems to the professor without having to approach him/her. The website has no physical presence of any superior, and it contains multiple voices and perspectives from CISs, professors, and American students. As a result, CISs, who are collectivists, would be more likely to learn and be involved in the website. By adjusting to low PD culture, CISs can feel more comfortable participating in the class and approaching their professors for help in the future.

Chinese Facework

Face refers to a person's claimed sense of positive image in a relational and network context (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Face impacts how people identify themselves, how they communicate with others, and how they talk to each other. It is vital to self-concept and interpersonal development, especially for the Chinese because they are raised with Confucian rules, which emphasizes social harmony and believes that everybody is good, is improvable, and can be taught through personal or social endeavors (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), there are three important features of face. First, face is salient and established in public rather than in private. One's face depends on how other people perceive one's image. Second, face is an image that one wants to project. Third, face is congruent with positive social values. People have the tendency to claim a positive face rather than a negative one (Ting-Toomey, 1994). Researchers believe that face concepts are culturally universal (Goffman, 1967). In all cultures, face concerns affect daily interaction and how people behave.

Facework involves communicative approaches that are used to save or manage self-face and to maintain, support, or encounter other people's faces (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Any behavior that people conduct regarding their face claim is called *facework* (Goffman, 1967). Goffman defined two types of facework: defensive facework and protective facework. Defensive facework involves any behavior that attempts to minimize the threat of losing face while protective facework includes actions that prevent counterparts from losing face. Research findings have revealed that face concerns both self and others are positively associated with destructive outcomes. Gao and Ting-

Toomey (1998) suggested that increased face concern of participant's results in a failure to reach an agreement, as well as in poorer interpersonal relationships with the other party because one is concerned less with outcomes and solutions but more with maintaining a socially imposed role or image. For example, it is hard for CIS to build deep relationships with American students because CIS always agree in order to maintain their own and American students' face. In addition, having a pre-occupation on face concerns leads an individual to play a certain imported social role in order to have a fruitful relationship with the people they interact with; otherwise, it cannot be successful due to lack of sincerity, progress, depth and proper conflict addressing. In an American culture that values self-expression, therefore, it is hard for Chinese to make close social connections because their communication style is perceived as weak or inadequate. Further, they are uncomfortable with the kinds of behaviors it will take to succeed in an individualistic culture.

There have been many research studies investigating the cultural differences of facework strategies. According to Ting-Toomey and Korzenny (1991), multiple studies have found that individuals from individualistic cultures tend to be more self-face oriented and were more likely to use aggressive dominating conflict strategies, whereas people from collectivistic cultures had a high level of other face concerns and were more likely to adopt avoidance strategies. In Hwang, Francesco, and Kessler's (2003) study on student's feedback seeking behaviors, it was found that in Singapore, Hong Kong, and the United States, fear of losing face was the general cause of students avoiding asking questions in all three cultures. However, it was only in the U.S. that asking questions in

class could lead to gaining more face, suggesting that they are communicationally pre-disposed to engagement and individual initiative. In addition, Park and Guan (2007) investigated the types of face threats and subsequent apologizing behavior. Positive face refers to one's self-esteem, while negative face refers to one's freedom to act (Mao, 1994). The results showed that when negative face was generated, Americans were more likely to apologize than Chinese, whereas when positive face was generated, Chinese were more inclined to apologize than Americans. Although this is not a universal conclusion about facework and cultural difference, it is clear that managing face is based on social interactions and cultural context. In addition, different approaches to face management influence social interactions between CISs and American students. For example, CISs apologize frequently because they want to save both their own and American students' face. However, this behavior might cause American students to perceive CISs as weak. In contrast, when American students refuse to apologize in certain situations, CISs are likely to perceive American students as rude and impolite. These misunderstandings and perceptions can harm social relationships and cause conflict between CISs and American students.

Research evidence regarding variations in communication patterns between members of East Asian and North American culture has continued to underscore the fact that the former emphasizes more social relationships and the latter emphasizes individualism (Yum, 1988). Confucianism is an important doctrine that has long influenced the predilection of East Asians to focus more on relationships. This ideology views appropriate relationships among human beings as the basis for society. Yum

(1988) argued that this philosophy of social relations and humanism has contributed significantly to patterns of communication in East Asia, including differentiated linguistic codes, emphasis on indirect communication, process orientation, and receiver-centered communication. In effect, these communication patterns vary fundamentally with that of North America, which focuses on direct communication, is outcome-oriented, reduces linguistic code differentiation, and centers communication on a sender (Griner & Sobol, 2014). For this reason, conflicts or challenges tend to occur in cross-cultural interactions or communications between the two cultures. For example, Americans will refuse other people by simply saying, "No." However, in China, which emphasizes respecting other people's face and maintaining harmony, saying "no" directly can lead to unintended problems. Instead, Chinese often use roundabout and vague terms such as "I'm not sure," "maybe," and "perhaps" to refuse other people.

Ting-Toomey has written extensively on Chinese facework and its value to different branches of science, such as sociology, political science, psychology, and human resource management. For example, in the book called *Communicating Effectively with Chinese,* Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) wrote: "Gaining and losing face is connected closely with issues of social pride, honor, dignity, insult, shame, disgrace, humility trust, mistrust respect, and prestige" (p. 54). Most importantly, the Chinese value group harmony, which means that it is essential for individuals to show concern for the self-face as well as other-face. Bood and Lee (1981) argued that, to Chinese, protecting others' face is more important than one's belief in accuracy or one's personal image. It is why Chinese say "yes," to something they disagree with: to save other

people's face (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). It can be argued that, to the Chinese, engaging in face-saving and face-negotiating behavior is considered more significant than honest and straightforward communication.

There are other aspects of face shaping communication styles. For instance, concern for face significantly influences many aspects of the Chinese communication process (Bood & Lee, 1981). For example, apprehension of other face leads to a non-confrontational style of conflict management, such as obliging, compromising, and avoiding (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). For instance, CISs rarely argue with American students in a group project, even though they have different opinions, in order to maintain group harmony. In addition, Chinese people generally refuse to argue or disagree blatantly with others in public, especially in the presence of a superior, in order to *give others face* (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Thomas, 2007; Wan, 2001). To westerners, Chinese thought and communication styles have often been regarded as challenging to comprehend (Ji, Lee, & Guo, 2010). Ji et al. (2010) suggested that Chinese prefer a holistic framework to process information; thus, they differ from their western counterparts who use an analytical framework that focuses more on one-to-one relationships and formal logic.

In sum, the research on facework is important in this project because it points toward the value of a website. The website can help CISs interact better without feeling like they are resented, looked down on, or rejected by other students. It will help boost their confidence and enable them to avoid potential face loss. When CISs have questions about American culture, they can ask these questions on the website without sharing who

they are or having to be concerned as much with other face. Thus, they can talk about embarrassing experiences or ask simple questions without worrying about socially imposed roles or feeling as though they are a face-threatening situation. Furthermore, as Bood and Lee (1981) argue, to Chinese protecting another person's face is more important than one's belief of truth or correctness, one's own image, or the risk of being misjudged by others as *uncritical* or *partial*. The website helps CISs learn American culture and better understand Americans' values and communication styles, which could help CISs better protect Americans' face in future communications. In addition, the website provides access to different resources when CISs need help, especially in an academic area. It is another way to save face because CISs would feel ashamed and lose face when they receive bad grades in class. In short, it minimizes other face concerns and helps them learn to manage self-face, which is important in an American context.

Overall, individualism-collectivism, PD, and facework illustrate different cultural norms and communication styles CISs will face and explain why a strategic website can help CISs learn American culture norms and solve their problems both academically and socially. The website will present multiple voices and perspectives including professors, CISs, and American students. It demonstrates a community and creates connection in a non-hierarchal environment. For this reason, CISs, who are collectivist, would feel comfortable learning and interacting on the website. In addition, CISs do not need to confront conflict or cultural difference but through website posting and emails. Without concerns about other people's face and personal imposed social roles, CIS can save face and avoid potential face-threatening situations.

CHAPTER 3

Market Research and Method

The website is intended for CISs because they face communication and cultural challenges while studying at Pepperdine University. American culture is quite different from Chinese culture, as American culture reflects individualism, whereas the Chinese believe in the notion of collectivism (Stipek, 1998). The cultural differences cause adjustment problems for CISs in American universities. Moreover, CISs are unable to communicate effectively with American faculty members and American students because of different communication styles and languages. The goal of the website is to help CISs at Pepperdine learn American cultural norms and provide resources and solutions to their problems both academically and socially.

The problems faced by CISs at Pepperdine were identified through a focus group discussion with CIS and interviews conducted with the student chair of Pepperdine University's CSA, the assistant director of the OISS, and professors of the university. The student chair of the CIS Association, who herself is a CIS and works closely with other CIS, provides insight from a CIS perspective. The assistant director of the OISS is familiar with the current programs Pepperdine provides to assist international student and presents an overall situation of CIS at Pepperdine. One humanities professor, Dr. Sharyl Corrado, was interviewed because humanities class is perceived as the hardest class by CISs at Pepperdine (C. Socquet, personal communication, September 29, 2016). In addition, one business division professor, Dr. Fang Tian, was also interviewed because she hosts Chinese chapel, which is an opportunity to help Chinese students better

understand Christianity and grow spiritually. Her interactions with CISs who attend the chapel provided useful insights.

Additionally, a focus group with CISs was conducted to gain further insight into their challenges and experiences. The focus group was held in a library study room. Five CISs participated; three freshmen, one sophomore, and one senior. Two of the participants were female and three were male. Four of the participants were majoring in Business and one was majoring in Advertising. All participants were recruited because of their personal connection with the author. They were invited to a WeChat group chat where the purpose and details of the focus group were explained. The focus group was held in Chinese to explore CISs' university life and classroom experience as a means to provide a more relevant and usable resource for students. During the focus group session, the CIS were first welcomed and explained the reason for conducting the session. Then, they talked about themselves and their background. The overall experience at Pepperdine was addressed by asking questions such as if they are happy at Pepperdine University and if the Pepperdine experience meets their expectations for college life. Subsequently, the classroom experience of the focus group was also explored. They were asked to write down words associated with their classroom experiences and talk about their experience with faculty members and other American students.

CISs also shared their social experience at Pepperdine, including participation in different social activities and struggles in creating friendships. Then, the focus group shifted to questions related to Pepperdine's resources and how well these resources did or did not benefit them in resolving their problems. Suggestions were gathered about the

format and content of resources they want in the future, with emphasis on the proposed website. The focus group discussion was concluded with a wrap-up session, asking if they would recommend Pepperdine to other CISs and why or why not (see Appendix A for questions and Appendix B for notes on the focus group).

<center>*Audience Research Process and Findings*</center>

Audience research involves a systematic way of obtaining information about the people who are directly affected by a specific action or problem in order to gain comprehensive insights about the problem and possible solutions. The research helps identify the scope of the audience and its preferences. Results from this study's interviews and focus group are presented here.

Observed Problems

Based on the interviews and focus group, there are four main problems CISs encounter at Pepperdine. The first is reading and writing. Different interviewees mentioned that CISs face difficulty in reading and writing assignments, especially in certain subjects, because of the language barrier. Dr. Sharyl Corrado, who teaches Pepperdine's humanities class, revealed that there are 15 CIS in her Humanities 101 class, and they either do not do the reading and writing assignments or they perform poorly on them. CISs usually fail or cheat in her class. According to CISs from the focus group, besides humanities, religion classes are also difficult for them because they lack a background in these subjects and the concepts are very abstract. One participant mentioned, "The religion class is the hardest for me because my family and I are not Christians. I'm always having trouble writing a paper that requires to connect with God."

The second problem is poor class participation. Expressing personal opinions in class is a new skill for the CISs, as they were never allowed to do it in their schools in China. This is because in a high PD culture, students treat teachers with great respect, and they show that respect by listening to the teacher quietly. Also, questioning and disagreeing with the teacher is perceived as a face-losing behavior. As mentioned by different interviewees, CISs are afraid of raising their hands in the class and they hesitate to make appointments with teachers out of respect. Sometimes, they do not even reply to professors' emails. The student chair of the CSA expressed that CISs have low class participation because of cultural disparities and language barriers. In addition, four of the five CISs in the focus group expressed that fear of losing face was the biggest factor preventing them from participating in class and approaching a professor for help. During the focus group, one CIS said, "I don't want to ask a question in the class because I'm afraid other people may think my question is stupid."

The third problem is plagiarism. Some professors complain about CISs lying and cheating in class. Dr. Sharyl Corrado mentioned that "Chinese international students, when completing assignments by themselves, earn average grades. But for a perfect assignment, they depend on others." Looking at and copying other people's homework is a common practice among CISs, as the emphasis is on shared knowledge. But it is not acceptable behavior in American universities because in American society, originality and creativity are valued highly and it is unacceptable to steal another's thoughts and ideas. However, CIS in the focus group did not think plagiarism was a problem for them.

Since plagiarism is a face-oriented topic, it is possible that CISs in the focus group avoided this issue intentionally.

The fourth problem is social barriers. Most CISs only spend time with other CISs. It is difficult for them to blend into the American students' community because they do not fully understand slang, nor are they familiar with the subjects American students are discussing. Thus, the communication between CISs and American students becomes a face-threatening situation for CIS. They are more likely to retreat from the conversation in order to save their face. The cultural differences and language barriers prevent CISs from hanging out with other social groups. As a result, according to the student chair of CSA, CISs start to regard other CISs as an in-group and American students as an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). From CISs' perspective, they were open to making friends with Americans, but cultural disparities and language barriers keep them from building deeper relationships with American students. One CIS in the focus group said, "I can't get American students' joke, and they can't get mine. This makes the conversation boring."

Resources at Pepperdine

The assistant director of the OISS revealed that 37% of international students are Chinese, and the number is increasing yearly. The total number of CISs enrolled in Seaver College is 128 for the 2016-2017 academic school year (C. Socquet, personal communication, September 29, 2016). Currently, Pepperdine University offers the following resources for CISs, such as the CSA, International Student Club, Shanghai orientation in the summer, cultural dinners in the café, cultural exchange class

Humanities 292, school success center, and volunteer tutoring for international students. For example, International Student Club is an organization that seeks to intertwine the cultures of all students, both domestic and international, and create a sharing environment through different events. Another is the summer Shanghai orientation, which is a welcoming orientation for upcoming CIS freshman to help facilitate a transition and ease their tension before coming to school. Cultural dinners in the café are opportunities for different campus groups to showcase their cultural heritage through traditional cuisine. It is a way to highlight the diversity of the campus and provide students with a cultural experience at home.

The CSA has an active group of 20 students and eight officers. CSA also holds various events to enhance communication among students; usually around 40 students attend an event. For instance, a freshman welcome party allows new and current students in different grades to sit and eat together. Similarly, a cultural festival is arranged where CISs represent their culture. It is an opportunity for these students to share their traditional beliefs. A Spring festival party and career fairs are also arranged by the association. CSA also has an official WeChat account that enables them to engage students in social matters. WeChat is a Chinese-based social media, thus it provides multimedia communication platforms such as text and voice messaging communication services, photo and video sharing, and location sharing.

Moreover, Chinese Chapel is offered as a religious opportunity for CISs. Chinese Chapel was started in Spring 2016 for CISs with the aim of helping them make cultural adjustments and familiarize them with Christianity, religion, and spirituality. Each convo

session is 30 minutes long, with the first 10 minutes allocated for worship. The convo also discusses topics related to the Bible and Holy Spirit. Guest speakers are invited to talk about the Bible and Christianity. Dr. Fang Tian, who leads Chinese Chapel, will help translate some abstract terms into Chinese and talk with participating students in a more Chinese style in order to help students better understand the concepts.

Overall, the interviews and focus group exposed four main struggles CISs face: reading and writing difficulties, poor class participation, plagiarism, and social barriers. Currently, Pepperdine provides various resources to help with the academic problems and social struggles that international student face, but they are not enough. Even though academic resources are provided, CISs lacked confidence in using them and lacked guidance on how to make them useful. In addition, no program has been developed to address poor class participation and the plagiarism problems CISs face. Lack of student involvement in order to understand the challenges they experience was also evident. Because CISs do not fully understand cultural differences and how to address to them, the acculturation processes to America generally and Pepperdine specifically are highly challenging.

Suggested Resource

During the interviews, OISS and professors recommended providing academic support to CISs. All interviewees and focus group participators agreed that a website is a great format to help CISs at Pepperdine both academically and socially. Additionally, Dr. Sharyl Corrado recommended improvements in humanities class, noting that English should be taught to CISs each semester. Humanities classes are usually large classes with

over 50 students each session, and this leads to limited attention for each student. Smaller classes would allow professors to take care of every student, especially CISs who lack background in humanities. In order to succeed in class, CISs should be required to take one English class every semester to help them with writing and reading. While these suggestions would no doubt help CISs, they fall outside the scope of this project. Regarding the website, the student chair of CSA offered suggestions, indicating that CISs should be introduced to American campus culture and should be able to engage in online chats with American students through a website in a way that would help alleviate some of the anxiety and help CIS learn about the different cultural communication styles of the U.S.

CHAPTER 4

Website Project

Overview

In order to address the struggles of CISs and provide resources to make their transition to an American college easier, an interactive website targeted at CISs attending Pepperdine University was created. According to Bennett, Maton, and Kervin (2008), today's young people have been immersed in technology all their lives, imbuing them with sophisticated technical skills and learning preferences. As a result, an interactive website is created, and it is also recommended by OISS, Pepperdine faculty, and the student chair of CSA. With access to the Internet, a website allows people from all over the world to connect with each other (Jones, 2006). Even if students are not at school, they can access the website as well. Language plays a crucial role in improving intercultural communication and cultural adaption (Aneas & Sandin, 2009). The website content will be in the English language because CISs are studying in an English-speaking country. The English web content will also assist CISs in learning and communicating in the English language with students from the U.S and allow non-Chinese to join and add more information to the website.

Today's student would find it hard to survive or communicate with others without the Internet. This is one of the reasons why this website project is proposed. The Internet has made access to information and communication easier. CISs can access to the website anywhere, anytime. The website can help them learn and connect with each other. In addition, from both interviews and the focus group, a website was recommended. For

instance, the student chair of the CSA mentioned that "CSA used to have a website, but it never launched. We definitely need a website to help CIS." In addition, Dr. Sharyl Corrado mentioned that "a website is a good platform to help CIS learn American culture." Another reason a website will be an effective communication tool is it that provides various types of social support messages to CISs, including informational, instrumental, and network support messages. Social support is regarded as a supportive resource embedded in interpersonal interactions, which provides emotional comfort, instrumental help, information, and appraisal. It provides a sense of belonging, esteem, information, and nurturing behavior to buffer CISs from psychological anxiety and depression (Berkman, 1985). Further, Yeh and Inose (2003) found that social support helped alleviate the negative effects of intercultural stress and culture shock among international students.

For this website project in particular, it first provides informational support on various aspects of academics, daily life, and personal development. Students can find not only answers when they need academic help, but also other daily information when they post questions like, "I want to go out for leisure this weekend, can anyone recommend some entertainment places?" Related informational support messages will be provided in response to those seeking daily life information. The website also provides instrumental support messages by teaching web users how to make an appointment with their professors and providing the email template and links to other resources. In addition, the website offers the network social support because CISs who use this website to create new friendships can gain a sense of social belonging and find companions for group

activities. Further, the website will not only generate and share relevant information about campus resources and American culture, but also help CISs connect with professors and other students, thus creating a virtual community. As Rheingold (1992) noted, a virtual community is, "A group of people who may or may not meet one another face to face, and who exchange words, and ideas through the mediation of computer bulletin boards and networks…independent of local time or location" (p. 414). As Rheingold (1992) noted, the most remarkable aspects of virtual community is that it exists on the basis of "the exchange of information as a kind of commodity" and "individual and group relationships" that eventually create a "a definite and profound sense of place in people's minds" (p. 420). In the website, students can easily retrieve, exchange, and share information about campus resources, social activities, and even tips for transiting to Pepperdine. The virtual community can facilitate people's information seeking behavior and increase the possibility of having their need for information satisfied (Rheingold, 1992).

The website has three main functions. The primary function is to help CISs adjust to American culture. Since CISs have high PD as a communication trait, which hinders them from approaching the professors and participating in class discussions, the website will help to decrease the PD between CISs and the professors. For instance, there is a video where Professor Chris Stivers welcomes CISs to the website and talks about the importance of asking professors for help. Quotes and suggestions from different professors are also presented on the website. Different email templates and tips on how to write to professor are also provided to students in this section.

Another struggle CISs face is plagiarism. According to interviews, CISs usually share homework because it is common in Chinese universities where individual thinking is not valued. However, this kind of behavior is forbidden in American colleges. Plagiarism is considered theft of intellectual property, and it would be unfair to other students who do the work themselves if a student gets credit for work that someone else does. A lack of knowledge of American college plagiarism rules usually gets CISs into trouble; it is not malicious, just a wide cultural difference and misunderstanding. The website offers a section where CISs can learn the rules and how to approach this problem. The plagiarism section has a scenario quiz for CISs, in which they are asked to respond to various situations. For instance, the website shows a scenario on sharing homework with roommates, and asks web users if it is ok to do so. The results of the quiz will allow students to learn about acceptable behavior in American educational institutions related to plagiarism and sharing work.

Another way the website will help CISs better adapt to American culture is that it provides a section where different campus traditions and slang are explained. For example, there are introductions to different slang terms like "wrap up," which means to finish or complete something, and "Pep Bubble/MaliBubble," which means a feeling that either Pepperdine or Malibu are worlds unto themselves, sheltered from the rest of the world. In addition, the interaction of CISs with American students will be increased through the website because CISs can leave their comments or ask questions about American culture and American students will respond through the website or via email. These American students will be recruited from cultural exchange classes such as

Humanities 292, campus cultural festivals, and other intercultural communication classes. It is also a good way for American students to learn more about CISs. This interactive section will not only help CISs to better understand American culture from a native perspective, but also create opportunities for CISs to make friends with other American students.

The second function of the website is to provide information to CISs. The information is provided in two main sections of the website, the academic section and social section. According to the literature review, the interviews, and focus group, CISs have difficulty reading and writing in English. Thus, in the academic section, information about existing campus resources such as the writing center, speech lab, and other tutoring programs is provided. There is also a question and answer section where students can find answers about where they can find help. For example, a question might be, "I am having trouble with my religion class essay. Where can I get help?" The answer would be, "Make an appointment with the writing center or make an appointment with your professor," with a link to the email template included. A link to the writing center website would also be provided. Through this section, students can learn about where, when, and how they can use existing resources on campus. In addition, a sub-section on campus activities will provide news updates about and other school clubs, like the International Student Club. For instance, the date of upcoming activities of the CSA will be posted. CISs can get information from this section and can participate in different campus activities. This is a good way for CISs to become more socially active and fit better with the campus culture.

The third function of the website is to create connection. The website provides a section facilitating opportunities for students to interact with other students. Students can post messages in this section such as, "I am going out to watch a movie this weekend, would anyone like to join me?" Or "I have had a boring day, would anyone like to hang out with me?" Students can also leave their WeChat ID in the post, so they can add each other as friends in WeChat. Such posts will help in building an online community of CISs. The section will bring people with similar interests together and ideally help students create new friendships.

Launched Website

The pilot website can be viewed at http://www.pepperdinemedia.net/chinese-resources. The website was created through an Adobe software, Muse CC, along with help from a friend who is a professional web programmer. It took two months to design the content and layout, and two months to program the website. The graphic design of the website aimed to be simple, but visually pleasing. There are two photos on the website depicting Pepperdine campus that were downloaded from the official Pepperdine website, and all other photos were downloaded from free stock photo websites. In addition, besides the video on the Professor Page, which was filmed with an iPhone and edited in iMovie, all other videos are linked from YouTube. The website was launched on Pepperdine's hosted web space on March 22, 2017.
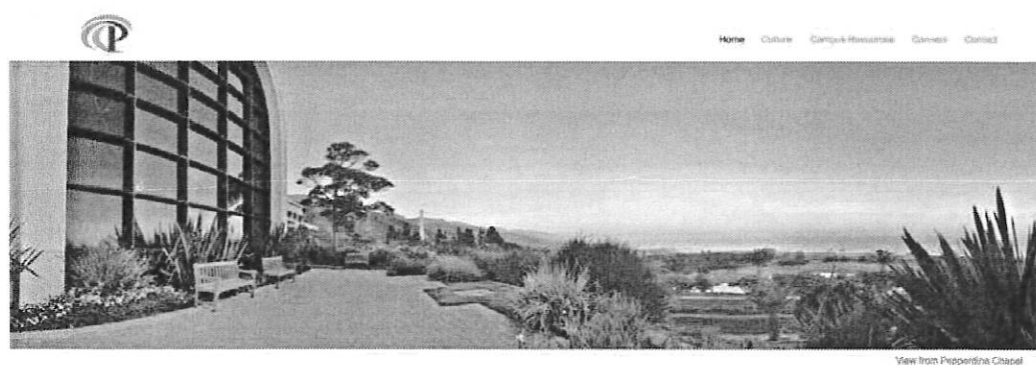
There are nine main pages: the Home Page, Culture Page, Slang Page, Campus Page, Plagiarism Page, Campus Resources Page, Professor Page, Connect Page, and Contact Page. The Home Page contains a photo of the view from Pepperdine Chapel. It

also states the purpose of the website and provides short descriptions and links to each page. The Culture Page has a photo of the Waves of Flags display. The page contains questions about cultural challenges CIS may encounter and explains how this website can help them. This page also provides links to the Slang Page, Campus Page, and Plagiarism Page. The Slang Page contains a photo of an American flag, explanations about different kinds of slang, and three YouTube videos that can help CISs learn more about American slang.

In addition, the Campus Page presents four YouTube videos about Pepperdine's culture, student life, and dorm tours. These videos are from Pepperdine's official YouTube channel. The Campus Page also provides tips on some of the challenging situations CISs may encounter. These tips are linked to CSA WeChat articles about instructions on how to pay tuition or register for classes. Different Pepperdine social media links are also provided on this page. The Plagiarism Page introduces college plagiarism rules and resources for learning how to cite sources and avoid cheating. It also contains a seven-question quiz to test CISs' knowledge on plagiarism and educate users. The Campus Resources Page has short descriptions and links to different campus resources: ACE (Academic Center for Excellence), One Stop, Professor Information, Career Center, Health Center, and the Calendar. There is also a Q&A section, which helps CISs learn about when, where, and how to use the campus resources. When users click on ACE, One Stop, Career Center, or Health Center, the website will take them to each resource's website page. However, the Professor Page is different. It not only introduces Pepperdine faculty and their expectations for students, but also contains a

video of Professor Chris Stivers from the Communication Division welcoming CISs and presenting advice for CISs from two other professors: Dr. Timothy Willis from Religion Division and Professor Barry Fike from Communication division. In addition, tips on how to write an appropriate and effective email to professors are provided on the page.

Furthermore, the Connect Page contains three forums to help CISs communicate with American students, exchange information on different classes, discuss social activity experiences, and make new friends. CIS can post information anonymously on this page. Finally, in the Contact Page, CISs can leave comments and questions about the website and the messages will go to the website maintainer. Screenshots of each page are presented subsequently.

Figure 1. Website homepage.

View of Waves of Flags Display

CULTURE

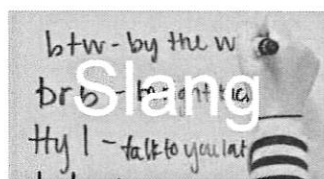Are you afraid of making new friends?

Do you sometimes feel lonely or homesick?

Do the students here use any particular words that confuse you?

Do you find it difficult to communicate with others, especially professors?

Do not worry! Everything you are feeling is completely normal. Know that while you may feel this, you are not alone.

The challenges faced by Chinese International Students stems from "culture shock." Culture shock is a feeling of disorientation many people experience when accommodating to a new way of life or culture. Many Chinese International Students find it difficult to adjust to the culture in the United States. This page provide you links to help you deal with some aspects of culture shock and make your experience at Pepperdine University a memorable one! We discuss things like slang, student life at Pepperdine, plagiarism and classroom. Click to find out more.

Our list of 10 essential American slang and fun videos

New to Pepperdine? Check out Pepperdine culture and student life.

Learn college plagiarism rule and how to avoid it.

Figure 2. Website culture page.

Figure 3. Website slang page.

Just sayin'

Sometimes it is used to indicate "but it's none of my business either way". Other times it might be used to emphasize what was just said. You kind of have to get the meaning from the tone of voice.

Hang in there!

This basically means "don't give up!"

Convo

Pepperdine requires regular assemblies where you will hear from engaging speakers from a Christian standpoint. You gain credits by attending the convo. Sometimes we ask "Convo?"— meaning "I'm only interested in anything remotely spiritual if it satisfies my Chapel requirement." (Chapel is another way saying convo).

Click here if you want to find out more about convo.

Pep Bubble / MaliBubble

The feeling that either Pepperdine or Malibu are worlds into themselves, sheltered from the rest of the world. Example: I'm going to LA to get out of MaliBubble.

Peppervine

Informal communication channel where rumor, gossip and unofficial news circulates (often about relationship, social events and other informal happenings).

There is also a offical Peppervine website where you can learn about organizations and events on campus.

Unable to find the word you are confused with? Post your questions here and our students are happy to answer your questions.
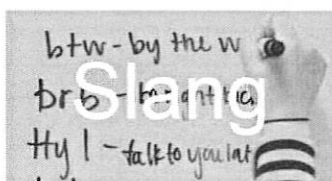
Our list of 10 essential American slang and fun videos

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Figure 4. Website slang page, continued.
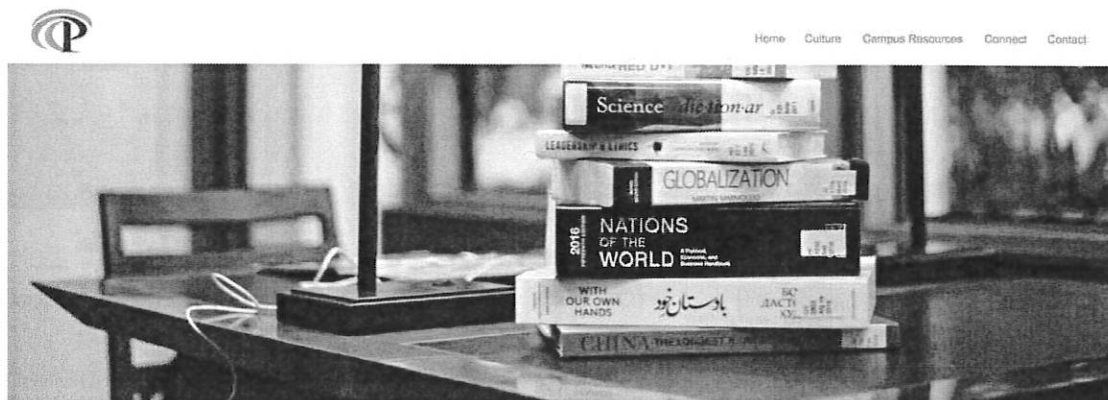
CAMPUS

Pepperdine is proud of the diverse community of students, faculty, staff, and alumni who find meaning in the moments, both big and small, that they experience on and off campus every day. Check these video out to learn more about Pepperdine culture and student life.

Pepperdine University | Seaver College

Seaver College Student Life

Seaver College | Girl's Dorm Tour

Seaver College | Guy's Dorm Tour

SPECIAL TIPS FOR CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS !

(The following links provide instructions on some of the challenging tasks Chinese international students may encounter. It's in Chinese.)

Figure 5. Website campus page.

PAY YOUR TUITION	DRIVE LICENSE
NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION	CONVO CREDIT
HOTELS NEAR MALIBU	IMPORTANT CAMPUS RULE
KEEP YOU SAFE	PHARMACY
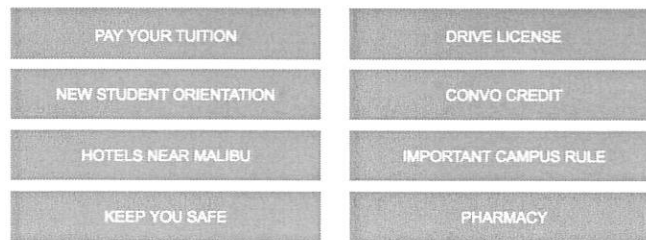
Unable to find the answer to your question ? Post your question here and other students are happy to answer your question.

You can also find the updated events and share your experience through Pepperdine social media.
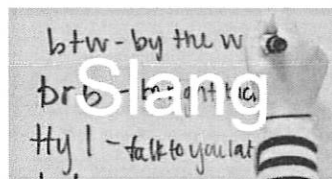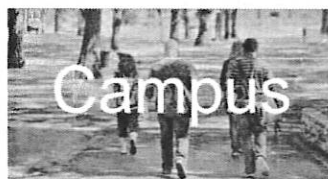
Pepperdine

Pepperdine Library

Pepperdine Graphic

Pepperdine Athletics

Slang

Campus

Plagiarism

Our list of 10 essential American slang and fun videos

New to Pepperdine? Check out Pepperdine culture and student life.

Learn college plagiarism rule and how to avoid it.

Figure 6. Website campus page, continued.
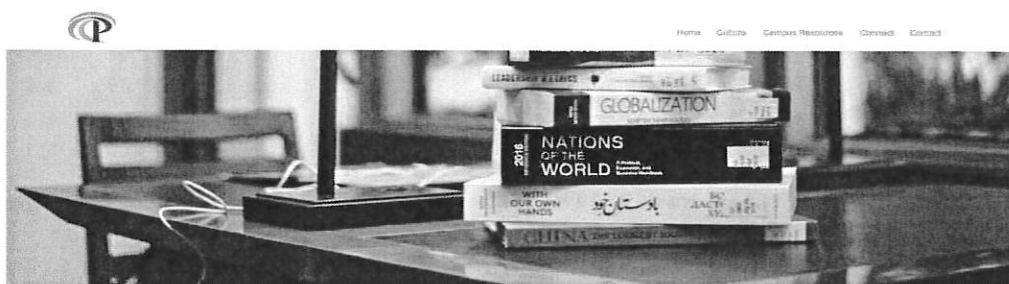
PLAGIARISM

As Chinese students, we have been trained to memorize the Standard Text and Answers during the studying process in China. Sometimes it is okay to look at other classmates' work as long as we memorize the perfect answer. However, American colleges focus on an individual's thought process, critical thinking, and problem solving skills. Thus, looking at other person's answer or using somebody else's idea without citing is called cheating. You can be expelled out from school.

Passing someone else's work off as your own, or referencing it without using the proper attribution, is absolutely prohibited and it is known as **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is a serious crime in higher education and can have a great effect on your academic reputation and your career after graduation.

How to avoid plagiarism?
The easiest way to avoid plagiarism is to know how to properly give credit to the original author of an idea. As you are researching, keep notes of where you obtained each piece of information.

Before you begin researching and writing your paper, ask your professor which style he or she prefers for formatting and citations. Common styles include the American Psychological Association (APA) style, the Modern Language Association (MLA) style, and the Chicago Manual of Style.

There are several resources for learning how to research for, format, and cite sources in a paper.

1. Purdue Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL). The site offers a detailed list of types of sources and the proper citation for each. Remember that when in doubt, citing a source is better than leaving it out.

2. Ask your professor for extra help. You can learn how to write an appropriate email at PROFESSOR page.

3. Make an appointment with writing center (ACE) to find a tutor for subjects you're having trouble in.

If you are trying your best, seeking help, and still struggling; it's much better to drop a course than earn a grade dishonestly. A dropped course will look much better on your record than being branded a cheater. In addition, cheating to get through a course will leave you ill-prepared for the next step in your career.

TAKE A QUIZ

Take a quiz to see how much you know about plagiarism. It's fine if you don't know the answer, we will teach you along with the quiz.
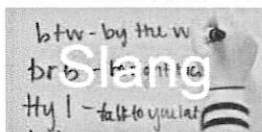
Slang
Campus
Plagiarism

Our list of 10 essential American slang and fun videos.

New to Pepperdine? Check out Pepperdine culture and student life.

Learn college plagiarism rule and how to avoid it.

Figure 7. Website plagiarism page.

1. Texts like Bible do not need referencing, since they are ancient and are not covered by copyright laws.

Choose the following options

- True

- False

(You are citing a modern translation of an ancient text. Even if you cite the ancient text in the original language, that edition may still be under copyright. A scholar always cites the edition she/he uses!)

1. Texts like Bible do not need referencing, since they are ancient and are not covered by copyright laws.

Choose the following options

- True

- False

(You are right ! !) NEXT QUESTION

Figure 8. Website plagiarism quiz page.

Figure 9. Website campus resource page.

Q: I need an official transcript for graduate school application, where should I go to?

A: Drop by One Stop and they can help with providing the official transcript.

Q: Do I need to pay to use the campus resources?

A: All campus resources are covered by your tuition and fees except the Health Center. However, if you have the health insurance, it will cover most of your fees.

Q: I am thinking about applying graduate school. Is there anyone I can talk to?

A: Make an appointment with Career Center to discuss about your graduate school application plan. Or talk with your professors, who can also advise and provide recommendation letters.

Unable to find the question you want to ask? Post your question here, and we will answer you as soon as possible.

Figure 10. Website campus resource page, continued.

PROFESSORS

In China, professors possess higher social status than students. We usually maintain distance with them and DO not express our individual opinions in class in order to show the respect for professors. However, in America, professors and students are more equal and it is encouraged to talk with them, share with them and ask for help when we need. Sometimes it is even ok to disagree with them.

Pepperdine has more than 700 faculty members who are hardworking and passionate about their work and their students. Each faculty member is committed to leading students toward the intersection of theory and real-world application in their fields. They all deeply care about student's experience at Pepperdine.

Watch this video and hear Pepperdine professor Chris Stivers welcome you and encourage you to talk with your professors.

First, please ask questions, either during class or after class. (I have had many American students tell me that they were afraid to ask the question that an international student asked, but that it was very helpful.)

Second, I prefer to know Chinese international student's native name, not their American name. I think a name is an important part of who we are, so tell me the actual name and I will try to learn it and pronounce it correctly.

Third, arrange a time to see me in my office. I DO NOT MIND.

Timothy M. Willis

Blanche E. Seaver Professor of Religion
Divisional Dean, Religion and Philosophy Division

Figure 11. Website professor page.

Chinese students are particularly close to me since my son has spent the last six years in Beijing teaching Chinese students English. I know they are hard working and want to do their very best.

To succeed academically be sure to stay in contact with your professors, follow the syllabus carefully, and don't be afraid in class to question something that you may not understand. The Professors are here to help you become the best student that you can be, so we don't mind questions concerning assignments. In this Speech 180 course, the key to getting an A in the class is to read the chapters before class, become a vital part of the class by asking questions, making comments, and providing your personal insights. Preparation before each speech is crucial, so follow the Professors recommendations for each speech, practice a great deal, and organize your thoughts so that they flow together.

We cherish each student and all have office hours to be used by each student if they need us for anything.

Barry Fike

Visiting Professor of Communication
Courses: COM 180: Public Speaking
and Rhetorical Analysis

Imagine this: It's Tuesday afternoon, the day before the exam, and you're not sure about the material. However, it's too late to attend the professor's office hours. As you sit at your computer, staring at the open email window, you freeze. How do you email the professor?

The ability to communicate your ideas and questions effectively through email is a valuable skill to develop. Use the following tips to help you develop quality email.

Dear Prof. _____,

    This is _____ from your class _____. I am sorry for missing class last Friday because I was sick. I am hoping that you could give me the hand out materials I missed. And I am also wondering can I make up the quiz this week?

Thank you.

Sincerely,
_____(Your name)

- How to email your professor
- 10 Elements of an Effective, Non-Annoying Email
- 18 Etiquette Tips for E-mailing Your Professor

Figure 12. Website professor page, continued.

CONNECT

Here we provide you the opportunity to share your thoughts and exchange all kinds of information. This is a good place for you to better transition into Pepperdine, learn about culture differences, gain tips on classes, and make new friends.

Chat with American Students

Here you can ask questions about American culture and slang, or talk about Chinese culture with domestic students so they can learn more about China!

Class

Here you can exchange information about different classes with other students: Is the class diffcult? Is the professor hard on grading? And learn tips on conquering various academic difficulties.

Social Activities

Here you can talk about social activities on or off campus. You can plan your next visit; find a travel mate or even carpool to an activity.

Figure 13. Website connect page.

Figure 14. Website contact page.

Application of Theories to the Website

The website beta-launched on March 29, 2017, and users were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the website's usability and behavior impacts through an anonymous Survey Monkey survey. The survey included nine questions. Participants responded to a Likert-type rating scale with questions ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree on the items related to website experience, along with potential attitude and behavioral changes because of the website. There was also a 10-point Likert-type rating scale with questions ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 10 (*excellent*) regarding the overall website experience and two open-ended questions asking which parts of the website were helpful and requesting suggestions for future website improvement. The result of the survey was an important factor examining if the website successfully incorporated academic theories to strategically communicate with its users. Responses to the survey provide support for how the theories applied to the website design and implementation. Additional detail on recruitment and survey distribution is found in chapter 5 below.

Individual-Collectivism

As explained in the literature review, the individual-collectivism perspective (Eysenck, 1996) describes the differences between the cultures in which Americans and CISs have been raised. Individualism epitomizes American culture (Witztum, 2012), which highlights values of self-reliance, individual rights, and singular benefit. In contrast, CISs come from a collectivistic culture, based on collective action, peaceful resolution, and community values (Wang & Chen, 2010). As a result of this CISs may feel alienated and alone once they arrive in the U.S. to work toward their degrees. The

website developed as a part of this thesis project provides several features to counter this problem. Firstly, the Connect Page on the website is an excellent platform for CISs to meet people from similar backgrounds and share similar values. This could help alleviate of their loneliness and give them the opportunity to overcome the cultural shock they must experience as a result of moving from one type of culture to the exact opposite. The online community would allow them to feel empowered enough to navigate the individualistic tasks they may face in the course of their education and allow them to adjust better if they have sufficient moral support while also alleviating pressure on face concerns. According to the survey, 85% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are likely to chat with other students on the site. One respondent mentioned, "I like the Connect Page because I am social. After viewing the page, I have the confidence that I can survive at Pepperdine."

Secondly, the Culture Page is also extremely important in the context of this theory because it lists all the shortcuts that a new student may need in order to adjust to his/her new surroundings, learn about the local slang language, and become more acquainted with the local culture. This includes an elaboration of both academic and social cultures, which can be extremely useful for the initial steps of overcoming the differences CISs feel between the place they were raised and what they now face. Additionally, being aware of the mindset of their American peers would allow them to respond to them accordingly and be more confident in their interactions with them, as they would be more aware of the customs that the U.S. society follows. This could be most beneficial in group projects. According to the survey, 95% of respondents strongly

agreed or agreed that they have learned something about American culture as a result of visiting the website. "I learned more about American culture and Pepperdine. All the links are very helpful," wrote one survey respondent.

Thirdly, another important feature of the website is the Campus Resources Page, which allows CISs to get acquainted with the different types of facilities available on Pepperdine's campus. As discussed in the literature review, CISs can develop individualistic tendencies leading to function in individualistic culture through more collective approaches (Hsu, 2011). Since this website can be accessed individually and does not involve direct confrontation, CISs can comfortably spend as much time as needed on the website without becoming worried about bothering others and feeling out of place. The Campus Resources Page not only provides information about students but also helps CISs interact with their professors and teaches them how to interact in a way that is normal within the culture of the American collegiate system. Articles like "10 elements of an Effective, Non-Annoying Email" and "18 Etiquette Tips for E-mailing Your Professor" teach CISs to communicate effectively with professors without fearing that they may be inappropriate in their communication style.

Fourthly, coming from a collectivistic cultural background, CISs emphasize the embeddedness of individuals in a larger group. Collectivism encourages conformity and discourages individuals from dissenting and standing out (Hofstede, 2001). The website's Campus Resources Page includes a Q&A section. When CISs see that other students are using the campus resources to get help, they are more likely to use the campus resources in order to fit in the larger group. Also, the content in the Culture Page (see Figure 15)

makes CISs feel that they are not the only ones dealing with culture shock. As a result, CISs will have more confidence in adapting and succeeding in Pepperdine because they know they are not excluded from a group.

CULTURE

Are you afraid of making new friends?

Do you sometimes feel lonely or homesick?

Do the students here use any particular words that confuse you?

Do you find it difficult to communicate with others, especially professors?

Do not worry! Everything you are feeling is completely normal. Know that while you may feel this, you are not alone.

The challenges faced by Chinese International Students stems from "culture shock." Culture shock is a feeling of disorientation many people experience when accommodating to a new way of life or culture. Many Chinese International Students find it difficult to adjust to the culture in the United States. This page provide you links to help you deal with some aspects of culture shock and make your experience at Pepperdine University a memorable one! We discuss things like slang, student life at Pepperdine, plagiarism and classroom. Click to find out more.

Figure 15. Culture page content.

Power Distance

PD is defined as the extent to which society expects inequality in power and authority; it is another important factor that can be addressed by the use of the communications website (Oh, Pieper, & Gerhart, 2010). First, an excellent example is the Professor Page. As CISs are used to high PD environments (Xu, Luo, & Zhang, 2011) while American institutions have low PD, a chance to interact and understand professors before meeting them without coming face to face with them will allow CISs to be more confident and be less intimidated by the difference in authority. Secondly, the welcome video from a professor at the university is an excellent way to reduce the PD and make CISs feel more at ease with their professors, allowing for a decreased PD between CISs and professors and encouraging CISs to ask for help from their professors. Also, the

website has a low PD environment, owing to the fact that the website itself has no higher status authority and, as a result, CISs can feel more comfortable interacting in this environment. According to the survey, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are more likely to ask professor for help in the future as a result of using the website. Moreover, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their view of professors had changed as a result of using the website. One respondent wrote, "The Professor Page makes me feel that professors are approachable." Another respondent mentioned, "The Professor part is super helpful! It gives me confidence to talk with my professor. The related link about 'how to write an email your professor' also impressed me."

Moreover, the website has the option to post queries anonymously. This is extremely encouraging for CISs, as they could feel less intimidated to post any issues they have that might be considered disrespectful in their own culture, but in the U.S. it is considered more acceptable to discuss sensitive topics. Thirdly, the plagiarism section is also extremely useful for CISs, as mentioned in the literature review. Imitation and repetition are considered the most profound forms of studying in the Chinese culture (Fei, 2007). The section on plagiarism will introduce CISs to plagiarism so they are more likely to avoid it. The guidelines on plagiarism could help them perform better in their courses by explaining the relevant concepts as accurately as possible.

Facework

According to the literature, facework is one's sense of positive image in a relational and network context (Pandarangga, 2016). Firstly, in the Chinese cultural context, harmony is always preferred over confrontation (Dongping, 2006), and CISs

may be more conscious of face-to-face interactions in comparison to American students and hence might not find it difficult to open up. For this purpose, the Connect Page on the website where CISs can post questions and exchange information is anonymous. Because CISs can ask questions without revealing who they are, there would be no face-threatening situation (María Gil, 2012), and they would be more likely to ask questions. According to the survey, 85% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they would be likely to chat with other students on the site. Ninety percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they would be likely to post information on the site.

Secondly, because CISs can use the website by themselves and do not need to interact with other people if they don't want to, they do not need to worry about face management, nor do they need to be concerned about other people's faces. They can relax, think about their responses when chatting, and interact only when they feel up to it.

Third, the website educates CISs about American culture, plagiarism rules, and where to get help on campus when they have problems. This information could prevent them from getting into trouble in the future, which can allow them to save face. Not only does face saving (Rusko, 2011) come from interacting with American anonymously in an academic capacity, but also the website also provides details about social activities, cultural, context and interests of American students. By knowing about them beforehand, CISs can save themselves from any kind of embarrassment, reducing some but not all face concerns, and introducing them to how they will have to navigate face concerns in the U.S.

CHAPTER 5

Website Evaluation

The website is meant to help CISs at Pepperdine University have a smoother transition and better learning experiences than they are currently having. It is also designed to help these students improve their communication skills, perform better academically, and adjust to American culture. The website beta-launched on March 29, 2017, and users were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding the website's usability and behavior impacts through an anonymous Survey Monkey survey. On March 30, 2017, a CSA member and I both posted the website and the survey address on WeChat to encourage CISs at Pepperdine to evaluate the website. Participants in previous focus group were also asked to evaluate the website through the questionnaire. I posted the same information again on WeChat on March 8, 2017 as a reminder to recruit more CIS to complete the survey. Since I employed a convenience sampling approach, I may have known some participants, but likely not all, and participants' identities were anonymous. The questionnaire (see Appendix C) was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the website in terms of providing helpful information to CIS and how it might ease their adaptation process to Pepperdine. It also asked for feedback and suggested ways to improve the website in terms of ease of use, navigation, and overall experience.

The questionnaire included nine questions, and individuals responded using a Likert-type rating scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree on items concerning website experience, potential attitude, and behavior changes. There was also a 10-point Likert-type rating scale question, ranging from 1 (*poor*) to 10 (*excellent*), about the

overall website experience and two open questions asking which parts of the website were helpful and requesting suggestions for future website improvement. A total of 20 website users answered the questionnaire, and only Pepperdine Seaver College CISs' status was collected, so no other demographic data (year, major, gender, age, etc.) were collected. The results are presented in Table 1.

As revealed in the table, for the Home Page, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the page is visually pleasing, and 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that this page makes them feel more at ease about being a student at Pepperdine. For the Culture Page, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something from the page, and 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the content gives them more confidence that they can be successful at Pepperdine. For the Slang Page, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something from the page, and 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that this page gives them more confidence that they can be successful and makes them feel more at ease about being a student at Pepperdine. For the Plagiarism Page, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that this page challenges their views of cheating and teaches them something about plagiarism rules. For the Campus Page, 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something from the page, and 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the content on this page gives them more confidence that they can be successful at Pepperdine.

Table 1

Survey Results

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Home Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	75%	10%	15%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	80%	15%	0%	5%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	90%	5%	0%	5%	0%
Culture Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	85%	10%	5%	0%	0%
Slang Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	85%	5%	10%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	90%	5%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	85%	10%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
Plagiarism Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	90%	0%	10%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	90%	5%	0%	5%	0%
It challenges my view of cheating.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	75%	15%	10%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	80%	5%	15%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	80%	15%	0%	5%	0%
Campus Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	80%	10%	10%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	85%	10%	0%	5%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	90%	5%	0%	5%	0%
Campus Resources Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	90%	0%	10%	0%	0%
I am more likely to use the campus resources in the future.	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	95%	0%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	85%	10%	0%	5%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	85%	10%	5%	0%	0%
Professor Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something about Pepperdine faculty.	85%	10%	0%	5%	0%
My view of professors has changed.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
I am more likely to ask professor for help in the future.	85%	10%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	90%	5%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%
Connect Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	70%	25%	5%	0%	0%
I learned something from the page.	70%	15%	10%	5%	0%
I am likely to post information on thie site.	60%	30%	10%	0%	0%
I am likely to chat with other students on this site.	45%	40%	15%	0%	0%
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.	75%	20%	5%	0%	0%
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.	70%	20%	10%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
Contact Page					
This page is visual pleasing.	80%	15%	5%	0%	0%
I am likely to post information on thie site.	70%	15%	15%	0%	0%
The information on the site seems credible.	90%	10%	0%	0%	0%

Regarding the Campus Resources Page, 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something from the page, and 100% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are more likely to use the campus resources in the future. For the Professor Page, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something about Pepperdine faculty and that their view of professors had changed. Ninety-five percent of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are more likely to ask professors for help in the future. For the Connect Page, 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are likely to post something on the site and 85% of respondents strongly agree or agreed that they are likely to chat with other students on the site. Also, 95% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that this page gives them more confidence that they can be successful at Pepperdine. Finally, for the Contact Page, 85% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are likely to post information on the site. Overall, an average of 94% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the website is visually pleasing, and an average of 96% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the information on the website seems credible.

In addition, the average score for overall website experience was 9.5, which was very close to excellent. For the question asking about which part of the website is most helpful, the Campus Resources Page and Slang Page were mentioned nine times (45%), the Professor Page was mentioned eight times (40%), and the Plagiarism Page and Connect Page were mentioned three times (each 15%). Most respondents (75%) mentioned that the website helped them learn more about American culture and campus resources. On the final question about suggestions for future website improvement,

respondents provided various suggestions in terms of graphic design, such as adding more pictures with less text, content selection, adding information about Visa and I20 processes, and more function features, such as creating a Chinese version, adding a search bar, and incorporating more videos and photos.

Overall, the findings regarding the effectiveness and impact of the website are positive and revealing. Although personal relationships and networks with some respondents may add possible facework bias in the survey results, the anonymity in the survey may mitigate this. For example, rather than indicating that the website was perfect with no further improvement needed, all respondents wrote suggestions for the website, implying that even with the desire for positive face, anonymity allowed them to offer critical comments and suggestions. The goal of the website is to help CISs at Pepperdine learn about American cultural norms and provide resources and solutions to their problems both academically and socially. Based on the survey results, respondents found the website both visually pleasing and helpful in the process of adapting to campus and a new culture. There were also signs of attitude and behavior change in terms of using campus resources, approaching professors, and views on cheating. Although the website did not directly solve CISs problems with religion and humanities classes, the website helped them become more familiar with the campus resources such as ACE and made them more likely to seek help from these resources and professors.

The website provides a good opportunity to help CISs become more open-minded and confident about being students at Pepperdine. It provides the opportunity to adapt to a low PD culture. While using the website, students might realize that they are

encouraged to initiate conversations with professors and that in such a social setting as a university, professors and students are equal in terms of presenting their ideas, thoughts, and questions. Through interaction with other students, CISs have a higher chance of becoming acquainted with Americans, and this could improve their outlook on studying in a foreign country. In addition, the website could improve the reputation of Pepperdine University, as it will demonstrate a deeper sense of concern for international students. The university's environment can be improved because the website will help enhance communication and mitigate misunderstandings between Chinese and American students. The website can also add to the university's resources, and could help attract more CISs in coming years.

Based on the website evaluation questionnaire results, some future improvements could be implemented to this site. For example, some respondents suggested that the Calendar Page was unnecessary. According to survey results, the Plagiarism Page could be placed under the Campus category instead of Culture in order to better reflect how CISs use the website. In addition, some respondents thought that the website should add a Chinese version with more diverse content, including a nearby restaurants guide, information on F1 visa and job searching, more culture-related videos, and quotes from professors. The website could be linked with WeChat or the Pepperdine official website to attract more CISs. A search bar function can also be added in the website to help CISs find information more easily.

CHAPTER 6

Next Steps

The website created for this thesis project serves as a helpful tool for CISs to learn about American culture and engage with their professors and other students. However, it is limited in terms of its influence on CISs' behavior. The website cannot force CISs to adapt to American culture nor to communicate with American students and professors. CISs must be willing to change, communicate, and also be open to a new culture. These are ultimately the necessary elements of adapting to a new culture. However when CISs are willing to change, the website has the potential to make the transition to and experience at an American university smoother by providing CISs the resources to better adapt to cultural and academic differences. There is an increasing trend of international students enrolling in Pepperdine Seaver College, so this project met a campus need of enhancing communication among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The website helps CISs to learn about American culture and provides an opportunity for intercultural communication between CISs and American students. However, the success of the website project would also need more research in terms of the measurement of total usage, online community building, and behavioral changes of CISs to determine its full range of effectiveness.

The website will continue to be hosted on Pepperdine server space and be handed over to the CSA for hosting and ongoing maintenance in June 2017. Further development and improvements to the website, such as a Chinese version and more content, will need to be completed by CSA members during summer 2017; the website could be relaunched

as early as August, 2017. However, my role in developing the initial template is concluded, and I will no longer be involved in the project moving forward.

Appendix A

Chinese International Student Focus Group Discussion Guide

I.   **Introduction/Warm-up**   10-12 mins.

Thank them for coming. Give them the reason for the focus group.

Tell me about yourself…

(**Note:** This question is meant to be open-ended to explore respondents' self-perceptions without prompting. Interviewer remains largely silent, asking only, "What else?" or "Tell me more about that.)

Questions: Where do you come from? What year are you? Who do you live with? Are a quick adapter to new environment? Why did you come to Pepperdine university?

II.   **General Experience at Pepperdine**   15 mins.

Let's now switch gears and focus on your experience at Pepperdine University. I know all of you came to Pepperdine university with a certain time. Please tell me:

*   How long have you been at Pepperdine university? how long plan to be here?
*   When you think about Pepperdine university college life, what are the words coming to your mind?
 *   Are you happy with your experience at Pepperdine university?
 *   Does Pepperdine university meet the exception you have for the college life?

III.   **Class Experience**   15 mins.

Please write down everything, absolutely any thought or feeling that comes into your mind, when I say, "**class experience at Pepperdine**."

(Without talking, respondents generate a list of words/thoughts/feelings individually, in writing. Moderator encourages them to "keep going" to fuel the stream of consciousness. When respondents are finished writing, moderator draws three columns on easel pad: positive, neutral, and negative.)

(One respondent at a time.) What words did you write? (For each) is that a positive, neutral or negative thought in your mind? (Record in appropriate column on easel.)

After all have gone, then ask, "Why did you categorize it this way?" (This may take some time to have a longer discussion about.) Encourage them to unpack and explain experiences that are positive, negative, and neutral - capture those experiences.

What is the hardest class you have taken at Pepperdine? What makes this class hard for you?

Are you comfortable participating in the class discussion? Why or why not?

Where would you search for help when meet difficulty/obstacles in class (talk with professor, go to ACE, discuss with classmate, talk with OISS)

How have faculty treated you?

How have other students treated you related to class? Or group projects? Have you made any friends through class? Do the American students tend to treat you more negatively or positively? With more or less respect?

IV.   **Social Life at Pepperdine and Beyond**   15 mins.

Now, please discuss the following:

- Do you engage in different social activities at Pepperdine? If so, which ones? If not, why not?
- If so, who do you engage with? Other Chinese International Students? American students? Faculty?
- Do you ever feel lonely at Pepperdine? If yes, in what situations?
- Do you have trouble creating friendships and fitting in with American students? Why is that? What resources would help you in this regard?
- What do you think Pepperdine could do to improve your social experience?
- Involved in Chinese Student Association? Why or why not?
- Do you engage in social activities outside of Pepperdine? In what situations? With who? Why or why not?

IV.   **Suggestion for Future Resources**   10 mins.

Were Pepperdine's resources helpful for you in transitioning to Pepperdine? (website, written material, welcome in Shanghai, orientation) If so, how? If not, what suggestions do you have?

I'd like you to think about your favorite format of resource that could be helpful for your experience at Pepperdine. Examples could be website, guidebook, international student center, online chatting...

Questions to consider: (1) Which format would you feel most comfortable to use? Why? (2) What particular section/content you want to be in the program? (3) Do you have any other suggestions for x to increase your college experience? (4) what content would you like to see more or less of?

V.   Wrap-Up/Other "Back Room" Questions

Would you recommend Pepperdine University to other Chinese international students? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Focus Group Notes

- Are you happy with the overall experience at Pepperdine (PPD)?
YES
Freshman B before come to PPD, it sounds very fancy.
Small class, resource not enough
Junior (transfer from UC riverside): walk in very good, smaller class. Previous school:
One stop, line too long, not very helped.
Freshman female: small community, location not good, no car, can't go out, too much
steps,
Garret: not very famous in China, people are very nice, Christian school, class too hard,
not very situation, religion,

-Words you associate with PPD experience
Private, small, friendly, too small, social circle is too small, limited, not very open,
Suburban, church life, rich, God, ocean, sunny, clique, (social with own circle), inclusive
in class, high-end, too many GE class, class too hard,

-Words with PPD class experience
Small, good communication with professor, can build relationship, (not that much, but
professor can recognize me)
Small, tough, faithful,
it looks very strict in class, but professor is very nice,
some professor too strict, Dillion,
heard other professor ask for dinner, like them

-Which class is hard, Why
Religion 102, language barrier, the context is abstract, no background, hard to
understand, high requirement by professor, exam not easy
Religion (no background), exam is very different from lecture,
First year seminar (religion related)
Humanities, (very rare)
Accounting 301 (major)
Psychology exam is very different from lecture

-How is your professor
All good

-Do you come to your professor for help?
Yes, not make appointment, no hard situation, deserve better score, ask for study guide,
Media law, exam is about a video first, worry cannot understand,

No , find classmate/roommate first, worry lose face in front of professor
No, appointment is very annoying
No, senior, find professor every time, get D-
 No, afraid being mocked
Professor want to build relationship, but I don't want to

Do you have problem with school plagiarism rules? Have you been in trouble because of it?
No
Citation is difficult
Heard other students have these problems

-Do you come to other resource like ACE?
Speech lab, writing center, career center
No, annoying, speech lab, not listen to me,
writing center, they did not email to me, in person is very nice
don't know how to make appointment, figure it out by myself,
if professor doesn't say, I don't know
career center professor bring me to there
will go to career center

-How have other classmate treat you? Positively or negatively?
American student won't communicate with you first, but if I come for help, they are all willing to help
Not much conversation, in general,
They are very nice in math class, because they need help from me
In face, very nice, but not close relationship

-Do you make American friends from class?
One: math class, make friends
After this class, no more communication
Korean friend
They are not American, Humanities, (many actively)

-What social activity you engage in PPD ?
CSA event, step forward day, freshman dorm activity
CSA event, step forward day (CSA promote),
Two students look at school calendar
friends tell me
walk in main campus
feel wired to participate, because don't know people,
email

-Who do you engage with? CSA? American student? Faculty?
Chinese student, not involve in CSA, rarely hang out with American student, have lunch with professor public speaking
2 60% 40%
DOUG 90%
80% Chinese

-Are you member in CSA
No
YES YES YES YES

-Do you have trouble creating friendships and fitting in with American students? Why is that?
Yes. Background different, interest different, funny point, language,
Not very willing to make friend, not force oneself
Yes nice, but if they don't talk too much, hard to
opinion, funny point different,
language barrier,
don't understand slang, don't want to ask because afraid of losing face
RA hugs me every time, feel wired
Entertainment way different, they just drink, they ask me to party, but never ask me,

-What resources would help you in this regard?
No, it is very private,
Some resource provide opportunity, but not entirely
Classroom
Basketball game (still play with Chinese)
They don't invite us
Hiking

-Any outside PPD social activity?
Friends from previous school

-Do you think PPD's resource is helping your transition?
Yes, orientation, writing center,
Yes but not enough, hear from Chinese
Eating, playing, class,
OISS not enough

-What do you think you need to better your experience in PPD?
Academic: category of class is not enough, more interesting class,

There is no event in campus,
Main campus event is not enough,
Walk in, not check, only through posters,
-There is a website to help your experience (culture, class participation, social life), what would you expect to see in the website?
Freshman may use more,
Event calendar, know what exactly it is
Photos of the event,
Student can post comments,
How to make friend with American
How to say hi,
Campus resource because not familiar with these
-Will you use the website as a useful tool?
Yes
If the information is helpful
Many general culture not enough, people can google-
Not general comment, has topic

-Would you post comment in the website to interact with other users?
Yes, only if I involve or I know the event
Yes if it is anonymous

-what content would you like to see more or less of?
Not many general
More interaction
Interesting content
Creative

Appendix C

Website Evaluation Questionnaire

- Visit the HOME page, and answer the question below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something from the page.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the CULTURE page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about American culture.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the SLANG page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about American culture.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the PLAGIARISM page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about college plagiarism rules.					
It challenges my view of cheating.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the CAMPUS page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about Pepperdine culture.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the CAMPUS RESOURCES page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about Pepperdine campus resources.					
I am more likely to use the campus resource in the future.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the PROFESSOR page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about Pepperdine faculty.					
My view of professors has changed.					
I am more likely to ask professor for help in the future.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the CONNECT page, and answer the questions below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I learned something about American culture.					
I am likely to post information to this site.					
I am likely to chat with other students on this site.					
The content on this page gives me more confidence that I can be successful at Pepperdine.					
The content on this page makes me feel more at ease about being a student here.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- Visit the CONTACT page, and answer the question below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
This page is visual pleasing.					
I am likely to post information to this site.					
The information on the site seems credible.					

- How would you rate the overall experience with the website? (1=poor, 10=excellent)

  1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

- Please tell us what part(s) of the website you think will be helpful to you, and why.

- If you could change one thing about the website, what would it be?

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