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## Institution-Sponsored Acculturative Support of East Asian Students at an American University

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Jason Tannenbaum

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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Institution-Sponsored Acculturative Support of East Asian Students at an American  
University

by

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MA, Temple University, 1999

BA, Western Connecticut State University, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2020

## Abstract

Acme University's (AU) Strategic Plan values international student wellbeing and campus globalization; however, East Asian students (EASs) who enroll at this American university face significant linguistic and cultural barrier during their time on campus. International students typically experience acculturation-induced stress when they enter a new educational system and social environment. AU acknowledged the absence of university-sponsored programs that foster communication/acclturation between EASs and their American peers. The purpose of this study was to explore how EASs perceived interactions with their American peers (AP) on campus as the EASs attempted to acculturate. The conceptual framework used to inform the qualitative bounded case study stems from Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs, specifically the need to belong. Structured interviews were conducted with 8 EAS undergraduates and 3 AU administrators to answer research questions regarding (1) EAS acculturation with regard to interactions with APs and (2) obstacles to EAS acculturation stemming from campus life. To identify emerging patterns and themes, reiterative coding and analysis were done both manually and with NVivo, which resulted in data-supported answers to the research questions. Findings from the study suggested that interactions between EASs and APs are necessary for EASs' successful acculturation and that EASs who do not achieve a sense of belonging on campus rarely acculturate. The data which emerged from the interview analysis resulted in a policy paper containing recommendations for engendering improved campus-wide interactions between EASs, the university administration, and APs. Such interactions will support social change as the university works to systematically encourage EAS acculturation and globalization on campus.

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## Dedication

This project is dedicated to my parents and step-parents without whose love and support I could not have completed it. I also dedicate this work to my daughters, Sophia and Hannah. I hope it serves as an inspiration to them.

## Acknowledgments

There are too many people to acknowledge everyone individually for their inspiration, but there are some who deserve tremendous credit. The completion of this project would not have been possible without the patient support of Dr. Earl Thomas and Dr. Linda Swanson.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

The natural challenges of creating interactions between East Asian students (EAS) and their host peers are great. ACME University (AU) must take proactive measures in order to cause social change on campus. The primary rationale for conducting this research is to determine whether EASs believed that AU has accomplished its stated goal of “embody[ing] an ethos of respect for, and celebration of, our diversity, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment” (Vision, 2016) and that the university “create(s) cultural awareness and intercultural understanding (while) integrating a global perspective” (Opportunitas, para. 8). The research for this project probed the degree to which EASs believed the university encourages acculturative communication between themselves and their American counterparts. The research community that studies Asian student demographics recognizes the importance of university-based initiatives to support EASs as they confront the challenges of acculturative adjustment.

For numerous reasons, including a lack of English language proficiency, EASs often suffer from social seclusion from their American peers (APs). These linguistic hardships and alienation from host students on campus can sometimes delay acculturation (An & Chiang, 2015; Curtin, Stewart, & Osgrove, 2013). Social isolationism particularly from APs is a common complaint among international students (Curtin et al., 2013). EASs themselves shy away from interactions outside of their own cultural group (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Mutually evasive behavior inhibits EAS cultural adjustment.

Many EASs describe feelings of alienation from their American counterparts and a general disorientation on campus (Campbell, 2012; Cho & Yu 2014). Other symptoms of initial maladjustment include feelings of homesickness, depression, isolation, and language difficulties during their first year abroad (Glass et al., 2013; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). For campus newcomers to culturally adjust to and derive a sense of belonging on campus, they and their American counterparts must collaborate. Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) found that international students perceived that most host students do not make a significant effort to bridge the intercultural gap with visiting students. Some American universities have seen an uptick in neo-racism, which involves discriminating against or eliminating international students from college campuses (Glass, 2012). In 2012, administrators at one prominent northeast university held a series of campus wide cross-cultural education events in reaction to frequently-posted messages on the university blog branding Asian students as dog eaters and terrorists (Redden, 2012). AU itself was embroiled in national controversy in 2014 when pictures of the football team quarterback dressed in Nazi garb and striking a Nazi salute pose were circulated on social media (SM).

One way universities facilitate stronger social integration is through the development of international clubs or associations in campus communities (Cho & Yu, 2014; Yakunina et al., 2012). Forty-six percent of international students studying at Canadian universities reported that despite the overwhelming evidence that EASs and their APs often require scaffolded university support, AU does not sponsor an international club like those which exist for African American, Hispanic, or those who

identify as LGBTQA. Two of the local institutions who compete with AU for EASs promote international student groups financially and administratively.. There is a need to study whether EASs believe that AU overtly sponsors intercultural events that advance EAS cultural adjustment.

An AU student development department member explained that neither curricula for the freshman orientation nor the First-Year Experience seminar included discussions which directly address methods of international student assimilation. The student development department member was unable to identify any means by which the university apprises its American students of its declared strategic plan to support international students. At other universities, researchers, educators, and students are calling on their administrations to take concrete steps to sponsor activities that promote cross-cultural communication. A Global Business Programs faculty member at AU explained that over 50% of international students attending undergraduate business programs at the university identify as EASs. He and his staff have long recognized EAS tendencies to form peer clusters for both social and academic activities. These students tend to gravitate towards cultural and linguistic peers because they share many of the same interests and also because they fear being misunderstood by those outside of their cultural peer groups. According to another AU administrator, others have expressed anxiety about actual or potential racial or linguistic discrimination. The university must take active steps to create a social and academic matrix from which the roots of intercultural relationships can grow. Without the university's intervention, acculturation rates will remain low.

The purpose of this bounded case study was to investigate EAS perceptions of AU's support of their acculturation, specifically in terms of what actions AU take to guide them toward acculturative interaction with their APs. University undergraduate EASs and staff who worked closely with this population provided their perspective on the institution's attempt to assist EASs in their attempts to acculturate.

### **Local Problem and Rationale**

Many universities across the United States have made international student (IS) recruitment a central element of their strategic plans. (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2014). AU's strategic plan lists globalization and diversification as two of its central goals. AU's strategic plan, which is called *Opportunitas: Embracing the Future*, identified the presence of 1,700 ISs as the starting point for the school's larger objective of enlisting greater and greater numbers of students from overseas. New York is the second most popular destination for EASs in the United States (Lu, 2016), and AU is highly ranked in business and computer science majors, those majors that attract 40% of all Asian degree-seeking students. Leadership at the university believes that the university's popular location and set of majors will attract a growing number EASs in the coming years. The problem is that the university does not appear to be providing enough support with regard to facilitating acculturative interaction between the EAS's and their APs.

Opportunitas (2015) pledged that the AU's recruitment strategy would include a plan for a continued commitment to providing superior quality acculturative support for its student body. Yet the document does not describe how AU plans to address the array of acculturative challenges ISs face.

Virtually all international students experience acculturation-induced stress when they enter a new educational system and social environment (Cho & Yu, 2014, Wang et al., 2015; Yusoff, 2012). The degree to and the brevity with which EASs culturally adjust to their new lives on American campuses are crucial elements of successful study experiences. It has been established that to encourage intercultural learning and reduce acculturative stress, interactions between EASs and domestic students are necessary (Andrade, 2006; Campbell, 2012; Wang et al., 2015). Yet EASs often report feelings of social isolation with APs (Curtin, Stewart & Ostrove, 2013). The purpose of this study was to determine how EAS perceive that AU supports their acculturation by sponsoring cross-cultural interaction with their APs.

### **Problem in the Larger Context of Education**

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2015), there are over one million ISSs studying in the U.S. That number represents a two-fold increase over the last ten years. Over 30% of those students come from East Asia, which consists of China, Korea, and Japan. The recruitment effort by American universities which precipitated exponential growth in the foreign student population in the U.S. was derived in part from university leaderships' desire to infuse a predominantly homogenously-populated campuses with added cultural diversity. School administrators and educational researchers believe that international students imbue college campuses with a rich intellectual and cultural flavor (Porter & Belkin, 2013). American universities across the country depend on international recruits to further their strategic plans to globalize their campuses. Murray (2009) argued that enterprises of the future will act in a more global



and collaborative in appearance and function. Therefore, universities must adopt transformative measures to meet globalization expectations. Murray further argued that universities face increasing pressure to position American students to succeed in the new globalized economy.

While universities face external pressures to globalize their campuses in order to prepare American students for their future as global citizens, administrators have also challenged admission departments to recruit international students for the purpose of boosting revenue (Murray, 2009). The premium tuition ISs pay to study at American universities represents a significant boost to a university's budget revenue (Glass, 2012). One quarter of all the world's international students choose the U.S. as their destination (Glass & Braskamp, 2012). University administrators recognize that revenue derived from the recruitment of international students has become paramount and fundamental to university budget planning (Adams, Leventhal, & Connelly, 2012).

Because an emphasis has been placed on recruiting abroad by the leadership, universities bear the responsibility of creating a supportive environment for international guest students as they gain a sense of belonging on campus (O'Keefe, 2013). Glass et al. (2013) questioned whether U.S. colleges and universities have made the necessary accommodations to embrace intercultural, linguistic, psychological, and social upheaval that can result from a rapid influx of international students. The need to study EAS acculturative support emerged from the primary question regarding the readiness of AU to foster initiatives that lead to intentional interactions between EASs and host peer students. While American students claim to understand the virtues of internationalization

and diversity, they rarely interact with students of diverse international backgrounds (Glass, Buus, & Braskamp, 2013).

Asian students form 62% of international students studying in the U.S. (IIE, 2015). EASs form over 40% of the total IS body at AU. Though all international students experience an adjustment period, EASs face a unique set of shared cultural and linguistic challenges. Most institutions only support EAS language admissions requirements in their consideration of EAS needs. Universities must address visiting students' emotional, social, and cultural knowledge deficiencies (Glass, 2012). When EASs arrive on American campuses, they endeavor to establish a new identity as valuable or worthy guests, but These visitors rarely realize a sense of validation from their host students (Glass, 2013; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013).

Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) said that building relationships with American students was of primary importance in the acculturation process. Yet forming relationships with host peer students remains an elusive goal for many EASs throughout their terms of study. The study found that EASs indicated feeling excluded by their hosts. In addition, they reported feeling disoriented by new cultural norms on American campuses. Lack of English proficiency and disorienting culture shock compound the overall challenge EASs face (Campbell, 2012; Ting-Toomey, 2013). Wang et al. (2012) said that EASs who experienced more interactions with host peers acculturated faster. They recommended that such communications between EAS and their American counterparts should take place even before visiting students arrive from Asia.

### **Definitions of Terms**

*Belongingness:* A sense of belonging involving experiences of personal involvement in a system or environment so that individuals feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment (Haggerty, 1992).

*Cross-cultural adjustment:* A psychological outcome that is associated with the degree of comfort an individual feels in his or her new role and the degree to which he or she feels adjusted to role requirements (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013).

*Culture shock:* Pronounced reactions to psychological disorientation that is experienced when spending an extended period of time in a new environment (Kohls, 1979).

*International students:* Non-immigrant visitors who come to the United States temporarily to take classes.

*Neo-racism:* Racism that focuses on culture or country rather than physical traits such as skin color (Redden, 2012).

*Scaffolding:* In the context of English as a second language, scaffolding refers to “providing contextual supports for meaning through the use of simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning” (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 345).

*Segment:* Used primarily in qualitative research, a segment is a unit or piece of data which may contain the answer to a research question (Merriam, 2009).

*Social adjustment*: Efforts made by individuals to cope with standards, values, and needs of society in order to be accepted. It can be defined as a psychological process (Jain, 2015).

*Social Capital*: A framework of benefits and resources derived from relationships with others (Coleman, 1988).

*Sojourners*: Those who temporarily leave their homes to study abroad (Gullekson & Vancouver, 2010).

*Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Test*: A test which scores whether international students possess the English language skills to succeed at the undergraduate and graduate level .

### **Significance of the Study**

EASs constitute 40% of the international undergraduate population on the campus of AU according to the university's international division statistics. My study contributes to the literature on international student acculturation by focusing specifically on how the university fosters cross-cultural interaction. My research of literature unearthed no study that examined the university's role in promoting this critical communication. First year EASs reported feeling isolated from APs due to difficulties with the English language and cultural miscommunications (personal communication, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2016). The university has listed diversity and globalization as strategic goals in their 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, but there has been no research regarding activities AU has instituted to ensure that EASs receive acculturative support. This study provides the university for the first time in its history with data regarding the existence and efficacy of interactive

acculturation-inducing activities. The university may then use these results to foster necessary social change on its campus.

### **Research Questions**

Universities should play an important role in assisting EASs through the acculturative process by facilitating interactions between these students and their APs. This project sought to resolve questions regarding the extent to which EASs experience university-sponsored support from their APs, in addition to the relationship between host peer support and acculturative adjustment to life on the AU campus. To gain a deeper understanding, I developed the following research questions that are aligned with the problem and purpose of the study.

*RQ1:* In what ways do EASs believe that their acculturation to campus life was affected by AP interaction and support?

*RQ2:* How effective has AU been in facilitating interactions between EASs and their APs?

*RQ3:* What are the obstacles to EAS acculturation in campus life?

### **Summary**

With their strategic plan, AU has prioritized supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of their international students. My case study will investigate whether participants or staff members believe the university satisfactorily supports the integration of international students, principally by sponsoring activities that cause interactions between EAS and their APs. The next section will examine research regarding why

students choose to study abroad and the challenges they face while studying in Western countries.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

Maslow's theory of a hierarchy of needs is the central conceptual framework that undergirds this study. As they evolve from childhood to adulthood, human beings progress upward from the lowest or basest level physiological needs (e.g. food, water, oxygen) to the second stage needs, described as personal safety (e.g. freedom from danger, lodging) to the love and belongingness stage (e.g. social acceptance) to the fourth level esteem (e.g. respect of others and self-respect), and finally the pinnacle stage known as self-actualization (the need to realize one's full potential). Nature generally dictates that human beings satisfy base needs before striving to achieve more psycho-emotionally challenging upper level ones. People gratify foundational level physiological needs first and then intrinsically pursue successively higher levels until they reach the fifth and final tier, self-actualization. It is imperative that EASs experience a sense of belongingness in order to achieve self-actualization.

Maslow (1943) described all needs as a desire for hunger-satisfaction. My study focuses on the third-tier hunger for belongingness. The unique aspect of this need is that the desire to belong can sometimes unnaturally supersede lower level needs. People sometimes put aside or ignore basic level needs such as safety and security, in favor of being accepted by an individual or social group. For example, children have been known to deny parental abuse for the sake of feeling accepted by the parents. Maslow addressed

how the powerful need for love, affection, and belonging motivates people to secure their place in a group. Accordingly, both American and international college students attempt to achieve a sense of belonging on campus, but many local and international students struggle to adapt to university culture (Slaten et al., 2014).

Within the context of a university campus, Slaten et al. (2014) said that the underlying factors contributing to belongingness are “a sense of commitment to the institution,” “an individual commitment to work in the setting,” and “the sense that one’s abilities are being recognized” (p. 1). Glass and Westmont (2013) evaluated the degree to which belongingness occurs on a college campuses based on how non-native English-speaking international students relate both in the classroom and while engaged in extracurricular activities, and concluded that achieving a sense of belongingness is one of the chief factors in terms of whether ISs persevere in their studies and attain academic success. O’Keefe (2013) listed ethnic minorities and international students as particularly at risk of dropping out of school, in part because they feel that they do not belong or are rejected. Because of their failure to provide support services specifically for ISs themselves, many universities tacitly expect foreign sojourners to succeed academically without the supports accorded to local students (Glass & Westmont, 2013). ISs who view themselves as belonging to their department and school complete their degrees at a higher rate. They also tend to see themselves as competent and successful students (Curtin et al., 2013).

Beyond the retention and academic statistics related to social acceptance and inclusion, 18% of all students on American college campuses have considered suicide as a

result of thwarted belongingness (Ploskonka & Servaty-Seib). This sense of rejection or non-inclusion accounts for one of three factors that are major contributors to suicidal thoughts. Of those three factors, including a lack of faith in one's own abilities and self-hatred due to perceived character flaws, an insufficient sense of belonging most conclusively predicts suicidal thoughts. Students often associate a perceived lack of belongingness with deficiencies in their own interpersonal communications skills. Hirsch, Jameson, and Barton (2012) reported there was a strong correlation between insufficient connectedness between non-native speaking international students and their peers with the propensity for sojourner depression and suicidal thoughts. The existence of strong social connections with peers predicted positive mental health and adjustment.

### **Review of Broader Problem**

AU has repeatedly stated the importance of inviting international students to the university for the purpose of globalizing the campus. The literature shows that EASs often struggle to acculturate on Western campuses. I will explore the problem of whether EAS acculturation is supported institutionally. Much of the literature on EAS, particularly Chinese students, pertains to the challenges and stressors that obstruct these students' academic or social acculturation. This literature review touches on how intercultural relationships determine the depth of EASs' acculturation on American campuses.

The first section of the review discusses Maslow's conceptual framework in terms of the human need to belong within the culture they live in regardless of how long they reside in that culture. The review then addresses the adversity EASs face when they elect



to leave their homeland to study abroad. Finally, this review addresses a sample of the methods institutions and students use to bridge the gap between EASs and their APs.

### **Search Terms**

Research for this literature review was conducted by using education and multidisciplinary databases such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, SAGE Premier, ProQuest, Academic Search Complete, and Google Scholar to search the following: *international students, east Asian students, cross-cultural adjustment, language and cultural adjustment, religion and cultural adjustment, acculturation, belongingness, homesickness, culture shock, international students and racism, international students and language, support for international students, globalization, American student peer support, support groups, SM and social support, international students and psychological well-being, and belongingness*. Each article's reference list was also reviewed to identify other relevant scholarly research that could be used to inform this study which seeks to identify variables that obstruct ISSs' efforts to socially adjust to American campuses and which activities cultivate such adjustments. In addition to scholarly journal articles, many types of resources were referenced, such as textbooks, websites, and SM sites devoted to international student issues.

### **Theories of Student Integration**

The literature does not present one clear and consistent uniform theory explaining what is meant by acculturation or integration on a college campus setting. Many studies discuss the behavioral challenges posed by studying abroad. They proposed that rather than the frequency or quantity of interactions between the international student and the

host peer, the quality, depth, and meaningfulness of encounters greatly impacts the psychological propensity to integrate or acculturate.

Tinto (1975) argued that ethnic Latino students were capable of succeeding in postsecondary education without integrating as long as they formed cultural subgroups of other Latino students to support them academically and socially. This behavior of mutual support among those of similar cultural backgrounds is known as clustering. However, Hurtado and Carter (1997) argued that minority students could not depend only on their subgroup if they wished to discover the many benefits of becoming a full and equal member of the campus community. Hurtado and Carter found that student body cohesion positively correlated with academic success, student absenteeism, social support, and mental health. However, they expressed doubts that the majority of IS can truly integrate academically and socially with the majority population without meaningful interactions with their host peers. Volet and Ang (2012) suggested that high quality interactions between ISs and their host peers encourages multicultural mixing, friendship, and cross-cultural understanding.

New students often feel overwhelmed by the many ways they must adapt when arriving in the country. Students must navigate and struggle with a new culture, educational system, and daily life tasks. They often depend wholly on cultural peers to negotiate these new challenges (Benson, 2016). When non-Western international sojourners first arrive in New Zealand, they have often had little contact with the new culture. Many Asian students take an initial innate stance of cultural superiority as a defense against the anxiety created by the expectation that they integrate. They will

sometimes even denigrate the new culture as they attempt to exalt their own culture (Bennett, 2013).

Canadian universities, like their American counterparts, host large numbers of international students on their campuses. The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE, 2015) found that 56% of IS respondents indicated that they had no Canadian friends on campus. 37% of those who took the survey indicated that getting to know Canadians is difficult. The CBIE's Code of Ethical Practice stresses the necessity of "promot[ing] the interests of international students in the institutional community, and provide meaningful opportunities for interaction that promote intercultural and mutual understanding between international students and other members of the institutional community and, to the extent possible, the surrounding community" (CBIE, 2014).

### **Shared Cultural Traits of EAS: Confucianism**

For the purposes of this project, EASs are defined as Chinese, Vietnamese, and Koreans because of their shared Confucian philosophy involving education and everyday life. Chuang (2012) defined Confucian-influence cultures as "societies that have been influenced by traditional Confucian philosophy historically and have been teaching Confucian values in their required education system" (p. 255). These values include a hierarchy of social order, respect for individuals depending on age and status, social justice, and the forming of harmonious relations with others. In general, Hofstede (2005) found that EASs today retain many of the educational traits of their ancestors, like the desire for strict and unambiguous relations between instructor and student as well as older and younger students. EASs also tend to be more group oriented than American or

other international students (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). This tendency toward inner circle group harmony sometimes poses challenges to American universities attempting to advance the enculturation process of EASs on campus (Huang et al., 2009).

Cultural dependence on the group or family to help make educational and general daily life decisions powerfully affects the EAS. Western students will more often look inwardly for answers regarding questions involving personal decisions. An EAS's sense of personal identity is determined by his or her role within the group or greater society. Therefore, the stronger the group's endorsement of one's behavior, the closer they affix their sense of self-worth and self-esteem to the judgments of those who are respected in their group (Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul, 2009). Disregarding the impulse to remain within the confines of one's cultural group in order to explore or adopt AP culture is not easily accomplished .

### **EAS Desire to Culturally Adjust**

Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) found that among EASs who had been studying on their campus for more than one year, rarely reported ongoing homesickness and culture shock. They reported feelings of curiosity and interest in terms of learning the intricacies of their host culture. Students appear to recognize that forging intercultural relationships with host students helps them learn more about American culture and gain self-confidence as they learn to communicate in multiple settings.

Foreign sojourners almost universally experience substantial emotional highs and lows during their first year studying abroad. However, EASs report that creating friendships with APs played an important role in forging a new identity as a member of

their new campus community (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013). Gareis (2012) reported that the quantity and substance of intercultural relationships affected the time it took for students to build their new identity. Those students who felt most secure with their identity prior to arrival frequently were more open to interacting with and learning from their American counterparts.

Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) said that participating students recognized that knowing their new classmates and friends for such a relatively short time hindered their ability to form deep relationships because they struggled to find common social topics to discuss. Many students mentioned that they had known their friends at home for years, and that over that period, they had developed a common history together, which strengthened and deepened those relationships. Glass et al. (2013) said that ISs begin to feel their confidence and sense of self-efficacy strengthen when given the opportunity to interact with their APs over a sustained period of time.

Tawagi and Mak (2015) studied 190 Asian-born international students at a mid-sized Australian university, and said that regardless of gender or length of stay in the country, 70% of the participants expressed a strong desire to be included in the day-to-day activities of the campus. Asian-born students often innately correlated inclusiveness with the depth and quality of interactions as opposed to quantity of meetings with fellow host students. Universities should craft and implement strategies to promote an inclusive climate in order for Asian students to achieve meaningful interactions with host students (Bodycott, Mak, & Ramburuth, 2013). The development of Intercultural competence requires that multidimensional cross-cultural interactions be woven into the formal

curriculum and extracurricular activities to prepare graduates for diverse and globalized workplaces (Knott, Mak, & Neill, 2013).

### **Cultural and Emotional Intelligence**

IS likelihood of achieving meaningful acculturation may rely in part on individual cultural and emotional intelligence. Mesidor and Sly (2016) define “cultural intelligence” (CI) as “the ability of a person to interact, relate, adapt, and work effectively across cultures” while they describe “emotional intelligence” (EQ) as the ability to recognize, evaluate, manage one’s emotions, and interact with others” (p.265). Students who possess a high CI and EQ tend to adapt rapidly. Morrell, Ravlin, Ramsey, and Ward (2013) found that prior international experience correlated with all areas of cultural intelligence. Emotional intelligence alone did not predict successful psychological adjustment, but paired with cultural intelligence, EQ predicts resilience and adjustment.

The CI and EQ of the international sojourner can be developed through interaction with the new culture. Bennett (2013) explained that often international students initially view the new culture with a degree of disdain. They reject the host-country’s values and exalt their own. Asian students who persevere through early stage pretension begin to understand and accept the differences between their own cultural values and those of their host. They gradually open themselves to intercultural relationships. Ultimately, these students begin to engage in cultural empathy and demonstrate a more pluralistic attitude. The integrative intercultural relationship forms when Asian students’ CI develops to the point that they view host culture situations,

beliefs, actions, and attitudes through a fluid lens of their own and the host culture's frame of reference.

Matsushima (2014) suggested that those who familiarize themselves with the host country's culture before arrival on campus often possess the CI and integrative social confidence to befriend host campus natives with relative ease. Asian students who build on and purposefully advance their CI by taking the risk of befriending host country students also develop a tolerance for awkward social situations that can arise from these relationships and learn to diffuse potential cultural clashes. Asian students who dauntlessly attempt to befriend their local peers adapt and integrate with more depth and at a greater speed than those who protect themselves by clustering with students of their own culture (Bennett, 2013; Matsushima, 2014).

### **Culture Shock and Homesickness**

Newsome and Cooper (2016) stated that students do not journey abroad for the purpose of replacing their own cultural heritage with a new one, but to add a new cultural perspective to their global outlook. This addition can emotionally and psychologically jar ISs when they first arrive on campus. They sometimes confront situations, behaviors, and attitudes that contradict deeply held ingrained cultural understandings. These new ideas or experiences can pose a threat to the visiting student's sense of right vs. wrong, good vs. bad, and personal identity. This sense of dislocation and disorientation can result in culture shock. Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) stated that virtually all international students suffer from varying degrees of culture and shock. They described culture shock as "the affective, behavioral, and cognitive disorientation sojourners feel when in an

unfamiliar culture” (p. 550). Wang, Wei, and Chen (2015) discovered that 65% of participants suffered significant to severe culture shock. Many of these students experienced emotional highs and lows during the early days of the acculturation process. Mesidor and Sly (2016) described culture shock as an amalgam of emotions such as anger, grief, and frustration that are usually attributed to external factors such as being misunderstood or mistreated by their hosts. During this stage, international students exhibit mistrustful behavior which leads to motivational deficiencies and uncooperative behavior. Similarly, Newsome and Cooper (2016) said Chinese students enrolled in British undergraduate programs believed that the host country shared many of the values of their home culture but were soon disappointed by discrepancies.

Homesickness is one manifestation of culture shock. Interviews with Chinese students revealed that 72% of the participants experienced some form of depression exacerbated by homesickness. These students tended to integrate cultural aspects of their home country into the norms they acquire from the host culture. Asian students are particularly prone to homesickness because their culture stresses collectivism, while American culture emphasizes the needs and interests of individuals (Newsome & Cooper, 2016). Whereas students from collectivist societies tend to consider how their behavior benefits or harms the group or society as a whole, they view the individualistic behavior prized in the western countries as self-aggrandizing or arrogant.

Missing family and friends ranks among the most challenging obstacles to overcome. It is precisely because students live away from their family and friends in their home country that Cho and Yu (2014) believe that making new host country friends can



reduce stress and anxiety among the EAS population. Kwadzo's (2014) research discovered that homesickness can be experienced in forms beyond missing family and friends. Food also figures prominently in students' longing for home. Several students in Kwadzo's study also mentioned the weather as a contributing factor for homesickness. One student from Thailand complained that during the spring season in northeastern America one can experience summer-like weather one day and snow the next. This unpredictability can add to a student's sense of bewilderment.

### **Cross Cultural Challenges: Racism, Cultural Ignorance, and Fear**

Brown and Leslie (2013) said claimed racism or perceived racism plays an important role in IS satisfaction. Such studies indicate global incidents of hostile, unapproachable, or intentionally disinterested hosts. Newsome and Cooper's (2016) study of Chinese undergraduate students "commonly expressed a sense of alienation and bewilderment in response to the racism and hostility to which they were exposed" (p. 202). Skin color or Asian features of foreign students appears to spark neo-racism among some American college students, which reveals itself in the emphasis on physical and cultural differences at the core of discrimination (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Glass and Braskamp (2012) remarked in their Global Perspectives Inventory Survey of 67,000 American and 3,000 international undergraduate students across the country revealed that few deep and consequential relationships arise between American and international students. According to the authors, international students "often live in a parallel social world, shut off from friendship with American friends" (p. 1). Campbell (2012) said that ISs sometimes feel isolated throughout the duration of their stay due to a

mutual inability to reach across cultural boundaries and establish sincere multifaceted relationships. Nearly three quarters of EASs in their first year of studying on an American campus report feeling stress related to the perception that they are being ignored by peers and discriminated against because of their physical appearance and/or language barriers. Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) reported that ISs had high hopes that they will be accepted as special guests when they first arrive on an American college campus but face unpredicted adjustment challenges due to hurtful culturally unkind comments and outright discrimination. On some university campuses, ISs are considered to be of lower social status due to their lack of perceived potential social capital, poor language skills, and deficient American cultural understanding (Latif, Bhatti, Maitlo, Nzar, & Shaikh, 2012). Thus, some students choose to interact almost exclusively with their home country peers.

Some ISs have reported a gap between their pre-arrival expectation of being treated as valued guests and the reality of having to struggle for acceptance by their host students. The reason for this disconnect ranged from mutual cultural ignorance to fear of an unknown culture to racism. In fact, ISs reported that often domestic students are unresponsive, disinterested, or reluctant to engage in deeper level relationships with them (Campbell, 2012). Glass and Westmont (2012) discussed the importance of developing relationships with others from their own culture and other international students as a base from which to explore relationships with APs. These relationships help students repulse depression and other negative emotions that impede acculturation and academic success.

Wang et al., (2015) listed social factors such as social connection as a major predictor of socio-cultural adjustment (p. 274). The author defines social connection as the “connection to the mainstream” and “the frequency of conversation with American friends” (p. 274). Yoon, Jung and Felix-Mora (2012) utilized the 7-point Likert-type Social Connectedness in Mainstream Society (SCMN) scale to determine how connected Asian students feel they are with their APs. This survey features statements such as for which they were asked to provide answers that ranged from 1= strongly agree to 7= strongly disagree. Those students who scored highly on this test predictably correlated closely with students who believed that they had acculturated rapidly.

### **Language and Communicative Style**

Language proficiency is one of the foremost variables studied by acculturation experts. A great many EASs suffer from linguistic difficulties which hamper initial stage cultural adaptation (An & Chiang 2015; Campbell, 2012). EASs frequently report lack of English speaking confidence as a prime reason they fail to develop relationships with domestic peers (Campbell, 2012). Students who participated in the Hotta and Ting-Toomey (2013) study also reported stylistic communication gaps between APs and themselves. Whereas, for example, Chinese students tend to engage in high-context communication (i.e. understanding through contextual clues) within their own language and culture, they found that effective communication required a more assertive and direct style when interacting with American classmates and friends. EASs who participated in the study indicated that interacting with American students required a great deal of time and effort.

To gain acceptance into most American universities, international students must submit a TOEFL score. This test determines a student's proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening in English. AU's undergraduate division requires a standard baseline score to gain admission. Each graduate program at the university sets its own baseline acceptance score. Three particularly well-known majors at AU, computer science, business, and law, require scores of 78, 90, and 95 (D. Cohen, personal communication, July 25, 2016). TOEFL scores have been found to positively correlate with not only projected academic success but also social adjustment (Wei et al. 2012; Gong & Fan, 2016). Therefore, those who possess stronger English skills tend to acculturate faster and with greater success than those who score lower on the test. EASs self-reported that those who spent significant time in English-speaking environments when on campus learned to communicate more effectively in a shorter time, which, in turn, caused accelerated acculturation. Predictably, those who spent their time predominantly with speakers of their own language struggled to develop English communication skills and acculturative relationships with American students (Wei et al., 2015, Gong & Fan, 2016).

### **Social Media: Social Capital, Networking and Information Sharing**

Beginning in the late 1990s ISs began to utilize SM to connect with other students from their home country, other ISs, and those from their host country. Researchers discovered that the use of SM facilitates acculturation and mitigates shortcomings in language proficiency, shyness, and cultural obstacles (Lin, Peng, Kim, & LaRose, 2012; Sin & Kim, 2013; Gómez, Urzúa, & Glass, 2014). Students who demonstrate personality

traits associated with extroversion tend to use face-to-face communication and SM to interact with APs for the purposes of sharing information, networking, and building social capital. Face-to-face peer contacts are often added to their SM contact lists. Those who demonstrated introverted personality traits found the use of SM particularly constructive for building a social network. Such students sometimes found face-to-face communication with Americans intimidating (Lin et al., 2012). Gomez and Glass (2014) found that acculturative stress was ameliorated by the use of SM. Minimizing the pressure of real time, face-to-face interactions via SM deepens relationships between introverted and extroverted ISs.

The rapid spread of SM use since the late 1990s has now made this mode of communication nearly indispensable for college students (William, Gosling & Graham, 2012). Park and Lee (2014) studied the motivation behind student use of Facebook at the University of California. The study revealed that college students valued this social networking site due to its ability to entertain but also to foster a sense of belonging in the Facebook community. The greater number of Facebook communications students made with other students on campus, the greater their sense of belonging and satisfaction with campus life. Given the popularity and correlation with belonging, the authors suggested that school administrations should develop programs or activities around the use of SM platforms like Facebook. On-campus groups should be encouraged to create and maintain such sites enhance students' sense of belonging to the group and university.

Lin et al., (2012) described the social capital derived from the use of SM platforms such as Facebook. They defined two varieties of value-added relationship

building techniques known as bridging or bonding (p. 435). Bridging relationships are those that form for the sake of information sharing. Students formed these relatively weak links for immediate purposes such sharing group school project ideas. Bridging also helped bring together diverse people. Bonding type relationships provided emotional well-being support. Bonding helped bring people with common interests together (i.e. passing a test, raising donations for a club). The researcher concluded that Facebook usage between ISs and their host peers positively affected adjustment. The results of survey by Sin and Kim (2013) of 800 international undergraduate students studying throughout the United States showed that female users generally leveraged SM to maintain already established relationships while men were prone to seek and develop new relationships. They recommended that students be encouraged to use SM to maintain and develop bridging and bonding forms of relationships.

Beyond the social capital constructed by interacting through SM, Sin and Kim's research on IS use of social networking sites discovered that SM played a central role in helping to disseminate information related to educational and social events on campus. Those ISs seeking information on everyday life through interactions with American students reported an easier cross-cultural transition. ISs sometimes did not use SM as a means to direct interaction but to access information on upcoming social events that may generate social capital and belonging. More than half of the respondents in the study reported that use of social networking sites helped them to stay updated on social events.

### **Organizational Engagement and Support of International Students**

The acculturation process begins even before students arrive in the U.S (Yoon et al, 2012). The researchers found that student acculturation rates correlate with mental preparedness as they approach their study abroad experience. Students who scored low on general social connectedness and self-efficacy surveys prior to arrival tended to struggle with acculturative adjustment. Mesidor (2016) suggested that universities should create a website containing material relevant to ISs to help them transition from their home to host country. In addition, literature related to university life should be sent directly to the students' homes. Host student-created hard copy and web-based literature can play a particularly important role in aiding pre-arrival adjustment. Sunjore (2014) also recommended creating university-sponsored correspondence programs that foster social and academic connection between host students and those preparing to make the journey abroad.

Once students arrive on campus, Glass and Westmont (2012) suggest that “meaningful inter-cultural communication requires a social context that enables international and domestic students to explore relationships” (p. 106). Cho and Yu (2014) called social support a critical component of the IS's emotional well-being. Therefore, universities bear responsibility for fostering a classroom and a non-classroom campus that is conducive to inter-cultural communication. Not only interpersonal support but also organizational support greatly impacts the social adjustment of students from abroad (Cho & Yu, 2014; Gillet et al. 2012). Wang (2012) reported that having a diversified

group of home country, international, and American supporters serves as a strong model for acculturation support.

One of the most effective and popular methods of bringing international students together with their host peers is a buddy system. Administrators pair students together for social and/or academic events. (Cho & Yu, 2015). Often the difference between succeeding or failing in their overseas experience depends upon the support students garner in the early days of their stay. A university in New Zealand created what many ISs perceived to be a successful matrix of support by pairing international and domestic students for academic projects in the first semester of freshman year (Campbell, 2012).

### **Critical Analysis of the Literature**

Many American universities that actively recruit foreign students who speak languages other than English as a native language often fail to comprehend the complexities these students face as they attempt to assimilate to their new campus environment. Many such universities tend to support foreign students' language development to help them succeed academically. The literature concentrating on foreign student acculturation indicates that the issues facing foreign students range far beyond language challenges. Culture shock, feelings of displacement, racism or perceived racism, inability to connect with local students, and homesickness all play critical roles in obstructing acculturation. It is clear from the literature that ISs face multiple challenges which demands a multipronged solution.



### **Implications**

The literature review indicated that EASs must have the support of their APs to fully acclimate to American campus life. AU envisions a campus that “embodies an ethos of and a respect for, and a celebration of, diversity while creating an inclusive and welcoming environment” (Opportunitas, p. 2). A preliminary investigation of AU’s attempts to foster interaction between EASs and their American counterparts revealed a lack of such university-sponsored activities. I have identified classroom, student-led organizations, dormitory, and SM as domains where the school can bolster support for social change associated with encouraging APs to help guide EASs toward the fulfillment of acculturation.

The evaluation of this problem may provide implications for the methods AU implements in its pursuit of a diverse yet cohesive campus. I have included a policy paper consisting of recommendations and practice changes aimed at socially transforming the university as part of the result of this project. The development of programs that promote the inclusivity highlighted in the Strategic Plan will advance the university’s plan to develop its reputation internationally.

### **Summary**

This qualitative project explored how successfully AU supports their EAS’ attempts to acculturate to campus society. The quality and duration of communication between international students and their host peers correlates positively with international student acculturation. For the purpose of carrying out this qualitative case study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight EASs and three staff members who work

closely with EASs about their perceptions of AU's methods of supporting acculturative interaction between EASs and their APs. Students and staff members were selected based on a set of criteria explained in depth in the upcoming methodology sections. A policy recommendation paper resulted from the analysis of these interviews. The upcoming sections detail the methodology that was used to collect data from study participants, data analysis, and how implications of the analysis may affect how AU approaches its goals and responsibilities to foster acculturative relations between EASs and their APs.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Data Analysis Results**

The objective of this project was to investigate the extent to which AU supports EAS acculturation on campus from the perspective of EASs and staff members who work with this population. In order to achieve this objective, I attempted to capture participants' experiences as conveyed from their authentic context on the AU campus. I used a qualitative research method case study approach to better understand the experiences of upper class EASs enrolled at AU. Qualitative research methods allow for the collection of data via a number of instruments that provide a description of human behavior while supplying a detailed understanding of the actions, feelings, or perceptions of a limited number of specific subjects (Gayago-Gicain, 2006). Researchers generally concur that qualitative methods offer a natural interpretive view of the meanings associated with phenomena such as behaviors, belief systems, values, and choices that exist within a particular social environment (Richie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormstrom, 2013). Hatch (As cited in Simons, 2009) described the case study as differing from other qualitative approaches such as ethnography and grounded theory in that it spotlights specific immediate contexts within a set of cordoned off parameters or boundaries as opposed to a historical or longitudinal viewpoint.

With social science research, qualitative researchers implement the case study more often than any other approach. Yin (2008) defined the case study as “an empirical inquiry of a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident” (p. 18).

Merriam (2009) characterized the case study as less of an approach and more of a choice regarding what to study within delimited boundaries. They represent the experiences, beliefs and action of the specific subjects within the bounded context. Therefore they often do not lend themselves to wider generalization and application.

I considered and rejected a number of approaches to query participants who will be chosen to contribute to this study before settling on the case study. Most qualitative studies explore meanings gleaned from life experiences (Polit & Beck, 2001). I have chosen to conduct an investigation into experiences regarding a phenomenon in its natural setting. In employing a descriptive qualitative case study approach, quantitative inquiry methods were rejected for this project in order to make meaning regarding EASs' perceptions of how successfully AU has fostered acculturative relations between themselves and their APs. While quantitative research relies on hypotheses and statistics (Creswell, 2009), this project will not depend on assumptions but on interviewee perceptions resulting from participant interviews.. Researchers often use quantitative approaches when attempting to accept or reject a hypothesis, but such techniques fail to reveal perceptions, reflections, and motivations expressed by participants. I also eliminated several other qualitative approaches. I decided against the longitudinal phenomenological approach because this project did not investigate modifications in attitudes or behaviors of a multitude of participants over a period of time. I deemed the grounded theory inappropriate because I am not attempting to explain a process by means of embedding myself in the environment being studied. EASs share many cultural traits, but I will not be observing my participants as a group. As a result, I rejected the

anthropological ethnographic study method. This qualitative case study will examine the perceptions, reflections, and feelings of EASs and staff members who work closely with EASs about the methods AU use to cause acculturative relationships to form between these students and their American counterparts.

## **Participants**

### **Roles of the Researcher and Participants**

I have worked as the associate director of the English Language Institute at my university for 5 years. My work brings me primarily into contact with graduate level EASs. The majority of students I work with have already earned a bachelor's degree and hope to gain admission to one of the university's graduate program. I chose to study undergraduates in particular because they are more likely to need a greater level of support than graduate students. Undergraduates also make up a greater total number of EAS studying at the university. Five female students and three male students interviewed for this study all self-identified as meeting the accepted criteria required of those considered EASs.

Staff participants were chosen because they had worked with international students on a regular basis for at least 5 years and had direct professional experience working with EASs. These individuals are most likely to understand challenges related to this population of students. All students who volunteered for the study were unknown to me before I initially contacted them to propose that they take part in the study.

According to Merriam (2009), member-checking of interviewees assists in eliminating bias by inviting participants to verify transcriptions for each interview. This

validation process reduces instances of misinterpreted data. Participants were asked to audit the transcribed content they provided in their interviews for the purpose of ensuring against bias. Once all interviews had been initially transcribed, participants were allotted 7 days to check the validity of each transcription. Of the 11 participants, four responded to my requests to check the faithfulness of transcriptions. Those four agreed that the substance of their transcripts met with their approval.

I collected data through face-to-face interviews conducted with student and staff participants. The student interviews were all conducted in a private area of the city campus library. This location was chosen because it was a central location that all students were intimately familiar with, and it was convenient for them. I met each student in a large lounge area located near the top of the second floor of the library and then moved to a private room near the back which provided us with the privacy necessary to conduct the interview.

DeMarris (2004) defined the interview as “a process in which the researcher and participants engage in a conversation focused on questions related to the research study” (p. 55). I interviewed undergraduate Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese students who are currently studying on the campus of AU. Five students were majors in business and three in computer science. I also interviewed staff members who have worked closely with this population of students on the grounds that they share a unique vantage point from which to observe EASs during their daily routines at the university. Staff members were familiar with not only the many successes achieved by this group but also challenges associated with navigating American academic and social systems. Eight students and three staff

members participated in the interviews. The ratio of five Chinese students (S1-S5), two Korean students (S6-S7) and one Vietnamese student (S8) generally reflects the relative population ratio of each EA group; Chinese students represent approximately 50% of AU's EAS population, while Korean and Vietnamese students represent about 25% each. Another 25% of the EAS population is a mix of Japanese and Filipino. The students were all undergraduates at AU. The three staff members (Staff 1-3) were the executive director of the international business department and two tenured Chinese professors.

### **Sampling Method and Participant Selection Sampling**

The project was designed to research and expand information regarding EAS's perceptions, reflections, and feelings associated with university-fostered attempts to engender acculturative relations with their American counterparts. I implemented purposeful sampling to choose AU staff members who have taught, worked with, and observed the participant group from discrete viewpoints. Bogden and Biklen (2007) explained that researchers choose a purposeful sampling technique to identify subjects or participants they believe "facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 73). I endeavored to gain this understanding by probing students who were regarded as general exemplars of the subject or participant group. I used a purposeful snowball sampling method to select the participants for the study. This sampling strategy involved identifying several initial EASs who met the criteria for participation, principally through an email blast to the target group sent by the AU International Students Division on my behalf. Those who agreed to participate were then requested to introduce me to others who may also meet the criteria (Patton, 2002). "This method supports the ongoing

development of leads to potential participants who would have otherwise been concealed from the researcher. Researchers find this method particularly effective when seeking to access participants who are difficult to find (Hechathorn, 2011). I have also employed criterion sampling which assures that selected participants meet predetermined criteria (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

### **Selection Requirements**

The objective of the participant selection is to achieve a sample size that will garner data saturation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). According to Merriam (2009), “there is not a good answer” (p.80) to the question of how large must a research project’s sample size be. Creswell (2012) provided a guideline that suggested a minimum of six subjects or participants for a case study. I interviewed eight students and three staff participants in order to reasonably cover the phenomenon for the purpose of the study and triangulate my study with multiple viewpoints.

Undergraduate Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean students at AU comprised the student portion of the sample. Staff who work closely with these students constituted the university staff informants. I chose to include eight students based on their relative population proportion within the student body. The staff members were chosen primarily based on their various roles as program directors, Professors and support staff for EASs in order to fairly view the obstacles and opportunities to EAS acculturation from diverse perspectives. Common themes or patterns that emerge from varying perspectives represent core experiences or shared phenomenon. Miles and Huberman (1994) explained



that maximum variation sampling seeks to involve the widest possible degree of characteristics or experiences that inform the study.

Students who participated were selected based on particular criteria. They were all above the age to consent to be subjects of the research conducted (Protection of Human Subjects, 2009). They identify themselves as Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, or Filipino and are currently enrolled as undergraduate students at AU. I chose those who were non-native speakers of English who moved to America for the purpose of enrolling at an American university. These students identified themselves as having achieved an English proficiency level that allows them to consent to participate in the study. Furthermore, they had proved their communicative English ability as a result of having submitted a passing TOEFL test score as part of their admission requirement.

Staff participants conformed to two of the three following criteria:

1. They have taught EAS in undergraduate courses.
2. They have counselled EAS on visa or academic questions for more than one year.
3. They routinely recruit students from EA countries.

### **Participant Recruitment Procedure**

Upon receiving Walden IRB research project application approval (#12-24-18-0476211) as well as AU approval to conduct this research, I proceeded with a purposeful sampling approach of both students and staff. Patton (2002) wrote that a purposeful sample is “specifically selected because it is not atypical, extreme, deviant or intensely unusual” (p. 236). Therefore, my intent was to choose individuals who represent the archetypal mainstream undergraduate EASs at AU. Purposeful sampling informed the

decision to select students and staff who provided thoughtful and personal reflections on their experience either as an EAS or a professional working closely with these students.

I complied with Walden IRB research policies which describe the information which must be shared with potential participants in order to ask their consent. In an initial email which explained the project and asked for consent, staff workers were told that they had been invited to join the study due to the fact that they work with the EAS population on a daily basis. They were told that participation in the study was voluntary and that they were free to accept, reject or ignore the invitation. If they elected to be interviewed, they were told that could still change your mind later. The email apprised them of the minimal possibility that they may experience some emotional discomfort as a result of participating and what to do if such discomfort should arise. In such cases, student were encouraged to seek advice of a school counselor should such feelings arise No compensation was paid to the staff members who participated.

I informed the student participants that they had been invited to take part in this research for two main reasons. They had self-identified as an EAS and that the results of the study aimed to benefit EASs. The students were told that although I work at AU but have neither the power nor inclination to benefit them for participation nor discipline them for not participating. They were told that their participation was absolutely voluntary and that they may discontinue participation at any time. I also informed them that they would receive a token \$25 Amazon gift card for successful completion of their participation in the study. In addition, the email made clear that this project was not conceived for the specific benefit of the interviewee but for future cohorts of EASs.

Finally, they were informed that they could accept, reject, or ignore the request to participate.

### **Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

Bogden and Biklen (2007) discovered that universities and participants sometimes express reluctance to involve themselves in research for a number of reasons. Lereau (1989) described situations in which participants actively inhibited their research or appeared to give intentionally misleading information in order to sway the results of the research. He attributes this behavior to fear or a perceived need to engage in political jockeying. The risk of such manipulation of the data collection process was reduced by allaying fears that the results of the research might hurt the participants or the subjects being studied.

All eight student participants were interviewed in private room inside the main library on campus. This location was chosen to mitigate potential interviewee concerns about their privacy and confidentiality. My introduction to the project explained straightforwardly the purpose of the student interviewees. All were asked to introduce themselves and briefly discuss their history starting from their decision to attend AU. Once the EASs completed their introduction, I explained that I have visited all of their countries and feel a deep respect for their cultures. I revealed to the Korean speakers that I lived in Korea for two years, am a proficient speaker of Korean, and that my wife is Korean. I divulged to the Chinese students that I took two ten-day trips to China in 2017 and a similar trip in 2018. I also explained my role at the university to both student and staff employees. Once we reached a level of comfort and ease with each other, I

apprised them again that they had the option to refuse to answer any questions or end the interview whenever they wished. I explained that the recording of our conversation on my cellular phone would be transferred to a memory stick and locked in a cabinet in my home immediately following our interview. I set the phone to mute as not to be disturbed by incoming calls.

### **Employee Informed Consent**

Those staff members who were selected as possible participants were sent an email which explained the purpose of the study and the safeguards put in place to protect participant confidentiality. The staff members were asked to read the consent email carefully (see Appendix B). They were told that they could accept my request to participate, reject it, or ignore the email altogether. If they decided to accept, they were asked to return the email with the words “I consent” typed in the subject line. I printed out a hard copy of the participating consent forms and filed them in a locked filing cabinet in my home office.

### **Protection of Students and Informed Consent**

Students who met the criteria for participation and were interested in joining in the research project as a result of the international division’s mass emailing which included the policies of the consent form (see Appendix C). The email described the objective of the study and the research methodology. It also explained that students were under no obligation to participate in the project to its conclusion. They were told that they may end their participation at any time or abstain from answering any of the interview questions. The email also stipulated times and dates that were convenient for me to

administer the interviews. At that point, I sent a follow-up email thanking them for agreeing to participate and asking them to suggest interview dates and times.

### **Participants' Rights Protection**

One of the important variables I considered in choosing EAS interviewees was whether all participants speak and understand English at an advanced level and therefore possessed the ability to consent as per policies defined by Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS). All international students must surpass an advanced TOEFL score of 75 (advanced) in order to gain acceptance at AU. Therefore, all participants will have reached the advanced language threshold as defined by the university before participating in the study. It was important that non-native English-speaking students understand the nature of the project and the methodologies utilized to collect and analyze the data they provided. I assured them that their confidentiality would not be breached. Participants were informed that their cooperation is voluntary and that they may end their participation at any time. They were told that they had the right to decline to answer any questions without reason.

I took the following measures to assure that the participants received ethical intervention. I explained the objectives of the research and the methodology used were described in the initial email. Each participant was provided a consent email which explained their rights. All of the files and names associated with the participants were encrypted as numbers in order protect their identity. Furthermore, all interviews were conducted private face-to-face at a secure location in order to ensure participants' confidentiality. All audio recordings were transferred to a thumb drive (USB or memory

stick) and locked in a filing cabinet in my home. I monitored each of the participants' English comprehension throughout the interviews to ensure that they understood all of the questions and produced answers that demonstrated their understanding. Then I began conducting interviews with student and employee participants once Walden University's IRB, AU's ethics committee, and the undergraduate dean of students granted me permission to undertake the research for the project. Data collection began with one-hour, face-to-face interviews with students and employees. The interview method garnered information from each participant which was then be analyzed for experiential thematic patterns.

## **Data Collection**

### **Rationale for Data Collection Method**

I collected data using a set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C). I had considered and eliminated focus groups as the principle method of data collection. Writing (2017) said the mood of the group can unduly influence individual participants' answers. I decided that the one-to-one interview best suited the research because it obtains information that the researcher has not personally observed. Patton (2002) described the interview as a conversation with an objective. The interview consists of "direct quotes from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge of actions, behaviors, and actions" (Patton, 2002, p. 37). I created open-ended student interview questions for the elicitation of the feelings, perceptions, and back stories that accompanied their acculturation experiences. These queries were designed to prompt the interviewees to consider their beliefs and thoughts as well as evoke the

memory of specific experiences that prompted changes to their mental models and ways of considering how their lives had evolved while studying at the university (Doyle & Ford, 1998). I reviewed my intentions and the data security protections in place. The email explained the security methods I used while transporting and storing personal participant data and interview contents.

### **Pilot Testing of Interview Questions**

The student participants in the study are highly-functioning English-as-a-Second-Language learners. Given that they had been accepted to the university with strong TOEFL exam results and subsequently completed two or three years at the university successfully proves their proficiency. Nevertheless, as an extra safeguard, I interviewed two EASs who were demographically similar to my study group to determine whether actual participants would understand and find the interview questions linguistically understandable and culturally acceptable (Turner, 2010). These pilot students indicated that none of the questions offended them, but I made several slight modifications to wording in order to clarify meaning as a result of their feedback.

A member of the senior leadership at the university audited the employee interview questions which were designed to evoke observations of student behavior and attitudes. I explained how each interview question aligned with my research questions. The senior leader affirmed that interview questions support my research questions and that the questions posed little threat of causing harm to the participants' well-being per Common Rule policies.

The semi-structured open-ended interview questions aimed to prompt conversation about the nature of EASs understanding, perceptions, and feelings of their lives and history on campus. The questions probed their initial, transitional, and current acculturation stages. Each interview spanned between 30 and 45 minutes including introductions, small talk, an explanation of the consent form, and the interviews themselves. The recordings of the interviews were then transcribed by the Temi transcription service.

Maxwell (2005) explained that member checking or respondent validation, the process of seeking feedback on transcriptions or findings, plays an important role in uncovering researcher bias or misunderstanding that may have occurred during the interview. I sent interviewees a copy of their transcribed interviews for their evaluation of the veracity of my transcription. I asked that they respond to the transcription of their interview within seven days by either affirming its veracity or noting areas where my reporting seemed incorrect. Four of the eight student participants and one of the three staff members responded to my appeal for feedback on the transcripts. All affirmed that the transcripts accurately portrayed the recorded interviews.

### **Data Management**

Data management protocols required that I arrange and file the data collected for this project to meet confidentiality and security standards (Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012). I transferred all data recorded on a cell to a password protected thumb drive which was stored in a locked drawer in my home office. The same data was then backed up on a OneDrive cloud storage account to protect participant privacy and to insure against loss of



data (Mell & Grance, 2011). All data associated with this study was kept securely in my office and OneDrive for five years and then destroyed.

The volume of data amassed from interviews necessitated the use a Computer Assisted Data Analysis Software (CADQAS) application called NVivo to support data management during the analysis section of the study. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed, re-read for accuracy, and entered into Nvivo for the purpose of coding the data. The strength of CADQCAS software such as Nvivo lies in its ability to house and process large aggregations of data (Zamawe, 2015).

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (2009) wrote that qualitative researchers should begin analyzing their data as soon as they receive it. Those who wait until all of the data has been collected to begin the analysis process risk subjecting the information to a lack of focus, confusion, and faulty recall. Collected chunks or segments of data should be preliminarily codified and associated with one of the major themes. These themes will ultimately help answer the research questions.

Bogdan and Bilken (2007) formulated a systematic approach to data analysis. This method encourages researchers to narrow the scope of their study. This approach spurs researchers to make difficult choices about which data to include in the study and how to code the data segments. The primary objective of the data analysis was to code these segments and categorize them beneath overarching themes or parent codes. These segments took the form of words or phrases that are repeated regularly throughout the interviews. I created a family of codes for the student participants and one for the staff

members (p. 173). For example, University represented one of the student themes. Staff perceptions of EAS social activities and tendencies emerged as an overarching staff theme. Codes may indicate relationships, processes, activities, and strategies (NAME OF AUTHOR? YEAR?). With the aid of NVivo, meaning materialized as a result of interpreting coded patterns.

### **Research Steps**

#### **Step 1: Data Acquisition and Coding Preparation**

Interview transcripts were given numbers in order to support the anonymity of the study. I scrutinized the transcripts' accuracy with the aid of the digital recording. Transcripts were marked with brief memos regarding insightful, patterned, or repeated participant comments. Transcripts were read numerous times for the purpose of comprehending the overview of the data (Creswell, 2009).

#### **Step 2: Coding of Data Segments and Analysis**

Merriam (2009) stressed that coding data segments begins with a pre-coding activity which is described as notes taken during the interview process. These notes lay the groundwork for more precise dissection and categorization of data segments. This pre-coding allowed the many salient data segments to emerge prior to NVivo analysis. These noted segments were later be categorized by overarching codes. Interview transcripts were entered into the NVivo application for analysis. Four main student and three staff themes or anchor (or parent) codes surfaced as a result of the NVivo analysis. These themes assisted me in deciding which data segments support answers to one or more of the research questions Foss (2007). I created a descriptive title for each of the

thematic categories and assigned smaller data units to them. Salient segments of data were tagged in the transcripts as codes and associated with one of the main themes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

Qualitative researchers use codes as labels to describe segments of data (Creswell, 2012, Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Raw data coding aided in answering the critical research question posed as the basis of this study. The transcripts were reviewed line by line to identify coded data segments which organically emerged as repetitive patterns, revelations of surprising information, or information explicitly indicated by a participant (Lauckner et al., 2012). I spurred the coding process by asking critical questions inspired by Saldana (2012) about the collected data: What activities naturally bring together EASs with their APs? What are the EASs objectives in participating in these activities? How do they describe their attempts to communicate with APs?

I categorized each of the participants' comments into coded segments. The software made it simple to organize, reorganize, and rename codes. However, I made all final decisions on the manner in which segments of data are coded manually.

### **Step 3: Organizing and Consolidating Codes**

A second review and examination of the data helped to determine which codes appeared more significant than others because they formed patterns which emerge as frequent, sequential, or causative (Saldana, 2012). I attempted to make sense of the data by reducing the number of codes created in step 2 and consolidating similar codes in order to refine codes to their most essential nature (Merriam, 2009). Once the initial coding was complete, I began to make connections between units of data.

**Step 4: Constructing Themes**

The first two reviews of the data focused primarily on discovering and refining codes. The third perusal generated more precise overarching themes that were distilled from the codes. These themes became the basis for the theoretical framework which answered the research questions. During the process of reconciling the codes under each theme, nodes sometimes shifted from one theme to another or were discarded if they no longer fit in any of the categories. Categories describe the umbrella under which a number of organized codes can be logically classified (Bazeley, 2009). I categorized and recategorized codes until they were reconciled beneath broad themes (Creswell, 2012).

The reiterative process of code organization under the umbrella of parent themes leads to data supported answers to the research questions (Ritchie et al., 2103). Nvivo assisted in producing four main thematic categories. These categories are often referred to as anchor codes which subsumes the data linked to these themes. I arranged the codes according to the relationships with other codes. These idea associations included causes and effects, explanations, and comparisons. Identifying code relationships and emergent themes lent to resolving the research questions of the project.

**Step 5: Making Meaning from Data**

The repeated process of recategorizing and reducing the data resulted in making meaning from codes and themes (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative data is composed of concrete and abstract chunked information which the researcher uses to form a coherent description of participant perceptions and reflections. I alternately utilized deductive and inductive means of analysis to tell the participants' story. I conducted a repetitive process

of refining and broadening themes to extract overarching themes. Discrepant cases were collected and noted as falling outside the overarching themes. Researchers may make sense of the bits of data by making a list of key points for the purpose of attaching meaning to them as they relate to the research question answers (Taylor-Power & Renner, 2003).

### **Trustworthiness**

The degree to which the results of this study can be trusted depends on my taking several actions to ensure credibility and dependability. I did not seek to transfer the results of this project to other institutions because the nature of this project was that of a bound case study. The trustworthiness of the project was anchored in the faithful adherence to the following standards. I chose staff participants who have experienced both a top-down and bottom-up relationship with the subjects as professors or program directors. I chose student participants who represent the subject group and matched the strict criteria I devised for participation. Interview questions were piloted prior to the interviews. Following the interviews, the interviewees were member checked. I sent transcripts to all participants asking them to confirm the accuracy of the transcripts.

### **Researcher Credentials**

I have spent my 25-year professional career as an instructor and university language institute director developing programs that assist non-native English speakers in achieving success in language acquisition and in multiple facets of their student life. Prior to my current position as the associate director of the English Language Institute at AU, I worked as the admissions director for a private Japanese high school on the east coast of

the United States. That position required expert interview skills in order to determine whether prospective students would gain admission to this competitive institution. I taught English and earned a masters of English as a Second Language while living in Japan and Korea for nearly ten years. I have identified my close relationship with the East Asian community as a possible source of bias. It has been my sworn responsibility to monitor my own reactions to the data to root out bias. Furthermore, I have asked a colleague in my field to audit all data results for the purpose of eliminating bias.

### **Triangulation of Data**

Triangulation of the data involved the testimony of eight students and three staff participants. I also achieved triangulation of the data results with assistance of a review of the literature regarding this topic of study and an underlying conceptual framework (Saldana, 2012). Participants were interviewed as the primary approach to collecting data. The Nvivo coding application tracked codes and continually correlated them with the original transcript. This allowed a clear and concise overview of the data and its source in the transcript.

### **Dependability**

I used tested methods of recruiting and sampling for this project. The initial student volunteers were recruited by means of a mass emailing that was conducted on my behalf by the international division. Once the initial student participants were recruited, those students then provided the names of other students who qualified as participants in the study based on the criteria required for participation. Snowball sampling allowed me access to students who I may not have otherwise had access to (Creswell, 2009). I sent

staff participants the IRB-approved email which explained the purpose of my study, the reason they were being asked to participate, a section describing participants' rights and protections, and instructions for consenting to be interviewed should they agree to do so. Once the interviews have been conducted, I sent the summary of the transcripts to the participants for member checking, a method of strengthening the dependability by participant auditing of the transcript.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Reliability refers to the consistency or the ability to replicate research results (Merriam, 2009). Social sciences encounter a particular challenge because human behavior is never fixed. Case study research often engenders discrepant results. Fielding (2009) defined discrepant data as outlying results which contradict the main and overwhelming findings.

Wolcott (2005) asserted that discrepant cases can be instrumental in opening new areas of study as researchers attempt to reconcile the discrepancies. Occasionally, the way in which the researchers formulate questions produces discrepant results. Research that includes interviewing non-native speakers is notably susceptible to generating discrepant results. Pre-testing questions on individuals whose language ability mirrors that of the study participants becomes vital to the success of the study.

More important than a focus on reliability vs discrepant cases is whether results are consistent with the collected data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Even in cases where the evaluation of the same data yields differing results, the results must make sense and be consistent or aligned in some way with the data. For the purpose of this study, I noted

discrepant cases and attempted to explain them within the framework of the case study, but time and resources did not allow me to fully reconcile such cases or specific interviewee answers.

### **Summary**

AU indicates in its Strategic Plan that recruiting international students for the purpose of globalizing its campus has become a priority. In addition, AU states that it strive to maintain the security as well as the physical and mental well-being of all students. This case study utilized a semi-structured interview EAS to determine their perception of how and to what extent AU supports its mission to help EAS's integrate on campus. The following section provides the introduction, rationale, review of literature, description, evaluation plan and overall implications for the project study.

This study yielded several predictable findings concerning language and culture and equally unexpected ones regarding discrimination on campus and the idea of belonging per Maslow. One approach to analyzing data involved the cutting and pasting of all of the research question-related quotations into a word cloud creator. The application tallies word usage and displays the most common words as the largest among all the words used. The wordart.com application allowed me to manually remove common function words, adverbs and words identifying individuals or specific schools within the university. The mortar board motif (see Figure 1) represents the ultimate hope of this study to support students up to graduation. Observing the word cloud, in this case shaped as a mortar board reveals that Student was the most frequently used word, followed by friend, group, help, social, American, Chinese, Culture, and language.





*Figure 1.* Word cloud.

The prominence of specific words and the minimal usage of others informed analysis of the interviews and assisted in the establishment of the findings and themes. The semi-structured interview questions yielded responses from eight undergraduate EAS’s and three university staff members that indicated the emergence of three major research question-related themes.

Table 1

*Research Questions, Themes, and Categories*

<u>Research Questions</u>	<u>Themes</u>	<u>Categories</u>
In what ways do EASs believe that their acculturation to campus life was affected by APs?	Theme I: Interaction with APs and acculturation	a) Willingness to interact and perceptions of belonging b) Clubs and Organizations: The best opportunity for interaction c) Absence of Discrimination but the existence of stereotyping
What is the perception of how effective AU has been in facilitating interaction between EASs and APs?	Theme II: University Facilitated Interaction	a) Classes and group work b) Professors c) Roommate support
What are the obstacles to EAS acculturation to campus life?	Theme III: Obstacles to Acculturative interaction	a) Desire to belong to Asian community on campus

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- |  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>b) unanticipated Interaction challenges</li><li>c) Group work breakdowns</li><li>d) cultural and linguistic barriers</li><li>e) dormitory obstacles</li><li>f) classes and professors</li><li>g) clubs and organizations</li><li>h) social media and official communications</li></ul> |
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### **Major Themes**

#### **Theme I: Interaction with APs and Acculturation**

The literature indicated that the quality and type of interaction between international students and their target language and culture peers effects the depth and speed of international student acculturation. This study documented the array of EAS experiences as they relate to their interaction with their APs. The interviews with participants revealed that several major factor contribute to this process including willingness to interact with APs and perceptions of belonging to the campus community.

### **Willingness to Interact and Perceptions of Belonging**

Maslow's theory of belonging was the underlying framework for this study. Students were asked directly whether they felt they belonged to the AU campus community or not. All students expressed some level of interest and necessity to interact with their APs. Students generally described their APs in positive terms. S8 called her American club mates "super friendly." S8 noted that she always goes out of her way to be friendly. Most people treat her in a friendly way in return. This student was the only one who reported having been elected to an on-campus organization leadership role. She spoke of several anecdotes related to her duties as the president of the Finance Club. The inclination for a university organization to elect an EAS indicates AP willingness to accept and interact with EASs.

S2, who is perhaps one of the most integrated of the student participants based on the amount of time he spends with them, commented that the people in class "are so nice to me. They explain to me about the homework." Perceptions of whether EASs belonged to the community at large or sub-communities varied greatly among the participants. S2, a Korean student whose English was among the least fluent, said he felt well integrated into the community as a whole: "I wanted to make American friends because I will learn about American culture and then English. I want to be like a native speaker." He reported that his APs friends work hard to explain things to him and repeat comments or questions when he can't understand and. He said:

They invite me to the bar with them. They taught me what and what not to say [in different social situations]. We socialize out at a bar. We play sports like

basketball or go to the bar and play video games. Sports and video games like FIFA make interaction.

S5 stressed the need for early intervention for freshman Chinese students. She thought it important to busy freshmen with on-campus activities as soon as possible when they arrive at the university. She said, "It's important to help them mix with students of other cultures so that they don't immediately fall into the habit of spending time with their own people." S8 followed this advice. She "threw [herself] out to talk with local people [in order to become a fluent English Speaker]." She stated that she had an American boyfriend and that he had helped her come to feel that she belonged by introducing "me to his friends and taking me to school events that my Chinese friends didn't go to." S6 also mentioned that American boyfriends sometimes play a large role in helping students achieve a social connection with other APs. The computer science department has seen an ongoing trend in which "Asian girls and black guys are dating." According to several students, a rivalry exists between the business and the computer science schools. Most thought that computer science was the friendlier of the two and did the most to help welcome international students.

S6 expressed ambiguity as to whether she felt she belonged to the AU campus community in general but gave her APs credit for attempting to make her feel welcome. She said, "It's a very safe community here." Harkening back to her comment about the Asian and African American students dating within the computer science department, she said, "People of color tend to be a lot friendlier than like white American friends. So I do have a lot more friends of color and then white American friends."

The uncertainty about how their interactions affected their acculturation vexed a number of students. S4 felt unclear about whether he had fully integrated at the university, but he said, “I feel part of the AU campus community because I’m here like four years already, so I feel like this is my school, my campus.” Other student also expressed doubt about their place as members of the community.

Students mentioned strategic reasons for attempting to interact with their APs. Four students felt that the purpose of learning how to communicate with Americans lay in finding a good job and functioning effectively with co-workers after college. S2 suggested that interacting with APs, “is good for getting a job or learning how to communicate in American culture.” S8 repeated this sentiment when she said, “[Interacting with American students] is very important because I want to get a job here so I have to familiarize myself with the American culture in a business environment.” The students reported a number of obstacles confronting them, but the majority of students intended to engage in an internship or work in the U.S. following graduation. They seemed to understand intuitively that they must practice mingling with general population of the university.

### **Clubs and Organizations: The Best Opportunity for Interaction**

Nine of the eleven participants mentioned joining on-campus student-led organizations as the best positive opportunity for acculturative interaction among the activities organized by students. S4 suggested that because on-campus clubs and organizations offer such potent acculturative interaction that all freshmen should be required to join a club for one semester. S8 said that she joined clubs for the purpose of

interacting. Early on in her first semester she realized how important attending on-campus events would be:

I had to help myself to integrate by joining organizations, joining events. I had to go to join events to make friends and go to clubs where all the students are not just Chinese students. I think it is good idea [for every freshman to join a club] because every freshman, has some weird things they don't understand. But if they belong to a club, then they adapt quickly. Classes are good for making business connection but clubs are good for making friends.

Staff 2 praised clubs and organizations for encouraging interaction between international students and their American counterparts. "I saw one Chinese student who was able to get a really fantastic job by joining millions of clubs." Staff 1 also mentioned clubs and on-campus organizations as one of the most effective ways for EASs to interact with Americans and learn about American culture. He stressed that clubs can help EASs to learn basic social skills: "They don't know how to make friends with Americans, so organizations give them a place to try out new skills and talk to students they wouldn't normally." S6 instinctively felt this: "I had to help myself to integrate by joining organizations, joining events, so I went to the events with the people that I know in that organization from time to time, it helps with your friendship." A number of students made recommendations about how on-campus groups and organization can be more effective in causing intercultural communication.

### **Absence of Discrimination but Existence of Stereotyping**

The literature shows that a heightened sense of discrimination and stereotyping at some American universities did not appear to be a factor in whether Asian students interact with their host peers at AU. None of the participants reported instances that clearly indicated discriminatory behavior on the part of APs or staff members. They did not feel that discrimination played a role in how or how often they interacted with their APs. None of the student or staff participants claimed that they experienced or witnessed discrimination while studying or working at the institution. Each individual was asked directly whether they had experienced discrimination. All gave definitive no answers. S3 from China said, “No [I have not experienced discrimination]. People are friendly.” S8 reported that she had not experienced discrimination on campus. She theorized that the absence of discrimination relates to the university’s location in heart of one of America’s largest and most diverse cities. This student observed that the university strongly supports the LGBTQ community. This indicated to her that AU encourages diversity on campus.

Clear and pointed discrimination seems to be absent from the EAS experience at AU, but two students mentioned occurrences that could have been interpreted as such. During a week-long volunteer activity on our suburban campus, S5 reported, “One girl always looked at me with a cold face. At one point she shoved me while walking down the hall toward me without apologizing. Then I heard her bragging about shoving me to her friends.” This student was unable to determine the root of her APs behavior. S7 claimed that she never experienced discrimination on campus but had gone to several internship interviews which were coordinated by the university. She complained that she



felt discriminated against during the interviews. She had not at that juncture received an offer. This student possessed one of the most challenging of Chinese accents to understand among the students I interviewed. This may have played a role in her inability to secure an internship. Nevertheless, students, who appear sensitive to the attitudes of others, do not experience discrimination in the course of their everyday lives.

Three students mentioned feeling stereotyped. One student found humor in the stereotyping when she overheard two passing American students mentioning, “Oh, this must be the time of year when all the Asian students wear surgical masks.” She commented while laughing, “It’s true!” Other incidents of stereotyping by American students made some of the EAS participants unhappy. One computer science student (S4) said that he felt stereotyped as the Asian with superior technical skills. He indicated that he later felt his APs were “using” him. He conceded, though, that he had made some legitimate friends as a result of having helped those classmates with their studies. This Vietnamese student also reported feeling intermittent frustration at continually being mistaken for a Chinese national, but after a while he just “got used to it.” The three students who mentioned having been stereotyped were among the most acculturated of all student participants based on their statements. This led me to conclude that these stereotyping incidents have not proven to be an overpowering barrier to interaction between EASs and their APs.

## **Theme II: University-Facilitated Interactions**

RQ2 was about how participants perceive AU’s attempts to facilitate interaction between themselves and their APs. Participants were split as to the degree of impact the

university had in facilitating acculturative interaction. For example, S6 stated, “There's not so much [AU] can do [to cause interaction] because there's only so much you can do to force somebody to make friends who doesn't want to.” Others opined that AU has the ability and responsibility to bring people together. Staff 3 spoke about AU's “responsibility to help them make friends.” S7, in speaking about her school dormitory (dorm) experience, she suggested that, “if [AU] makes a little more effort, they can choose more suitable roommates.” S4 supported the idea that AU does a fair job of creating an environment conducive for cross cultural communication. He commented that, “[AU] is really trying hard to help us make friends with events and sports. I met my best American friend at an open-mic night event. That was at the international division office.” The data seemed to show that students would like the university to help create situations or environments for organically generated conversation to develop.

When asked how the university should go about purposefully assisting EAS to interact with American students, S3, 5 and 6 pointed out that communication should be “natural,” not compulsory or artificial. Staff 3 agreed that engineered methods of causing interaction such as academic or social buddy systems hold limited appeal and efficacy. Relationships should occur naturally, according to students. The university must find willing participants. The research indicated that the following environments create the most fertile matrices from which intercultural communication can grow.

### **Classes and Faculty-Assigned Group Work**

Group work appeared in every participant's responses related to how the university facilitates interaction between students. Group work and small faculty-

assigned group projects play a major role in most business and many computer science courses. Such assignments generally involve the instructor grouping students together to work on a project or presentation. Two faculty members and four students suggested the classroom and group work meetings as environments conducive to quality interaction between students. S2 described an unconventional yet effective environment to communicate with his groupmates, "I spend time in the bar with Americans, usually during, during group project. I speak with them a lot." S4 mentioned that classes are "always a great place to meet people." He felt that his knowledge of computer science made him "kind of popular" with other students because he had parleyed his know-how into friendships with people who would ask him for homework help. S8 commented that her business classes were, "pretty organized. The teacher tried to put us into the groups that I mentioned. It increased my interaction with other students. That's what helped me integrate myself into the school system." She went on to say that when test preparation study groups are formed, Asian students often receive invitations to join because of their stereotypical study prowess. This student also took advantage of her reputation as a strong student to develop friendships as a result of being asked for help with schoolwork.

Staff also highlighted the classroom and group work activities as an excellent starting point from which meaningful communication and relationships can develop. Staff 2, a computer science professor, explained that his department used a self and mutual summative evaluation form to ensure that students were working together and contributing to the group project.

Staff 3 added that when attending courses in their major, many students already have a lot in common because they study the same subjects. Staff 3 joked, “Even if they’re just comparing notes on professors, at least their talking with each other.” Staff 2 said that in the business program, “we ask professors to group the students as to maximize diversity within the group.” They attempt to carefully construct the groups purposefully so that international students do not feel like an outsider. However, this kind of positive communication within a group often requires the professors to be skilled in engineering a social group. Students felt that instructors’ skills in creating such groups varied widely.

### **Faculty**

Some professors provide EASs with an ample source of intercultural communication and support. These professors help them gain the confidence to make friends outside of their cultural group. S2 praised his English as a Second Language instructors:

They taught me how to speak and write. I've never, never wrote an essay. Yeah. But they, they taught to me how to write and then helped me to speak. They also showed me how to do a presentation, how to make a PowerPoint, you know, so it was nice.

Other students discussed similar positive relationships with professors. S3 mentioned that his professor encouraged him in his pursuit to procure an internship. The instructor helped him because “she liked me a lot. We talked about a lot of things; how to get a job and how to understand American culture.” S1 called most of her professors

generally “very helpful and nice,” but one professor gave her some very specific useful tips, including encouraging her to join Toastmaster on campus. This organization supports professional public speaking and leadership. Participating in Toastmasters meetings gave her the confidence to meet a more diverse group of friends and acquaintances.

### **Roommate Support**

Providing EASs with AP roommates materialized as one of the most effective systems the university employs in facilitating interaction. S2 said, “Every freshman should live in the dorm for at least a semester. You learn a lot from your roommate.” He explained that the dormitory offered, “students the best way to get to know each other. They should be in the dormitories to really acculturate.” S4 explained, “it was fun living in the dorm. My roommate helped him with many tasks at the beginning of school such as registering for classes and learning how to get around the city.” Several students said that they developed a positive relationship with their roommates. S4 said, “My roommate is a close friend who I could tell private things to if I had to.” When asked if she got along with her roommate, S8 said, “She was the best roommate ever. We weren’t super close, but we respected each other and got along.” S1, who reported having very few AP friends, said she felt close to her roommate. She felt her roommate behaved patiently with her when other she encountered who sometimes expressed frustration in attempting to communicate with her. She credited her roommate with having helped her strengthen her language skills and cultural understanding.

### **Theme III: Obstacles to Acculturation**

Group work, on-campus clubs, and dorm roommates offered the best opportunities for some students to interact and acculturate, but these environments were also among those mentioned as the most likely to damage their confidence during the initial acculturation phase. Students face a plethora of difficulties when they first arrive at the school. The majority of students felt jarred by the steepness of the social and academic learning curve. Several students contemplated returning home soon after arriving due to the cultural and linguistic barriers, but all decided to stay.

#### **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers**

Cultural and linguistic obstacles emerged as the two most problematic barriers EASs face in almost all situations. Staff 1 has observed language problems and deficiency of American social skills in Asian students. He stated, “They don’t know how to be friends with American students.” S1 said she is unfamiliar with American culture and how, “they do things.” These differences have challenged her to the point that she no longer endeavors to make friends with her APs. S4 added that, “We cannot give our entire heart, to open our entire heart to talk to American people, but to Asia's we can feel, I don't know, that kind of common sense. It’s easy to talk.” Every participant mentioned that these obstacles hampered their ability, and in some cases, their motivation to interact with others beyond their cultural or language group. S2 appeared to be one of the most integrated students, but he worried that he did not understand some important interactions. He said, “Many of Americans speak slang. So I don't understand, sometimes I misunderstand things.” This student also struggled with written communication: “I had

a lot of grammar problems. Korean writing style is different. So the first time it was so difficult.” Similarly, S7, a sports marketing student spoke about the challenges she faced in completing reading assignments. This student struggled not only with a lack of English but also familiarity with American retail products, so her marketing courses overwhelmed her. She felt that she did not have time to socialize in general because it took her much longer to complete assignments than her APs. Staff 3 felt that the greatest obstacle to integration lay in cultural barriers masked as a language barrier. This professor summed up the struggle for them this way The differences are so vast between, you know, between the food, the language, the belief system, what they wear, what they watch on television, you know, all of those things. S6 pointed out that, “It’s hard to come together. Like we can be friends, but it's hard to be very close because we often don’t understand each other.” S6 talked about the cultural differences in terms of a values gap. It was her opinion that Asian students like to spend money on quality meals while APs want to spend money on alcohol.

Other students expressed their inability to develop solid, well-rooted relationships with their APs. S3 said, “I can’t make deep friendships. It's hard. It's not that hard to make like friends, friends, but it's hard to make *real* friends, deep friends. I feel a gap between myself and American students.” S7 lamented the fact that she did not, “know how to really establish relationships with American students because if we meet each other, we'd maybe just say, ‘hi’ and that's it. We don't have deeper conversations.” S4 agreed, “I think because of the language barrier and, um, I guess the, the culture difference, which makes us very hard to connect. Right. Find a topic to talk about.” S1

also described her relationships with American students as lacking depth: “We have each other’s numbers but don’t talk deeply.” All three staff members expressed the belief that the university must take a stronger, more direct hand in guiding interaction between international and American students.

Asian high schools and universities generally apply a Confucian based approach which stresses the understanding of social respect levels in education. This unifies EASs as a social group. Professors at AU tend to implement a Socratic teaching style that encourages ever-enlightening conversation between themselves and their students. However, Socratic style courses create adversity for EASs. They struggle to navigate the, language, quick changes of topic, and non-sequiturs. S5 felt that professors sometimes do not make an effort to include international students in the class discussions. She said that when she asked professors for advice on getting involved in such discussions, she was told “just go with it, go with your gut.” She explained that most EASs do not know how to conceptualize such advice. S5 explained that unlike some of her APs who attempt to stand out in a classroom setting, she said, “Asians don't want to be the first one to answer the teacher’s question, don't be so, um, I don't know, aggressive or something. Western culture, they encourage you to speak up or like you have to stand up yourself.” China is an “introverted culture,” she continued. According to this student, Chinese society does not encourage people to speak up or be too assertive in class so they feel awkward in American classroom discussions.

Staff 2 emphasized that the large number Chinese students in the business school dulls the incentive to integrate with the population at-large, whereas East Asian countries



with a smaller number of enrollees appear to feel more stimulated to acculturate. Some Chinese students manage to graduate without acculturating, he reported. They depend on their on other EASs, not APs or university staff, to steward them through the complications of living and studying at AU.

### **Unanticipated Interaction Challenges**

Several students related their surprise at the difficulty they experienced in communicating and developing relationships with their APs. S5 mentioned that many of her friends had a “love and hate” relationship with American students because she had had an initial desire to interact with them but later could not navigate a long-lasting, satisfying relationship with any. S8 who spoke English at a high level and perceived herself to be acculturated, noted that, “I have to spend time to maintain a relationship, not like in China. Once you establish a friendship [in China], you don't have to spend so much time maintaining it.” Staff 1 told the story of one student who spoke English poorly and therefore spent an inordinate amount of time in the library compared to his American classmates studying in order to keep his grades up.

S6, perhaps the strongest English speaker of the group, described the challenge of making American friends. “I thought that I would make a lot more friends. It's been a lot harder to make friends in university than I expected.” S4 portrays the school's AP's as “generally friendly” but the community at large as virtually impenetrable. S1 and S6 pointed out that before they arrived at the university, they had anticipated making American friends and belonging to the campus community. S1 said, “I underestimated how hard it was going to be to make friends. Sometimes I feel lonely because I can't

make friends. Now, I've lost my passion to make friends with Americans." S6 who spoke English relatively well, echoed those sentiments when she said, "I was really hoping to make a lot of new friends, but over time I lost interest in belonging to the American group." She volunteered that she would get a new Asian boyfriend at the beginning of the each school year in order to prevent or deter American students from asking her on a date. She had dated an Australian previously and found all the cultural miscommunications "more difficult" than dating Asian guys. She also expressed disappointment that her roommate showed no interest in her language or culture. When she asked her roommate, if she wanted to learn to say "hello" in Chinese, the roommate said, "No, I'm terrible at languages." Several students rejected the concept of making friends with Americans as not, or no longer, important to them. S4 admitted, "It's not a priority to make American friends because it's difficult to communicate." He claimed to be too lazy to keep repeating himself when APs didn't understand what he said. S5 called socializing with Americans "a waste of time" because such efforts end in frustration.

### **Belonging to the Asian Community on Campus**

This study appears to validate Maslow's theory that generally people demonstrate a desire to belong to a group. In this case, though, EASs revealed that all but one student expressed some level of desire to belong with their own compatriots or other Asians; six of the eight students claimed that they placed more importance on their relationship with their own compatriots than those with the campus community at large. Students described their desire to belong with their compatriots as arising from linguist, cultural, familial and epicurean bonds. The school of business at the university boasts a national reputation.

Students from all over the world compete for admission. Asians, particularly Chinese students, tend to earn many of those spots; therefore, the university tends to have enough of these students that they can effortlessly cluster with their own compatriots and avoid the hard work of relating with their APs.

S7 expressed a linguistic-based yearning to belong with her compatriots as she discussed a particular group work project she had been assigned to. She said that she made an initial attempt to understand her American classmates but soon retreated into talking about the project in Chinese with the other Chinese student assigned to the group. She explained that, “It was just easier [to discuss things in Chinese]. We understood each other.” S2 likewise found a safe haven when he discovered The Korean Club on campus. When he attended his first meeting, he exclaimed with excitement and relief, “You guys speak Korean? Thank god!” He went on to say, “Korean friends are important, too, because we can speak Korean language. They gave me some American tips.”

Four students mentioned that cultural similarities cause students to group together with other Asians. This study asserts that Confucian social norms lie at the core of similarities among East Asian cultures. This philosophy dictates the rules of social relations in school, within the family, and other circumstances in which social interactions occur. S4, 5, and 7 all mentioned that cultural connections lead them to seek out other Asians. S5 said, “Most Asian girls are kind of introverted. Even though I’m more outgoing than some girls, I understand their feeling.” Three students mentioned that school system parallels between their own educational experience and that of their Asian peers had drawn them to each other. The American system can be challenging to navigate

for the EAS. S7 claimed she had no American or non-Asian friends. She reasoned that Asian students cluster together because, “We all understand school in Asia. Classes are so different here.” The mutual understanding of Asian familial roles and interactions also stimulated Asian students to band together. S4 explained that, “We all have Asian families. They understand the social structure, how my mom or dad will react to things. We feel more comfortable belonging to the Asian group.” A6 echoed those sentiments as she gave one important reason why she and another Asian student who did not speak her language had become her best friend at AU: “We both have Asian mothers, so we understand each other.” S7 emphasized the power of family influence when she said, “My mother decided that I should come to [AU]...and she decided my major.” This student mentioned her mom as a powerful figure in her life at several points during the interview.

Student and staff participants mentioned a love of similar cuisine that attracted EASs students to each other. Staff 3 observed that Chinese students tend to “group together” at AU. When I asked him to speculate why, he responded somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “It’s simple. They all eat the same food.” While this overstatement was meant as a joke, there appears to be some truth behind it. Staff 3, a Chinese professor, agreed that one of the challenges for EASs remains breaking away from “rice and noodles culture.” S1 admitted that one of the reasons she did not have any American friends and spent most of her time with other Asian students was because, “we can cook together. Cooking Asian food is my hobby. I like spicy food like Korean and Thai.” While discussing the question of food, she advocated for more inter-cultural cooking events at the university.

## Group Work Breakdowns

A number of students reported that faculty-assigned group work projects appeared to heighten students' sense of alienation, rather than enhance acculturative communication between themselves and their APs. S1, a marketing student, said that she had been placed in numerous project groups while a student at AU. She expressed frustration at her lack of English or cultural aptitude caused American group members to, "just ignore me" during discussions. She thought that because she did not communicate well, her APs found it easier to speak with each other than with her. S3 experienced a similar disaffection from her group project members due to language and cultural barriers:

I still feel like outside of the [project] group but it's okay. Yeah, maybe because of a language gap. So if I'm the only Asian, they communicate their ideas to each other. I feel I am outside because I can't express myself well.

S5 said she experienced and heard from other Chinese friends that during group project "there's lots of annoying drama" within the groups. She criticized her fellow APs for not always working hard and "dropping work on other members" shortly before a presentation. She said that her relationship with her APs consists mainly of discussing homework: "Apart from that, we don't have any connection." S6, a marketing major, has worked in professor-assigned groups during almost every course she has taken at AU but prefers to work alone. Like S5, he thinks there is always one or two people who does all the work in the group. Despite being one of the strongest English speakers, she has never made good friends with members during group work.

### **Dormitory Obstacles**

While most participants agreed that the dorm environment presented a great many opportunities for EAS to acculturate, it also repelled them. Staff 2 noted that historically speaking, “a lot of friction gets stirred up in the dorm.” Several students felt ill-suited to their roommates. S6 said, “We had the same sleeping schedule, but that’s it. Everything else was different.” She, as did two other students, complained that her roommate smoked Marijuana in the room which made her unhappy. As a result, she moved out after one semester. S5 transferred into AU as an upper classman, so she located accommodations for herself, rather than in the dorm. However, she related the story of her Chinese friend who often complained about her dorm experience. S5’s friend expressed that her roommate did not care what she felt about them often behaving against dorm rules. The roommate and her friends knew S5’s friend feared speaking up for herself: “She suffered a lot because her roommates were rude, so she didn’t sleep well.” S5 was disappointed for her friend who lost a considerable amount of money because she moved out before she was contracted to do so due to her unhappy dorm experience.

All of the student participants said that the dorm cliques daunted them. S6, perhaps the strongest English language speaker explained, “I didn’t really feel like I fit in very well to the environment [in the dorm], so I moved out.” She held that the American students on her dorm floor were “grouped up” in cliques which intimidated her to the point that she felt she did not belong. S3 regretted that he “never got a chance to have a close friend” in the dorm because dorm cliques seemed impermeable to him despite the

fact that he spoke English well and had immersed himself in hip-hop dancing outside of AU.

The scope of this study does not cover dorm cost in great detail, but it should be noted that all students who had endeavored to live in the university dormitory complained about the prohibitive cost. In China most universities require first year students to stay in dorms where the cost is subsidized by the government and therefore is relatively inexpensive. The AU school dorm, located among some of the most expensive real estate in the country, charges two to three times what they might pay if they rented off-campus accommodations with a roommate or two. The cost of the AU accommodations stands as an obstacle to students acculturative interactions in the dorm. None of the students who had attempted to live in the dorm stayed there longer than one semester.

### **Classes and Professors**

Staff 3 recalled that in 2006 and 2009, AU made concerted efforts to recruit international students, particularly focusing their efforts on China. Consequently AU “accepted a big influx of Chinese students... [there was a] big shift in population,” which resulted in “professors and students griping” about the drastic change. He noted that the university did not formally train instructors in how to best communicate with the new arrivals or how to help these students confront the challenges they face when they enroll at the school.

Staff 1 believes that professors represent one of the great impediments to EAS acculturation. He pointed out that many of the faculty members, “don’t understand some of the differences [between Asian and Americans students.] And they have not been

trained to deal with these differences. They [the university] need to train them more.” Students also felt that faculty members needed more coaching in engineering and supporting group projects. Most students indicated that faculty generally behaved convivially with them. Each student was able to point to at least one faculty or staff member at the university who had supported or assisted them in an important way. Yet most also had met a number of instructors throughout their tenure who frustrated them and had dampened their enthusiasm to adapt socially. S1 called her business professors “very nice” but “not really helpful” in assisting her to integrate with class or other group project members. S3 agreed with S1’s assessment when he remarked, “professors are sometimes unhelpful and do not show leadership.” S4 criticized some of his professors: “I can’t express myself in English. Some part is my fault and other parts are teachers’. [They] don’t try hard enough to understand me.”

Part of the communication problem may lie in the fact that many professors themselves are non-native speakers who suffer with their own communication problems. Three students reported experiencing difficulty understanding some non-native speaking professors. S1 remarked “I just cannot understand [what] the professor [is] saying.” When asked about her classroom English comprehension, S8 replied that, “some teachers are hard to understand. They have an accent, so sometimes I have to ask a classmate what’s happening.” Communication breakdowns between student and professor appear to negatively affect students’ general attitude toward the school and their ability to form affiliations.



S5 shared her insight that many of the professors are adjuncts who do not fully invest their time and energy at the university because they themselves do not feel fully integrated with the general AU community. S7 claimed that, “the professor didn't teach you a lot of things, just gave you the homework and said do it by yourself. It hard to us to read all the cases without an explanation.” S6 said she felt that professors would group students at the beginning of a course as a means of avoiding having to teach the course material.

### **Clubs and Organizations**

The two students who claimed that they had no AP friends were also the two who were not interested in clubs or organizations. On why she had not joined any clubs, S1 said, “I’m not a clubs person.” S5 said, “I’m not interested in socializing at clubs on campus. I’m trying to pursue my career.” S6 commented that she had been asked to join The Chinese Club but decided not to. She described herself as, “more like a lonely old wolf.” Both of these students conducted their interview in a lively way and did not appear overly shy, but they described themselves as having essentially given up on trying to create strong relationships with their APs.

Just as students who felt driven out of the dorm partly due to the cost of rent, S4 said he had been initially interested in joining an on-campus organization until he discovered the costs entailed in joining. He decided not to join a club he had been invited to join when he discovered that he would have to pay a joiners fee and dues.

S6, a strong English speaker expressed inner conflict about her membership in The Taiwanese club. During club meetings, students only speak Chinese. This student

said she knew students who only speak Chinese during their daily lives. She felt it important to interact with her APs and expressed a distaste for cultural groups or cliques. However, she admits that as a busy member of The Taiwanese Club, she takes little action in order to intermingle with students outside of this culturally based group.

### **Social Media and Official Communications**

Most of the students said that they use the Blackboard online course management system to keep up with assignments and receive professor updates, but they do not use the discussion board feature unless directed to do so by the instructor. S6 objected to the use of assigned discussion board tasks because she described these interactions as “artificial communication which is not helpful.” Staff 1 believes that professors’ inability to organize and engineer engaging online discussions results in a lost opportunity for meaningful interaction. Students judged AU’s general use of SM and official communication from the school to be unhelpful. S6 one of the most outspoken proponents of on-campus clubs believed AU does a poor job of publicizing and supporting club activities via SM.

Among the divisions or departments which commonly interact with EASs, the international division (ID) which issues student visas and monitors student visa application processes received the highest marks for their communication with incoming students. Students reported, however, that ID SM sites such as the university’s various Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn accounts did not provide timely, relevant, or interesting contents.

In response to a question about the business school's use of the social media to help build an online community, Staff 3 conceded, "We've been really bad about that." The business school has recently taken steps to improve the efficacy of their community-building and outreach campaigns, according the professor. S5 and S7 indicated that the posted content on sites such as Facebook and Instagram provide little or no helpful information to students. S4 perceived that these departments and organizations barely post. Furthermore, he said, "their posts are not interesting or important to me." AU's social media usage not only suffers from a lack of useful or interesting content, it competes with China's social media giant WeChat.

None of the student participants reported checking the AU social media sites on a regular basis. All of the Chinese students claimed that they look at their WeChat feed exclusively for updates, including those related to AU happenings. S2 said she does not seek out AU's social media platforms:

Because everything's, like Instagram and Facebook, so separate. Right? There's no kind of unity. Students are confused about where to get the best data. [name of university events calendar]? Facebook? Instagram? So we always depend on WeChat for information.

S8 agreed that AU social media campaigns proved unhelpful, so she relies on WeChat to share and receive important communications relevant to the Chinese community.

Neither students nor staff could point to a cohesive social media strategy at the university. Students felt that finding all of the resources demanded too much energy and

did not reward them with attractive or helpful content. Consequently, this means of communication does not support EAS interaction or adaptation.

### **Discussion**

The data analysis generated from the interviews with students and staff members at the university indicates that interaction with the community at-large expedites acculturation. AU facilitates interaction in some key ways, but numerous factors conspire to hinder acculturation. All three themes produced substantial data to create a picture of the of the opportunities and challenges EASs face. The third theme regarding the obstacles to acculturation produced extensive data which constitutes the primary basis for the project: a policy paper which recommends a group work summative evaluation for business and computer science projects. The project aims to assist the university in removing obstacles to EAS acculturation and boost efforts already in place.

The data appears to confirm that per Maslow's belief that people yearn to belong and that EASs desired to acculturate or integrate with APs when they came to the school. EASs reported that APs at AU support their acculturation by treating them in a mostly friendly way and displayed an openness to accepting international students in general. S6 described the campus as "a safe community." Several students describe spending enjoyable, relationship-building and productive moments with their APs on and off campus.

Students speak about the necessity to interact with their fellow Americans for two basic reasons: to become a fluent English speaker and for networking with peers for future (business) opportunities. S8 spoke of "throwing herself into" social situations on

campus in order to learn to speak English better. Other students intuitively understand the need to befriend local peers for the purpose of learning more about American culture and for setting the groundwork for future internships and employment. School clubs and organizations emerged as offering the best non-academic opportunity for students to interact. Participants noted a disparity in the university's advertised level of international students support and its actual level of support beyond on-campus clubs and organizations.

The research revealed numerous obstacles to EAS integration into the general population at AU, but discrimination does not constitute one of them. None of the students point to any clear actions taken by American students or staff that can be construed as discriminatory. Cultural differences and culture shock prove challenging for EASs to overcome, but the evidence does not point to the need for the university to take remedial action or use resources to curb bias on campus. The absence of this obstruction removes one of the major stumbling blocks plaguing some American universities. Stereotyping remains a relatively minor obstacle for the students, and they report not feeling shunned.

The evidence gleaned from this study showed that on-campus groups and clubs, classes and group work, and interactions with professors and roommates produced the most opportunities for acculturative interaction between students. However, the university does not appear to maximize its potential to promote acculturative interaction in any of the realms where administrators or student ambassadors facilitate interactions between students.

AU boasts a large number of clubs and organizations which operate somewhat independently within the university. Several students feel that these organization represented their best prospect to intermingle with students on campus outside of the classroom. Three students and two professors mention the necessity of joining an organization in order to practice English with native speakers and learn American culture and customs. Students also see clubs as a way of networking for future employment. S8 joined and worked to become the president of the finance club because she felt instinctively that her club mates would signify potential job contacts and leads. However, students complained that the university does not do enough alert them to the existence of these clubs nor do they appear to know where to find social media posts about them.

Two staff members mentioned group work as conducive to significant communication between students. Yet several student participants question the efficacy of group work as a method to cause to meaningful interaction because they felt that students mostly “fool around and gossip” (S6) during formal discussion time. To combat inattention to the project tasks, computer science professor explained that their department uses a specially designed a self and group evaluation rubric at the end of each project. These evaluations require students to analyze their own and their group members’ participation after they complete the project. According to the professor, the knowledge that this evaluation will be administered at the end of the project impels students to do their share of the work and communicate productively with each other. Without such a summative evaluation mechanism, students express strong negative feelings towards group work.

All students report that at least one professor has helped them to understand and/or conduct themselves in American society. English as a Second Language received many of the plaudits for not only helping students improve their speaking and writing skills, but also assisting to navigate complex administrative or social situations. They also mentioned that several instructors skillfully orchestrated student pairs or small groups work in the classroom. Some faculty appear to carefully plan project group members in order to put international students in a position to succeed.

Students think some professors supported them as much or more than other individuals they mingle with in other areas of the university, but most students feel that faculty members also impede their ability to acculturate. While several students describe some professors as “nice” and “kind,” they also complain that other professors express annoyance or impatience at having to explain details to international students more thoroughly than they do to their AP. It appears that many professors across majors have fundamental gaps in their understanding of difficulties EASs confront in the classroom and during group projects. Therefore, they do not implement strategies to assist EASs to participate completely in course related activities. The fact that many of the faculty hold adjunct statuses also contributes to the lack of detailed focus on student social and academic success. According to several students, adjuncts tend not to be as invested in student success as full-time faculty. S5 surmises that adjunct professors’ focus seems divided because they work multiple jobs. Furthermore, many professors speak English as a second language and are also challenged with cultural misunderstandings. This

exacerbates EASs' struggles to learn course content and how to operate within conversational activities in class.

Roommates also receive some credit for helping facilitate acculturation among some of the students. Two of the students said they regarded their roommate as their closest friend and the person who proved most helpful in mentoring them through the initial entry into AU community culture. These roommates receive praise for their patience. Students feel that while most people they meet in their daily life lack the patience to give them time to formulate their thoughts or to try to understand them linguistically, some roommates demonstrate tolerance. Thus, roommates represent one of the most important potential resources for EAS adjustment at the university.

At the same time, social pitfalls await EASs when they check in. Three students mentioned that room or dorm mates drank alcohol and smoked marijuana in dorm rooms. Asian countries view marijuana smoking legally and morally reprehensible, so some students are deeply shocked to discover its use in the dorms. In two cases, that roommate's marijuana smoking in the room put them at immediate odds with their roommates and roommates' clique. These cliques formed as a result of sports team or on-campus organization membership; not in the dorm. Numerous student participants say that moved out of the dorm at the end of their first semester because they could not penetrate these cliques and felt like outsiders. The university does not appear to be doing enough to cause purposeful communication between students in the dorm.

The university appears to be making strides in creating a fertile environment for students to adjust to their new lives, but the obstacles to cultural acclimation appear to be



overwhelmed by the plethora of obstacles they face. The challenges range from the allure of belonging to a group of compatriots to communication breakdowns during group projects. Therefore, the areas with the greatest potential opportunities for relationship building paradoxically become the most formidable hindrances.

Perhaps the greatest obstruction lies in the temptation to cluster with others of the same nationality, Asian culture, or language group. Taiwanese view themselves as a distinct culture from their mainland Chinese peers, but these two groups tend to band together under the umbrella of linguistic connections. The research clearly unearths that six of the eight EASs value belonging to their own cultural cluster over AU acculturation. Students express a powerful sense of relief or ease when in the company of their cultural compatriots. Even extroverted and otherwise integrated students feel this heightened sense of comfort. Only one student who intentionally decided to fully invest herself in assimilating claimed that they felt more at ease in the presence of other EASs.

Many students arrived at AU with ambition to make friends their APs. However, several students report having felt shock at the difficulty level of creating even simple acquaintanceships. Linguistic and cultural gaps between the EASs and their APs represents a one-two punch that appears to oppresses students' desire to attempt to connect. Students and staff feel EAS require not only much more time to study and complete academic work, but also more time and energy to form and maintain relationships with Americans. The challenge proves so overpowering that at least half of the student participants have by-and-large given up on attempting to form friendships

outside of their own cultural cluster. Those students reported that they no longer feel it important to develop such relationships.

Group project work, which the staff participants in this study see as necessary for EASs to mix with students outside of their linguistic or cultural cluster, presents the student with the highest degree of university facilitated challenge. Students must not only navigate the academic and associated linguistic terrain but also juggle the social interactions which are unfamiliar to them. Students reported that they often cannot understand the conversation nor do they have the confidence or facility with English to attempt to enter group discussions. Several students also expressed surprise at the amount of physical intimacy and candid talk American students engage in during group meetings. Such behavior and blunt conversation about sexual matters presents a daunting obstacle to interaction for the visiting students. Students feel that the university must make a concerted effort to lead and help organize groups initially.

AU's social media and communication strategy appears unfocused. Students receive fairly steady important information flow from the ID before they arrive at the university and during their tenure at the school. However, these messages are generally not intended to facilitate interaction but to notify students of school deadlines and processes. Students tend to rely on their compatriots for such information, so they do not scrutinize these messages thoroughly once they arrive at the university. Most students also depend on the online Blackboard application for course-specific information but do not engage in chats on the Blackboard discussion boards unless assigned to do so. Students express discomfort with using discussion boards because of their linguistic

shortcomings but also because students view such conversations as “artificial,” and therefore without value. AUs social media outreach and community-building attempts appear particularly erratic to students and staff. Students from China use the Chinese app Wechat for almost all of their social media communications. The 500+ member Wechat AU feed disperses information to students at the university, though sometimes erroneously. Wechat also acts as a way for students to share information and socialize with each other. Students say that they rarely, if ever, check AU’s official social media sites because the sites do not offer interesting or important content for them seem to know about many of them because they do not appear on one centralized website and the university does not appear to have a cohesive social media strategy to help build a sense of community.

### **Conclusion**

A qualitative case study approach was chosen to answer research questions regarding how interaction between EASs and their APs affects acculturation, how the university supports such interaction, and the challenges associated with acculturation. This descriptive case study approach was chosen because the study intended to learn about the EAS acculturation experience at AU. I accomplished this objective by conducting one-hour interviews from a spectrum of EASs and staff members who work closely with the EAS population at AU. Participants were ‘member checked’ by asking them to audit the transcribed content they provided in their interviews for the purpose of ensuring against bias. Once all interviews had been initially transcribed, the participants were allotted 7 days to check the validity of the transcription. Of the 11 participants, four

responded to my requests to check the faithfulness of the transcriptions. Those four agreed that the substance of their transcripts met with their approval. Analysis of their responses to my semi-structured interview questions exposed thoughts, beliefs, feeling and mental models that inform acculturation development. I chose snowball sampling to cultivate potential participants among the students, while professors were purposely chosen based on their work with this population of students. The questions and the location chosen to conduct the interview were done so to comply with ethical standards set by the university, the state, and national government. I stored interview data according to a standard protocol and assessed using qualitative analysis software. Interviews were assessed, triangulated, and then validated by interviewees. Analysis of the data identifies environments in which EAS encounter their APs, the potential and pitfalls of interactions, the obstructions acculturation, and recommendations for change. Section 3 discussed the main area where the university could make an immediate impact on facilitating acculturative interaction. The university supports 26 official social media sites and a number of unofficial campus organization groups, but students do not impact building a sense of community among all students and causing acculturative interaction between EASs and APs.

This study addresses three research questions. RQ1 involved EASs' perceptions of how interactions with those associated with the university, particularly APs, affected their ability and desire to acculturate to campus life. Participants identified types of interactions that were prone to accelerate the integration process. RQ2 focused on the ways in which the university purposefully stimulates acculturative interaction.

Environments ranging from the classroom to the dorm to online spaces represent the best opportunities for interaction. RQ3 involved the obstacles EASs face in attempting to acculturate at the university. This theme yielded the most extensive data due to the many hindrances students encounter over the time they study at the university.

The finding confirmed the existence of a problem at the local level and uncovered themes that serve as elements of the problem. The themes addressed the questions with the ultimate project goal of clarifying obstructions, identifying opportunities, and pinpointing strategies for resolving the problem. Each theme or anchor code contained categories which support the resolution of the research questions. These themes and categories do not exist in isolation. They form a cohesive and broad overview of the EAS experience as it pertains to their acculturation journey at AU. The project deliverable attempted to achieve the EAS perceptions that their faculty-assigned groups facilitates positive and acculturative interaction.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

EASs overwhelmingly singled out faculty-assigned group projects as their greatest challenge and the environment with the most potential for acculturative interaction on campus. This project proposes to positively influence current negative perceptions regarding these interaction events. Analysis of data led to the conclusion that the acculturation process of EASs benefited from interaction with their APs and some efforts have been made by AU to facilitate such interactions. The results of the data analysis showed that the university should take action to support acculturative interaction between EASs and APs in the classroom, the dormitory, and via social media. Therefore, I have chosen to present AU with a policy recommendation paper that outlines interview participant perspectives, a review of the literature, and recommendations for policy change as my deliverable project. The study found that significant obstacles to acculturation exist for these students. Students and staff indicated that faculty-assigned group projects present the best opportunity for acculturative interaction in a classroom setting, but also produced the most challenging obstacles. I chose a policy paper as a project for this study in order to make recommendations regarding one area where the university can make an immediate impact on EAS acculturation. The policy recommendations paper (see Appendix A) issued to AU was derived from evidence collected from eight undergraduate EASs and three staff members who work with this population at AU. EASs require the university's support in key areas of campus life including group projects. Implementing this recommendation will provide faculty with

tools to assist EASs to integrate academically and socially. The current lack of targeted support causes EASs to perceive that they do not enjoy a sense of full citizenship on campus. This negative perception poses implications for the academic and social success of these students and further recruitment and retention of such students.

### **Rationale**

The project addressed what changes AU should make in the way it structures ubiquitous group work projects, manages dorms, and invokes EAS participation in social media conversations. Students mentioned faculty-assigned group work as the most problematic. My investigation concluded that there were numerous areas where the university can or must impact student acculturation, as well as areas where they currently impede this process. This project alone cannot solve all of the social difficulties students confront on a campus. Therefore, I limited the scope of the findings to recommending changes regarding one academic aspect of studying at AU: group work. Addressing this facet of student life will broadly impact EAS acculturation at the university. Data shows that implementing the recommendations addressed in the project policy paper will positively affect EAS acculturation. The hope is that the process of revamping group work operation methodologies will resonate with other obstructive systems at the school. It will assist AU to formulate methods to more effectively contend with the issues that obstruct EAS integration at the university and will cause positive social changes on campus.

## **Review of the Literature**

I conducted the project literature review based on research findings and subsequent thematic discoveries regarding opportunities for and obstacles to EAS acculturation to campus life at AU. The study findings revealed that EASs confront linguistic and cultural challenges in virtually all realms of campus life. I chose a policy paper as the project deliverable for this research. The project identifies academic, student life, and social media communication shortcomings according to the school. This project literature review focuses on identifying these obstacles and solutions implemented at other institutions with the hope that such solutions may be used by AU.

### **Search Terms**

I used the Walden University Library to conduct the project literature review, which provided access to a number of databases including ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, ERIC, PsycInfo, Google Scholar, and the Walden Library of Theses and Dissertations. Key search terms were: dormitory, students life, roommate pairings, group work, group projects, evaluation and feedback, intercultural communication, faculty classroom management skills, social media community-building, social media style guide, university social media strategy, managing the communicative classroom, university community-building, group evaluation rubrics, and productive icebreakers.

This literature review highlights the peer-reviewed resources that outline best practices, suggestions, and guidelines for integrating university dorm tenants, engineering academically and socially productive study groups, and strategies for enhancing a sense of community via social media. Furthermore, I researched these topics with a particular



focus on how these techniques and strategies are best employed to maximize EAS perceptions that they belong to the university community at large.

### **Effective Dormitory Housing**

American and international students agree that proper dormitory housing is one of the most important aspects of creating a positive experience for students in a university setting. Student productivity and success depends on how effectively a university manages the critical area of dormitory life for students (Akiyonde, 2014). Graham, Hurtado, and Gonyea (2018) explained that the social environment of residence halls is qualitatively different from living off campus. Living in dorms leads to involvement in social, cultural, and extracurricular activities (Graham et al., 2018). The decision to live in a dorm may also lead to conceivably broader student outcomes such as networking for future employment and other opportunities.

The literature describes several key factors that affect student satisfaction within a residential setting. One key factor appears to be length of time students live in dormitories. According to Rajapaksha (2015), students who persisted through the difficult early stages of getting used to shared living spaces and who stayed all 4 years felt a greater sense of community and ownership over the dorm. These students returned positive post occupancy evaluations (POEs) about their dorm experiences. Students who live in dorms throughout their college experience graduate at a higher rate than those who live at home or off campus. Roommate selection, staff engagement, and peer-student empathy were the most selected POE complaints (Lubis, Fauzi, Lubis, & Fauzi, 2014).

Universities can boost their exit survey evaluation results by installing an efficient web-based Dormitory Residence Management System (DRMS) for multiple purposes but principally to pair roommates. Many universities, including AU until 2017, changed from a paper-paper based system to an online one. Many like AU use online systems merely to collect information, but those systems have no algorithmic facility to analyze student dorm application results (Ning & Chen, 2016). For all intents and purposes, officials still pair roommates manually without the benefit of sophisticated student survey response analysis methods. The vast majority of top 100 universities in the United States use computerized systems to pair roommates. Conley (2019) warned that such systems are programmed to match students based on likeness which minimizes the possibility of students rooming with someone from a different culture or background. The most widely used online roommate management system is Roomsync, which is powered by Facebook. Universities such as the University of Kentucky, University of Illinois, and University of Florida have benefited from implementing Roomsync. This online application and dorm management system allows students to fill out a 25-question profile questionnaire that indicates their own living habits and also choose characteristics they would like in a roommate. The system stands out among other DRMSs in its unusual capacity to allow students to choose roommates that have similar backgrounds compared to their own or intentionally choose someone with a different background (Morgan, 2019). It can also allow the user to intentionally choose an international student for a roommate. Once the University of Florida implemented its system, roommate complaints dropped 67% in the

first year (Roomsync, 2019). The system allows administrators to match students manually or based on percentage of matching answers among potential roommates.

Khan created a DRMS according to the specifications stipulated by Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh to manage their needs. The primary objectives of this system is to create a web-based room distribution, dorm activity scheduling, and fee management client. According to Khan the system not only features a simple interface accessed by phone or computer, it provides students with information on activities scheduled to run in the dorm via automatic alerts. This function promotes interaction between dorm students. Ning and Chen (2018) found that interaction between students enhances a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging ranked among the top three most important indicators of satisfaction among college roommates according to the post occupancy evaluation. Najib and Tabassi (2017) found that along with the condition of the facilities and staff services, students indicated that that a dorm system that takes steps to encourage a quality of social life are those which receive the highest marks.

Nabilou and Khani (2015) determined that the university dormitory that rated the highest between two university dormitories in Iran did so due to the exceptionally high scores students assigned to the staff. Students perceived staff to be pleasant and kind. This led all other categories evaluated, including questions about the state of the physical plant, furniture and, cleanliness, and services. Students emphasized that staff's willingness to engage with them played the greatest role in their positive perceptions of the staff. Graham et al. (2018) found that students who live in dorms have an advantage

over students who live off-campus and farther away than walking distance because living in close proximity to staff and faculty allows for more interaction.

The depth and frequency of peer interaction plays a critical role in whether students achieve a rewarding college experience (Mayhew et al., 2016). Living in the dormitory instead of off campus provides students with the opportunity to engage in this kind of quality peer contact which promotes a sense of community and belonging among dorm residents. Friendship and residence life are considered to be vital components for national and international student adjustment and emotional well-being. Holton (2016) determined that international students who lived in diverse dorms or primarily with British peers felt they could form unique connections by virtue of all students having been thrown in for the first time living outside of their family. The study showed that students tend to place-make whether they are national or international students. They hope to blend in yet maintain a sense of personal or dorm room uniqueness. Students transfer their normed family life to non-familial dorm mates. This provides the foundation for community cohesion. Inter-personal relationships within the home are converted to emphasize the diverse ways unrelated adults might experience a sense of at-homeness in residence halls (Wilkinson, 2014). Living in the dorms optimizes the potential for gaining a student experience and can be linked to multiple community-building practices such as friend-making, socializing, and living as family with those who are strangers (Holton, 2016).

Students perceive the experience of dorm life as both private in the family sense and public as they live in close quarters with other who are not their family members.

Researchers find that living and intermingling with classmates on a daily basis creates a sense of community and understanding of how to behave and react emotionally within that community. This community which is new to students when they typically move in as freshman acts as a natural growth step in students' progression away from family dependence and toward adult independence. They engage in community-building activities such as group dorm cleaning, movie nights or dorm-wide outing such as to a skating rink to strengthen their social bonds and create a perception of mutual concern and care for each other. Well-adapted students see the dorms as a place where students can interact and have fun outside of pressurized setting of the classroom (Graham et al., 2018).

The challenge for both domestic and international students is to adapt to the community of the dorm while making choices as to which activities or social occasions suit them and which may not. International students may choose not to take part in dorm activities they deem improper or outside of their values. For example, students may be under pressure to drink alcohol or participate in other new or uncomfortable social situations. Not participating in such activities can damage a student's social standing in the dorm. Students at a London university reported overwhelmingly that those who do not drink are not considered to be dorm community insiders. As a result, such students who cannot or will not adapt to community standards, regardless of the potential impropriety of the standards, may inadvertently exclude themselves from future social activities because others perceive them to be acting outside of the expected norms (Dovey, 2013).

Students seek friendships and networking opportunities in class, on-campus organization, sports teams and in the school dorms. An examination of emotional responses to stress in college freshman at a California university (Williams, Morelli, Ong, & Zaki, 2018) found that students who primarily seek dorm peers to widen their social network select those who demonstrate empathetic, helpful, caring, and positive traits. Therefore, the authors believe universities have should provide or support the inculcation of these values in the dorm staff and students. Beyond creating an open and welcoming atmosphere in the, university dorm steering and leadership committees must take purposeful steps assist international students to understand local norms and adapt to them (Holton, 2016).

### **Group Projects**

Group and team work have played a larger roles in universities and corporate settings over the last 30 years. Thus group projects have become a primary obstacle for Asian students as well a transferees working in The States. Duhrigg et al. (2016) revealed that perceived a sense of safety when interacting with their groupmates. That feeling was generated by members allotting an equitable amount of speaking time to each member and supporting members even when rejecting particular opinion or suggestion. Another norm that effective groups adhere to is the intuitive understanding of how others in the group react to their tone of voice, their facial expressions and other nonverbal cues. Accepting and nurturing behavior not only supported community-building among the group or team members, but actually raises the collective intelligence of the groups. Gilbert (2018) found groups that did not follow one or either of these norms perceived a

degeneration of group intelligence and efficiency. One or two group members monopolizing of group discussion time inhibits group discussion productivity more than any other behavior. Those who possess less assertive personalities and international students who speak English as a new language generally need a longer time to formulate thoughts often lose opportunities to submit ideas because they cannot compete with the dominators in the group. A group which fails to address the problem of dominating behavior by one or two members can hobble its ability to complete the project satisfactorily or in the allotted timeframe because not all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute.

Students are acutely aware of and affected by the body language and facial expressions used by others. Groups and group members who fail to express positive body language and facial expressions in the presence of their group members risk alienating each other from the start (Colonello et al., 2017). Students who develop and exhibit a self-awareness of how their facial gestures can positively impact the group as they act as non-verbal leaders who assist each member to feel safe to express their opinion. Such compassionate behavior lifts the productivity and intelligence of the group. Students who complete executive function skills training tend to promote harmony, safety and equality within the group. Such training teaches students to help members to slow down group discussion dominators and support less assertive students to participate with the use of verbal and facial signals.

Faculty, particularly in business and STEM majors, routinely assign students to group projects. Yet they rarely provide specific instructions on project development

procedure, oversight of group progress, or purposeful leadership (Natoli, Jackling, & Seelantha, 2014). When professors assign students a project, often they allow the students to choose their own group, which often leads to a sense of apathy, apprehension, neglect and a failure to problem-solve (Maiden and Perry, 2014). Therefore, faculty or instructor leadership plays a vital role in the success of the group project. Group project success rates improve when faculty assigns roles among group members and allow each member to have an opportunity to lead during the course of the project. Faculty must spend adequate time helping students understand cooperative behaviors, including active listening, active participation, reflecting on alternative viewpoints and suggestions, asking clarifying questions, and providing constructive feedback. The number one complaint that students lodge against university group work is that only some (or one) students actively participate in producing the deliverable, while other lesser or non-participants benefit from hard work of others. Faculty must hold both the group and the individuals in the group accountable for the final deliverable produced by each group (Wooland, 2018).

University groups work effectively when faculty practice well-organized adaptive leadership techniques when forming, overseeing and evaluating group performance. This technique based on a framework developed by Crislip and O'Malley (2013) tasks group members' four actions. First students are expected to analyze the situation. They should explore the challenges and opportunities related to the project. Individual must develop and understanding of their own power, weaknesses as well as to understand others' behaviors that prompts you to react negatively. Group members



should endeavor to understand others opinions and reasoning and not shy away from uncertainty and disagreement. This requires participants to experiment beyond your comfort area. Furthermore, there may be times when one must intercede in order to promote equality with empathetic words and body language. Finally, this method asks the group members to attempt to inspire others. Engage with all members of the group. This demonstrate that the collective purpose requires the ability to develop trust among group members.

Students experience frustration when not all group project members participate or when some members are excluded from participation (Woodland, 2018). Therefore, the role of the professor who assigns the project includes continuous oversight of group progress. The professor observes the group interaction and provides direct and indirect feedback on individual student participation. Indirect feedback takes the form of re-guiding conversation that have digressed and inviting non-participants to rejoin the group by posing opinion questions to them (Natoli et al., 2014). To increase the potential for successful completion of the project, students deliver a mid-term presentation and report on project progress and problems (McCloone, Lawlor & Meehan, 2016). This mid-term assessment offers students a clear demonstration of what will be expected of them at the end of the course, so that they can make adjustments to their process or direction. The authors suggest that instructors should not interfere with group discussions but intervene when students fail to show empathy to each other, begin to monopolize discussion, or to participate altogether. By the midpoint of the semester, the professor who has asserted her or his direct leadership on

the group begins to encourage the group to take on adaptive leadership roles and take full control of the project management. Group project assignments should conclude with a summative feedback survey and qualitative reporting. The survey should include questions about student perceptions of the effectiveness of the faculty member as facilitator, empathy and effectiveness of their partners, teamwork and communication, the opportunities to lead and resolve problems, and how the project added to their own education and professional readiness (McCloone et al., 2016). Group projects are often flawed in two essential ways. Social loafing, defined as a reduction in effort on the part of some students when grouped. This phenomenon occurs when some students appear to take a free ride while other students exert time, energy and resources to the project. Student participants said that unfair grading systems that assign the same grade to each student irrespective of comparative effort sometimes makes for a negative project result (Lin et al., 2019). They determined that professors and facilitators must make clear at the start of the project what will be the attitudinal expectation of group members. Explaining the details of the summative peer and group awareness surveys with students before the project begins strengthens the odds that the students will complete the project successfully. Hyun et al. (2018) suggested that informing students beforehand that at the end of the project they will be expected to evaluate each peer with the following types of questions produces cooperative interaction and, a stronger social network and successful completion of the

Project:

1. Did your groupmate prepare enough for group discussions?
2. Did the peer enthusiastically contribute in the group discussion?
3. Did the peer do their fair share?
4. Did the peer show respect to others in the group?
5. Did the peer show sincerity during the class?

The questions are rated by a Likert scale of 1 (never) through 5 (always). Students also have an opportunity to respond qualitatively in a lined space below each question.

Students who participated sufficiently in completing tasks and in discussion, respected others, sincerely attempted to include all voices scores highest in such evaluations.

### **Social Media Connections**

Today, SM plays an important role in a university communicating with its students and facilitating interaction between students. For EASs, interacting with the host schools social media is an essential step in the adapting to the new culture (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014). Before they arrive in the U.S., international students use SM outlets to learn about the new culture. They search for and expose themselves to cultural norms and traditions but also the stereotypes and biases they will most likely face (Sawyer and Chen, 2012). Ju, Jia, and Shahom (2016) found that most Chinese students living in the US of their own volition regularly check and passively interact through liking their American classmates' SM posts on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, though the government blocks these sites in China. This willingness to spend

time browsing these American SM page shows a willingness to learn about American culture and to join or form local social networks. However, the allure of forming cliques with compatriots can overwhelm the desire to acculturate once students arrive in America (Gomes et al., 2014). Sojourners must consciously place more importance on adapting to the new culture than to maintaining their home culture while living abroad. For those who successfully focus on adaptation, SM becomes an important tool for building social capital through the development of bridging relationships, those that focus on sharing social and school-related information (Sawyer & Chen, 2012).

Chinese students tend to use Wechat and Baidu SM applications to keep in touch with friends and family back home. They have begun to use American-based applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter to establish their knowledge of their host country, interact and participate in the local community, and proactively use these application for school or work purposes (Tu, 2018). He found that students generate more than 75% of SM content at universities. Chinese students tend to join SM sites or pages related to their major or, to a lesser extent, those focusing on a hobby or personal interest. These students are inclined to use SM versus email because they already understand the general SM format of newsfeeds, likes, and comment operates as opposed to the more complex formal communication style associated with email. Many students join on-campus organizations such as finance, computer science, or robotics clubs because they act as a supplement to their majors. They recognize the importance of expanding their professional network through interactions with others via the SM platform chosen by the group. Ma et al. (2014) found that making deeper bonding relationships proves too

difficult via social media, Chinese students living in Japan successfully built bridging (information sharing) relationship with host peers via social media. Students also reported using SM platforms as a language learning tool. Those students who most often check in and actively comment on American SM sites became more linguistically and culturally adept as they improved their English reading and writing skills through the use of those mediums. This improvement appeared to have an ameliorating effect on acculturative stress. In general, all students felt it important to use English on SM sites. The study correlated length of time spent in the U.S and the amount of English Chinese students read or use English in their daily lives.

Wechat with its billion plus subscribers remains the most prominent SM recruiting tool for Chinese universities use to contact and interact with prospective students (Feng, 2019). University marketing and media directors in china face increasing economic pressure to generate applicants, just as American universities do. According to the author, those universities which achieved success in recruiting students via Wechat did so by sharing policy, necessary qualifications, scholarship opportunities, and other critical university information along with highly engaging photos, videos, and links. These posts serve the dual function of providing critical information to prospective students but also strengthens and unifies the university community.

Facebook is the primary SM platform used among college bound 17-20 year-olds to research and socially connect with universities they plan to apply to (Hesel, 2013). The researcher found that students use FB to observe student life and consider how they will fit in with the campus community. Frequently students search for information regarding

majors, housing, services such as inter-campus transportation, and on-campus organization. Fagerstrom and Ghinea (2013) found that 88% of students in a Norwegian university engaged with a school official or student ambassador via FB versus only 43% of students who did not use the FB. Once students enroll at a university, students use SM as one method of staying connected to the university. This connectedness positively correlates with higher grades and retention.

Yet, universities struggle to develop a uniform branding scheme across platforms or implement an effective student engagement strategy according to the authors. Research on student engagement with SM indicates that the total number of likes a post receives indicates its effectiveness in engaging students. Students most commonly only use the like button to engage with content because it only takes one click as opposed to sharing which requires two clicks. When students comment on or share content on their own newsfeed, there is an opportunity for more stakeholders to view that content in their own feed and like it. Therefore, the total number of likes can be considered a measurement of student engagement. The challenge for universities is posting content which attracts and maintains the attention of students without overwhelming them with perceived meaningless information (Holton & Chyi, 2012). Students negatively react or do not engage with the content posted multiple times or across multiple platforms. The study encourages universities to find the proper cadence for posting new content. Media and marketing directors should determine the correct mix of image, university information, and external news content to boost engagement with and between university community members, including students, faculty and staff, parents, alumni, prospective

students, and other stakeholders such as community organization or businesses linked to the university. FB users generally find content that includes image, videos, or fun or helpful links more attractive and are more likely to inspire students to engage. The media and marketing department of the top 100 universities in the U.S. post images or videos one or fewer times per day for best results on engagement. Those who posted more than once a day saw diminishing returns on their posts. (Kwok & Yu, 2012).

### **Summary**

AU devotes considerable financial and human resources to recruiting international students, particularly EAS who can afford the university's expensive tuition and housing. Yet there appears to be an imbalance between resources spent on attracting these students and those spent on helping these students connect with their fellow peers. This study establishes that EASs need assistance with learning how to interact during class-related activities and how to take part in SM discussion, which aids cultural adaptation. Most do not know how to cultivate a satisfying dorm experience which leads to unhappy students and dorm vacancies when they decide to move out, on average, after one semester. Developing strategies to assist EASs will be key to future recruitment and retention efforts. The literature review supports the creation of a policy paper which advocates for AU to develop best practices for helping sojourners cope with situations they may face during group discussions in class or in the dorm or via SM. Additionally, the policy paper outlines recommendations for suggested faculty and staff action and attitudes toward these students as supported by the literature review. Accepting and implementing these

recommendations, enhances the likelihood that EASs will acculturate more quickly and with an enriched perception of satisfaction.

### **Project Description**

#### **Needed Resources and Existing Supports**

To provide world-class education to globally-oriented families in East Asia, the university's highest-ranking members realize that they must make changes to their current method of working with EASs. The new university president has spent much of the last year visiting China and making broad statements to cabinet members regarding the need to pivot AU's marketing efforts toward Asia. Because the official who gave me permission to administer the qualitative interviews for this project is a close advisor to the president, I believe there is already support for social change. There will probably be financial and human resources available to make the changes I have proposed, particularly because vast sums of money are not required to make those changes.

I believe there will be support for the recommendations I suggested even if not all of the faculty in the business and computer science choose to implement the summative evaluation. My role will be to support the process without interfering in student interactions or with staff members' responsibilities. I believe if I offer an array of methods which would encourage intermingling of all students, this will allow the sector leadership to choose which methods they would like to try and not to feel as though I or the university is forcing them to make immediate, drastic changes.



**Potential Barriers**

The barriers most likely to challenge the successful implementation and social change-making will be time, faculty, and students. In order to implement these new processes or activities, it will take my time to monitor the project, conduct surveys and collect limited qualitative data. I have a very busy role at the university that sometimes takes me abroad for periods up to two weeks. Therefore, I will probably need the support of a student assistant or other volunteer to help stay active with the projects selected for each sector.

The insight I have gained after nearly 30 years as a faculty member and program director leads me to believe that faculty and staff often feel protective of their sector, division, or department. An outsider offering assistance is sometimes interpreted as criticism of the current system and their job performance. I must have support of senior leadership and the trust of the faculty or staff member I will work with in order for the project to succeed. The delicate way in which I approach the computer science and business school to explain the benefits of implementing the intervention will be critical to achieve the intervention goals.

Student participation will play a key role in whether, and to what degree, the intervention affects positive or productive interaction between EASs and APs. If students do not cooperate according to the guidelines of each process or activity, the intervention will almost certainly fail to produce the desired effect. It will be important to make sure students have been properly oriented before implementation so as to convey the meaning and goals of the project.

**Possible Solution to the Barriers**

The barrier to the time problem may simply be to delegate some of the responsibilities associated with implementing the group project summative evaluation to different disinterested party such as the a student aid. The Qualtrics online survey system includes a powerful analytical function that can help compile comments, numbers, and percentages. This feature cuts the time necessary to evaluate the data significantly.

I intend to explain that the data we collect at the end of the project will not be shared with management or other outside entities. Faculty control the data results and come to their own conclusions as to the meaning of each outcome. The university does not present a campus-wide policy on instructor evaluations. I strongly recommend that faculty seek feedback on how participants felt about their own participation, the attitudes and behaviors of their peers, and the leadership of the faculty. However, faculty would have the facility to customize the Qualtrics survey by adding, editing or removing questions or sections of the base survey template.

Faculty members or I, as the researcher, must explain the goals of the summative Qualtrics survey clearly to students. They will be informed that the purpose of the evaluation is to cause productive interaction among all students in the group and that students should not attempt to dominate the group, attempt suppress other opinions, or otherwise isolate members. Their goals include empathy, patience, inclusivity, and general social support. The project also aims to improve perceived unfairness in terms of participation levels, and ultimately grading.

### **Implementation and Timeline**

When I applied for IRB approval to conduct this study at AU, I requested that a high-level official whose main role is to ensure the well-being of students give me permission to administer qualitative interviews at the school. This executive member consented to my proposal and suggested that I write a policy paper to help the university strengthen its ability to facilitate positive interaction between itself and students and students with each other. I will present my findings illustrating the difficulties and opportunities inherent in faculty-assigned projects to administrator named above and the dean of the business school. If amenable, I will assist each of these university sectors in implementing best practices for facilitating positive, if not productive, communication between international and their host peers. The summative evaluation may additionally enhance communications between other marginalized groups such as non-traditional students or sometime students from other parts of the country, as well.

### **Timetable and Stages**

1. I will submit the policy recommendation paper to a senior academic administrator and the dean of the business school via email. After they have had the opportunity to read the paper, I will ask him to take a brief survey aimed at collecting feedback on the implementing the summative evaluation. This Qualtrics survey will be sent via email.
2. Provided the administrator and the dean indicate that he believes the summative evaluation can create the desired effect of supporting positive and productive interaction between faculty-assigned group work participants, I will assist the dean in

- approaching faculty with data supporting the employment of summative evaluation for group work.
3. For those faculty who agree to participate in the pilot summative evaluation program, I will hold a preliminary instructional meeting in early winter 2020 to explain the steps for implementing the evaluation.
  4. Faculty will meet with students toward the beginning of the spring semester to explain the purpose and procedure for the use of the new evaluation. It will be critical at this stage to share the actual questions they will be asked in the summative survey.
  5. Students will be asked to respond to a truncated version of the of the final summative survey to determine how group member perceive the group dynamic and whether they feel that member communicate with each other in a positive, empathetic and productive way.
  6. Students will receive the final summative Qualtrics survey in an email which they will be asked to complete within 48 hours. They will be told that their final grade will not be made available to them until they complete the survey.
  7. The faculty members will evaluate the results of the survey to discover which areas students felt were successful and which ones were not.
  8. Faculty members and I will evaluate results to work with faculty over summer 2020 to enhance the opportunities to for group participant interaction.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The analysis of summative survey evaluations for interventions will determine the success of the intervention. This evaluation type was chosen because many participants

can be surveyed at once and because the Qualtrics survey system includes powerful analysis and reporting tools. The faculty member will be responsible for informing group members of the behaviors and attitudes expected of each group member and that they will be evaluated at the end of the project based on these principles. The group members will be responsible for upholding the expected attitudes and behaviors throughout the project. At the midway point and at the end, students will be asked to respond to survey questions about themselves, their peers and their professor. Students will be provided with quantitative Likert scale questions and qualitative questions in which students are encouraged to elaborate on the reasons for their answers. The faculty member or perhaps I will analyze the data and recommend courses of action per the results.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

A project evaluation plan is a systematic approach for assessing the effectiveness of a program and to ensure outcomes are meeting targeted goals. Best practices suggest that the researcher identify areas which need improvement. One should then inform stakeholders of program strengths and weaknesses, and finally provide evidence for decision-making and determining program success (Merriam, 2009). I plan to present the policy paper to the Provost, Dean of Students, and Deans of the Schools of Computer Science and Business. The scope of the proposed evaluation plan includes measuring their satisfaction with the main recommendation: implementing a summative evaluation for business and computer science group work. These executive leaders will read the report, consider its potential efficacy, and respond to semi-structured survey questions (see Appendix D). I justify the use of this survey because the executive leadership will

decide whether the strengths of the project and its recommendations outweighs the possible limitation. Furthermore, this survey will reveal whether this project can cause social change.

### **Overall Project and Evaluation Goals**

The overarching goals of this project are to assist EASs to participate more effectively and confidently in groups and therefore engage in substantial acculturative interaction with their group mates. As a result of increased feelings of acceptance as a result of recommendations, EASs will perceive a heightened sense of belongingness, and therefore, social change will occur. The overall goal of the evaluation is to increase awareness of the problem that EASs generally do not feel they belong which impedes their ability to acculturate. The key stakeholders who stand to gain from this project are the EASs, their APs, and the faculty who may implement the recommended summative evaluation.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

Qualitative data analysis determined that a majority of EASs feel alienated as a result of unsuccessful attempts to acculturate to the general campus community. Students either do not know how to integrate with their hosts or are invested in maintaining their home culture. There are numerous obstacles to acculturation including the language and cultural between the EASs, their APs, and the university. Stakeholders including students, campus community members, future employers, and local communities benefit when EASs learn to adapt to the campus community. Implementing the proposed intervention in the dorm, for group work, and in SM covers social change in three distinct

sectors of the university: residential life, academics, and communications. The scope of this project as well as time and resource constraints do not allow me to address every obstacle during the qualitative interview process. However, I believe by tackling these acculturation barriers, the university will impact EASs, their APs, and the campus. The intervention is designed to encourage interactions and result in cultural and emotional mutual understanding. If any or all of these interventions have a significant effect on student acculturation, there could be wider implications for the local off campus community and potential employers who will interact with or hire individuals who have had the opportunity to grow and learn cross-cultural skills at AU.

### **Larger Contextual Implications**

By taking a leadership role in implementing innovative interaction facilitating methods that support positive and/or productive EAS and AU interaction, the university can create a culture built on empathy, trust, understanding, and mutual assistance. Both local and international students will enter the professional stage of their lives emotionally, culturally, and educationally by being prepared to negotiate across cultural divides. The university could become a premier destination for sojourners as it raises its profile as a state-of-the-art institution which actively through policy encourages acculturation and student success.

### **Conclusion**

AU leadership has made it clear that plans to step up the university's campaign to compete for talented in East Asia. Consequently, it behooves the school to take responsibility for providing EASs and their local peers with tools and opportunities to

interact. Such opportunities will not only create a further sense of harmony on campus, but will also afford EASs opportunities to acculturate and become part of the campus community and build a culture that benefits society at large. In order to make this impact, AU must show not only the willingness to accept EASs and their international tuition, but also must make positive strategic decisions which expedite the acculturative intermingling of students.



## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The purpose of this study was to explore the degree to which EASs and staff who work with these students closely perceive AU's success in facilitating acculturative interactions between EASs and APs. I conducted two in-depth literature reviews and collected and analyzed data from semi-structured one-on-one interviews with eight student participants and three staff members. I determined that a case study report in the form of a position paper was appropriate for addressing the central problem and questions and communicating the results of the study. I will examine the project's strengths and limitations and suggest recommendations for addressing the problem differently. This section also includes a reflection and discussions of scholarship, project development, and social change and leadership. I will conclude Section 4 with my general thoughts and possible directions for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

Qualitative data that I gathered via semi-structured interviews allowed students to express their opinions freely and share their lived experiences. These data had been missing from current efforts to resolve issues of EAS isolation or cultural clustering. This took on significance given the current federal administration's seemingly negative views on EASs, particularly Chinese computer science students. Based on my observations and data gathered during interviews, I believe that EAS interactions with their APs facilitates their acculturation, AU must do more to encourage interactions between EASs and APs, and obstacles hinder their ability to acculturate to campus life at AU (see Appendix A).

Students and faculty participants alike agreed that faculty-assigned group projects presented the greatest challenge and best opportunity to interact substantially with each other. Therefore, a summative evaluation would determine whether group members behaved inclusively and empathetically in their interactions with their groupmates. There should be a principle expectation that students will endeavor to communicate empathetically and encourage less assertive group members to interact with each other positively. Lastly, the case study report in the form of a position paper is a strength because it defines a strategy that may be recommended for campus-wide implementation if early pilots succeed as expected.

### **Project Limitations**

Case studies inherently contain limitations because they tend to contain small and non-random sample sizes (Creswell, 2014). The main strategy I recommended in the position paper was intended for this specific local site and not other settings. The recommendations I made in this project are specifically applicable to AU. This limits its generalizability. The other limitation regards the degree to which administrators, faculty and students agree to participate in the implementation of my recommendations.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

There are many different methods AU may consider adopting in order to remove or reduce linguistic and cultural obstacles that hamper EAS acculturation. For example, this study found that EASs struggle to integrate in the dormitory. The interviews revealed that many struggles stem from unhappiness with incompatible roommates. Roomsync uses algorithmic data help students choose their roommate based on 25 different areas of

potential similarity or agreement. Several large universities including the University of Miami have seen significant satisfaction increases in exit surveys. One feature of the application allows APs to intentionally choose to live with an international student. It seems clear that matching EASs with roommates who are predisposed to accepting international students would improve the satisfaction of all students in dorms.

My research also found that SM can also play a role in creating a matrix for bridging or bonding relationships between EASs and their APs. Most Chinese students, for example, use Wechat for almost all online communications. However, these communications tend to take place completely in Chinese. Therefore, these students are not taking advantage of important announcements, information, and interaction opportunities online. Participants in this study reported that AU does not publish interesting or helpful content. Therefore, I recommend that the university establish consistent policies for publication across SM platforms. Many university marketing departments have created campus-wide guidelines for all SM posts. This enables quality control and effective communication for all constituents. By applying such policies, the university has the opportunity attract a wider audience to the school.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

This project study started with my observation of a problem involving ESL international students who appeared to struggle to acculturate on campus, which was further inspired by the knowledge that the university hoped to attract more Asian students to the school to widen its cultural diversity and develop new revenue streams. After identifying the problem, I asked myself and others many questions and realized that the

best approach would be a qualitative inquiry. The case study design would best answer how and why questions. Writing the initial proposal was a laborious task. I was expected to meticulously describe each step of the process which caused me some frustration. Now that the study is complete, I have learned the value of incorporating a detailed methodology and reporting system. It was important to learn how my own personal biases can affect data collection, data analysis, interpretations, implications, and assumptions. Through the process of working through each of the steps that included identifying the problem, exhaustively reviewing literature, collecting and analyzing data via semistructured interviews, and reporting findings and results, my appreciation has grown for the precision required of scholarly work.

### **Scholarship**

This project required extensive academic scholarship. The literature review was developed through the process of investigating over 75 peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional literature, and periodicals. Conversations with and among colleagues and other academic professionals provided me with further information regarding the ways in which EAS acculturation obstacles can be addressed. My nearly three decades closely associated with Asian culture spurred my interest in finding a solution to barriers involving EAS acculturation at AU. I conducted two literature reviews. The first began with general research on the challenges facing EASs in English-speaking countries abroad. The second review focused on the academic and social challenge that all interview participants identified as a major barrier to acculturation: faculty-assigned group work.

## **Project Development**

I developed this project over a 3-year period. Careful consideration and guidance from my chair assisted in completing each stage of the study. The interviews, member checking, chair review, and editing were crucial for completion of this comprehensive study. AU is a diverse institution that serves students from all over the world, EASs make up the majority of these students, so I believed that it was important to study this issue in order to encourage acculturative communication between these students and their local peers as well as shed light on information that may be critical to the institution's attempts to recruit and retain these students in the future. Hearing directly from these students and those who work closely with them proved critical to understanding the problem and possible solutions. Data gathered through interviews were not unexpected as many of the barriers EASs experience while attempting to acculturate seemed apparent to those who work with international students. Once I settled on a qualitative case study as my approach, my goal was to collect and analyze data for the purpose of writing a position paper recommending an intervention, which I believe will cause repeated and substantial acculturative interactions between EASs and school leadership. This position paper recommends one main strategy and ideas for two others. I have suggested a plan for implementing a summative evaluation for initial computer science and business major group work.

## **Leadership and Change**

This project emerged from my long-time interest in supporting Asian students. At the beginning, I felt a deep sense of confusion and lack of knowledge as to how to proceed with each section of the project. Over time and intensive practice, I began to understand the root of the local problem and the technical requirements for a scholarly thesis. I possessed an intuitive sense of the obstacles facing EASs at the university because of my own experience living and studying in Japan and because of the many anecdotal stories I have heard over the years. This project allowed me to study the subject in great detail. There are those who have studied international students acculturative for many years and possess knowledge much wider and deeper than I. Yet, I feel as though I have become a scholar in this field. I have already given a number of talks on the challenges EASs face and participated in seminars related to international student issues. I have learned the steps required to perform a rigorous qualitative research study. As a result, I believe I can now lead others through this process.

My recommendations for implementing strategy to support EASs integration are meant to cause social change at the university. While students did not report experiencing discrimination at the university, they tend to feel ignored by their American counterparts. Clearly, if AU hopes to lead in the notion of broadening diversity, it behooves them to accept and implement my recommendations such as the ones I have made in this project in order to change the university-wide mindset. I have changed in that I am no longer naïve about the great and many obstacles our visiting students and the university must overcome in order to become a leader.

### **Reflections on the Importance of Work**

Because I have spent a great deal of time focused on the subject of acculturating EASs, this study has spurred me to look at other great many ways that AU can assert itself during the process of acculturation which leads to success inside and out of the classroom, a harmonious campus, and the retention of EAS students. This project aims to create social change on campus and ultimately in the community. As a result of conducting this academic and field research, I was able to recognize and appreciate the research that has already been published by members of the scholarly community. Researchers have made substantial progress in the field of education and how it impacts society at large, yet more information is needed to learn about cultural diversity and culture change. Reading through other studies provided me with clarity regarding the time, efforts, and commitment required to engage in research.

Conducting this study allowed me to comprehensively view the challenges and possible solutions to EAS acculturation. Vast literature exists on the topics regarding this issue, yet I believe that this research project adds value to the current canon of research. The strength of this research is its ability to facilitate social change at AU. The impact will be limited in size at the outset, but with the cooperation of students, staff, and faculty, it could develop into a campus-wide phenomenon. I developed a greater understanding of scholarship, project development, the evaluation process, and leadership and change. This project study is important to AU and external constituents. AU's strategic plan includes developing a campus atmosphere that caters to international students. This mission will be achieved by demonstrating and explaining the inclusive

and empathetic attitudes necessary to attract EASs. As educators, I believe we have an obligation to prepare all of our students for a globalized future. This preparation will necessitate innovative and effective interventions, such as the strategies I recommend in my position paper. The goals and strategies are aligned with the AU's mission and expressed value. My belief is that my work will eventually make a substantial impact on the university.

### **Implications and Applications**

The implications of my study are that AU and other higher education institutions may begin to examine their current campus culture more deeply. They may begin to look for gaps between their stated mission to encourage diversity and acceptance and actual practices. I have recommended that the university examine how they administer academic projects (group work), the shortcomings in the residence halls, and failure to communicate effectively through SM. Maslow's theory of human motivation put forth that human needs are arranged as a hierarchy. The framework of this study contends that belongingness is a basic human need, just above primary needs such as subsistence and shelter. It appears that AU's failure to adequately support acculturative interaction drives students to cluster with and belong to their own cultural group. Once the need to belong, possess self-esteem, and feel safety are met, the individual can then move upwards toward self-fulfillment and actualization (academic and social) of their full potential (Maslow, 1943). The case study which supported the project was conducted locally. Therefore, the findings specifically pertained to AU. One main strategy emerged based on data analysis results and anticipated outcomes. Knowledge gained from this study can



further inform other suggested interventions in the dorm and for SM communications.

The strategy requires faculty in the business and computer science school to implement principles or guidelines for proper communication between group members followed by a summative evaluation of whether those guidelines were met. This work would provide an opportunity for university leaders to identify obstructions that impede student success and resolve them.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Future research is needed on challenges that may not have been unearthed by this research study. This study focused on the problem of EAS acculturation from visiting students' perspectives. Studying the problem of acculturation from the APs' point of view would be an instructive project because it may inform campus-wide training programs for all AU community members. The parameters for this project necessitated that the study be conducted at the university where I work. Data gathered regarding EAS' acculturation at multiple sites could lead to generalization of the findings which would promote thoughtful dialogue across American campuses. A multisite case study would be a possible option for comparing acculturation in different regional environments. By conducting research at other sites, the findings will be broader in nature, and validity and generalizability of the findings will be strengthened.

### **Conclusion**

This study provided EASs a voice with which to share their perceptions and lived experiences. Most students praised AU's diversity and openness to nontraditional students. However, feedback revealed that EAS face a myriad of obstacles when they

begin their studies at AU, and the university must do more to help them overcome them. Students shared valuable information and criticism for which the school must be accountable. If the university addresses acculturative obstacles with well-constructed and considered strategies to combat these hindrances, they can become leaders in globalized campus development and EAS will report an improved environment into which they can acculturate. I believe AU can make transformational changes toward greater acceptance of EAS and therefore become what students, faculty, and university leadership aspire to be.

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## Appendix A: The Policy Recommendation Paper

### **Background of Existing Problem**

AU population in 2018 included 1,700 East EASs. These students are defined as hailing from East Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. This position paper distills the findings of a study conducted at AU under the supervision of two doctoral chairs, the institutional review board, and the university reviewer. The study attempted to answer questions about the lived experience of EASs attempting to acculturate to campus life at AU. No single widely accepted definition of the word ‘acculturation’ exists. For the purpose of this study, acculturation means the blending of one’s home country culture with that of a new one. This study gathered data based on established literature regarding the acculturation of international students and data collected during qualitative interviews.

### **The Key Questions Probed**

- In what ways do EASs believe that their acculturation to campus life was affected by AP interaction and support?
- How effective has AU been in facilitating interaction between EASs and their APs?
- What are the obstacles to EAS acculturation to campus life?

I interviewed eight students, identified as (S1-S8), and three staff members (Staff 1 – Staff 3) who work with this population of undergraduate students for this study. This policy paper intends to further inform AU of the hardships EASs often suffer as they attempt to grasp American culture and interact with the campus community.

Additionally, I offer research and literature-based recommendations for enhancing university-facilitated interactions.

### **EASs and AU Opportunities**

According to OpenDoors.org (2019), over half a million EASs studied in the United States 2018. 364,000 of those were Chinese, while Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam contributed to the remainder. AU, like many other universities across the United States and the world over the past 15 years has identified EASs as a resource for informing globalized campus concepts and as an important revenue source (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2014). AU's strategic plan calls on the AU community to "embody an ethos of respect for, and celebration of, our diversity, creating an inclusive and welcoming environment" (Vision, 2016). Moreover, *Opportunitas* (2015), the university president's call to action directs the campus community to create a cultural awareness and intercultural understanding (while) integrating a global perspective. Despite the student visa and attitudinal challenges posed to these students by the current federal government administration, the number of these students (technically known as "sojourners") rose 5% over the previous year. Opportunities abound for AU to raise and widen its international reputation while attracting high quality candidates who will complement the academic and social fabric of the campus.

The well-publicized \$140 million investment the university made in building the state-of-the-art new dormitory complex have drawn favorable reviews, but the project also encumbered the university with this debt and downgrade in the university's credit rating, according to Standard & Poor's (2015). The expansion of the efforts to recruit or

attract EASs partially alleviates the university's existing economic difficulties. Many other universities face similar financial hardships due to the enrollment decreases in traditional brick and mortar universities as well as stiff competition from distance online options. The opportunities to recruit students from Asia have escalated, but the competition from rivals stiffens symmetrically. Therefore, if behooves the university to maximize its likelihood of attracting and retaining students at a higher rate than local, national and international competitors.

### **The Problem**

America is the most attractive international study location for EASs and their families, according to Opendoors.com (2019). Newly middle and wealthy class Asian families see the US, and particularly in New York as an epicenter for study, multiculturalism and opportunities. Countless Asian students dream of studying, adventuring to and succeeding at an American university. However, despite attempting to prepare themselves emotionally, linguistically, and academically before they arrive, many EASs describe feelings of isolation from their American counterparts and a general bewilderment on campus (Campbell, 2012; Cho & Yu 2014). Other symptoms of initial instability include feelings of homesickness, depression, separation anxiety, and language barriers in their first year abroad. In order for EA sojourners to culturally adjust and develop a sense of belonging on campus, it is critical for both they and their American counterparts collaborate to bridge the culture and linguistic gaps between them. According to researchers, international students perceive that most host students do not make a significant effort to bridge the intercultural gap with visiting students (Hotta and



Ting-Toomey, 2013). Some universities have been troubled with the uptick in anti-Chinese sentiments on university campuses over the last three years (Wu, 2019). AU suffered its own crisis several years ago when pictures of a prominent student athlete wearing Nazi regalia and posing in a Nazi salute were released to the press. The university must guard against such future eventualities and, on the contrary, reach its potential as a world leader in international student education, hospitality, and student acculturation.

Linguistic and inter-cultural barriers represent the two greatest challenges for EASs and the general population of sojourners from non-native English speaking countries. These linguistic difficulties cause students to feel alienated from host students on campus which sometimes delay acculturation (An & Chiang, 2015). They face the adversity of negotiating linguistic hurdles that range from formal in-class discussion to informal group work chat sessions. Many studies show that EASs suffer from feelings of isolation during classes, group work, and in the dorms. Students report that they do not know how to speak to American students. They sometimes do not know the current topics of conversation or important points of pop culture. They report falling behind in conversations and frustration when linguistically or culturally misunderstood by American students and staff. Dorms that fail to create a welcoming atmosphere risk causing unhappy residents, criticism on social media, a high attrition rate, and loss of revenue. EASs desire and benefit from a dorm atmosphere that actively promotes interaction between a wide range of students and staff.

The results of several large scale research projects reveal that in order to quicken and deepen EAS acculturation to the campus community, universities must initiate programs and policies that actively promote interaction between EASs and the university at large (Cho & Yu, 2014). These acculturation initiative should span freshman orientation meetings, class discussions, residence life, and on-campus organizations and clubs. Plaudel's (2013) interview with a freshman female Chinese student evoked the following rhetorical question. "Universities are eager to accept our fees – but are they doing enough to support Asian students like me once we get here?" Clearly, it is important for universities to understand the obstacles faced by these students and take steps to assist them in their quest to acculturate on campus.

### **Rationale and Summary Findings**

I have worked with EASs for over 25 year. The largest percentage of the 1,700 international enrollees at AU hail from that region, so I decided to explore the acculturation experience of this population as the capstone project of my doctoral program in higher education leadership. A qualitative case study was chosen because I believe that this approach would allow me to discover the in-depth lived experience of students attempting to acculturate into a vastly different university community from their own. I interviewed eight East Asian undergraduate students and three AU employees who work closely with this population. Students were asked about their experience while employees were questioned about their observations of this group. Interviews were conducted at locations chosen for their privacy. Each participant agreed to the terms I presented and were given assurances that I would not share their identity with the

university. The interview questions were previewed by the Walden University institutional review board. All recorded data was stored securely according to best practices. All interview response data was examined with the assistance of Nvivo qualitative analysis software. The results of the analysis allowed me to identify key reasons EASs and recommendations for areas where the university can facilitate acculturative interaction between these students and their APs.

### **Findings**

The Nvivo qualitative analysis software completed its initial analysis of interview comments germane to the study. I then organized the data into three overarching themes: EAS interaction with their peers, the areas where AU facilitates acculturative interaction, and obstacles to acculturative interaction. The first two themes allowed me to highlight areas and situations that are conducive for expediting interaction. However, the third theme, obstacles to acculturative interactions garnered the most data. I coded comments made by the eight students as S1-S8 and staff comments as having been made by Staff 1-3.

Having become aware of the anti-Asian sentiments which have been on the rise over the past three years in the U.S., I wanted to discover whether students perceived racism or discrimination on campus from students or employees of the university. Fortunately, students answered overwhelmingly no to questions of whether they had experienced discrimination. In fact, not one student could point to a single instance in which they perceived overt discrimination during on-campus interactions with APs or

employees at the university. S8 summed up her response by saying that she had not experience discrimination, and that “people are friendly.”

On the whole, EASs reported that their peers are friendly, if not particularly engaging. Some students have made close personal friends with their APs. One Korean student said that he’d made friends with students who play the same online soccer game. He said his APs invite him to socialize off campus and explained many slang expressions and points of (pop) culture to him. S8 volunteered that she had found an American boyfriend and “threw herself into” cultural circles and on-campus organization. She credited her strong English skills with having the “courage” to attempt to break down the cultural and linguistic barriers.

### **Student-Led Interactions**

Clubs and organizations emerged as the most helpful student-led interaction facilitators on campus. Nine of the eleven participants discussed on-campus clubs and organizations as presenting the most opportunities for acculturative interaction on campus. S4 suggested that because on-campus clubs and organizations offer such potent acculturative interaction experience, she suggested that all freshmen should be required to join a club for one semester. S8 said that she joined clubs for the purpose of interacting. Early on in her first semester she realized how important attending on-campus events would be. This concurred with S4’s opinion that all freshman should be expected to join one club for their first semester:

I had to help myself to integrate by joining organizations, joining events. I had to go to student organizations to join events to make

friends and go to clubs where all the students are, not just Chinese students. I think it is a good idea [for every freshman to join a club] because every freshman, has some weird things they don't understand. But if they belong to a club, then they adapt quickly.”

Staff 2 said clubs encourage interaction between international students and their American counterparts. “I saw one Chinese student who was able to get a really fantastic job by joining millions of clubs.” Staff 1 also mentioned on-campus organizations as one of the most effective ways for EASs to interact with Americans and learn about American culture. He stressed that clubs can help EASs to learn basic social skills: “They don't know how to make friends with Americans, so organizations give them a place to try out new skills and talk to students they wouldn't normally.” S6 instinctively felt this: I had to help myself to integrate by joining organizations, joining events. so I went to the events with the people that I know in that organization from time to time, it helps with your friendship.”

Clubs and organizations were identified as fertile ground for sparking communication the university received low marks from student participants for its inability to promote and “spread the word” (S4) about the wide variety of organizations available. S6 criticized the school for lacking a cohesive SM strategy to share important information such as upcoming club or organization events or how to join: “because everything's (like Instagram and Facebook) so separate [i.e. not found in one place].

Right?” There's no kind of unity. Students are confused about where to get the best information.

Research conducted on the use of SM to form “bridging” (information sharing, but not in-depth relationship building) relationships has become increasingly important. Yet partly due to the dominance of the Chinese SM platform WeChat which allows students to share/view content, comments, pay for almost anything in China, students by-in-large ignore American SM platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Students expressed interest in interacting with the university’s SM for the purposes of informing themselves of university news while searching for social and professional opportunities. Yet the university is perceived to be missing an opportunity to involve EASs in activities at the university. Interviewees and staff perceive that most departments and organizations barely post. Several students shared S4’s opinion that “[Club and departmental] posts are not interesting or important to me.” Students indicated overwhelmingly that they do not feel the university succeeds in using SM to effectively connect students to the clubs and groups that hold the most power to join students inter-culturally.

### **University-Led Interaction Facilitation**

The interview results revealed that students and staff believe that meaningful and repeated interaction with APs quickens and deepens EAS acculturation. While participants believe that dormitory life and group projects offer the most quality opportunities for the university to enable acculturative interaction, these situations present the cultural and linguistic difficulties to negotiate.

Participants said they think that the dorm environment presented a great many opportunities for students to learn American culture from their dorm mates. Some roommates received credit for helping facilitate acculturation among some of the students. Two of the students said they regarded their roommate as their closest American friend. One roommate became the most helpful American friend by mentoring one of the EAS participants. Some roommates received praise for their patience. Students feel that while most people they meet in their daily life lack the patience to allow them to formulate their thoughts some roommates demonstrate tolerance.

On the other hand, Staff 2 noted that historically speaking, “a lot of friction gets stirred up in the dorm.” Several students complained that they were ill-suited to their roommates. S6 said, “We had the same sleeping schedule, but that’s it. Everything else was different.” S5 related the story of her Chinese friend who often complained about her dorm experience. The friend expressed that her roommate ignored her requests for quiet or to clean up after herself in public areas of the dorm room. S5 said she feared speaking up for herself: “She suffered a lot because her roommates were rude, so she didn’t sleep well.” She expressed disappointment for her friend who lost a considerable amount of money because she felt forced to move out before contracted to do so.

All of the student participants who had begun their college experience in on-campus housing said that the dorm “cliques” overwhelmed them. S6, perhaps the strongest English language speaker of the interviewees explained, “I didn’t really feel like I fit in very well to the environment [in the dorm], so I moved out.” She held that the American students on her dorm floor were “grouped up” in cliques which intimidated her

to the point that she felt she did not belong. S3 regretted that he, “Never got a chance to have a close friends” in the dorm because dorm cliques seemed impermeable to him despite the fact that he spoke English well and had immersed himself in hip-hop dancing outside of AU.

The main project recommendation for this paper aims to resolve what students regard as their chief obstacle to acculturative interaction: faculty-assigned group projects. Business and computer science majors at the university report that nearly all of their courses require students to engage in some form of project-based learning. EASs recognize that such activities are intended to encourage the exchange of ideas and build rapport among group members, but they reported that often such projects heighten EASs’ sense of isolation. S1, a marketing student, said that she had been placed in numerous project groups while a student at AU. She expressed frustration that her lack of English and cultural understanding caused American group members to, “just ignore me” during discussions. She felt left out of discussions because she perceived that her APs found it easier and quicker to find solutions without waiting for her input. S3 experiences a similar separation from her group project mates due to language and cultural barriers:

I still feel like outside of the [project] group but it's okay. Yeah, maybe because of a language gap. So if I'm the only Asian, they communicate their ideas to each other. I feel I am outside because I can't express myself well.

Students reported that professors rarely assign roles to group members, so the groups often struggle to get their project plans off the ground. Group members tend to waste time as they attempt to identify the goals and strategies associated with project without the



professor's leadership. Staff 1 said that EASs can rarely take the lead in these groups because they do not have the linguistic capability to keep up with the fast pace of banter between native speakers. Despite being one of the strongest English speakers, she has never made good friends with members during group work.

S5 criticized her fellow APs for not making the effort to communicate or work hard. She experienced her APs "dropping work on other members" shortly before a presentation. Furthermore, students almost always receive the same grade for a completed project irrespective of the work each contributed to the project which also breeds discontent and barriers to communication. S5 thinks professors do not provide the proper organizational framework and leadership to each group. As a result, EASs are presented with a powerful opportunity to communicate with their fellow peers in social and constructive environment, but their efforts are defeated not only by their own language and cultural barriers but also by what they perceive as a lack of leadership by professors or accountability of each individual group member.

### **Review of the Literature**

I conducted the project literature based on the research findings and subsequent thematic discoveries regarding the opportunities for and obstacles to EAS acculturation to campus life at AU. The study findings revealed that students confront linguistic and cultural challenges in virtually all realms of campus life. This project literature review focuses on identifying obstacles and solution implemented at other institutions with the hope that such solution may be utilized by AU.

### **Search terms**

I used the Walden online library to conduct the project literature review, which provided access a number of databases including ProQuest Central, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Psychinfo, Google Scholar, education journals, and the Walden Library of Theses and Dissertations. Key search terms were : dormitory, students life, roommate pairings, group work, group projects, evaluation and feedback, intercultural communication, faculty classroom management skills, social media community-building, social media style guide, university social media strategy, managing the communicative classroom, university community-building, group evaluation rubrics, and productive ice-breakers.

This literature review highlights the peer reviewed resources that outline best practice, suggestions, and guidelines for integrating university dorm tenants, engineering academically and socially productive study groups and strategies for enhancing a sense of community via social media. Furthermore, I researched these topics with a particular focus on how these techniques and strategies are best employed to maximize EAS perception that they belong to the university community at large.

### **The Effective Dormitory**

Students agree that proper dormitory housing is one of the most important aspects of creating a positive experience for students in a university setting. Student productivity and success depends on how effectively a university manages the critical area of dormitory life for students (Akiyonde, 2014). Graham, Hurtado and Gonyea (2018) explained that the social environment of residence halls is “qualitatively different” from living off campus. They believe that living in dorms leads to involvement

in social, cultural, and extracurricular activities. The decision to live in the dorm may also hold conceivably broader student outcomes such as networking for future employment and other opportunities.

The literature describes several key factors that affect student satisfaction with a residential setting. One key factor appears to be length of time students live in the dormitories. According to Rajapaksa's (2015) study, students who persisted through the difficult early stages of getting use to shared living and who stayed all four years felt a greater sense of community and ownership over the dorm. These students, by in large, returned positive post occupancy evaluations (POEs) about their dorm experience. Students who live in the dorms throughout their college experience graduate at a higher rate than those live at home or off campus (Ike, Balwin and Lathorus, 2015). The following variables topped the list of POE complaints: roommate selection, staff engagement, and peer-student empathy (Lubis, Fauzi, Lubis, Fauzi , 2014).

Universities have boosted their exit survey evaluation results by installing an efficient web-based Dormitory Residence Management System (DRMS) for multiple purposes but principally to pair roommates. Many universities, including AU until 2017 changed from a paper-paper based system to an online one. Many, like AU, use online systems merely to collect information, but those systems have no algorithmic facility to analyze student dorm application results (Ning and Chen, 2016). For all intents and purposes, officials still pair roommates manually without the benefit of sophisticated student survey response analysis methods. The vast majority of top 100 universities in the United States use a computerized system to pair

roommates. Though sociologists Conley (2019) warns that such systems are programmed to match students based on like-ness which minimizes the possibility of students rooming with someone from a different culture or backgrounds who implement an algorithmic-based pairing system reach overwhelmingly better results than in previous years when a manual system paired roommates. The most widely used online roommate management system is Roomsync which is powered by Facebook. Such universities as University of Kentucky, University of Illinois and University of Florida have benefited from implementing Roomsync. This online application and dorm management system allows students to fill out a 25 question profile questionnaire that indicates their own living habits and also to choose the characteristics they would like in a roommate. The system stands out among the other DRMSs in its unusual capacity to allow students to choose roommates that have similar backgrounds from their own or intentionally choose someone with a different background from their own (Morgan, 2019). It can also allow the user to intentionally choose an international student for a roommate. Once the University of Florida implemented its system, roommate complaints dropped 67% in the first year (Roomsync, 2019). The system allows administrators to match students manually or based on percentage of matching answers among potential roommates.

Khan (2018) created a Dormitory Management System for the specifications stipulated by Jahangirnagar University in Bangladesh to manage their needs. The primary objectives of this system are to create a web-based room distribution, dorm activity scheduling, and fee management client. According to Khan, the system not only features a simple interface accessed by phone or computer,

it provides students with information on activities scheduled to run in the dorm via automatic alerts. This function promotes interaction between dorm students, which the research says is critical for EAS acculturation. Ning and Chen (2018) found that interaction between students enhances a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging ranked among the top three most important indicators of satisfaction among college roommates according to the post occupancy evaluation. Najib and Tabassi (2017) found that along with the condition of the facilities and staff services, students indicated that that a dorm system that takes steps to encourage a quality of social life are those which receive the highest marks.

In a comparative study of two university dormitories in Iran, Nabilou and Khani (2015) determined that the university dormitory that rated the highest between the two did so due to the exceptionally high score students assigned to the staff. Students perceived the staff to be pleasant and kind. This led all other categories evaluated, including questions about the state of the physical plant, furniture and, cleanliness, and services. Students emphasized that staff's willingness to engage with them played the greatest role in their positive perceptions of the staff. Graham et al. (2018) found that students who live in dorms have an advantage over students who live off-campus and farther away than walking distance because living in close proximity to staff and faculty allows for more interaction. Their research suggests that students learn life lessons, proper decision-making technique and how to interact as adults.

The depth and frequency of peer interaction plays a critical role in whether students achieve a rewarding college experience (Mayhew et al, 2016). Living in the

dormitory instead of off-campus provides students with the opportunity to engage in this kind of quality peer contact which promotes a sense of community and belonging among dorm residents. Friendship and residence life are considered to be vital components for national and international student adjustment and emotional well-being. A qualitative study which included national and international students' perceptions of peer-shared housing at a University in the U.K. conducted by Holton (2016) determined that international students who lived in diverse dorms or primarily with British peers felt they could form unique connections by virtue of all students having been "thrown in" for the first time living outside of their family. The study showed that students tend to "place-make" whether they are national or international students. They hope to blend in yet maintain a sense of personal or dorm room uniqueness. Students transfer their normed family life to non-familial dorm mates. This provides the foundation for community cohesion. Inter-personal relationships within the home are converted to emphasize the diverse ways unrelated adults might experience a sense of 'at-homeness' in residence halls (Wilkinson, 2014). Living in the dorms optimizes the potential for gaining a student experience and can be linked to multiple community-building practices such as friend-making, socializing, and living as family with those who are strangers (Holton, 2016).

Students perceive the experience of dorm life as both private in the family sense and public as they live in close quarters with others who are not their family members. Researchers find that living and intermingling with classmates on a daily basis creates a sense of community and understanding of how to behave and react emotionally within that community. This community which is new to students when they typically

move in as freshman acts as a natural growth step in students' progression away from family dependence and toward adult independence. They engage in community-building activities such as group dorm cleaning, movie nights or dorm-wide outing such as to a skating rink to strengthen their social bonds and create a perception of mutual concern and care for each other. Well-adapted students see the dorms as a place where students can interact and have fun outside of pressurized setting of the classroom (Graham et al., 2018).

The challenge for both domestic and international students is to adapt to the peers community of the dorm while making choices as to which activities or social occasions suit them and which may not. International students may choose not to take part in dorm activities they deem improper or outside of their values. For example, students may be under pressure to drink alcohol or participate in other new or uncomfortable social situations (Holton, 2016). Not participating in such activities can damage a student's social standing in the dorm. Students at a London university reported overwhelmingly that those who do not drink are not considered to be dorm community insiders. As a result, such students who cannot or will not adapt to community standards, regardless of the potential impropriety of the standards, may inadvertently exclude themselves from future social activities because others perceive them to be acting outside of the expected norms (Dovey, 2013).

Students seek friendships and networking opportunities in class, on-campus organization, sports teams and in the school dorms. An examination of emotional responses to stress in college freshman at a California university (Williams,

Morelli, Ong and Zaki, 2018) found that students who primarily seek dorm peers to widen their social network select those who demonstrate empathetic, helpful, caring, and positive traits. Therefore, the authors believe universities have should provide or support the inculcation of these values in the dorm staff and students. Beyond creating an open and welcoming atmosphere in the, university dorm steering and leadership committees must take purposeful steps assist international students to understand local norms and adapt to them (Holton, 2016).

### **Social Media Connections**

Today social media plays an important role in a university communicating with its students and facilitating interaction between students. For EASs, interacting with the host schools social media is an essential step in the adapting to the new culture (Gomes, Berry, Alzougool, & Chang, 2014; Ma, Ma, & Ito, 2014). Before they arrive in the U.S., international students use SM outlets to learn about the new culture. They search for and expose themselves to cultural norms and traditions but also the stereotypes and biases they will most likely face (Sawyer & Chen, 2012). In a study of Chinese students living in the United states, Ju, Jia, and Shahom (2016) found that most of their own volition regularly checks and passively interacts through “liking” their American classmates’ SM posts on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, though the government blocks these sites in China. This willingness to spend time browsing these American SM page shows an inclination to learn about American culture and to join or form local social networks. However, the allure of forming cliques with compatriots can overwhelm the desire to acculturate once students arrive in the U.S. Gomes et



al., (2014) says that sojourners must consciously place more importance on adapting to the new culture than to maintaining their home culture while living abroad. For those who successfully focus on adaptation, SM becomes an important tool for building social capital. Through the development of ‘bridging’ relationships, those that focus on sharing social and school-related information can help students feel significantly more a part of the community. Chinese students tend to use Wechat and Baidu SM applications to keep in touch with friends and family back home. They have begun to use American-based applications such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter to establish their knowledge of their host country, interact and participate in the local community, and proactively use these applications for school or work purposes (Tu, 2018). Tu found that students generate more than 75% of SM content at universities. Chinese students tend to join SM sites or pages related to their major or, to a lesser extent, those focusing on a hobby or personal interest. These students are inclined to use SM versus email because they already understand how SM newsfeeds, likes, and comment operate as opposed to the more complex formal communication style associated with email. Many students join on-campus organizations such as The Finance, The Computer Science, or The Robotics clubs because they act as a supplement to their majors. They recognize the importance of expanding their professional network through interactions with others via the SM platform chosen by the group. Ma et al., (2014) found that making deeper ‘bonding’ relationships often proves too difficult via social media, Chinese students living in a large Midwestern university successfully built bridging (information sharing) relationship with host peers via social media. Students also reported using SM platforms as

a language learning tool. Those students who most often check in and actively comment on American SM sites became more linguistically and culturally adept as they improved their English reading and writing skills through the use of those mediums. This improvement appeared to have an ameliorating effect on acculturative stress. In general, all students felt it important to use English on SM sites. The study also shows a correlation between length of time spent in the U.S and the amount of English Chinese students read or use English in their daily lives. Wechat with its one billion plus subscribers remains the number one SM recruiting tool Chinese universities use to contact and interact with prospective students (Feng, 2019). University marketing and media directors in china face increasing economic pressure to generate applicants, just as American universities do. According to the author, those universities which achieved success in recruiting students via Wechat did so by sharing policy, necessary qualifications, scholarship opportunities, and other critical university information along with highly engaging photos, videos, and links. These posts serve the dual function of providing critical information to prospective students but also strengthens and unifies the university community.

Facebook is the primary SM platform used among college bound 17-20 year-olds in the U.S to research and socially connect with universities they plan to apply to (Hesel, 2013). This researcher found that students use FB to observe student life and consider how they will fit in with the campus community. Frequently students search for information regarding majors, housing, services such as inter-campus transportation, and on-campus organization. A study at a Norwegian university (Fagerstrom

& Ghinea, 2013) found that 88% of students who engaged with a school official or student ambassador via FB applied to the university versus only 43% of students who did not use FB. Once students enroll at a university, students use this SM as one method of staying connected to the university. This connectedness positively correlates with higher grades and retention (Wilson & Gore, 2013).

Yet universities struggle to develop a uniform branding scheme across platforms or implement an effective student engagement strategy according to the authors. Research on student engagement with SM indicates that the total number of 'likes' a post receives indicates its effectiveness in engaging students. Students most commonly only use the 'like' button to engage with content because it only takes one click as opposed to 'sharing' which requires two clicks. When students comment on or share content on their own newsfeed, there is an opportunity for more stakeholders to view that content in their own feed and "like" it. Therefore, total number 'likes' can be considered a measurement of student engagement. The challenge for universities is to post content which attracts and maintains the attention of students without overwhelming them with perceived meaningless information (Holton & Chyi, 2012). The research shows that students negatively react or do not engage with the content posted multiple times or across multiple platforms. The study encourages universities to find the proper cadence for posting new content. Media and marketing directors should determine the correct mix of image, university information, and external news content to boost engagement with and between university community members, including students, faculty and staff, parents, alumni, prospective students, and other stakeholders such as

community organization or businesses linked to the university. Facebook users generally find content that includes image, videos, or fun or helpful links more attractive and are more likely to inspire students to engage. The media and marketing departments of the top 100 universities in the U.S. post images or videos one time per day for best results on engagement. Those who posted more than once a day saw diminishing returns on their posts. (Kwok & Yu, 2012).

### **Group Projects**

Group and team work have played a larger and larger roles in universities and corporate settings over the last 30 years. Thus group projects have become a primary obstacle for Asian students studying in The States. Studies by Duhrigg et al., (2016) suggested that the most effective corporate teams in the United States make their group members feel a sense of “safety” when interacting with their groupmates. That feeling was generated by members allotting an equitable amount of speaking time to each member and supporting members, even when rejecting particular opinion or suggestion. Another norm that effective groups adhere to is the intuitive understanding of how others in the group react to their tone of voice, their facial expressions and other nonverbal cues. Accepting and nurturing behavior not only supported community-building among the group or team members, but actually “raises the collective intelligence” (Duhrigg et al.) of the groups. The authors found the inverse to be true as well: groups that did not follow one or either of these norms perceived a degeneration of group intelligence and efficiency. Gilbert (2018) found that one or two group members monopolizing group discussion time inhibits group discussion

productivity more than any other behavior. Those who possess less assertive personalities and international students who speak English as a new language generally need a longer time to formulate thoughts often lose opportunities to submit ideas because they cannot compete with the dominators in the group. A group which fails to address the problem of dominating behavior by one or two members can “hobble” (Duhrigg, 2016) its ability to complete the project satisfactorily or in the allotted timeframe because not all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute.

Students are acutely aware of and affected by the body language and facial expressions used by others. Groups and group members who fail to express positive body language and facial expressions in the presence of their group members risk alienating each other from the start (Colonello et al., 2017). Students who develop and exhibit a self-awareness of how their facial gestures can positively impact the group as they act as non-verbal leaders who assist each member to feel safe to express their opinion. Such compassionate behavior lifts the productivity and intelligence of the group. Students who complete what Zalezo (2016) called executive function skills training tend to promote harmony, safety, and equality within the group. Such training teaches members to gently slow down group discussion dominators and support less assertive students to participate with the use of verbal and facial signals.

Faculty, particularly in business and STEM majors, routinely assign students to group projects. Yet they rarely provide specific instructions on project development procedure, oversight of group progress, or purposeful leadership (Natoli, Jackling, & Seelantha, 2014). When professors assign students a project, often they allow

the students to choose their own group, which often leads to a sense of apathy, apprehension, neglect and a failure to problem-solve (Maiden and Perry, 2014). Therefore, faculty or instructor leadership plays a vital role in the success of the group project. Group project success rates improve when faculty assigns roles among group members and allow each member to have an opportunity to lead during the course of the project. Faculty must spend adequate time helping students understand cooperative behaviors, including active listening, active participation, reflecting on alternative viewpoints and suggestions, asking clarifying questions, and providing constructive feedback. The number one complaint that students lodge against university group work is that only some (or one) students actively participate in producing the deliverable, while other non- or lesser participants benefit from hard work of others. Faculty must hold both the group and the individuals in the group accountable for the final deliverable produced by each group (Wooland, 2018).

University groups work effectively when faculty practice well-organized adaptive leadership techniques when forming, overseeing and evaluating group performance. This technique based on a framework developed by Crislip and O'Malley (2013) tasks group members' four actions:

- Analyze the situation: Explore the challenges and opportunities related to the project.
- Manage oneself: Know your power, weaknesses, and others behaviors that prompts you to react negatively. Endeavor to understand others opinions and

reasoning, do not shy away from necessary uncertainty and disagreement, and experiment beyond your comfort area.

- Intercede skillfully: Learn to make conscious choices to promote equality with empathetic words and body language.
- Inspire others: Engage with all members of the group. Demonstrate that the collective purpose requires the ability to develop trust among group members.

Students experience frustration when not all group project members participate or when some members are excluded from participation (Woodland, 2018). Therefore, the role of the professor who assigns the project includes continuous oversight of group progress. The professor observes the group interaction and provides direct and indirect feedback on individual student participation. Indirect feedback takes the form of re-guiding conversation that have digressed and inviting non-participants to rejoin the group by posing opinion questions to them (Natoli et al., 2014). To increase the potential for successful completion of the project, students deliver a mid-term presentation and report on project progress and problems (McCloone, Lawlor & Meehan, 2016). This mid-term assessment offers students a clear demonstration of what will be expected of them at the end of the course, so that they can make adjustments to their process or direction. The authors suggest that instructors should not interfere with group discussions but intervene when students fail to show empathy to each other, begin to monopolize discussion, or to participate altogether. By the midpoint of the semester, the professor who has asserted her or his direct leadership on the group begins to encourage

the group to take on adaptive leadership roles and take full control of the project management.

Group project assignments should conclude with a summative feedback survey and qualitative reporting. The survey should include questions about student perceptions of the effectiveness of the faculty member as facilitator, empathy and effectiveness of their partners, teamwork and communication, the opportunities to lead and resolve problems, and how the project added to their own education and professional readiness (McCloone et al., 2016). Group projects are often flawed in two essential ways. “Social loafing,” defined as a reduction in effort on the part of some students when grouped. This phenomenon occurs when some students appear to take “free ride” while other students exert time, energy, and resources to the project. Students said that unfair grading systems that assign the same grade to each student irrespective of comparative effort sometimes makes for a negative project result (Lin et al., 2019). The authors determined that professors and facilitators must make clear at the start of the project what will be the attitudinal expectation of group members. Explaining the details of the summative peer and group awareness surveys with students before the project begins strengthens the odds that the students will complete the project successfully. Hyun et al., (2018) suggested that informing students beforehand that at the end of the project they will be expected to evaluate each peer with the following types of questions produces cooperative interaction and, a stronger social network and successful completion of the project:

1. Did your groupmate prepare enough for group discussions?



2. Did the peer enthusiastically contribute in the group discussion?
3. Did the peer do his/her fair share?
4. Did the peer show respect to others in the group?
5. Did the peer show sincerity during the class?

The questions are rated by a Likert scale of 1 (never) through 5 (always). Students also have an opportunity to respond qualitatively in a lined space below each question. Students who participated sufficiently in completing tasks and in discussion, respected others, sincerely attempted to include all voices scores highest in such evaluations.

### **Recommendations**

My research unearthed a number of university units that would potentially benefit from the implementation of interventions aimed at encouraging social interaction for the purpose of the assisting EASs acculturation. I have focused on implementing an intervention for group work interactions. Students and staff interview participants agreed that the greatest potential for acculturative interaction lies in professor-assigned group project discussions. Interviewees suggested that group work was the most high stakes interaction they engage in because their own performance and the performance of their peers depends on successfully navigating the obstacles to associated with completing the project. Therefore, I recommend that faculty inform groups at the time of assignment that they will be expected to display empathetic and inclusive behavior throughout the project. They should also be informed that they will take a summative survey. According to Crislip and O'Malley (2013), this is as an appropriate intervention for the difficulties

that students outlined in the interview. The authors have found that students tend to share more of the responsibilities associated with the project and attempt include all members because they understand that their grades will be impacted not just by what the faculty member perceives about their participation. Therefore, I recommend implementing a summative survey which includes the following questions:

*I, myself:*

1. prepared for each group discussion
2. enthusiastically contributed in group discussions
3. did my fair share of the work for the project
4. demonstrated a desire to include all group members
5. showed respect to other group members

*Your groupmates:*

1. prepared for group discussions.
2. enthusiastically contributed in group discussions.
3. did their fair share of the work for the project.
4. showed respect to others in the group.
5. demonstrated a desire to include all member in group discussion and during moments of decision-making.

*Your professor:*

1. helped group make decisions on roles within the group.
2. clarified directions and goals for the group.

3. was receptive to questions about the project.
4. assisted group to re-aim or focus following the midterm.
5. professor responded to questioned in a timely and helpful way.

The questions are rated by a Likert scale of 1 (never) through 5 (always). Students are also encouraged to respond qualitatively in a lined space below each question if they would like to further explain their answers.

### **Outline of Intervention Methodology**

The purposes of implementing the summative assessment are to elicit reflection on the self, peer, and professor but also to inform group members of what specific actions and attitudes will be expected of them from the outset of the project. It will be critically important for faculty to meet with the class to read each of the assessment questions together and answer student questions pertaining to the assessment. Faculty should hold a review session of the evaluation items at the midway point in order to reiterate the salient topics in the assessment. This review aims to refocus students on the goals of communicating civilly, effectively, and productively. This also reminds the group that every student is expected to participate and that students who tend to dominate must sometimes yield to and encourage less assertive group members. Students who participated sufficiently in completing tasks and in discussion, respected others, sincerely attempted to include all voices scores highest in such evaluations.

### **Potential Problems and Solutions to Implementation**

Professors may not implement this or want to be exposed to student criticism or who may believe that the intervention would require more work than they are willing to

invest. My solution to this problem is to offer to handle much of the implementation at first. Once I instruct the professors on the process, they will find it much easier to implement in future courses. Unless otherwise incentivized by penalties, rewards, or a desire to lodge feedback for completing the survey, students may simply not complete the survey. My recommendation would be to explain to students that they will not receive their final grades until they answer the survey questions truthfully and in a timely manner.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The evidence shows that implementing an intervention for group work activities is job one. Yet significant shortfalls in the dormitory system remain. Students reported that they struggled to integrate themselves in the dorms due to cultural and linguistic barriers. The dorm activities do not appear to support the interaction between EASs and their peers. As a result, all of the students interviewed for this project moved out of the dormitory after one semester because they did not feel they belonged. The university must consider ways to help these students feel welcomed to be part of the dorm community. Failing to recognize that this student group tends to leave the dorms after the first semester will only further isolate them on campus and result in financial loss for the university.

### **Conclusion**

My study revealed a number of the areas in which the university can take steps to facilitate communication between EASs and the rest of the campus community, particularly with their APs. I discovered through the student and staff interviews that the

areas that the university can assert the greatest impact were group projects, residence life, and social media interaction. I believe that if the university took corrective measures in these realms, they would improve the student experience for EAS, their APs, and the community at large. The university would move closer to realizing its mission of developing a globalized campus and bolstering its bottom line.

## Appendix B: Staff Interview Protocol

Protocol Form

Staff Interview Protocol

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee (Name and Title): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Post Interview Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Introductory Protocol

*As mentioned in the consent form, I would like to audio record our conversations today. I am the only researcher on this project and only I and the ethics board that oversees my project will have access to the recording of this conversation which will be eventually deleted after the data has been transcribed. I would like to remind you that, your involvement is voluntary and you may refuse to answer any question or end the interview at any time should you desire to do so. This project has no intent to harm you or anyone else as a result of your participation.*

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today.*

*I have planned for this interview to last one hour at the longest. During this time, I would like to ask you a variety of questions.*

Introduction

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about the acculturation of EASs on this campus. This research study as a whole focuses on the means by which EASs acculturate, particularly with the support of the university and their interactions with American host students. This study does not aim to evaluate your involvement in this process. I am attempting to learn more about the general process by which this process takes place on campus.

### **Interviewee Background**

How long have you worked

in your position? 1-3 years 4-10 years 11 or more years

at this university? 1-3 years 4-10 years 11 or more years

What is your highest degree? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Interviewee and EASs**

1. Describe your role as it relates to EASs (Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese students).
2. How often do you have an opportunity to interact with these students?
3. What is the purpose of these interactions?

### **Institutional Perspective**

1. What is the strategy at this university for helping EAS to acclimate to campus life here?

Probes: Is it working – why or why not?

2. What resources does the university use to aid EAS student acclimation?

3. Who or what part of the university system has traditionally excelled at aiding this acclimation?

Probe: Do you see or detect a widening of the circle of individuals or groups who aim to support these students?

5. Have you or your colleagues encountered resistance by the university or HP to aiding acculturation?

6. Have you seen or heard of discriminatory behavior targeting these students?

### **EASs and APs**

1. What is the university doing to foster interaction between EASs and their host peers (HPs) in classes?

2. Have you witnessed HP making an effort to interact with EASs? In what setting?

3. Have you witnessed EASs initiating contact with their HPs?

4. How do EASs react to HPs initiating interactions with them?

5. Do you believe these interactions are important for the acclimation and/or well-being of EAS on campus? How so?

### **Protocols for Students**

#### **EAS Attitudes toward Each Other**

1. What is your perception of EASs toward each other? Do they tend to cluster together or do they often attempt to interact with their HPs?

Probe: Why do you believe they behave in such a manner?

2. What do you believe they learn about university life from each other?



Probe: Would it be more or less helpful if they learned these things from a HP?

### **Technology and Social Media**

1. What social media or internet based applications (such as blackboard) do EASs use to interact with others at the university?
2. Do you believe internet based applications foster communication between EASs and HPs?
3. Does the university encourage the use of these applications to foster relationships between students

### **International Student Groups**

1. Are you aware of any international student groups on campus?
2. What is the purpose of these groups?
3. Do these groups tend to be culturally diverse or made up of just a few cultural groups?

Probe: Do HPs tend to join these groups?

3. Are you involved with these groups in any way?

### **Depth and Quickness of Acculturation**

1. How welcoming is this university to EASs?
2. Is the university doing enough to welcome these students?
3. Is it important for EASs to acclimate? Why?
4. What are the greatest barriers to acclimation?

Probes: How can barriers be overcome?

5. How can interaction opportunities between EASs and HP be maximized?
6. What else can the university do to maximize interaction between EASs and HPs?

7. What is one change you would like to see that would promote acculturation of EASs.

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

## Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

**Protocol Form****Student Interview Protocol**

University: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee (Name, Year, Major): \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Survey Sections Used:

\_\_\_\_\_ A: Purpose of Interview

\_\_\_\_\_ B: Interviewees Background

\_\_\_\_\_ D: University Perspective

\_\_\_\_\_ E: EASs and APs

\_\_\_\_\_ F: EASs and Their Attitudes toward Each Other

\_\_\_\_\_ G: Technology and Social Media

\_\_\_\_\_ H: International Groups on Campus

\_\_\_\_\_ I: Depth and Quickness of Acculturation

\_\_\_\_\_ J: Demographics (no specific questions)

Other Topics: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Post Interview Comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Introductory Protocol for Student Interviews**

SCRIPT Researcher: This research project has the following objectives: 1) To gain a better understanding of EASs' experience as they attempt to acclimate to the university campus setting. 2) To deepen my knowledge and understanding of what factors impact the acclimation experience 3) To provide insight into what programs the university might use to support EASs. I'll be asking you a series of questions about your experiences as a full-time undergraduate student. Please feel free to ask me to repeat or rephrase any of my questions if you are unsure of what I am asking. Are you ready to begin? Here is my first question:

#### **Demographics**

1. What country are you from?
2. Gender

#### **Interviewee Background**

1. How long have you been at the university?
2. What is your major?
3. What was your mother or father's highest level of education?
4. What was their level of support for you coming to this university?

#### **Interviewee Motivation for Matriculating at the University**

1. Why did you decide to attend AU?
2. What kind of experience were you hoping for by attending this university?
3. What were your expectations about being able to feel that you belong on campus?
4. How important was it for you to interact with your APs?

### **Perspective on the University's Role in Helping EASs to Belong**

1. What are the ways the university tried to help you get use to campus life?  
Probes: Is it working – why or why not?
2. What were the ways that the university helped you interact with your APs?
3. Who or what part of the university system did the best job of helping you become a part of the campus community?
4. Have you been disappointed in any way with how the university community has treated you?
5. Were your pre-arrival expectations about becoming part of the campus community matched by the reality/

### **EASs and APs**

1. What is are professor doing to cause interaction between you and your (APs) in classes?
2. Do your APs make an effort to interact with you? In what situations?
3. What, if any, are situations when your APs do *not* make an effort to interact with you?
4. When you interact with your APs, do you usually start the conversation or do they?
5. How do these interactions make you feel part of the university community on campus?  
How so?
6. Have you or friends ever felt discriminated against on campus? Please describe the situation.

### **EAS Attitudes toward Each Other**

1. How would you describe your relationship with other (Chinese) students on campus?

2. Would you say you tend to spend most of your time with other Chinese students or with non-Chinese students?

2. What do you believe you learn about university life from each other?

Probe: Do you believe it would be more or less helpful if you learned these things from a HP?

### **Technology and Social Media**

1. What social media (SM) or internet based applications (such as blackboard) do use to interact with others at the university?

2. Who do you use these applications with?

3. Do you believe internet based applications help you feel more like you belong on campus?

4. How do these applications affect your relationships with HPs?

5. Does the university encourage the use of these applications with peers?

### **International Student Groups**

1. Are you aware of any international student groups on campus? Do you attend meetings or events?

2. What is the purpose of these groups?

3. Do these groups tend to be culturally diverse or made up of just a few cultural groups?

Probe: Do HPs tend to join these groups?

3. Are you involved with these groups in any way?

**Depth and Quickness of Acculturation**

1. How welcoming is this university to Chinese students?

2. Is the university doing enough to welcome students like you?

3. Is it important for Chinese students to feel part of the campus community? Why?

4. What are the greatest challenges to becoming part of the community?

Probes: How can barriers be overcome?

5. What are the best opportunities for Chinese and HPs to interact?

6. What else can the university do to help EASs and HPs interact?

7. What is one change you would like to see that would promote a feeling of belonging for Chinese students?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

#### Appendix D: Project Evaluation Survey

How did reading the policy recommendation paper modify your views or perception of the challenges experienced by EAS acculturation to campus life, if at all?

What do you believe are the most serious obstacles EASs face when attempting to acculturate to campus life at the university?

The paper mentions the group projects, residential life, and university-centered social media as areas where the university can assert support for these students. Which do you believe should be the university's primary (or first) concern?



What is your opinion of the potential effect of setting attitudinal expectations at the beginning of a faculty-assigned project and asking students to evaluate their own, their peers and the faculty member's attitude and performance in a summative survey?

What was your overall takeaway from the policy recommendation policy?