

DISSERTATION

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

HOW ARE THEIR NEEDS BEING MET?

Submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

#### HOW ARE THEIR NEEDS BEING MET?

An emerging trend today is the increased enrollment of international students at community colleges. International students look to American community colleges as a stepping stone to achieving an education that might otherwise be beyond their reach. They are attracted to the community college by the lower tuition costs, opportunities for guaranteed transfer to a four-year university, and the opportunity to study at a variety of geographical locations throughout the United States. California is one of the most popular destinations for international students in the United States. In 2011, more than 23,000 international students were enrolled in California's 112 community colleges. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experience of international students at selected California community colleges and explore how they perceive their needs and expectations are being met. Twenty nine international students from 19 countries were interviewed at seven California community colleges with small, medium, and large international student programs. The phenomenological interview was used as the primary method of data collection. The interview questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to discuss the wide and varied nature of their experience as international students at community colleges. Through the use of an interpretive phenomenological approach to qualitative research, five thematic structures were identified: *Reasons, Academic Experience, Social Experience, Cultural Experience, and Problems and Solutions*. The essence of the phenomenon of the international student experience at the community college is identified as: *The Stepping Stone*.

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## DEDICATION

For Sean and Ash

These things, I warmly wish for you—

Someone to love, some work to do,

A bit of o' sun, a bit o' cheer.

And a guardian angel always near.

(An Irish blessing)

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### **Background**

In 2001, 547,867 international students were enrolled in institutions of higher education in the United States. Ten years later, in 2010/2011, the numbers had risen by 32 percent to 723,277 (Open Doors, 2011). An emerging trend during this time period was the increased enrollment of international students at community colleges. From 2004 to 2011, the numbers of students enrolled in community colleges in the United States increased from 81,869 to 89,853 (Open Doors, 2011). Traditionally, international students have studied in the United States because of the quality of the educational, social, and cultural experiences available. Today, many international students are attracted by the lower tuition costs for a community college education, opportunities for guaranteed transfer to a competitive four-year university, and the opportunity to study at a variety of geographical locations throughout the United States (Raby and Valeau, 2007).

Likewise, international students are important to institutions of higher education in the United States because they support the institutions' commitment to international education and make a substantial financial contribution to the colleges and their communities. They help to internationalize the campus by adding diversity and offering a global dimension and perspective to the student body that might not otherwise exist (Dellow and Romano, 2006). This helps the institution to educate globally competent students who are prepared to contribute and participate at a competitive level in the

global job market and economy (Cardwell, 2006). A second factor is that their presence helps to promote understanding and tolerance of the universal commonalities and differences between people. This exposure helps foster peace and diplomacy throughout the world (Bell-Rose and Desai, 2006). International students also contribute to the academic repertoire and curriculum of the institution with the skills, knowledge, and experience they bring with them. This enhances the learning experience of the local students as well as the international students (Raby and Valeau, 2007). Finally, international students offer a substantial financial contribution to the institution and the community. International student fees generate a high level of income for community colleges, and in most states, the colleges are able to keep this revenue (Evelyn, 2005). For these reasons, international students are a valuable asset to schools, colleges, and universities in the United States

California is one of the most popular destinations for international students in the United States. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 96,535 international students were enrolled in California institutions of higher education making California the highest ranking state for international students in the country (Open Doors, 2011). In 2010-2011, the net contribution from international students in tuition and fees and living expenses to the state of California was a total of \$2,991,641,000. In 2010, approximately 23,300 international students were enrolled in California's 112 community colleges. Based on enrollment numbers, 12 California community colleges ranked in the top forty leading community college international student programs in the nation. The ranking started with the highest number of 6,261 students in Houston Community College, Texas. Santa Monica Community College ranked highest in California and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation with 3,107

international students, and De Anza Community College was 3<sup>rd</sup> in California and 4<sup>th</sup> in the country with 2,374 students. Grossmont College ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in California and 29<sup>th</sup> in the country with 719 international students (Open Doors, 2011).

Developments in California during the past twenty- five years reflect the growing commitment to international education in the state. The California Colleges for International Education (CCIE), a non-profit, educational consortium was formed in 1985 to promote international understanding through education. Its goals were to:

encourage development of an international perspective in community college classrooms; increase awareness of and encouragement in international development through technical education; promote opportunities for sharing of international/intercultural expertise; form liaisons between national organizations and consortia involved in international and intercultural education activities; and provide an international and intercultural education resource body to the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges (CCIE, 1985).

In 1999 the California Global Task Force stated that its vision was to support “Learners in developing an awareness of and shared accountability for international and global competencies, at home and abroad, preparing them for full participation in our increasingly multicultural communities” (CCIE). The California Education Code Sec. 66010.4.3 also included the following “a primary mission of the California Community College is to advance California’s economic growth and global competencies through education, training, and services” (Official California Legislative Information).

The California International Education Policy Resolution was signed into law on September 11, 2002, affirming California’s support for international education and encouraging “institutions of higher education to support programs relating to learning about different cultures, global issues, and promoting the exchange of Californians and international students” (Official California Legislative Information). The resolution was

added to California's Education Code as Section 66015.7 International Education Policy Resolution. In the 2008-2009 academic year 84 of the 112 California community colleges were members of CCIE and were reported to be involved in some or all of the following initiatives: Faculty Exchange Programs; International Business and Trade; Internationalizing Curriculum; International Development and International Distance Learning; Study Abroad; and International Student Programs (CCIE).

In his May 28, 2009, address, Chancellor Scott of California's Community Colleges, affirmed his commitment to international education and encouraged community colleges to pursue and develop the following four areas: "Education Abroad, International Students to your Campus, Professional Development of Faculty and Staff, Incorporate Global Economy into the Curriculum." Scott cited the "economic benefit ... and enrichment to [the] entire student body" as the major advantages and that the end goal "is to inspire our own domestic students with first-hand knowledge of others in the world and to bring academic excellence to all students" (Scott, 2009, p. 2).

California leaders and educators have expressed their commitment to international education and international students at California community colleges. They recognize the benefits that international students bring to the student body, the campus, and the community and are working to ensure success in this area. Likewise, enrollment trends clearly indicate that California community colleges continue to be a top destination for international students.

California community college international student programs range in size from large programs with as many as 3,000 students to small programs with as few as 15 students. Community colleges with a strong commitment to their international student

programs have a dedicated budget for staffing, resources, recruitment, and international student activities. They have a clear view of the benefits of international students on their campus and have a desire to increase their numbers. They have a history of international student recruitment and are actively involved in recruitment. They generally have adequate staffing and resources to serve the needs of their international students. Fitzer (2007) refers to community colleges with an enrollment of more than 500 international students as “high-pursuit” institutions. However, smaller international student programs can also be identified as having a strong commitment to recruiting and serving international students. Many of California’s community colleges are “low-pursuit” colleges (Fitzer), where the budget allocation for international student recruitment, activities, services, and staffing is very small or non-existent. Basically, international students have access to the same services as the local students except for visa and immigration processing. They pay the same tuition as international students in the larger international student programs, but they may not get the same services. For this study, I will refer to international student programs with more than 1,000 international students as large programs, those with 300 to 1,000 students as medium, and those with fewer than 300 international students as small programs.

### **Problem Statement**

Two major occurrences in the first decade of this century have impacted international students and the community colleges which host them. The aftermath of the September 11, 2001 (9/11), attacks saw some serious changes in the process and experience for students interested in attending U.S. colleges and universities as visa and immigration regulations became increasingly stringent and challenging. Numbers

dropped at that time, and students looked for opportunities in other countries such as the UK, Australia, and Canada. Recent publications by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, point to a growing concern that U.S. institutions of higher education may have lost their competitive edge in attracting international students in the post 9/11 era.

A second concern is the economic crisis that has affected colleges and universities throughout the United States resulting in major reductions in funding, resources, and course offerings. In 2009-2010, the California community college system took a reduction of \$520 million (8%) in state funding, which followed a \$400 million cut in the 2006-2008 period. The 2009-2010 cuts resulted in a reduction of 38,000 fewer course sections offered. This reduction in course offerings along with strict adherence to enrollment caps resulted in 140,000 fewer students enrolled from the previous year. Similar reductions took place in 2010-2011. Current projections are that there could be a \$264 million cut for the upcoming academic year if the proposed tax initiative is not passed on the June 2012 ballot. This is expected to deny access to hundreds of thousands of students throughout the state.

International students will find it increasingly difficult to enroll in the courses they need for graduation, transfer, and fulfillment of their visa requirements of enrollment in twelve units per semester. Payment of their international student tuition fees of \$3,000 or more per semester does not give international students priority registration status, nor does it guarantee that they will be able to procure a space in a class. Some might question the community colleges' commitment to serving international students and argue that international students should not take up spaces that are needed for local students first,

particularly at a time when California's community colleges are expected to deny access to such a large number of students.

In addition, limited resources make it difficult for community colleges to provide the on-campus support needed by international students. While some community colleges have dedicated funding for recruitment, staffing, and resources to support an international student program, many do not. Very often, colleges depend on one staff member, whose work with the international students is just one of his/her many job responsibilities. The staff member is responsible for recruiting students, staying current on visa and immigration regulations, processing and overseeing students' papers, and responding to any issues that arise regarding the international students' status at the college. This person may be the only person on campus with whom international students interact and bond. Without the appropriate personnel and support services due to severe budget reductions, it is very difficult for international students to "see the campus as their home; a place to spend the entire day; a place where friendships and support are evident" (Frost, 2007, p. 14).

My fear is that international students are pursued for their financial contribution to the institution but may not be receiving adequate services and resources. Those colleges that have dedicated funding and staffing continue to be able to support their international student programs. However, smaller colleges have more limited resources and staffing and are more severely affected by the budget cuts. Services for international students are therefore seriously impacted. The problem is that limited resources, support services, and a reduction in academic offerings make it increasingly difficult for institutions to meet the educational, social, and cultural goals of the international students on their campuses.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experience of international students at selected California community colleges and explore how they perceive their needs are being met in terms of their educational, social, and cultural goals. The study will identify factors that influence international students in their choice of community colleges, identify their educational, social, and cultural goals, and examine how their needs and expectations are being met. The study is intended to identify those aspects of the international students' experience that support them in achieving their goals, highlight gaps that impede the fulfillment of these goals, and identify emerging themes related to the international student experience at community colleges.

## **Research Questions**

The main research questions are:

1. How and why do international students choose a particular community college?
2. What are the educational, social, and cultural goals of international students at their respective community colleges?
3. How do/did they expect their chosen college to meet their needs and fulfill their expectations?
4. How have those needs and expectations been met?
5. What are some ways in which their needs have not been met?

## **Significance of the Study**

The September 11, 2001, attacks changed the face of international education in the U.S. and had a particularly significant impact on international students and programs in the United States. The rate of growth in international student enrollment in the U.S.



(Table 1) increased by 6.4% from 547,867 in 2001 to 586,323 in 2002. However, in 2002/2003, the numbers dropped by 0.6% to be followed by a -2.4% drop in 2003/2004 and a -1.3% decrease in 2004/2005, when the U.S. had 565,039 international students. The growth rate picked up again in 2006, but there were significant changes in the distribution of students between 4-year undergraduate programs, graduate programs, and 2 year programs. In 2008/2009, the rate of growth for 4 year undergraduate institutions was 10.9%; the growth rate in graduate programs dropped from 11.0% in 2001/2002 to 2.3 in 2008/2009. However, the most significant growth was in 2-year and non-degree institutions with an increase from 1.6% growth in 2001/2002 to 27.4% in 2006/2007, 20.1% in 2007/08, and 10.6% in 2008/2009. Clearly, the new trend was to see a major increase in enrollment of international students in community colleges (Open Doors, 2011).

Table 1

*International Students in the USA*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of International Students in the U.S.</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
2000/01	547,867	
2001/02	582,996	6.4
2002/03	586,323	0.6
2003/04	572,509	-2.4
2004/05	565,039	-1.3
2005/06	564,766	-0.05
2006/07	582,984	3.2
2007/08	623,805	7.0
2008/09	671,616	7.7
2009/10	690,923	2.9
2010/2011	723,277	4.7

The number of international students at community colleges continues to increase. They come to American community colleges because of the low-tuition and the opportunities to transfer to four-year universities. Community colleges welcome them because of the impact they have on the local students, the college, and the community. Many community college students have had little or no opportunity to interact with citizens from other nations and need that exposure to broaden their horizons. Community colleges leaders have expressed their commitment to hosting international students on their college campuses. The enrichment factor for the students, the college, and the community is invaluable. However, many community colleges have shrinking resources and face increasing frustrations serving their student populations. Within this context, international students are often low on the priority list, and colleges are ill-equipped to serve their needs.

Research studies have focused on international students at the post-graduate and graduate level at four-year universities and on large international student programs at community colleges. While much of the literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this study explores the perspective of educational leaders, managers, administrators, staff, and faculty members about the presence of international students, international students programs, and international education on their community college campuses, very little research has been done to capture the experience and perspective of the international students themselves.

This study will examine and explore the key components of the international student experience at small, medium, and large community colleges, and determine the

extent to which international students perceive their needs and expectations are being met. The study will conclude with a summation of the criteria that international students consider instrumental for them to achieve their goals. This information may assist community college recruiters, staff, administrators, and faculty to evaluate how to continue to attract international students to their campuses and make the best use of their limited resources to serve the needs of their international student populations.

### **Researcher Perspective**

I have worked with immigrants and international students at the university and community college level and am currently working in a large community college district with a small international student program. International students in a large and established international student program benefit from the support system of these programs but may have limited interaction with American students. International students in smaller institutions have a different type of experience as they have to be more independent and may tend to integrate more with American students. I expect that my findings will show that a variety of factors contribute to fulfilling the international students' needs and expectations and that it cannot be assumed that one experience is better than the other. If administrators, staff, and faculty at small, medium, and large community colleges become better informed about international students' expectations and experiences and how their educational and personal goals and expectations are being met, they can learn more about the general and specific factors that impact that outcome.

### **Delimitations**

The study will be limited to students in California community colleges. Since California has 112 community colleges, there are adequate types of community colleges

to choose from. By interviewing fifteen to thirty students at different colleges, there should be adequate information to allow me to examine the international student experience and identify emerging themes that might apply to community colleges elsewhere in the country.

### **Limitations**

The study is only focused on California community college students. Therefore conclusions are limited and not generalizable.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

The Literature Review gives an overview of research in the area of international education starting with the historical background and the components of international education. It examines the reasons why U.S. universities and colleges have pursued and continue to incorporate international education into their mission. The review focuses on the area of international students and international student programs and discusses the benefits of international students in our universities and colleges, the criteria that influence their decisions in choosing a particular type of institution, and various aspects of the international student experience. While the review of literature includes research carried out in American and overseas universities and colleges, of particular interest is recent research that explores the experiences and perceptions of international students and community colleges.

### **Historical Background**

Scanlon (1990) traced the development of international education back to the writings of Comenius, Montaigne, Rousseau, Kant, Fichte, and Penn and outlined the historical framework for the development of international education through the centuries. He claimed that the desire for nations to cooperate and work together for peace was expressed after every major war from the seventeenth century onwards. In 1876, at the International Conference on Education, John Eaton, U.S. Commissioner of Education called for the foundation of a permanent organization that would coordinate and oversee

efforts for international education and conferences. After World War I, the Committee for International Cooperation and the International Bureau of Education were established. With the introduction of the Fulbright Act in 1946, Americans got an opportunity to study abroad; in 1947, the Truman Commission emphasized the importance of developing international awareness among U.S. citizens and acknowledged the community college's role in achieving national and international peace and democracy (President's Commission, 1947), and the establishment of the Peace Corps in the 1960s gave young Americans an opportunity to volunteer overseas and helped to raise awareness of world affairs and issues among community members.

It was not until the early 1970s that community colleges became interested in international education. Rockland Community College, in New York, established an office of international education in 1969, and by 1975, had introduced international and comparative analysis, language and civilization offerings, and study abroad programs into its curriculum. In 1976, more than 50,000 foreign students were studying in community colleges in the United States, about one third of all foreign students studying in the U.S. While some argued the need for internationalization within the mission of the community college, others felt that it was not their responsibility and that the focus of the community college should be on the immediate community rather than the international one (Scanlon, 1990). Scanlon cites the importance of the government publication *Strength Through Wisdom* in 1979 (Perkins, 1979) in recognizing the important role of the community college in providing and promoting international education, international literacy, and a forum for exploration of world cultures.

Fersh (1990) reported that in 1978 the U.S. Commissioner of Education called on the community colleges to lead the initiative towards international education, and the following year, President Jimmy Carter identified the community college as playing a central role in educating and sensitizing the community about international education. The increased interest in international education was motivated by world changes, developments in technology, and vocational instruction. This was also a time of increased interest in economic globalization within the United States. Fersh included the Brevard Community College mission of international education as “referring generally to all programs, projects, studies, and activities that help an individual learn and care more about the world beyond his or her community and to transcend his or her culturally conditioned, ethnocentric perspectives, perceptions, and behavior” (p. 68). Fersh claimed that international education “should not only increase one’s knowledge but should enhance one’s wisdom and affinity with humanity” (p. 68).

In 1982, the AACC adopted a policy statement on International Education, which acknowledged and stressed the need for Americans to be internationally aware and competent to function successfully within the “diversity of cultures and systems both within and beyond our national boundaries” (AACC). The document identified a number of activities that would help Americans achieve these skills and competencies, some of which were: foreign language exchange programs, study abroad programs, foreign students on U.S. campuses, faculty exchange programs, and the provision of technical assistance to other countries. The inclusion of global dimensions in the curriculum, cultural and ethnic studies and forums on foreign policy issues, and the significance of the leadership role to be played by the community college were also mentioned.

Philip Venditti (1992) presented examples of what was being done to promote international education in community colleges around the U. S. in the early 1990s and discussed the reasons why community colleges should be involved in international education. According to Venditti's estimates in 1992, the financial value of 350 foreign students to a college would be approximately \$450,000 and \$4 million to the local community. At that time about a third of all U.S. colleges and universities had a multicultural requirement with 12% of schools focusing on domestic diversity 29% on global multiculturalism and 57% that included both. Venditti also included statistics that pointed towards the United States' dependence on international trade. One in every six jobs in the U.S. at that time depended on international trade; one of every three acres of U.S. farmland produced food for export overseas; and about 33% of the profits of American businesses at that time were generated overseas. International security was also mentioned as the U.S. spent about \$608,000 per minute on defense at that time.

In 1994, the American Council on International Intercultural Education (ACIIE) and the Stanley Foundation published a report titled "Building the Global Community: The Next Step," which documented the discussions and conclusions reached by twenty-four participants at a conference to clarify the mission and goals of the community college in international and intercultural education, and to identify strategies and future plans. They defined global education as "an umbrella term that describes a range of activities encompassing intercultural, multicultural, and international education" (ACIIE & Stanley Foundation). The report stressed the importance of embracing global education and incorporating it into the comprehensive mission of the community college. It proposed that community college students develop knowledge and an understanding of



global interdependence, global peace, and conflict management, global environment and natural resources, and alternatives for the future.

In the opening address for the “Building the Global Community: The Next Step” conference, Richard Stanley described the present era as a time of “interconnectedness and interdependence,” when the role of hierarchy is declining, decision making is no longer centralized, and people look beyond their church and state to define their identity. He urged the community colleges to take on the responsibility of preparing “a globally competent citizen” (p. 25). Stanley defined globally competent citizens as “people who are knowledgeable about the world and who possess the skills, values, and commitment appropriate to the support of quality, long-term survival of all human beings” (p. 25).

The participants of the conference identified six strategic areas for global education program development: establishing support for global education among college personnel, business and industry, and the community; using organizational partnerships; harnessing new technologies; consulting with other nations; coordinating efforts among colleges; and celebrating diversity and respect for commonalities.

John S. Levin (2001) discussed how the community college was forced to reconsider its role and mission in light of changes in the global economy. In “Globalizing the Community College: Strategies for Change in the Twenty-First Century” (2001), he examined globalization theories and trends as they evolved in the late 1990s, and through his case study of seven community colleges, demonstrated how these trends caused internal changes in the community college. While globalization and immigration were not new features in American life, their form in the 1990s was quite different from previous decades. The 1990s saw changes in the management of production, new developments in

the speed and capacity of technology, and a large wave of immigration from Asian and Eastern European countries. As a result of these developments, community college programs changed to meet the needs of the labor market. His study suggested that the community college mission shifted in the 1990s from serving local communities to serving the global economy and became a “globalized institution.” Levin analyzed the impact of globalization on four domains within higher education: economic, cultural, information, and political, and the ways in which community colleges included these changes into instructional delivery and curriculum as a response to the changing trends in globalization. One of the most significant developments was the internationalization of the community college campus witnessed in the recruiting of international students, development of international studies programs, and sponsoring of projects in other countries.

In 2000, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) conducted a survey of community colleges in the U. S. regarding their involvement in international programs and services. Of the 1,171 colleges which responded, 82 % reported having international components in their courses compared with 40% in 1995, and 83% of colleges reported sponsoring activities to promote global awareness on campus and community, compared with 43% in 1995. Colleges were recruiting increasing numbers of international students, bringing greater diversity to campuses and their surrounding communities.

The September 11, 2001, attacks had a dramatic impact on international education in the U.S. and caused a sudden decline in the numbers of international students. NAFSA’s January 2003 report stressed the importance of a “highly visible campaign” to

dispel global perceptions that the U.S. does not welcome or value international students (NAFSA, 2003). In June 2006, NAFSA published a second report, which updated and expanded upon the 2003 recommendations. Again, the report expressed major concerns that the U.S. was losing its status as an attractive destination for talented international students looking for better opportunities elsewhere. The report pointed to “a failure to adjust our thinking about security and immigration to the realities of the age in which we live” (NAFSA, 2006).

In his December 2009 NAFSA report, Johnson, urged U.S. policymakers to introduce visa and immigration policies that were more open and accessible to international scholars and students. His concern was that talented students would look to other places that were more easily accessible and offer better opportunities. He acknowledged the Obama Administration’s commitment to “constructive U.S. engagement in the world, to an economic recovery that would enhance long-term economic competitiveness, and to robust student, scholar, and citizen exchanges” and urged Congress and the administration to work together to “ensure that the United States can be open, accessible, and attractive to the world’s best students and talent” (Johnson, 2009).

Gillespie (2006) discussed the impact of the September attacks and argues the need for a stronger commitment to international education. Gillespie believed that “we need to consider not only how to make our curricula more international but also how our educational practice contributes to, mitigates, or acts as a corrective to America’s role as real or perceived global hegemony” and suggested that international education initiatives be based on the principles of “mutuality and equality” as opposed to “profit and loss” (p.

262). Clearly, the literature points to the significant impact of the 9/11 attacks on international education and international students in particular.

### **Importance of International Education to Higher Education**

The literature review revealed a number of reasons why international education is important to higher education and specifically the community college. These reasons were discussed by Venditti (1992), Evelyn (2005), Dellow and Romano (2006), Cardwell (2006), and Bell-Rose and Desai (2007) Boggs and Irwin (2007), and Raby and Valeau (2007). First, changes in the global economy had a direct effect on the U.S. educational system and society. Dellow and Romano (2006) discussed the impact of globalization and off-shoring on the community college and the need to prepare students to deal with increasing globalization in our society. With an increasing number of jobs being outsourced, a changing technology, and new consumer demands, many workers are faced with retraining in order to reenter the job market (Dellow and Romano, 2006). In order to assist reentry students and prepare them to compete in a global economy, community colleges need to undertake policies that will internationalize the campus and prepare students to interact with workers in other countries. Students need to know about other countries, cultures, and languages and acquire the competencies and skills they need to compete in a global market. Research carried out by the Committee for Economic Development in 2006 indicated that four out of every five jobs in the United States have an international connection and that the community colleges would be “remiss” if they were not preparing their students to succeed in this new economic environment (Raby and Valeau, p. 9).

The Bureau of Economic Analysis reported in April 2005 that U.S. companies achieved \$315 billion in overseas profits in 2004, with a growth of 78 percent over the past ten years decade (Bell-Rose and Desai, 2006). This growth in profits was far greater than the growth of domestic profits by U.S. companies. The predictions were that graduates from U.S. high schools and colleges would be buying, selling, and working in a world market and competing for jobs with people in different parts of the world for many jobs. Therefore, Cardwell (2006) stated, it is vital to prepare our graduates to access foreign markets, and the way to do this is through comprehensive global education.

Second, Bell-Rose and Desai (2006) discussed the changes in the political situation and national security needs since the September 11, 2001 attacks and “subsequent events” in Afghanistan, Iraq, North Korea, and elsewhere. They also identified threats to national and global security and stability: the HIV/AIDS pandemic, terrorism, poverty, nuclear development, the possibility of a global flu epidemic, global warming, and other forms of environmental destruction. They identified the need for political and business leaders who would communicate our values of democracy and free enterprise around the world, security and military personnel with global and cultural knowledge and skills and the ability to speak languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Korean and Farsi.

Third, Raby and Valeau (2007) discussed the “humanist rationale” (p. 9) for international education and stated that students need to learn to understand and respect differences among people in our multicultural society in order to be able to resolve conflict and live in peace and harmony. They referred to this as “international literacy” (p. 9). According to Bell-Rose and Desai (2006), we are citizens of a world community,

and we need to understand how forces inside and outside our country are interconnected. U.S. students today need to be prepared to provide leadership on “sustainable development, conflict resolution, social justice, and human rights” both within the U.S. and around the world. (p. 11). Boggs and Irwin (2007) discussed the need for community colleges to prepare students to live in an increasingly global society and economy. They quoted from Sebastian Padron, the president of Miami-Dade College in Florida who said that the world “is populated by far too much misunderstanding, hatred and violence,” and that making international education a high priority will enable people to move beyond the “narrow ideas” that separate them (p. 26). Boggs and Irwin urged community colleges to make global understanding and communication an integral part of their mission. Cardwell (2006) wrote that people with a global education would have a better understanding and appreciation of people in distant cultures and would have more of an interest in their welfare thus creating more lasting and peaceful relationships between peoples and nations. Fersch also advocated that international education “involves learning not only about others but also about ourselves, how and why we are alike and how and why we are different, how we became the way we are, and what we can become” (Fersch, 1989).

Finally, Raby and Valeau (2007) stressed the importance of international education to the community college environment, student population, and curriculum. They referred to this as the “academic integrity rationale” (p. 9), based on their belief that international themes are an essential component of the curriculum. For example, a student in a health related field needs to be aware of the health issues associated with migration from other countries. Boggs and Irwin acknowledged the expansion of the community college curriculum to include global aspects such as international student recruitment programs,

study abroad programs, and faculty and staff exchanges. The article stressed that the community college and its mission must embrace international education, emphasize inclusiveness, and recognize the importance of study abroad opportunities. Study abroad programs and the presence of international students in the community promote a greater understanding of the commonalities and differences between people, counteract “insularity” and “provincialism” and create stimulating and enriching classroom discussions thus preparing students to live, work, and communicate successfully in an increasingly diverse and global community. Venditti (1992) also noted the need for a global perspective in all areas of study, and emphasized the central position of the community college as “the point of entry into the mainstream” for newly-arrived foreigners as well as ethnic minorities in the U.S.

A number of factors motivate community colleges to attract international students. Evelyn (2005) noted that international students have a high retention rate, and many are able to go to school fulltime without working and participating in campus activities because they have financial support from their family. They generate a high level of income for community colleges, and in most states, the colleges are able to keep this revenue. Estimates are that international students spend about \$13 billion a year on tuition and living expenses in the U.S., and community colleges get about \$2 billion of that amount. Evelyn gave the example of Los Angeles Community College, which claims an income of about \$3.8 million per year in tuition from its 950 international students and Bunker Hill Community College, in Boston, which generates about \$3.75 million from its 500 international students.

In his qualitative study (2007), Fitzer examined the motivations for and implications of enrolling foreign students at California community colleges. The study found that colleges enrolling significant numbers of foreign students received substantial financial, cultural, and academic benefits. One of the most important motivators identified was the opportunity to create a more diverse campus through the presence and participation of international students on campus and the interaction between them and the local students. A second motivation or benefit was that international students help the local economy's labor needs because they offer a range of different skills. Finally, the financial benefits of recruiting and enrolling international students were significant especially at times of budget cuts.

However, not all parties are in agreement that international education should play a prominent role in the mission of the community college. Raby and Valeau (2007) acknowledged that while there is strong support for international education, many community colleges are experiencing serious under-funding and a lack of support for international programs and program reduction. One of the major arguments against the globalization or internationalization of the community college is that too much focus is placed on vocational education and economic trends to the detriment of other aspects of the community college mission. Second, Evelyn (2005) raised the concern that local students are being turned away because of budget constraints, and places are being given to international students instead because of the attractive revenues collected from foreign student tuition. Falcetta (2005) acknowledged the benefits of study abroad programs, but, he claimed, the typical community college student who works an average of 20 hours a week cannot afford the cost of such a program. Thus, access is not equitable for all



students. A fourth concern mentioned by Raby and Valeau was that institutions should focus on the needs of their specific geographic communities and that the focus on international education would actually compete with programs that support the local community.

Green and Siaya (2005) reported on a study carried out by the Center for Institutional and International Initiatives, which evaluated how community colleges are internationalizing their curricula and student experiences and identified common strategies among colleges that have actively pursued international student programs. The study examined the responses given by 233 community colleges to an institutional survey conducted in 2001 by the American Council on Education. One of the conclusions about international education and community colleges was that study abroad programs are central to international academic opportunities, but there was no direct correlation between the presence of international students and the level of internationalization.

In his qualitative study (2007), Frost, identified four key components of global studies programs, and outlined ways to integrate global studies into college curricula. The four components were inclusion of programs with a global context, a study abroad component, a requirement for completion of a foreign language sequence, and an ongoing professional development seminar for students and faculty. International student programs were not included as one of the components.

Raby and Valeau's (2007) response to concerns about international student programs on community college campuses was that community is no longer defined by geographical boundaries and that we need to consider our community as global. Students need equitable access to international education as well as study abroad programs. In fact,

the community college has historically offered these opportunities to a larger number of low-income and minority students than any other higher education institution. Some community colleges, according to Falcetta, have responded to this challenge by offering shorter-length study abroad programs for students in order to meet their goal of access for all. Raby and Valeau responded that by cutting back on funding, we are discriminating against community college students. If students do not have access to international education and the opportunity to experience and understand the global world at the community college, they may not get that chance elsewhere as many will not transfer to the four-year university.

### **The Student Experience**

This section of the literature review presents findings from recent research about criteria that influence students' choice of institution, what students look for when they choose an educational institution, the measures colleges and universities are taking to recruit international students, how international students feel about their experience and the challenges they experience, and how significant the social aspect of the college experience is for academic success. The studies reviewed in this paper were carried out at U.S. universities, U.S. community colleges, and international institutions. By identifying the location of the research, the researcher hopes to identify the shortage of research on international education at American community colleges and the need for studies such as this.

### **Criteria that Influence Students' Choice of Institution**

Ruby's quantitative study (2007) explored college choice factors that influence international graduate students in their decisions to attend graduate programs in the

United States. The researcher determined that the major factors related to college choice for international students were (1) general characteristics, including program and institutional characteristics, (2) recruitment and marketing practices, (3) financial incentives such as scholarships and graduate assistantships, and (4) faculty reputation and research opportunities. Results indicated that these general factors were most influential in determining college choice, followed by recruitment and other influences.

Wongpaiboon's comparative study (2008) was carried out among international undergraduate students at the University of Southern Olivia (USC). The researcher surveyed USC international students from 2003 and 2008 to compare the reasons why the international students chose USC for their academic programs. For the 127 respondents in 2003, the first reason was the scholarship or funding offered (25%), second the low cost of tuition (24%), and third family ties to the institution or town (18%). However, for the 34 respondents in 2008, the first consideration was the reputation of the institution (50 %), followed by the institution's reputation towards internationals (38 %). The third consideration was for scholarships or funding offered (32 %) (p. 73).

Another interesting difference was how students learned about USC. 40 % of the 127 2003 students received most of their information about USC programs from their friends or families; 15 % of them learned about USC through educational exhibitions; and 13 % received their information from the Internet or other media sources. In contrast, eighty-eight percent of the 34 respondents from 2008 reported that they learned about USC from the Internet, 85% got information from their family and friends, and 8% got information from through an educational counseling service and educational exhibitions. The increased use and impact of the internet as a recruiting tool was clearly identified by

2008 international students at USC. In 2003, 13% of students received information from the internet while in 2008, 88% of students learned about USC from the internet. Family and friends also play a significant role in the recruitment process (40% of students in 2003, 85% in 2008). And finally, alumni networks, friends and relatives were identified by 55% as the most effective; contact through home university or college was 24%; information distribution through websites, consulates and recruitment offices was identified by 17%; and presentation of information through other media such as TV or newspaper was ranked fourth by 7% of respondents. While Wongbaipoon's USC study gave some insights into students' experiences with services at USC in the years 2003 and 2008, it yielded little generalizable information about students' experiences and satisfaction with college services.

In Binsardi and Ekwulugo's (2007) study, four leading reasons for choosing a country and institution were identified. Forty four percent of the 62 respondents chose international recognition as the first reason. Ease of university entrance and immigration procedures ranked second (31 %). The opportunity to work during and after the course of study was third (16%), and the fourth was the cost of living and other reasons (9%) such as the shorter degree duration of the UK education system and other personal reasons. The USA was the main competitor (chosen by 44% of the participants), with Australia at 23%, Canada at 20% and other countries at 13%. 37% of the respondents chose price factors as a significant aspect to attract more international students; 31% chose availability of scholarships; 21% chose student care and services; and 11% chose facilities such as libraries, computers, etc.

The purpose of Mallet's (2007) quantitative dissertation study was to investigate recruitment activities and college choice factors that influenced international undergraduate enrollment at 61 (48 public and 13 private) universities in the United States. The study examined recruitment practices, reasons why international students choose to attend particular institutions of higher learning, and administrator's perceptions of student choices. Mallet concluded that international students consider the following factors when choosing an institution to study at: academic reputation, recommendation of family and friends, and geographic location.

Popular recruitment activities include virtual tools such as websites and listservs, brochures, and mailing lists, domestic recruitment from local high schools and intensive English language bridge programs, and overseas recruitment travel. Overseas travel is used more often by private institutions than public institutions (Mallet, 2007).

In summary, international students consider the following factors when choosing an institution to study at: academic reputation, recommendation of family and friends, and geographic location, program and institutional characteristics, recruitment and marketing practices, financial incentives such as scholarships and fellowships, and faculty reputation and research opportunities, ease of university entrance and immigration procedures, job opportunities, cost of living. Popular recruitment activities include virtual tools such as websites and listservs, brochures, and mailing lists, domestic recruitment from local high schools and intensive English language bridge programs, family and friends and overseas recruitment travel.

In conclusion, research into international student recruitment, choice factors, success factors, and satisfaction levels has been carried out among university graduate

and undergraduate students, but very little research has been carried out among community colleges. Since there is a significant increase in the number of international students choosing to attend U.S. community colleges, further research is needed in this area.

### **Challenges**

A major challenge for international students identified in an Australian study (Sawir et al, 2007) was loneliness—personal, social, and cultural. For this study, Sawir interviewed 200 international students from 30 different countries who were studying at nine Australian institutions. The interviews, which lasted 30 to 50 minutes, covered a range of topics—finances, living arrangements, work, family, friendships, networking, language, experiences with authority, personal safety, and culture. The study concluded that international students experienced loneliness due to separation from family and loss of family support, difficulties in establishing social networks due to age differences, language, and cultural barriers, and the challenges of maneuvering in their new institutional settings. The study also pointed to the importance of the role of institutional relationships and institutional responsibility in the experience of the international students and cited the example of Hong Jie Zhang, a 25-year-old international student at the University of Canberra, whose “badly decomposed” body was only discovered 7 months after her death. The authors of this study acknowledged the importance of strong support networks for international students and that students frequently look to friends and same-culture networks. However, they concluded that the institution has an important responsibility in addressing this function. They also suggest that “friendly classrooms, competent administration, and sensitive student services are more significant for

international students than for domestic students” (Sawir et al, p. 170).

Cultural loneliness has a deep impact on international students according to the authors of this study. In order to adjust to the new culture, they would need to “set aside core elements of their identity” with severe consequences. Examples cited include adopting “an ideology of possessive individualism” in place of a collective ideology, or “a reduced commitment to the extended family,” or even having to “drink alcohol to mix successfully with local students” (Sawir et al, 2007, p. 171). While the authors acknowledge the importance of “nationally defined student organizations,” and “make[ing] friends among their national compatriots or other international students,” they stress the importance for international students of forming and developing “relations with local students.” Their suggestion for doing this is to create interactions between international and local students “based on sharing and mutual respect in a common learning setting.” This will be possible if local students have the openness and curiosity to learn more about the lives and cultures of the international students at their institutions.

Galloway and Jenkins (2005) examined adjustment problems of students at two private, religiously affiliated—in California and Texas. They surveyed 417 international students and 70 faculty and administrators who oversaw them. The student response rate for the students was 52% with 215 surveys returned, and of the 70 faculty and administrators selected for the study, 44 responded—a response rate of 63%. The researchers used the *Michigan International Student Problem Inventory* (Porter, 1993) , which included 11 variables: admission and selection, orientation services, academic advising and records, socio-personal, living and dining, health services, academic advising and records, student activities, financial aid, placement services, and the English

language. Students were asked to rate the variables as major, moderate, or minor problems. Results, according to the researchers, pointed to “nothing worse than minor problems” (p. 178). In ranking the problems from most problematic to least problematic, the three biggest problem areas were financial aid, placement services, and the English language. When faculty and administrators’ perceptions of student problems were rated, the researchers concluded that they “overestimated the extent of the problems that the international students were facing” (p. 181). And, there was also a significant difference in the ranking of problem areas. For example, financial aid was ranked first by students but eighth by faculty and administrators. The researchers also used hierarchical regression analysis to examine the relationship between the 11 variables and the independent variables of gender, marital status, country of origin, time at the university, and problems with the English language. Their findings suggest that problems with the English language had a greater impact on student problems than any other demographic factors.

Galloway and Jenkins (2005) made a number of significant suggestions based on their findings: the need for administrators to understand the range of international student problems, the importance for international students to have a strong command of the English language, and the importance of adapting programs to meet the needs of individual students or student groups rather than using a “one-size fits all” approach (p. 186).

While this study identified a wide breadth of possible problem areas for international students and showed the disconnect between student perceptions and faculty/administrator perceptions, it did not provide a deep understanding of the extent



and nature of the problems experienced by the international students. This researcher would argue that it is very difficult to achieve this without individual interviews with international students.

In their (2007) study, Senyshyn, Warford, and Zhan examined the adjustment process of international undergraduate students at the University of Tennessee. Findings from this study identified students' national origin as an important variable in their adaptation to the new culture. Students from Central and Western Europe and Canada appeared to have fewer problems than Asian students. With regard to gender, males appeared to feel more satisfied and confident and have fewer adjustment problems in the new culture. Length of stay and academic status were also significant with overall adjustment improving for students the longer they were at the university. English ability also impacted students' academic and social adjustment. Students with TOEFL score ranges from 590-609 appeared to have a more positive experience than students in the lower score range of 530-549. One of the limitations of the study was the small sample size and response rate. Of the seventy-one subjects in the study, the response rate was 42.25% with responses from 30 students.

Positive relationships have been identified in previous research between student engagement and academic performance. The goal of Parikh's (2008) study was to find the relationship between student engagement and academic performance (GPA) among international undergraduate students – the main research question. Parikh set out to show that international students do not necessarily need to be socially engaged in order to succeed academically. University of Buffalo international students had a higher than normal mean GPA but were less involved in extra-curricular activities on campus. This

mixed-method study investigated the question of how students could perform so well while they were socially disengaged. The main research question examined the relationship between student engagement and academic achievement (GPA). The College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) was administered to approximately 300 international students to collect data on the different ways in which they were engaged on campus. Findings suggested that the international students at the University of Buffalo were more heavily involved in campus academic-type activities with a positive relationship to GPA, such as library and computer use, extra reading and hours of study. On the other hand, their mean scores were lower on involvement in personal and social activities, which are negatively related to GPA. The implication was that interpersonal relationships with peers and social experiences had little direct impact on grades.

Epstein Chernoff's (1996) mixed methods study looked at differences in factors that motivate success among international students and two other groups of immigrant students (1. permanent residents and 2. asylum seekers, refugees and paroles) at Miami-Dade Community College, in Miami, Florida. The perception of the researcher was that international students were more successful overall than other immigrant groups at Miami Dade Community College. They had higher grades, were in more of the Honors programs, and were more involved in co-curricular activities. Epstein Chernoff's goal was to investigate the factors that motivate students to make the decision to leave their home country and study overseas (explored through qualitative research) and the factors that motivate them to succeed (examined through quantitative research).

The questionnaire consisted of 106 items grouped into 15 variables: (1) Task Orientation, (2) Perseverance, (3) Parental Affection, (4) Fear of Failure, (5) Social

Acceptance, (6) Success/Failure, (7) Future Orientation, (8) Involvement, (9) Parental Restriction, (10) Test taking, (11) Competitiveness, (12) Independence, (13) Rigidity, (14) Unidentified, and (15) Anticipatory Behavior. For each of the variables, the findings showed that international students were significantly higher than the other two groups in all areas. For all of the fifteen variables, international students showed higher motivation attributes than students in the other groups. Compared to the other two student groups, international students were more successful at the institution compared to the other two student groups as measured by such variables as GPA, Credits Earned and Honors Awards.

In summary, the literature reviewed showed that international students encounter a range of challenges that include personal, social, academic, and cultural. In-depth research of student perceptions is limited and warrants further research.

### **Recent Research Studies about the International Student Experience**

Chen's (2008) study surveyed dissertations on international education completed between 2000 and 2007 as an assessment of developments in international education – and identified areas of significance to community college educators. Of the 368,039 dissertations completed between 2000 and 2007, Chen's initial search identified 93 as related to international education and community colleges. After closer examination, 29 were found to focus on aspects of international education and community colleges. One dissertation was about studying abroad at community colleges, and 14 were about international students at American community colleges. Chen identified the following emerging themes: faculty and administrators' experience and perception of the internationalization of community colleges; international students' experiences,

perceptions and performance at community colleges; government policy, recruitment and enrollment of international students; and the benefits of international education.

Samman's (2005) dissertation presented faculty and administrator perspectives about internationalization of community colleges. The suggestion was that successful internationalization requires time, shared visions, collaborative leadership, and a dedicated resource. Dean (2007) identified six key points for internationalization of community colleges which included president's leadership style, professional development, and accountability. Beckford's (2003) mixed-methods study presented the perceptions of 119 presidents and chief academic officers at community colleges. Some of her conclusions were that community colleges were slow to internationalize their community colleges. Kissell (2007), Stroman (2004) and Chao (2004) focused on international students and their experiences in English as a Second Language programs.

Cohen (2007), Doku (2007) and Zeszotarski (2003) studied the experience of international students at community colleges. Cohen (2007) presented 26 distinct challenges and barriers for international students at community colleges as identified by 144 students and 39 faculty. The most common barriers were time and effort in English, misunderstanding, disrespect from faculty, staff, and fellow American students, lack of information about community college services and procedures, stress, family, and finances in a new cultural environment. Practical solutions included increased institutional support that would address a broad range of students' concerns; an international student office; professional development to help faculty understand and support international students, and international student orientation. It is important to recognize that Cohen's definition of "local international students" included "non-visa

students who may be refugees, immigrants or other permanent residents, and possibly citizens, but who identify with another country, were raised in another country's traditions, and were schooled for many years in another country” (Cohen, p. 14).

Doku (2007) examined experiences of international students at two community colleges in the United States. This qualitative study presented findings from interviews with 18 international students about the reasons for their choices, and about their social and academic experiences. Doku found that tuition costs, recommendation of friends and family, and employer sponsorship were the major reasons for students’ choices. Challenges included difficulties adjusting to the United States system of education, speaking up in class, locating available resources and services. Positive experiences included instructor support and academic resources. One of the major conclusions of Doku’s studies was the importance of social interaction and the existence of a strong support system for international students. The majority of participants in this study reported that they socialized with other international students on campus and participated in activities organized by the International Students Office.

Zeszotarski’s (2003) study examined international students enrolled in a California community college and their background expectations and experiences. The researcher used a mixed methods approach with a survey of 110 international students and interviews with 20 students. The interviews focused on students’ expectations about study abroad, the impact of previous international experiences, and definitions of global competencies. Zeszotarski concluded that students expected to benefit from the flexibility of the American system of education, get career training that they would not get at home, and gain long-term career preparation for a global market. Students chose to study at

community colleges because of the transfer opportunities, cost of tuition, and academic flexibility.

Fitzer's (2007) dissertation examined the motivations for and implications of enrolling foreign students at California community colleges. In this qualitative study, two types of colleges were examined: "high-pursuit" institutions, which pursue international students aggressively, and "low-pursuit" institutions which do not. Ten administrators from three different high-pursuit institutions and eleven administrators from two low-pursuit colleges were interviewed. The study found that colleges which enroll significant numbers of foreign students receive substantial financial benefits and tangible cultural and academic benefits. However, administrators at low-pursuit institutions were divided on benefits received. The high-pursuit institutions generally have transfer education as their priority mission. The study also found that there had been no significant displacement of domestic students by foreign students at any of the institutions included in the study. Finally, only colleges that have certain community characteristics and conditions succeed in high-pursuit and high enrollment of international students.

In summary, international students encounter challenges in social, cultural, and academic situations. They experience loneliness and social isolation and need strong support networks. Adjusting to the new culture and finding opportunities to experience the American culture first hand can also be challenging for international students. Academic challenges include coping with the English language, speaking up in class, maneuvering through the new system of education, and finding the necessary resources. Research suggests that the involvement of the institution, the students' personal characteristics and cultural background, and length of stay in the country are significant

variables in determining how international students cope with the challenges they encounter. Further research is needed to determine the impact of the different types of community college programs on international students and their goals.

### **Conclusion**

The Literature Review has given an overview of research in the area of international education starting with the historical background and the components of international education. It has examined the reasons why U.S. universities and colleges have pursued and continue to incorporate international education into their mission. The review focused on the area of international students and international student programs and discussed the benefits of international students in our universities and colleges, the criteria that influence their decisions in choosing a particular type of institution, and various aspects of the international student experience. One of the weaknesses identified in the review of literature is the lack of research about international students at community colleges, and in particular, research that explores the experiences and perceptions of the international students. This study will contribute to the body of research by examining how the goals and expectations of international students are being met at California community colleges.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experience of international students at selected California community colleges and explore how they perceive their needs are being met in terms of their educational, social, and cultural goals. The study will identify factors that influence international students in their choice of community colleges; identify their educational, social, and cultural goals, and examine how their needs and expectations are being met. The study is intended to identify those aspects of the international students' experience that support them in achieving their goals, highlight gaps that impede the fulfillment of these goals, and identify emerging themes related to the international student experience at community colleges.

The main research questions:

1. How and why do international students choose a particular community college?
2. What are the educational, social, and cultural goals of international students at their respective community colleges?
3. How do/did they expect their chosen college to meet their needs and fulfill their expectations?
4. How have those needs and expectations been met?
5. What are some ways in which their needs have not been met?

Chapter Three of the study includes five main areas: (a) an explanation of the research methods and procedures and how the chosen method of inquiry fits with the



purpose of the study; (b) procedures used for population and site sample selection; (c) the techniques used to collect and record data; (d) details about the data analysis process; and (e) the trustworthiness of the process.

### **Research Methodology**

Qualitative research methodology is based on the understanding that “meaning is constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 3) and that the researcher seeks to understand “how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them” (Glesne, 1992, p. 5). A qualitative approach was used for this study because it allowed me to “understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved [and] to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu” (Glesne, p. 4).

Interpretive phenomenology was utilized to carry out this study. According to Patton (1990), phenomenological research is based on “the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience” (p. 70). The essence of the experience is uncovered as the participants explore and describe their everyday human and social experiences and give their perspective of their experience. They give meaning to their experience and their reality. This type of qualitative inquiry enabled me to collect detailed in-depth insights into the experience of the participants, to analyze and compare participants’ experiences and in this way to identify the essence of being an international student.

### **Population and Site Selection**

The study was carried out at selected California community colleges with international student programs of different sizes. My goal was to select two small, two

medium, and two large international student programs at California community colleges. The 'small' programs are those with fewer than 250/300 international students; 'medium' have between 300 and 950 to 1,000 students; and 'large' refers to programs with more than 1,000 international students.

My goal was to select colleges through a nominated sample of programs at community colleges which are committed to their international students and international student programs. Initial selection of the colleges was based on information collected through a questionnaire distributed to administrators of international student programs at California community colleges. Over the course of three months, the survey was distributed twice through the NAFSA Region XII list serve for California community colleges. Respondents were asked to nominate three California community college international student programs for best practices and reputation. Four colleges emerged based on the ten responses from international student program staff and administrators. My second step was to consult with a leading expert in the field of international education in California and ask for her recommendations. She suggested that I go with the recommendations that I had, and she gave me two additional suggestions. She also gave me the names of key contact staff members or administrators at each of the colleges. From these two steps in the process of site selection, I made contact with six colleges, four of which agreed to participate in the study. Two of the colleges had small international student programs, one medium, and one large. I decided to begin my study and work on selecting two more colleges as time went on. Based on conversations with the gatekeepers at the colleges I visited and contacts I made at the NAFSA Region XII conference in November 2011, I chose three more colleges.

In the weeks prior to the study, I initiated contact with administrators and staff members at the first four selected colleges. I mailed a letter of introduction to the coordinator or administrator of the international student program at each college. I followed this up with an email and phone call. The most important part of this step was identifying the key person with whom I should communicate. Establishing strong communication with the appropriate personnel at each of the colleges was one of the most important steps in the process of selecting sites and participants. For the large programs, this was generally the international student advisor and not the director or coordinator of the program. This contact went smoothly for the first two colleges as I had established contact with the coordinators of the programs in the year prior to my study. I had email and telephone communication with the third college, a small college, but only succeeded in getting their involvement in the study when I knocked on the door of the International Student Office and had a face to face conversation with the director and administrative assistant. For the fourth college, a medium program of around 900 students in an urban area, I failed to get a response to my emails and phone calls from the director, but I finally got in touch with the international student advisor and got great help and support from him. I chose the fifth college based on my need for a large college. After a number of attempts to make contact with the program administrators, I got in contact with an international student advisor who was very willing to assist me in my study. However, despite many attempts to solicit student participation, only one student agreed to participate. I still needed two more colleges—which I found through workshops and conversations at the NAFSA conference. I made face to face contact with the key personnel at the conference and subsequently communicated with them by email.

The designated staff member served as the gatekeeper for my research at each of the selected colleges. My goal was to identify eighteen to twenty-four participants for the study, three to four at each of the six colleges. With the help of the gatekeeper, I distributed a demographic survey to the international students at that college. This survey included a brief description of my research, my contact information, and a questionnaire requesting demographic information, willingness and availability for interviews. My intention was to review the surveys that were returned to me and then select the participants based on the information I collected.

All of the students would have to be F-1 visa holders and enrolled full-time at the institution. F-1 visa holders are foreign/ international students who have been granted visas to study full-time at a U.S. institution and are expected to return to their home country on completion of their studies. Other criteria used for selection would be based primarily on cultural diversity. My goal was to achieve cultural diversity by including students from different Asian countries, Europe, South and Central America, the Middle East, and Iran if possible. For the 2009-2010 academic year, the top ten countries of origin for students at U.S. community colleges were South Korea, Vietnam, China, Japan, Nepal, Mexico, Hong Kong, India, Taiwan, and Brazil (Open Doors, 2010). I hoped to include a participant from each of these countries and others included in the list of the top twenty-five countries of origin.

Length of study at that particular community college, linguistic ability, and willingness and openness to participating in the study would also be considered. I felt that it would be preferable to include students who had had sufficient time attending the community college, at least one semester, to be able to reflect on their experience and

evaluate how their needs and expectations were being met. Student interest in the study and willingness to participate were also important factors in selection of participants. I intended to follow Moustakas' (1994) guidelines in selecting participants who have "experienced the phenomenon," are interested in "understanding its nature and meaning, and are "willing to participate in a lengthy interview." They also needed to agree to the interview being recorded and the data being published (p. 107). Stringent adherence to these criteria for selection of participants proved difficult. The first challenge was that the gatekeepers did not always have the means to distribute and collect surveys from a large group of students. Secondly, when the gatekeepers distributed the survey, students did not always respond. The reality was that selection of students took place in two ways.

Based on the information they received, international students responded to the gatekeeper and volunteered to participate. The gatekeeper then asked them to contact me directly. The second method was that gatekeepers contacted students whom they thought would be willing to participate, explained the project to them, and asked them to contact me directly. In both cases, the gatekeepers sent me the student names and contact information. The involvement of the gatekeeper in this process was a key piece in getting students to participate. Another change from my original plan was to increase the number of participants from 18-25 to 24-30. I did this because at some of the colleges I had more than three volunteers and I was interested in hearing about their experiences and did not want to turn anybody away. Given that one of my criteria for selection was to include participants who were interested in "understanding its nature and meaning, and are "willing to participate in a lengthy interview" (Moustakas, 1994), I felt that I needed to be open to hearing whatever these students wanted to share with me. Once I had

“selected” the participants and received names and contact information from my gatekeepers, I made initial contact with the participants.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to the interviews, I created a profile of the selected colleges based on information from two main sources: (1) the administrator survey, and (2) document analysis. The administrator survey included information collected about budget, staffing, resources, demographics, and specific services and activities offered to international students. The document analysis included promotional materials, orientation materials, and relevant web materials. Having this information in advance helped me to situate the participants within the context of their institution, and it gave me a clearer understanding of what to listen for in my interviews.

Before the interview started, each student was asked to complete the demographic summary and sign the Informed Consent Form, which explains the purpose of the study, the process for data collection, and how the transcripts would be handled and eventually destroyed. Time was allowed to explain the process to the participants, to answer any questions that came up, and for me to introduce myself to the participant. The participants were told that they could stop the interview at any time, and I made every effort to put them at ease. During or directly following the interview, I reviewed demographic information to ensure accuracy and clarify any information that appeared to be missing.

The location of the interviews was determined with the help of the gatekeeper on each campus. I was able to use an office, an empty classroom, or a private study room in the library. I conducted interviews face to face at six of the seven colleges. Due to distance and time constraints, three interviews at the seventh college were conducted

using Skype. Three other interviews of participants who had missed their interview appointments but were still eager to participate were conducted on Skype. One interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes was conducted with each student. A digital recorder was used to record the interviews, and I used a second recorder for back-up. The interview began with the following opening statement: *“I would like to talk to you today about your experience at this college. I will ask you some questions to guide you through the interview, but feel free to include any information you would like to include.”* I had prepared a set of questions in advance (Appendix 1), but I adjusted my questions based on the participants’ description of their experience. I also gave participants the flexibility to talk freely about their experiences.

The phenomenological interview was used as the primary method of data collection. “The phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). As described by Moustakas, the phenomenological interview begins with a short informal conversation between researcher and participant in order to create a sense of ease and trust. The focus of the interview is to allow the participant to “focus on the experience . . . and then to describe the experience fully” (p. 114). My responsibility as the researcher was to create a comfortable environment that will allow the participants to participate honestly and fully.

The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after each interview was completed. In order to capture the students voices as closely as possible, grammatical or vocabulary errors were not corrected at that point.

## **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, I used Moustakas' (1994) methods of data analysis as derived from human science research investigations (p. 120) because his approach has systematic steps and clear guidelines which incorporate textual and structural descriptions.

Moustakas uses four stages for data analysis: (1) The Epoche Stage, (2) Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction, (3) Imaginative Variation, and (4) Synthesis of Meanings and Essences. In the first stage, we "clear our minds, and put away whatever might color our interpretation of what we hear." As we approach our field work, we do not take a position, and "every quality has equal value" (p. 87). The second stage involves four steps: bracketing, horizontalization, clustering the horizons into themes, and organizing the horizons and themes into a coherent textual description of the phenomenon.

Bracketing involves examining the phenomenon based on its own intrinsic meaning and not the meaning imposed from the outside by the researcher. In order to do this I needed to set aside and 'bracket' my own prejudices and viewpoints prior to the interviews.

Using phenomenological reduction, I constantly returned to the essence of the experience to uncover the inner meaning of the experience. Using horizontalization, I laid out all of the data, weighed each part with equal value, and as I proceeded with my data analysis, I excluded statements that are irrelevant, repetitive or overlapping. This follows Moustakas' modification of Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of data analysis.

Moustakas recommends listing every expression that is relevant to the experience, checking each expression to be sure that it captures an element of the experience and that it can be abstracted and labeled (Moustakas, p. 120).



I then clustered the horizons into themes and wrote up a textural description of the phenomenon—what the participants experienced—for each participant. The third stage, Imaginative Variation, involved developing a structural description of how each of the participants described the conditions, situations, or context of their experience, identifying underlying themes and universal structures, and searching for examples that illustrate the themes. I then created a large table of horizons clustered into themes and included a line reference to supporting data from the transcripts. The final stage involved a synthesis of the textural and structural descriptions into “a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

### **Trustworthiness of the Process**

Trustworthiness and reliability for this project was established through the series of steps in the research process. I will seek to achieve trustworthiness and reliability by using the following procedures (Creswell, 2007, p. 191):

- The interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber, and I checked them for accuracy.
- Member checking was used. I shared my analysis and interpretation of the interview with each participant and sent my findings and conclusions to each of them for feedback and commentary.
- Triangulation involved examining different data sources of information and using relevant information as justification for themes. The sources used were the demographic summary, the transcribed interviews, college published materials, and the researcher’s field notes.

- As much contact as possible was established prior to the campus visits. And, I visited six of the seven campuses.
- I enlisted the help of an external auditor, a professional acquaintance, who was not familiar with the project to read through and check for clarity.

### **Conclusion**

The experience of international students enrolled in California community colleges was explored in this qualitative study to determine if and how their needs are being met at California community colleges. Throughout the process of selecting the site and participants, determining the research methods and procedures, collecting, recording, analyzing, and validating the data, I sought to identify emerging themes related to international students' experiences. I acknowledge that this is not a definitive study. I chose to use an interpretive phenomenological approach to qualitative research as it allowed me to capture the essence of the experiences described by the participants.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### **Introduction**

Chapter Four contains four parts. The first part describes the institutions and the characteristics of the small, medium, and large international student programs in the study. This part also introduces the participants. Part two presents the thematic structures of the phenomenon that emerged from the analysis of the data. The five structures are *Reasons, Education, Social Experience, Cultural Experience, and Problems and Suggestions*. The social experience is different from the cultural experience in that the social experience has to do with interaction and relationships between people whereas the cultural experience involves getting to know and learning to adjust to the American culture. The third part contains a textural structural synthesis of the thematic structures following Van Kaam's method of phenomenological analysis (Moustakas, 1994) and, how they come together to describe the international student's community college experience. Finally, part four describes the essence of the phenomenon: *The Stepping Stone*.

### **Institutions and Participants**

#### **Institutions**

I interviewed 29 international students at seven community colleges: two of the international student programs were small, two were medium, and three were large. The descriptions of the community colleges contain some general geographic information, some demographic information, student enrollment at the college, and a description of the

international student programs, which includes details about the size of the program, the student demographics, revenues generated, and any relevant information that was available.

Table 2

*Enrollment and Revenues*

<b>Institutions with pseudonyms</b>	<b># of Int'l Students</b>	<b>Tuition &amp; Fees (thousands)</b>	<b>Living Expenses (thousands)</b>	<b>Total w/Dependents (thousands)</b>
Black Mountain College (BMC)	1,508	\$9,804.10	\$29,354.00	\$37,283.00
Green Valley College (GVC)	1,125	\$5,654.90	\$26,670.40	\$30,885.30
Yellow Beach College (YPCC)	1,115	\$7, 195.00	\$29,221.80	\$34,731.30
Green River District (GRD)	950	\$5,618.70	\$20,955.50	\$25,389.80
Red River College (RRC)	281	\$1,313.40	\$6,312.50	\$7,286.00
Blue Lake College (BLC)	95	\$509.90	\$1,241.40	\$1,673.20
Orange Grove College (OGC)	51	\$223.60	\$1,206.60	\$1,376.10

**Large International Student Programs**

**Black Mountain College.** Black Mountain College (BMC) is located in a large metropolitan area. The college has approximately 22,000 students, about 1,500 of whom are international students representing 57 nations. The International Student Office (ISO) has a director, two staff members—an international student advisor and an admissions officer—one full-time counselor, and five to six student assistants. BMC’s largest group of international students is from Korea, with the second largest from China. The ISO actively recruits overseas. BMC’s website includes a welcome from the director and offers a counseling blog in addition to a series of presentations on topics such as academic success, transfer, and choice of major. The website also offers information about home stay programs and furnished apartments within walking distance from the college. The ISO website publishes an International Student Handbook and regular newsletters. BMC requires a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of at least 500 (paper based), 173 (computer based), or at least 61 (internet based). Students

must score 5.5 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTs) or 4 on the International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP). The college receives about \$9,804,100 in international student tuition and fees per academic year. An estimated \$37,283,000 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

**Green Valley College.** Green Valley College (GVC) is located close to a large metropolitan area. The college has approximately 30,032 students, and 1,150 of them are international students representing more than 100 countries. The International Student Office (ISO) has a dean of international education and eight staff members—a director for International Programs and a director for International Marketing, one full-time academic counselor and three part-time, an international student advisor, an admissions officer, and five to six student assistants. GVC’s largest group of international students is from Hong Kong, with the second largest from China, and then Indonesia. The ISO actively recruits overseas. GVC’s website offers links to information on academics, employment, transfer, and driving in the U.S. GVC requires a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score of at least 500 (paper based), 173 (computer based), and at least 61 (internet based). Students must score 4.5 on IELTs or 3.5 on the iTEP. The college receives about \$5,654,900 per academic year in international student tuition and fees. An estimated \$34,731,300 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

**Yellow Beach City College.** Yellow Beach College (YBCC) is a large community college. The college has approximately 16,000 students, approximately 1,100 of whom are international students. The International Student Office (ISO) has a director

for International Programs, two academic counselors, three international student advisors, and a number of student assistants. YBCC's largest group of international students is from China. The ISO actively recruits overseas. YBCC's website offers links to information on visa regulations, housing, academics, employment, clubs and organizations. New students are required to take an English assessment test for placement but are not required to have a TOEFL score. The college receives about \$7,195,000 per academic year in international student tuition and fees. An estimated \$30,885,300 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

### **Medium International Student Programs**

**Green River District.** Green River District (GRD) is a four-college district located in a large metropolitan area. The district serves approximately 28,500 students with an international student program of 900 to 950 students. The International Student Office (ISO) is located at the district office, which is close to one of the college campuses. The ISO has a director, an academic counselor, two international student advisors, and a number of student assistants. GRD's largest group of international students is from China. The ISO actively recruits overseas but also attracts international students already in the area. GRD's website offers links to information on visa regulations, housing, academics, employment, clubs and organizations; the ISO also publishes a regular newsletter. International students need a score of 610 (paper based) or 61 or above (internet based) on the TOEFL, or an IELTS score of 6 in order to be eligible to enroll in regular college classes. The college receives about \$5,618,700 in international student tuition and fees per academic year. An estimated \$25,389,800 is

generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

**Red River College.** Red River College (RRC) is located close to a large metropolitan area. RRC has approximately 19,000 students, 320 of whom are international students. The International Student Office (ISO) has a coordinator of international programs, one part-time academic counselor, two international student advisors, an administrative assistant, and two to three student assistants. One of the advisors recruits overseas; one advisor recruits locally from private language schools and intensive English programs in the area. RRC's website offers links to information on academics, housing and home stay programs, and transfer. RRC requires a TOEFL score of at least 450 (paper based), 133 (computer based), and at least 45 (internet based). Students must score 4.5 on IELTS or 3.5 on the iTEP. The college receives about \$1,313,400 in international student tuition and fees per academic year. An estimated \$7,286,000 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

### **Small International Student Programs**

**Blue Lake College.** Blue Lake College (BLC) is located in a small city of approximately 18,000 residents. BLC has approximately 1,200 students. Fifty percent of BLC's students are Hispanic, and BLC has about 95 international students. There is one director, an advisor who is responsible for academic counseling and immigration matters, and an administrative assistant. The ISO director recruits actively both nationally and internationally. BLC is one of 12 California community colleges that have dormitories. It attracts students from around the world, but the majority of its international students are

from Asia. BLC does not require a TOEFL test, but students take an assessment test. The college receives about \$509,900 in international student tuition and fees per academic year. An estimated \$1,673,200 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

**Orange Grove College.** Orange Grove College (OGC) is located in a city of about 200,000 residents. OGC has approximately 18,000 students, 51 of whom are international students. OGC has one full-time counselor who is also the coordinator of the international student program and two student assistants, who are usually volunteers. The ISO does not have an operational budget and does not receive any funds from international student fees. The ISO recruits locally and through the website. Its International Club is supported by community members who help organize social activities and housing for the international students. OGC's website offers links to information on academics programs of study, visa regulations, the local area, and club activities. OGC requires a TOEFL score of at least 450 (paper based), 133 (computer based) and 45-46 (internet based); OGC also accepts other internationally recognized tests. The college receives about \$233,600 in international student tuition and fees per academic year. An estimated \$1,376,100 is generated in living expenses by international students and their dependents in the community.

### **Participants**

I interviewed seven students at two community colleges with small international student programs, nine students at two medium-sized international student programs, and thirteen students in large international student programs at three large colleges. Of the 29 participants in the study, 16 are between the ages of 18 and 21; six between 22 and 25,



six between 26 and 35, and one is over 35. Participants came from Albania (1), Argentina (1), Brazil (1), Mainland China (3), Costa Rica (1), France (1), Greece (1), Hong Kong (5), India (1), Indonesia (1), Japan (3), Korea (2), Macau (1), Philippines (1), Romania (1), Russia (1), Thailand(1), Vietnam (1), and Zimbabwe (1). Twenty-four students came to the community college with a goal to transfer to a four-year university. Five of the participants had completed their bachelor’s degree prior to moving to the United States; two of the five decided to start their education over with a different major whereas the other three were planning to do post-graduate studies and were taking classes at the community college in order to meet the requirements for legal status while waiting for their permanent residency. The majority of the students whom I interviewed are supported by their parents, particularly those students in the 18 to 25 age bracket. Those students who were recruited to the large colleges are funded by their parents. However, the older students, aged 26 and over, are supporting themselves with some help from their families.

Table 3

*Participants in the Study*

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Length of time in the United States</b>
1	James	Thailand	30	OGC (small)	1.5 years
2	Chen	Hong Kong	18	OGC (small)	1 year
3	Elaine	Philippines	23	OGC (small)	2 years
4	Hiroshi	Japan	22	BLC (small)	2 years
5	Young-Soo	Korea	30	BLC (small)	1.5 years
6	Koyuki	Japan	20	BLC (small)	1.5 years
7	Larissa	Russia	20	BLC (small)	2 years
8	Lara	Russia	43	GVC (large)	5 years
9	Sarah	China	20	GVC (large)	6 months
10	Lily	China	21	GVC (large)	1 year
11	Alex	Hong Kong	18	GVC (large)	1 year
12	Daniel	Indonesia	18	GVC (large)	1 month

	<b>Participant</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Length of time in the United States</b>
13	Henry	Hong Kong	18	GVC (large)	1 month
14	Austin	Hong Kong	18	GVC (large)	1 year
15	Olivia	Brazil	27	GVC (large)	2 years
16	Sophia	Hong Kong	19	GVC (large)	1 year
17	Khloe	China	19	YBCC (large)	1 year
18	Robert	Romania	23	GRD (medium)	2.5 years
19	Farai	Zimbabwe	21	GRD (medium)	1 year
20	Sakina	India	19	GRD (medium)	10 months
21	Antonio	Argentina	35	GRD (medium)	3 years
22	Aiko	Japan	20	GRD (medium)	2.5 years
23	Sebastian	Costa Rica	28	GRD (medium)	8 months
24	Nicole	France	21	GRD (medium)	1 year
25	Dinh	Vietnam	24	GVC (large)	4 months approx
26	Ilyas	Greece	28	RRC (medium)	2 years
27	Min-Kyung	Korea	24	BMC (large)	2 years
28	Anna	Macau	19	BMC (large)	1.5 years
29	John	Albania	22	RRC (medium)	2 years

**James.** James is a 30-year old male student from Thailand. He has been at OGC for three and a half years. His native language is Thai. He describes his English level as high-intermediate. He has a degree in English from Thailand and worked for four years in hotels in his native country. He came to Orange Grove because he had an American teacher in Thailand from here and they became friends. James stayed with this friend when he first came. His major is Interior Design. His goal was to transfer to a four-year university, but he may not be able to do so because of the cost.

**Chen.** Chen is an 18-year old male student from Hong Kong. He has been at OGC for one year. His native language is Cantonese. He describes his English level as intermediate. He graduated from high school in Hong Kong. He came to this area because he has an aunt and uncle in the area with whom he lives. He hopes to major in Engineering, get a master's degree, and return to Hong Kong.

**Elaine.** Elaine is a 23-year old female student from the Philippines. She has been at OGC for two years. Her native language is Tagalog. She describes her English level as intermediate. She has a Pharmacy degree from the Philippines. She came to Orange Grove because her parents moved here from the Philippines. She is on an international student visa and attending community college while she is waiting for her permanent residence and deciding what to do next. She lives with her parents. She plans to return to the Philippines and study medicine.

**Hiroshi.** Hiroshi is a 22-year old male student from Japan. He has been at Blue Lake College for almost two years. His native language is Japanese. He describes his English level as beginning. He dropped out of high school in Japan and worked for about three years. He came to this area because his sister is a student at this college. He lived in dorms when he first came. Now he shares an apartment. He wants to study geography and travel the world.

**Young-Soo.** Young-Soo is a 30-year old female student from South Korea. She has been at BLC for a year and a half. Her native language is Korean. She describes her English level as beginning. She has a two-year degree in hotel management from a college in Korea and worked in a hotel in her native country for eight years. She decided to go college because she wanted to improve her English. She came to BLC because it does not require a TOEFL score, it has dormitories, and it is in a small, safe city. She learned about it through an agency. She is unsure of her major. Her goal was to transfer to a four-year university, but she may not be able to do so because of the cost.

**Koyuki.** Koyuki is a 20-year old female student from Japan. She has been at BLC for a year and a half. Her native language is Japanese. She describes her English level as

intermediate. When she was in high school in Japan and heard her friends planning where they would go to university; she decided that she would like to study abroad just to get away and have a new and different experience. She came to this college because they have dorms. She learned about it through an agency. She is a Resident Advisor in the dorms. She plans to transfer to a four-year university and major in Business and Tourism.

**Larissa.** Larissa is a 20-year old female student from Vladivostok, Russia. She has been at BLC for two years. Her native language is Russian. She describes her English level as intermediate, but she sounds closer to advanced. She came to the U.S. because she wanted to get an American education, broaden her experience, and follow her parents' dream for her. She is majoring in Criminal Justice and expects to transfer to a four-year university within a few months. She has completed her AA degree. She chose this college with the help of an agency because of its location and the fact that it has dormitories. She is a Resident Advisor in the dorms.

**Lara.** Lara is a 43-year old Russian student who left Russia in 2000. She spent five years in Israel with her husband and then moved to the U.S. Lara graduated from university in Russia and has an MA in Russian Language and Literature. She has worked in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. She would like to do a master's degree in Psychology. She is studying at the community college while she waits for her permanent residency. She has been at GVC for a year and a half.

**Sarah.** Sarah is a 20-year old female student from China. She has been at GVC for six months. Her native language is Mandarin. She describes her English level as intermediate. She came to the U.S. because she wanted to get an American education and because it was her parents wish for her. Her strongest subject is math; she hopes to

choose a major within the medical field. She expects to transfer to a four-year university within a few months. She used an agency to help her find a college and this was the only college the agency suggested. Her first months in the U.S. have been overshadowed by her parents' divorce, the breakup of her relationship with her boyfriend, and a conflict with one of her instructors.

**Lily.** Lily is a 20-year old female student from northern China, near to Hong Kong. She has been at GVC for one year. She completed one year at university in China with English as her major. She decided to leave China and study abroad because this would be a way for her to study English, learn about the culture, and transfer to a four year university. She works in the International Student Office and has changed her major from English to Accounting. Lily feels that that she is not like other Chinese students. They like to stay together within their own group whereas she likes to challenge herself and work to achieve her goals. One of her goals is to learn as much as she can about the American culture. She hopes to live and work in the U.S.

**Alex.** Alex is an 18-year old student from Hong Kong. This is his second year at GVC. He decided to study abroad because his two sisters had; it was also his parents' dream for him. Alex is actively involved in two clubs on campus and has a number of Chinese (Hong Kong) friends. He interacts mainly with other Hong Kong students and feels that this is a "dilemma" because he wants to immerse himself into the American culture but also wants to keep his own culture. He finds public transportation very difficult and relies on his friends for rides. He plans to transfer to a UC school.

**Daniel.** Daniel is an 18-year old student from Indonesia. He is a freshman and hopes to study finance at the University of Pennsylvania. Daniel has been at GVC for

about six weeks. He has found a job on campus and has joined two clubs. He likes his home stay situation, is enjoying his classes, and has met other students from many different countries. He considers himself independent and is adapting well to the culture. His parents are supporting him, but he intends to pay them back. He finds public transportation difficult.

**Henry.** Henry is an 18-year old student from Hong Kong. He has been at GVC for a month. He attended an international school at home. He chose to study in the U.S. because he did not get the grades to get into a good university in Hong Kong. He would have been accepted into a “generic” university, but even that would have been more expensive than getting an education in the U.S. He wants to pursue a practical major that will help him get a good job and is thinking about physics or architecture. He chose this college because of its transfer reputation.

**Austin.** Austin is an 18-year old student from Hong Kong studying at GVC. He is a sophomore, and he has been here for a year. Austin would like to study a subject that interests him such as anthropology, but he feels that he needs to study a subject that would be more practical such as business. He feels this pressure from his parents because they are paying for him to study in the United States. He plans to pay his parents back after he gets a job. His goal is to graduate and get a job, but he would like to study some subjects that interest him later on. He chose this college because of its reputation for transfer to a good university.

**Olivia.** Olivia was born in Brazil but has lived outside of Brazil for many years. She is 27 years old. She moved because of her parents’ careers to Germany, Spain, and the UK. Olivia got her bachelor’s degree from the United Kingdom. She works in the

International Student Office and takes classes at GVC. She plans to pursue a master's degree once she gets her residency. Being at community college has offered her the time and opportunity to explore new subjects and keep her status legal until she gets legal residency.

**Sophia.** Sophia is a 19-year-old student from Hong Kong. She decided to study at GVC because her brother had studied there five years ago. He majored in economics at the University of California, San Diego and returned to Hong Kong. Sophia saw that he grew and matured from the experience and she was inspired to follow in his footsteps. She feels some pressure to choose a major that will generate a good income. However, she wants to major in social science and anthropology, which are not considered very practical subjects in her culture. She would like to work in journalism when she returns to Hong Kong.

**Khloe.** Khloe is a 19-year-old student from China. She dropped out of high school in China when she was 16 and studied on her own. She has been in the United States at YBCC for a year. When she first came, she studied English at a language school. She is a student senator and international ambassador for the International Student Office and hopes that she can be a spokesperson for the Chinese students on campus. She likes to do volunteer work. She has made many Chinese friends but finds it hard to make American friends. She spent last summer hitchhiking through Alaska. She plans to get an associate degree in film and then decide about transfer.

**Robert.** Robert is a 23-year old student from Romania. He came to GRD because his sister was living and studying in the area. He has been here for two and a half years. He works on campus and has made many friends, mostly other international students. He

is the president of the student government at his college. He feels that his international student friends have been helpful because they can understand and empathize with each other. He wants to be an entrepreneur in the future. He wants to study business and transfer to a good university.

**Farai.** Farai is a 21-year old student from Zimbabwe. He has been at GRD for a year and a half. Farai's goal is to get a degree in finance and work in the financial world. He hopes to get an internship next summer and use that to help build his accounting career. He plans to transfer but is concerned about the cost. His mother has had a profound influence on his life. He learned about helping people from her. He hopes to return to Africa and give back to his community.

**Sakina.** Sakina is a 19-year old female student from India. She has been at GRD for ten months. Sakina chose to study abroad because she wanted to have a different experience, get to know people from diverse backgrounds, and experience different cultures. She lives with her aunt, who lives close to the college. She chose community college because it offers her a cheaper option than university and gives her time to explore before she decides on a major and transfers to university.

**Antonio.** Antonio is a 35-year old student from Argentina. He has been in the United States for three years. He and his wife first moved to Texas, where they had friends, and then chose GRD because they have friends here. He had always liked the English language and was happy to take the opportunity to come to an English speaking country. He had studied English in Argentina and came to the United States with a good level of English. However, he needed the opportunity to interact and communicate with native speakers of English. His major is English language, but he would like to add



Spanish and get a double major. He works as a Spanish tutor on campus. He plans to transfer to university but is worried about the cost and is looking for avenues for financial aid or scholarships.

**Aiko.** Aiko is a 20-year old student from Japan. She has been at GRD for two and a half years. She dropped out of high school because she did not like the educational system in Japan. She studied at home and got her high school diploma. She decided to study abroad because she wanted to study English and she wanted to have new experiences. She has made both international and American friends, does a lot of volunteer work in the community, and is getting ready to transfer. Aiko says that she is more outgoing, independent, and active than when she first came to the U.S.

**Sebastian.** Sebastian is a 28-year-old student from Costa Rica. He has been at GRD for eight months. He dropped out of high school in Costa Rica because he did not like to study and wanted his freedom. He traveled, worked, and studied in New York, Costa Rica, Germany, and the UK. He chose to study in the U.S. because he could attend a community college, which would be cheaper than university and he already felt comfortable with the English language. He chose GRD because his brother and sister-in-law live in the area. He wants to get his associate's degree in a health/medical related major and then decide about transfer. He is concerned about the cost of college.

**Nicole.** Nicole is a 21-year-old student from France who has spent one year in the U.S. She attended college preparatory school in France for two years. She decided to leave France and study in the U.S. because she did not get accepted into business school there. She studied English in New York and then moved to California because of her transfer goals. She lives in a residence hall, volunteers in the community, and is

interested in meeting new people. She feels that the cost of tuition and living in the U.S. is very high.

**Dinh.** Dinh is a 25-year-old student from Vietnam. He graduated with a degree in bio-technology in Hanoi. After graduation he was unable to get a good job in his career field in Vietnam. He wanted to do his master's degree overseas but was not able to get a scholarship. He chose GVC because of its transfer reputation. In addition, he has friends in the area and his girlfriend's parents live here. He wants to major in economics and transfer to university.

**Ilyas.** Ilyas is a 28-year old student from Greece. He has been in the U.S. and at RRC for two years. He attended a community college a few years earlier but dropped out because of poor grades, which impacted his visa status. He works on campus, is actively involved with the International Student Club, and is working towards transferring to do his bachelor's degree in computers, specializing in networking or web administration. He lives with his aunt and is close to his cousins.

**Min-Kyung.** Min-Kyung is a 24-year old student from Korea. He has been at BMC for two years. His parents sent him to study in Canada when he finished elementary school at the age of 11. He finished high school in Canada and returned to Korea to complete his two years of military service. He decided to pursue his studies in the United States because of the value of an American education in Korea. He works on campus, is the president of the business club, and is actively involved in student activities on campus. He hopes to transfer to UC Berkeley.

**Anna.** Anna is a 19-year old student from Macau. She has been at BMC for two years and plans to major in economics. She hopes to transfer to UCLA or UC Berkeley. If

she does not get her first choice, she may transfer out of state. She decided to study at BMC because of its reputation for transfer. Anna works in the ISO and lives with two roommates. She plans to transfer at the end of the semester.

**John.** John is a 22-year old from Albania. He has been at RRC for two years. He moved to the U.S. to be close to his sister. His original goal was to study medicine, but he is thinking of changing to pharmacy—following in his father and sister’s footsteps. His parents encouraged him to move to the U.S. so that he would be with his sister. He found it difficult to adjust initially but now feels more comfortable.

## **Thematic Structures**

### **The Structure of Reasons**

**Introduction.** When international students arrive at a community college they need to have gone through a decision making process that involves three steps. The first part of their decision making process is the decision to study abroad as opposed to studying in their native country. Once they have decided to study abroad, the second part of this process is deciding whether to study at a university or at a community college. And, the third step is deciding at which community college they want to study. The thematic *Structure of Reasons* includes the supporting themes of the international students’ decision to study abroad, their choice to study at community college instead of university, and the reasons for choosing their respective community college.

**Reasons for studying abroad.** The first supporting theme includes the reasons why international students choose to study abroad. For many of the students, their parents wanted them to study abroad. It was the parents’ dream for their children to have a better education than they felt they could receive in their home universities.

*Parents' wishes.* Min-Kyung did a summer study abroad program in Canada when he was eight years old. His parents learned about this opportunity through a home stay program that recruited Korean students to attend summer school in Canada. Min-Kyung spent two months in Canada and lived with a host family. He returned home to Korea and completed elementary school. He was then sent to Canada to complete his middle school and high school education:

After I graduated elementary school in Korea my parents decided to send me abroad to study . . . and my parents always were very eager to offer me a high quality education, which often times is a little difficult for me or anyone to get in Korea.

In Korea, the focus of the educational experience is on getting good grades and getting into a good university. Students feel the pressure to perform and get the best grades possible. According to Min-Kyung, students study all day and attend tutoring centers until late in the evening. His parents wanted a different experience for him. He recalled that his mother surprised him with the news that he needed to get ready to go to Canada:

One day, my mother came up to me and said, "You're going to get prepared for Canada," and I was a little surprised, but still I said "yeah, why not" because that was the week right before the mid-term exam, and I was just excited that I didn't have to take it. That's how my journey all started, so I flew to Canada in the year of 2000, on August 30th to be exact.

This was Min-Kyung's second study abroad experience. He stayed in Canada until he finished high school and then returned to Korea to complete his military service.

Min-Kyung attributes his international education to his parents' desire for him to have a better life and to experience the opportunities they had never had. Min-Kyung's father had grown up in a traditional Korean family where he was expected to carry on his

father's legacy and run the family business as soon as he graduated from college. Min-Kyung feels that:

[His father] knew how important it was for a person to get educated, so he really wanted to offer me the education that he wanted, and he didn't want to strand me, you know force me to carry down the heritage of the family business.

Min-Kyung's mother also grew up in a traditional family, but her father was very strict and did not believe that women should have an education. She had wanted to study, but that would have meant leaving home and moving to Seoul, and "she couldn't even dream about it because of her father." Both his mother and father "had a similar view towards the kind of education they wanted to offer to their children, so that's how I think it all got started."

Once Min-Kyung finished his military service, his parents again encouraged him to complete his college degree in the West. An American education is highly valued in Korea and Min-Kyung's parents felt that he would be much more successful with a degree from the United States. Min-Kyung agreed with them and started looking for colleges in the United States.

Hiroshi's path to the community college was different from Min-Kyung's but similar in that his decision to study abroad was based primarily on his parents' input. Hiroshi dropped out of high school in Japan and joined a band. His parents gave him a choice: "I had a choice to go to Tokyo by myself or come here ...they were going to support me if I came here." Hiroshi decided that the option to study in the U.S. with his parents' support was the better one. Similarly, Lily's parents encouraged her to study in the U.S. and are supporting her financially. She said that she really wants to go back to China after she graduates, "but my parents want me to stay here" because they believe

that “the U.S. is a developed country, there are a lot of opportunities here, and it can offer me better jobs, a better education, and a better background for my kids.” Lily is willing to honor her parents’ wishes and follow their dreams for her.

Following their parents’ wishes and dreams is a recurrent theme among many Asian students. Min-Kyung, Sarah, Austin, and Alex talked about a growing trend among Asian parents to send their children to study abroad. Sarah said that:

Most Chinese parents believe they can afford to pay for their children to study abroad. They would definitely do that because if you graduate from the United States, you will get the knowledge of English and everything, and it’s more competitive if you move back. I have to say the education in Chinese universities is kind of bad because in China the college is hard to get into, but it is easier to graduate. In contrast, here it is a little bit easier to get in, but you have to study really hard to graduate.

Austin, from Hong Kong, talked about his parents following the Asian tradition “because they have a kind of tradition among Asian parents, that they want us to go into some popular school, like UCLA.” Alex, who is also from Hong Kong said that “the education system here is far better than in Hong Kong, so, my parents decided to have me go to the United States to study.” Like many of the other Hong Kong students, Alex followed his parents’ advice that “if you study at an overseas university, it is much easier for you to get a job.” His goal is to complete his education and then return to Hong Kong.

Min-Kyung works in the International Student Office in a large international program. The largest group of international students at that college comes from Korea. He made some observations about why so many Asian students, and in particular students from China and Korea, decide to come to the U.S. to study abroad and how Asian parents are instrumental in this trend. Min-Kyung echoed Sarah’s belief that China and Korea do not offer a quality university education. He believes that Japan is a more developed

country and “is offering quality education in their nation already, so there is no necessity for them to, turn their head the other way and see the USA as an opportunity. They can simply just go to Tokyo University and to some other well known Japanese schools.” He feels that “those factors are lacking, especially in Korea, and I am pretty sure that it’s the same deal in China. So that’s the reason why certain groups turn their head to the USA, and therefore, there are many students from Korea and China studying here.” He recalled that “in Korea, when a group of 20 friends get together, at least five to ten students are studying abroad, not only in the USA but in Australia, Canada, you name it.” He said that not everyone can afford to send their children to study abroad. Parents need to be “financially stable” in order to do so. And parents who can afford to send their children abroad do so because “there is a set belief that if you go and study abroad, you’ll become much more successful than you’ll be by staying in Korea.” Upon their return, students are expected to be able to get better jobs and be more successful because of their international education and experience. Min-Kyung believes that “The reason why we have so many students from certain countries is that they are all within developed Asian countries. So from those countries there are many people that are better off sending their children to study abroad, earn the title, and come back, and have them be much more successful in their field.” Because many Asian families now have a better standard of living and are financially better off, they are willing to pay to support their children to study abroad.

Having their children study abroad is not only the dream of Asian parents but other parents as well. Larissa from Russia said that she became interested in studying abroad because “first it was my parents dream; they wanted me to study abroad.” It was

initially her parents' dream for her to study abroad, to get an American education, and then return to Russia. Larissa now shares this dream to travel and study overseas. She and her parents felt that an American education would have value in Russia or anywhere in the world. Larissa took the chance her parents offered her and is very grateful to have this experience.

Ilyas also came to study in California because his parents wanted him get an American education. They have close relatives living in the U.S. and wanted Ilyas to live with them.

Well my parents wanted me to go to school in the U.S., and it was the easiest. I wasn't going to a place that I had nobody. I had family around. So, if I wanted to go there for the weekend and I had somebody to talk to.

In summary, parents make the decision to send their children to study abroad because they have the money, because the same opportunities do not exist at home, and an American education makes their children more competitive in the marketplace. This is a growing trend in many Asian countries, but it is also applies to other countries.

***Students' own desire to study abroad.*** Students also choose to study abroad because it is their own wish for a new experience and new opportunities. Perhaps somebody in the family had studied abroad and influenced them to do likewise. Chen's father studied in Canada when he was young and then moved back to Hong Kong to raise a family. His sister studied at OGC and Chen followed in her footsteps. Farai's father came from Zimbabwe to do his master's degree in physics in the U.S. and got a management certificate from Harvard University. His father passed away a year ago and Farai says that his father "had a big impact" on him. Daniel, who comes from Indonesia, said that "his father is a U.S. graduate, so he told [him] it's very good to study in



California because it's easy to adapt because Indonesia is so tropical" and California has a similar climate. Similarly, Austin was inspired by a family member, his cousin:

[She] came here ten years ago; actually she went to New York and studied over there, and she told me that it would be a good experience if I came to the United States and met different kinds of people here, and so my parents kind of liked this idea, so they started saving money and now I'm here.

Austin's cousin felt that it would be good for him to study abroad and meet new people.

He liked the idea and then his parents agreed with it.

There is also what Min-Kyung calls the "domino effect" among students whereby students see their friends studying abroad or planning to study abroad, and they decide to do this too:

So you see your friends studying abroad, and you ask yourself what it'd be like, and you think to yourself that it should be much better than what I am getting here. Then when it comes to your family and their financial status, if they're stable, and if they can afford it, if I were them, I might as well tell my parents, "You know, I want to go see the world myself; my friend Mike is there, and he says it's fantastic; Jessica there, is studying and it's fantastic, and just look at our uncle that just came back from the United States, he's getting this decent job that I can barely even dream of," so it's like the domino effect I would say.

This quote from Min-Kyung explains how students are influenced by friends and family members to make the decision to study abroad and experience what their peers are experiencing. If their families are in a position to support them, it makes the decision much easier.

Some additional reasons why students choose to study abroad are the value of an American education; the desire for further education; the opportunity for improved languages skills; and the chance to meet new people, have a new experience, and pursue a personal dream. These supporting themes are not mutually exclusive. Some students may experience one or two of these reasons for choosing to study abroad. Or, perhaps

their personal dream may include all of these reasons. Therefore, I will not present each of these reasons as discrete discussion points.

Dinh graduated with a degree in bio-technology from a university in Vietnam. However, he was not able to get “a good job in bio-technology, back home.” He wanted to get his master’s degree abroad,” but I couldn’t get a scholarship.” Dinh worked outside his field for three years in Vietnam and then decided to start over and get a degree in a new field. He feels that a degree from an American university will make him more competitive.

Young-Soo got her degree from a two year college in Korea and wanted to improve her English skills and get a bachelor’s degree also. She said that “honestly I graduated only from a two year college, and then I just wanted to study more, basically more English, but I wanted a degree too.” Young-Soo left her family and her job in the tourist industry in Korea to pursue her dream in the United States.

When Koyuki was in high school and heard her friends planning where they would go to university, she decided that she would like to study abroad just to get away and have a new and different experience. She felt that she wanted to be different from her friends. She wanted to experience a new country, learn new skills, and make new friends, so she decided that she wanted to go “out of the country, and then actually, I just thought that America is really big, so that’s why I just chose it.” Larissa also wanted a new experience and an opportunity to get an American education. She said: “I was thinking that I'd like to travel, to be honest, and I'd never been in the U.S. and I know a U.S. education is a high quality and valid all around the world, so I thought if I can have a

chance, I want to try it.” She contacted an agency and chose the first college that accepted her.

International students decide to study abroad because they are motivated by the value of an American education; the desire for further education; the opportunity to improve their English skills; and the chance to meet new people, have a new experience, and pursue a personal dream. With the help and support of their parents, they are able to make this happen.

*Summary of reasons for studying abroad.* Very often international students do not make the initial decision to study abroad themselves but follow their parents’ wishes for them. Parents see study abroad as an opportunity for their children to get a better education than they would get in their native country. An American education would prepare them to compete and become more successful in their chosen career field when they return home. International students themselves choose to study abroad because they are influenced by friends and family members who have had a similar experience; they want to have a chance for a better education than they would get in their home country or pursue further education; and they want to improve their language skills, meet new people, have new and different experiences, and pursue their personal dream or challenge. This leads to the question of why international students choose to begin their studies at a community college rather than at a four-year university.

**Reasons for studying at the community college.** The reasons for studying abroad that I have discussed so far are not surprising as they align closely with those discussed in the literature review; however, one reason that I had not anticipated was that students choose to study abroad because they did not succeed at home. Perhaps they were

not accepted into a university in their native country or had not applied because they knew it was out of reach. Likewise, applying to or attending an American university was not a feasible option for them.

Some international students had dropped out of high school in their home country, and coming to study at a community college was a second chance for them. Hiroshi dropped out of high school because he did not like studying. He was influenced by some of his friends who were also quitting and he was attracted by the idea of making money and being independent:

I think I was really young. I didn't like studying, and I wanted to work because all my friends were bad boys...and they didn't go to high school, and they started to work and have money. And I wanted to get money too, my own money, and then I wanted to live my by myself. I was 16. I think in every generation 15 or 16 year-olds want to live by themselves.

His parents were not happy with his decision and stressed the importance of getting an education. His father got his degree from the U.S., speaks English, and is a teacher. He wanted Hiroshi to learn English.

They were sad; they told me studying is very important, because my dad graduated from an American university, so he can speak English too, and he's a teacher actually of English, so he told me if you can speak English, the world will be like your country because English is the world language.

If Hiroshi had stayed in Japan, he would not have been able to go to university without a high school degree and would have had limited job possibilities. He was thinking about playing music with his band when his parents offered to send him to study at BLC.

Similarly, Aiko was not very interested in school in Japan and felt that it was very stressful. She dropped out of high school and started studying at home. She said:

I think when I entered high school my first year I asked myself why I am studying and that kind of stuff, so I just stopped going there, and I was studying by myself at home or doing a part-time job and wandering around.

Aiko did not like the educational system in Japan and says that “I couldn’t really... deal with it. I couldn’t really cope with the Japanese educational system.” So, when she was 15 years old she stopped going to high school and studied at home instead. She says that the high school she attended was very competitive and the level was high for her:

It depends on the high school and it depends on the school’s level, but the one that I went to was kind of second level in my prefecture...so it was really quite a high level for me. I like studying, but... I couldn’t deal with it.

Aiko got a high school diploma by studying on her own and then decided to study at a community college in the U.S. because:

In Japan I wasn’t really thinking to go to university, but I thought I should have something that would help me to look for a job, so then I started thinking about doing something different and maybe it would work for me because I couldn’t really follow the Japanese educational system, I think that’s why I came here.

Aiko got a new opportunity to get an education within a different structure and system of education by applying to a community college. She spent two months in an intensive English program at a private language school before she started at GRD. When I met Aiko she was two months away from graduating with an AA degree in psychology and was planning to transfer to a California State University (CSU).

When she was 16 years old, Khloe dropped out in her second year of high school in China. Her reasons were:

I was sick in my second year of high school, and it was a pretty serious disease. I didn’t want to continue my studies. It was too intense for me in high school in China, so I dropped out from my high school, but I still wanted to continue my studies. There is no way go to college in China if you don’t have a high school diploma, and so my parents and I decided to send me out to study abroad.

Khloe also spent two months at a private language school, and once she had achieved the required Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) score, she was accepted at Yellow Beach City College.

Like Aiko, Khloe did not like the system of education in her home country, so she studied by herself at home:

It's a very different educational system in China and America, so I didn't really like the way we students study in China. I mean it's too intense and the only purpose that we study in school is only for preparing for the tests, so I didn't really like that way, so I did a lot of factual reading or writing by myself at home.

Dissatisfaction with their national educational system is a theme that I have heard from many students from Japan, Korea, and China. The system is very competitive in high school with a lot of emphasis on test-taking and grades. Students attend school all day and then have private tutors in the evening or attend private tutoring schools. Once they prove themselves and get accepted into university, a lot of the pressure is removed. After Khloe recovered from her illness, her decision was not to return to the pressures of high school.

Sebastian dropped out of high school in Costa Rica because he did not like studying and he wanted his freedom:

I was not a brilliant student. I think this is a typical story of students that have a free spirit, or I was maybe hanging out a little bit too much with friends, or I was just not interested in studying. Then, my father was not the most patient person. I have a really good relationship with my family. I love my parents, but they . . . didn't have the patience to or maybe they didn't work that well with me on that aspect of how I could enjoy high school when I was at that age, which was 16 or 17 years old. That was almost ten years ago.

It is now ten years later and Sebastian has had the opportunity to travel and study in the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Germany. He now feels ready to focus on his studies at GRD where he hopes to earn his AA degree. He feels a need to prove himself to his

parents and win back their trust in him before they will agree to support him at a four-year university. Community college is giving him the opportunity to do this.

Ilyas also dropped out of high school in Greece and played music in a band. He then decided to attend community college in the U.S. but dropped out the first time.

I wasn't interested in going to school back then. So, for a while when I dropped out of high school, I worked as a musician, but I decided to go back to school afterwards. This is actually my second time at a community college. The first time I stopped and now I am doing it the right way.

He first came to the U.S. in 2003 but was not too interested in school. He failed some of his classes, and, as a result, he lost his legal status as an international student.

It was 2003. I stayed about two years. It wasn't that I had difficulties academically. I was at a young age and living by myself and I wasn't that interested in school, so the problem was that I wasn't going to school. I was skipping school a lot, so I was failing classes because I wasn't showing up, which was in violation of my visa. I was out of status, and I had to go back.

Ilyas feels fortunate to have this second chance and is very happy with his experience at RRC. He lives with his aunt and has the support of his cousins and a community of friends.

Some students did not get the grades to get into university back home; they did not take the SAT test for entrance into an American university, or they applied to university and were not accepted. Lily took the university entrance exam in China and took English as her major for her first year in university. When I asked her why she decided to come to the United States, she gave the following reasons:

I was busy preparing for my entrance examinations, so I didn't get a chance to apply to university, so when I heard about there's a program called 2+2 like two years in community college and you can transfer to a 4-year university, I thought it was a good chance for me to give it a shot to try again, so I just came here.

This would be a way for her to study English, learn about the culture, and transfer to a four-year university. Lily chose community college rather than applying to a four-year university because she felt that she would save time for herself by transferring through the community college, the application process was easier, and it would be a less expensive option:

The first reason is that I spent a year in China as a freshman so I wanted to save some time for myself, and the second reason is that it was really hard to directly apply to a 4-year university; my expectation is to get into one of the top 30 or 40 universities in the U.S., and that's really harsh because a lot of people are applying, and the third reason is that it is more expensive to get into 4-year university.

While Lily initially wanted to study at a four-year university, she chose the community college as her first step because the application process was easier, and she feels that she will have a better opportunity to transfer to a prestigious university.

Henry chose to study in the U.S. because he did not get the grades to get into a good university in Hong Kong. He would have been accepted into a “generic” university, but even that would have been more expensive than getting an education in the U.S. He said:

My decision to come here was motivated because of cost reasons first, and another reason was my grades were not as good as they should be. I was hoping for higher grades, but then my grades only got me into generic universities in Hong Kong; however, the generic universities in Hong Kong, in comparison to the ones here, are still more expensive.

Henry would have liked to attend a prestigious university in Hong Kong and would not have been satisfied with an average or “generic” university. His best option was to apply to a community college and work towards transfer to a prestigious university in the U.S. Alex, also from Hong Kong, chose to go to community college instead of university because he did not feel prepared for university and: “I don't want to jump from high



school directly to the college life, that quick, yeah...” He took the TOEFL test and the IELTS tests before he came. Alex feels that he will be better prepared for university after studying at the community college.

Chen chose to study at a community college because he did not take the level 13 exam to enter university in Hong Kong. Because he had not fulfilled the prerequisites for university in Hong Kong or in the United States, the best option for him was to study at a community college. Austin also felt that it would be difficult or impossible for him to get into a school such as UCLA, so he decided that community college would be a better option for him. Some of his friends recommended community college as a means for transfer to a ”popular” university.

People were telling me that it’s impossible to get into UCLA right. . . And some of my friends recommended that I come to community college because a lot of people can transfer to different kinds of places like popular schools or universities by going to community college, so that is the main reason why I’m here.

Since direct entry into the university of their choice was not an option for Henry, Alex, or Chen, community college offered that possibility through transfer.

Nicole decided to leave France and study in the U.S. because: “I did my exams to get into business schools in France, and it didn’t work out. I didn’t get the schools I wanted to go to, so I decided at first to go for a break in the United States to improve my English, and I finally decided to stay.” She decided that she wanted to study at a particular University of California (UC) “because it has a good reputation I guess and . . . I have a lot of friends who came here as exchange students, and they told me a lot of good things about Berkeley.” So, she chose a community college and hopes to transfer to UC Berkeley.

Another reason for attending community college, which I had not anticipated, was that students get an international student visa while awaiting their permanent residency. Elaine is studying at OGC because she is not yet a U.S. resident and needs an international student visa in order to stay in the country. Although Elaine had finished college in the Philippines, she enrolled in the community college while waiting for her permanent residency (green card) and deciding what to do next. She says, "I'm still an international student because we need to do several processes before I get the green card." Olivia is originally from Brazil and moved to the U.S. with her parents. She has a degree from the UK and plans to go to graduate school. Her parents have become citizens, but she is still waiting for her green card:

I'm not a typical student because I was at university in England, an international student as well. I graduated and started working, and basically my parents moved over to the U.S. five years ago, and now they have gained citizenship. I'm still in the process of getting my green card. It's a seven year process, so I still have a few years left, two years left, until I get mine.

Olivia works in the International Student Office and is enrolled in classes for a certificate in Media. She is on an international student visa.

A third student, Lara, is also taking classes while waiting for her permanent residency. She has a master's degree in Russian Language and Literature from Russia. She lived in Israel for five years and then moved to the U.S. with her husband. She would like to get another master's degree, but she feels that she does not have the confidence to embark on it right now. It would also be very expensive for her as an international student. She also said that getting another bachelor's degree at a state university is not an option at this time. Due to budget cutbacks, CSU schools have reduced enrollment and are not accepting students who already have a bachelor's degree. She feels that her only

option is to enroll as an international student at a community college and get an F-1 visa. Attending a community college in order to maintain legal status was not a reason I had anticipated for international students' decisions to study at a community college.

***Summary of reasons for studying at community college.*** Most international students have a goal to transfer to a four-year university. They choose to go to a community college because they do not have another viable option. They did not get into university, or they did not apply to university. So, community college offers them an opportunity that was not available to them at home. In some cases, the study abroad experience was not exactly a factor in making their decision, but having a chance to get a higher education was the driving factor. Their best option was to attend community college and then transfer to a “good” four-year university. Community college offers a more affordable option than university. Access and admission to a community college is easier than a university as it requires a lower TOEFL score and does not require an SAT score. There are more community colleges to choose from, and many students prefer the smaller size. Finally, some students attend community college so that they can get an F-1 visa and remain in the country while awaiting their permanent residency.

**Reasons for choosing a particular community college.** Two major factors influence students in choosing their respective community college. One is that they have family or friends in the area. The second is that they made a specific choice to go to that institution because of what it offers them academically. A third factor is that students from the same community in their home country choose a college because they are directly recruited by that college; they use the same agencies, which represent the interests of a particular college in that region; or, students learn of a particular college by

word of mouth in their schools and community. This may result in large numbers of students from the same region at the same community college.

*Friends and family in the area.* The most decisive factor in choosing a particular community college for students in four of the participating colleges was that they had family members or close friends in the area. Very often they were able to stay with these relatives or friends and keep their costs down. In the first small college that I visited, all three participating students were at that college because they had friends or family in the area. James moved to Orange Grove because he had become friends with an American teacher in Thailand and was able to stay with him when he first arrived. Chen's decision to study at OGC was based on the fact that he could live with his aunt and uncle and they would take care of him. Elaine was at OGC because her mom got a job as a pharmacist in the area and the entire family moved from the Philippines.

At the two medium-sized colleges, the majority of the international students I met had chosen that college because of family or friends in the area as well. At GRD, Robert first moved from Romania to Daytona, Florida, because he has cousins who live there. He spent eight months in Florida and then moved to California because his sister was there. Robert's sister is a biochemist and moved from Indiana to the Bay Area, "and as she moved to the Bay Area, the older sister insisted that I move here." He left Florida and moved to the Bay Area to live with his sister. He stressed the importance of family and how important it was for him to be close to his sister:

Having family here, and Romanians are very much about family, it would be outrageous for us to be on the same continent and not be close enough to visit each other; we are family oriented; it's just the culture, so she didn't feel quite comfortable with having me come to Indiana because she didn't like it there, but when she moved to California she insisted that I come.

Farai chose to study at GRD because his mother had friends in the area, and he has been able to live with them.

Well my mother has been close friends with my aunt and uncle for about 30 years so that's how the whole relationship came about; they met in the United Kingdom in the 70s, so when it came to time for me to decide where to go to university I reached out to them and asked them if there were any opportunities for me to come out here and get an education.

He has been living with them since he came here a year and two months ago. His "aunt and uncle" have been very kind and helpful to him. He says: "to have people to stay with which has been really great...that really did help, you see, I'm very fortunate in that aspect, really fortunate." His aunt took him to the college in his first week to attend orientation where he met counselors and other staff members.

Sakina did some online research to help her find a community college close to where her aunt lives. When she found GRD, she decided that this college would be the best option for her. She said "one of my aunts lives here, and she said that this is a really good college if you want to be here." Sakina decided to attend community college "for financial reasons, and I wanted first to see like if I would be able to adjust over here . . . because if I had taken admission in a university and I wouldn't have liked it here, then I would have been spending a lot more." She has been here for 10 months. Studying at the community college has given her time to experiment and adjust before applying to university, and living with her aunt makes this experience possible for Sakina. I asked if it would be an option for her to move out on her own at some stage and possibly live with roommates, but she felt that:

Well, that's going to be financially pressurizing for my parents because in my family, my mother was the only one who was working because my father has been bedridden for the past 13 years.

Her father does not work and her family lives with her grandparents in India. While her family might accept her moving out, financially it would be very difficult for them.

After he dropped out of high school in Costa Rica, Sebastian traveled, worked, and studied in New York, Costa Rica, Germany, and the UK. One of the reasons he chose to study in the U.S. was because he could attend a community college here, which would be cheaper for him, and because he already felt comfortable with the English language. Other factors in making his decision were features such as location, cost, and cultural similarities:

Costa Rica is not so far from the United States compared to Europe; the language, the community colleges which are cheaper, and I think that the cultural similarities, in some ways, I think those are the different aspects that made me consider the United States as a choice for studying.

And, the major reason Sebastian chose GRD was that his brother lives here:

Also, I have the advantage that my brother lives here. I'm actually living right now with my brother and my sister-in-law, so you know that makes things a lot easier since I don't have to, I don't have to pay for room and board... He's been here for some 20 years.

He finds it convenient to live with his brother because "I live about five minutes walking from GRD." His brother is also a good support for him and a good role model since he is also a community college student and is applying for transfer to a UC school next year.

When Antonio, who is also a student at GRD, and his wife decided to come to the U.S. so that he could pursue his education, they first went to live in Texas because they had a friend from Argentina there and this made the process easier. "I have a friend . . . from Argentina, so we stayed with him because otherwise it's hard for people from another country to come because it's a different culture." They spent one year in Texas and then decided to move to California, again because they had friends here. They

decided on this area because this is where their friends live. Antonio decided to attend the local community college “because the Argentinean couple that I mentioned before lives in Green River, so we came and we stayed with them for a couple of months and that was when I got to the knowledge about the Green River Community College District.” Having friends in the areas helped Antonio and his wife in their transition to the area and also gave them the opportunity to find a community college in the area.

Ilyas came from Greece and chose to study at Red River Community College in Southern California because he has cousins in the area and has a supportive and helpful living situation with his aunt. He said that:

The choice was to live with my aunt because she was living by herself also because her husband had passed away, and she liked the idea of me coming and staying with her because she wanted company. Right now she lives about 5 minutes away from RRC driving distance. That was an easy choice. If I had to choose to go somewhere to live by myself, I probably wouldn't have done it. Having a family helped me a lot. So, she's really helpful, and she's on top of things too; not like controlling me. But she's really interested in what I'm doing how I'm doing and all that.

Living with his aunt and having the support of his cousins is helping Ilyas make a success of his second attempt at community college. His friend John also chose to come to RRC because his sister is a student there and he lives with her. John came to California because of his sister.

Community college allows students who might not normally come to the U.S. the opportunity to get an education. Many of them are from middle class families who do their best to support their children while they study abroad. Having family in the area allows the international students to come and pursue an education. Otherwise, it might not be possible.

*Choosing a college for what it offers.* In the case of three of the seven colleges that I visited, students chose the college for a particular aspect of the college itself. They frequently learned about the college and were recruited, either by college personnel who actively recruit overseas or by a recruiting agency. In two colleges, there were large groups of students from Korea, Hong Kong, or mainland China who chose the particular college because of its reputation for transfer to a particular UC institution. In the other case, students were attracted to the college because it has dormitories, does not require a TOEFL score, and is located in a quiet, safe community.

When Sarah decided to study abroad, she wanted a college with a good transfer reputation and went to an agency. “I found this college through an agent . . . there are a lot of studying abroad agents” in China. She chose community college because it required a lower TOEFL score than a university would:

At the time, I applied for school I didn’t have a good enough score to get enrolled in universities, and the agent told me that well you could apply for a community college because the requirement of TOEFL score is lower.

Sarah’s parents paid the agency \$4,000 just for the application process. She felt cheated because the agent did not give her information about her options—that there were many other community colleges that she could attend. She was only told about Green Valley College. She also felt that the application process was simple and could have been done without the help of an agent.

Likewise, Lily learned about Green Valley College “from an agent in Hong Kong and one of my friends as she actually attended Green Valley five years ago and she recommended this college to me.” She paid fees to the agent and she felt that “it’s a little bit high, but if I had time I would prefer doing it by myself, but I knew this in July I



would like to come here by the end of August so time was tight.” Using the agent allowed her to move more quickly through the application process. The agent took care of the application and accommodation.

Henry, Lily, Austin, Alex, and Sophia are part of a large group of Hong Kong students studying at GVC. Henry, like the other Hong Kong students, came to GVC because of its transfer program and its reputation for transfer. “But the reason why I came to Green Valley was they have the transfer program and pretty much every person I’ve talked to who is a Hong Kong student is here for the transfer program.” They all share a desire to transfer to UCLA.

Another factor in the selection process for students in large international student programs was that students came in groups; the Chinese students tended to go to a particular large college, and a large group of Koreans went to another of the large colleges I would attribute this concentration of students at one particular college to recruitment efforts, agency connections, and word of mouth, but it was not a topic that emerged from the international student interviews and would need to be discussed with the International Student Program management.

*Summary of reasons for choosing a particular community college.* International students choose to study at a particular community college because they have family or friends in the area and they can live with them. Without this kind of support, many of them would not be able to afford to attend college at all. Another reason is that they make a choice based on certain features of the institution such as its reputation for transfer to a particular university. Another reason is that students from the same area in their home country choose a college because they are directly recruited by that college.

**Summary of the Structure of Reasons.** In my discussion of the *Structure of Reasons*, I have analyzed data from student interviews that describe international students' decision making process in deciding to study abroad, in choosing a community college rather than going directly to a four-year university, and in determining which community college to attend. From the first supporting theme of why students choose to study abroad, I have identified the following reasons: their parents want them to study abroad because of the value of the experience and the value of an American education; the students themselves choose to study abroad because of the influence of family or friends who studied abroad previously; they believe that they will get a better education than they would get at home, or they want to pursue further education; and they hope to improve their language skills, meet new people, have new and different experiences, and pursue their personal dream or challenge. Secondly, students choose to study at a community college because it offers them an opportunity to get an education that they might not otherwise have access to due to the fact that they did not graduate from high school or they did not get accepted into university at home or abroad. Community college offers them the possibility to transfer to a four-year university and graduate with a bachelor's degree. Community college is a less expensive option, has open access, many locations to choose from, and smaller campuses. And, an unanticipated reason for choosing a community college, was for students to get an F-1 visa and remain in the country while awaiting their permanent residency.

Finally, international students choose their respective community college because they have family or friends in the area or because some particular aspect of the college

appeals to them. In some cases, students also choose a college because of the recruitment and application process they experience.

Knowing about the background of the participants and understanding the international students' reasons for studying abroad are key factors in understanding the expectations of international students as they embark on their educational journey. At this point, I can say that international students expect to complete their community college education and transfer to a four-year university. Whether they are eligible for transfer to a UC or CSU school will depend on their grades and performance at community college. They expect that their educational experience will be different from that which they would receive in their native country. They expect that this opportunity will give them a second chance to get a quality education, that they will improve their English skills, and that an American education will be valued when they return home and will help them to be more competitive in the workforce. They expect that they will be able to depend on their families for partial or total financial support and that they will be able to rely on family and friends for help with accommodations along with getting to know the area and the college. They expect to meet new people and have a new experience that will perhaps change or reshape their lives. These are some of the conclusions I have made about international students' expectations based on my analysis of data for the structure of reasons.

### **The Structure of Education**

**Introduction to the structure of education.** *The Structure of Education* describes the international students' educational experience at the community college. The supporting themes of goals, choice of major, counseling, coursework and the

classroom, and the role of the International Student Office will be discussed in this section.

**Goals.** In accordance with state law, California community colleges have developed Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) programs with University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) schools. Community college students who complete the requirements for UC or CSU schools and satisfy the requirements of the agreement are eligible for transfer if space is available and if the university is accepting transfers. Seven UC campuses offer guaranteed admission to California community college students who meet the specific requirements: UC Davis, UC Irvine, UC Merced, UC Riverside, UC San Diego, UC Santa Barbara, and UC Santa Cruz. UCLA and UC Berkeley do not offer guaranteed admission to community college students.

The majority of international students at California community colleges have set a goal to transfer to a four-year university. A small number of international students are in a transition phase, taking courses while waiting for the next step, which is very often graduate school. Twenty-six of the international students in the study share a goal to transfer to a four-year university and complete their degree.

The first supporting theme for this phenomenological structure will include a discussion of students who want to transfer to UCLA or UC Berkeley but sign a TAG with another UC school as a back-up plan. A second supporting theme includes students who choose to transfer to a university because it has their desired degree program or is close to where they are living. And, third, some students are concerned that they will not be able to afford to pay for university tuition and are reconsidering their original transfer goal. They may instead opt for an AA degree unless they can get financial aid or a

scholarship. Two or three students are considering transfer to universities out of state, and three students plan go on to graduate school or medical school. A reality for all participants is that their plans are tenuous. They have no guarantee that they will be able to do what they want and they need to be flexible.

*Transfer to UCLA, UC Berkeley, or Plan B.* Community colleges do not have direct transfer agreements (TAG) with UCLA or UC Berkeley and admission is extremely competitive. Thus, as a back-up plan, many students have signed a TAG with another university.

Alex said that his goal is to “get into college.” He has signed a TAG with UC San Diego, but he will also apply independently to UCLA and UC Berkeley. His dream is to study at UC Berkeley and “be a successful engineer.” He has completed 50 units, but in order to transfer “you need to complete at least 90 units, two years, so I will complete the remaining units in the remaining quarters.” He feels that he is on track with his goals and expects to transfer at the end of this academic year. He is not quite satisfied with his GPA and is working on improving it.

Henry came to GVC because of its transfer program and its reputation for transfer. He had been here for only a month when I spoke to him. He came to this college specifically because it has a high transfer rate to UCLA. Like many of the other Hong Kong students at GVC, Henry wants to transfer to UCLA. He is open to other universities besides UCLA, but he said: “there’s UCLA and that’s my main goal.”

Austin learned about GVC through a friend Hong Kong and that GVC was recommended based on its reputation for transfer to the University of California. Austin

is hoping to transfer to UCLA and study business and economics, but he has also signed a TAG agreement with UC San Diego. Austin stated that:

Basically, my friend told me about Green Valley College, and I went to some exhibitions, and there were a lot of agencies in Hong Kong. They were all trying to help. And, if you want to get into the best UC, you got to come to Green Valley, and I mean when I looked at Green Valley online, I thought it was pretty cool, and my parents liked it, and so that's the reason why we decided to go with Green Valley.

Robert, a student at GRD, has completed 54 units and his goal to complete 60 units for transfer. His first choice is Berkeley or UCLA, and his second choice is UC San Diego. He has signed a TAG with UC San Diego and thinks that "San Diego is a very good plan B." Robert has done his research about the different UC schools and is aware of their strengths and weaknesses. He hopes to get one of his first choice schools but will be content with his second choice.

Nicole decided on UC Berkeley "because it has a good reputation I guess, and I have a lot of friends who came here as exchange students and they told me a lot of good things about Berkeley." She had originally wanted to study business, but "I changed my mind again, I want to do art history and maybe get a master's and a Ph.D. in Art History and do Chinese as well as Asian studies." For Nicole, the choice of schools is perhaps more important than the major. If she does not get her first choice, she will consider returning to France.

Lily spent a year at university in China before she came to study at GVC. Her parents are paying for her to study abroad and her first choice for transfer would be UC Berkeley and then UCLA. She has signed a TAG with UC Santa Barbara "because UCSD rejected me to sign their TAG because I spent a year in university before I came

here.” Having spent a year in university changes her status for admission to UC San Diego and makes her ineligible to sign their direct transfer agreement.

In summary, international students take advantage of community college programs as a stepping stone to transfer to a four-year university. They seek admission to a school to which they would not have originally gained admittance. Their top choices are UCLA or UC Berkeley. As a second option, they sign a TAG with another UC school.

*Transfer to a particular location or a desirable program.* Chen’s goals are to improve his English, transfer to a university, get a master’s degree, and return to Hong Kong. He said that he does not plan to get an AA degree as it does not have any value when he returns to Hong Kong. He hopes to follow in his sister’s footsteps by transferring to a university in the Los Angeles area. His sister has contacts and acquaintances there and that will make the transition easier for him. UCLA is his first choice. While Chen would very much like to get accepted into UCLA, he is willing to attend another university as long as it is in the LA area. The location is more important to him since his sister studied there and has acquaintances that could help him out.

Location is also a guiding factor for Hiroshi. His plans are to transfer to Humboldt State University because he thinks that he will like the area and its environment:

I’m going to go to Humboldt, Humboldt the northernmost area ...because it’s like my home town. My hometown’s near Tokyo, but we don’t have an ocean, and I was looking at a university with good nature, like really good nature, because my home town has good nature like mountains and rivers.

He said that he has two more semesters including this one before he is eligible for transfer. Hiroshi has decided on geography as his major, but he has not decided what he

wants to do after he graduates. However, he feels confident about his choice to transfer to Humboldt.

Sakina hopes to transfer to a prestigious UC or a state university in the area. This way she would be able to continue to live with her aunt. After her bachelor's degree she would like to do a master's. Because she is in a large metropolitan area, she feels that she will have a number of choices.

Aiko says, "I will graduate from college this semester, and I am already applying to CSU" for fall semester next year. If she graduates as planned, she will have eight months before she starts at a CSU, so she is thinking about doing a practical training program, "so...I will have eight months, and I might do some kind of practical training program (OPT) with the college, so I can get a job, maybe a paid job...without an actual work visa...because international students cannot work here." She hopes to stay in the area when she transfers.

In summary, Chen, Hiroshi, Sakina, and Aiko are international students who would like to transfer to a university in a particular location because of their personal preferences or needs. Either they like the geographical location or they have friends and relatives in the area.

*Changing plans.* Some students have had to or may have to reconsider or change their plans because of their financial situation. Ideally, Farai would like to attend a prestigious UC campus. He hopes to get an academic scholarship in order to attend a UC or private university but realizes that it is very difficult as an international student because most private universities do not offer scholarships to international students.

What I'm really thinking of is trying to get some sort of scholarship from a private university based upon my academic grades and everything, and so that has



been very tricky and hard. You know, I looked at Boston University, Pepperdine, Santa Clara, University of Southern California, George Washington University, or Washington, and most of them don't offer scholarships to transfer students; they offer Presidential Scholarships, all these amazing scholarships, but only to freshmen students.

Farai is disappointed that cost may limit his options for transfer and feels that his last option would be to go to a CSU in the area. He knows that college tuition will be very expensive for him and is realistic about the challenges he faces.

That has been very painful, because I was really looking forward to going to one of these universities and growing even more from the resources that they offer, you know, so my last option would probably be to go to a CSU nearby and finish the remainder of my degree, but you know financially it's going to be difficult for me to go there because I'll have to now start finding accommodation firstly and feed myself and all of that stuff, so...that's going to be bumpy; it's going to be a challenging time.

When James came from Thailand to the U.S. his academic goal was to transfer to a four-year university, but he is not sure of that because of the cost:

Actually, initially I wanted to transfer to a four year college, but the cost here gets higher and higher, and I'm not going to make it. So, this is my last semester actually; I'm done with my major already so I'm just taking one of the General Education classes to get an associate's Degree here.

James's parents help him with his expenses, but he is under financial pressure. At this point, James is undecided about his future. He would like to transfer to a four-year university or get some work experience and is looking into the possibility of getting an internship with an interior design company in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Young-Soo's goal was to complete 60 units and transfer to a four-year university. She is paying for college herself. She finds the tuition costs difficult and feels that she will not transfer right away because money is a problem Young-Soo knows that university will be even more expensive. She says:

It's so hard, so obviously, first my plan was to graduate in this school and then I will transfer immediately, but actually it's kind of difficult for me right now because money's a problem. . .and university is so expensive.

Young-Soo has been here for two years "like four semesters, over one year and a half."

This is her fourth semester, but she needs one more year to graduate. "I think next semester I need one semester after spring semester 2012, and I will graduate with an AA degree." Her progress was impeded by her need to take two semesters of ESL classes because of her weak English skills. The college did not require a TOEFL score, but Young-Soo spent two semesters in lower-level ESL classes because she was not adequately prepared.

Khloe said she would like to transfer to "UCLA because for film students, there's only a few places to go to like New York University or UCLA or University of Southern California, so I prefer UCLA." She expects that if she wants to attend UCLA, it would cost "\$50,000. . . per year including daily expenses." She is concerned about the cost and has decided to get her AA degree from YBCC. She needs two and a half years to get her AA degree and will then decide what to do next:

I was planning to transfer after three years studying here, but I decided to see where I'm going 'cause the tuition fee for me is pretty high; so right now I want to get my associate's degree in Yellow Beach City College first and then we will see whether I can just go to university; maybe I will or maybe I won't, so that's my goal.

Antonio is supporting himself. His academic goal is to transfer to a state university, but he is not sure if he will be able to achieve this goal. He said, "Then I hope to transfer to CSU; that's my wish, but let's see what happens; I would like to go there." He has "heard that they have a good Spanish department." Antonio has a positive outlook and feels that he will somehow be able to reach his goal to transfer to a CSU.

Sebastian has dropped out of school a few times and is now starting over at 28.

He wants to get his AA degree first and then decide about transfer:

First of all, I would like to get an associate's degree although I want to go to a four year university. I want to get an associate's degree first just to make sure that I will get more credibility and have some sustainable qualification like an AA degree so I can maybe later on ask for a scholarship or get further support from my father. Going to a four year university is real expensive for an international student.

The major difficulty for Sebastian transferring to a four-year university would be the cost.

In order for me to get their support, I have to make them trust in me to prove to them that I can do better with grades and hopefully a combination of a scholarship and my family's support I might be able to pay the expenses of a four year university.

While his family may have the resources to pay, he feels that he has lost credibility and his father may be unwilling to support him.

Farai, James, Khloe, Antonio, and Sebastian share the fear that their opportunities and options for transfer may be limited because of their limited financial resources. While their families may be able to help them with some of their expenses, it will be difficult for them to cover their costs with the increased tuition at the four-year university.

*Out-of-state transfer.* A small number of students would like to transfer out of state. Daniel wants to study at the University of Pennsylvania, but chose to start at community college "because first community colleges are cheaper..., it's easier to enter and they provide a good environment and smaller group of people; it's kind of easy for me to adapt to the U.S." He wants to transfer to the University of Pennsylvania because "it's one of the best in the world." He does not know if it will be as a sophomore or junior, but he plans to complete some "some major and some GE courses here." He said:

They actually say that it's easier to transfer as a sophomore rather than a junior because they have limited spaces for juniors, and also, I'm not sure...if I will

transfer in my sophomore year or junior year, but I guess I'll try to transfer during the sophomore year.

Ilyas may stay in the area, attend a CSU, and continue to live with his aunt.

However, he is also considering a university in Minnesota because: "they have one of the programs that I need." He and his friend "are looking at a different school in Minnesota...which is a little cheaper. It's the same cost as a community college, and they have a scholarship program." The Computer Science program at a Minnesota university appeals to Ilyas and he is willing to move there.

A small number of international students are interested in studying out of state because of their desire to study at a particular university. They need to be sure that they have the resources in order to make this move. Daniel and Ilyas feel this would be a feasible move for them.

**Graduate school.** Three of the students I spoke with plan to go to graduate school. Elaine got her B.S. degree in pharmacy in the Philippines and moved to Orange Grove when her mother got a job there as a pharmacist. Upon the advice of the International Student Coordinator at OGC, she looked into the possibility of getting credit for her degree but was told that she would need to repeat all of her coursework if she wanted to get a pharmacy degree in the U.S. Instead, she has decided to go back to the Philippines and get her medical degree. This would take only four years and would actually be recognized in the U.S. She will only have a short stay at OGC and will return to the Philippines to pursue a degree in medicine. Elaine is planning to return to the Philippines "because if I get a medical degree in the Philippines, after I graduate there, it's possible for me to come back here and get a job as a doctor."

Olivia is taking classes for a certificate at Green Valley, but when she finishes at GVC she would like to do a master's degree. She is not sure, however, of her area of focus:

I was thinking to maybe even do a master's, and until now I haven't figured it out, so the community college was good because then I could pick and mix what I wanted to take, and figure out if I wanted to do master's or not, but also take and develop my skills in different areas.

Attending community college gives Olivia the time to decide what course of study she plans to pursue.

Lara is taking classes at the community college while she awaits her permanent residency. She has a degree in psychology and plans to do her master's degree. In the meantime, she is taking classes that interest her.

In brief, Elaine, Olivia, and Lara are studying at the community college while they wait to embark on the next stage of their studies. They plan to go on to graduate school, but they need to maintain legal residency in the U.S. By enrolling at a community college, they are able to do this.

*Summary of goals.* As discussed in this section, the majority of participants in this study plan to transfer from community college to a four-year university. Some have set their sights on UCLA or UC Berkeley, but because admission to these two schools is highly competitive, students have created a back-up plan to transfer to another UC school using the Transfer Admissions Guarantee. Some students hope to attend a UC or CSU school in their area because it offers the program they want or because they are not in a position to move to a different location. Some students are reconsidering their plans for transfer due to their financial situation and may choose to get their AA degree first. A

small number of students are thinking about transferring out of state. And, a few students are planning to attend graduate school.

*Choice of Major.* Community college gives students time to decide about their major. Some international students were still unsure of their major, and some had changed their majors either through personal choice or parental pressure.

When Larissa came to the U.S. her goal was to get a degree in criminal justice. She has already completed her A.A degree and is planning to transfer to a state university. She is expanding her horizons beyond criminal justice as she was advised that she does not need a bachelor's degree in criminal justice in order to work in that field; she was advised she should get her bachelor's degree in a field that would complement her interest in criminal justice, such as computer science or linguistics. Larissa said:

I'm probably going to change my major...because I was talking to my teacher and my instructor for my CJ classes, and I talked to him about which school is good for criminal justice. He actually told me that to work in this field I don't need to have the BA in criminal justice. He says for me it's going to be good to have a computer science degree, and I decided to go into Linguistics because I like to study languages. Back in my country, I was taking French classes and right now I am studying Spanish also. So I want to continue with a linguistics major, but basically my goals are the same, I want to transfer and I think go to graduate school as well, so I won't stop only with a BA degree.

Larissa is looking beyond her bachelor's degree and planning for a master's degree. Instead of studying criminal justice, she is now considering linguistics or computer science.

Austin would like to study a subject that interests him such as anthropology, but he feels that he needs a more practical major such as business. He feels this pressure from his parents because they are paying for him to study in the United States. He plans to pay

his parents back after he gets a job. His goal is to go back to Hong Kong and get a job, but he would like to study some subjects that interest him later on:

They [his parents] just want me to be more practical, because they're kind of using all of their savings; I mean actually I really want to study something like psychology or anthropology because I'm interested in this subject, but maybe I can do it after I graduate and after I'm working. I can still go to university in Hong Kong to study these subjects...the thing that I want is to pay back my family. I want to go find a job easily after graduating and save some money.

Lily has changed majors from American literature to accounting. She says that she changed majors and feels that she would have a better chance of finding a job in accounting than in English.

Because when I was thinking about studying abroad, I knew that it would be very expensive to study here, and if I continue my English Literature major, I'm not positive about finding a job right after graduating; with a bachelor's degree, and if I work as an accountant, if I manage accounting I, think it will be better for me to find a job here.

Min-Kyung did not know what he wanted to major in before he came to study at BMC. He knew that he had an interest in business, but he needed to take some classes before he felt sure that he wanted to major in business.

Prior to BMC, I honestly didn't have a set belief as to which major to pursue, so I just came to BMC try to see everything for myself, but I always had this interest in business partly because my father himself was an entrepreneur so I always had something to learn from, but both my parents and I wanted me to have a fundamental textbook knowledge prior to getting some hands-on experience. So, I took business classes in the first semester and some of the general education requirements because I couldn't get into classes, but then I came across a business club on campus called Phi Beta Lambda, and I was just drawn into it. There was something that got me, got me really into it, and as I became more active in the club I saw myself indulging myself in Business.

As Min-Kyung has taken classes and become involved in activities on campus, he has developed a stronger sense of his desire to study business and is hoping to transfer to UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

Through the process of taking classes, meeting other students, and becoming involved in extra-curricular activities, students are able to decide on their major while still at community college. This gives them the time to choose the appropriate school for transfer.

**Counseling, coursework, and the classroom.** International students are required to have a particular TOEFL score to enter most California community colleges. This ensures that they have attained a certain proficiency in English before they embark on their coursework. Students who have not reached the required TOEFL score can study at an intensive English language school and re-take the TOEFL. These language schools are usually private or are part of an extension program at a university. When students are admitted to the community college, they must take a placement test and are then placed in the appropriate ESL or English class. Of the seven colleges included in this study, only one did not require the TOEFL test but did have a placement test for new students. This happened to be a small international program, but this does not appear to be true for all small international programs at community colleges. Once students have completed their placement tests, they meet with a counselor or advisor to develop their education plan and select their classes.

My discussion of the international student experience in this section will include the supporting themes of experiences with counselors, different teaching styles and educational systems, interactions with instructors both in-class and outside the classroom, and group dynamics in the classroom.

***Counseling.*** The role of the academic counselor at the community college is to provide educational advising. The term “counselor” within the community college



context is usually used to refer to the role of academic advisor and does not normally include the areas of personal or career counseling. Counselors at the community college are usually faculty members, and their primary responsibility is their academic advising role. On the other hand, “advisors” or “international advisors” are staff members who work in the international student offices and provide services for international students.

Very often the academic counselor is one of the first people that students meet on campus. International students have certain expectations from their counseling experiences, but often feel that they do not get the help they needed. They feel that they are given the basic information they need for their education plan at that community college but nothing beyond that. Some international students come with a degree or partial degree from their home country and need information about getting credit for work already completed, going on to graduate school, or getting financial aid and scholarships. However, students report that counselors generally do not offer this kind of help. Some students are homesick and want emotional support and counseling. They are dealing with culture shock and have expectations that the community counselors will be able to help them.

Robert feels that he has not had very productive experiences with counselors at GRD. He said that he met with “a couple of interesting counselors who dissuaded me from coming to counseling at all to ask for questions. There were a couple of them that were rude, and a couple of them were simply not knowledgeable enough.” He completed an assignment for an English class in which he did a survey of the counseling office. Through the survey, he learned that there are good counselors, but he feels that he has not

seen them. He has found help at the International Student Office and has been happy with that:

The teacher insisted on us doing a survey on something on campus; she's very campus oriented. I did the survey, and it turned out that I simply wasn't lucky enough. There are definitely people who are stars of the counseling department. If you go to them, most of the students are satisfied, and there's a couple of counselors that they simply can't fire, they're trying to but they cannot, and those are the ones that I got both times and I simply got unlucky, so I never got proper counseling. That sort of dissuaded me from getting counseling. . . I did the whole thing myself, and then I came and I talked to Michael at the International Student Office, maybe a month ago and he was like, 'you're good, you're on the right track,' so that was my experience with counseling.

Sebastian feels disappointed with the counseling services he has received at GRD:

Regarding counseling for career counseling, I'm a little bit disappointed with the background that I got from the different counselors. I do understand that there's a high volume of people that they have to deal with, and cannot share their time with all these people, especially at certain times of the year when there's a period of enrollment.

He feels that the only help available had to do with getting his AA degree and transfer, but he was not offered any information about scholarships for four-year universities:

When I got here I had the idea of what I wanted to do. I always knew that I wanted to do something related to medicine, biology, or health sciences, but I was not really sure of the hassles or the obstacles of getting through that network. . . I didn't know the process that I had to go through in order to achieve that goal, I realized that from a third party that came to the college a couple of weeks ago. They were offering scholarships and information for students who wanted to transfer to four year universities, and they were surprised that I didn't have those details that I had to accomplish before transferring. . . . This was basic information that I didn't get from my counselors when I spoke with two different counselors from GRD, and they just gave me information about how to go through the process of getting the associate degree.

Sebastian would like to see community colleges put more energy into the needs of international students because they generate so much revenue:

I think that part of the interest of the educational system of California should be in promoting international students to come over here and get their education here due to the amount of money that we are actually bringing into the United States.

Dinh felt that his meeting with the counselor “wasn’t as good as I expected.” He said: “We went over the questions too fast, and the advisor didn’t give me enough detail, or we just didn’t have enough time...so I wasn’t satisfied with that.” When I asked if he would go back again and try to see another counselor, he felt pretty sure that he would not:

No, because I think if I need to know something it’s better to do research on my own on the internet...and I would find the answer. I think I would only go to the counselor when the answer is not on the internet, like if I had a problem in school that I needed them to help to fix, but if I want to learn about transfer, learn about other schools, it’s all available on the internet...and I can just email the school where I want to study, to transfer.

Antonio has seen a counselor only once and has not felt a need to have another visit:

I think that I talked to a counselor only once...and now...I try to manage by myself, I mean; I don’t usually go to talk to a counselor. I just went once and he kept telling me only what my study plan was, but then I didn’t come back again, so, I cannot say so much about that.

Antonio got help from the counselor with his educational plan, but he felt that he would not get any other information so he did not return.

Min-Kyung also talked about his counseling experiences at BMC. He felt that he got very limited information.

I really want to do no harm for BMC, and that’s the reason why I’m here, I have something to say about the counseling part. I had a counseling experience myself because I was running here and there and running all over, trying to get some information, so I talked to several counselors I’d say and you know again this is my personal opinion, but I got a feeling that they are giving the best answer for themselves...they’re not giving out the answers for international students or for that student exclusively...you know.

Min-Kyung’s goal is to transfer to UC Berkeley and he feels that he has worked very hard to make that happen. Because UC Berkeley is not one of the UC schools included in

the Transfer Admissions Guarantee, he thinks that counselors were not very interested in discussing that option and would prefer to see him look at a "safer" school.

It all comes down to again, and this is my feeling, but they were more concerned about transfer rates...because you see if a student doesn't make it out to the school that she wants from the school side just the one school who didn't get to transfer out, so...they were just trying to guide them towards somewhere they can transfer. Maybe they're seeing the reality and maybe they have seen so many students who didn't make it to the university that they were risking very hard, so maybe that could have been the best counseling for that student to take a step down and apply to somewhere else, but you know you have to first listen to what the student want. And that's a general feeling that I had, so I went there a couple of times, and I discovered that I wasn't really getting anything besides the brochure that they had, the checklist.

Min-Kyung feels that he did not get the individual help or response for his individual situation. Since he wants to transfer to UC Berkeley, he expected the counselor to guide him in that direction. Instead, he got information about the UCs that are part of the TAG. He feels that he did not get the information he needed from the counseling department and relied instead on his friends and other students:

So, I talked a lot to my friends and those friends who transferred out to the university they wanted and honestly I could get a lot of information from them rather than the counselors because when it comes to counselors I have to explain everything to them, like how we are different, how I am different, how I could be different, but you know just going, approaching my friends, we already have so many similarities and there are some students exactly like me who, like a predecessor, just walked the same pathway. Just asking them what they did is often times more convenient for international students.

Min-Kyung has learned to find his way and has done the research himself; he is optimistic about the possibilities of transfer to his first choice university.

On the other hand, one of Sarah's best experiences was her visit to the counseling office in her first week at the college:

I went to the counseling room and the counselor told me well you're, you're brave to come here first off. At that time I did not feel I was brave. She just told me ...you have to overcome those difficulties and that this will be another place that

you can call home. This touched me so much, so she helped me to figure out what classes I have to actually take and so that helped me a lot.

When she was having a lot of difficulties at the beginning of the semester, Sarah found comfort and support from her visit to counselor.

***Summary of counseling experience.*** As I listened to the student descriptions of their counseling experiences, I felt their sense of disappointment with the encounters they had. They felt that they had not received the advice and guidance they needed. In some cases, they expected emotional support or career counseling. They expected more time and more support from the counselor with whom they met, but the focus during their appointment was on developing their educational plan. I believe there is a mismatch between the international students' needs and expectations and the scope of what the counselor is in a position to offer. International students are alone in a new environment and are trying to understand the new educational system. Counselors have a large number of students to see, so the time they can devote to each student is limited. Also, most general academic counselors have not had training in international student services and are not equipped to deal with some of the issues that arise for international students. This is a difficult situation.

***Teaching styles.*** Most students noted that the teaching style they encountered in community college classes was quite different from what they had experienced in their home countries. Classes are very often more student centered, more interactive, and more focused on creativity and less focused on testing.

In China, according to Khloe, the focus is on exams and getting results and instructors are not very helpful:

You can say teachers in China are really mean because the only purpose in Chinese schools, as I told you, is for the tests; if you do well on the tests you are a good student; if you do not, you're a bad student.

She likes the flexibility of the community college system and feels that “here it is very different; you can do whatever you want; you can get access to anything you want. You just need to talk to different people and get different help.” She feels that there are some major differences between how students learn in the U.S. and how they learn in China:

I need to find a way to explain that in China, students are clever, but they don't have creativity...because we're doing the same thing day after days year after year...and so I am doing things here the way I want to, which I cannot do in China.

Khloe likes the more creative style of teaching and the focus on learning instead of testing that she has experienced in her community college classes.

Sakina has enjoyed her classes and the teaching style at the community college as well. She finds that classes are less theoretical here and more practical than her classes were in India. She said that “in India it's more like theory; education is more based on theory, and it's quite intense compared to here.” Sakina likes the more practical, hands-on approach to teaching at the community college.

Larissa talked about one of her classes in which the professor, Mr. G, provided an opportunity for students to get to know each other and communicate with each other at the beginning of each class. She said,

I was shy in one of my classes, but Mr. G actually helped me a lot because during the class you have to talk to different people every five or ten minutes of every class, so I got to talk with almost the whole class, which is about 35 people.

She found “Actually everybody was nice, and if I didn't understand the question or what they were talking about they were happy to help me.”

Lily is aware of different teaching and learning styles and while she likes interactive classes, she finds group work challenging—especially when she is in a group with other Chinese students who are reluctant to communicate in English.

A lot of different professors have different kind styles of teaching, and some of them are good. For some of them, you have to participate a lot in the class in order to earn points, and some of them require you to do presentations and actually do group projects.

Her math professor uses what Lily calls an Asian-style, which is lecture style and teacher-fronted. On the other hand, the business professor uses a more student-centered teaching style, which requires more participation. Lily likes the student-centered approach because it requires students to be more active.

The professor in my Math 1A class will put all the concepts on the board, explain them carefully to us, and then she will give us exercises to practice the concept. She does not require any participation in the class or any group discussion or presentation. As for my business class, that's totally different. The professor required us to do a group project, like a business plan, and we need to participate in the class in order to get participation points, so it really needs you to stand up to express your point of view, sometimes to convince your classmates why your view is right and theirs is wrong. It requires you to ... be really active. Instead of just sitting there and accepting things, you're actually giving things and you're exchanging your view...I like that kind of class experience because it is really rewarding and you really understand what the teacher is thinking, what the teacher is teaching, things like that.

I asked Lily if she has a preference for one style over the other and found that she had conflicting feelings. While she likes the American style of teaching, she is not altogether comfortable with it. She doesn't like to speak up in class and can be overwhelmed when listening to other people's opinions. However, she recognizes that in many cases she learns more in the more interactive, student-centered classes.

Daniel is in his first semester and feels: "well the professor is good; she can make the class interactive and not boring, because if you're active, she'll give extra credit so

people are answering questions and it's really fun." He likes the teaching style and the interactive nature of the course. He likes that his instructors are organized and the expectations are clear. He compares his educational experience here with his experience in Indonesia:

It's clearer here; the syllabus is set, and so the dates are clear when to submit homework, and when I have an exam. It's not really clear in Indonesia; sometimes it changes and so it's pretty good here, so I can do my homework early, so I'm not going to be late to submit it.

Olivia said that the teachers at GVC are nice, classes are small, and she has had the opportunity to take a number of classes from the same teachers. She can also take online classes. She seems to be more familiar with lecture type courses and finds the interactive style classes more demanding.

I'm loving it...classes are great, and the teachers are really nice and really close because the classes are small, and it's nice that you kind of stumble into the same teachers again, so they teach many classes. I also take online classes, which is a new thing, and that was strange at first but you get used to it. Sometimes it's more demanding than the sit-in class because they want you to interact. I don't know how many times throughout the week, so it's kind of tedious.

I asked Antonio how he feels about his experience at his community college. He has noticed some significant differences from his home country, Argentina. Here, classes are more diverse, exams are given more frequently, and there is more student interaction and activity. He pointed to the following differences:

It's different. Well first of all, in Argentina classes are homogeneous... in Argentina all of the students, or 95% of the class are from Argentina; there are practically no students from abroad; here it's international students...so that's one difference, one big difference.

Here, the system is different; here we have exams . . . for the semester only. In my country it's not for the semester; in my country it is for the whole year. Here in one year we have two semesters here, but in my country it's just a complete year. For me it's better... the way it is here with semesters.



I think in Argentina it's more traditional; the methodology is more traditional...the traditional way is the figure of the teacher at the front of the class you know talking for an hour and that's it; all the attention is on the teacher. That's the traditional way; it's really old fashioned that way; there's not so much interaction, at least not in the way there is here...here I'm taking English 5, and the professor never talks, I mean we interact between ourselves, and the professor poses a question and we have to interact ourselves and talk.

He also feels that there is little room for student interaction within the traditional teaching style of Argentina.

It's wonderful here; I prefer it to the traditional way because the other way is passive students, students who are sitting over there just listening, and it's a little bit boring and frustrating. This is the way I like it...because this is the way you learn, here, interacting with other students...always...of course, always in a respectful atmosphere, but you can interact.

He finds that students take the class seriously, regardless of age:

There is a huge variety of ages in my class. I had a student 18 years old and a woman over 50 years old, but yes, but...that student of 18 years old takes the class as seriously as the person who is 55 years old. I think it's good, it's good at least for me because you can hear different points of view from different stages in their lives from somebody who is 18 from somebody who is 55, and you can hear both; I think that's good. I think that enriches the class.

Antonio likes the diversity of ages, backgrounds, ethnicity, and interests in his classes.

He finds the style of teaching and learning less traditional, more challenging, and more rewarding.

Nicole says that the instructors "were really, really nice and way different from the teachers in my country; like they would always give you extra information; they had office hours, and they were all very nice and helpful."

*Summary of teaching styles.* In brief, students find the teaching style at California community colleges quite different from what they experienced in their own country and perhaps not quite what they had expected. It is more interactive and student-centered. Students are expected to participate in group discussions and presentations. There is less

of an emphasis on one big exam at the end of the semester and more on learning and creativity. International students are not always comfortable with the new experience initially, but as they become accustomed to it, they find that they enjoy it, they interact more with other students, and they learn more.

*System of education.* Students also talked about the different system of education and how confusing it is for them to maneuver their way through such requirements as general education, core courses, electives, and transfer courses. In their home country, the system was different. Students chose their major before entering university and spent four to five years on the path towards that major with a prescribed list of courses and one group of students. This was their expectation when they came to the community college.

Robert feels that it is difficult for international students to understand a system in which you choose your own classes and professors every semester. He compares the American system with the system he was familiar with in Romania:

It's generally different for somebody coming from outside of the U.S. educational system; well, nowhere in the world does it work like this, so for any international student it's going to be hard to make sense of what teacher I take...because we don't have that problem, you don't get to choose your instructors; you come at the beginning of the year, they assign you to a classroom with 30 other people, and other instructors come to you or you all travel from instructor to instructor, and you will spend from first grade to twelfth grade with those people, and then when you go to college they assign you to a new group of 30 people and you'll spend the next four to five years with them and you don't choose instructors.

Robert had taken some classes in Romania and was accustomed to a different system.

Students decide on their major when they start university. They are placed within that major and take the required coursework in the prescribed sequence. They generally stay with the same group of students for the duration of their studies and graduate at the same time.

Koyuki also said that she has had trouble with the American system of education because it is very different from the Japanese system that she was familiar with in high school. Likewise, from Nicole's experience, the system of choosing classes is different from how it is done in France. Before students decide to go to college, they choose their area of specialization: "In France you just have college; you just specialize when you go to college or you go to prep school and prep school is all general education... You'll get six hours of philosophy, six hours of economy, six hours of everything, or you go to university and then you study only psychology or only mathematics, or only whatever major you choose...so it's different." In France, lectures take place in big amphitheaters and "everything is planned" based on the student's choice of major.

Nicole likes the style of teaching in the U.S. and feels that the course expectations are clearly laid out. She says, "I would say the style of teaching is really helpful, and you know what you have to do to get good grades. This is the thing; they just tell you if you do that, that, and that, you get an A and that's easy." She feels that it is difficult to get to know people because you do not have the same group for all of your classes—"you don't have a group like a progression of the same people going to the same classes. I think this is a little weird because you don't get to know each other for that reason."

Many international students find it difficult to get used to the American system of choosing their core courses, electives, and general education courses. This is the first time they have encountered this kind of process. They find the system confusing and look to counselors, instructors, and staff members on campus for help.

***Instructors.*** Students said that their instructors are helpful and friendly and are available and accessible outside of class. Hiroshi feels that he has had a good educational

experience so far: “it’s been good, really good. I saw instructors like I have never seen in Japan. I mean I can’t believe this because teachers in Japan are really strict and formal.” Instructors in the U.S. are more relaxed and less formal “so that was a surprising fact for me, but I like it, I like it; it’s awesome for me.” The instructors are approachable, and “I talk after class if I have a problem.”

Khloe has found her teachers at YBCC very helpful:

I think all teachers help me a lot with my studies; they are not just like you just finish your class and then leave; they always help you if you have questions. You can always come to them, I mean talk to them about the courses or not, about the courses. Teachers in China don’t do that.

Koyuki is happy with her academic experience. Classes are small, and professors are helpful.

It’s really small, the class, so like when I don’t know or don’t really understand, I can ask the professor, and usually the professor teaches me how to do that or explain when I don’t know something.

Lily has had a positive experience with staff and faculty members on campus. She talked about a wonderful experience with her accounting instructor. Lily felt the instructor was very good and that the experience gave a real boost to her self-confidence.

I took an accounting class, my first quarter when I came here, and I had no experience in accounting before when I was in China, but my accounting instructor here is really helpful. She understands my anxiety and my discomfort with the terms and things like that. She suggested visiting her during office hours and asking questions. She said that you may encounter some difficulties in the beginning, but if you just try hard and ask questions and form study groups with other students, you are going to make it, and finally I got an A in that class and more surprisingly after class I kept contact with her. I kept talking with her for several quarters, and she elected me as a student of excellence in the accounting department, which was really unexpected. I am really thankful for her help. Yeah, she was like my mentor here.

Robert has found some instructors that he likes and has found them to be very accessible. He has built a rapport with them and likes to take as many classes from them as he can. He likes instructors who are strict and serious and provide interesting lectures.

There are a couple of instructors that I've created just a personal rapport with, and I keep taking classes over and over with those instructors just because I know them. I'm comfortable with their way of teaching; most of them are old school instructors. They're a little bit older and they sort of remember how things were done in the old way, which is the way things are still done where I come from, so the old schoolness of them; they're usually more strict, but they have the tendency to give you more, so they will ask more from you and they will be a little bit stricter and harder, but they will give you a lot of information...and they will provide quality lectures...if you want to listen.

When he came to GRD, he met other international students and got some practical advice and suggestions from them:

When I came here, other international students essentially I think Emilio looked at my schedule once and he was like "whooooaaa...don't take that teacher; he's like that's a C right there; don't, don't do that, no let's go and change it right now." So he took me, and I was like why, what's up, why would I, so he showed me Rate My Professor.com.

Robert finds that other international students can be more helpful than counselors when it comes to choosing professors. And, in particular, international students help each other because they have had similar experiences. American students assume that the international students already have the information they need.

It was another student, it wasn't a counselor, and it wasn't somebody from school. It was a different student, an international student, which is more important, because American students will either already know this, and they wouldn't think that you don't know this, like everybody knows this, or they wouldn't necessarily have the preference for this or that instructor, because of an instructor having an accent, if the instructor is international as well, and he has an accent. On one side it's easier for you to connect with them because they're international as well and there's something to talk about. On the other hand, if their accent is really strong and your English is very bad, and they don't happen to speak your language, you're in big trouble, you will not understand what they're saying and you will probably have a bad grade, and for internationals we all come here for something.

He uses Rate My Professor.com and feels that it works for him with choosing his instructors.

Aiko has had good experiences with her professors. In particular, she likes her psychology teacher:

I like my psychology teacher; if I go talk to her and if I have any questions she always welcomes us, asks if we have questions, and any problems going on, and then she listens to us and then she's really nice.

She feels that if you do your best and you communicate with your professors, you will do well in class. She communicates with her professors and has found them to be very helpful.

I usually just try first and I talk with them and you know first I talk to them and if they're not really willing to help us I'm just going to give up, but most of the time they're nice and I usually send an email to them like I might have to be absent from this class, so is there anything I can do and then usually they understand that situation so we can maybe figure out something...I think that's what you have to do is just try once...and ...and see if they can help me out.

She goes to their office or emails them: "I do...everything like going to their office, talking to them in offices hours. I go after class, and if I don't have time, I send an email to them."

Sebastian is also happy with his instructors. He feels that they go beyond their assigned duties and responsibilities to help their students. And many of them empathize with their students and understand the situation of the international student:

I have no complaints for my professors; most of them I see as mentors, beyond their duties are as professors. Many of them have the understanding and the patience to understand what I'm going through as an international student, and also community colleges, they recruit students that have . . . in other words special needs. Some of these people already have their families; they are starting their studies at an older age than usual, or they don't have the economic resources to study, so I'd say that professors have a more human approach to understanding the situations which the students are going through.

He came to the community colleges with some preconceptions about the faculty and students and he has been surprised to find that these are not valid:

I think that many international students prefer the community college over some over private colleges, and they like the eagerness of the professors to see their students develop. . . These professors have this interest, this kind of social point of view of seeing people do better. It actually surprised me . . . because I saw community colleges as a place where poor people, poor in money and poor in education go, people that don't have the discipline or the interest to study, that they were just there because of the benefits of being a student or just killing time. But, but actually it turns out that it's the other way around. People are here because they want to be better; it's because they want to study; it's because they're putting a lot of effort taking some time from their families or not working as much or as they can because they want to have an education. And, the professors have this human understanding of their situation, and it's just really surprising and really encouraging and . . . it's just impressive for me.

Sebastian had some perceptions that community college students were not very serious students and that they went to college just to pass the time. He now sees them differently. He feels that they are hardworking and dedicated. They make a lot of sacrifices to attend community college. The professors who teach these students empathize with their situation, understand their challenges, and are eager to help and support them.

Antonio feels that in Argentina his professors cared very little about their students whereas here the professors feel "closer" and empathize with the students' situation

In Argentina ,I feel that the professor do not understand the students so much; I was studying before coming here. I was taking English training courses to be an English teacher; I used to attend classes at night because I used to work during the day... so I realize the professors do not care how much effort students make there because most of the students are people who are already married and people who have already children and they go at night to the training course, but I feel like the professors do not pay attention to that. But here, I think it's different, like professors can feel a little bit closer to a student who has to work, who has to study, or maybe who has children.

Antonio's observations are similar to Sebastian's. He feels that community college professors get to know their students and their situation. They are aware of their

students' many commitments to their families, their work, and their studies. On the other hand, professors in Argentina do not seem to care about their students.

Ilyas has found his full-time and part-time instructors accessible and helpful:

Not everyone is a full time instructor, and they don't all have offices at RRC. My last English instructor didn't have an office in RRC, so if you want to meet her, you have to send an email, and she will tell you what time she can come and meet you—in one of the rooms in the library or in the writing center.

He can always manage to get an appointment with his instructors. Even the part-time instructors will find a time and location to meet with their students.

In general, international students have very positive opinions about their instructors and have had good experiences with them. They find them accessible and easily approachable in class, after class, and during office hours. Instructors are friendlier and more informal than the international students are accustomed to in their home institutions. For the most part, the participants in this study are happy with their experience with their instructors.

*Student conflict and difficulties.* There were, however, some examples of difficult experiences, conflicts, and misunderstandings between students and instructors. Sarah had a difficult experience with one of her ESL instructors in her fourth week at the college:

I kind of had a fight or a quarrel with my ESL teacher in the first month, but I really don't know until now; I still have no idea why she was so mad at me. Probably, it was because of the way I asked her questions. She didn't like it, so there was one day she asked me to stay after the class and she told me, and the first thing she told me was 'You're not happy in my class,' but at that time I totally had no idea what happened, so she said a lot of mean words to me. I couldn't risk explaining anything or responding to her because I was shocked, and there was nothing I could say. And I believe I'm a diligent student; I'm really serious about my courses, so I felt really bad because this was the first time I think I heard those kinds of words from my teacher, so I was kind of . . .very upset.



Sarah never quite understood what the issue was, but she was very troubled by the experience. She felt that she might have asked too many questions in class and upset the instructor. “I drove the questions too far away from the topic she was talking about.” Sarah told her friends about the problem. “After I told the story to some of my closest friends they didn’t think it was my fault or something, and probably it depends on the person’s personality.” Sarah did not understand what she had done to cause this problem. She said, “Until now I didn’t really figure out why.” She moved to the back of the room and tried to ask fewer questions but got into trouble again when she looked at her phone during class to check the time. Sarah’s strategy for dealing with the situation was to keep quiet, study hard, and stay at the back of the room. She finished the semester and got an A in the class.

Elaine recounts an experience with one of her instructors at OGC that left her feeling confused and embarrassed. She asked her instructor for permission to miss one class to attend a Holy Week event, something that was important to her because of her family, religion, and culture. She said that the instructor “got mad at me because she said that I have to separate religion from doing other things here in the States but in the Philippines, it’s okay, because almost everyone of us is Catholic; that’s why it’s okay and it can be excused.” She was not penalized for missing class and did not lose any points because this was the only absence she had. However, she felt bad because, “I was embarrassed in front of my classmates.” When I asked Elaine if she had been able to talk privately with her instructor, she said that, “well I talked to her . . . when the class was about to start . . . and then my classmate was there.” This experience seemed to have had a

profound impact on Elaine. She felt humiliated and embarrassed in front of her classmates.

In both of these situations, the students felt confused about what actually happened and came away from the experience feeling embarrassed, confused, and frustrated. They did not understand what they had done wrong and why the instructor was upset them. They felt vulnerable because of their language difficulties and the new culture within the classroom, the college, and the new country.

*Group dynamics.* In the larger colleges, it is not uncommon to see large numbers of international students in the same class. They choose similar majors and select particular instructors based on recommendations of friends in their network and information from websites. They choose classes together and work on homework together. This has a tremendous impact on the interactions between students in the class. Robert works in the International Student Office at GRD and has observed that:

All the people from China, from Mainland China will always take like the same math class together and there are 12 or more in my math class now; I'm studying with them simply because they're so organized and everything, so it worked out, you know. It's a big group, and they all work together and everybody has all the homework, and they're pooling resources together to attack the course better and they're always hanging out together.

Robert has observed that many Chinese students stick together. They take classes together, study together, review for their tests together, spend their free time together, and generally support each other.

However, Lily finds that group activities are difficult when there is a large group of Chinese students:

I remember when I was in a music class, and my groups were made up mostly of Hong Kong students. During the group discussion, they didn't like to say much about the topic. And I'm not that talkative, and it's really hard for me to break the

ice between them in order to stimulate their thoughts, but that's a good challenge for me. This makes the teaching and learning experience in the classroom very difficult. English is not being used by all students in the classroom.

This interferes with the instructor's ability to involve all students equally and with the students' ability to interact with each other. It also means that some students are being excluded.

*Summary of counseling, coursework, the classroom.* In many cases, international students were disappointed with their counseling experience and felt they did not get the help they needed. Instead, they turned to friends, classmates, and staff members in the ISO for help. They like that community college classes have a teaching and learning style that is more creative and interactive than their classes in their home country. However, they find the system of education confusing because they are not used to taking responsibility for choosing their classes and instructors. They reported having positive experiences with their instructors in most cases. However, two students spoke about conflicts they had with their instructors in the classroom. Finally, students feel that it is difficult to have large numbers of international students in the same class as it can have a negative impact on the interaction among the students in class.

**The role of the international student office and staff on campus.** All of the colleges involved in this study had an international student office and staff members. The International Student Office (ISO) is responsible for helping international students in many ways—orientation, registration, and compliance with the rules and regulations for maintaining their visas. Staff members also organize social activities for international students, which will be discussed in the structure of the social experience. In this section, I will discuss the two supporting themes of the role of the international student office and

the importance of the relationship between international students and key personnel on campus.

*The International Student Office.* Lily attended a three-day orientation for new students. “The orientation is basically to introduce the college to new international students and solve some problems for them and. . . it’s for three or four days.” It is conducted by the international student office, and they have counselors and staff members on hand, “who talk about how you’re going to register for a class and about the clubs on campus.” About 300 students attended orientation. Lily found this very helpful and recommends it for all incoming international students at her college.

Austin also found the ISO helpful when he first arrived. They gave him a survival guide and held a three-day orientation session. The ISO offered a field trip, but it cost \$20, so Austin decided not to spend the money on it.

Sebastian is happy with the services offered by the ISO and its staff on his campus. He said that:

I’m really happy about the international students’ office and I think. . .they do a really good job in giving the students an introduction to American culture, American education and how to adapt to this environment, and . . . I’m very happy with their job; they are super helpful, joyful, enthusiastic, friendly. . . .They’re just really great professionals there.

They provide support with immigration and visa needs:

They also provide a lot of support in regards to my immigration status; they make sure that I follow the rules properly; they make sure that I take my minimum of 12 units. They make sure that I’m doing well in school, that I don’t get low grades, and that I’m not getting into trouble.

Ilyas works part-time in the ISO at RRC and has observed that:

The staff are really organized. In my old school you were on your own. At RRC the office is very active and Aya, one of the academic advisors for the ISO, is really on top of things. They know most of the international students by name. They’re really friendly, and the nice thing is they have a lot of events either

through the ISO or international student club. So, every other week we find a place where we hang out, and if you have nothing to do you can get together with the international club.

The ISO at RRC has five staff members: two advisors, the coordinator, and the assistant to the coordinator, and the academic advisor. The academic advisor is part-time and there are also a number of student assistants. The ISO organizes a three-day orientation for international students:

When they first arrive, we tell everyone to check in at the office. They meet everybody—the 4 or 5 people who work there and the student workers. We have a big orientation before classes start. That’s a three-day orientation, we go through everything that has to do with immigration, academic wise, and a tour of the campus. We explain a little bit about banking and all that. You meet with an academic advisor. You schedule your educational plan . . . and if you want to transfer out, you decide on which classes you have to take so you don’t take any classes you don’t need.

Dinh has found the international student office “helpful, and they regularly have a lot of activities for us; they support us with housing, with studying, and they contacted me before I came and I found that very helpful.” On the day I spoke with him, he had just attended a Thanksgiving dinner hosted by the ISO for 200 international students:

Today, they invited all the international students to come for dinner for free food, and it was good; there wasn’t much activity, but I cannot complain; it was good that we had a chance to meet each other and have dinner together. . . There were I think almost 200 international students.

Aiko finds it easier to go to the ISO to see a counselor. Usually there is no wait-time because the counselor there is dedicated to international students only and is available three days a week. Aiko says, “I usually go to the international office to meet the counselor there because otherwise I have to wait to meet the counselor in the colleges, so usually I go to the international office.” When she goes to the ISO, “I can just quickly see them and talk to them.” GRD also offers a three-day orientation for new students.

The relationships between international students and staff members in the ISO are a source of support and comfort. The activities conducted by the ISO staff members help introduce international students to their new educational experience, orient them to the college, and guide them through the process of reaching their goals.

***Key contact person.*** Another important aspect of the international student office is that there is a staff member on campus students know by name and they can go and talk to for whatever reason. In many cases, it is the international student advisor; in some cases it is the student assistants in the office, international students themselves, who form this important relationship with international students.

James has a friendly rapport with Angela, the International Student Coordinator at OGC, and he is very grateful for her help. “Angela has been really supportive to me like whenever I have problems, even something small I can talk to her. She’s a very good listener, and she’s a good advisor.” James likes to bake and often brings pastries and cookies to the International Student Office.

Angela has also been an important person in Elaine’s life and has helped her adjust to OGC and life in the United States. Angela was the first person Elaine met at OGC. She says that:

Angela knows that I’m a little bit shy so she helps me come out of my shell like she convinced me to attend the International Club, and she let me help her with some of her work relating to other people.

Elaine volunteers in Angela’s office twelve hours a week. This has helped her socialize with other people and gives her a sense of belonging.

Robert says that the international student advisor at GRD, “Patrick is formidable.” Robert works with him in the ISO and has great respect and admiration for him:

I think I met him one of the first days that I came here and he was kind of strict that day. Sometimes . . . Patrick will say no, that's not possible. So my first experience with Patrick wasn't that positive, but the next time I came in, he was extremely helpful, and then the next time I came in he was even more helpful, so I warmed up gradually to him and then eventually I started working here. Now he is very good at making people feel good in this office about their job, you know, making people comfortable and that's a skill that I would like to have. I'd love to be able to do what he is doing, so I'm just quietly looking over his shoulder and learning how to do that, how to be that way, how to sort of stabilize and anchor this office and have everything work a certain way.

According to Robert, "[Patrick] is like a good instructor. He is lenient, and he will help you; he will give you all the information that you need, he will give you more information than you need but then he'll ask for a result, so, it's a very efficient way to work out, I want to know how to do that." Patrick has been a good mentor for Robert in the work environment in the ISO along with being a good advisor.

Farai also feels that Patrick has been particularly helpful and supportive:

I also got to meet Patrick, here, who's been amazing and I said "let me align myself with Patrick and just have a good support system of people that I can ask questions from."

Patrick has been very personable and friendly and he has helped Farai with many areas: academic, social, cultural, and legal issues pertaining to his visa status.

If I have any question, I feel like I can ask Patrick anything...that's easy. That's how much of a nice man he is. You know at the end of every conversation, we have it's always 'Alright, T. you have a good day, feel free to contact me again if you need anything else.' That's his goodbye; those are the last words I remember, and so from those words, I'm always asking Patrick questions, and he's really helped me with my academic studies, figuring out whether I should take a heavy load of units, or if I should cut it down, you know, giving me advice as to whom I should speak to on campus about certain things. Also I was getting my driver's license, so he also assisted me in figuring out what I need to do to get authorization to get that and everything, but he's just, in terms of just being an international student, he just tells you everything.

Patrick has also helped Farai with “travelling out of the country and everything, he’s really helped me a lot on that . . . and meeting the requirements if you leave and how you get back in and all of that type of stuff.”

Sakina has found people helpful on campus: “Michael and Patrick . . . they’re both quite helpful; whenever I come in I’m always looking forward to getting help from both of them.” Michael and Patrick are two of the international student advisors. They have helped her with registering for classes. In particular, she talks to Patrick, the international student advisor in the ISO: “mainly with Patrick, Patrick is the person whom I talk most with.” Sebastian also feels that Patrick has been like a friend to him. He said: “I’m really happy with Patrick, more than an assistant or a school officer, I almost see him as a friend.”

Ilyas talked about Mai Ando, the international student advisor in the ISO at RRC. He has found that “she helps a lot of students too . . . somebody walked in with two suitcases I had to take them to a hotel, but next day she took them around to find an apartment. It’s not like she had to do that. She was just glad to help.” Ilyas works in the ISO and has always felt that it was a very friendly place: “Even like before I was working in the office I was like doing like going in there just to say hi.” Ilyas feels that this office creates a warm and inviting atmosphere for international students.

Min-Kyung also works in an ISO and has had very positive experiences with the staff members:

Rosa, who’s our director at the office, wrote me a letter of recommendation for my scholarship and she is just, she is the busiest woman on campus I would say, but she put her time and she wrote me a letter. Not only that but the staff are very heartwarming; they make it like a family like environment; therefore, I’ve stayed working there for about two years.



In summary, the international student office plays a very important role in the lives of the international students. Their staff members, advisors, counselors, coordinators, and directors ensure that the international students are fulfilling their visa requirements; they offer academic support and guidance; provide emotional support and a warm, and welcoming environment; and they organize social and cultural activities. In sum, they play a key role in shaping the international students' academic, social, and cultural experience at their respective community college.

*Summary of the structure of education.* *The Structure of Education* incorporates the themes of goals, choice of major, coursework, counseling, instructors and the classroom, , and the International Student Office. The goal for the majority of international students is to transfer to a four-year university. The first choice for many of them is often UCLA or UC Berkeley, but as a second choice they sign a TAG, which guarantees them a place in a UC. They may also apply for admission to a CSU. Some students choose a college because of its location or because it offers a signature program that interest them. A number of students are thinking about changing their plans because of unanticipated costs. Two students are planning to move out of state, and three hope to go to graduate school. The data points to the fact that the international students' goals are subject to change depending on the students' experience in the first two years at community college.

Some students have already chosen a major whereas some are still exploring their options. Parental pressure and influence sometimes causes a change of major. International students also choose to change their major when they start to consider the cost of the education and the possible ensuing career opportunities.

In a number of cases, students expected direction and guidance from counselors, and they felt that they did not receive it and were disappointed with their counseling experiences. The focus of the help they received was on their education plan.

Students saw some very real differences between the style of teaching and the system of education between the U.S. and their home country. While they like the teaching style in their community colleges classes, they find the system of choosing core courses, electives, and general education courses confusing. Students also commented on the difficulties of having large numbers of international students in the same class and the impact it may have on group dynamics and interaction in the classroom.

The International Student Office plays a central role in the international students' experience by providing visa and academic guidance and a certain measure of emotional support. Students also expressed their appreciation for the presence of a key contact person on campus who offered them guidance, mentoring, emotional support and friendship.

Finally, international students come to the community college with the expectations that they will reach their goal to transfer to a four-year university. Some expect to transfer to two of the top UC schools in California. Others expect to transfer to a UC school through a TAG, to a CSU school, or to an out-of-state university. They expect to get help from counselors with their choice of major and future career path, and they expect emotional support and guidance. They expect a positive learning experience in the classroom, and they expect to be able to enroll in the courses they need for transfer. They also get help and support from the International Student Office.

## **The Structure of the Social Experience**

*The Structure of the Social Experience* includes the supporting themes of living situations, establishing friendship and networks, club involvement, and activities outside of college. This structure also includes a discussion of the supporting theme of personal development as it relates to the structure of the social experience.

**Living situations.** International students find accommodation with a host family through home stay programs, in apartments close to the college, with family and friends in the area, and in dormitories. In many cases, their living situation has a direct impact on the international students' social interactions and experiences because of the people with whom they live. This is why living situation is included in the structure of social experiences.

**Home stay.** Min-Kyung got in touch with a home stay program called ISS before he came to the U.S. One of their staff members picked him up from the airport and took him to the home of the family with whom he would be staying. Min-Kyung's home stay experience was a good one:

I filled out an application with the ISS, so the room and the house were already chosen before my arrival, and I also had a pick-up from the airport. This is a program that home stay agencies offer as well. So I came to the airport, found the exit, and then we met; he picked me up, and he dropped me off at my home stay, so...I said, hello, made some short introductions, and then I found my room. I arrived actually a week before school started, and the next day, they showed me the college, and they showed me the environment. There was a kid of my age. He had a car, so he drove me around, showed me [the city] and all, so I enjoyed it. Then I got to learn how to take the bus to school, so I came to BMC and I commute that way.

This experience was fairly typical for students at the large colleges. At GVC, Sarah, Lily, Alex, Daniel, Henry, and Austin all started out with host families through a home stay program. Likewise, Khloe (YBCC), Min-Kyung, and Anna (BMC) all stayed

with host families. The host family welcomes the student into their home and acts as a support system both socially and culturally for the new arrivals.

When she came to GVC, Sarah did a home stay and lived with a Mexican-American family for four months. Sarah really liked the family and found them very supportive and helpful. She said,

I am really thankful for the things they did for me in the first week. They brought me to the bank, and they helped me to get to know America. At first, they really made me feel better because it has a sense of family. And in that family they have one little girl and one little boy, and Auntie she was pretty nice to me . . . they cooked some Mexican food or American food for me... and it was really good.

Sarah had signed a contract to stay with the family for three months. After the three months were up, she decided to move out and rent an apartment with two other international students. "I have two roommates. One is from Japan, and one is from China." They speak English with each other. Also, Sarah now has a car and finds it easier to get around.

Lily lived with a host family when she first came to GVC. This was organized through an international home stay program (ISP). ISP also provided a driver to pick her up from the airport. The host family was very nice to her and they took her to different places. "They are a local U.S. family and they are really nice to me. On weekends, they would take me out to a baseball game, to the beach, to amusement parks or to places like Los Angeles during long weekends, and they make great food." They have two girls, one in elementary school and one in middle school. Lily stayed with the host family for about a year. She feels that it was a very good experience. "I think it was very helpful; they introduced me to a new culture, and I got a chance to really live with them and to know their habits and how to improve my oral English."

Alex lives with a host family, as arranged through a home stay program. They are Filipino-American. They have a 22-year old son, but Alex does not get to spend time with him since he works and goes to the gym after work. Alex feels lucky to be with this family and says: “they’re very nice, not like other host families, but mine is very good.”

Alex’s host family has helped him in many ways:

They helped me with buying things when I first came here. They told me what to buy; they took me to the bank to help me open an account, and they helped me set up the internet connection with them, although very trivial, it’s very important.

Alex has heard of other students who have had problems with their home stay family, but I did not hear of any negative experiences between international students and the host families.

Daniel lives with a woman whose daughter is at a university on the East Coast. He feels that “it’s really good; she’s nice, and sometimes she cooks, sometimes I cook; I prefer it that way.” His host mom has helped him find his way around, but he likes to be independent and take care of himself. He said: “actually I like to do in my own way, so I didn’t really ask for help, but she helps a lot by showing me around and showing me some supermarkets.” Daniel thinks that he will stay with his host mom as this is a very comfortable situation for him.

Henry says that his host father is “a nice person, but the only issue is that he has curfew, even though I’m over 18.” Henry has to be home by 10 PM, even on weekends. Henry thinks this is “because of [the host father’s] prior experience, of having issues with students not coming back on time.” Henry has “told him that’s, it’s...it’s impossible on weekends, and we’ve sort of settled on that, but I don’t think he likes it still.” Other than this issue, Henry is very happy with the situation.

Austin also lived with a home stay family when he first came to the United States. He had a very good experience with them. "My host mom just treated me like family." He feels that his host family was "awesome, I mean it was like the best host family ever." Other students told him about negative experiences they had had with their home stay family. Austin says that a "lot of my friends told me 'my host family sucks, they just force me to do housework and provide nothing for me to eat.'" Austin's host mom is "actually a single-parent family, and the host mom doesn't mind cooking, and she did laundry for me; she cooked for me, and she's just awesome. She knows how to make different kinds of western food and Spanish food, and we were having a good time, and I tried to learn Spanish." Austin said that the family is Spanish-speaking, but they also speak English. They helped him get around and helped him in many ways. "The host family is very nice to me; they told me that if I need anything, I can just ask, and if I want to get to any places they would just drive me there." Austin stayed with them for a year and says, "I wanted to try to be independent; they did my laundry, yeah I mean, and it's good but I wanted to try to do my own thing." Austin moved out at the end of the first year and now lives in an apartment with other international students who are also from Hong Kong and speak the same language, Cantonese. Austin is very positive about his home stay experience.

Khloe also stayed with a host family when she first came to the U.S. She liked the home stay family very much and says that "my host family was so nice; they treated me like their second daughter. I always come back to visit them." Ilyas is an international student himself and works in the International Student Office at RRC. He says that a lot of international students at his college do home stays. The ISO does not arrange the home

stays but provides information about an organization in the area that does. Some of the international students are under 18 and they are not old enough to get an apartment on their own, so they usually find a home stay situation for the first year. Ilyas has not heard about any problems that the international students might have experienced.

Min-Kyung works in the ISO at his college and meets a lot of international students. Although he had a very good home stay experience himself, he talked about impressions he has gotten from other students about home stay experiences: “I was very fortunate, and the fact that I stayed there for six months explains itself, but based on the experience with other international students, I was one of the few lucky people.”

Based on his conversations with other students, Min-Kyung’s impression is that students are exploited in the home stay experience:

Many see international students as a person or a group of people to rip off, and just because they don’t know anything or are not capable of communicating or expressing themselves quite yet, I see these outrageous overcharges. They try to get every penny out of the deposit that they put before leaving the room, “you didn’t clean your room; it will cost you \$100. You know you didn’t tell me a month in advance; I can’t give you your deposit”...and then it’s like you know when they complain to the school, the school isn’t responsible because school is not doing it, right? And the person who is in charge is very hard to reach. It’s my own judgment. Having seen my friends go through all that, there is not a friendly person for students. I can only imagine how much money they’ll be collecting from all the international students because the charges are outrageous.

Min-Kyung feels that international students are often forced to pay high fees and surcharges by the host family and the home stay program The ISO does not and cannot get involved because the program is run by a private company. He feels that he was exploited when he paid to be picked up at the airport by a home stay agent:

It was \$80 just to get myself picked up and be delivered to a home stay family...and you know even if I took a cab, I’m looking at \$50 max, I guess; \$80 I think that’s crazy, and he wasn’t even on time. I was stranded there for two hours.

Min-Kyung's host family was Filipino-American. He said that the only problem was the food: "that's a problem, the food was Filipino...so I it was actually my reason for exiting the family because I just couldn't survive eating instant noodles for half a year, and I was paying for something that I couldn't eat." International students pay between \$650 and \$750 per month for room and board, "but when it comes down to meals, it's really personal, but as a foreigner, it's really hard to get used to American food." Besides the food, Min-Kyung was happy with his experience with his host family.

International students reported hearing horror stories about home stay experiences and home stay families. However, this did not come out in the interviews with the international students in this study. The host families took good care of the new arrivals: they showed them around; they helped them with such practicalities as opening a bank account, finding public transportation, and getting a driver's license; and they provided an introduction to American society and culture. The international students have had very positive experiences with their host families.

*Apartments.* Depending on the location of the college, students are often able to find apartments nearby. The most common trend is for students to start out with a home stay situation and then move to an apartment once they have made friends and have become familiar with the area.

Hiroshi lived in the dormitory for his first year and then moved to an apartment near the college. He lives with a roommate who came at the same time as he did and they plan to graduate at the same time. He likes living in an apartment because on the weekends, "usually people come over to my house . . . I don't know, they don't even tell



me; they just knock on my door.” He likes the freedom of having his own place and having his friends come and visit.

Now Lily is “living in an apartment with two students who are also from mainland China.” She says they try to cook every day, but sometimes she is too tired or too busy. She says “when I first moved to that apartment, we would sometimes invite friends to come over and have dinner together, cook together, but I have two roommates, and one of them lives in the living room, so it’s not that good to always invite friends here.” She takes the bus to college and feels that “it’s really convenient.” Lily is happy with her current living situation.

Antonio lives in an apartment with his wife and two roommates: a professor who works at a CSU school, and Ruth, a retired woman. They have gotten to know “neighbors, or friends of my roommates, my roommates’ friends.” His wife

sometimes goes to adult school because she needs to learn English, but it’s lucky for her because where we live she has to talk in English because they speak only a little bit of Spanish; they are learning a little bit of Spanish because we are there, so sometimes we exchange languages.

One of Antonio’s roommates “teaches Asian American studies [at CSU] . . . and later I’m going to talk to him and see if he knows something, or maybe he can tell me where to go to talk about getting some financial aid.” This roommate has been able to give Antonio some information about the CSU school that he hopes to transfer to and they also speak English together. While Antonio is content with his living situation: “I would like it to be better, but I know the way we live right now is temporary; that’s my hope, my faith; my faith is that one day we’ll be in a better condition; that’s why I’m studying, but only God knows.” In the meantime, Antonio and his wife practice their

English, get to know people, and learn about different aspects of American society through their roommates.

At RRC, students live in apartments close to the campus. Ilyas reports that: “RRC doesn’t have dorms, but it’s really close to a UC campus, and there are apartments. It’s only about 10 minutes away. Most of the students live there.”

Likewise, Min-Kyung says that at BMC:

There are rental houses in the neighborhood. A lot of students actually live there sharing the rooms, because it’s within walking distance. It takes about two minutes for them to get here. They don’t limit it to students only, but the majority of the population is taken over by BMC international students. So, it’s like a little neighborhood... whenever they have a party or study group get together it’s at the apartment complexes all the time.

Living in student apartments is a good way for students to get to know each other and form a group of friends. The fact that the apartment complex is close to the community college campus is very beneficial for international students who do not have a car. This also makes it easier for the ISO to attract students to the college.

***Family and friends.*** As discussed in the structure of reasons, a number of international students came to the area because they had relatives and friends with whom they could live. This gave them a place to live as well as a support system. Living with friends and family offers students a supportive environment that is not unlike the home stay situation. James, Chen, and Elaine, at OGC, Olivia and Dinh at GVC, Robert, Sakina, Farai, and Sebastian at GRD, and Ilyas and John at RRC have family or friends in the area.

When James first moved to the United States he stayed with an American friend and former teacher whom he had met in Thailand. This helped him get to know people and places when he first arrived: “I remember the first and second week I came to the

states, my friend and I went on a road trip from the Midwest, from Texas to Philadelphia, three or four days.” After six months he moved to another college and got his own apartment. Chen lives with his aunt and uncle. He does not see them a lot. When they are together they use their native language, Cantonese, rather than English. He would prefer to live with young people of his own age, but he is not in a position to do that because of the cost. He has made friends with other Asians and Asian-Americans. Chen spends his free time with his friends playing games and watching movies.

Elaine lives with her parents and sister. She frequently describes herself as shy and prefers to study, go to the library, and spend time at home with her family. She has met other Filipinos and neighbors through her family.

Olivia lives with her parents, who came to work in the area. She feels that it is a good idea to stay in this area because her parents are happy here and do not plan on moving. Olivia meets people through her parents. “I live with my parents, so my parents have a big group of friends, and when they get together, they might have all the children there, and we get together as a group.

Similarly, Dinh moved to this area because his girlfriend is from here. She is studying in New York, but he sees her parents very often. He spends the holidays and weekends with them. They invite him to their home and he enjoys this as it is a good break from his roommates. He also likes the fact that he is learning about the American lifestyle and culture.

Robert’s relationship with his sister is very important to him. He and his sister lived together for a year, and she was very protective towards him:

She was definitely a support, and she helped me through the initial period. Even though she’s not that much older than me, her instinct to protect her younger

brother is extremely strong. Even though I'm taller than her, and I'm extremely protective of my sister, she still has that very Romanian style: this is my brother; I have to make sure that he is fine and everything, overly protective.

At the end of his first year, Robert's sister moved away, but by then, he felt that he had settled in well and had made some friends in the area.

Farai's support comes from his "aunt" and "uncle." He had only planned to stay with them for a year, but when his father died unexpectedly, they said that he was welcome to stay longer. He knows that he cannot stay with them forever and would like to experience college life on his own, so he plans to move out once he graduates from community college. He knows that he can come back to them if the new situation does not work out.

In the beginning, they said I could stay with them for a year. That was the agreement that I had with them, "Okay I'll stay with you for a year, and I'll get a grip on everything and I will figure out what, where, and how everything goes first. But, since my father passed away in the summer they said I could stay with them up until I graduate...so I understood that I can't stay with them forever number one, and number two I want to also enjoy the college experience, I don't want to...not enjoy the college experience, and I also want to participate in a campus environment and college experience. I decided I would rather give it a try, and if it doesn't go so well, then I could reach out to them.

Farai is looking at his options for transfer and hopes that he will have the resources to support himself when he is ready to transfer. He knows that he can always come back to live with his family friends.

Sakina lives with her aunt. She has a cousin of 23, but she is away at college. Sakina feels that "living with relatives has been helpful." She eats with them and spends time with her aunt. She takes public transport back and forth to the college and finds this very convenient as her aunt's house is "just like two blocks away from the transit station." Sakina has not met many people since she arrived here 10 months ago, but she

has gotten to know “just one family... next door.” They’re from the Philippines and she got to know them through her aunt. She has had family gatherings with them. She says: “they usually have a family gathering, so they invite us as well because like my aunt considers them like a part of her family, and they think the same way, so if there’s any family gathering they also invite us.” This is a very comfortable situation for Sakina and she is grateful to be able to live with her relatives.

Sebastian lives with his brother and sister-in-law and spends a lot of time with them.

On vacations or in our free time, we take long trips to different parts of California, or we go to Costa Rica to visit our family, or we just make trips to places that we like to know. My relationship with them is really strong, and that’s because they’re not just my family, but because I’m spending a lot of time with them.

Sebastian has been in the United States for about eight months, and during that time he has been busy studying and has not had the time to make new friends. Having his brother and sister-in-law has made his transition to the college and the community much easier for him as they support him academically, emotionally, and financially.

Ilyas lives with his aunt, who lost her husband the year before and is glad to have his company. Ilyas grew up being close to his aunt and cousins in the U.S. “And, I grew up close with my cousins and my mom’s sister; we were really close. Every summer they were visiting, and my cousin and I grew up like brothers.” He likes having this family support and a place where he can feel at home.

The international students find that having family members and friends in the area really improves their experience because they have a good support system. Being able to live with relatives makes it much cheaper for the international students to be here.

Without this support, they might not be able to study abroad.

*Dormitories.* It is unusual to find dormitories at California community colleges, but they do exist. Some students choose to attend a college with dormitories because they feel that it will offer them more security and safety. At BLC, international students are required to live in the dorms for the first year. Hiroshi and Young-Soo lived in dorms when they first arrived. Larissa and Koyuki remained in the dorms after their first year and became resident advisors (RAs).

Young-Soo lived in the dorms when she first arrived. She “had a roommate from Russia,” and she felt that “it was a good experience” at first, but having to live in the dorm for a whole year was too much.

I don’t know; one year, in my opinion, is too long because of the requirement. It’s okay if it is mandatory for a student who is under 25 years old to live in the dormitory for one year, but this is kind of expensive. But six months, I think is really good.

Because Young-Soo was over 25, she was not bound by this requirement and was able to move into her own apartment after six months, “so I just stayed only one semester and then I moved out.”

Koyuki chose BLC because the college has dormitories. She said that, “because here they have a dorm; it’s the only college here which has dorms, so I chose the dorm.” The other option that she considered would have been to stay with a host family. She felt uncomfortable with the idea of living with a host family based on what she had heard from her friends:

I kind of feel like I was worried about a host family because I heard from my friend who had experienced staying here, and then my friends told me some host families are really evil to new students. They just want to get money, and I felt kind of scared, so I just chose to live in a dorm and make friends.

Koyuki has had an opportunity to work as a resident advisor in the dorms, which helps cover some of her expenses. She has found it challenging because she has to oversee American students:

I feel really weird, because I'm kind of on top, or like a leader, so I need to tell American students, 'you cannot do this or that.' So, I kind of feel weird, because I always got information from someone, so I never expected that I would be teaching someone.

While being an RA is a great opportunity, it is very challenging for Koyuki. She deals with American students in the dorms even though she feels that she is lacking in knowledge of the language and the culture.

When Larissa arrived at the airport a driver from BLC picked her up and she was welcomed at the residence halls when she arrived.

And then I'm living in the residence halls. The resident hall coordinator, and one of the RA girls... were waiting, and they showed me my room and a little bit around. I had a roommate from Korea.

After her first year, Larissa became a resident advisor and still lives on campus. She recalls that when she came to BLC she was very shy, but she has been able to make a lot of friends:

I was very shy to be honest, and it was my first time here; I didn't know anybody, and I came by myself, but . . . I have made a lot of friends since the beginning; first the friends from the residence hall because we all live in the same building; and then after I started to work in the cafeteria. I also met new people and started to hang out. You hang out with one person, you meet other people.

The students at BLC have been able to make friends while living in the dorms and they feel that this was a good way to start their time at BLC. Because BLC is in a small city with a population of approximately 13,000 people, finding home stays or apartments for newly arrived international students might prove difficult. Having dormitories is one way of attracting international students to the college.

*Summary of living situations.* In this supporting theme, I have outlined the living situations experienced by international students and the impact these situations have on the international students' social experience. New students often stay with a host family for the first few months. They are introduced to this program through the ISO and make the arrangements themselves prior to arrival. The ISO does not run home stay programs, but they do collaborate with home stay programs in the area. Students are often anxious about the experience as they may have heard stories or rumors about bad experiences that other students have had with host families. However, all of the experiences that were shared were positive. The host family helped the international students when they arrived, welcomed them into their home and family, took them to places they needed to go, and helped them as they settled in and got to know the area and the community. Within their first year, the international students often leave the host family and move to apartments near the college where they can live with roommates, get to know their neighbors, and invite friends in whenever they please. They have fewer restrictions than they do with their host family; they gradually learn to be independent, and they develop a social life.

Similar to the home stay experience, international students who live with family and friends in the area have an established support system and get help in many aspects of their everyday lives. Being able to live with relatives also makes it less expensive for the international students to be here and reduces some of the financial pressure. While it is not the norm, if a community college has dormitories the situation is much easier for international students who move to the area and do not know anybody. They can make friends easily, feel safe and secure, and find future roommates.



To conclude, accommodation did not pose a major problem for international students. There are a number of options to choose from, and it is not necessary for community colleges to have dormitories in order to accommodate international students.

**Forming friendships.** The supporting themes that emerged in the theme of forming friendships were that students stayed within their own ethnic group, students reached out and made friends with other international students, they made friends with American students, or they did not see friendship as a priority and did not get involved with people to a great extent.

*Friends within the same ethnic group.* Koyuki found it difficult to communicate and socialize with people at first. She attributes this to her poor English skills. While she met many American students in the dorm, she did not feel comfortable talking to them. She found friendship and support from a fellow Japanese student, who was a student in the dorm and had been at the college and in the country longer than Koyuki. Koyuki referred to this friend as her “senior” and said, “my senior is from Japan, and she was an RA in the dorm. She really helped me, and then she told me how to speak and how to communicate.” Koyuki found that their personalities were similar and they became close friends. This friendship gave her support and guidance through the adjustment process. Her friend has now transferred to another state, but Koyuki still considers her a friend and role model.

Sarah participates in some of the International Student Club activities and enjoys them. However, most of the friends she has made are Chinese, and it has been hard for her to make non-Chinese friends:

It’s kind of hard for me to make friends with Americans because I feel like it’s hard for me to make friends with people from other countries. I know there are

some students, and they are really successful socially. They make friends with Americans and students from other countries. I always feel not confident enough about my English, and probably that is the reason why I don't really have too many friends here.

Sarah feels that her shyness and her poor language skills prevent her from making friends who are not Chinese. Sarah had only been in the U.S. for six months when we spoke. Her experience of finding it difficult to make friends from outside her own ethnic group is not unusual.

Henry met other students from Hong Kong and elsewhere during the International Student Orientation:

First I met students who are from Hong Kong mainly because my roommate was from Hong Kong. Then, in orientation we started playing some ice breaker games. In class we talked about the things that happened in orientation; that sort of stirred up some conversation of interest...and ...after that step by step, we formed some networks.

He feels that it is easier to meet people here than in Hong Kong because "in Hong Kong, everything's very packed; there's not very much space to communicate with other people whereas here you just walk over and sit next to them and talk about stuff, it's just more open." Henry's friends are mostly international students from Hong Kong. He hopes to get to know a lot of people, but at the same time feels that it is good to belong to your own ethnic group or a small group of friends. He believes that it is important to be committed to your relationships and that you need to protect your reputation among your friends from your home country. Henry wants to meet other people, but it is important to him to be included in his group of Hong Kong friends. He feels that he needs to be loyal to the group and does not want to get a reputation for reaching too far beyond the group.

I want to get as large of a network as I can, but I think it's good to stay dedicated to your own group because as I learned in history, you can have a very large network, but what if one of your friends, one of your close friends loses faith in

your commitment to their relationship with you. Then you know you start getting a reputation.

International students may want to reach out and form a diverse group of friends. However, they are afraid that they may be rejected by their own group if they do so. There is a certain amount of pressure on international students to stay with their own ethnic group. As a result, they avoid making new friends from other countries.

Khloe has made friends at YBCC. They are mostly Chinese. She finds it harder to make American friends:

It's always easier to make Chinese friends in college because we always find somebody in common, but it's quite difficult to find American friends or friends from other countries because we don't share any experiences or things in common.

She meets her Chinese friends "like in classes or other friends; it's a very small college so people know each other." She wants to get to know American students, but she has found it difficult.

When international students have access to students from their own ethnic background as in the case of Koyuki, Sarah, Henry, and Khloe, and can find friendship among their own group, they do not need to reach out and get to know students from other countries. It is easier for them to socialize within a group where they share the same language and culture and have similar backgrounds and experiences. Stepping outside their comfort zone and getting to know new people is much more difficult.

***Friendships with other international students.*** Chen is one of the few Hong Kong students at OGC. He attended the orientation session provided by the ISO as a new student and met some other international students from Mexico, South Korea, and Japan, and they became friends. In his free time:

I usually spend my time at my house; well you know there's not much to do in Orange Grove. Sometimes, I would go out with my friends, but usually we go to a friend's house to stay there for some time like maybe play games or watch movies, or usually the time is spent in my house like I would spend time watching the local TV.

Many of Lily's friends are international students and "some of them are from mainland China; some of them are from Japan and Turkey, and most of them are from Hong Kong." When she first started at Green Valley College, she found people throughout the college really helpful. She said: "everybody is so friendly, and if I have any question, I can just ask the students there and they will like respond to me really politely." In particular, she found that she had a lot of interaction with other international students and that "they're really friendly, and they want to know more about the Chinese culture, and so sometimes we just chat about the classes and about our experience here and our hobbies." She says that:

It's really funny that I met most of my close friends in the international student orientation and then in my class. Now it's in my club and study groups and places like that.

Lily feels that she has stepped out of her comfort zone and that it is getting easier for her to meet new people. But while it is easy to meet people initially, it is difficult to form deeper friendships.

I feel that it is becoming easier for me to talk to new friends from other countries. It's easy for me to just go out there and say 'Hey, how are you? Where are you from?' But you know to develop a deeper relationship with them is kind of hard for me.

Lily says that she doesn't meet many local American students because she is in clubs that have mostly international student members "because in both the business class and the international connection club, there are a lot of international student members, so maybe the local students do not want to participate in this club because sometimes they're by

themselves.” She feels that the presence of so many international students in the clubs discourages local students from participating.

I asked her how she feels about the size of the college. She responded:

I don't really care about the size of the college. I prefer the more diverse college, or if the college has all local students. That would be better because I would really get a chance to force myself to some degree to talk to them and to know about their culture.

Lily has a desire to reach out and make new friends from new places and she is willing to take a risk and move beyond her own ethnic group. However, it is difficult with so many students from her native country on campus.

Daniel has also met international students from other countries: “Well, there are some international students from Brazil, from Vietnam, Hong Kong, Americans and other Indonesians.” He feels that, “it's fun to meet new people and make friends.”

Austin has also made friends with other Chinese students. When he first came to GVC, he met other Chinese students from Hong Kong and found it comfortable. Soon, he realized that GVC has a diverse student body and that it was possible to meet students from many different countries. He likes this kind of interaction and now enjoys meeting people from all over the world.

At first, I didn't notice that there are a lot of Chinese here, so basically, when I first got here I used to hang out with Chinese people because I knew nothing about California, so it was much more comfortable to hang out with Hong Kong and Chinese people, but after I got used to the life here and got to know about the college, I started to know people from all over the world. The diversity of students here is so large, and we can easily run into Europeans or people from Africa easily. I think here I have a lot of chances to meet different kinds of people, especially since the international office promotes interaction between races and different kinds of event. So I'm having fun here knowing people from all over the world.

Austin likes the opportunity to get to know people from different places and says:

I mean luckily I'm not the person that is afraid of speaking in English, so I mean if I can get the chance to get along with the people from all over the world I would be fine. I just need the chance, or you know a platform for me to get in touch with them.

He finds people very helpful and friendly and spoke about people with great enthusiasm:

They are just so cool to me...I mean in Hong Kong, when you look at somebody then their facial expression is like 'Why you looking at me?' but here, they're just like, 'What can I do for you?' It is just amazing. I just can't believe that they're such a group of kind people over here. Maybe we have a lot of international students here, and we all have some problem getting into this community, so basically they offer help whenever somebody needs the help.

Although Austin has a desire to meet new and different people, he did not refer to any situations in which he did meet new people.

Robert has met a number of helpful people at GRD. In particular, other international students have been helpful because they can understand and empathize with each other:

Saeed is Algerian. He just moved here maybe a year before I came to the States. He helped me out a lot in the beginning. There's a bunch of international students, and of course there's a lot of American friends who help me out a lot. But in terms of the school stuff, it was always easier for me to just go and ask an international student as Americans don't know that I cannot really do that, I can't get a job and get work study; I don't qualify for any financial aid.

Robert has established some good friendships and networks through the college. He finds that he can learn more through his international friends because they have had similar experiences. He feels that American students do not understand the situation of the international student. When Robert needed help choosing his professors, he learned about the website Rate My Professor.com from his international friends; he got help with choosing classes, and found housing through his social contacts, all of whom are international students:

That's how I found Rate My Professor dot com. That's how you find housing. When I was moving into the apartment that I just moved into right now, that's how I moved in. There were international students living there, and I asked them how it is. It's very important to have this support network.

He says that he makes friends with other international students: "very easily with internationals. That's what makes you instantaneously get a connection with people."

Since they are in a similar situation, international students reach out and help each other, become friends, live together, provide support for each other in their new home away from home. Students like Robert, who do not have a network of friends from their own country, tend to meet a more diverse group of international students than students who are part of a large network.

Sakina talked about the people she has met since she came here. She said, "Lots of people are really nice and helpful, and they understand that I'm an international student." She has gotten to know some other international students through her classes:

I have a friend from Korea, and a friend from Vietnam. I got to know them through my Asian-American studies class. It was actually a class activity; my teacher did not give us mid-terms or final exams. She made us do presentations, so we had to work in groups, and that's how I got to know them.

She also has "a friend from India, and one from Pakistan." She meets up with her friends outside of college and they "have lunch together or just hang out or go shopping."

Aiko became friends with a Chinese student but did not get to know American students at first because she was very shy. She found it easier to get to know other international students:

My first friend was a Chinese guy the same age as me, and he started talking to me, and then we started hanging out. I didn't really get American friends because I couldn't really talk to them. I was too shy to talk to them, so I usually got along with Asians and international students.

She made friends “usually in the class” rather than through the ISO. She has not found any clubs or activities on campus that really interest her: “I couldn’t really find anything then, but these days I found a tennis club and I started to go there. Aiko feels that she has made a lot of friends at this point. In their free time, “we go shopping, or well we just hang out at somebody’s house and then watch movies, cook together...and go to karaoke together.” She feels that her “friends are helpful. Usually they help me out like studying or more. If I feel homesick sometimes I go out and then talk to them.” While her first friends are mostly international students, she says that she is making American friends now.

*Friendships with American students.* James has made friends with people of different ages and from different backgrounds. He knows the three other Thai students on campus, but he has made most of his friends through his classes. He said:

Here students tend to hang out with the same skin color you know the same ethnicity, the same race, that’s typical, but I don’t. It gets too crazy, a bunch of Asian kids and they’re hanging out, drinking and singing and being loud. At first you know I was excited to go out and get to know people, but after that I grew tired of that because it’s just a little too much.

James has a wide group of American friends. They are people he has gotten to know through the Interior Design Program: “They’re all women in maybe their 20s to 50s, so it’s pretty interesting to get to know them and listen to what they have to offer.” James is very much an individual, who is comfortable with people and is selective about whom he gets to know. The Interior Design Program has been a great social support system for him. He says that:

Some of my friends from the interior design department, because we are not just classmates, we’re friends. I can fully say that we are friends because we hang out; we share stuff, we share our ideas not just like anything academically.



James's social group is centered mainly around his group of friends from his department.

Hiroshi did not know people when he first came to BLC, but he was interested in making friends and learning English:

The first time I came here I didn't have any friends; well I was able to talk with international students, but I didn't want to because I came here to study English and why would I speak Japanese, right? So I didn't hang out with them, so I was just by myself.

He soon made friends: "I just met this guy, and he was just playing his guitar on the street . . . I knew how to play the instrument, and it helped me a lot to make friends." Hiroshi plays base-guitar, and he and the musician soon became friends "and he, (Sean) was my first friend here." Sean is from Blue Lake and is a student at the college.

Hiroshi also plays soccer and organized other students at BLC to play soccer. "I also played soccer a lot . . . because even though I couldn't speak English, I could still be friends . . . like playing soccer." At first, he played soccer with community members and later started a soccer club at the college. In addition, Hiroshi sometimes gets involved in community activities in Blue Lake: "Sometimes, I go to a fair; if there's a fair I go there, or I go to the thrift shop. It's interesting, but you know here there's nothing to do."

Hiroshi said that Blue Lake is "really small" "There's a bar and Chinese restaurant there." Hiroshi goes out to a restaurant occasionally. He feels that it is interesting to live in a small town because people are friendly:

It's very interesting because everybody knows everybody here. So . . . not everybody but many people know me too, because I think my personality is really friendly too and so and I mean I try to speak English and they are interested in me. I try to speak, right? So that is a good cycle. I can talk with friends, so I can improve. I improve, so then I can talk more and I improve more.

Even though Hiroshi lives in a small city, which does not have a lot of social activities, he makes an effort to get to know people because he is motivated to do so.

Nicole is a student at GRD and has gotten to know more people from her residence halls than from school. She says that it is hard to feel connected to people at the college: “yes, it’s very hard ... like you do group activities, and then you just go home because everyone is different here and people have family lives. Some students are 35 years old and some are 17, so you’re just too different to really stick together.” She says: “basically the first friends I made were people working in my residence because they were all American and they’ve been living here for a long time and they were very nice to me and showing me places and visiting, and now they are really good friends. Yeah I have a couple of good friends here.” Nicole says that the most valuable experience for her has been “getting to meet people.” She feels that “it’s very important, to meet people with a different mentality but a common point of view, who like traveling and looking for something else.”

Students like Hiroshi and Nicole who are willing to take advantage of the situation they are in and reach out to the people around them are able to make American friends. However, it does not happen without a desire and a conscious effort on their part.

***Friendship is not a priority.*** Some international students may not be very comfortable with getting to know new people or are not very interested. It is not a priority for them at this time.

Sarah feels that she is shy and lacking in confidence and therefore has trouble making friends. She says that she is “not open enough.” She wishes there were some kinds of activities that would help people like her. She says, “I feel like I’m asking for too much, but if they could make some special things for shy students.” When I asked her if she had joined any clubs she responded that, “I heard it is just a waste of time; instead,

you should focus on studying more, So ... so far I didn't join any clubs." She feels that the International Student Club activities are just "playing ... there are not many that are serious." However, she is happy because she just got a job on campus as a math tutor. She said that her focus is not on social activities, but "I just know that the goal for me is to come here and just study." Sarah was unusual among her peers at her college, who were very motivated to get involved in clubs and extra-curricular activities. Sarah instead chose to focus on her studies only.

Farai describes himself as serious, and he does not party a whole lot. His priority is getting good grades, so when his friends invite him out, he does not always go.

You see that's one thing about me, I've become a little too serious...with school, so sometimes my friends can invite me, let's go partying...or something like that, and I say I don't want to go partying. I think I need to study because I've realized that I've done so well in school that I don't want to just slip easily because it's taken so long to get to where I am that a few things could really mess it up. So, I'm very serious in terms of that and I realize at times I've got really good grades, but I need to maintain them, so that means don't change what you've been doing too much. I have to keep it the way it is, so I don't tend to be social, I don't tend to go out too much on weekends; I go out a few times in a month maybe you know maybe one or two weekends, one weekend in a month.

He likes to spend time with his cousins and his neighbor or go jogging. But, he sees this stage in his life as a time to be serious and focus on his studies.

I do hang out with my cousins sometimes or hang out with my neighbor. We go get something to eat, walk around, you know that type of stuff or go jogging and everything like that. That's mostly what I do. When I was in Zimbabwe I used to have a lot of fun, so now I feel like this is a new chapter in my life. I need to be serious and build something sustainable.

Farai has made a few friends at GRD, but he is not interested in having a lot of friends.

He feels that he does not need many friends and is more interested in having good friends. He is friends with a neighbor, a friend from Green River, and he has two Zimbabwean friends.

I have made a few friends, but I've always been someone that doesn't try to make too many friends because I don't need too many friends, I need good friends, quality friends, not quantity, so I've made a few good friends. I've made a few American friends. Most of them are lady friends, uh... I don't know why that is, though, but I guess I've made mostly a lot of lady friends, and in terms of guys that I would really say are my friends, I think I've only made one guy friend, one African American guy friend that I would say is my friend.

Besides getting to know his neighbors, meeting people at the college, or meeting people through his cousins, Farai has also made a friend through the National Association of Black Accountants. He says that he is careful about making friends and "I guess it's just aligning myself; sometimes I like to just align myself with the right people." He likes to get to know people who have similar interests, who are involved in the same area of study, and who are on the same career path.

Antonio is married and has a busy life outside of college. His life revolves around studying, tutoring Spanish, spending time with his wife, and interacting with his roommates:

In my case, I do not interact so much with students. I mean just when I am in the classroom, I mean the class, but because I study when I go to college, and then I return to my house because I have a wife, so I spend most of my time with my wife, but I also have to study, I mean I have quite a busy schedule, and my social life is very little.

His social life is not really based on the college but centers around his wife and his roommates:

I live with two more people, but yes honestly at college, I talk with the students but not so much, I mean the students who are in the same class. Honestly I don't talk, when I go to, when I teach as a Spanish tutor I interact, but I'm teaching them... I mean I'm not talking about something else, just a particular thing, about the Spanish language. I don't interact with people outside college because I go to my house at that point.

I asked if he and his wife were involved in any community activities when he is not studying, but he said the reality is: "I should do something when I'm not studying, but the

problem is that I am usually studying or working, I honestly don't have time." He would like to have more time to relax, to get to know people, and to enjoy that side of life, but that is not his priority and he is very grateful for what he has:

I sometimes think that I should not pay too much attention to my studies and try to spend some time with my wife, just enjoy life. But, you know what, we are very lucky, we are in this country; we are in the United States, and I'm studying, and we are in the in the process of being better in the future so let's enjoy it because I mean there's only one life.

Antonio is also very committed to his studies and getting his degree in English and Spanish. He is willing to make sacrifices in order to achieve his goals. He and his wife intend to return to Argentina when he finishes college. He does not have the time to socialize with people and make new friends.

Sebastian also feels that he is too busy with his school work to socialize with people:

My social life is really limited, even though I believe I'm able to communicate in English fairly well so that people can understand me fairly well, but I have very little time for a social life. I'm a full time student and I'm not working and many people might say that I have enough time to do a lot of stuff but because of my obligation of getting good grades to keep my legal status in this country and because of my intention to have an education in this country in a four-year university, I have to put a lot of time and effort. I have to sacrifice that social time and invest that time into studying and resting.

Sebastian feels that it is not that easy to make friends at the community college:

There's not much room to make friends in community colleges... I mentioned before that a big part of the student population has a difficult situation or complex situations to deal with; they have their families; they have their jobs, or they have difficulties or just natural obstacles of life. Their life doesn't spin around college life and making friends.

When he does get to know people, the interaction is very much related to the college experience. They study together and discuss school issues. They share experiences about being in a new country and culture, but they have not become close friends.

My social life is limited in my experience with the students, with the rest of the students, the relationship that I have with them, it's a cordial relationship, but it's mainly about study groups, tuition, study buddies, basically. Here and there, I get to know a couple of classmates that I had last year you know last semester and ah they are one of them is from Algeria and the other guy is from Iran. I like to know their points of view, and we like to share our experiences and see how we react to different aspects of American society ... but besides that you know even though I have a friendship with just these two people, basically I will say that I don't even have so much time to meet them. I see them once a month, about once a month as an average.

He has made some American friends, but they already have their family, friends, and a social network. It is hard to establish close, intimate relationships when you are busy with your life and your studies.

I have made American friends, but because they already have their friends from childhood, they already have their families, they already have their lives going on, and because of my lack of time for socializing, it's not as easy to make friends with them because of your status as an international student. When you have a circle of friends like they do, and you have intimacy, and you have your history with them, you just hang out with them. You have your group like I used to have a group of buddies in Costa Rica to hang out with. They have their groups here; it's their native land, their homeland and I just find it very normal that they just hang out together.

Sebastian concludes that:

I can tell you a lot about school, but if you ask me about my personal life, even if I make an effort to give you precise details, it will be difficult because basically my life right now is college. I'll say that 70-75% of my life is college.

Sebastian is now 28 years old and is very aware of the fact that he needs to focus and complete his education. He sees this as his priority. He finds friendship and support with his brother and sister-in-law with whom he lives.

*Summary of forming friendships.* Four supporting themes emerged in forming friendships: students stayed within their own ethnic group, they made friends with other international students, they reached out and made friends with American students, or they did not see friendship as a priority and instead focused on their studies. Students within large groups of international students from the same ethnic background or the same country tend to stay within their own group, they live together, they join the same clubs, and they spend their free time together. It is often difficult for them to break away and make new friends. This tends to occur most often in colleges with large international student programs. This supporting theme of large networks will be discussed in the next section.

The second supporting theme is that international students make friends with other international students. This is especially true if they do not have a group of friends from their own country or ethnic background. They help each other out, they socialize with each other, and they sometimes live together. While many students expressed a desire to meet American students, only a small number of students actually talked about having done so. This requires having the opportunity to meet people, or having the motivation and the courage to go out and create the opportunity. Many international students are afraid to do this. Finally, some international students are so focused on their academic goals that they do not have the time to have a social experience and depend on their family for friendship and support.

**Large and small networks.** Students at small community colleges are part of a small, diverse group of international students while students in large international student programs may belong to a large group of students from the same country or ethnic background. Students have different feelings about the size of the group and their sense of belonging. Sometimes students stay together in their own ethnic groups, speak their own language, and do not interact with other students. The lone students who do not belong to the large group feel isolated. International students from a particular ethnic group who try to break away from the group may be ostracized by their fellow students. When students stay within the same network of friends, they miss out on the opportunity to learn the language, assimilate culturally, and have a well-rounded experience.

Chen is grateful that he is in a small international program rather than being part of a large group:

I wouldn't go to a place with a lot of people who speak my language...not because I don't like to see Chinese in America. It's just because I don't want to speak a lot of my language that will affect my study of my language. My goal is to speak perfect English as local people, read and write well, and maybe I might learn the other language.

Larissa also likes the fact that she is studying at a small community college where she is the only Russian speaker. She compares herself to students who come from China and Japan who are

always between themselves because they're always stuck in their language, and I think if you come here you should use English. You should not use your native language because you can speak your native language perfectly. I believe that English is the one you have to learn.

Initially, she felt jealous of other students who had friends from their native country, but she now feels that she is more successful because she is alone here. She acknowledges and appreciates her success.



The international students at GVC are a diverse group, but there are large numbers of students from Hong Kong, China, and Indonesia. Some students mix with students from other backgrounds, but many of the Hong Kong and Chinese students do not. Lily says:

Some of the people from Hong Kong and mainland China are willing to mingle with other international students and local students, but I think for a majority of them are more willing to spend time with students from their own country.

Lily's opinion is that students who only want to mix with their own cultural group do not need to come to the U.S.; they could do that in their native country. She feels that it is better to meet a diverse group of students rather than sticking with your own ethnic/cultural group. She was very willing to share her feelings about this.

It's not necessarily a bad thing to stay with your own group, but I found that it is not that helpful compared to mingling with other international students. If you feel like mingling with Hong Kong students, you don't have to come here; you can just study in your country. The point of studying abroad is to find yourself a new platform to meet all kinds of students and to experience life here and learn the culture and language.

Austin meets a lot of other Asian students in the Business Club. They are encouraged to use English by their advisor so that other students will not feel left out. He recognizes the fact that it is disrespectful to other students when the Chinese students speak Chinese among themselves.

In business, I don't know why, but Asian people are kind of very interested in business, so honestly there are a lot of Asian officers in the business club, but our advisor tried to force us to use English because it's kind of respecting other people who don't understand English.

He has a group of Hong Kong friends, whom he refers to as the "Hong Kong gang" and "the network," who share the same goal to get into UCLA from the community college. They help and support each other in their endeavors to transfer to UCLA. He feels that

the network is a good thing, but it also means that he speaks Cantonese more than English and does not meet students from other countries. He believes that the best strategy is to find a balance between spending time with the Hong Kong group and others.

I mean you just need to find the balance where you have Hong Kong people, I mean Hong Kong friends, that's for sure, that's unavoidable here. But the only thing is whether you hang out with Hong Kong people all the time or speak English around other people outside.

The previous year, he spent 80% of his time with "people who are not from Hong Kong and 20% with Hong Kong people, but now, a lot of them have transferred to other universities, so it's 80% with Hong Kong people and 20% with non-Hong Kong people."

The negative aspect to spending time with the Hong Kong "network" is that:

I got pretty bored, yeah because I mean I'm so excited about the interaction between people from somewhere outside of Hong Kong because they always have new ideas and inspire me that I mean all the Hong Kong students here they just do stuff that we can do in Hong Kong like going to movies and going for karaoke and just having dinner or something like that. I mean the other international students, the non-Hong Kong group they would have something different and they can teach me their own kind of language.

Austin is busy with his applications for transfer this year, so he does not have time to find opportunities to meet non-Hong Kong students, "so, basically, either I go out with the Hong Kong people, or I just stay home and you know study or work on my stuff, so I don't have a lot of time to stay on campus and walk around and see whether there are new people."

Olivia works in the ISO. She has also noticed that the Chinese students at GVC tend to stay together in a group and speak in Chinese, not English.

It's just funny to see so many Chinese, Asian students and how they really stick together...and don't really separate and I feel that that's sad because they don't really get experience. There was one girl that was in my class and we were super

friends. We had a Communications class together, and her friends were doing business. I got to do homework with her, and we hung out sometimes with her friends and I just saw they really don't even try to practice English among themselves.

Olivia feels that the students who stay together in their own ethnic groups and use their native language do not enjoy the full experience of being an international student.

Ilyas has also noticed that some students want to stay together in their group and never learn English. Being the only Greek international student, he has to speak English:

Even at RRC now, we have a lot of people who come from the same country. They stick around together and don't get used to talking English in public or whatever. For me, I was the only Greek person there. So I had to speak in English. From what I see you have to get used to it.

He has noticed that many students who stay together in their own group never get the opportunity to practice their English or get involved in social activities.

*Summary of large and small networks.* Large groups of international students from the same country or the same ethnic background often choose or are recruited to attend the same community college, and they find themselves part of a large group or network of friends. How they handle the network determines the kind and quality of social interaction they experience. If they interact only with their own group, they miss out on certain social and cultural experiences; if they break away from the group, they may be seen as abandoning their ethnic group and native culture and may be rejected by the group. While students who are at smaller community colleges with a more diverse international student population may feel more alone, they also have more opportunities to get to know people, society, and the American culture.

**College and club involvement.** College clubs provide students with opportunities to meet and interact with other students, develop their social skills, and build their

organizational and leadership skills. Regardless of the size of the college, there are opportunities for international students to become involved in clubs.

*International Student Office/Club.* Elaine has met other international students through the International Student Club at OGC. She acknowledges her shyness and says that club activities help take her outside her shell. Some of the activities involve senior citizens from the community who collaborate with the International Student Club.

Lily works in the international student office and is involved in two clubs.

The first one is the International Student Connection (ISC), so we have club members from all over the world, just sharing cultures, and sometimes we'll have field trips to LA and some amusement parks, and the other one is the business, accounting, and economics club, and we learn about social networking there and how to do a presentation and sometimes they will bring in guest speakers.

The clubs offer an opportunity to meet students from all over the world, to participate in field trips and social activities, to learn about social networking, and to make presentations in front of people. The ISC meets once a week on Mondays. Lily says:

Last meeting we did a presentation on your ideal honeymoon destination, and for our upcoming events we'll have a general election. During Halloween, we'll have a party, and during Thanksgiving, we're planning to have a field trip, maybe to Los Angeles.

Lily is vice-president of the ISC and is really enjoying the experience. She established a close relationship with the former club officers. They had confidence in her and encouraged her to take on the position. Lily feels that she has learned some new skills and that the experience has helped her to be more outgoing. She says:

I really love this club because the previous president and vice president are really close to each other. Although they have transferred, we still keep in touch, and they actually encouraged me to run for this position. I was not that outgoing, and I know that it is a really big responsibility especially being vice president, and I really don't like public speaking. But they say that it is good for you to try a new kind of experience and to tell yourself that it's possible for you to do that; otherwise, you don't have a chance to, even encourage yourself to try a new style.

The experience of running for the position of vice-president taught her a lot. She gained self-confidence and developed leadership skills:

I did my speech and the Q&A, and I got the position. The process is not easy, but I really learned a lot during that. At least my self-confidence was hugely boosted, and I love this club because I want to help other international students to get to know each other and to really know that they're not alone here; we are all here supporting you, and if you have any problem or question just come to us and we'll try our best to help you.

The president of the club is Malaysian, so she and Lily get to practice their English together. Lily has grown and developed in her position as vice-president. She has had to learn how to delegate responsibility to others.

I don't like to give my officers pressured. I just want them to enjoy themselves in this club, but the problem is that if you don't push them, sometimes they don't do the thing, they don't do their responsibilities, so if that's the case I have to do all the things for them although it's their job to do it. I am also learning how to lead people and how to help them dig out their potentials. I'm trying to trust them and give them the opportunity to have their own events. If they have any questions, they can ask me, but I'm not going to take over their events...or anything like that.

Alex has been involved in the International Student Club and was one of the organizers for an event called International Night. He says that,

I came here last winter and was fortunate because the international night planning committee started planning the international night in winter. It's a very epic event, it's very big, and lots of international students are involved in planning international night. We have different cultures performing on the stage, and we try very hard to include as many cultures as possible, and we want the audience to watch the show at a very low price and try to demonstrate different cultures in front of many people.

Alex plans to be involved in organizing the next International Night. He also enjoys the activities put on by the International Student Club: "they have several field trips for us, like to San Francisco and to San Jose. They took us to San Francisco, Golden Gate Bridge, and to the University of San Jose to ice skate." Austin also participated in and

helped organize International Night. He said that he got to know a lot of international students at his college because of his involvement in this event.

The International Student Club at RRC is unusual in that it consists of international and local students. Ilyas told me: "There's about 5 or 6 students that are United States born students. The rest of us are international students. We meet every week, every Tuesday, in one of the facilities in RRC." The ISO holds an orientation session for international students and the club helps out. They organize a lot of social events and activities on campus. Ilyas said that:

Every other week we find a place where we hang out, and if you have nothing to do you can get together with the international club. Like last Friday, we had a welcome party for new students at the park. We had sports events, a small barbecue. We usually have a small get together at the house. We do some trips. Last year we took a trip to Grand Canyon. We had a Japanese party in one of the parks also. That was completely paid by the International Club.

The club is active in communicating with and helping all international students:

During the orientation for new students they always help out. We have an email list, and every time we have a new event, we send out information by email or through face book. With all the new students if they need help, they don't know about banking or how to get a cell phone we help them too; we drive them around.

Many of the club members are old friends.

We see each other every day, but officially every Tuesday. From the ones who participate at every event, usually there are about 40 to 50 people. And at the beginning of the semester, we have new students coming. We get 60 to 80.

I had the opportunity to meet some of the club members when they presented at a NAFSA conference and when they came to my local area on a field trip. The students are very active club members and take their responsibilities very seriously. Having a mixture of international and local students creates opportunities for the international students to

speak in English, to become involved in the community, and for all of the students to share information about their backgrounds, society, and culture.

*Other clubs.* Alex is on the executive committee for the Hong Kong students' club at GVC. He is the treasurer and has learned how to look after money. He says that "one of our missions now is to get students here involved in many different activities, like getting them used to the environment here." They plan to have joint club activities with other clubs, and he feels that this is a "great experience." Alex feels comfortable there because he can speak his native language, Cantonese, with his friends who are "mostly Asian people." Involvement in club activities with other Hong Kong or Chinese students gives Alex ready-made opportunities to socialize and establish a body of friends. However, it does not offer him or the other international students much exposure to the language or culture.

Daniel has become a member of student government at GVC and has made a report about the budget as he is on the finance board. Daniel is in his first quarter, and he feels that this will be a good way to make friends and will be helpful on his transcript. He attends two meetings a week: "the student government meeting is once a week and there is a budget meeting once a week, too, and finance board meeting." Daniel is also able to meet with other students and hang out at the student government office. He goes there often. "When I wait for classes I'm there doing my work and talking to people, it's fun."

Austin is involved in a number of clubs on campus at GVC. He is an elected officer for the Business Club. He is also the representative for the Business Club in Student Government.

I'm involved in the business club first of all and yeah being part of I mean being one of their elected officers over there I think because my position is called OBD

representative. My position is part of the student government and I enable the student government to communicate with the clubs. So I'm, the representative for the business club here.

Khloe is a member of "student senate and also the international ambassador for the international student office" at YBCC. She feels that

student senate is the top student organization because we have the best students, the best of the best so when other centers or other departments or offices want to pass policies or any decisions they want to make for students, they need to go through student senate first.

Khloe is "the only Chinese student" in Student Government and feels that she can be a voice for the large number of Chinese students at this college. Through her involvement in the student senate, Khloe has learned how to advocate for the Chinese students on campus; she has learned to express herself in English and speak confidently in a large group; and she has learned a great deal about campus politics and student issues.

*Summary of college and club involvement.* Through their involvement with college clubs and organizations, students get opportunities to meet and interact with other students; they develop their social skills, and build their organizational and leadership skills. International students at the medium and large colleges tend to have more opportunities to become involved in clubs than students at the small colleges.

**Activities outside of college.** Students get involved in community activities outside of the college that give them opportunities for social interaction. In this section, I will discuss church involvement, volunteering, and leisure activities with roommates and friends.

**Church.** Sarah has found it helpful to attend church in her community. She had not gone to church when she lived in China, but she says that someone at the grocery store "felt sympathetic for me . . . so they told me 'well if you have difficulties, you could



talk and find help among the people in church'... so that made me . . . want to find the church." Many of the people she has met at the church are Chinese-Americans, the children of immigrants, and they have been very helpful and friendly. She attends activities and has made friends her own age at church. Church members have given her advice and helped her with some of her daily survival needs such as buying a car. Sarah was baptized during the summer. She said that, "church is the biggest change for me, and it makes me feel better." Sarah is not very outgoing and, as previously discussed, she prefers to focus on her studies than get involved in clubs and activities on campus. By participating in church activities, she has established a comfortable social network for herself.

Lily also goes to church every week. She meets people at church and speaks Chinese with them. They give her help and advice. Lily goes to a Chinese Christian church:

People there are mostly from Hong Kong and mainland China. We speak Chinese there, and they also have students from two other community colleges. I like it because there are a lot of old people there, like uncles and aunties. If you have difficulties, you can just ask for their opinions and sometimes they'll help you out.

The church is a good support for Lily. She did not attend church in China but started going in the United States. I asked her what prompted her to start going to church. She said that:

Before I came here, my mom told me to try to go to a church because it's like a second family here because people believe if they're Christians, normally they would treat people really nice. And, if you have any difficulties they are really willing to help you out, and they understand how you're feeling here, and they may have had some similar experience as you, so just try going to church there.

Daniel has attended two different churches. He prefers to go to the church that is closer to his house, where there are few Indonesians and more opportunities to meet new people. He has made new friends through church. They invite him to their homes, and he has had a number of opportunities to socialize with them.

Henry is also involved in a local church, which is “mostly Chinese.” “They organize a few trips; sometimes they might do some activities, or they might take us out to San Francisco. Then on Sundays it’s Bible study, and they eat lunch together and hang out.” He says that “they’re on a similar system” to his church in Hong Kong.

Austin started attending a Chinese church when he first came here, but he did not like the fact that other Chinese students were going there only for the social aspect. He found that they were not going there to worship but went there to meet people.

I went to a Chinese church last year, but the thing is that it attracts a lot of Hong Kong and Chinese people, and most of them go to the church not because they want to worship God. After the hymns, they just want to meet some people there and spend their time, but you don’t have to do in the church, and I just feel I don’t like it. I don’t want someone to turn around and ask me, ‘what are we going to have for lunch?’ during church. I just don’t feel like that’s right.

So he found another church “that is a local church here. I just get into the church and listen to the priest, right and you know I just go there on Sunday morning and after that I just go back home.” He still sees people who just go to church for the social aspect, but he is happier at this church. “Sometimes there’s just people who come and say ‘Oh hi, how are you’ or something like that and they introduce themselves to me.”

Elaine attends church with her family. She socializes and interacts with other Filipinos that she has met at her church.

Olivia attends church with her family and has met people from other states through a church group:

There are some really nice people that come from different states, and they are kind of international too; they don't know people, and they want to make friends, so that makes it easier for us to get together and they kind of see me as international like foreign, but at the same time we have the same interests and so on, so it makes it real easy.

It was interesting to learn about the international students' church involvement and to hear about how it fulfilled a social function and provided a support system for them.

***Volunteering.*** Khloe has become involved in community volunteer work. She decided to volunteer in an elementary school as a homework tutor because:

I want to help people so that's why ...because there is a website called Volunteer Match and the places that I can do internships. I found out that there is an internship program, so I wanted to help students with their homework.

She is involved in a club at her college that does volunteer work in the community. The group is called "beach angels," and they "clean up the beach every weekend." Khloe became involved "because the principal of the club is my teacher, English teacher, so she asked me to help them, so I said 'yeah, why not.'" Her instructor offers extra credit for students who volunteer. She finds it ironic that all of the students who volunteer are Chinese. There are no Americans.

What is ironic is that we help Yellow Beach community but all the club members, I mean most of the club members, are Chinese. It's very interesting to go to the club and only Chinese students clean up the beach...where are the American students? They never come.

Aiko has also gotten involved in community activities in her community. She helped out with a multi-cultural street festival. She also does "a kind of balloon art" and donates her time and work in the community. She says "I make a balloon and then make like animals and flowers and stuff. I learned it from my dad and he's a kind of street performer on the weekend." She does not sell the balloons but donates them to people.

Aiko also reached out and volunteered at a children's party with an African-American woman who was organizing this event:

I saw it on Craigslist, and she was doing it by herself, everything like holding the event and inviting all the kids like for Halloween. Whenever any holidays came up, she did all the events for them mostly kids so I went there a couple of times to do make balloon art, and you know entertain the kids. I really love kids and I love communicating with them, so...I enjoyed it.

Aiko feels that she gained some useful skills from this experience. She developed better communication and organizational skills and learned about networking and making connections with people.

Aiko heard that it was a good idea to do volunteer work, so she has found a number of volunteer opportunities. Besides the balloon art, she volunteers at an Asian hospice.

I am also doing one more volunteer work; I've been doing it for one year or so. I work at the office in an Asian hospice. I usually go there twice a week; I've been doing it since last year. I usually file and do chores in the office.

This experience is giving Aiko some office experience. She likes working and being actively involved: "I never worked, I never worked in an office, and I feel like that's kind of an internship or something like that." Aiko said that it is not usual to do volunteer work in Japan "because we don't, it's not really required, so then I never thought about it." Aiko says "I heard from all the people and I started doing it." When I asked her why was doing volunteer work, she said she heard that volunteer work was required to get into university and so decided to do it. Now that she is involved in volunteering, Aiko, like other students, enjoys doing it and finds that it provides a way to get out in the community and meet people.

*Friends, roommates and co-workers and other social activities.* Chen gets together with his friends to play video games. Larissa is the only one of her friends who has a car, so she drives her friends to the coast or to the closest major city to go shopping. Alex comes to campus every day and sees his friends; he may have lunch or dinner with them and gets rides from them if he can. Sebastian takes care of his little niece when his brother and sister-in-law are busy. Sebastian occasionally plays soccer as does Hiroshi. Hiroshi likes to go to a restaurant or a bar in his small town. Nicole visits museums and art galleries.

Olivia has an active social life outside of the college. She gets together with her coworkers from the International Student Office: “my interaction with people is actually outside the college or in the office because I work in the international student office.” She has become friends with some of the staff members and they do things together outside the office. Some of them are her age or just a little older while some are younger.

It’s kind of fun because we do things outside the office as well, at least the younger ones; there are the older members in, the office, but the younger ones that are just a few years older than me I think 30 to 35 or something, so we do things outside.

Khloe had some unusual adventures during her first summer here. She hitchhiked to Alaska on her own and spent a week there. She enjoyed the experience and returned safely.

*Summary of activities outside the college.* International students who look for ways to become involved in American life and society find opportunities to do so. Some attend church and form a social and support network of friends and acquaintances. They find that church members are willing to help them as they find their way in their new society and community. Also, students become involved in volunteer activities in their

community. They may choose to do this as a way to build their resume or just as a means of social involvement. These activities offer them opportunities to meet people, practice their English, and learn more about the new society and culture. Finally, international students spend time with their roommates, classmates, and friends and enjoy such everyday leisure activities as watching movies, playing video games, or going out for lunch or dinner; one adventurous student took it upon herself to hitchhike to Alaska.

**Personal change.** The supporting theme of personal change describes the ways in which students have grown and changed through their social experience. They feel that they have become more independent, more responsible self-confident, and outgoing. Being away from home and outside of their familiar environment gives students an opportunity to grow and change. Since these students discussed their personal change as a general theme, I will not break down the changes into discrete points but will discuss them as they occurred for specific participants.

*Lily.* Lily likes to be independent and adventurous when it comes to new experiences and situations. She said that she gets her strength from her parents and that she is not like other Chinese students. They like to stay together within their own group whereas she likes to challenge herself and work to achieve her goals. She says:

I'm not like the other Chinese students. They like to mingle with the students from China, but I am willing to challenge myself and to reach my goals, and they think that I am able to reach my goals, and so sometimes their encouragement is really good for me. I personally I don't have much self-confidence, but if somebody gives me their approval, that will help me a lot.

By focusing on her goals and reaching success along the way, Lily has become more confident in herself. She also feels that her personality has become more outgoing and interactive. When she went back to China for a visit, she noticed that her personality and

behavior had changed in some ways. From her experience in her new environment in the U.S., she has become outgoing, more dynamic, and more active.

I found myself more outgoing than before, and I encourage myself more than I did when I was in China because the culture here is to be active, to be dynamic. It is not just about sticking to the old things that are safe, so that helped me a lot. In the past, my mom would always tell me “you can do this, and you cannot do that,” but when I went back I would try to think “mom, is this the best way to do it, maybe we can do it that way” and my mom was really proud of me in this aspect.

Through her exposure to people in a new society, Lily has changed and grown and can observe these changes in herself:

I think my definition of being independent, not only means that I can live by myself or cook for myself, and clean my own apartment, but it also means I am independent; I have self-control and self-discipline. I think one of my goals is to be a self-disciplined person, and I am working on that.

Lily feels that: “I still need to change myself into a more creative and a more self-disciplined person.” Being away from her family, meeting with new people, and challenging herself here in the U.S. has given her this opportunity.

*Aiko.* Aiko has returned to Japan a couple of times. She went back to see her grandmother a week before she passed away. While Aiko was at home, her family felt that she had changed. She was more talkative; she connected and interacted more with people. “They said that I was so talkative and I had become a person who is more focused on life and making connections with people.” She compares herself to when she was young: “because I couldn’t do much when I was young, and then my dad was always saying ‘now you became so social and became way better than before.’” Aiko is not sure about her future plans, but she feels prepared to handle whatever situation comes along, whether she stays and works in the United States for a year or two or returns to Japan and

looks for a job. She would like to take advantage of whatever opportunities come her way and continue her journey of personal growth and development.

*Khloe.* Khloe also feels that her personality, along with her attitude and behavior, have changed since she came here. She has become more involved with other people and groups of people and has become more talkative and outgoing.

Actually I think my personality has changed a lot coming here because I used to be very quiet in China...and I just wanted to do things that I wanted to do. I mean like reading or studying by myself because everybody does that in China, right? So, after I came to America, I realized that if I want to learn more I need to participate in classes, I need to talk to teachers, I need to talk to students, I need to join groups, so I need to speak...

Whether Khloe decides to stay or to return, these changes will affect her personality and her relationships with people. She feels that this experience has changed her life and the lives of the people she touches. If she goes back and works in the film industry in China, she will have an effect on her culture and people back there. She will take a new perspective back with her just like she has brought her Chinese perspective here and is sharing it with people she meets in the U.S.

I'm much more outgoing here...compared to how I was in China, but I think it's a good thing because you always need to meet different people and speak with and learn from them, so I think I will do that if live in China or work in China because before I came here I never knew it was a good thing to do. Nobody pushed me or inspired me, so I didn't know what would happen if I became more outgoing or optimistic. And, after I did that I realized that it's a good thing so maybe I will continue to do that...even if I live in China.

Moving away from her family has not been difficult for her although it has been hard on her parents: "for me it doesn't affect me a lot because I'm trying to be independent, but for my parents it's very hard for them 'cause they've never been so far for so long."

Last summer, Khloe went hitchhiking in Alaska by herself for seven days and says that this was a life changing experience for her: "the experience I had in Alaska also



changed me a lot, so right now I really want to help people.” One of her main goals in coming to the U.S. was to become more independent, and she feels that she has succeeded in many ways.

**Chen.** Chen feels that he has grown and matured through this experience of getting to know people: “ I learned proper relations, some kinds of communication between people, how you know if someone is a good person, or how I define whether they’re doing something good to you or not. That’s what I learned since I came here.” He also feels that he has grown personally and has become more independent of his family.

I used to live in an environment in which everything was taken care of by my parents, I didn’t need to cook; I didn’t need to wash my own clothes; all I did was just eat and sleep and go to school. So after being here, I learned not just how to cook for myself and not just take care of myself but also how to live in a new environment.

From my conversation with Chen, I got a strong sense of the importance of family in his decisions. He would follow in the path that had been established by his father and sister. At the same time, it was important for him to be away from his family and establish his independence. He said that when he lived at home, his mom constantly asked him to do things for her. After he moved to the U.S., she called him every day. Now, she does not do that as much and he feels stronger and more independent.

**Sebastian.** Sebastian feels that the exposure to different cultures and peoples has helped him grow and mature as a person:

Just the influence of different cultures and being exposed to doing things more independently and being able to have this experience of being away from home, I think that makes me grow as a person, makes me grow academically, and will put me in a better position whenever I want to start working.

He is now 28 years old and feels that he has grown personally and become more independent. He also feels that he is now ready to focus on his education and his goals.

*Sophia.* Sophia had seen her brother grow and change through his study abroad experience and felt that she needed to do the same. She realized that her she was under pressure from her parents and her society to choose a major that would enable her to make money, but her interests were in journalism, anthropology, and social science. Now that she is away from home and experiencing a new system of education, a different lifestyle, and a new group of friends, she feels that she can make better choices for herself. She has been able to communicate this to her parents, and she feels that they are more willing to listen to her and acknowledge her right to make some independent decisions.

In summary, through the experience of leaving home, moving to a new country and new environment, meeting new people, and moving beyond their comfort zone, international students grow as people. They mature into independent, self-confident adults, with a clearer sense of their personal and academic goals.

**Summary of the social experience.** The structure of the social experience for community college students includes the themes of living situations, friendship, establishing networks, club involvement, and activities outside of college. This structure also includes the supporting theme of personal change. International students find accommodation in home stays, dormitories, apartments, and with family and friends. Many of their social activities are intertwined with their living situation. They establish friendships with students from the same ethnic background, other international students, and some Americans. For some students socializing is not a high priority as they are focused on studying and surviving. Some international students are part of a large network based on their native country or ethnic background. While they find support and

friendship from their network of friends, they do not always step outside and meet new and different people. Students who do not have family and friends in the area become involved in college and club activities and form friendships in this way. Outside of college, many of the students are involved in activities with their church, their host family, and their roommates and friends. International students attribute changes in personality and behavior to their exposure to a new social group, new cultural experiences, and new opportunities for personal challenge and growth.

### **The Structure of the Cultural Experience**

*The Structure of the Cultural Experience* includes the supporting themes of becoming familiar with the culture prior to arriving in the United States, getting to know the culture, adapting and assimilating into the American culture, dealing with a diverse society, and going beyond the superficial aspects of the cultural experience.

**Familiarity with American culture prior to arrival.** Many students said that they were familiar with American culture before coming to the United States. This familiarization took place in four ways: through exposure to American television shows and movies; through interaction with American friends and acquaintances at their school, church, or place of employment in their home country; through previous visits to the United States; and through exposure to a lifestyle in their home city that reflected aspects of an American and international cosmopolitan urban culture.

*American culture on TV and in the movies.* Austin feels comfortable in the U.S. and felt prepared when he came here. He says: "I don't think I had to change a lot of myself to get into this community here. I don't know, but probably it's because I had a taste of what American culture was like." He has experienced American culture from TV

although the perspective he has seen is very much that of Hollywood and Los Angeles. “I thought that in California there would be beaches everywhere, but the TV shows and movies are all about Los Angeles and certain areas of LA.” His experience does not match the images he has garnered from TV.

Robert feels that he was introduced to American culture and the English language through cartoons on television. He feels that his experience was not very different from an American child who would have watched the same cartoons and TV shows.

I think I have adapted reasonably well. When I was growing up I was an American kid to a very large extent. We had Cartoon Network, we had Fox Kids and we had Nickelodeon, so those were the three channels I grew up with that were all in English. One of them was translated into Russian part of the time, that was Nickelodeon, but the other two were in English, actually, so if you wanted to watch cartoons, and you were seven, where I was living, you had to understand a little, tiny little bit of English or Scooby Dooby Doo was not that relevant...so I was forced to learn a little bit of English then.

Robert also feels that adjusting to the culture has been an easy process because he was already familiar with American culture through TV, and he already knew English.

*Interaction with Americans in the native country.* Robert learned English when he was young. He went to a Christian camp when he was twelve and had to use English there. He also worked with an American firm in Romania after he graduated from high school.

My English was pretty good. I think I went to a camp when I was 12, and there were Americans there; it was like a Christian camp and there were guests. I think there were five American kids that came to that camp as well and I was the one translating for them essentially. I suppose by that time my English was decent, and when I was graduating high school I was working with an American firm and I was conversing pretty freely so before I moved here my English was decent. That was one of the initial barriers that was already not there, and the cultural part...since I did grow up with part of the American culture, it wasn't as hard for me to adapt.

Robert feels that his knowledge of English and acquaintance with Americans through his work experience helped prepare him for his experiences in the U.S.

Henry's education at the international school in Hong Kong was all through English and he feels confident about his English skills. He feels that he had some experiences in Hong Kong that helped him prepare for the new culture:

I'm pretty sure the international school helped because first of all, they promote open-minded people, and they like the well-rounded types of person, and part of being well-rounded means you learn different things from different cultures. The good thing is that through learning these things you can communicate more easily with other people; you can understand their background more easily.

Henry also received help from a church pastor in Hong Kong who gave him some cultural information and "gave me some support for what to do and what not to do such as making eye contact for too long; it's just strange, that's one of the things, like small things that could get people into a lot of trouble." These experiences helped Henry anticipate some of the problems he might face in the U.S.

Daniel feels that the

new culture is not that hard, since I have a lot of friends from different countries in Indonesia, so I learned the different cultures pretty well. And, America has people from everywhere, and it's nice to learn about the different cultures here.

He was also familiar with Americans from his life in Indonesia because it is a cosmopolitan country and has a diverse group of people. There are people from many different backgrounds: "well of course from Asia, but then from Italy, from other parts of Europe, Sweden, and from the United States. "He also met Americans through his church in Indonesia: "and they have an American church in Surabaya, so I went there several times. My friends asked me to join them, so we mostly met people from the U.S." Daniel had been in the country for six weeks when we spoke and he felt that he was coping well.

Dinh feels that he did not experience any culture shock. He lived with his American girlfriend in Vietnam for a year and feels that he became familiar with the culture:

Being in new culture? I guess I'm not the best person to ask this question because I didn't have any culture shock here...only because in Vietnam I had lived with my girlfriend for a year, and I had a lot of American and Western friends, so I got used to American culture before. But I was shocked when I was in Vietnam when I got to know American culture and how independent people are. This kind of individuality is very new to my culture, so I'm sure other Vietnam students get some culture shock about that.

Dinh feels that his adjustment to the new culture was easier than that of other Vietnamese students because he had learned about the culture from his American girlfriend.

International students feel more comfortable about the culture and the new experience if they have met and talked with Americans and if they have established relationships with them prior to coming here.

***Previous visits to the USA.*** Ilyas feels that his cultural adjustment has not been too difficult because he had visited his cousins in the U.S., and his cousins had visited Greece frequently, so he felt comfortable with the culture. Also, this was Ilyas's second time to begin community college. He had spent a semester at a community college three years previously, so he felt that he knew what to expect.

It was a little different in the beginning, but I got used to it pretty fast...because I always liked it over here when I was coming to visit and having had the experience of staying here a month and a half every other summer it was not that big of a jump, because I knew what was going on, what everything was like and all that.

His past experiences gave Ilyas a positive feeling about American culture and he feels that he was well-prepared for the adjustment to the new culture.

Sebastian traveled outside of Costa Rica from an early age. He feels that this helped him adjust to the American culture:

Well, I left Costa Rica, and I've been coming and going back to my country and several other countries on different occasions. I have family in Florida; they moved to the United States before I was born. My uncle and my aunt have been here for some 35 or 40 years already; they have their own life here. I think that was the first introduction to North American culture for me.

Sebastian feels that his Costa Rican culture, his travel experiences to other countries, and his previous visits to the United States have helped him with his cultural adjustment. He was first introduced to the American culture when he traveled to Florida to visit his aunt and uncle and he has been back a number of times.

*Familiarity with a culture that is similar to the American culture.* There is a feeling among international students that their culture has been influenced by the American culture to the extent that their cultures are similar. They feel that if they have lived in a large cosmopolitan city, they share a kind of global culture with other urban areas. These cultural similarities make the experience of moving to a new cosmopolitan area easier for them.

Sebastian also feels that certain aspects of the Costa Rican culture have made it easier for him to get used to living in the United States:

I don't find my staying in the United States so drastic because Costa Rica has so much influence from the United States, and our countries have a really good relationship, so the culture shock was not that strong. There are a lot of United States citizens living in my country, in Costa Rica, and also the U.S. dollar is kind of a second currency, and English is the second language that we use there.

Young-Soo feels that American culture is not so unlike Korean culture, so she has not had a problem with adjustment. She says:

culture was actually not the problem because Korea is pretty much like American society, so I already knew American culture from movies and drama, so really I

expected that, and it was not that shocking, so it's fine, and then I've kind of enjoyed it.

Young-Soo has spent two years in a small community and has not had a lot of exposure to American life and culture beyond the small college.

Sakina has been in the U.S. for 10 months and feels that she has adapted to the new culture quickly. She was used to a metropolitan culture and lifestyle in India and this has helped her here.

I actually adapted really quickly because I adjust to changes really fast, and also because I lived in a city, one of the metropolitan cities in India, so the culture was a little bit similar, so I didn't really feel like it was a drastic change.

Sakina, like many of the international students coming from large metropolitan cities such as Hong Kong, Shanghai, Seoul, Tokyo, Bangkok, and Mumbai felt that they were prepared for life in an American city because of the similar aspects of their urban lifestyle. However, for some, the move to the smaller, more rural areas was more difficult.

In summary, international students feel that their assimilation into American life and culture has been made easier by their prior knowledge of and exposure to American culture through TV and movies, their American friends and acquaintances, their previous visits to the U.S., and lifestyle similarities between their culture and American. This appears to be true particularly for students in the early stages of the adjustment process.

**Getting to know the culture** Many international students felt familiar with American culture and had certain expectations about the culture before they came, but the reality was sometimes quite different. They found that that they particularly liked certain aspects of the culture but had difficulty with others. They discussed some obvious differences between their own culture and the new culture. This section will discuss



expectations as opposed to the reality of the experience, the positive aspects of the cultural experience, and observations about cultural differences as described by the international students in this study.

***Expectations and reality.*** The major difference for Young-Soo was the move from a large city to a rural area. She had not anticipated what it would be like to live in a small country town. She feels that

I really need a car in here because you know when you live in Korea, we have a subway; the subways are really good, so I don't need a car, just you know one subway ticket, and I can go wherever I want but not here. If I want to go to the market here, it's 20 minutes or even 40 minutes away on foot.

When she needs to get around, "I ask my friends, or I make a friend who has a car and just go with them." Young-Soo feels limited by the lack of transportation and by the small size of the community. This has made her adjustment to the new culture very difficult.

Koyuki said that her experience of living in such a small town as Blue Lake was not what she had expected. She had expected parties, shopping malls, and more activity, and she was surprised by how small and rural Blue Lake is. However, she has adjusted to living in Blue Lake and actually missed it when she went to Los Angeles.

It is small, has a lot of cows, and it smells. And there is nothing to do. I expected America is really free, so everyday there would be parties. But there are no parties. It's a kind of small place, and I cannot buy clothes. I never expected a place like that, but after I got used to being here like I really felt comfortable, so when I when I went to LA during winter vacation I kind of felt like I missed Blue Lake because LA's a really big city, and it's really noisy, so I was missing Blue Lake.

As discussed, students have some expectations based on their prior experience with American culture through TV, friends and acquaintances, or assumptions about the

similarities between their culture and the new culture. The new reality presents some differences and some real life difficulties.

*Positive aspects of American culture.* International students identified some positive aspects of their cultural experience: the climate, the clean air, the food, the educational system, and honest, friendly people.

Daniel likes the area he is living in. He finds:

the environment is pretty good. I live in a nice place; there are lots of trees, and the air is fresh, and there is a lot of stuff like restaurants from different countries, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, so I can find any kind of food here, which is good.

He compares his new neighborhood to where his family lives in Indonesia. The weather is very hot there and the city is crowded. Transportation is not very good, so people depend on their own car or motorcycle and there is a lot of pollution. Daniel likes the fact that he can use public transportation and finds it convenient.

Alex likes the American educational system because it gives students more choices and the freedom to choose their own classes. It also allows students to change their major if they wish and does not restrict students in the way the Hong Kong system does.

One of the aspects Sakina likes about living in the U.S. is that “over here there’s less corruption compared to India.” She says that in India, “you can bribe the police officers if they catch you on the road.” There is also corruption when applying for a job and admission to college:

People who are really rich would just use bribes. There are people from the villages, from the countryside who score maybe like 98% or 99% on their exams and they still don’t get into a college whereas there are students, kids who hardly score 50% or 42%, and they get into the colleges because their parents pay a huge amount of money to the college.

Sakina also said that “India’s really highly populated...so with population there’s a lot of pollution and all that, but over here you don’t have too much pollution, and there’s no corruption here.” Sakina also talked about the class system of castes in India. Even though people are more open, and there is more equality today, the caste system still exists:

It’s like people are becoming more accepting that ...there shouldn’t be a class system, but then on the surface you can pretend, but somewhere inside, it would still restrict you because there are people who would show that they’re not really going to change and want to stay like it was back in the past.

She likes the social equality of American culture and feels: “that’s a good thing...that there’s no caste system.” Here there is no corruption; and people have freedom and equal rights.

Aiko says that she has not had difficulties with the culture. Living in the U.S. is similar to Japan. She loves the food:

I don’t think I had culture shock and stuff. Maybe I did, but I don’t really remember what it was like. I didn’t really find any difficulty living here because I have, like I can get everything here; it’s just the same as Japan and um...and there were no problems for me about food, I love everything yeah; I love every food so it’s just fine.

These expressions about culture are based on the students’ limited exposure to American culture. They have identified those aspects of the culture that appeal to them. They like the climate and the natural environment of California; they like the food; they like the opportunities that the new educational system gives them; and, they like the system of transportation. They also like the honesty and friendliness of the people and the fact that American society embraces openness, equality, and freedom.

*Differences in how people behave.* Students commented on some noticeable differences in how people behave. Elaine has observed that community life is different here from the Philippines. In the Philippines, people are outside and the streets are busy, whereas here in the U.S. the streets are quiet: “It was different, because in the Philippines, there are a lot of people outside, and then when I arrived here everyone’s inside their houses.” She was used to living in a busy city, Manila, but she finds life in her neighborhood in Orange Grove “boring.”

Hiroshi has noticed a difference in how people interact with each other. He feels that people in the U.S. do not have the same sense of politeness as the Japanese:

I think honestly people are rude. I was living in Japan for 20 years, and they’re really polite; they care about politeness. I’m not talking about everybody here, but for example, they won’t tell me please or you know, like, they don’t have to tell me please, but in my culture we naturally say please.

Although Americans may not be as polite as Japanese, Hiroshi feels that they are friendly, and he is comfortable living in the U.S.: “but I like friendly people too, I mean, they’re really friendly compared with my country people, really friendly, and I feel comfortable with that.

Elaine is not comfortable with public displays of affection “because, it makes me uncomfortable to see couples having public display of affection...because in the Philippines it’s kind of immoral to do that...in public.” She has observed that Americans kiss and embrace in public and she feels uncomfortable with that.

Henry drew some comparisons between Hong Kong and American culture. He feels that people in the U.S. are more open and have more freedom:

This community is very open, I’m sure you’ve heard from other students that people are nice, like when you try to cross the road, cars will stop for you unless they don’t see you. Thinking back on Hong Kong, if you’re open to your own

ideas and you're not open to others, then that's a flaw, that you should deal with before you come to America. You should be open to others' ideas.

Hong Kong is "still pretty traditional." And, while people believe in free speech for themselves, they do not want it for others. He says: "the irony is that Hong Kong runs on a freedom of speech idea, but many people in Hong Kong can't really handle it when there are so many different opinions." Austin also feels that human rights are very important in the U.S. and he likes this. He feels that it is quite different from Hong Kong.

First of all, everything is about human rights here. When you are crossing the road, the car must stop and wait for you. In Hong Kong nothing would happen. I mean nothing similar would happen. They'd just blast their horn and give you a look like what are you doing here or something like that.

Hiroshi has made new American friends and he feels that they are different from his friends in Japan—perhaps not quite as serious:

I mean for example, I met a lot of friends like I have never seen in Japan. They're more carefree; they don't care about anything in a good way. I think about things too much...and my friends in Japan also think a lot even though they may be bad, but here... they don't care about things so much.

He says that as he has learned more about the culture, he has learned to communicate, understand, and socialize:

I learned how to communicate, I learned smiling is really important, I learned because I didn't understand but I have to understand and how can I, make a conversation even though I couldn't understand. So I just smiled even though I didn't understand, and then they would talk to me and eventually I would be able to understand them...that's the biggest experience I think. That's good, I learned a lot from that.

Hiroshi has also learned more about himself from this new environment and new situation. He says that he did not have any specific expectations when he came, but he is happy with his experience so far and just wants to continue to improve his English skills:

I didn't expect anything honestly because I just wanted to come here and that's all. I wanted to come here so I didn't expect anything just that I'd be in America.

That's what I thought...and in America, I like America...I don't know why, I think my dad likes America, that's why, maybe he influenced me, so when I came here I was happy I'm in America and from now on I'm going to study English so my focus is pretty much on studying English rather than studying some other subject.

Lily says that she is excited about the culture, and in particular, she likes the food. She finds people very friendly and open to talking and sharing their experiences. In comparison, she feels that Chinese people do not open up as much as Americans and that the interaction between people in the U.S. is different from people in China.

I think it's interesting and really exciting to know about culture. I was really obsessed with the food here, I like the American style food like pizza, hamburgers, and also I like people's way of thinking. They're always very friendly to you; they're not afraid of making friends with you; they are really willing to share their experience with you, but in China that is not true for strangers. We are not that willing to talk to you because we're kind of worried that you have some bad intentions towards us, but here people are always happy and they are willing to get to know you and let you know about them.

When I asked Farai if he had found any difficulties with the culture, he talked about how he likes the way people communicate here and compares it to how people communicate in England.

I wouldn't say I found anything different with the culture. I've liked the way people communicate more out here as opposed to England. There, people don't communicate the way people do here. You know, when you get onto a bus; you get onto the underground trains, and people don't even talk to each other, but out here there's more communication. I like that.

Farai lived in England when he was in high school. He prefers the way in which Americans interact and communicate with each other. He feels that people are friendlier and more open.

Koyuki says that she loves America and finds people very friendly and helpful.

I just feel like when I go to the like a K-mart or a Save-Mart, a lot of people say 'what's happening?' and I kind of feel happy, because they really care about me and then they are really friendly...so I really feel happy.

This is different from her experience in Japan, where, “nobody cares about people they meet. They just care about their friends; they never say hi to each other.” Koyuki feels comfortable getting to know people and reaching out even with her limited English skills.

Antonio has observed some differences in how people relate to each other in this culture. While he is very much aware of the differences between Argentina and the United States, he feels that they that are not really a problem for him.

In my country it's different; in my country we're closer to each other. We usually express our feelings towards people. We have more physical contact, we hug people, we kiss people, we shake hands with people. Families get together; at least, every Sunday we get together, and we have lunch together; it's a completely different culture there.

Here, I noticed that people are more distant between each other, even a father with a daughter or a father with a son. Here, when kids are 18 or 19 years old, they just move and you know start living their own lives, and in my country, it's not like that. In my country you have people who are 25 years old, and they are still living with their parents.

Here people are colder, you know, they do not express themselves so much but that doesn't mean that they don't love, they love, but in their own way. I'm not criticizing this country. I mean I respect this country because that's where I'm studying. I'm just saying it's a different culture. It's a different culture.

Antonio feels that people are closer to each other in Argentina and are much more expressive of their feelings than in the United States. There are more family gatherings and more physical displays of affection. Also, adult children are not as independent as Americans. In Argentina, it is not unusual for adult children to live with their parents until they marry. Antonio has not gotten to know many Americans, so there are differences that he has observed but perhaps has not experienced directly. He was also careful to add that he is not making a value judgment but is merely observing these differences.

The experience is more difficult for Antonio's wife than it is for him:

Well for her it's even a little more difficult because when she came here, she didn't speak English, so that made everything worse because if you don't speak the language it's hard...but now she's getting better. It's getting better I mean we will survive. I think that humans adjust to different situations. That's one of the greatest gifts about human beings; we can adjust to different lifestyles. It's difficult at the beginning, but we are going to make it in the end.

Antonio and his wife plan to stay in the United States until Antonio finishes his education, but they intend to return to Argentina when he finishes. Antonio is focused on his studies and supporting himself financially. As discussed in the structure of social experience, his primary focus is on his academic experience and not so much on the social or cultural experience.

*Differences in how students behave.* Elaine says that she was nervous about the cultural differences between the Philippines and the U.S. when she first got here. She noted a number of cultural differences in our interview. First, students in the Philippines stand up when the teacher walks into the room and when they need to answer a question. This is different from the U.S. She said:

Well, at first I was a little nervous because we have a different culture in the Philippines compared to here, especially when it comes to class. In the Philippines when the professor arrives, we need to stand up and greet him. I did that at first because I was used to that.

Second, in the Philippines, she wore a school uniform. Here she has needed to buy more clothes: "we also use uniforms so I need to buy clothes, different clothes, so that I won't wear the same over and over."

Sarah feels that she has learned how to be more independent and compares Chinese students to American students.



The strongest thing that I feel in America is that most people are independent ... like in school, people sometimes work in groups, but sometimes people work by themselves; they are working towards their goal, but in China we have some stable classes and stable classmates; we never change classmates during the two or three years. Of course, we made friends because of that, and so we can work together or something, but here because the period of classes only lasts for three months, I mean the quarter system, they only last three months or so it's hard to make groups, friends, because it's too short;...I think friends are still important, but here we tend to be more independent to face our studies, to face our lives.

Because students are more independent and classes are not “stable,” it is harder for Sarah to get to know people. She says that: “it doesn't mean that American culture here isn't good or something, I mean here it is really wonderful, but I don't feel I really fit into the culture, if I were more open that would be easier.”

Koyuki is grateful for the benefits of being in a small college, where she gets to practice her English and gets to know people. She feels that a small community like this is not for everybody, and students who “really expect the American dream” might not want to come here. Koyuki would like to see some more Japanese food at the college and some Japanese restaurants in the community.

As students experience the new culture, they compare it with aspects of their own culture. In this section, I have presented and commented on international students' prior expectations as opposed to the reality of their experience, the positive aspects of the cultural experience, and international students' observations about cultural differences and behaviors.

**Adapting to the culture.** Students had different experiences as they went through their adjustment and assimilation into the culture. This section will include a discussion of students' opportunities to get to meet people, their homesickness and culture shock, and their experiences as they get to know and adapt to the new culture.

***Opportunities to get to know the culture.*** Koyuki had an opportunity to go to the home of an American friend in Los Angeles. This was a good learning experience for her as she learned about American family life and culture. She was very excited about the fact that, “last year, in winter, I went to my American friend’s house, and I stayed the whole winter vacation.” She enjoyed the closeness of the family, ate a lot of macaroni and cheese, slept on a sofa bed, and did not have to take her shoes off in the house as she would in Japan. Koyuki appreciated this opportunity to spend time inside the home of her friend and get some insights into their culture.

Dinh also has an opportunity to learn more about American family life as he spends his weekends with his American girlfriend’s parents. And, Farai lives with his mother’s close friends, whom he refers to as “aunt” and “uncle.” However, neither Dinh nor Farai discussed their observations or experiences based on their interactions with an American family.

As discussed in the structure of social experience, students got a taste of American culture through their home stay family. They learned about American culture and lifestyle through their experiences with their host family. However, visiting with and getting to know Americans closely was quite unusual.

***Culture shock and homesickness.*** Elaine says that she had a lot of difficulties with the culture and suffered culture shock. “I experienced culture shock because basically I’m like an alien here in this place.” Likewise, her sister who is in high school has had some cultural difficulties. Elaine feels that children are raised differently here in the U.S. and are “kind of liberated, but my sister and I are so conservative.” She stays

close to her family and Filipina friends and, therefore, does not have many opportunities to adapt culturally.

Sebastian misses the sense of freedom, relaxation, and comfort of his life in Costa Rica.

I miss the security and safety that I have of running in my country without getting rolled over by a car or without having to stop at every corner because of a traffic light or a stop sign or having police looking at me because I'm running or being super happy or that they might think I'm on drugs or just stole something. That sense of innocence that I have in my country, I think that's something that I miss and having people, you know having the time and having that friendship from the rest of the people and that sense of cooperation. That's something that I'm missing here. Here it's not so easy to make friends because of the culture I'll say, although I'm not blaming it. I understand that part of the culture of the United States is to work really hard and that's basically what's going on in every part of the world right now. But, having a little bit of time to talk to someone new, to have a cup of coffee or to take a break from what you're doing and just look out and see where you are and what you're doing and what's going on and say Hi to somebody. That's something that I'm missing from my country, that natural human behavior, and not just focusing on your keyboard or your writing.

Sebastian misses those aspects of his Costa Rican culture that he feels comfortable with and that he can take for granted. He has to be more vigilant when he runs on the street and crosses at a crosswalk. He has to be more concerned about how people perceive him and what he may be doing that would get him in trouble. He does not have the sense of security of living among people who know him and care about him. And, he misses the easy interaction that he has with people back home when he sits and has a conversation with friends over a cup of coffee. He misses being carefree and having old friends. He feels the stress and discomfort of living outside of his comfort zone and having to start all over and build new relationships in a new and foreign environment. He also misses playing soccer with his friends and notices that the U.S. is not as fascinated by soccer as the rest of the world:

Soccer is not in the sport culture of the United States but it is in the rest of the world. There's always this debate who likes to play football and then what kind of football. Real football...yeah but what's real football or the football that everybody else plays? This is one of the topics on which you can disagree and still have fun about. I like playing soccer.

Soccer was a big part of his life in Costa Rica and an easy way to make friends. He misses that and would like to get a group of students together to play when he has time. He feels homesick and does not have the time or leisure to establish a new lifestyle in the U.S. For now he is preoccupied with college, classes, and grades.

Nicole finds it "hard being away from my siblings and my friends in France." and says that "it's still very hard when you see that something is happening and you're missing it." Nicole has decided that "in the future I want to live in Europe ... because of that, and I didn't know that when I, when I came here, I was just excited about new things." She sees her time in the United States as temporary but wants to enjoy it.

Farai misses his friends in Zimbabwe but uses Face book to keep in touch with them.

I do miss it; there's times when I definitely miss Zimbabwe or when I'm on Face book and I see some of my friends in Zimbabwe and I'm like wow, man, these guys are doing this and that and I read the online Zimbabwe newspapers every week. I always try my best to look at those, and so there are definitely times that I miss Zimbabwe a lot, definitely, yeah.

Farai, like many international students, uses social media to keep in touch with family and friends back home. This helps alleviate some of the homesickness and feelings of isolation. This is a reality that many international students experience.

***Adjusting to the culture.*** Henry feels that he has assimilated well into the American culture and because of his proficiency in English: "it's easier, because with the international school background I think I've just been trained with English, which is the

main language used here. He feels that “I can blend in, and I’m not ashamed of saying I’m Chinese. He has adjusted to the culture but does not know it deeply. He says:

I think I’m guilty of the fact that I know about a lot of cultures superficially, but I don’t know deeply about them. I can talk to them about their history because I learnt about it, but in terms of their country, I don’t think I know enough to understand their really complicated inside jokes.

He wants to get to know the American culture, but the difficulty is that there are many cultures and ethnic groups here:

I definitely want to get immersed because who wants to be a loner, right? But then the thing is there’s so many cultures here there’s so many different cultures and so many different backgrounds that it’s difficult to know about most of them.

Lily says that she wants to learn about the culture and that it was one of her goals when she came to the United States:

First of all, from the cultural aspect, I expect to learn about the U.S. culture and break the barrier between me as a Chinese student and the local students, this is my goal.

She likes living in the United States and feels that it is a friendly culture, but she finds it difficult to fit into the culture because of the language. She says:

I found that this is a little bit difficult for me to fit myself into the U.S. culture because maybe it’s because of the language barrier or maybe it’s because our cultural background is different. I mean I can chat with the local students, but when it really comes to things apart from studies, I find it difficult to communicate with them because you know something they don’t know; they know something that you really don’t know.

She said, for example, that she does not always get the jokes another student makes perhaps because of the speed with which she speaks. She is not sure if it is just her problem, or if it is a problem that other international students experience.

For example, during my study group there’s a student from Indonesia and local students and me, and when we’re taking a break from the studies, the local student is really talkative, and she tells me a lot of things about TV shows and sports

games, things like that and actually it's really humorous. She'll make a lot of jokes, and I don't really get the jokes that she makes. Sometimes, she will say something, and her speaking speed is kind of fast for me and because she is really excited about what she is talking about, it's not good for me to interrupt her and say "excuse me, can you say it again?" Things like that . . .well I don't know whether it's just a personal issue or it's just a lot of international students.

Understanding humor is difficult in a new language. And when jokes include social and cultural references, it becomes more difficult. Lily finds it difficult to follow jokes because of the language, the social and cultural nuances and references, and the speed with which they are told. Lily says that she was frustrated with the culture at first and talked to her host family. They gave her some very sound advice about how to get to know the culture:

At first I was kind of frustrated about it, and I talked to my host family about it, and they told me to go to more activities with them and to watch some movies and news and try to know more about the U.S. culture, read more books, something like that, and my host mom told me that if you don't know what exactly they're talking about, like basketball, something like that, you can tell them what your culture is like, maybe they will be interested.

Lily got some very useful tips from her host family. They gave her some practical insights into how she might learn more about the culture and find some topics that would help her get to know Americans. Lily would rate her cultural adjustment as follows: "well if adjustment is 100%, I will grade myself at 80% I think." Lily hopes that she will continue to get to know people, understand the nuances of the language, and feel more comfortable with the culture as much as she can. She also hopes to be able to live and work in the U.S. after she finishes college, so culture is important.

Alex feels that he tries "hard to adjust . . . to the new cultural environment." I asked if he had had opportunities to meet American students on campus, and he said that

“well I try hard not to talk as much Chinese as possible, and I try hard to talk more English with other people” and noted that

I think to me it’s fine because my English is not that bad, but for many of my friends like those who came here, they don’t really speak English, and they talk to their own group in their own language, so they can’t really learn the language.

Regarding opportunities to speak English with non-Chinese students, he says:

I think it’s totally based on your intentions; if you want to speak in English, you will definitely find someone to speak English, and even if you don’t want to speak in English, then it’s understandable that you’ll only find friends to talk to in Chinese.

When I asked Alex if he had ever had the experience of talking to another student in class and going for lunch or coffee afterwards, he said that he had done that once. He said that it is difficult because: “sometimes the class is full of international students, and it’s hard.”

When students socialize within their own ethnic group only, this makes the opportunity for any kind of cultural interaction or experience very difficult.

Like many other international students, Alex does not get involved in any community activities. He says, “Occasionally, I’ll watch some news but, I don’t really participate in community events.” His social life centers around his college activities. This makes the opportunity for any kind of cultural interaction or experience very difficult. Alex is aware of some of the differences between Americans and people from Hong Kong. One of the differences he notices is in the style of music played on the radio. Some of the music he hears on American radio would be considered “illegal” and would be “banned” in Hong Kong. He says that “if you want to live here, then you need to follow the rules here.” Alex seems to be willing to give it a try, but he is limited in what he can do because he is still dependent on his friends to give him rides.

Khloe feels that she is adjusting well to the culture because she is willing to

reach out and get to know people, unlike many of the other Chinese students:

I think in this college, I do pretty well because I always get to know people from different aspects. I can say that I always meet different people, so I get a chance to talk to them. But compared to my friends, I mean my Chinese friends or other international students, they still want to remain in the same group that they are always in.

Chinese students tend to stay together, and the Hong Kong students also stay together, but sometimes the two groups intermingle. When students stay within their ethnic or cultural group, they tend not to assimilate into the American culture.

Robert feels that he has adapted well to his new environment, but he feels that other students may not have coped so well:

Some are very poorly adapted, and generally there's a lot of selection. If you're not good enough, you'll run out of money and you'll go home, so...there's sort of a survivorship bias here. If they are not keeping up, if they're not doing well, they'll simply have to go home; they'll drop below 2.0 or they will not have money to pay rent and they'll have to go home, so you really only get to see the good ones, or interact with the good ones...because everybody else has to leave ... all the time, that's just the way it works.

He feels that the adjustment process for Chinese students is easier than it might be for some other students because of their proximity to the local Chinatown:

Specifically about the Chinese students, for them it's kind of easy because Chinatown is right there, big Asian community; there's people they can ask if they're having trouble with their English; they're probably living next to some other students, some other international students or some immigrants at the same level of English and they're still going to community college, so they have a support network here...simply because of the proximity of such a large Asian community here...and it's a little easier for them, plus, there's a lot of Asians here, it's the biggest Asian community outside of Asia.

Min-Kyung says that at his college some students want to assimilate, but if they do, the result may be that they are excluded from their group.

Well there are definitely a few groups of students that actually want to get themselves engaged with American society and cultures and all, but the thing is once they decide to do that, they get left out of their own groups...



While many students want to assimilate and know that this is something they should be doing, they do not do it. They find it very difficult because of the peer pressure.

And then again, the other groups know for a fact that it is something that they should strive for; but just because they know they don't have the guts or you know whatever it costs for them to do it and they're not doing it. They know that, but this person is trying to see the American culture for him or herself; he she is being like a mirror to that group; they know that it's something that they should be doing, but they see themselves not doing it and then they get frustrated, and... what does the group do? They just exclude him/her from the group and just treat them as somebody else.

When students step outside their group and try to assimilate, they are often excluded from the group. Min-Kyung believes that this exclusion happens because of jealousy. When students are insecure and do not want to interact with other students from different backgrounds, they do not like to see their friends do it. Min-Kyung has not experienced this kind of exclusion himself. He spent many years studying in Canada before he came to the U.S. and feels comfortable with the English language. He sees himself as a leader and role model for other international students and he feels that he "perfectly fits right in the middle" between his native Korean culture and the new American culture.

In summary, students had different experiences as they went through their adjustment and assimilation into the culture. Students were also at different stages in the process, and some are still dealing with homesickness and culture shock. Some students came with a goal to learn as much as possible about the new culture. They are interested in blending in and assimilating into American life and culture. On the other hand, some students are afraid to take a risk and reach out beyond their own ethnic group for fear of exclusion and isolation by the group. Finally, for other students, the cultural experience is not a high priority, and their focus is on their academic experience, their family, or their future goals.

**Diversity of American society.** Students are attracted to the cultural diversity of American society. Many students are not familiar with this kind of diversity in their own cultures. As outsiders, they find it easier to fit into a society that is ethnically diverse. In this section, I will discuss international students' experience with diversity in the United States, their perception of what it means to be an American, and their perceptions about their own ethnic identity.

*Fitting into a diverse society.* Olivia likes to get to know people from other cultures. She spent most of her life living outside her native country of Brazil. She has lived in Germany, Spain, and the UK. She now finds that she identifies best with people who have a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic background. She mentioned that she has a friend who was "actually from here... at the same time she's Indian/French/American so that kind of mix, I guess you do kind of identify or make yourself more comfortable with people that already know you for being international or being from everywhere." She fits in well and feels very comfortable in this culture and in particular likes living in California.

Olivia went to Brazil for a visit and said, "I felt like I'm Brazilian, but I'm not...you know you're out of place," but living here in California, "it's different; you can be international and adapt or not, depending on the country you're in. It's a multicultural place, already, a metropolitan city, so it's much easier than somewhere else."

As regards her assimilation and integration into the culture, "I feel it's the first time I've actually felt like I could see this as home." When she has lived in other places, she says:

Everywhere else it's like there's these little things that kind of annoy me, but here in California, I think it's totally different from what I've experienced elsewhere...

I don't know exactly what, I can't pinpoint one thing. But, it feels very comfortable.

Olivia feels happier and more comfortable living in California's diverse society than in any previous location.

Farai feels that he has adjusted well to life in the U.S. He is still surprised by the diversity in the United States.

It was interesting when I came here. I was just ready to learn and grow. It was just a new environment, new culture. You know in Zimbabwe, you barely see so many cultures in one area. When I first came here, I was surprised that it is so diversified out here. There are Italians, Irish, Africans, Europeans, just the whole spread you know, Asians as well; so that to me was the big factor in that I was now in a society with a lot of different cultures and that really intrigued me. So, that was my first impression coming out here.

Nicole also likes the diversity of the American culture and finds it quite different from France. She has learned and grown from her experience here.

I've learned. When I came here, I was faced with a lot of diversity, which is not the case in my country, people of all ages, all backgrounds, and all ethnicities. It was just crazy for me because I come from a small town in France and it's different, and I like it a lot actually here because everyone is really into civil rights and freedom and great ideas like that and I like it. I really like it.

She likes people's openness and freedom and feels free to express herself. For example, if she wants to go to church, she feels free to do so.

I really like the way that people are really open to each other; they are very friendly; they come to talk to you if you're on the street with a map; they come and help you. People just don't do that in France. And, I went to church several times ...because I'm not, I don't really feel Catholic, in France, and I didn't want to be stigmatized if I went to church, but here it is just okay, like it's good. And I went to the Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco.

She says that when she went back to France for the summer, and "I felt good, but I felt different from other people my age." Nicole feels that she has changed from the cultural exposure in the United States.

Some students were surprised by the diversity of the United States but embraced the opportunity to be included in such a multi-cultural society. On the other hand, some students had difficulty with the concept that there is not one single American race or ethnic identity and tried to determine what that looks like.

*Perceptions of what it means to be an American.* A common perception or misconception among international students is that Americans are White Caucasians. Non-White Americans are identified by their ethnic or cultural group such as African-American, Asian-American, Filipino-American, and Mexican-American. However, in the minds of many international students, Americans are White-Americans.

Young-Soo wants and expects to improve her English and get to know the American culture. She has some misconceptions about what it means to be an American. She associates English language ability and American culture with White or Anglo Americans. Her perception is that Hispanic-Americans and African-Americans are not “real” Americans. If she is not exposed to White-Americans, she is not being exposed to the real American culture and is not learning proper English. She said:

The one thing honestly is I want to learn English properly, right, but here, actually there are very few white people. I know Mexicans all have good English, but actually, this is not the first language for them, right? So, I didn't know when I came here that there were Mexican-Americans and Africa-Americans, and they speak Mexican-English and African-American English, and White people's English is different, and actually White people's English is more proper, Actually this is the bad thing in here like when I go to class, 60% or 70% are Mexican.

She refers to Hispanic Americans as Mexican, whether they were born in the U.S. or not, and she is confused by their ability to speak English and Spanish:

They said that they can speak Spanish and English and I asked them which is comfortable for you guys, and some people say English, and some people say Spanish, or both. They have pretty good English skills, but you know it is a little different.

She feels that she is missing out on the cultural and linguistic experience because she is not meeting more White-Americans.

Koyuki has found kindness and support from the American and Mexican-American/Hispanic students. She feels that the Hispanic students have been able to empathize with her because, as she assumes, they or their families came to the U.S. as immigrants.

Actually I felt like here, there are a lot of Mexicans, not only Americans, so I feel like they know how you feel because some of them were born here, but some just moved here, like immigrants, so that's why they know how to communicate, or they feel for people, who are from a different country.

Min-Kyung also shares the perception that all Americans are White. He refers to them as “native” Americans (not Native-Americans). From his experience, many of the host families for the home stay program are not White Americans: “but the major population of people doing the home stays they're not Americans, I mean they are Americans, but they're not native Americans, no, not Native Americans, but you know I'm thinking American like Caucasians. They're not Caucasians.” He says that his host family “was Filipino, and many host families are like that, Filipino born in America.” In his perspective, they are not “real” Americans because they are not Caucasian.

Both Young-Soo and Koyuki have been in the United States for less than two years and have been at a small college, but Min-Kyung studied in Canada for about seven years and has been in the U.S. for two years at a large college in a large metropolitan area. It is interesting that they all share this perception that a “real” American is a White Caucasian.

*Ethnic identity.* Moving from their native country to a new environment and culture causes people to question and rethink their identity within this new environment. Chen has some conflicting feelings about Asian and Asian-American identity and Asian stereotyping. He feels that Asians are culturally different from Asian-Americans, who dress very casually in baggy pants and baseball hats, listen to rap and “hip-hop” music, and are informal in their dealings with others. Asian-Americans dress differently and behave very differently from Asians who grew up in Hong Kong. The culture of Hong Kong was affected by the British, and people are more polite, conservative, and formal. Chen is still very aware of the cultural differences. While he can accept the culture of local Americans, he is more affected by the differences between his culture and that of Asian-Americans.

Farai was the only African student in the study and he had some interesting thoughts about his identity and how he fits within the African-American culture in the U.S. He says that it is not very usual for Zimbabweans to leave and go to other countries, but the economic situation has forced people to leave. Farai is proud of his country and his people, has a strong cultural identity, and like most Zimbabweans, hopes to return home. He finds the U.S. a good place to live, but he is not quite sure of where he fits in. He is not African-American but is often perceived as such. He is aware of being African but perceived as African-American in the United States and says that he wants to be careful:

Well you know because I am from Africa, right? And this is America, this is a different place that I'm in so it's just, I'm just careful of what I do and what I say because there you don't want to be offensive to anybody; you want to be careful of what you say to anybody, you want to be sure of what you say and that something is addressed correctly and people don't perceive you as saying the

wrong thing because you know people can take things differently, and it's a big crowd, as compared to Zimbabwe, so you just got to be careful.

He feels that he has adapted well to the culture and in particular has learned a great deal about the African-American culture in the U.S.

I haven't found anything really difficult in terms of adapting to the culture, especially since you know I have my uncle and aunt, and they've just shown me so much especially in the African-American culture and how they're different, they're different, just the different parts of the African American culture and the African American community that is just amazing, so I haven't really found much difficulty.

Farai is fluent in English and sounds like a native speaker of English because he lived in England. People are not sure of where he comes from and do not always realize that he is from Africa because of his fluency and pronunciation.

Some don't realize that I come from another country. Some do realize that I come from another country, but most people, I guess when they look at me don't realize I'm from another country, and from my speech, not many people would think that I'm from another country.

It is important for Farai to preserve his Zimbabwean heritage and identity. He also wants to fit into the new environment and finds that he identifies more closely with African-Americans.

Chen and Farai introduced personal concerns about their ethnic identity and how they identify with Asian-Americans and African-Americans respectively within a diverse multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society. These concerns did not emerge as supporting themes in other interviews, and my assumption is that students are not at this point in their cultural journey and may experience this at a later time.

Likewise, the other supporting themes of fitting into a diverse society and understanding the diversity of ethnic groups in the United States, as discussed in this section, emerged from some interviews but not all. Cultural assimilation happens in

different stages and at different time periods for each individual. Many international students are still in the very early stages of cultural adjustment and have a fairly superficial perspective of what is involved in getting to know a new culture. My sense is that many of them see their stay as temporary and they may not go beyond this stage.

**Beyond the superficial into a deeper understanding of cultural differences.**

Many students talked about what Henry termed as “superficial” aspects of the culture. They felt that they were familiar with the culture before their arrival because they had watched American movies, had met some Americans in their home country, or had found similarities between their native culture and the American culture. They were aware of some obvious differences in cultural norms and cultural behaviors and felt that they had done a good job of adapting to the new culture in a superficial way. However, they have not had the opportunity, or perhaps they have not taken the risk, to identify, understand, or adopt the more subtle aspects of cultural behavior and practices.

Aiko feels that there is a different style of communication between the two cultures and she has had some difficulties communicating and interacting with people. She thinks about these differences and works on ways of overcoming them. She wants to keep her own Japanese culture, but she is also interested in adopting the new culture. She feels that people are more direct here, which has led to misunderstandings.

I think because of the cultural differences, I sometimes had difficulty dealing with people. Like, if I say a word, I don't know if it will offend people or not. Maybe it was okay in Japan, but it's not here so... that's still happening to me a lot. Usually because I'm Japanese I am expecting people to feel something. For example, in Japan, we don't have to say the word but they feel the atmosphere of the conversation, and they figure out the meaning, and then they just stop talking. But here, we have to have our opinion and make it clear. I wasn't used to saying my opinion much...because I feel that's too intrusive and then...arrogant or something, but now I am learning that I have to have my own idea or whatever, so I have to tell them what I'm thinking, what I'm feeling.



With time and practice, Aiko has developed a clearer sense of what she needs to do in order to express her opinions and feelings. She is developing a keener sense of the subtleties of communication, facial expressions, and body language. Aiko has also learned to ask for help from her American friends when the meaning or the intention of the message isn't clear:

I ask friends sometimes "what's the problem with that?" and they tell me this does not really work. This does not work here in the U.S. and I then I know that's why. And, now I sort of understand that I'm using different words. We have to learn it I think.

She tries to learn about the culture through experience, and "so, I try not to repeat that kind of problem." She misses Japan but says: "I like this culture, but I like my Japanese culture too so ... I am just coping with both at the same time. I try not to lose my Japanese sense of culture or anything."

Robert discussed some of the more subtle aspects of adapting to the culture based on his personal experience. In particular, he focused on styles of communication and interaction between people.

There's a lot of other stuff that is a little bit more complicated that goes beyond faking the accent and beyond just smiling to people; it's the way Americans interact. There are a lot of things, subtle things, as I get more and more involved in business, as I get more and more involved in working with the school's administration; there are many things that we do slightly differently.

He says that Americans appear to be adverse to conflict and do not express their disagreement directly. They do not clash with their opponents publicly, but do so indirectly and covertly.

I will use a very violent and very juicy metaphor. If you are to stab somebody in my culture, you are not going to stab them in the back, you're going to stab them smack in between their eyes; it's head on confrontation. If you are confronting somebody at all, you will confront them head on, you will bring stuff up in a

meeting publicly so that everybody can see, you will challenge publicly, you will do your fighting publicly and you will win or lose publicly and it will be settled. However, in the States, Americans are much more conflict adverse, so the tendency will be to harm each other quietly from the back, and whoever can do more of this sort of burning quiet damage, that's who wins.

Robert has observed that the ways in which Americans handle conflict is different from how people would handle it in Romania and other parts of Europe. He says that in the professional world in particular, Americans are not willing to confront each other face to face about issues of conflict. Rather, they go behind the person's back and discuss the problem and even slander the person's good name. On the other hand, in Robert's culture, the conflict takes place face to face; it is very direct and very public.

He relates this practice to what he has observed in his work environment and discusses how administrators and managers deal with conflict.

In my culture, we don't do it that way, so if two administrators are warring, if their departments are warring, like two deans don't get along, they will bring stuff up in public meetings. Here these two deans will quietly pinch each other and create issues for each other by setting stuff up in such ways that their adversary would be disadvantaged. In my culture, it's not only that it's not respected, it's not really acceptable. If you operate in that way, people will not interact with you...you will be isolated, you will be considered somebody that is dangerous, that is behaving inappropriately, but this person is not behaving like the rest of us, so we need to isolate him. Even among your friends, you will be alienated. Here this is perfectly acceptable, so I did not expect the person that is not only smiling at me but is having casual conversations with me and is asking me how I am doing to actually be an adversary and disagree with pretty much all of the things that I do and actively work to undermine my efforts. For me that was a surprise, and I could not understand it.

Robert was surprised to learn that deans and managers could smile at each other, interact with each other publicly, but at the same time undermine each other behind the scenes.

He found it contradictory to have people appear friendly and supportive to him but disagree with everything that he said and did.

Robert learned about the different communication styles from his experiences working with student government, from his co-workers, and student friends. He has learned about the rules of behavior but has encountered some contradictions. He feels that people are liberal and easy-going in many ways, but conservative in other ways. He finds that people appear very friendly and casual, but can be very formal when it comes to human contact and interaction. He has learned that, “physical contact is a complete no-no, so if you invade somebody’s physical space, they’re likely to sue you with sexual harassment charges.” Robert was advised that if he was meeting with a female colleague in student government, he should do so with the office door open. He was surprised by this directive:

I remember when I started working with the student government, Brian, a war veteran and the president of the associated students, who is much older, and has experience interacting with people, was to a large extent one of my mentors. He was always telling me that you cannot close the door to the office when you talk to female colleagues, and I said, “Wait a second...that’s simply a private issue that I have to discuss with that person; we’re about to impeach this, officer, and I have to talk to her. How do I do that if I have to keep the door open?” He said “No, you cannot close the door.” So, all these are small things that American society is hyper-sensitive about. Then, certain aspects that they are very lenient and careless about are issues that we feel strongly about. So, as I am going into these more complicated social structures, like business, like interactions on a professional level, it’s a challenge to learn all that...and I certainly have learned that I have to proceed with caution.

Robert has learned that he cannot make assumptions about the culture and that he needs to have a better understanding of what is acceptable and what is not, especially in areas that might be perceived as sexual harassment. He has learned about acceptable and unacceptable ways of behavior through personal experience. He described a situation in which he was told that he was being too loud. He had heard other people being louder than him in other situations and assumed that his behavior was acceptable. However, he

got in trouble with the dean for his behavior because “the social context for that was not acceptable.” He now realizes that,

There are all the small things that I had to learn, and I feel I’ve learned them pretty well, because the things that have been brought up to me I’ve addressed and I’ve addressed even things that could have been brought up to me so I’ve safeguarded myself, I’ve assumed an attitude that’s keeping me safe from any issues of this sort.

He learned from this experience that he had misread the cues and his efforts to fit in were not really appropriate. He has learned that “I’m in a different culture, that things will be different, and eventually I learned how to handle situations better.” He now realizes that he needs “to read the situation and read beyond the situation, to anticipate something that might happen.” So if he is not sure how to behave in a given situation, he now observes how other people behave and tries to follow their example. He does not assume that certain behaviors are acceptable just because he has observed it occur. He says that:

I heard a dean cuss in a meeting once, and I wondered if it was acceptable here now, and am I allowed to do that in a public meeting? It doesn’t seem like this would be right, so it really got me thinking if that was appropriate, and I actually asked somebody. I asked Brian if this was normal, and he was like “no, those guys get in trouble for this.”

Based on these experiences, Robert has developed some deeper insights into the more subtle aspects of behavior and has developed his own skills and abilities to integrate into American society and business world. His goal is to finish his education and build a life and career for himself in the U.S. My assumption is that he has a strong motivation to assimilate culturally in order to succeed with his goals, and he has invested a lot of time to develop this sensitivity and awareness of cultural differences and acceptable behavior. While other international students observed cultural and behavioral differences between

their culture and the American culture, I did not see the depth of awareness and observation in their experiences as I did with Robert.

***Summary of the structure of culture.*** International students feel that they are familiar with certain aspects of the American culture prior to arrival in the country. They have gathered this information from American TV shows and movies, through encounters with Americans abroad, on previous trips to the U.S. and from similarities between their own culture and American culture. Their expectation is that the reality will be similar to their expectations. Many international students are in the United States for a temporary period and plan to return home after they graduate. Their experience of and exposure to American culture may be limited. They have been able to experience certain aspects of the culture and are able to comment in generalizations about differences in food, personal behavior, physical displays of affection, the educational system, and more. They may feel that they have adapted well, and this is true within the scope of their world as community college students. However, few of them understand the complexity and diversity of the multi-cultural nature of American society. As international students with limited English skills, they see themselves as separate from the culture and, therefore, have not considered their identity within American society. Likewise, few have had the opportunity to build relationships with Americans and explore some of the deeper aspects of the cultural experience.

### **The Structure of Problems and Solutions**

**Introduction to problems and solutions.** This structure is called *The Structure of Problems and Solutions*. In my interviews with international students, students responded to questions about difficulties they experienced and changes they would like to

make in their experience. The supporting themes for this structure emerged through different parts of the interview as students discussed their reasons for coming to a California community college and their academic, social, and cultural experience. The problems range from transfer issues to transportation problems. Some issues create barriers to the international students' success while others are inconveniences that can be overcome.

An initial factor that impacted students' experience is that the decision to study at a community college in the United States was not their first choice. I believe that it is important to consider this point within this structure because it had negative influences on the international students' experiences.

In the area of their academic experience, students identified some issues that directly impact their ability to reach their goals. These are budget cutbacks resulting in reductions in course offerings, registration difficulties, and reduced tutoring services; cost of tuition; and quality of counseling. Issues that interfered with students' learning experience include conflicts with instructors, language difficulties, getting to know a different educational system, and the disadvantages of a large "network" of international students from the same ethnic or language background. Other issues within the social experience and cultural experience include a desire for more social activities, more opportunities to meet Americans, and more club activities. Another concern is that international student offices need more staffing and need to be conveniently located. Students also have concerns about transportation, accommodation, and food.

This section will focus on the major problems within the academic, social, and cultural experience of international students. I will introduce the supporting themes and

then discuss some positive feedback and solutions that emerged. Some of these difficulties have been discussed within the other structures but will be developed more fully within this section.

*Second choice and a second chance.* Community colleges offer American students an alternative to the traditional route of attending a four-year university. It gives them a second chance to reach their goals through transfer and gives them the time to explore their options and decide on their major. This is also true for international students. Within the structure of reasons, I have explored the reasons why international students have opted to study at a community college as a second chance to get a higher education. However, the downside is that a second chance is also a second choice. The fact that this was not the students' first choice has had an impact on their experience.

Studying at a community college in the United States was not Sarah's first choice. Her preference would have been to study in China, but she did not pass the entrance exam to get accepted into a Chinese university. Her parents could afford to pay for her to study overseas, so she made a quick decision to attend community college and then transfer to university. Sarah's parents filed for divorce the first week after she left China and she broke up with her boyfriend. These events colored her first experiences in the U.S. and now six months later, she is still troubled by them. The fact that these events happened in her first week seemed to greatly impact her emotional state. Sarah also had a difficult experience with one her instructors, which upset her. This was discussed in the structure of education. She finds her new situation as a student at an American community college difficult because she is not interested in social involvement or cultural adjustment. Her shyness has made it difficult for her to get to know people. She feels

alone here, and she feels that she doesn't fit in. Sarah says that "if there's one thing I could change, I would have studied harder when I was in China and probably I wouldn't have come here." She feels more comfortable since she got a job on campus as a math tutor. She said that her focus is not on social activities, but "I just know that goal for me to come here is just to study." However, she still finds the situation difficult. Many international students, like Sarah, are only focused on graduating with their degree and returning to their native country. They do not see the value of the personal, social, or cultural, aspect of their experience.

Alex suggests that students take the SAT first and then make a choice. If they get a high enough score, they should go to university rather than community college. If they do not get the required score for university, they should then register at a community college. He feels that community college is "something like a pre-college experience. It's not yet a real college, a real 4-year college, so it's different for me. I still don't consider this as the four-year college life." And, the fact that this is not the real college experience makes Alex very selective about the kinds of activities in which he becomes involved. He chooses only those extra-curricular and club activities that will enrich and enhance his university application.

Min-Kyung started his study abroad experience in middle school when his parents sent him to study in Canada. He said, "I was grateful for every opportunity that I could possibly get, and I really wanted to get to know the culture and all." Min-Kyung is now studying at a large community college and has many Korean friends. He also works in the ISO and meets many international students. His perception is that the international students who come to the community college today are not here to experience American



society and culture. They are not very interested in the whole educational experience.

They are only interested in the terminal degree at the four-year university. Community college gives them that chance, a chance that they might not otherwise have had:

But, nowadays all that students want is the name or title of the university they get their degree from. They want to be able to put this on their resume, and it will be useful for them in their mother country. I want to highlight this, and it is only my personal opinion, but BMC is just a gateway to university. It's not like they will be proud of the title of graduating from BMC. It is the title from what is to come...that they are worried about, so at BMC all they need is their great reputation and their 4.0 GPA or the best GPA prior to the transfer. So, simply put, they're not here for the educational experience. They're not here for the material that they're being taught. They're just worried about how to get an A, how to get an A from homework, how to do the homework in the way that the professor will give them an A. So when the groups get together all they talk about is how to do the homework, and what you got on your quiz or test. "Oh, you got that; well can you show it to me?"

Students are so focused on getting good grades and transferring into the best schools, they do not have the interest or the time to have a full and complete educational, social, and cultural experience.

In conclusion, international students are focused on doing what they need for successful transfer and graduation with a degree from a good school. Their focus is on their academic performance and whatever extra-curricular activities will help with their college transfer application. If they have access to a supportive network of friends from their own ethnic group, they study together, enroll in classes together, and offer each other suggestions about faculty to take and faculty to avoid. While this focus on academic success may not be a problem in itself, it means that international students are less likely to become involved in the social and cultural aspect of their experience.

***Summary of second chance and second choice.*** International students study at an American community college because it offers them a second chance to get an education.

The fact that this is not their first choice influences the international students' perception of their experience and the degree and level of involvement. They tend to focus heavily on their academic experience and do not embrace opportunities for social and cultural involvement.

**Factors that make it difficult for international students to achieve their goals.**

In this section, I will discuss the issues that make it difficult for international students to achieve their academic goals of transferring and graduating from a four-year university. These factors are budget constraints, cost of tuition, and quality of counseling.

*Budget constraints.* Budget constraints have resulted in reductions in course offerings and services at California community colleges. Students experience difficulty registering for classes because of reduced course offerings and fewer sections of courses that are being offered. As a result, completing the courses required for transfer takes more time. Maintaining 12 units per semester to satisfy their visa requirement means international students may have to take classes they do not need in a given semester. Colleges have also reduced their tutoring services.

*Reductions in course offerings and registration difficulties.* Students find it difficult to register for classes because there are fewer sections and these sections fill up quickly. Colleges handle this differently. Many students had difficulty getting the classes they wanted and felt that it was taking them longer than expected to complete their requirements for transfer. Because of the 12-unit requirement to maintain their visa status, they sometimes had to enroll in classes they did not need. However, at other colleges, students had priority registration and did not have any trouble getting into classes.

One of the major frustrations James feels is with the registration process. Because he is a community college student with a prior degree, he has the last priority for registration. He said: “I don’t get to register until the last minute pretty much, and if they could have let us register early, that would help.” Also, because international students are required to have a minimum of 12 units for their visa, he sometimes has to take courses that he does not need.

Hiroshi was not able to register for a class because it filled up quickly. He said that, “last semester I wanted to take one class but that was full, so I gave up, and I registered for another class.” However, he was able to register for a different class and hopes to be able to get into the class he missed in a future semester. He says that if he goes to talk to a counselor, it will help him to get “priority” registration” at his college.

Alex has had difficulties in dealing with wait lists. He says that it has been a problem because “I need to fit my class schedule, and I’ve been waitlisted two times.” However, he has been able to work through the waitlist and get the classes he needs. He generally tries to carry 15 to 20 units per semester.

From time to time, Koyuki has had trouble registering for classes, but the professors have done their best to get her in—perhaps one of the advantages of being at a small college. She said that:

Actually, when they have a popular subject and an unpopular subject, and then the popular subject is really quickly closed and there is a wait list, but actually even though I am on the wait list, the professor tries to get me in.

And, because next semester will be her last semester, she will have priority for registration.

Khloe is aware that there are difficulties with course registration and says that

this is an issue being discussed by the Student Senate:

There's another issue that student senate is discussing because next semester, spring semester, we're going to cut 70 classes and then the next semester, which is fall semester, we're going to cut 100 classes so it's in total 170 classes, we haven't decided which classes we need to cut but this a very big issue because you know that American students get a chance to register classes before international students.

She says that domestic students get to register before international students because:

That's the way the policy works, that's another issue that we're talking about in student senate. We haven't decided yet because it will affect many students who get the chance to register for classes first. For some reason, DPS, disabled students, or EOPS students, retired military students... and veteran students, yeah, they have the privilege to register first, and then next are the American students in general, and then after that there are the international students.

Given the reduction in course offerings, this makes it difficult for students to get the courses they need. The Student Senate is currently discussing the system for establishing priority for course registration:

We're discussing that with the Academic Center because they want to change in some respect, and they want to set a limitation for units. I mean if students have 100 or 120 units, they shouldn't get the priority to register early; they would get less priority to register. We're discussing it, but right now, international students don't get much priority.

The problem is that if international students do not maintain 12 units, "we lose our visa," and it takes much longer for them to get their degree or transfer so it is costly. Because this is a big concern for international students, Khloe feels that she is in a very good position to advocate for international students, and "fortunately I have the voice, I can speak for them in student senate."

Aiko says that it has become harder to get into classes because classes fill up quickly:

Now the classes all get full immediately so we don't have a choice. Then we just have to register as soon as possible, and if we want to add classes, that's kind of

impossible right now. I think that everyone feels that because of budget cuts. Not many classes are available.

When she tried to register for a biology class, she was not able to get in because it filled up so quickly. She said, “actually I wanted to take one more class here, like a biology class but, it was all full, and I couldn’t add it, so I thought it’s fine, it’s not really required.” In the past, students might have had the option to take extra courses, but this is no longer possible.

Ilyas talked about the situation at RRC where international students are given priority registration: He said that “the one nice thing we have because they cut a lot of classes is that international students have priority registration.” He does not know how the college manages to do this, but it gives him a very secure feeling to know that he will be able to get all of his classes. Ilyas agreed that this is an unusual situation:

From what I know, the only ones who have priority are veterans, international students, and athletes. So the classes are pretty much open when we get to register. We don’t have to worry about wait lists. In the case where we need 12 units, and the classes are full, you don’t have to wait.

It is unusual to see this situation, but it offers a convenient solution to the issue of registering for classes and maintaining the required number of units.

Sebastian also observed students have difficulties with the registration process although he has not had problems himself:

The registration process is tough; it is really tough. I’ve been lucky to enroll into my classes earlier than most people, but you see those huge waiting lists when you start the semester, all these people that go to classes and wait for somebody to get sick or somebody to be absent to take their place.

Sebastian feels that GRD needs more course sections with fewer students because classes are so full due to funding issues. He says that: “We need more professors to teach the

same classes. Classes are super full especially in the first couple of weeks, and we need bigger classrooms.”

Antonio is also aware of the impact of the budget cuts at GRD, which has resulted in registration problems and layoffs:

Right now because this is a particular time in the United States, at GRD there have been a lot of budget cuts, and a lot of people were laid off. A lot of professors were laid off and now I know that, that if you want to enroll for next semester you have to do so right away because if you wait, maybe you won't be able to do it then. Now there are fewer professors, I think, and fewer classes, but there are more students and so it's hard. For me personally, I didn't have any big troubles so far. Everything is alright. I'm taking the classes that I need.

While Antonio is aware of the difficulties of registering for classes, he feels very happy to have the opportunity to study at a community college and says: “I'm very grateful ...for being here. Yes, I know it's hard, but I do not complain, I'm just trying to keep on moving forward and that's it.” And, I believe this is true for most international students. They are aware of the difficulties due to budget shortfalls and have experienced problems themselves. They may have had to take classes they do not need in order to maintain the required 12 units for their visa. This costs them extra time and money. However, they usually find a way to overcome the problem and stay on track with their goals to transfer to a four-year university.

***Reduced tutoring services.*** There are not as many tutoring opportunities at GRD as when Aiko first arrived, and she would like to see individual scheduled tutoring sessions rather than drop in tutoring: “We used to have one-on-one tutoring...but they don't have it...that much anymore. I need it; international students need it; we all need it; but the budget stopped it.” Now the tutoring services are limited, and “there are usually

tutors in one room, and we put our name on a list, and they tutor us for only 15 minutes each.” Students also need to wait longer until a tutor becomes available.

***Summary of difficulties of achieving goals.*** Access to classes at community colleges is hampered by a shortage in funding and severe cutbacks. Many international students experience the consequences of a reduction in course offerings, difficulties of registering for classes, and access to tutoring services. While they may not be directly affected in a given semester, they certainly feel the pressure of finding classes and registering early so that they can get a full load. They are also acutely aware of how much their education is costing them and their families and the sacrifices that they and their families are making.

***Cost of tuition.*** Cost of tuition for international students is a supporting theme that came through in many of the interviews. A number of international students pay their own way and/or have limited support from their parents. As they move closer to transfer, they fear that they may not be able to support all of the costs involved. Some students are receiving financial help from their families but worry about the burden on their families. Some students feel that it is unfair that international students have to pay more than local students and still have to register later than other students, especially at a time when services are being reduced. The supporting theme of the cost of their education is relevant to many international students.

***Students in financial danger.*** In particular, the international students who fall within the age group of 25 and older, James, Young-Soo, and Antonio, are experiencing difficulties supporting themselves. As international students, they are not able to get financial aid, and they worry that they will not be able to support themselves at a four-

year university. James (OGC) is about to graduate with his AA degree. He would like to transfer to a four-year university or get some work experience and is looking into the possibility of getting an internship with an interior design company in the San Francisco Bay Area. James is under financial pressure. His parents help him, but he is not sure that they will be able to cover the costs of transfer to a four-year university. He said, "I was thinking that maybe I can't make it to a four year college because it's really expensive." It was not clear if he has a job or not, but my sense is that he does work illegally. And, he has to keep it a secret because of his international student status. Transferring to a four-year university would mean moving from Orange Grove. Rents will be higher, and it will be hard for him to find work. He is reluctant to move to a city where he does not know people. At this point, James does not have a realistic plan to transfer to a four-year university and he will soon graduate. His only option is to look for a work experience opportunity in interior design. He has a friend in the Bay Area who may be able to help him. If he does not find an internship within 60 days, he will have to leave the country.

Young-Soo (BLC) also finds tuition very difficult because she is paying for herself. She compares herself to other international students who are younger and are supported by their parents. She feels that they do not have as many worries as she does:

Usually international students just graduate high school, and they come here and then they don't have any real life problems or worries about anything, so then they can just concentrate on studying and actually they don't need to worry about tuition or money. But actually, my case is different. I saved money by myself. So every thing's really hard.

She says that most of the international students are supported by their parents, but "people who are over 30 or so pay for themselves." Of the 70 to 90 international students at BLC, "there are two of us over 30, me and another one guy." Young-Soo took a risk



when she gave up her job in Korea and moved to the U.S. to pursue her education. Her parents warned her that it would be very difficult and she now understands why her parents felt that way.

When I decided to quit my job and come here, my mother and father really hated it, so we argued actually for about three years, but at that time I really wanted a new experience. I couldn't understand what they were saying. I was annoyed, honestly. I felt that this is my life. Now, I really understand why my parents said it was difficult.

Young-Soo did not realize that by beginning college with weak English skills she would need two or more extra semesters; she would have difficulties in all of her classes; and, she would have to spend more money than she had expected. She did not anticipate how difficult moving to the U.S. would be and how it would change her life. Young-Soo now feels that she will not be able to get her bachelor's degree because of her financial situation. She is contemplating a future move from Blue Lake to Los Angeles where she may be able to find work within the Korean community, but she will need to find a way to maintain her legal status in the United States. She will have a grace period of 60 days after graduation before she must leave the country. She would like to stay in the U.S. rather than return to Korea and says that "right now my plan is to live here, work, get a green card or become a citizen." She knows that it may be difficult, but she is thinking about the possibility of joining the army. She believes that if she can enter the army and work for four years, "I can get citizenship, a house, a car, good pay, and college tuition." Young-Soo is also considering the possibility of finding a sponsor through whom she could get legal residency. Considering Young-Soo's financial situation, it appears unlikely that she will be able to reach her original goal to graduate from a four-year university.

Antonio (GRD) is 36 years old and supports himself and his wife. He discussed the difficulties of his situation without financial support from his family back in

Argentina:

My parents are not exactly middle class; they're working class. I mean my parents are not business men and we just have enough. Well now my father has passed away, but my mom has just enough you know to eat. She's a retired woman, but it's hard because our local currency is so weak in comparison to the United States currency. It's very, very hard.

Antonio supports himself and his wife by working as a Spanish tutor and an assistant professor at his college. He is taking extra time in school because he wants to get a double major in Spanish and English. Antonio's time is taken up with work and his studies, which leaves little time for family life or a social life. One of the changes he would like to see is a way for international students to get financial help:

One of the things that I would like is for the district to offer international students the possibility to get financial aid because it's very hard to get financial aid; it's almost impossible.

He would like the financial assistance to be in the form of loans, grants, or scholarships:

to help them to pay at least half the semester, not the complete semester, but some help...I know this is hard because international students are supposed to pay, but still I think that it would be very nice to help those international student who really have a desire to get a degree and are making a lot of effort to get their goals, educational goals. There should be some way to help them.

His academic goal is: "to transfer to a California State school; that's my wish, but let's see what happens." Antonio is worried about the cost of university as an international student and is trying to find out if CSU has any kind of financial aid for international students. Antonio is optimistic that he will find a solution so that he will be able to return to Argentina with his bachelor's degree.

While these older independent students explained the urgency of their financial difficulties, many other students also discussed their concerns about the cost of their education and the sacrifices that their families make in order to support them. Their parents are middle-class and have had to work hard and save in order to send them abroad. Students are aware of the costs and try to keep their expenses as low as possible. Some of them plan to pay their parents back once they start working.

*Financial burden for parents.* Dinh (GVC) completed his education in Vietnam and is now working on a second degree in a different field of study. He feels that tuition is expensive for international students. He says that “it is expensive ... I think the tuition is not good; it’s too expensive.” While his parents help him with the tuition costs, he is responsible for his living expenses:

I get help from my family for tuition, but I don’t get help for living and the rent, so I need to work and next quarter I want to work. This quarter I don’t have a chance to work because now I’m very busy, but next quarter I want to work as a tutor or do any job on campus.

He is trying to find a job on campus because his international student visa restricts him from working off campus. Dinh’s financial situation is stable at the moment and his parents will continue to cover his tuition costs. However, unless he is able to get a job, it will be very difficult for him to cover his living expenses.

For Khloe, the cost of studying in the U.S. is also a major difficulty.

The cost of living here is very expensive. I don’t want to bother my parents, so money is very important for me, and I always keep in mind that I cannot spend much...because of my family’s condition. So money is very important, and that’s also blocking if I want to continue my study in university. That’s very difficult for me.

Khloe is afraid that she may not be able to continue her education because of her financial pressures. This would mean returning to China with an associate’s degree only,

which would not hold any value. She would then have to consider moving to Hong Kong to get a college degree.

Nicole finds the cost of tuition and the cost of living “crazy,” and she is not able to work here. She says “I got a student loan in France, and I’m lucky because my mother can help me out now, but it’s crazy.” She is not sure that her mother will be able to continue to help her. Nicole would like to transfer to UC Berkeley and hopes that she will be able to get financial support or a scholarship to help make that possible. Otherwise, she will return to France.

Daniel would like to have a car to make his commute to the college easier but is very aware of how much this is costing his parents: “because actually, I don’t want my parents to pay any more. I owe my father money, and I need to pay him back, so I need to save some money.” He plans to pay his father back for some of the costs he has incurred. Daniel is in his first quarter at the college and was very determined to get a job when he arrived. Through his persistence, he succeeded in finding a job at the bookstore on campus. Initially, he was turned away because he did not have a social security number. He went back to the book store several times and even told the manager that he was willing to volunteer. He finally got a social security number and was hired to work 10 hours a week. Having a job will help take some of the financial pressure off Daniel and his parents. I believe that his persistence and optimism will also help him a great deal.

Robert works in the International Student Office, so this helps him financially. He also gets help from his parents and occasionally from his sister:

Well, I have a student job, and another student job, and my parents are helping out, a lot, and my sister helped with the smaller things, so she would help me pay for the smaller stuff. She would loan me money when I was very low, which was pretty often, especially before I had a student job.

He also does some tutoring, but this is now being cut back:

My parents pretty much send me tuition money, and my sister used to help me with rent. Other kinds of expenses I would cover with whatever money I could make on the student jobs...so the various student jobs that I had the I used to work at the tutoring center...and then that went down, so I started tutoring in the math lab, and now that's going down.

While he acknowledges that he "cannot work outside of the college," he points out that:

There are ways for international students to generate some income and that because it's California, people are very understanding of the fact that international students have a hard time, especially now with the economy going down, if it's bad in the states then you can imagine that somewhere for example in western Africa it's much, much worse. Where I come from, it's much, much worse, so international students do struggle, and a lot of international students find ways to get another job off campus. There is OPT, optional practical training which allows people to work off campus, they can take a year off when they're done with their AA degree and . . .there are also all of these other ways that you know that students can work. There's always the opportunity of just getting paid cash and if nobody gets caught, then you are okay.

Robert has captured the pressures that so many international students are under.

They have help from their families, but they cannot expect too much from their parents, so a large part of the burden is on their own shoulders. They have to find ways to get work, and sometimes that may mean working illegally. If international students are found to be working illegally, they will lose their visa and have to leave the country.

In summary, it might be assumed that international students who come to the United States come from wealthy families and do not have to worry about the cost of their tuition and their living expenses. The reality is that families have saved and sacrificed in order to send their children to study abroad. International students are very aware of how much this is costing their family and try hard to keep the costs down. Many international students are able to find work on campus; I expect that some work illegally off campus. Given further anticipated cutbacks in California community college funding,

there is no guarantee that offices and programs such as the International Student Offices will be able to hire student workers, resulting in increased difficulty for international students to support themselves.

*Unfairness of tuition costs.* As of spring 2012, California community colleges are charging \$36 per unit for in-state tuition, and \$244 for non-resident and international student tuition. Therefore, tuition for an international student who is taking 12 units is approximately \$3,000 per semester as opposed to \$432 for a California resident. Many international students feel that it is unfair that they are paying more for tuition than domestic students.

Henry (GVC) is concerned about the high fees that international students pay, and the fact that international students pay more than local students.

A lot of people don't know that locals are getting a much higher benefit. I think for your thesis that's a pretty important point, the fact that we're paying more, not for living expenses, just the school fees in general.

It troubles him that international students pay more, but he feels that it is up to him to make the most of the experience and for the college to make the most of the extra money. He hopes that the college is putting the extra tuition paid by international students to good use and providing services for international students.

Robert's major challenge also has to do with the cost of being an international student. He resents the fact that it is so much more expensive for international students than it is for domestic students:

It's very expensive, and sometimes it's really painful to spend all of that money knowing that there are other people that spend considerably less, and they are openly very angry about the fact that they are spending as much as they are, and here I am spending ten times more for this education.

Robert compares his situation to that of American students who, in his opinion, have more resources than he does coming from a poor country like Romania where people earn considerably less. He feels that what would be considered “a lot of money” for American students is an “enormous” amount of money for him. Robert works in the International Student Office and is president of the student government at GRD. He feels that he is familiar with campus finances and politics. He is aware that international students provide a large source of revenue and feels that the college needs to use it wisely. An international program such as the one at his college with about 800 international students receives approximately \$5,000,000 a year in international student tuition. This goes into the college or district fund and can be used at the discretion of the college management:

So they need a much more organized system; it just needs to be a more organized, more structured, more serious program, and it'll probably be cheaper to run it then because more international students will come and let's face it, this is bringing more revenue to the school. I think the 800 international students at Green River account for half of the revenue that the district is getting...and they're not even 10% of the population...so...to a very large extent it's been sustaining this district and ...and some of the universities, they could benefit greatly from having more international students. So, all they need to do is just make it easier for those students to come here, and it will not cost them anything, it'll benefit the students for sure and it'll make it much easier for the students to have a good educational experience here. And I feel that it will be very beneficial for America's image to have more people go to school here.

While I could not verify Robert's claim that international student tuition accounts for half of the expenditure on student FTS in his large district, I believe he makes an important point about the significance of how international student tuition is being used at community colleges.

He would like to see the college take a more business-oriented approach and use the tuition from international students more wisely. He feels that colleges should manage

their finances more efficiently and put the international student tuition to better use, in a way that would benefit the whole student population. He feels that community colleges have the freedom to use international student tuition as they wish and do not generally use it to fund classes, but “it goes in our case just to the general fund; part of it funds this program and everything that’s left is pocket money for the district. And classes are funded by state funding.” His suggestion is that

the money that the international student pays is more than the FTS, so...they will get more money in and they’ll be able to use that money, not as pocket money for when they screw up, but they will be able to open more classes with the money coming from the international students, and in our case, it’s almost 50% of the FTS, it’s like five million, we get I think 10 or 11 million dollars in FTS, and at the same time they’re making four and a half or five million off international students. It’s ridiculous. They could run another school just with.

Robert has a unique insight into the complex financial issue surrounding international student tuition due to his work in the International Student Office, his coursework in business and economics, and his involvement in student clubs on campus. However, his concerns are shared by many international students, who question what is happening to the revenues generated by their international student tuition.

In summary, the issue of the difference in cost is a concern for many international students, especially for those students who are supporting themselves and fear that they may not be able to pay for themselves at a four-year university. Also, international students compare the cost of their tuition and the cost for local students. Because their tuition is considerably higher than that of domestic students, international students expect a certain quality and availability of services in return for the money they are paying. This is a concern that will become even more pressing as international students deal with the



fees for CSU and UC schools. The current cost of international student fees and tuition is approximately \$38,000 at a UC and \$18,360 at a CSU.

*Counseling.* As discussed in the structure of education, many international students feel disappointed by the quality of the academic counseling services at their community college. In order to avoid any confusion, I would like to explain that community college counselors are academic counselors. They may be general counselors; they may be assigned to a certain area of counseling or have expertise in certain areas such as disability services, transfer, or international students. However, when an international student meets with a counselor, they may not always have a chance to speak to an international student counselor. And if this is a small college, general counselors may be assigned to work with international students as part of their larger duties. ISOs employ international advisors who work with international students. They work on immigration and visa issues, orientation for new students, recruitment and outreach, and the day to day running of the ISO.

Chen (OGC) said that he is now on track with his goals, but “I didn’t know what class to take, I didn’t know what was more important, I wasted two semesters taking a lot of general education classes which I didn’t need.” He feels that he did not get the counseling help that he needed, and this cost him extra money and time.

Sebastian would like to see better counseling services, with some psychological and career counseling.

I wish I could have better counselor services . . . better quality of counseling, and maybe more counselors that can offer more time to the students and with a stronger psychological background, with better knowledge and understanding of the student’s wishes. This counselor knew that I wanted to go to a four year university after my AA, but she never put the cards on the table explaining to me

the opportunities and the difficulties that I would have of doing that after getting my AA.

Again, Sebastian mentions the need for more intense counseling services to help students with finding their direction:

I wish I could have a better relationship with my counselors. I think that counselors should be mentors as well; they should be people that get a little bit into your mind to try to find out what your problems are and how to solve those problems; they can do a lot better regarding this. But, I mean I also understand that because of the lack of budget and the difficulties that the educational system in the United States is going through, I understand that they only have certain tools and certain abilities to do their job.

Sebastian's expectation is that counselors should offer career and psychological counseling. He is disappointed that they do not.

Aiko also finds that she cannot always get the kind of counseling help she needs.

People are really available anytime you want, but I didn't feel like they helped me a lot in what I was asking, because most of the information I was asking was for transfer, for my credits, for what I had to do to transfer. Every time I talked to the counselors, they said, 'I don't know, ask international advisor, or I don't know, take this form.' They are nice but not that helpful.

In particular, when she looked for information about scholarships it was difficult:

They didn't want to help when I was looking for scholarship opportunities. I don't think there are scholarships for international students, which is quite normal, but when I tried to ask, they said they didn't know and that I should go on the internet.

She says that she eventually got the information she needed, "but it was difficult." In addition, as previously discussed, Min-Kyung's opinion and experience is that counselors are more concerned about transfer rates and meeting transfer quotas than actually listening to students' wishes for transfer. They appear to encourage students to go with the safer choice rather than their first choice.

In spite of the difficulties that international students face in finding the kind of counseling help they need, they manage to find ways to get the help they need. It may be through the international advisors, staff members, student workers at the ISO, their network of friends on campus, internet websites, or their peers in student clubs and classes.

**Issues that interfere with students' learning experience.** Within this section, I will discuss language difficulties, the complexities of a new system of education, and the disadvantages of large networks of international students

*Language difficulties.* Community colleges generally require that students achieve a required score on the TOEFL test for admission. If students do not achieve that score, they are advised to enroll in an intensive English program (IEP) and retake the TOEFL test. Intensive English programs tend to offer TOEFL preparatory courses and shorter, more intensive academic English preparation than community college ESL programs. IEPs may offer 6- or 8-week courses, whereas community college courses are either 10-week quarters or 16-18 week semesters. BLC did not require a TOEFL score, and some international students at that college reported having difficulties with English, which interfered with their learning experience. Language difficulties also impede international students' social and cultural involvement.

Hiroshi felt that his first semester was difficult "because of the language" and mentioned a couple of times that he had difficulty with "vocabulary." He has not had as many problems recently: "no, I don't have problems now; I didn't understand but asked all the time...and if I ask, people were willing to help me out."

Young-Soo is happy with her experience at BLC, “but the only one complaint is the ESL class” and she feels that “this part is a little bad.” She wishes that she had studied more English in Korea so that she would have been better prepared from classes. She did not need to take the TOEFL test, but because of her poor English skills, she had to take two semesters of ESL classes. This cost her time and money. She does not want other students to have the same experience. Her suggestions regarding the college mainly have to do with the English/ESL program. If the school does not require a TOEFL score, it needs to improve its ESL program:

If you guys don't enforce a TOEFL score or something, you people are supposed to think that maybe students cannot speak English that much and then you know this school should make a good English program.

She suggests that students build their English skills before coming here:

I have to mention that it is better to study English and then come here because this school doesn't have any ESL class, just nothing, just thinking nothing's better so just ah study basic skill and then come here and then maybe there will be no problem.

Lily feels that people speak too fast, and it is difficult to understand them. She says, “I don't know whether it's my personal issue or it's just a lot of international students.”

Many international students spoke about language challenges and about a desire to know more English, but they did not give any direct indication that their English skills interfered with getting good grades in class. Insecurity about their English skills did make it more difficult for international students to build relationships with Americans.

*System of education.* As discussed in the structure of education, students had difficulty understanding the American system of education. Larissa's reaction was similar to that of many international students:

The system was confusing for me because it's completely different from that in Russia. I was very confused the first time with all the units and how the class schedule works and which classes are transferable and which are not. The system was very confusing, actually. If you think about college or university in my country, it's basically you choose only your major and they already, they give you the classes you have to complete. They give you for example your first semester, first year, and you have to complete these classes, and they've given you the exact schedule, and it's not like here where you can choose, you make up your own schedule.

International students find this system very different from that which they were used to in their home country. However, with time and support, they learn to find their way.

*Being part of a large network.* Alex feels happy with his decision to study at GVC where there is a large group of Hong Kong students, but he acknowledges that it is a “dilemma” because he wants to immerse himself into American culture, but also wants to keep his own culture. He thinks that he can do this, but he should not “stick with the same kind of people all the time.” He feels that being part of a large network prevents him from practicing his English and getting to know people. Alex: says “One of the disadvantages is that there are too many international students here, like if I want to learn more English I will need to go out and talk to the local community.” He feels that:

Many of my friends like those who came here, don't really speak English, and they talk to their own group in their own language, so they can't really learn the language. Well I try hard not to talk as much Chinese as possible, and I try hard to talk more English with other people.

When students stay within their own ethnic group, they do not speak English, speaking their native language instead.

Austin is part of the same group at the same college as Alex, and he would like to see fewer Hong Kong students at GVC:

If here we could have fewer Hong Kong students, it would be much better, I mean although I love the network here because it helps me a lot...throughout the times I

have spent here, but I mean I hope that I could be exposed to California culture here.

While he likes the Hong Kong network, he finds it difficult to meet people and would like an opportunity to get to know more of the California culture. He would like to see fewer Hong Kong students and says:

I think the only thing I would just want to change is to...to minimize the number of Hong Kong students here. They're doing a good job here; I have everything I need. The only thing I'm concerned about is the Hong Kong population here.

He feels that it is not a good idea to have one large group of people, whether it is the Hong Kong group or an Indonesian group of students. He feels that the large Hong Kong presence in class can make other students feel uncomfortable and isolated. The lone students who do not belong to the large group feel left out. The international students in the group tend to use their native language first before explaining things in English.

He says:

I have to say because you can run into some Hong Kong students in every class, every single class here, and when they have to do group projects, if there are five people, three of them from Hong Kong and the other two students from different countries, they just kind of feel, they would feel isolated, I think.

Austin wants to have an opportunity to meet other people and was happy when he did not have to take lower level ESL classes with many Hong Kong students. He says:

I was so happy that I didn't have to take the lower level of the ESL class because all my friends went to the lower level so I know that there's a lot of Hong Kong people going to the same class...so I just don't want to speak Cantonese in an English class.

Austin feels that being part of a large group makes it harder for him to get to know people. It also makes it harder for him to speak English in class. He prefers when he does not take classes with other students from Hong Kong.

*Summary of issues that interfere with students' learning experience.* In summary, students who have not reached a sufficient level of English proficiency, experience difficulty with their academic studies and with their efforts to socialize and make friends. When international students are required to have achieved a particular score on the TOEFL, they enter community college with a level of English proficiency at which they can succeed in regular college courses. This gives international students a greater chance of success. International students may lack confidence because of their English skills and are reluctant to step out of their comfort zone and get to know new people. With time, their English skills improve and their confidence grows. Students initially feel confused by the new system of education and choosing their courses and professors. International students are not used to doing this in their own country and look to counselors for help and guidance. With time and support, they learn to find their way.

Finally, belonging to a large network of international students from the same native country or ethnic background may give students a sense of belonging, but it often prevents international students from getting involved with students from other backgrounds. It limits their interaction with their classmates and instructors, and it isolates other students who are not part of the group.

Other issues within the social experience and cultural experience include a desire for more opportunities for social involvement. Students want more opportunities to meet Americans and more club activities. Also, students feel the boredom of living in a rural area. Another concern is that international student offices need more staffing and need to be conveniently located. Students also have concerns about transportation, accommodation, and food.

### **Opportunities for social involvement and the international student office.**

Students discussed their difficulties in getting to know the American culture and meeting people. Khloe said:

I mean personally I really want to make friends with American people, students, but it's difficult for me because I need to ...but it's quite embarrassing because I don't understand anything. I need to ask them to explain everything to me. I mean literally every time, so I am just afraid. Getting to know the American culture is difficult for me.

She would like to reach out and get to know people but she feels afraid to do so because of her limited English skills.

Aiko would like to see more organized social activities: "I want to have more activities for international students ... so that students go out together ... sometimes travel together or just do something to have more of a connection between them." She feels that she has made suggestions to the International Student Office, but nothing has been done. She would like to see the ISO do more. She would like to have more opportunities to meet other international students through the ISO, but feels that: "It's not really working. That's why there's no reason to get involved." Aiko feels that the ISO on her campus has not responded to student demands' for more social activities, so she does not see any point in asking for more help.

Robert, who is a student at the same college as Aiko and works in the ISO, attributes this to a shortage of staffing and budget constraints. In the past there were some ISO activities but the person responsible is no longer working there:

I mean sometimes we do have activities, but I think the person who used to do that is no longer here...so I'm supposed to do this, but I'm too busy doing other stuff, so I don't, I don't physically have the time, and I don't know who else could.



Chris was the one who was responsible for organizing these activities. When he was transferred out of the ISO the position just went away:

Chris used to work in this office, he used to do most of that stuff, and they went to Lake Tahoe once in the winter, but Chris got transferred, because they were low in Admissions and Records, so they got pressed and they moved him there.

At a time when colleges are short-staffed and underfunded, it is increasingly difficult for International Student Offices to create this kind of social and cultural experience for their international students. When staff members leave or move to a new position, there may not be anyone to replace them, so the work for which they were responsible goes undone. Students who are not able or are not motivated to go out and create the experience for themselves will miss out on the opportunity to interact and socialize with other students on campus and people in the community and to assimilate into the American culture.

**Transportation and accommodation.** Students feel that it is difficult to get around without a car and identified transportation as one of their initial problems. One of the difficulties for Alex is getting around using public transportation because he does not own a car. He said:

It's not easy because you need to track the time table, and the time is not flexible, like the bus comes only every half an hour. So I need to adjust my time according to the schedule of the bus.

The main difficulty Daniel has had so far is transportation. When he first came, he found that "it was hard to ride the bus the first time because I didn't know where the stops are, so I missed several bus stops." He has continued to take the bus to college, but:

It's really difficult because I need to switch buses. First I need the 22 bus and the 40 bus; and it takes like an hour from my host family's house to here, sometimes more...and if I miss the bus, or the bus is full, I need to wait for another half an hour for the next bus to come.

Sometimes he misses the bus and ends up being late for his 8 AM classes. He has learned that he should schedule his classes later in the day if he is using public transport. His suggestion is that: “the college should have its own bus so they can pick everyone up, and you just pay a monthly fee...so it would be really helpful.”

When I asked Austin about any difficulties he had faced, he said:

I think the only thing is transportation, because Hong Kong has the best transportation in the world. I want say the best in the world. You can get to everywhere through the public transportation. You don't have to have a car actually, so I mean it is the only thing that I feel irritated about here.

Henry, Daniel, and Austin all experienced transportation problems because GVC is not easily accessible by public transportation. Min-Kyung also had trouble with transportation at his college, BMC, when he first came:

I lived with my host family for a while, but it came down to an issue of a lack of transportation. Especially with the extra-curricular activities that I do after school and bus lines stop at around 7 p.m. here which is just terrible and my club, my club finishes at 6:30 so if I were to try to do it, I just couldn't. The environment doesn't allow me.

He moved from the host family to apartments within walking distance of the college, where he lives with other college students, and now he has his own car.

Daniel's suggestion was that community colleges should have dorms on campus:

“I think I do because it saves time and lot of time, like two hours this is a lot I mean if I work for two hours it's a lot of money, too.” Other than this, “I can't think of any difficulties other than the bus. I'm happy with everything so far.” Daniel would recommend this school to other students and would advise them to “find a place to live near the campus, of course, and I will tell them that it's pretty good... the campus is nice, you just come here and it is a nice place to learn and to live...and they have good programs here.”

Dormitories are not common on community college campuses and international students for the most part are able to find accommodation with home stay programs, relatives and friends, and in apartments in the area. Transportation issues emerge depending on the location of the college. Students may experience problems if they do not have accommodation close to their respective college and if the college is not close to a good public transportation system.

**Positive feedback and suggestions.** Included in this section is some of the positive feedback from international students about their experiences at their respective community college and some of their suggestions.

**Positive feedback.** Larissa sees the benefits of attending a community college rather than a university. She feels that the community college would give her the time and support system she needs to adjust to third-level education in the United States. Overall, Austin is happy with his experience so far and says that on a scale of one to ten, he would rate his satisfaction as ten. He had only been here for four weeks when we spoke:

Things that have happened to me would be a ten because I mean American's pretty fair. If the teacher tells you to hand in your homework like a week before if you procrastinate then it's your own issue. If you miss the bus, it's your own issue, if you don't like, if you're a loner and you don't like talking to people, then that's your own issue not to learn; it's hard but it's fair.

He feels that international students should not worry too much about their language skills. They should be outgoing and willing to take risks and "break that language barrier." This is what will help them succeed.

Sebastian feels very happy with his experience at GRD and commented on the following areas:

I am really satisfied with the services that the international student office provides.

I believe that this is also what international students should expect, since we are really putting a lot of money into this country, so at least we deserve to have good service.

I am happy with the instructors that I have. Of course, I have to say that some are better than others, but overall, I'm very happy.

I had the impression that community colleges were not that good because of the lack of budget, but it turned out to be the opposite.

I have a good relationship with all of my instructors. I am very happy with all of them. I get along better with some than others, but I think that's perfectly natural, and I mean, honestly, I have no complaints.

Khloe (YBCC) felt pretty satisfied offered the following insight:

We can always get help from the international student office, so I mean they have counselors and advisors, and if you have any problems you can talk to them, and they can always help you. That's a very good place to go, but other than that, I like the way it is.

Farai would not change anything about his experience so far and feels that all of his experiences have led him to a greater understanding of life. He feels very fortunate for the experiences that he has had:

I know this sounds like I'm being too positive or too confident, but I don't think there's anything I would change. Everything has led to where I am now you know everything I've seen, everything I've learned, everything I've heard be it positive or negative has led to my understanding of America right now and so there's nothing I would want to change about the experience. I've been extremely blessed, like truthfully blessed and lucky to be where I am right now and I'm very fortunate...very very fortunate, a lot of people would love to be in the shoes that I'm in right now to be able to speak to you today...you know and to be able to say I'm going to school to study, to better my life and better my family. A lot of people from Zimbabwe would love to have the opportunity that I have, so there's nothing I would want to change.

These student comments capture the overall positive response that international students have to their academic, social, and cultural experiences as they pursue their education.

*Suggestions.* Lily feels that it would be a good idea for international students to communicate with other students before coming here. In particular, she feels that it would be a good idea if they could connect more with local students. People are friendly, and in general GVC is a good place to start your life in the United States.

I think it would be more helpful if we could chat with the current students here before we come here and to get to know what life is like here, and also, it would be better for the college to provide us some opportunity to connect with the local students, and to maybe hang out with them.

Olivia would like to see students involved in more community activities that would take them outside the college:

I don't know if there are clubs that could have something, like once a week or once a month or something like that, you'd have a gathering of the students where they could say let's go bowling, or let's do this and then have some kind of community transportation, some way to get them to different places.

She would also like to see activities where international students could interact with domestic students. She would like to see this happen "once in awhile or after exams or something or ... in the first few weeks, just getting people out."

Farai would like to see more African international students studying at community colleges. He says:

I was saying I would love if we could get like more word about you know the Green River Community Colleges or any community colleges or the opportunities for international students to go to school in Africa. You know, I know that you can go to a four year university, but not every African can go to a four year university. That's why I'm in community college 'cause it's less expensive, and so if you can get that out to a lot of Africans through maybe the American Embassies and everything, I think you would see a lot more Africans being able to come out here and study and get to learn, grow, and go back to Africa and build Africa, so that would be great if they could do that and build more awareness of the community colleges.

He feels that Africans would have something to offer and that they would benefit tremendously from attending a community college:

It opens up those doors and you'll find bright, brilliant students coming in to these community colleges, you know, and really making an impact and giving these colleges even a bigger name just based on what they have to offer.

***Summary of positive feedback and suggestions.*** In summary, students' suggestions mostly had to do with increasing their social encounters with other people. Lily feels that it would help if international students could communicate with other students before their arrival in the country and if they could connect more with local students while they are in the U.S. Olivia would like to see more opportunities for international students to interact with local students. And finally, Farai would like to see more African students at the community college. He feels that this would benefit the local students and the African students.

**Summary of the structure of problems and suggestions.** In the structure of problems and solutions, I have discussed some of the issues that impact the international students' experience at the community college. These supporting themes include community college as a second choice, challenges to achievement of academic goals, issues that interfere with their learning, opportunities for social involvement and the ISO, and transportation problems. This is followed by a discussion of positive feedback and suggestions.

International students choose to study at an American community college because it offers them a second chance to get an education. It may not be their first choice. Some international students feel that because it is their second choice, it may not be the best choice, and this influences their perception of their experience and the degree of involvement. They tend to focus heavily on their studies and their grades and do not embrace opportunities for personal growth, social involvement, or cultural exploration.

The second supporting theme discussed in this section has to do with the challenges the international students face in achieving their goals. California's ongoing state budget crisis has resulted in a reduction in course offerings, registration difficulties, and limited tutoring services. If international students cannot maintain 12 units per semester over time, they will not be able to maintain their F-1 visa. This creates a problem for the international student and the college. As with domestic students, completing the required coursework for transfer within a two-year period is becoming increasingly difficult. For international students, this means a great deal more money spent on tuition than originally planned. This is hard for them and for their families.

International students may not feel confident in the level of their English skills and face challenges in their coursework and tests. They are also reluctant to explore new opportunities and get to know new people. With time, their English skills improve, and their confidence grows. Students feel confused by the new system of education and being able to choose their courses and professors. They feel that they do not get the help and guidance they need from their counselors. Another issue is that belonging to a large network of international students from the same cultural background often prevents international students from getting involved with other students and limits their social interaction and cultural adaptation.

Other problems that emerged are the desire for more opportunities for club activities and social involvement, staffing and location of the ISO, the boredom of living in a rural area, transportation, and accommodation. On the positive aspect, international students feel that attending community college before university gives them time to adjust to higher education in the United States. They feel that the instructors are helpful,

accessible, and fair. They like the role of the International Student Office and are grateful for their connection and interaction with ISO staff members. They feel very grateful for the experiences and opportunities they have had.

The international students' suggestions are mostly related to a desire for increased social encounters. It would help if international students could communicate with other students before their arrival in the country and if they could have more opportunities to interact with local students. And a final suggestion is that colleges should attract more students from African countries.

### **Textural Structural Synthesis**

Five themes emerged as core elements of the phenomenon of the international students' experience at California community colleges. They are reasons for international students' choice to study at a community college in the USA, their educational experience, their social experience, their cultural experience, and problems they encountered. This section summarizes each of the five structures and then presents a synthesis of the structures and how international students' experience the phenomenon related to their financial situation and size of program.

### **The Structure of Reasons**

International students choose to study abroad because of a desire to get a better education than they would get at home. In many cases, their parents also share the same desire for their children to get an American education and then return home and get a good job. International students study abroad because they want to pursue further education—perhaps a second degree or graduate school. They want to improve their



language skills, meet new people, and have new and different experiences as they pursue their personal dream or challenge.

Students choose to study at a community college because it offers them the opportunity to transfer to a four-year university and graduate with a bachelor's degree, which they might not otherwise be able to do. Community college is a less expensive option than a four-year university, has an easier application process and admissions policy, and offers many locations and smaller campuses. A final reason for studying at a community college is that community college provides students who pay international student tuition a place to be and an F-1 visa to remain in the country while awaiting permanent residency.

Students choose their respective community college because of how they were recruited, and/or they found some particular aspect of the college that appealed to them. Very often it is the transfer reputation or the transfer rate to a particular UC school. Another reason for choice of college is that international students have family or friends in the area with whom they can live and in this way reduce their expenses.

### **The Structure of the Educational Experience**

The structure of education describes the supporting themes of goals; choice of major; counseling, coursework, and the classroom; and the role of the International Student Office. The goal for the majority of international students is to transfer to a four-year university, either a UC or CSU school, or, as in a few cases, an out-of-state school. Students choose a university because of its reputation or because of its location. A small number of students think may change their plans for transfer, and they may graduate with an AA degree because of financial pressures. Three students hope to go to graduate

school. Their goals may change as they go through their first two years at community college. However, community college offers the international students the first step towards getting their bachelor's degree. Some students have already chosen a major whereas some are still deciding. International students experience pressure from their parents to choose a practical major rather than one that interests them personally. They may also change their major when they start to consider the cost of the education and the expected earning power and ensuing career opportunities upon graduation.

International students expect direction and guidance from counselors and they feel disappointed with their counseling experiences. They get help with their education plan and transfer requirements, but they would like more emotional support, career guidance, and scholarship information. International students find their instructors accessible and friendly and are able to get help from them in class and during office hours. Students have found differences between the style of teaching and the system of education between the U.S. and their home country. They like the teaching style in their community colleges classes, but they find the system of choosing core courses, electives, and general education courses difficult. They also commented on the impact of having large numbers of international students in the same class.

The International Student Office plays a pivotal role in the international students' experience, in particular by providing visa and academic guidance and a certain measure of emotional support. Students also expressed their appreciation for the presence of a key contact person on campus who offered them guidance, mentoring, emotional support, and friendship.

## **The Structure of the Social Experience**

*The Structure of the Social Experience* for community college students includes the themes of living situations, friendship, establishing networks, club involvement, and activities outside of college. This structure also includes the supporting theme of personal change.

The international students' social activities are often intertwined with their living situation. They may live with host families through home stay programs, dormitories, apartments, and with family and friends.

International students often gravitate towards students from their own country if there is a large group of students from the same ethnic background at their college. They also feel comfortable with other international students, and while they have a desire to get to know Americans, it is often difficult to do so. For some international students, developing a social life is not a high priority as their primary focus is on their studies. When there is a large network of students from their native country or ethnic background, students find support and friendship from their network of friends and do not always step outside of the group and meet new people.

Students become involved in college and club activities and form friendships in this way. Outside of college, many of the students are involved in activities with their church, their host family, and their roommates, friends, and their families. International students believe that their personality and behavior have changed due to their exposure to this new experience.

## **The Structure of the Cultural Experience**

International students come to the United States for a temporary period and plan to return home after they graduate. They learn about American culture prior to arrival in the country from American TV shows and movies, through encounters with Americans abroad, on previous trips to the United States, and from similarities between their own culture and American culture. They expect that the reality will be similar to their expectations, but this is not always the case.

Their experience of and exposure to American culture may be limited because they do not have an opportunity to meet Americans, to live with them, to experience a variety of experiences outside the college campus experience. They experience the life of an international student on their particular community campus and in their particular community. They observe and experience such aspects of the culture as differences in food, personal behavior, physical displays of affection, the educational system and more. They may feel that they have adapted well, and this is true within the scope of their world as community college students. As international students with limited English skills, few have had the opportunity to build relationships with Americans and explore some of the deeper aspects of the cultural experience.

## **The Structure of Problems and Suggestions**

The supporting themes in this structure include community college as a second choice, challenges to achievement of academic goals, issues that interfere with their learning, opportunities for social involvement and the ISO, and transportation problems. This structure also included a discussion of positive feedback and suggestions.

International students choose to study at an American community college because it offers them a second chance to get an education. The fact that it is their second choice may influence their perception of their experience and the degree of involvement. Rather than enjoy the full college experience with opportunities for personal growth, social involvement, or cultural exploration, they are focused on meeting the requirements and getting the grades for transfer.

International students face challenges in achieving their goals due to California's ongoing state budget crisis, which has resulted in a reduction in course offerings, registration difficulties, and limited tutoring and other services. Completing the required coursework for transfer within a two-year period is taking extra time and costing more money. Confidence in their English skills is also a source of anxiety for international students. They face challenges in their coursework and tests and are reluctant to find new opportunities to meet new people. Students also feel confused by the new system of education and being able to choose their courses and professors. Getting the help they need and expect from counselors has also been difficult, and there is a strong sense of disappointment. Belonging to a large network of international students from the same cultural background can be helpful, but very often it reduces opportunities for interaction.

Overall, international students feel positive about their experience at California community colleges. They feel that the community college experience introduces them to the American system of education, society, and culture. They like their instructors and appreciate the work of the International Student Office and ISO staff members. They feel very grateful for the experiences and opportunities they have had. Their suggestions are

mostly related to a desire for increased opportunities for social encounters, in particular with native students.

### **Synthesis of Structures**

I have described and illustrated the thematic structures that make up the phenomenon of the international student experience at a California community college, and at this point, I will synthesize these structures in an attempt to describe how students experience the phenomenon based on two factors: their financial situation and the size of the international program. I believe that these two factors have an effect on shaping the experience of the international students at California community colleges.

**Financial situation.** International students currently pay \$244 per unit to study at a California community college. A student who averages 15 units per semester pays \$7,320 in tuition plus any additional fees charged by the college for insurance and other services. Non-resident tuition and fees for 2011-2012 at a UC school average somewhere around \$38,000. While this includes tuition, fees, and health insurance, it does not include books and supplies, room and board, and personal spending. Students can expect this to cost around \$15,000. Thus, expenses for an international student at a UC school for the academic year 2011-2012 are at least \$53,000. At CSU schools, resident tuition and fees are approximately \$7,200 with an additional non-resident per unit fee of \$372, adding up to a cost of approximately \$18,360 per year if a student enrolls in 15 units per semester. With an additional \$15,000 for housing, travel, and living expenses, this adds up to \$33,360 per year.

The financial situation of international students and their families has a tremendous impact on the nature of the experience from their initial choice of community

college to their final decisions about transfer. None of the international students in this study identified their families as wealthy. Families saved and budgeted in order to send their children to study overseas. They see community college as a cheaper option than university but will eventually have to shoulder the costs of the four-year university. For all concerned, cost is an important factor in the decision-making process. In discussing this subject area, I will look at three kinds of situations related to money and finances.

*Students with full financial support.* These students have the security of knowing that they will have full or close to full financial support from their family throughout their time at community college and the four-year university. These international students are usually recruited from overseas by an agent who represents the interest of a particular college or by a college recruiter or director who travels abroad to international education fairs. Agents demand a fee that could be as high as \$4,000 to \$5,000, which is paid by the international students and their families; agents may also receive compensation from the community college whose interests they represent. International students in this situation have the opportunity to choose their community college and in that way define and shape their experience

The international students in this group do not need to worry about accommodation as the college will offer options of a home stay program, nearby furnished apartments, or dormitories. This gives them a certain amount of control over their experience. They can stay with a host stay or dormitory until they feel ready to move to an apartment, at which time they have established relationships with other international students and have some possibilities for roommates. They can then choose where they want to live and with whom.

International students with full financial support from their family join clubs and get involved in extra-curricular activities. They may get a job on-campus to help with some of their living expenses, but this is a choice rather than a requirement. In addition, they are not overly worried that it may take them an extra semester to transfer to the four-year university. However, they do worry about getting into their university of choice. This is a high priority for them. Many have set their sights on UCLA or UC Berkeley or UC schools included in the TAG.

The students in this financial situation are generally in the larger international student programs, have been recruited from Asian countries, are focused on transferring to a UC school, and do not appear to have any financial hardships. Daniel, Lily, Sophia, Henry, Alex, Austin, Min-Kyung, and Anna fit into this group of students. They all study in colleges with large international student programs. Hiroshi, at the small BLC college, is also being fully supported by his family and does not appear to be under financial pressure. He hopes to transfer to a CSU school.

*Students who depend on family and friends.* Without the support of family and friends to live with, these international students would find it difficult to afford to study abroad. They have some family support, usually for tuition and perhaps some living expenses. They choose a community college that is close to where they can live with their relatives, but they worry about the cost of their education. Consequently, their focus is on doing well in their classes, keeping their expenses as low as possible, and finding a job. They come to the college in order to take classes but do not always get involved in social and extra-curricular activities on campus. They may have family commitments and do not have the freedom to get involved in on-campus activities. They sometimes work on



campus, and my sense is that they may work off-campus without reporting it to the ISO, which would result in termination of their visa.

Because their situation is affected by their living situation and their finances, they have a different experience from the previous group of students. They get to know neighbors and people in the community through their relatives and friends. They face the challenges of living on a limited income and having to survive without the security of knowing that their parents will pay for everything. They do not belong to any large ethnic or cultural group. They are individuals who carve out their experience on their own. And, while they are dependent on their relatives and friends for their physical survival, they are learning how to be independent human beings who are responsible for a large part of their own journey and experience. Like the other group of international students, they want to transfer to a four-year university but are practical and pragmatic in their expectations. They may transfer to a UC, CSU, or out-of-state school depending on which situation offers the best opportunity. Farai, Sakina, Nicole, Chen, Ilyas, and John would identify with this experience. Robert has the goals and of the first group of students but some of the financial struggles of this second group. Antonio would share the goals of this second group but some of the financial challenges of the third group.

*Students with limited resources.* These are students who took a risk and came to the United States for a new experience and a better opportunity. In some cases, they had completed their education and wanted to pursue further education, and in some cases they had dropped out of school and wanted to start over. They have some family support and/or they had saved money from three to four years of work. Now that they are close to completing their requirements for transfer to university, they are facing the reality of how

much the four-year university will cost them and are opting to finish up their education at the community college with an associate's degree. They will then look at their options: perhaps a practical training experience, which will delay their decision for another nine months; or, maybe they will return home with their additional education and see what opportunities will open up for them. These students may not achieve their goals to transfer to university at this time, but they have benefitted from their experience and the additional education that they would not have gotten at home. James and Young-Soo would identify with this group. Sebastian is also unsure of his future.

**Size of the program.** To some extent, the size of the international program affects the international student experience, and in some ways, it does not. In this section, I will describe what I learned from students about how they experienced small, medium, and large international student programs.

***Small international programs.*** Students find themselves studying at small international programs because they are in the area and this is the most convenient option. The first college I visited, OGC, is a large community college of 18,000 students but has a very small international student program, which has dropped from 75 students in previous years to 51 students. The college does not choose to invest more time, money, and effort into the recruitment process at this time. While the coordinator of the program would like to see the program build back its numbers, she does not have the funding to do this.

International students at OGC chose the area before they chose the college because they have relatives or friends here. They meet other international students quickly through orientation and social activities hosted by the International Student Club

and a community group that supports the club. There is a diverse group of students without one majority group, so international students interact with other international students and local students. They meet American students in class and at campus activities. If they are willing to be independent and adventurous, they can find opportunities to get involved in social and community activities, practice their English, and get to know the culture. The coordinator of the program is a friend and advocate for the international students on campus and a very important part of their experience.

The second small college, BLC, has 1,200 students and 95 international students. I was surprised to find so many international students in such a small community of only 18,000 residents. Fifty percent of the American students are Hispanic, and the majority of the international students are from Asian countries, Japan in particular. The majority of the students at BLC live locally. They have come to this college because it is in a small, safe community; it has dormitories; and the college does not require a TOEFL score. The director of the program travels a great deal and recruits within the United States and overseas. The college is committed to building the international program. International students at this college develop a sense of community very quickly by living in the dormitories. They are required to live there for at least six months. When they move off campus, they find accommodation in a nearby apartment building. One of the most positive aspects of the international student experience is that they get to know people very quickly. They get to know their instructors, and their instructors work closely with them. The campus library is a central location and a great meeting place for students. The ISO is open and accessible to all students, and the administrative assistant, the counselor, and the director of the program have an informal easy relationship with students. On the

downside, moving to a small rural agricultural community has been an adjustment for many international students. Once they become accustomed to it, they like it. Also the absence of a TOEFL requirement means that students may come prepared for their college level courses and have to take ESL classes that are targeted for the local Spanish speaking immigrants. In general, students at this small college appreciate the opportunity to interact with students from different backgrounds rather than being with many students from the same ethnic background.

In summary, a distinctive aspect of the small international program is the opportunity for students to interact with students from diverse backgrounds and staff members on campus.

***Medium international student programs.*** These programs range in size from 300 students to 900 students. RRC has about 320 international students in a college of approximately 19,000 students. The ISO recruits primarily from Japan and from local private language schools and intensive English programs. However, many of the international students who attend RRC are students who came to the area because they have family or friends with whom they can live. The ISO is a warm and welcoming place, and students are very close to the international student advisor who is also the advisor for the International Student Club. If students choose to stay within their own ethnic group, it is possible to do so, but there is a strong emphasis in this program on getting students involved in the campus culture and local community. As previously mentioned, RRC has an international student club made up of local students and international students. I have met students from this club on two occasions—once when they presented at the NAFSA regional conference, and just recently when they paid a

visit to one of the colleges in my district. They like to create a network of friends that includes all of the international students on campus, organize social activities, and help new students with their adjustment to life in the new culture. They see the value in the experience for all parties concerned—local and international students. Students enjoy their academic experience at the college and feel that they have many opportunities for transfer to four-year universities in the area.

On the other hand, GRD is a large urban community college district with an international student program of about 900 students. The ISO actively recruits internationally, nationally, and within the state. It also attracts international students who have moved to the area and find its four colleges easily accessible by public transportation. GRD has a very diverse student body. While the largest number of international students at this district are from Asian countries, GRD also attracts international students from around the world. The international students are not based at one particular college and may take classes at two or three of the colleges in the district. They have opportunities to meet other international students and American students both in-class and outside of class. The ISO staff members work closely with their international students. Many of the international students feel that they have a friend and mentor in Patrick, the ISO international advisor. His presence is very important to them. Students commute to the college from areas throughout this large metropolitan area, they do not spend a lot of time on campus, they do not get actively involved in student clubs, and they are more focused on their lives outside of the campus arena. Their experience tends to be defined and influenced more by their lives off campus than on-campus.

*Large international programs.* I interviewed 13 international students in three large international programs Black Mountain College, Green Valley College, and Yellow Beach College. The three colleges had similar features. They had large enrollments. Each college has a well-staffed ISO and recruits actively internationally, nationally, and statewide. All three colleges have large groups of international students from Hong Kong, China, and Korea respectively. Many of the international students at these colleges chose to come here because of their connection with an agency or recruitment officers and were particularly attracted by the reputation of the college for transfer to a prestigious CU school. Therefore, there are large networks of Asian students on each campus. There are international students clubs that host social activities and provide an opportunity to develop leadership skills. Very often, the club is dominated by one or two cultural groups. Students who do not belong to a large network or who choose not to stay within the network find opportunities for social and club involvement on campus and in the community.

To conclude, international programs can be defined by certain features that are specific to their category. However, we cannot neatly categorize international student programs by size. The larger programs tend to have some clearly identifiable features such as staffing, social activities, and recruitment practices, and the small programs have certain similarities. However, those programs in the middle share features of both the small and large. While the size of the program will have an impact on the international students' experience, it is not possible to conclude that international students in a particular program of a given size will all have the same experience or that the

characteristics are all the same. At the end of the day, so much depends on how individual students interact with the situation in which they find themselves.

### **The Essence: The Stepping Stone**

I have decided on *The Stepping Stone* as the essence of the phenomenon of the international student experience at the community college. When Min-Kyung talked about his reasons for studying abroad, he said that his father did not want him, his only son, to be “stranded” in Korea with the responsibility of managing the family business and carrying on the family legacy. When I included Min-Kyung’s quote in my discussion of the thematic structures, I was tempted to paraphrase his words and use “confined” in place of “stranded,” but as I thought about the meaning of the word “stranded,” I realized that they are not quite the same. When people are stranded, they do not have a way out of their situation. They have a sense of being stuck within their situation without any options or choices. Community college offered Min-Kyung a way to get an education and an avenue to a four-year university.

I understand the meaning of “stranded” from personal experience. I grew up in Ireland, a small island, and when I graduated from high school the country only had four universities. At that time, students who did not get accepted into university had no other opportunity for a third-level education. There were a couple of two-year vocational and technical colleges, but there were no other academic schools or colleges in the country. I was fortunate to be admitted to the university of my choice that at the age of 17, and I stayed on course to get my four-year degree.

Many young people around the world find themselves in a situation where they do not have the opportunity to attend university. Their opportunities for a third-level

education are limited by academic and socio-economic factors. Perhaps they do not meet the stringent requirements for admission to university; their families cannot afford it, or perhaps there is a perception that they are not smart enough and should not even attempt to go to university. Without the opportunity for a third-level education, they are “stranded” and cannot even dream of getting a third-level education.

Community colleges in the United States offer international students the *stepping stone* they need to a university education. California’s 112 community colleges have the lowest tuition costs in the nation, offer open access, and are conveniently located in small and large cities throughout the state. The only requirement for admission for international students is that they have reached a certain level of English language proficiency before they register in college level courses, and that they have the resources to pay their fees and support themselves. In this way, students who have not applied for university admission in their home country or have applied but have not been accepted into university can attend a community college in the United States. In addition, students who would like to get an American degree but have not applied to an American university or have applied and been rejected can apply to community college and then transfer to a four-year university. Community college offers them a stepping stone to the university and the degree they want so badly.

Students who have dropped out of high-school or college and cannot find their way back into mainstream education in their native country can easily apply to a California community college, and with California’s open access policy, are easily admitted. They can complete their requirements for transfer and gain admission to a UC or CSU school and graduate with their bachelor’s degree. Community college offers them



*a stepping stone* that they would not find elsewhere. Also, with 112 California community colleges, it is possible for international students to find a college in a location where they will have family support.

International students who are in transition between their undergraduate degree and graduate school need to time to decide on the next step. By taking classes at the community college, they are exposed to the American educational system; they have time to explore new areas of study before they choose their post-graduate studies; and they have the opportunity to live legally in the U.S. on an F-1 visa for less money than they would pay for graduate school. Community college offers them a *stepping stone* between their undergraduate degree and their post-graduate studies and between their life in their native country and their new country as they await permanent residency.

Community colleges also offer students an opportunity for personal, social, and cultural growth as they transition from their native culture to a multi-cultural, global cultural experience, and identity. This is their first step in becoming global citizens of the world. Community colleges provide that *stepping stone*.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

### **Introduction**

Chapter Five is a summary and discussion of *International Students at Community Colleges: How are their needs being met?* In my study, I have researched the experience of international students at California community colleges and examined their reasons for choosing this kind of institution; their academic, social, and cultural experience; and the kinds of problems they encountered at their respective community colleges. As I examined their experience, I was also able to identify how the international students' financial situation and the size of the international program impacted certain aspects of their experience.

I addressed the research questions by collecting data from 29 international students at seven California community colleges. The participants shared their lived experiences at their respective community college by responding to my open-ended questions. I followed the phenomenological methods of Moustakas (1994) as I analyzed the 29 transcripts and identified the elements of the experience unique to international students at California community colleges. Based on my research questions and the stories shared by the participants, I arrived at five thematic structures that included elements common to the international student experience: *Reasons, Education, Social Experience, Cultural Experience, and Problems and Suggestions*. These structures came together in a synthesis of the international student experience as it intertwined with the

financial situation of the student and the size of the international program; the structures lead me to the essence of the study: *community college the stepping stone*.

In this chapter I will discuss how the findings address the research questions, relate the findings to the review of literature, share my assumptions and biases as related to the study, discuss the practical implications of the findings, and offer some closing remarks.

### **Research Questions and Findings**

This section will focus on how the findings of my study answer the research questions. In my discussion, I will combine the questions and discuss the following three areas:

- How and why do international students choose a particular community college?
- What are the educational, social, and cultural goals and expectations of international students and how do/did they expect their respective community college to meet these goals and expectations?
- How have those needs and expectations been met and what are some ways in which their needs have not been met?

#### **How and Why Do Students Choose to Study at a Particular Community College?**

The first research question asks how and why international students choose a particular community college. The data offer insight into why students choose to study abroad, why they choose a community college rather than going directly to a four-year university, and why they choose to study at a particular community college. Thus, before I discuss why students choose to study at a particular community college, I will address

why international students choose to study abroad and why they choose a community college as opposed to a four-year university.

International students choose to study abroad for the following reasons: their parents want them to study abroad because of the value of the experience and the value of an American education. The students choose to study abroad because of the influence of family or friends who have previously studied abroad. They believe that they will get a better education than they would get at home, or they want to pursue further education. They also hope to improve their language skills, meet new people, have new and different experiences, and pursue their personal dream or challenge. Secondly, students choose to study at a community college because it gives them an opportunity to get an education that they might not otherwise get because perhaps they did not graduate from high school, or they did not get into university at home or in the United States. Community college offers them the possibility to transfer to a four-year university and graduate with a bachelor's degree. Community college has open access and a relatively easy admissions process, many locations to choose from, smaller campuses, and is a less expensive option.

Two clear themes emerge for why international students choose a particular college. In the first case, students make a conscious choice to attend a particular college because of what it offers them. The most common features are the college's reputation for transfer and its proximity to the four-year university to which the international students wish to transfer. A secondary factor is that the college has a signature feature that attracts them, such as dormitories or a particular TOEFL requirement. And thirdly, international students go where their friends go. Perhaps they worked with the same

agency as their friends; in some cases they went where the agency sent them. Or perhaps their high school has an agreement with agents or recruiters from a particular college. In this case, students may come to a college as part of a large group from the same background and geographical location.

The second factor that influences students' choice of community college is that they have family and friends who either live in the area or have moved to the area. This gives the international students a place to live and a support system that will help them take the first step to enrolling in a community college. It is always easier to make a move to a new location if some connection with that community exists. Having family and/or knowing people in the area helps international students take the first step to move to a new country. The next step is to look for a community college in the area. With California's 112 community colleges and numerous educational centers, it is not difficult to find an institution that is within reach in a particular geographical location.

**What are the educational, social, and cultural goals of international students at their respective community colleges and how do international students expect their chosen college to meet their needs and fulfill their expectations?**

International students come to the community college with the expectation that they will reach their goal to transfer to a four-year university. Some expect to transfer to two of the top Universities of California (UC). Others expect to transfer to a UC through a Guaranteed Agreement for Transfer (TAG), to a CSU school, or to an out-of-state university. They expect to be able to decide on a major that will lead them to a suitable career. They expect to get help from counselors with their choice of major and their future career path, and they expect emotional support and guidance. They expect a positive learning experience in the classroom, and they expect to be able to enroll in the

courses they need for transfer. They also expect to get help and support from the International Student Office.

On a social level, they expect to make friends—international friends, and American friends—meet new people, and get involved in on-campus and, sometimes, off-campus activities. Like adolescents and young adults in American society, they expect to have fun with their friends and participate in age-related activities. Also, like young American adults, they expect to be able to establish their independence from their parents. The study abroad experience gives them the opportunity to live away from home and manage their lives on their own. In many cases, they hope to support themselves or supplement their finances by getting a job, either legally or illegally. They do not appear to be interested in getting romantically involved or finding a life partner. Or, at least they did not share that information.

Culturally, they expect to hold onto their own culture and at the same time get to know the new culture. They want to improve their English skills and immerse themselves into the culture to the point that they can comfortably and freely between the two cultures. They want to enjoy the aspects of American culture that please them and avoid those that do not. Basically, they want to be able to pick and choose.

Additionally, they expect to complete their community college coursework and transfer requirements within two years followed by an additional two years at a four-year university, thus completing their bachelor's degree in a total of four years. Some expect that they will have the resources to reach their goals based on their parents' support; others can only hope that they will have the resources they need in order to make this

happen. Finally, once they have completed their education, the international students expect to be able to leave and return home, get a good job, and live successful lives.

**How have those needs and expectations been met and what are some ways in which their needs have not been met?**

**Academic needs and expectations.** International students feel very satisfied with the academic preparation they receive at community college. They like their classes, their grades are good, and they feel that they are on track for transfer. Their instructors use a teaching style that is interactive and invites student participation, they apply reasonable standards and requirements in their coursework, and they are willing to help students and respond to their needs in the classroom and during office hours. Occasionally, instructors appear not to be aware that their new international students are fearful and vulnerable and do not know how to communicate their needs and their problems.

International students network with other international students and quickly learn how to select instructors based on their reputation. International students take into consideration factors such as the teaching style of the instructor; the types of tests, quizzes, and assignments given in class; the rapport that the instructor has had with international students in the past; and if the instructor is a native speaker of English. In my opinion, this points to a need for more professional development for managers, staff, and faculty in the areas of multi-cultural sensitivity training. When international students come to a college that is not ready to meet them academically, it is very difficult for them to succeed. Likewise, the campus culture needs to be open and willing to reach out to them and value their presence. Community college personnel need to be able understand and respond to the needs of the international students, and they need to have the tools to

do so. As they welcome international students to their colleges, they need to see the value of their contribution to the campus culture, which goes far beyond the financial factor.

International students are not always satisfied with their academic counseling experiences. They have expectations that the academic counselors will work with them on their choice of major and career path; give them emotional support and guidance; and provide resources and information about scholarships, second bachelor's degrees, and graduate school. Instead, general academic counselors are responsible for helping international students with their education plans and transfer requirements but do not provide psychological or career counseling. These are different departments and do not exist at most community colleges. I know from my experience with the academic counseling faculty at my community college that the counseling ratio is one full-time counselor to 900 students with some additional counseling hours from adjunct faculty. Appointments are generally scheduled in 20 or 30 minute blocks and students are lucky to get one or two appointments in the semester. And, I believe from my own experience, that with one or two appointments per semester academic counselors do not have the time to get to know students individually and personally. This is often a disappointment to the international students who desperately seek a friendly face on campus and clear and comprehensive academic guidance. A strong academic counseling/advising component is an essential part of the international experience, and in most cases, this is an area that international students feel is missing.

Instead, international students find guidance, emotional support, and day-to-day help from the ISO coordinators, advisors, administrative assistants, and student assistants. Establishing a connection and having frequent interaction with college representatives/



personnel plays a key role in the international students' experience at the college. It is extremely important that international students have a "go-to" person on campus—a name and a face that they clearly associate with the college. This may be a clerk in Admissions and Records who has a part-time responsibility for visa requirements and processing of international student paper work in a small international program. Or, a full-time international student advisor in a large program. Regardless of whom that person is, it is important that international students have the opportunity to connect.

International students, like local community college students, are directly impacted by the severe reductions in course offerings due to the condition of the California state budget. This directly affects their ability to enroll in courses required for transfer. They are not always able to get the classes they need, or they may have to take extra classes that they do not need just to remain legal. The result is that they spend an extra semester or two at community college. Considering that this situation may not improve for another two or three years, it could very well continue to be difficult for international students to get into classes. A direct consequence is that they will not meet their goal to transfer from the community college within two years, which will cost the students and their families a great deal more money than they had anticipated. They can also expect to face similar problems at the four-year University of California or California State University schools.

Although one cannot predict how the transfer process will work out, when international students will be ready to transfer, or whether they will get into the university of their choice, I believe that if international students meet the requirements for transfer

and have the economic resources to do so, they will be eligible and able to transfer to a UC or CSU school.

**Social needs and expectations.** International students in small, medium, and large international student programs have opportunities to meet people and make friends—international friends and American friends—in the classroom and through their club and extra-curricular involvement. Larger international student programs and larger colleges offer more opportunities for extra-curricular involvement. On the other hand, smaller international student programs offer a more intimate environment for students to interact and make friends. While international students feel that people are friendly, open, and welcoming, ultimately, the responsibility lies on the individual students to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. Some students choose to stay within the comfort and familiarity of their own cultural or ethnic group and do not want to reach out and meet new people. Some students express a desire for more organized activities but do not participate in those currently being offered. Some students are focused on their studies and do not want to take time for social activities while in community college. Also, some students have family commitments and obligations and are not in a position to take time out for friendship and a social life. Outside the college environment, students get involved in church activities, volunteer opportunities, go shopping, go out for lunch, play video games, and participate in other age appropriate activities.

International students also feel that the community college offers them a safe place to grow up and establish their independence away from their families, without the academic and financial pressure of the large four-year university.

**Cultural expectations.** International students say that they want to learn more English and adapt to the new culture. While they certainly improve their language skills, their expectations for cultural assimilation may not be met so easily. The main reason is that the international students do not realize how long it takes to assimilate to a new culture. Observing cultural differences, making American friends and acquaintances, or having prior familiarity with the culture through the media does not equate with the time and effort involved in understanding and assimilating into a new culture. Moving freely and comfortably between cultures involves letting go of some of the native culture and embracing aspects of the target culture. International students experience a small slice of American culture in their college experience and community involvement. Their closest relationships are with other international students, their families, or their friends from the same language and cultural background. Until they are willing and able to step outside of their immediate environment, they will not be able to immerse themselves in the American culture. Similarly, if their goal is to return to their native country when they finish their education, it is unlikely that they will put time and effort into their cultural assimilation.

### **Findings and Review of Literature**

As I compared my findings to the literature, three areas emerged as relevant. They were: (a) criteria that influence students' choice of institution, (b) challenges and suggestions, and (c) institutional responsibility.

**Choice of Institution.** According to the literature, international undergraduate students consider the following factors when choosing an institution: academic reputation (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2007; Mallet, 2007; Wongbaipoon, 2008), recommendation of

family and friends, geographic location (Mallet, 2007), ease of university entrance and immigration procedures, job opportunities, and cost (Binsardi & Ekwulugo, 2007). The major factors related to international students' choice of graduate schools were general characteristics including program and institutional characteristics; recruitment and marketing practices; financial incentives such as scholarships and graduate assistantships; and faculty reputation and research opportunities (Ruby, 2007). Doku (2007) found that tuition costs, recommendation of friends and family, and employer sponsorship were the major reasons for international students' choices of community colleges. Zeszotarski (2003) concluded that students chose to study at community colleges because of the transfer opportunities, cost of tuition, academic flexibility, and long-term career preparation for a global market.

Based on the findings in my study, international students choose to begin their studies at a community college rather than at a four-year university because in many cases they were not academically successful at home, the cost of tuition is significantly lower than a four-year university, the application and admissions process is easier, and they can transfer to a four-year university to which they might otherwise not have been accepted. They study at a particular community college because of its reputation for transfer and the recruitment activities that attract them to that college.

International students also choose a community college for its geographical location. However, this aspect is somewhat different from the findings in the literature. International students choose the location first because they have family or friends in the area who will be able to help them with accommodation, introduce them to the community and the culture, and support them through the challenges of the new

experience. Once they have settled upon a location, international students then choose a college, which is not especially difficult because California has 112 community colleges located across the state. I believe that this criterion of choosing a community college because of having family and/or friends is characteristic of the community college environment.

**Challenges and Solutions.** The review of literature identified international student challenges and offered solutions in the following areas: social interaction, cultural adjustment, and language ability.

**Social.** According to Sawir et al. (2007), international students experience loneliness on a personal, social, and cultural level. They have difficulties in establishing social networks and making friends. Doku (2007) also identified similar difficulties for international students at two community colleges. One of the findings from Doku's study, which fits with my findings, is the importance of social interaction and the existence of a strong support system for international students.

International students talked about homesickness, which manifests as missing family and friends back home and certain aspects of their culture. They also discussed the difficulties they experience in making friends and establishing a social network outside their own ethnic or cultural network. However, they did not use the word "loneliness." International students like the small size of community college campuses and feel that people are friendly and helpful. One of the benefits of coming to the community college first is that they are not overwhelmed by the size and pressure of a larger university campus. About half of the participants in this study live with family or friends and in this way do not feel such personal or social loneliness as if they were on their own. Many of

the other participants came as part of a group, or they established a network of friends once they arrived. Some other students found that their living situation with a host family, in dorms, or in student apartments helped them create a social network. Also, international students point to the role of the ISO and its staff members as a way of meeting other international students through orientation, making friends, and becoming involved in social activities. To conclude, while international students experience homesickness, my study does not point to loneliness as a major aspect of the phenomenon of the international student experience.

*Cultural.* Sawir et al. (2007) suggest that cultural loneliness has a deep impact on the international student experience. They see adjustment to the new culture as a lengthy process that involves some fundamental changes in one's identity. Identity was certainly a supporting theme that emerged for students in my study as they determine what it means to be an American and struggle to understand how they fit within this new multi-cultural environment. They assume that an American is a White-American and did not quite see other American ethnic groups as Americans (as in Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans). Chen, a Chinese student from Hong Kong, struggles with the differences between his culture and the culture of Asian-Americans. He expected similarities but found them to have a very different culture from him. Likewise, Farai tried to identify with an African-American culture because he is from Africa. And, while he could easily have been perceived as African-American, he felt very connected to his African heritage, identity, and culture which are different from the culture of African-Americans.

Sawir et al. (2007) suggest that if international students are to adjust to the new

culture, they need to “set aside core elements of their identity” with severe consequences. They cite examples of cultural adjustment as adopting “an ideology of possessive individualism” in place of a collective ideology, or as “a reduced commitment to the extended family,” or even as having to “drink alcohol to mix successfully with local students” (Sawir et al., 2007, p. 171). I think this helps me understand why students from Hong Kong, Korea, China, or Indonesia might have difficulties stepping away from their cultural network and operating independently within the new culture. It would appear that many international students actually avoid or delay cultural loneliness by staying close to their own cultural group or family members. They miss certain aspects and activities that were part of their lives at home, and they do not easily find ways to replace them. By staying within their cultural or ethnic group, they can recreate a sense of their own culture. They are more familiar with belonging to a group and relating to their cultural community. The individualism and independence of American adolescents and young adults is very unusual in their experience. Many international students at community colleges have limited exposure to American cultural experiences and are still at a point where their understanding of the new culture could be considered “superficial.”

In the larger community college international programs, students tend to belong to a network of friends from the same ethnic or cultural background, and while they have a desire to get to know the culture, they are reluctant to step outside the group. Some students talked about their fear of being “isolated” and “ostracized” by the group if they appear to be finding new friends and getting more involved in American social and cultural activities. I believe this fits with Sawir’s (2007) explanation that there are consequences involved when students choose to adopt the new culture. This involves

changes in their identity, changes in commitment to own cultural group, and a loss of the collective sense of belonging to a group. Sawir's conclusions, in my opinion, help explain the situation of many international students in my study as they hold onto the bonds with their own network or with other international students.

Cultural assimilation happens very slowly or does not happen at all when students see their experience at a community college as a stepping stone to their four-year degree and their eventual return home. Senyshyn, Warford, and Zhan (2007) cite length of stay as a significant part of adaptation to the new environment. Overall adjustment improves for students the longer they are at the university. These conclusions also support my findings. International students in my study had been in the U.S. anywhere from one month to three years, and while they were in different stages of getting to know the culture, they had not gotten very far in terms of cultural assimilation.

*Suggestions for social and cultural involvement.* One of the major conclusions of Doku's (2007) study was the importance of social interaction and the existence of a strong support system for international students. The majority of participants in Doku's study reported that they socialized with other international students on campus and participated in activities organized by the International Students Office.

Sawir et al. (2007) acknowledge the importance of campus clubs and organizations that are culture specific and the need for international students to meet other international students. However, they stress the importance for international students of forming and developing relationships with local students. Their suggestions are to create opportunities for international and local students to meet and interact based on their mutual interests. They believe that this will be possible if local students have the



openness and curiosity to learn more about the lives and cultures of the international students at their institutions (Sawir et al., 2007). This also supports my findings that international students need to interact with local students. Students who find this opportunity through club activities and leadership opportunities, within their departments and classes, and through the experience of working on campus have a greater chance of becoming socially and culturally involved and adjusted.

*Academic challenges.* International students have difficulty maneuvering the educational system in a new institutional setting and in a new country. (Sawir et al, 2007). Doku (2007) also points to difficulties adjusting to the American system of education, speaking up in class, and locating available resources and services. Again this fits with my findings that international students have difficulties with the new American system of education whereby they need to choose their classes and professors.

International students also feel shy and vulnerable in class and tend to stay within their own language group. International students in my study did not have difficulty locating resources and services. The difficulty they experienced was that the resources and services are not always available. My study also points to the importance of the ISO office, its managers, staff, and student workers in helping international students with all aspects of their experience: classes, counseling, housing, immigration, and general personal support.

Galloway and Jenkins (2005) suggest that problems with the English language have a greater impact on international student problems than any other demographic factor. In addition, Senyshyn et al. (2007) claim that English ability impacts students' academic and social adjustment. They suggest that students with higher TOEFL score

ranges (590-609) appear to have a more positive experience than students in the lower score range (530-549). I did not explore the impact between TOEFL score and social adjustment and success in my study. However, students' language ability and perceptions of their language ability clearly impacted their willingness and their ability to seek out new social experiences with American students and people in the community. Also, since many community colleges only require a TOEFL score of 450, international students entering community college may have lower English language skills than entering international freshmen at a four-year university. Galloway and Jenkins also stress the importance for international students to have a strong command of the English language. These conclusions support my findings that the experience is more challenging for international students when their English skills are not strong.

Doku (2007) suggests that solutions in the area of academic success include support from instructors and greater access to academic resources. International students in my study feel positive about their instructional experience but feel that services in the areas of tutoring and counseling are not adequate.

### **Institutional Responsibility**

Sawir et al. (2007) acknowledge the importance of strong support networks for international students. They believe that the institution needs to take responsibility for its international students and ensure that students have access to the resources they need. They also suggest that "friendly classrooms, competent administration, and sensitive student services are more significant for international students than for domestic students" (Sawir et al., 2007, p. 170). Galloway and Jenkins (2005) also stress the need for administrators to understand the range of international student problems and the

importance of adapting programs to meet the needs of individual students or student groups.

Cohen (2007) presented the most common challenges as identified by 144 community college students. These challenges were time and effort in English; misunderstanding; disrespect from faculty, staff, and fellow American students; lack of information about community college services and procedures; stress; family; and finances in a new cultural environment. Practical solutions for dealing with international students' problems included increased institutional support that would address a broad range of students' concerns, an international student office, professional development to help faculty understand and support international students, and international student orientation.

The common thread running through the research suggestions is that the institution has a responsibility to its international students—as it does to all students. International students are at a new institution in a new country and need support. International students feel that it is the responsibility of the college to provide the services for which they are paying. Also if community colleges want to build their international student programs—in particular the large international student programs—there needs to be some institutional investment and commitment. The participants in my study did not use the term *institutional responsibility*, but based on their stories, perceptions, and experiences, it was clear that they had a certain expectation that their respective colleges should offer them the services and resources for which they are paying.

International students look to and depend on the International Student Office. A good office has good leadership and a good infrastructure, and this was evident in the

majority of the colleges in my study. International students like to have a “go-to” person on campus, whose office door is open and whose staff members give them a warm welcome. Establishing and maintaining a good ISO also requires institutional commitment. If the office is run by one person only, who is perhaps getting close to retirement, the knowledge and the resources that person has built up will go with them when they leave.

Many international students are very much aware and surprised that they are paying higher tuition than local students and that the revenues they generate in tuition go directly to the college or the district. They question where the money is going and why it is not used for resources and activities that they need. In particular, large international student programs generate large sums of money for the college. They feel that the involvement and commitment from the college leaders is very important, and an investment of time and resources into the international student program is a core part of its success of the program.

Fitzer (2007) made a clear distinction between “high pursuit” institutions, which recruit international students aggressively, and “low-pursuit” institutions, which do not. One of his primary conclusions was that “high-pursuit” colleges need to have certain community and college characteristics and conditions in order to successfully recruit large numbers of international students. Successful high pursuit colleges are in large metropolitan areas. Within the colleges, there is a commitment to international education and international students, an administrator who advocates for the international student program, and agreement and investment from constituents within the college community. Successful high-pursuit colleges offer international students a variety of opportunities for

social engagement. The “high-pursuit” characteristics identified by Fitzer fit the large colleges and the largest of the medium colleges in my study, and the commitment of the institution accounts for the successes in these programs

### **Researcher Perspective**

I first became interested in this topic when I started teaching English as a Second Language at a small college in a large community college district in Northern California. I was curious about why we had so few international students; I wanted to learn more about why other colleges and districts worked so hard to attract international students, but my district did not. In a district of approximately 70,000 students, we have about 350 international students. I was curious about why we did not actively recruit international students. I had worked at state universities and intensive English programs and understood the value of the international experience for international students. I also appreciate the value of international students as an important component of a diverse college and community. I have lived and taught abroad and also feel passionate about the value of international exposure and experience. My children have lived, traveled, studied, and volunteered overseas, and I have directly witnessed the value these experiences have had on them and on our family as a whole. So, I had expected to see more of an international student presence on my campus and in my classes. International students would benefit from the experience of studying abroad, and our local students would have the exposure to the international students.

Based on conversations with my college and district leaders, I learned that the rationale was that we need to serve our local students and take care of the needs of the minority students in our area first. We should not bring in international students and

displace our local students at a time when we do not have enough classes, services, and staffing to meet all of their needs. Our district serves approximately 10,000 students over our cap, which means that the district does not receive remuneration for these students and is already straining its limited resources. If we choose to recruit large numbers of international students, that would require a large support system and infrastructure throughout our district. We would need money for recruitment, services, and staffing. With our current enrollment of 350-400 international students in a large district of 70,000 students, we can manage to absorb the international students into the existing framework. However, if we expand our goals for recruitment and inclusion of international students, we will be moving into a different sphere. As Fitzer (2007) pointed out, a college needs to recruit large numbers of international students in order to see a significant financial impact for the college, the district, and the community.

Thus when I began this study, I wanted to understand why some colleges recruit international students and some do not. I wanted to know if it made a difference to the students whether they were in a large, medium, or small program. I also wanted to know how community colleges could recruit international students to a college that did not have dormitories. And, I was curious about how international students are different from the immigrant students that I see in my ESL classes. I wanted to know more about how the international students feel about their experience and if their needs are being met. I wanted to consider how a college or district could claim to serve its local students but not include international students in its college community. I wanted to understand how a college or district could claim to embrace diversity yet not consider international students

as part of that diversity. In sum, these are the biases, assumptions, and questions that I brought with me as I embarked on this study.

### **Practical Considerations and Recommendations**

International students come to American community colleges for an opportunity to get an education. For most of them, this is a stepping stone to a four-year degree and an opportunity that they might not have had in their native country. As I met with these 29 international students, most of them under the age of 25, I realized that they are similar in many ways to our young adult domestic students. Some of them have previously dropped out of high school and claim not to like school; some have not decided on their major or their career path; some know what their preferred major would be but are under pressure from their parents; some are under financial pressure and worry about the increasing cost of tuition and living expenses; some do not particularly like living with their family and would like to move out, but are not in a position to do so; and most of them are just growing up, getting to know themselves, and trying to establish their independence and individuality away from their families. Many of them are vulnerable and shy. In addition to these factors, international students are dealing with a new language and a new life in a place that is very far from home.

As illustrated in Chapter One, the number of international students enrolled at institutions of higher education is increasing annually. In particular, community colleges are witnessing tremendous growth. And, while colleges may claim to welcome international students onto their campuses because of how they enhance the learning experience of the local students and enrich the college culture, my fear remains that a major motivating factor is the revenue that is generated by international student tuition.

An additional fear is that local students are being displaced by international students. When community colleges make the leap to recruit large numbers of international students to their colleges, they need to consider what they are offering those students, what they are doing with the fees and tuition paid by the international students, and which extra services need to be included in the college structure. In this section of Chapter 5, I will offer some general considerations and recommendations, which will be followed by some specific suggestions.

At the planning level, I recommend that districts/colleges clearly articulate their goals for international student recruitment, enrollment, and services in their strategic plan or their master plan. I recommend that they establish best practices for incorporating these new international students into the college community and ensuring that their needs are being met. For districts/colleges that actively recruit international students, this involves making decisions about the number of international students that could realistically be served given the existing or planned services and course offerings. It means setting realistic quotas for the number of international students to be recruited. It also involves recruiting in such a way that colleges end up with a diverse group of international students as opposed to a large dominant group from one ethnic or cultural group. Finally, at the national, state, district, and college level, I recommend the establishment of ethical and forthright practices in the recruitment of international students. This involves a clear acknowledgment on the part of the college of its reasons for recruitment. It also involves ethical and transparent dealings with recruitment agencies to ensure that agents are not extracting money from international students and also being paid a commission by a particular college per student recruited.



As I have shown in my study, many international students choose to attend a community college because they have family and/or friends in the area and have chosen the closest community college. They have not been actively recruited to the college, and community colleges may not be prepared for them. The reality is that enrollment of international students at community colleges is increasing whether they recruit or not. It is, therefore, essential that community colleges foster an environment in which international students can succeed and have their needs met. I strongly recommend ongoing professional development for managers, staff, and faculty in areas such as cultural sensitivity, learning styles, global competency, and comprehensive internationalization. Given the varied educational and cultural backgrounds of international students and the stringent requirements for immigration compliance, I recommend that resources and staffing be allocated for international student programs regardless of their size, and that personnel undergo ongoing training through professional organizations such as NAFSA: Association for International Educators in order to ensure that the rights of the international students, the college, and the district are being protected.

The following are some specific practical recommendations based on my experience in this study.

**College-wide:**

- Establish an area in a central location where international students can access help from designated international student staff members. Ideally, this would be an International Student Office, but it could also be part of the Counseling Department or Student Services Department.

- Identify and train academic counselors who work specifically with international students. Enable the counselors to deal with cultural differences, communication difficulties, and the kinds of personal and social issues that are common to international students at community colleges.
- Designate and train more than one staff member to work with international students to ensure that ongoing support and shared knowledge is maintained.
- Use a portion of international student tuition revenues to support the international student program and offer services that will promote a successful experience for the international students at their respective college.

**Academic Areas:**

- International students need to be proficient in English before they begin their college coursework. Increase the English proficiency level of international students before they take their college courses by requiring a TOEFL score that is comparable to that required of students at the four-year university. Students who have not achieved the required score need to take ESL classes either at the college or at an intensive English language program.
- Find ways to incorporate the international students' experience and cultural background into the college's overall globalization efforts. For example, identify curriculum areas and college-wide themes that relate to the countries and cultures represented by the international students on campus, and in this way create a broader body of knowledge that is accessible to domestic students as well as international students. Create study abroad opportunities for domestic students to countries represented by international students on campus and offer opportunities

for the international students to become involved in planning these programs and interacting with the study abroad participants.

**The Social and Cultural Area:**

- Offer more opportunities through club activities for international students to interact with American students. Establish an international club on campus for domestic and international students. The club would support the international students in socializing with American students and offer them opportunities to get to know the culture. At the same time, the international students would share their knowledge and experience with the domestic students.
- Provide opportunities for international students to become involved in community activities through volunteer programs and cultural events

In conclusion, these are some of my specific recommendations in response to the challenges and the successes experienced by participants in this study. They are also based on my observations of the international student programs in the study and my conversations with staff members at the respective colleges.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

In Chapter One of this dissertation I discussed some of the reasons why international students are important to institutions of higher education in the United States and presented some of the claims made about international students by leading experts in the field of international education:

- They help to internationalize the campus by adding diversity and offering a global dimension and perspective to the student body that might not otherwise exist (Dellow & Romano, 2006).
- They help the institution to educate globally competent students who are prepared to contribute and participate at a competitive level in the global job market and economy (Cardwell, 2006).
- Their presence helps to promote understanding and tolerance of the universal commonalities and differences between people. This exposure helps foster peace and diplomacy throughout the world (Bell-Rose & Desai, 2006).
- International students contribute to the academic repertoire and curriculum of the institution with the skills, knowledge, and experience they bring with them. This enhances the learning experience of the local students as well as the international students (Raby & Valeau, 2007).

Future studies are needed to investigate the impact and contribution of international students to the community colleges they attend to determine if the international students are actually valued on campus for their contribution in the areas mentioned above. This would involve examining the perceptions of students, staff, faculty, and administrators about the value and contribution of international students on campus.

The second area of recommended research has to do with the requirements for English proficiency. Some community colleges do not require a TOEFL score while the majority of community colleges require a minimum score of 450. CSU schools require a minimum TOEFL score of 500 while UC schools require 550. The requirement may be

higher for specific majors. Research is needed to determine how the incoming level of English proficiency for international students at community colleges impacts their academic success and their success in achieving their transfer goals.

To conclude, the two major areas of recommended research are the contribution of international students to community colleges and secondly, the relationship between English proficiency levels and academic success.

### **Closing Remarks**

My fear when I started working on this project was that international students are pursued for their financial contribution to the institution but may not be receiving adequate services and resources. I think that anyone who is involved in working with international students should work diligently to ensure that this does not happen.

My comfort in completing this research is that international students appear to have a wonderful learning experience regardless of the size of the international student program or the college. Finally, my hope is that our understanding of the world community will be expanded to include the global community and that all of the students being served at the community college will share a common goal to become global citizens.

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## APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS FOR FIRST STUDENT INTERVIEW

- Tell me about yourself, your family, your education in your home country. . . . .
- How did you choose to study at this college?

### **Social**

- Tell me about your experiences at the college.
- How have people treated you?
- How about other students on campus?
- Tell me about how you spend your free time.
- Tell me about your experience in the community? How has that been?

### **Academic**

- Tell me a little bit about your goals and expectations when you came here to this college.  
Have they changed? Have you achieved them?
- Tell me about the people you have met here who have helped you.
- What has been most helpful for you at this college?
- Tell me about anything that has been difficult for you?

### **Culture**

- Tell me about your experiences living in a new culture.
- Tell me about how it has been adjusting to a new culture and lifestyle.

### **Overall**

- What would you keep the same and what would you change about your experience here?
- As you look back on your experience at this college, do you have any thoughts or suggestions about what would have been helpful for you.