

1-23-2008

Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Climate in Higher Education

Becky Appley Boesch
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Boesch, Becky Appley, "Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Climate in Higher Education" (2008). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 5983.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.7853>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND THE COLLEGE CLASSROOM
CLIMATE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

BECKY APPLEY BOESCH

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of


DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
in
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:
POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Portland State University
2008

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The abstract and dissertation of Becky Appley Boesch for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Education were presented January 23, 2008, and accepted by the dissertation committee and the doctoral program.

COMMITTEE APPROVALS:


Joan Strouse, Chair



Christine Cress


Yves Labissiere


Swapna Mukhopadhyay


Susan M. Conrad
Representative of the Office of Graduate Studies

DOCTORAL PROGRAM APPROVAL:


Randy Hitz, Dean
Graduate School of Education

ABSTRACT

An abstract of the dissertation of Becky Appley Boesch for the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership: Postsecondary Education presented January 23, 2008

Title: Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Climate in Higher Education

In recent years, the immigrant population in the U.S. has increased dramatically. This increase has caused educational institutions to try to understand this population and their needs in order to aid in their academic success. While this awareness has surfaced in K-12 education, higher education continues, partly because of a lack of research on these students, to render these students and their needs insignificant. While this paper cannot begin to explore all the questions needed to be answered in terms of this population, it can provide an initial glimpse into one important aspect of education for the immigrant, the university classroom climate. Studies in classroom climate have stemmed from the two theoretical bases of social constructivism and critical theory. That is, learning is inherently social and that the dynamic of the classroom mirrors the dynamics of power and oppression in larger society. Although few studies have been done looking at classroom climate and the immigrant specifically, a number of minority studies show that classroom climate can play a significant role in a student's academic success. From a review of

the literature, the specific aspects of classroom climate which pertain to this population are teacher/student interaction, student/student interaction, curriculum/pedagogy and English anxiety. Based on this information, an exploratory research study was conducted to determine how the college classroom climate influences immigrant students' academic experience and perceived success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all the people that believed in me. In particular, I want to thank my husband John. While I often doubted whether I could complete this due to extraneous pressures, he never did. I want to thank him for the countless ways he accommodated me so that I could do my work. I also want to thank my parents, especially my mother. She instilled in me at an early age, a belief in the value of education and a belief in myself. These two values have been necessary foundations throughout this experience without which I would have surely failed.

I also want to thank Dr. Joan Strouse. Without her constant prodding and encouragement, I doubt that I would have been able to finish. Her encouragement, feedback and support were invaluable. She became more than my doctoral advisor. She became a mentor and a friend.

Finally, I want to thank the participants in my study for their willingness to commit their time and the incredible honesty they exhibited in our conversations. Thank you for entrusting me to convey your experiences, ideas, and beliefs. My respect and concern for immigrant students has only increased through this work. They are incredible people whose voices deserve to be heard.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTER	
I STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	1
CHAPTER	
II LITERATURE REVIEW.....	4
Theories and Related Concepts.....	4
Related Research.....	6
Research Studies on College Classroom Climate.....	11
<i>Teacher/Student Interactions</i>	11
<i>Student/Student Interactions</i>	14
<i>Curriculum and Pedagogy</i>	16
CHAPTER	
III RESEARCH AND DESIGN PROCEDURES.....	19
Study Design.....	19
Research Questions.....	22
Subjects.....	24
Data Collection and Analysis.....	32
Limitations of the Study.....	37
Conclusion.....	39
CHAPTER	
IV DATA ANALYSIS.....	41

Student/Professor Interaction.....	41
<i>Focus Group Findings on student/professor relationship.....</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Tokenism.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Cultural Separation and Disenfranchisement.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Cultural and Linguistic Barriers.....</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Individual Interview Findings on professor/student relationship.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Positive Classroom Influences.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Personal Connection within the classroom.....</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>Professor Availability.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Clear Explanations and Assignments.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>High Academic Expectations.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Concerned with Improving Teaching/Learning.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Established Mutual Respect.....</i>	<i>54</i>
<i>Negative Classroom Influences.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Unclear Explanations and Expectations.....</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Cultural and Linguistic Barriers.....</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Intimidation and Lack of Respect.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Professor's Unavailability and Unwillingness to Help.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Overwhelming Content and Expectations.....</i>	<i>63</i>
Student/Student Interaction.....	63
<i>Focus Group Findings on Student/Student Relationship.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Individual Interview Findings on Student/Student Relationship.....</i>	<i>66</i>
Student/Pedagogy.....	76
<i>Focus Group Findings on Student/Pedagogy.....</i>	<i>76</i>
<i>Individual Interview Findings on Student/Pedagogy Dynamic.....</i>	<i>80</i>
Student/Content.....	87
<i>Focus Group Findings on Student/Content Dynamic.....</i>	<i>87</i>
<i>Individual Interview Findings on</i>	

<i>Student/Content Dynamic</i>	88
Students' Perception of Academic Success.....	94
Conclusion.....	103

CHAPTER

V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....106

Comparison with Existing Research.....106

General Theories.....106*Ogbu's Cultural-Ecological Theory*.....106*Cummins' Framework of Empowering
and Disabling*.....109*Classroom Climate Studies*.....109*Teacher/Student Interactions*.....109*Student/Student Interactions*.....111*Student/Pedagogy Dynamic*.....113*Student/Content Dynamic*.....114

New Ideas Emerging from this Study.....114

Student/Teacher Interaction.....114*Student/Student Interaction*.....116*Student/Pedagogy Dynamic*.....116*Student/Content Dynamic*.....117*Assessment of Academic Success*.....118

The Ethos of Learning.....119

Suggestions for Further Research.....123

Summary of Major Findings and Lesser Research.....127

Implications of the Study.....128

Conclusion.....131

REFERENCES.....133

APPENDICES

A. Prior Learning Questionnaire.....137

B. Human Subjects Application.....155

C. Focus Group Interview Scenarios.....165

D. Individual Interview Questions.....168

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page		
1	Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Invited Research Participants.....	26
2	Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Research Participants.....	27
3	Demographic Information on Research Participants.....	29
4	Reasons Given for Positive Professor/Student Relationship.....	49
5	Reasons Given for Negative Professor/Student Relationship.....	56
6	Reasons Given for Positive Student/Student Relationship.....	70
7	Reasons Given for Negative Student/Student Relationship.....	73
8	Reasons Given for Effective Classroom Pedagogy.....	81
9	Reasons Given for Ineffective Classroom Pedagogy.....	85
10	Reasons Given for Effective Content.....	87
11	Reasons Given for Ineffective Content.....	93
12	Reasons Given for Academic Success.....	95
13	Reasons Given for Not Succeeding Academically.....	98

CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to determine how the college classroom climate influenced immigrant students' academic experience as well as their perceived success. Because the term "immigrant" has been used to describe a wide range of populations which are often quite different and distinct, the meaning of "immigrant student" will be narrowed to the following three criteria:

1. traditional college age students (18-21 years old)
2. students who have graduated from an American high school but may have begun their K-12 education in another country
3. students for whom English is a second language

The reason for defining immigrant students as such is because studies indicate that immigrants who fall under these criteria are potentially most disadvantaged academically. For example, Boshier and Rowekamp (1998) found that "refugee/immigrant students who are most 'at risk' at the post-secondary level are those who experienced interruption in their L1 (first language) education and completed high school in the U.S." (p. 37).

This research is needed because of the dramatic demographic changes occurring in the U.S. and among the nation's school children. "Between 1980 and 1990, immigration contributed a full 39 percent of the population growth in the

country” (Portes, 1996, p. 2). This population growth is not only evident in K-12 but also in postsecondary institutions. Boshier and Rowekamp (1998) find that “refugee/immigrant graduates of U.S. high schools are one of the fastest growing groups in higher education today” (p. 24).

Currently, immigrant students remain overlooked in higher education. While the K-12 system has noted this population and various programs and policies have been implemented to help ensure their academic success, they have gone largely unnoticed by postsecondary institutions. Gray, Rolph, and Melamid (1996) found in a study of 14 carefully selected institutions that “campuses collect little or no data on immigrant status” (p. xii) and the assumption among these institutions was that, apart from language issues, immigrants were “doing just fine.” And yet, little data have been collected to either support or challenge these assumptions. Gray et al. (1996) concluded that “needed information includes descriptive statistics about immigrants’ enrollment and retention in college, attitudinal and needs assessment studies, and evaluations of student outcomes and of the effectiveness of remedial and ESL programs” (pp. xv-xvi). A companion study conducted by Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) reiterated the absence of substantive research among this population. They stated that “no study has yet focused on the immigrant youths’ participation and attainment in postsecondary education” (p. 5).

It is clear that higher education needs to study immigrants as a significant student population to determine how they are experiencing college and how postsecondary institutions are aiding or thwarting their academic success. To that

end, this study will examine one piece of that experience, the college classroom climate. Every classroom creates its own climate based on “its psychological context, defined in terms of what the student expects as a consequence of contemplated behavior. Such expectations are based on the interactions between the student and the teacher...the student and his or her peers” (Vasquez, 1988, p. 243) and class content. Previously, college classroom studies have revealed that women and racial/ethnic minorities are often alienated or silenced within the classroom which in turn can significantly impact both their self esteem and academic achievement (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule 1997; Davidson, 1996; Ogbu & Simons 1998; Swaminathan & Alfred, 2001-2002). Although no significant college classroom climate studies have examined immigrants specifically, there seem to be potentially relevant connections between the experiences of researched groups and immigrants since all are minorities and, although their experiences are different, they all must negotiate an often confusing and sometimes alienating college classroom. This research study attempts to examine the connections between immigrant students and other minority groups’ experiences in higher education. The results of the study, the implications of these results, and suggestions for future research are discussed.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories and Related Concepts

The theoretical basis for classroom climate studies springs from two major theoretical bases—social constructivism and critical theory. Social constructivism focuses on the inherently social nature of learning and emerged from the work of Lev Vygotsky. Within this theory, “human activities take place in cultural contexts [and] are mediated by language and other symbolic systems...” (John-Steiner & Mahn as qted. in Alfred, 2003, *Sociocultural Theory*, ¶ 1). This interaction between learners and their environment occurs, according to Rogoff, along three planes—personal, interpersonal or social, and community or institutional. Thus, people make meaning of the world through individual characteristics such as cognition, emotion, behavior and beliefs as they interact with others within a culture that has inherited certain historical and ideological understandings (cited in Alfred, 2003, *Sociocultural Perspective*, ¶ 2). This creation of meaning is not static but rather dynamic and interacts on all planes.

In applying social constructivism to the classroom, the importance of classroom climate studies is apparent. If learning and meaning making occur primarily within a social context then each classroom creates its own learning environment. More specifically, the interaction of all the participants in the class—

the teacher, the student, his or her peers and the material being studied—create a different and distinct learning experience for each person in the room. Thus, using Perez's definition, Alfred (2003, Sociocultural Theory) reiterated that the application of social constructivism in the classroom is to seek “to understand the cultural worlds within which individuals have grown and developed, how individuals interpret who they are in relation to others, and how they have learned to process, interpret, and encode their world” (¶ 2).

Another key theoretical construct that sheds light on the meaning each student attaches to the classroom experience is critical theory. Critical theory is concerned with how power and oppression manifests itself among different groups. This theory assumes that social inequities exist and are perpetuated in cultural and institutional systems. Therefore, “one of the major tasks of a critical analysis is to uncover and expose these power relationships wherein the domination of one group's interests result in the oppression of other groups” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 347). In the past, race/ethnicity, class and gender have been the primary social categories used to understand the dynamics of oppression and domination. But while exposing the dynamics of power and oppression is a start, according to Collins, critical theorists also hope to provide ‘definable concrete projects for social change without which talk of justice, emancipation, and equality becomes hollow rhetoric’ (cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 353).

One major focus of classroom climate studies as they relate to critical theory has been in the understanding and presentation of knowledge or the “canon” and its role in the alienation or silencing of minority groups. Ellsworth (1994) explained:

teachers and educational institutions interpret and structure meanings into curriculums, and they mediate and produce official school knowledge through language, images, stories, and ways of interacting in the classroom. In this sense, curriculums and teaching practices can be understood as acts of representation, and teachers and students can be understood as active participants in the social construction of meaning. (p. 100)

This “construction of meaning” more often than not reproduces existing dynamics of power and oppression. Thus, much discussion has surfaced in higher education about how we define the “canon” of knowledge and whose voices are represented in that canon. In addition, higher education has begun to examine “how” knowledge taught in the classroom privileges the traditional dominant group of white, middle class, males and disadvantages other minority groups.

Related Research

Building upon these core theoretical constructs, several researchers have proposed a number of hypotheses to help understand the classroom experience of marginalized groups. One of the most widely recognized is Ogbu’s cultural-ecological theory of voluntary and involuntary minorities (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

There are two major aspects of the theory.

One...is about the way the minorities are treated or mistreated in education in terms of educational policies, pedagogy, and returns for their investment or school credentials. Ogbu calls this the system. The second...is about the way the minorities perceive and respond to school as a consequence of their treatment....the second set of factors are designated as community forces” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, Cultural-Ecological Theory, ¶ 2).

Not all minorities experience education the same and, according to Ogbu & Simons (1998), voluntary (immigrant) and involuntary (nonimmigrant) minorities experience and interpret their school experiences differently, which, in turn, promote the academic success of one and the failure of the other. Ogbu & Simons (1998) believed that voluntary (immigrant) minorities may suffer some difficulty in school such as language and cultural problems but these difficulties are not long lasting. This is because they either adopt a “tourist” attitude—a willingness to adopt American ways—towards the larger American culture and/or have voluntarily chosen to immigrate to the U.S. Because of these factors, they did not see themselves as oppressed by the larger society. However, involuntary minorities are those who have been “conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, *Involuntary Minorities*, ¶ 1). Thus, they did not willingly enter into American society and interpret their presence as one of coercion. Because of this difference in attitude, “involuntary minorities are less economically successful than voluntary minorities, usually experience greater and more persistent cultural and language difficulties, and do less well in school” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, *Involuntary Minorities*, ¶ 1).

This cultural-ecological theory surfaces in classrooms in terms of attitudes toward learning and the curriculum. According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), voluntary minorities (immigrants) maintained positive attitudes and high academic expectations in the classroom. These students willingly conformed to classroom expectations such as paying attention, doing their homework and learning English.

Involuntary minorities, on the other hand, saw classroom expectations as an attempt to rob them of their identities and the curriculum as an attempt to impose white culture on them. School and the classroom became vehicles of oppression rather than empowerment.

Although Ogbu and Simons (1998) conceded that these two distinctions of students are not mutually exclusive and that some voluntary minorities (immigrants) may encounter experiences similar to involuntary ones, he painted the immigrant classroom experience as largely a positive one. However, this uniformly rosy picture of the immigrant experience has been questioned by others. Citing Bhatnagar's research, Berryman (1983) stated that "immigrant children suffer disadvantages which are not too dissimilar to the disadvantages suffered by indigenous children in inner-city schools. Immigrant children carry the additional burden of being culturally and often racially different, of being part of a visible and/or audible minority" (p. 3). Gibson (1997), too, questions the simplicity of Ogbu's classifications. She conceded that

the quantitative findings do indicate that *in the aggregate* immigrant minorities are more successful in school than involuntary minorities. However, Ogbu's analysis has centered on one particular type of immigrant minority, namely those who have migrated voluntarily to a new country to enhance their economic opportunities and who enter the new country with full rights of permanent residence, and he has given less attention to how well his model pertains to other types of immigrants. Although a number of recent U.S. studies indicate that school success patterns for the children of refugees, undocumented aliens, and temporary workers may be similar to those of economic immigrants, there is also evidence of a great variability in the school performance of immigrant students. (pp. 432-433)

Thus, understanding the immigrant student classroom experience as a homogenous one that is generally positive and academically rewarding is perhaps too simplistic.

Although similar to Ogbu & Simons, Cummins (1993) offered another frame by which to understand the immigrant student classroom experience, particularly those who are language minorities. "The central tenet of the framework is that students from 'dominated' societal groups are 'empowered' or 'disabled' as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools" (p. 104). This "empowering" or "disabling" is demonstrated through (a) the degree that the student's language and culture are incorporated into school programs (b) the degree to which minority community participation is encouraged and incorporated into the student's education (c) the degree to which teaching pedagogy promotes students to use their first language in generating knowledge, and (d) the degree to which professional educators in their assessment of these students are advocates (p. 104).

While Cummins (1993) presents this framework in relation to K-12 education, it has applicability for postsecondary classrooms as well. In order to empower minority language immigrants, educators need to display a positive and inclusive attitude towards the student's home language and culture and help create a classroom dynamic which encourages genuine dialogue between the student and the teacher. As Cummins stated, "widespread school failure does not occur in minority groups that are positively oriented towards both their own and the dominant culture, that do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and that are not alienated from their own cultural values" (p. 105).

Belenky et al. (1997) presented another possible frame from which to understand the immigrant's classroom experience. In their interviews of 135 women, they uncovered the varying interpretations women had of their academic or parenting classes. These women's understandings of themselves within the classroom displayed a range of five different ways of knowing: silence, received knowledge, subjective knowing, procedural knowledge and finally constructed knowledge. Silence can be equated with a state of disempowerment. It is a "position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority. [They are passive, feel incompetent and are defined by others.]" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 146). The final stage, constructed knowledge, can be equated with full empowerment. Women at this stage "view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. [This stage is characterized by the development of an authentic voice.] (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 147).

This framework holds promise for understanding the immigrant student's classroom experience since it seems that, for many, silence is a tangible experience. Kiang (1992) found that many immigrant students feel embarrassed by their English ability and as a result maintain silence. Wong (1987) echoed this reality in that many Asian immigrants "are rewarded for sitting quietly in the back of the classroom, making no trouble for anybody, demanding no attention" (p. 215). While this silence can be interpreted as disempowering for these students, Swaminathan and Alfred (2001-2002) stress that silence is a necessary part because during this "period,

students are learning skills of sorting out what is relevant in classroom discussions, figuring out how to transition to other forms of epistemology, learning the codes of how to disagree and challenge existing knowledge, and learning how to move away from their own prior schooling socialization” (p. 31).

Research Studies on College Classroom Climate

Since few studies have focused exclusively on immigrant college students, the current understanding about college classroom climate must also be drawn from similar research done in connections with other minorities. The climate of a classroom develops from the interaction of the teacher and students, the student themselves and the material studied and pedagogy used. Each of these aspects will be examined separately. The climate of the classroom is important because, according to Vasquez, (1988) “studies have found that student perceptions of the classroom environment can have a direct impact not only on achievement of students, but also on their personal-social behaviors” (p. 243).

Teacher/Student Interactions

Research done into teacher/student interactions reveals several important elements in creating a positive classroom environment. First, most research reveals that teachers should hold high academic expectations toward their students. Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen and Allen (1999) reported that African American students reported feelings of discrimination in the classroom, (i.e., a negative classroom climate, when the faculty held lower academic expectations towards them). “It is generally believed that high expectations are communicated to the student through

different types of cues, verbal and nonverbal, and the student's performance is consequently affected" (Vasquez, 1988, p. 244). In support of this, Trujillo (1986) found in his observation-based classroom study of interactions between professors and minority and non-minority students that "non-minority students were asked significantly more complex questions by professors, were pushed more to better their responses to professors' questions, and received greater amounts of time during the professors' response to their questions than did minority students" (p. 639). Another aspect related to the time professors were willing to invest in their minority students surfaced in Nettles study in 1991 which found that "African-Americans were likely to report higher GPA's when they reported higher levels of out-of-class contact with faculty..." (Hurtado et al., 1999).

Research also indicates that teachers can create a positive or negative classroom environment by how they respond to a student's culture and language. In Davidson's (1996) 2 year ethnographic study of racial/ethnic minority high school students, teachers were viewed positively who were "explicitly supportive of beliefs and values integral to [the] pro-academic identity" of the student (p. 79). Marbella, a Mexican immigrant, explained about a specific teacher:

Well, he's a good person. He's on good terms with us. He tells us that he would perhaps like to be Mexican because, well we want to study, we want to be someone in this country. (p. 79)

Conversely, by ignoring or glossing over immigrant student's culture and language, instructors can make these students feel "invisible." Swaminathan and Alfred (2001-2002) found in interviews with immigrant students "that instructors, in their

eagerness to head off any possible conflict in the classroom, are guilty of glossing over differences within immigrant groups and between immigrants and nonimmigrants. [Immigrant students] expressed concerns about being rendered invisible through the erasure of difference” (p. 30).

Instructor support and understanding also needs to transfer to the student’s anxiety towards speaking English. Alfred (2003), Kiang (1992) and Pappamihiel (2002) found that teachers’ behavior could exacerbate this anxiety and thus negatively impact the classroom environment. Kiang found that when his student subjects “tr[ie]d to participate, their teachers ma[de] them repeat themselves or d[idn’t] take their points seriously, so they [chose] to withdraw instead” (p. 105). At the same time, Kiang also found that teacher sensitivity toward English needs can help create a positive classroom climate. Kiang found Asian immigrant students responded positively to classes in which teachers wrote as much information as possible on the board and used videotapes to help illustrate the content of lectures (p. 105).

Alfred (2003), in her phenomenological study of anglophone Caribbean immigrant women, perhaps best demonstrates the need for cultural and linguistic understanding. She found that within the postsecondary classroom, “some experienced marginality, alienation, and isolation, which they attributed partly to their Caribbean culture, their language, and their racioethnic identity. Their marginality also resulted from the behavior of faculty and students who initially

ignored them in discourse communities and were not sensitive to cultural differences.”

Student/Student Interactions

Fellow students can also have a tremendous influence on how an immigrant student experiences the classroom. As Hurtado et al. (1999) state, “peer groups in college are very influential and are responsible for much of the socialization and learning that occurs in the college and university environment.” Although no studies could be located that looked at this as a central question of inquiry in regard to classroom climate, the importance of student/student relations in the classroom surfaced in other studies. As mentioned earlier, Alfred (2003) in her study of anglophone Caribbean immigrant women found that fellow students made the college classroom a chilly one.

Although the participants were allowed into the academic culture, they did not feel welcome upon entry. This was partly compounded by the position of silence that they occupied within the higher education classroom. Most of them agreed that speaking in class was one of the greatest challenges that they faced in the American classroom....the earlier ridicule they encountered from the American public as a result of their Caribbean accents, in conjunction with the cold, exclusive environment where they felt ignored by faculty and peers, made it particularly difficult for them to verbally demonstrate their knowledge. (¶ 37)

Pappamihiel (2002) similarly reported that peers could directly impact both the level of comfort and participation of immigrant students in the classroom. In a study of 178 Mexican-born middle school students Pappamihiel found higher levels of anxiety when these students were put in mainstream classes. Below is excerpt from one of the interviews conducted.

RESEARCHER: Are you more nervous in ESL or regular (mainstream) classes?

PARTICIPANT A: Regular...because I feel like when I say something the other students are going to laugh at me.

RESEARCHER: Are you more nervous in ESL or regular classes?

PARTICIPANT B: In the regular classes...the ones who know English and Spanish get impatient. They don't want to work with them (ELLs) because they don't know how to do it.

RESEARCHER: Why don't you like talking with them (non-ELLs)?

PARTICIPANT D: Because they know more English than me, and if I say something wrong, they laugh. (p. 339-340)

It is clear from both of these studies that an immigrant student's peers who do not respect the culture and language issues of that student can adversely affect the climate and learning of the classroom.

Another factor which may impact the climate of a college classroom is the number of immigrant students within it. Kanter (1977) stated that persons who are significantly underrepresented within a group are identified as tokens and "are often treated as representatives of their category, as symbols rather than individuals" (p. 966). Evidence from her studies suggest that token individuals "may undergo a great deal of personal stress and may need to expend extra energy to maintain a satisfactory relationship" (p. 987) in their environment. This tokenism can contribute to the student feeling alone, isolated and marginalized. However, Hurtado (1994) cautioned that the numbers of underrepresented students not be so large as to create a racist backlash against them. Just what percentage of immigrant students would help create a positive classroom climate is unclear. Yet, the importance of

positive peer relations is clear. Research indicates that “dissatisfaction with the social and emotional environment is...a frequently cited reason for minority students leaving college and for poor performance” (Richardson & Skinner, 1992, p. 36).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In terms of curriculum, research indicates that course materials which allow for the inclusion and/or exploration of the immigrant students’ cultural or racial identity positively contributes to the classroom environment. In Davidson’s (1996, p. 81) ethnographic study of racial/ethnic high school students, Marbella, a Mexican immigrant student, clearly indicated that her favorite class was one in which issues of American racism and the norms and values of American society were explicitly discussed. In addition, this was the class where Marbella was given the opportunity to explore her and others’ heritage. Kiang (1992) also found that the addition of Asian American Studies courses had a positive effect on Asian American immigrant students because it allows them to become “integrated academically and socially” (p. 104). Students commented that in the Asian American studies classes that they felt a greater level of respect and in turn participated and learned more (Kiang, 1992, p. 105). Harklau (1999) also found that a multicultural curriculum positively contributed to learning because “multicultural texts provided students [in her case study] with a social space within the institution where they could engage in explorations of ethnicity that they found interesting and productive in their own identity work” (p. 264).

While a multicultural curriculum can support a positive classroom climate for immigrants it can also exacerbate cultural differences or inaccurately portray the immigrant's culture. In her year-long ethnographic study of immigrant students in EOP and ESL programs, Harklau (1999) discovered that the curriculum can often reinforce stereotypes of difference. By examining the curriculum used, Harklau noted that the material "positioned students' cultural backgrounds as deviance from a seemingly culture-neutral, unmarked white professional class norm and linked multiculturalism with remediation" (p. 263) or "carried a representation of neatly partitioned cultural dualism between the USA and 'your country'" (p. 271). In other words, the curriculum potentially further marginalized immigrant students and/or failed to recognize their culture as a part of the larger American culture.

Besides the curriculum, classroom pedagogy also can impact classroom climate. Classroom pedagogy reveals a variety of cultural beliefs and values about the teacher /student relationship, student/student relationship and the understanding of knowledge and learning. Both Hurtado et al. (1999) and Vasquez (1988) advocated a cooperative rather than competitive learning environment for minority students. This often means a large amount of group directed work with the teacher's role as one of facilitator. In fact, Treisman's (1992) redesign of college calculus classes to one which used collaborative and cooperative learning techniques led to dramatic academic improvements among minority students. However, while this might aid the classroom climate for minorities, Alfred's research with anglophone Caribbean women seems to cloud these findings.

During the women's participation in American educational systems, they were both thrilled and challenged by the way learning was facilitated in the classroom. Although they found value in the notion of learning in collaboration, the cocreation of knowledge, and in their own construction and validation of knowledge, they also struggled with the need for more emphasis on teacher-directed instruction and content mastery. (Alfred, 2003, ¶ 45)

At the same time they struggled with collaborative learning, the women in Alfred's study also struggled with group work. One participant, Rita, stated:

Doing group work and participating in group discussions were not things I enjoyed as a student. In fact, I hated it. I was sometimes the only Black person in my group and always the only foreigner. I felt very much like an outsider. (Alfred, ¶ 47)

What is apparent here is that immigrants often bring very different notions of learning to the classroom and these notions may be in conflict with the practices which have proven effective with other minorities.

Besides pedagogy, immigrants may also differ in their understanding and approach to knowledge. Harklau (1998) stated that

one widely acknowledged goal of a U.S. college education is to develop students' 'intellectual virtues' (e.g. creativity, problem-solving ability, tolerance of ambiguity, and ability to think critically). Such virtues often are presented as self-evident, culturally neutral, and superior modes of thought and logic. There is considerable evidence, however, that cultures differentially value modes of manipulating knowledge and displaying understanding. (¶ 21)

Thus immigrant students may find the college classroom disorienting and alienating.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Study Design

This qualitative study was exploratory in nature for two reasons. First, because of the small number of participants and the researcher's inability to purposefully sample those who participated, the study can only be exploratory. A second critical reason that this study was exploratory was because of the limited study of this population in higher education. "One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory; not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to build a picture based on their ideas" (Creswell, 1994, p. 21). Qualitative research acknowledges that reality is subjective and multiple among the participants in the study and the researcher realizes that these experiences as well as her own are laden with values and biases (p. 5).

The primary methods for data collection were through a freshman entrance survey (see Appendix A), focus groups and in-depth individual interviews. The survey provided primarily demographic and descriptive data on the participants as stated above. The interview methods were primarily exploratory in nature—to try to uncover how an immigrant student experiences the climate of higher education

classrooms—and open-ended in nature. Using interviewing techniques was appropriate because

if the researcher is interested...in what it is like for students to be in the classroom, what their experience is, and what meaning they make of that understanding—then it seems...that interviewing, in most cases, may be the best avenue of inquiry (Seidman, 1998, p. 5).

Both types of interviews—focus groups and individual interviews—offered different benefits and limitations and by employing both, the researcher hoped to maximize the strengths and mitigate the weaknesses of each.

For example, there are several benefits to focus groups. First by the nature of interviewing a group, the researcher is able to gather a wider range of voices and perspectives and thus achieve a wider voice. In addition, the ability of research subjects to be represented collectively might lessen the power differential between the researcher and the subjects thus reducing their inhibitions about participating. Merton, Fiske, & Kendall (1990) echoed this sentiment by stating that “the group interview utilizes the same kinds of social mechanisms for releasing the inhibitions of individuals who are otherwise reluctant to disclose what are for them intimately private matters” (p. 141-142). As each individual shares their personal experience it releases others to share perhaps even more personal feelings and thoughts because a climate of safety has been established. In addition to lessening inhibitions, focus groups also help group members activate forgotten details about their experience through dialogue with others (p. 146) which, in turn, can make the data richer and more complex.

But just as there are advantages to focus groups, there are also disadvantages. Merton et al. (1990) raised several of these potential weaknesses. First, because of the social nature of focus groups, it is relatively easy for the interview to veer off task into irrelevant and unnecessary conversations as focus group members interact with each other. This results in a loss of precious interview time for the researcher and as well poses a challenge for him/her to get the interview back on task. A “leader effect” might also occur where group members who are more articulate and outgoing lead the group’s ideas into a kind of “groupthink.” In this case, the focus group can actually reduce the variety of perspectives rather than expand them. Similarly, individuals can become silent in the group because they are intimidated by those they perceive to be more articulate and capable. The final danger raised by Merton et al. (1990) is that “an excessive multiplicity of topics may be advanced in the group interview with the result that no one of these is explored in substantial detail” (p. 150).

Similarly, in-depth interviews also offer advantages and disadvantages for data collection which often mirror, in reverse, those presented by focus groups. First, because the interview is limited to one person, the researcher will not be able to gain a broad perspective of the phenomenon. In addition, due to the more personal nature of the one-on-one interview, research subjects may feel intimidated because of the power differential between themselves and the researcher. This power differential can be exacerbated through differences in race and ethnicity, gender,

class, linguistic differences, and age (Seidman, 1998) and could potentially limit both the nature and amount of data gathered in the interview.

However, if these issues of power are dealt with successfully, the individual interview can yield even richer data than the focus group.

In the private interview, [the research subject] may report more of himself, be readier to provide that information which enables the inquirer to reconstruct the personal context of his response; in the group interview, he may adapt to the presence of several others by largely confining himself to reports of his response, telling less of the contexts which help account for his more or less distinctive response" (Merton et al., 1990, p. 152).

It is clear that the individual interview can allow the researcher to explore the experience of the participant with more depth because the researcher can maximize opportunities to explore relevant experiences and reflections as they emerge in the course of the interview. However, this exploration cannot be exhaustive because of the necessity to limit the length of each interview. Seidman (1998) best sums up the motivation and value behind in-depth interviewing.

As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Finally, it is deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' stories" (pp.7-8).

Used together in this study, focus groups and in-depth interviews provided both a broader context as well as individual voice to the experience of the interviewees.

Research Questions

These qualitative research methods of focus groups and interviews were the main data gathering techniques used to uncover the sociocultural nature of learning. If learning involves all participants in the room—student, teacher, peers, and

material—then the learning of a student can be thwarted if a student does not feel that he/she is valued and respected. A main cause for this marginalization in the classroom is because schools mirror a larger society in which some groups have power and respect and others do not. As Harklau (1999) reiterated “schools are one of the main institutional sites where societal discourses regarding ethnic diversity, identity, and social position are imposed, adapted, and resisted” (p. 257).

Educational researchers have recognized both the sociocultural nature of learning and social power dynamics in learning and have begun to study how the college classroom environment impacts racial/ethnic minorities and women, and to some degree, the poor. But another group, immigrants, has also historically been oppressed and yet little attention has been given to understanding their classroom experience. This lack of attention stems from assumptions that immigrants are “doing just fine.” It is true that immigrant students have a higher persistence rate in school than native students, particularly minorities. But, academic persistence is different from academic success or comfort. With these thoughts in mind, the current research study explored how immigrant students’ are experiencing the climate of higher education and what contributes to that perception. The specific factors that were examined in light of this question are the teacher/student relationship, the student/peer relationship and the curriculum/pedagogy used as well as the immigrants students’ perceived English proficiency.

The research questions were:

How are immigrant students experiencing the climate of higher education classrooms?

More specifically, how does the immigrant's perception of the student/teacher relationship, student/peer relationships, class curriculum/pedagogy and his/her individual English proficiency influence this perception of classroom climate?

Subjects

The subjects of this study were drawn from students attending Portland State University (PSU). PSU is an urban university with a diverse population of over 20,000 students located in Portland, Oregon. It has traditionally been an open-access university. According to Portland State's mission, the university is "committed to providing access and opportunity to learners from regional, national, and international communities in their pursuit of lifelong learning and diverse educational goals." In addition, "PSU values diversity and fosters a climate of mutual respect and reflection that supports different beliefs and points of view and the open exchange of ideas." (<http://www.pdx.edu/mission.html>)

The participants were returning traditional age (18-21) sophomore students at PSU who had successfully completed their freshman year as well as the required yearlong Freshman general education class. This year-long class is traditionally a small interactive class of approximately 35 students which uses an interdisciplinary

curriculum. The goals of the course are to teach critical thinking, communication skills, diversity and social ethics and responsibility.

Several rationales existed for drawing from this population. First, the researcher had ready access to this population through a freshman entering survey. Second, by choosing sophomores, these students would have gathered enough classroom experience to be able to talk about college classroom climate as well as taken enough classes to demonstrate a specific level of academic achievement. Thirdly, because Portland State University consists of a fairly diverse number of students in terms of race and ethnicity as well as immigrant groups, it was likely that finding appropriate participants would not be difficult.

Initially, the study planned to conduct focus groups with 30 students and from those 30 purposefully select 4 from each group for individual interviews. This did not seem an unrealistic number because, based on previous freshman survey numbers, an average freshman entering class is usually around 1000 students with approximately 180 immigrant students within this population. Unfortunately, the immigrant student numbers were unusually low for the particular year that was used for the study. Initially, 54 students were identified as eligible and invited to take part in the study. Of those 54, ten initial mailings to join the study were returned undeliverable so only 44 students received an invitation to participate in the study. The gender breakdown of these 44 students was 15 male and 29 female. Thus, 34% of the potential participants were male and 66% were female. The racial/ethnic breakdown of those invited to be part of the study are shown in Table 1:

Table 1

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Invited Research Participants

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Asian	26	59%
Black	2	5%
Hispanic	4	9%
White	12	27%
Total	44	100%

Of the 44 students invited to participate, only 12 students agreed to be part of both the focus groups and the individual interviews. This was after two separate mailings as well as e-mail reminders. Therefore, because of the small numbers, the researcher was not able to use purposeful sampling in terms of sex, race/ethnicity, linguistic background, academic achievement or major choice but rather had to use those who had agreed to participate in the study. More females, 10, than males, 2, chose to participate in the study. Thus, 83% of study population was female as opposed to 17% male. In comparison to those invited to participate in the study, Whites were under represented by 19 %, Blacks were over represented by 4% and Hispanics and Asians were over represented by 8%. The racial/ethnic breakdown of the participants are shown in Table 2:

Table 2

Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Research Participants

RACE/ETHNICITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Asian	8	67%
Black	1	8%
Hispanic	2	17%
White	1	8%
Total	12	100%

Even though the gender and racial/ethnic breakdown was not an ideal sampling from those who were invited to participate in the study, the participants do reflect a fairly diverse racial/ethnic pool.

In addition to being somewhat diverse ethnically, the participants in the study displayed diverse educational and immigration backgrounds as well as English fluency levels by migrating at very different ages and entering the American K-12 system at the both elementary and secondary levels. In order to maintain their confidentiality, each participant was given a new name to protect their identity. The researcher chose mostly American sounding pseudonyms for the participants because for the majority of the students, the real name they chose to be identified by was American sounding rather than from their ethnic/cultural background. This is particularly interesting to note in terms of the importance of personal names and cultural and ethnic identity. Of the eight Asian participants in the study, Bill, Alice and Betty were ethnic Chinese either from mainland China or Hong Kong. Bill came to the U.S. at age 15 and entered the K-12 system in the 9th grade. Alice came at age

12 and entered the 6th grade. Betty came when 10 and started in 5th grade. Two other Asian participants, Candy and Tara are originally from Vietnam. Candy came at age 16 and entered highschool in the 9th grade. Tara also came at 16 but entered the K-12 system in the 11th grade. Yali, another Asian participant, emigrated from Cambodia at 12 years of age and entered the 8th grade. Sarah too originally came from Sri Lanka at 12 years of age and she entered the American school system in the 8th grade. The final Asian participant was Harriet from Korea who immigrated at age 3 and entered the K-12 system in 1st grade. The two Hispanic participants in the study, Alina and Mary came from Mexico and Guatemala respectively. Mary came at the age of 2 ½ and entered kindergarten. Alina's age of immigration and entrance into American schools was not available although in her interview she revealed that she did attend middle school in the United States. The one Black participant, Karen, emigrated from Kenya at age 15 and entered the 10th grade. Finally, the one White participant, Eric, from Bosnia, came at age 10 and entered 7th grade. The following table summarizes the key demographics of each participant in the study.

Table 3

Demographic Information on Research Subjects

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Language Spoken at Home	How Long in the U.S.	Gender	Age	Major
Alice	China	Mandarin	7 years	Female	20	Accounting
Alina	Mexico	Spanish	n/a	Female	19	Business Admin/ French
Betty	China	Mandarin	17 years	Female	19	Accounting
Bill	China	Cantonese	6 years	Male	21	Computer Science
Candy	Vietnam	Vietnamese	7 years	Female	23	General Science
Eric	Bosnia	Bosnian	10 years	Male	20	Undecided
Harriet	South Korea	Korean	17 years	Female	20	Biology
Karen	Kenya	Kenyan	5 years	Female	20	Business/Nur sing
Mary	Guatemala	Spanish	17 ½ years	Female	20	Education
Sarah	Sri Lanka	Sri Lankan	7 years	Female	19	Computer Engineering
Tara	Vietnam	Vietnamese	4 years	Female	20	Business
Yali	Cambodia	Cambodian	8 years	Female	20	Biology

It is important note that there was a wide range of English fluency among the participants. Betty, Harriet, Yali, Alina, Mary, Karen and Eric had nativelylike fluency in English. However, Bill, Alice, Tara, Candy and Sarah displayed varying degrees of accents and in addition, Bill, Alice, and Candy seemed to also struggle with English comprehension from time to time. Because the numbers of the participants in the study was so few, extra care was taken to keep their identity confidential. Besides changing their names, all information collected from them is locked in a private cabinet.

Each of the participants in the three focus groups in the study were to be drawn respectively from students with high (3.0-4.0), middle (2.0-2.99) and low (1.0-1.99) GPAs in order to see if classroom climate perception differed among students with different academic performance. The students' GPAs were accessed through using the university's online academic database (i.e., banner). However, once again, because of the low number of participants, a purposeful sampling from each of these GPA levels was not possible. Eight of the participants GPAs were high (3.0-4.0) and four of the participants GPAs were middle (2.0-2.99). No participants GPAs fell in the low category. Thus, the participants were, according to their grade point averages, performing well academically and those students' voices that were struggling academically were not represented. Also, because of scheduling conflicts amongst the students, those participants with similar GPAs could not be grouped together in focus groups and therefore, the researcher was not able to determine if classroom climate perceptions differed according to the range of GPAs represented.

Although the number of participants was small enough that two focus groups could have been conducted instead of three, again, due to primarily scheduling conflicts among the students, three different times needed to be offered in order for all 12 participants to attend the focus groups.

In addition, because of the limited participation in the study, the researcher was also not able to purposefully choose the academic majors represented in the study. Five of the participants were majoring in the hard sciences with most planning some type of medical career. Six of the participants were majoring in the social sciences with most pursuing some type of business degree. Finally, only one participant was a liberal arts major, pursuing a degree in foreign languages and literature. Thus, while the participants in the study show a fairly diverse selection in terms of race/ethnicity as well as immigration and educational background, the study was not able to balance the participants on the basis of gender, GPA or major. The result was that the participants were heavily female, academically successful and primarily science and social science majors. This occurred because the initial pool of potential participants for the study was projected to be approximately 100 based on previous years' numbers but, due to unforeseen reasons, was only 44 the particular year this study was done. In addition, of the potential pool of 44, the researcher sent invitation mailings twice and an e-mail once but only the above twelve responded to the invitation to be part of the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The possible research participants were identified through the entering Freshman Survey (Appendix A) and once they were identified, they were contacted through the mail and asked to participate in the study. Because of the inevitability of non or no responses, the researcher sent these requests to as many students as fit the research participant profile. This mailing included an introductory letter, a stamped self addressed return letter, and a human subject consent form which addressed the following criteria:

- Their right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time.
- The central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection.
- Comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents.
- A statement about known risks associated with participation in the study.
- The expected benefits to accrue to the participants in the study.
- A place for them to sign and date the form (Creswell, 1998, pp. 115-116).

See Appendix B for a sample of the human consent form and the accompanying letter. Special care was given to protect the identity of the participants and keep their identities anonymous by using pseudonyms. Only the researcher had access to the data gathered and all research materials were kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. Specific emphasis was given in the initial mailing to provide an incentive for

participation through offering a \$25 gift card from the school bookstore for participation in both the focus groups and the interviews (a \$50 value).

Once the subjects agreed to participate in the study, three separate focus groups from 3 to 6 students were conducted. As stated earlier, because the students' schedules, it was impossible to organize the focus groups according to GPA and so the researcher was not able to ascertain if collective perceptions of classroom climate differed according to measured academic achievement. The main purpose of the focus groups was to address the initial research question: How are immigrant students experiencing the climate of higher education classrooms? This larger research question was explored in light of the specific areas raised in the literature review of teacher/student, student/student, curriculum and pedagogy as well as English language issues. These areas were explored and discussed through using three hypothetical classroom scenarios which mirrored the existing literature in the above areas. Using hypothetical scenarios allowed the students to talk about their perception of classroom climate without feeling personally vulnerable. In order to ensure that the scenarios were both understandable and addressed the necessary areas of classroom climate, the researcher piloted the hypothetical scenarios with three immigrant students known to her and made necessary changes based on their feedback prior to conducting the focus groups. (See Appendix C.)

According to Merton et al. (1990), focus groups of 10 to 12 are ideal because they are large enough to provide good coverage of a topic but small enough to allow adequate participation for all subjects (p. 137). However, again, because of the small

number of participants and scheduling issues, it seemed better to conduct three different focus groups ranging from 3 to 6 students rather than one large group of 12. This way, the researcher could not only triangulate the data but also create a smaller and more intimate focus group. The focus groups were approximately one hour in length—in accordance with existing literature on focus groups—and were held in a small conference room on campus which was both private and non-intimidating. Keeping the location to the campus ensured that all students would easily be able to attend. The researcher conducted the focus groups around a small table so as to minimize power dynamics and used a high quality tape recorder to record the responses of the group. Because of the purpose behind the focus group, the questions connected to the scenarios were open-ended in nature. As Seidman (1998) stressed, “the truly effective question flows from an interviewer’s concentrated listening, engaged interest in what is being said, and purpose in moving forward” (p. 77). Interviews by nature are dynamic and therefore the initial focus group questions served primarily as a guide.

Once the focus groups were completed, the researcher transcribed the data electronically using a transcriber. Careful attention was given to keeping the identity of the students anonymous and confidential. Once transcribed, the data were read initially to gain an overall understanding of how immigrant students were experiencing the classroom and how this possibly was impacting their academic success. The researcher also paid attention to other emerging factors which seemed to contribute to differing classroom climate perceptions. Once a general

understanding was gained, the researcher then began to organize the data into meaningful categories. This mirrored Creswell's (1998) idea of "horizontalization" of the data. According to him, "the researcher... finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topics, lists out these significant statements...and treats each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements" (p. 147). From these statements, categories and meaningful units emerged.

The emergent categories derived from the focus groups served as a basis for developing in-depth questions for the one-on-one interviews. While the researcher hoped the data from the focus groups would help develop more in-depth individual interview questions in light of the areas already identified by the research— student/teacher relationship, student/peer relationships, class curriculum/pedagogy and the student's individual English proficiency—new and unforeseen questions surfaced as well. In order to explore these areas in more depth, each student was asked to participate in an additional half-hour to 45 minute interview to try to gain a more in-depth understanding of who they are and their specific classroom climate experience. See Appendix D for the individual interview questions used. As with the focus groups, the interview questions used were open-ended so that the interview could remain free flowing. These interviews were conducted at the same location as the focus groups, a small comfortable private conference room on campus. That way, the student was both familiar with the setting as well as the location, thus potentially lowering their anxiety. Individually interviewing each of the 12 students allowed the

researcher to gain a more in depth perspective on their experience. Each interview was recorded, transcribed and analyzed in the same manner as the focus groups with special attention paid to maintaining the confidentiality of the participants.

The researcher's reason for conducting the focus groups prior to the in-depth interviews was twofold. By conducting the focus groups first, the researcher hoped to minimize the possible intimidation that students may feel by the researcher. Subsequently, when students were contacted to participate in an in-depth interview, they would already have met the interviewer and hopefully would feel more comfortable in participating in a private interview. In addition, the focus groups allowed the researcher to gain a broad understanding of the phenomenon which then conceptually drove the more focused individual interviews, thus allowing the interviews to yield richer data.

By using both focus groups and individual interviews, the variation in the collection of information helped ensure that the data were both reputable and accurate. Additionally, the researcher allowed the interviewees to read the findings and make any corrections or address any inaccuracies which were necessary. Ongoing review by the researcher's doctoral advisor also provided "an external check of the research process" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). And finally, clarification of researcher bias from the outset of the study allows any reader to understand the biases, prejudices and orientations which may have impacted the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 1998. pp. 201-202). All these measures helped ensure the quality and accuracy of the study.

The time line for gathering, interpreting and writing the data was as follows:

- Fall Term 2005: Human Subjects Approval
 Identification of Potential Research Participants
 Initial Mailing to Potential Participants
- Winter Term 2006: Second Mailing to Potential Participants
 Analysis of Demographic/Descriptive Data of Research
 Participants
 Focus Groups
 Transcription and Analysis of Data from Focus Groups
- Spring Term 2006: In-Depth Interviews
 Transcription and Analysis of Data from In-Depth Interviews
- Summer Term 2006 Initial Results/Interpretations Written
- Fall Term 2006 Overall Results/Interpretations Written

However, due to unforeseen family circumstances, the writing of the overall results and interpretations took longer than originally planned.

Limitations of the Study

One significant limitation to the study is the biases and potential prejudices I, as the researcher, bring to the study itself. Because I believe so strongly that these immigrant students are encountering challenges in their college experience, I needed to exercise caution in not fabricating those challenges to support my own preconceptions. In addition, I hold various positions of power which may have acted

as an impediment to immigrant students fully disclosing their experiences. First, I am white and the majority of my research subjects were members of a racial or ethnic minority group. In addition, my position as a middle class and middle-aged teaching professional at Portland State University may have also served to distance me from my subjects. I also have never had to live in a country for an extended period of time that required me to learn a second language fluently and therefore, I do not intimately know the frustrations encountered by trying to function in another language. I am also not an immigrant and therefore have not experienced first hand the challenges that go along with assimilating permanently into a society.

While I have not experienced these immigrant challenges specifically, I have experienced them indirectly. My mother is an immigrant and I saw first hand as a child the challenges she encountered in being “different.” I also have lived overseas in a variety of countries and have tasted what it feels like to be “the other” not only linguistically but also racially. I also can empathize with the immigrant experience because, for many years, I taught immigrant students and experienced through them the hurdles they encountered at school as well as in larger society.

Another possible limitation to the study was some of the participants’ limited English proficiency. Since I conducted both the focus groups and in-depth interviews in English and I am not proficient in the variety of second languages that were represented, the study may be limited because all participants may have not been able to communicate their ideas fully and deeply. While translators could have been used, because of the wide variety of first languages represented in the study, it was

not feasible or practical. In addition, translation itself is fraught with accuracy problems as well. Another related limitation to English proficiency is cross-cultural misunderstandings. These students may conceptualize their experience through a different cultural lens than mine and thus make it difficult for me to truly understand their experiences.

Another limitation is the narrow focus of the study and the small number of participants. Because this study was conducted at only one university, it can not be broadly generalized to second language immigrant populations in all higher education settings. Also, it is possible that the limited number of subject who took part in the study may not reflect an adequately broad cross-section of sex, race/ethnicity, language, academic achievement and student majors. Additionally, this study only examined students who had completed their freshman year. Thus, the study was not able to determine if immigrant students' perception towards the climate of the higher education classroom changes or how they themselves change within their college experience. In addition, it was not able to understand the experiences of those students who leave prior to completing their freshman year. Finally, this study did not examine how immigrants' perceptions of classroom climate compared with native students and therefore was not be able to determine if immigrant student perceptions of classroom climate is different from native students.

Conclusion

In an attempt to understand how immigrant students are experiencing the college classroom environment, an exploratory qualitative study was conducted

wherein twelve students participated in three focus groups and individual interviews. These methods of data collection were used because the researcher believed that by using both focus groups and interviews the strengths of each could be maximized and the weaknesses of each lessened. In addition, by gathering data from multiple settings, triangulation of the information would enable a more accurate interpretation of the data. Because the research was conducted at only one university and the number of participants was small and not completely representative of those invited to participate, the study needed to be exploratory in nature and any conclusions drawn must be tentative in nature. Although every attempt was made to have a representative sample of those research subjects eligible to participate in the study, it was not possible due to lack of participation. Those who did participate were heavily female, racial minorities, academically successful and primarily science or social science majors. Thus, the voices of white immigrants, liberal arts majors and academically struggling students are not well represented in this study.

CHAPTER IV

DATA AND ANALYSIS

After the researcher finished transcribing, codifying, and analyzing the data yielded from the focus groups and individual interviews, immigrant students' experiences yielded complex and contradicting data. In order to make sense of this data, the following discussion is organized in the same categories presented earlier except that curriculum and pedagogy are made separate from one another. Those categories once again are student/professor, student/student, student/curriculum and student/classroom pedagogy. While the researcher has tried to represent the voices of all the students equally, some students, particularly Bill and Alice, because of limited English abilities were not as verbal as the other participants and the researcher, during both the focus groups and individual interviews, often needed to ask for additional information and clarification in order to solicit more ideas. Even so, their voices are not as prolific as the other students.

Student/Professor Interaction

Focus Group Findings on Student/Professor Relationship

Initially it seemed that immigrant students' want to maintain a certain distance and anonymity from their professors. The overwhelming response to

Scenario I in the focus groups was that 10 of the 12 students identified with Vinh who felt comfortable that the professor largely ignored him in the class and didn't ask him for his perspective on the Vietnam War. Students gave several reasons for wanting to remain silent in the class and most of these were connected to their cultural and linguistic identities.

Tokenism. For several, they did not feel qualified or comfortable speaking on behalf of their cultural group. Betty, originally from China, stated that "When we're talking about...my own culture which I'm familiar with...I don't want to tell things that are wrong from my own experience....Sometimes I don't like talking about it." Yali, a Cambodian immigrant, who identified with both Tran and Vinh, hypothetical characters from the first focus group scenario, shared her discomfort with the focus group.

Yali: "I'd also be like Vinh if she [the professor] kept questioning me. I had a teacher, an English teacher in high school, anytime when she talked about September 11th, for example, we had an Arab in our class and she kept asking him. It was kind of like....okay? okay? It wasn't an attack but she kept on referring to him and saying 'What do you think about this and this point?' As if he could explain everything and she did the same thing to me...."

Researcher: So, let me ask, are you saying that if you feel like a professor is asking you to speak for everyone within your group...

Yali: Yeah, just...

Researcher: That would make you really uncomfortable?

Yali: Yeah

Researcher: Because you feel like you can't speak for your group? Is that what you're saying?

Yali: Yeah...I'm like the result of the war but I don't know exactly what went on and why it happened. So, I can't really say....but just my input on how it affected me.

Cultural separation and disenfranchisement. Not only did students not want to be tokens for their group's cultural experience, but some intimated that they felt that neither the professor nor the students would care to learn about or understand their experience. Eric, a Bosnian immigrant who also identified with both hypothetical characters from scenario one, stated "I think that I see both points of view because one of this is...sometimes you just don't want to be called on.....What you tell them—the class—they are not going to care about even if you do present your opinion." Betty, a Chinese immigrant, echoed his sentiment. She stated that "It's not like I don't want to share sometimes [but] maybe people don't want to know about your experience." Candy, from Vietnam, related a time when she said nothing in class because she felt that her perspective wouldn't be understood by either the professor or her fellow students.

Candy: ...I got that question from my professor because he's a history major when I came into [the] class. He [told] something wrong about the history of the Vietnamese War in America and I thought I know all that stuff but the ideas he gives [are] different from what I...studied in Vietnam...but I didn't give him my opinion about what I want to say because....here they think different and that's why they asked for the war.....

Researcher: So, your understanding of the war was different than everybody else in the class?

Candy: Yeah. I'm not on any side, American side or my...I see both sides had good reasons to start the war.

Candy's sense of cultural separation in the classroom was an underlying sentiment echoed by many of the students. This cultural separation can cause discomfort on a number levels. Immigrant students don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences and as Alina, an immigrant from Mexico, noted, professors feel uncomfortable delving into other cultures. Alina stated:

I was thinking that a lot of the times, the professors feel uncomfortable too when they have...when they are speaking about something and they're trying to...and they have a student who knows the language and culture or the subject. In one of my classes we were studying Freda Kahlo and I noted that every time the professor would pronounce a word in Spanish, she would look at me. It's not that it made me uncomfortable but I guess it makes him or in this case, the professor, very uncomfortable.

Cultural and linguistic barriers. Besides a sense of being uncomfortable either because of tokenism or a feeling of cultural separation from others in the classroom, some students also felt that their perceived lack of the English language competency and understanding of American culture, impacted their level of comfort in the classroom. Both Bill and Tara identified with Vinh—who wanted to remain silent—primarily because they didn't feel their English was proficient enough. Bill stated, "I don't like to talk because of my English." Tara's silence in class would be caused by both cultural and linguistic factors.

Tara: I think I would be like Vinh. I'd rather not be asked. I don't know...you know culturally...I left when I was a senior in high school so we were really passive. In a class session, we're not very interactive with the teacher. Unless they ask, we don't really discuss with each other. So, I'll just be that way....I think the language too, you know, like I'm not as confident as an American student to speak out maybe or in expressing my ideas, you know, effectively.

Another cultural aspect which surfaced in the students identifying with Vinh was the recognition of the professor as the authority. Alice, an immigrant from China, stated that she would not want to be asked because the professor is the expert on the knowledge being taught, not them. Alice stated that “I would want to hear what he would talk about because he’s really studying it and he’s got a degree on it so his...knowledge is at a level better than me. That’s why I’m sitting in the classroom and he’s talking. So, it’s better if you listen.”

Even though most students identified with Vinh, two students, Harriet from Korea and Karen from Kenya, clearly sided with Tran. They felt it is their obligation to present their immigrant perspective so that the professor and class don’t remain unaware. In response to the first scenario used in focus groups (Appendix C), Harriet stated that “I probably wouldn’t have been like outraged...but I probably would have raised my hand and maybe if they weren’t clear about some points then I would help clarify.... [because I’m] helping other people see that from other people’s perspective.” Similarly, Karen from Kenya felt that “it’s also good for some people to see from your direction. Sometimes I say things in classes. I speak about Kenya even though we are a third world country. I am very proud and I don’t care what people say.”

In summary, it would appear that most immigrant students don’t want the professor to solicit their ideas in class because they feel insecure or unsure of themselves in relation to the rest of the class. This insecurity stems from the fact that a) they don’t want to offend the professor or class, b) they don’t want to act as

cultural tokens for their immigrant group, c) they feel unsure about their English proficiency, and d) they have differing cultural perspectives and understandings. Thus, while an initial conclusion from these focus groups might be that immigrant students prefer not to interact with the professor in class and instead prefer to remain silent, this conclusion may be misleading for the reasons noted below.

After analyzing the data which emerged from the individual interviews, it appears that the immigrant students interpreted the classroom environment of Scenario I—wherein one student was frustrated because the professor “seemed” to ignore him even when he had relevant cultural/historical information to contribute while one student was glad he was not called on—as a hostile one. Most pictured the class as a large impersonal lecture class and the professor as uncaring. Thus, in a classroom of perceived hostility, immigrant students would prefer to be anonymous. However, from the interviews, it appears that immigrant students really want a more interactive relationship with their professor. Eric, from Bosnia, summed up this sentiment about Scenario I. “But on the other side, I would be somewhat...I would be more frustrated than happy...since if you already know something and you have more insight about it and yet the professor is just ignoring you...that would be quite frustrating. It would be nice to share what you know and your experience also.”

Individual Interview Findings on Professor/Student Relationship

Positive classroom influences. During the individual interviews, when asked to describe whether their overall classroom college experiences had been more positive or negative, eight clearly stated that it had been positive, three were

ambivalent about their experience and one student's college classroom experience had been mostly negative. It appears from the information gained in the interviews, that professors play a critical role in establishing a comfortable and positive learning experience. When asked generally whether their college classroom experience had been overall more positive or negative, five students indicated that their professors had contributed to their overall positive classroom experience. The reasons given for their overall positive experience was that the professors were helpful, available and nonjudgmental. They gave clear assignments and used a variety of teaching styles as well and respected and understood diversity. Mary from Guatemala stated that she has enjoyed her professors because they "have been educated to think outside the box so it's easier for me...." Sarah from Sri Lanka echoed this by emphasizing that the professors weren't judgmental but rather someone who was "willing to accept you and...your level...and then try to help [you], starting from [your] level."

These comments as well as the importance of the professor in creating a positive classroom experience were fleshed out much more on the second individual interview question which asked them to discuss a specific positive classroom experience and what made it positive. Every student, without exception, mentioned the professor in describing their specific positive classroom experience. In fact, for three it was the number one reason, for four it was the number two reason and for three it was the number three reason. Karen, from Kenya, emphasized the importance of the professor in the following quote.

For me, if I have a good professor, my chances of succeeding are high. So it starts with the professor because that's the person who I'm feeding

information from...rather than the book. I've noticed that no matter how much I read the book, [if] there's no professor, or the professor does not do a good job, I cannot...my chances of passing are not that high.

Mary, from Guatemala, supported Karen's sentiment on the important role the professor plays by stating that "they (professors) have a big role in presenting the classroom. They're the ones that guide you."

When asked about what it was about these professors that made the classroom experience positive, there were a variety of answers given. Listed below and explained in the pages that follow are the specific professorial actions (in order of frequency) that made their learning experience positive. It is important to note that often students gave multiple reasons for why their professor had contributed to their positive experience and therefore, far more than just one reason per student participant is identified.

Table 4

Reasons Given for Positive Professor/Student Relationship

Explanation	No. of Responses 12/12 responded
The professor established a personal connection between him/herself and the students within the classroom that established a positive relationship.	7
The professor was available outside of class.	7
The professor explained the material clearly and gave clear, reasonable assignments.	5
The professor seemed to enjoy teaching and was motivated to improve his/her teaching and students' learning.	4
The professor had high academic expectations for his/her students.	4
The professor set clear ground rules for mutual respect in the classroom.	3

Personal connection within the classroom. A significant aspect which seven students highlighted was the fact that their professors created a personal, comfortable atmosphere in the class. The distance between teacher and student was lessened through a number of ways. This could be as simple as using their own personal lives in their teaching. Karen of Kenya stated that “Professors that have had an impact on me are those that use some of their personal experiences and analogies in teaching. It makes me connect with him or her a little bit better....” For Alina, from Mexico, it was as simple as the professor making sure that all students were included in class activities. Alina stated that “she (the professor) would ask a question and then if she noticed you had not spoken throughout the whole class then she would

ask you to read or to answer the questions. It was like you were not afraid to answer even if it was wrong....” While using personal experiences and intentionally including students within the class learning involve little personal risk for the professor, for Mary, from Guatemala, the professor went beyond this and became open and vulnerable with her students. Mary stated that her professor began the class by sharing personal things about herself that related to the topic that they would be studying. Mary mentioned that “she was like, ‘I’m really open and you can be open, too.’”

Another way that professors personally connected with their students was displaying empathy and understanding towards them in what some would consider insignificant ways. Alice, of China, reiterated a time in her class when a student spilt her juice in class. “She (the student) kept saying sorry to her and she said, ‘No you don’t have say sorry, things happen.’ She like said, ‘Stop saying sorry. it’s okay.’ It was really, really impressive.” Similarly, both Tara and Yali noted that their professors empathized with the academic pressures they encountered. Yali stated that “he understood that most of us were freshmen and we weren’t used to getting up that early.” Tara mentioned that the way her professor talked was “very comforting and she...It’s just like she was trying to tell the freshman not to worry much. You know. We’ll take it easy on you. We won’t grade that hard. This is how it’s going to work....”

It is clear from most of these students’ examples that the professor through his or her willingness to share about him/herself and/or exercise understanding

towards students created a dynamic in the class where students felt a personal connection with their professor. This was also Candy's experience. She stated that she felt comfortable in the class because "you know them like friends and you feel comfortable to talk to your friends...." For Harriet, from Korea, it was not only a connection beyond the typical teacher/student one but also one of feeling appreciated and recognized by the teacher. Her teacher had actually visited her parents' store and recognized Harriet from that context as well. In addition, Harriet stated that "I felt like I was appreciated in that class because, like, I would do good on the quizzes and so my TA would notice that. So, I felt like I was appreciated and that, you know, I kind of stood out."

Professor availability. Besides this personal connection, most students also felt strongly that professor availability outside of class was critical to a positive classroom experience. This availability ranged from being accessible after class, by e-mail or through office hours to conducting extra study sessions on the weekend or evenings for students. Betty, from China, related how the professor's extra time outside of class helped her succeed. "...when I went and talked to her, she actually...we went through my problem and she helped me go through that problem and pointed me to a direction that was positive. And, I ended up doing a good job on the paper or assignment....I was actually talking to her for more than an hour, talking about things." Alina echoed Betty's sentiments.

The professor was really available. She was really...if we e-mailed her, she would e-mail you back. And before every time we had an exam...she would have an extra class....And, it wasn't really like a class, but she would cover

what was on the exam and if you had any questions right then, you were answered. So, I think that was very helpful.

Clear explanations and assignments. Besides the personal connection professors created through class and outside contact with students, five students also felt that the professor's ability to explain material clearly and assign clear achievable assignments/expectations contributed to their positive experience. Eric, from Bosnia, explained how his Anatomy professor made the material accessible through clearly prioritizing the information.

Well, anatomy itself has a lot of content...then the lectures, there was a lot of...content so he made it positive by emphasizing what we needed to know as opposed to what [was secondary]. For example, [he clarified] what kind of things were going to be a major part of the exam as opposed to what kinds of things were only going to have a few questions.

Sarah, from Sri Lanka, reinforced Eric's sentiment that the professor clearly organized the material in order of importance. "...The way that the teacher was talking it was like you know that these are the things that you had to learn and this is what it is....Like here's the topic and these are the things you had to know...."

Tara, from Vietnam, also stated that the teacher's constant use of examples helped make the material clear as well. Karen from Kenya clarified further how the professor does this for her.

Karen: [the professor] has to make it [the material] understandable. He has to simplify it in such a way that I can understand it.

Researcher: What does that look like? Can you give me an example of what would...does that mean he puts nice charts on the board that show the relationships of ideas or is it because he asks questions in class? I mean, what is it?

Karen: Okay. It's highly interactive, you know, having [to] give well detailed notes and also, you know, encouraging students to work in small groups 'cause I do very well with that....engaging us in questionnaires: what do you think about this? You know, making sure that some, at least some people say something in class. I like to get my ideas out there, but if he can't initiate that, for me to want to say something [then] I cannot learn well.

This need for clarity in the presentation of material also translated to the assignments as well. Yali, from Cambodia, stated that her professor took the time in class to help the students tackle their assignments. She elaborated that, "he gave us a lot of time both in class and in mentor session to go over our work...." For her, this really helped her understand the material.

High academic expectations. Four students also felt that the professor's high academic expectations for them also contributed to their positive experience. Sarah, from Sri Lanka, stated that her class was so difficult that the students were compelled to form study groups which made the experience extremely positive. She further amplified that "...even though the teacher didn't ask us to work in groups, what he wanted was us to work in groups because he made the methods so tough." Eric, from Bosnia, clarified how academic rigor makes a class worthwhile. "It's a hard class and you have to put a lot of hard work into it, but in the end you do go to class looking forward to it because you know you're going to learn something really interesting." Betty, from China, further explained how a class with academic rigor made learning meaningful. She stated that

...I wasn't actually looking forward to the class in the fall term because it was so hard because of what she expected. But, as I worked harder and harder, I actually really liked the class and I feel that the class had meaning....

Concerned with improving teaching and learning. Besides academic rigor, the same number of students felt that having a professor who clearly enjoyed teaching and was committed to improving their teaching and students' learning contribute to a positive classroom experience. Both Tara and Eric stated that seeing that their professors were excited about the material they were teaching helped them be excited about it as well. Alice, from China, stated that her professor regularly checked with students about how they were doing. For example,

she was always concerned whether you're doing well on the assignments....She asks who started and who hasn't started the homework....she started asking quite often at the beginning, but at the end she didn't ask that much because when you have problems, students get to have a chance to e-mail her.

Candy, from Vietnam, noted that her professor was not only concerned about her students' development but her own as well. She states that "she let us, like, let her grow" through regularly soliciting suggestions from students through e-mail on how to improve the class. Tara, from Vietnam, reiterated Candy's sentiment that her professor's effort to improve herself contributed to her positive classroom experience.

Established mutual respect. Three students also noted that their positive classroom experience had occurred because the professor clearly demonstrated respect for the students' experiences and in two students' cases clearly set out guidelines of respect amongst the students themselves as well as the professor. This produced an atmosphere of openness towards diverse viewpoints. Eric, of Bosnia, stated that his anatomy professor welcomed students to share their outside personal

experiences that related to the material at hand. For Mary and Alice, the professor deliberately set up class expectations around respect. Alice related the specific actions her professor took.

She started the class with just a simple speech. It's like introducing herself to the class. And....she asks people to write down what they are sensitive about. What other people can tell when they look at you. And that surprises me because everyone puts what they, the most sensitive things on it. And she wrote it out and nobody knows who wrote things and stuff. She just wrote it out so people might be sensitive about the topics and gives us background, like we try to avoid talking about things and be negative about it. So that made the whole class very positive in a way.

Mary, from Guatemala, had a similar experience where "there was no limit as long as you weren't like intentionally hurting somebody....I don't know, it just seemed like all of us had our own views but still knew about others and we kind of respected that."

Negative Classroom Influences

As with the positive experience, when asked to describe a specific negative classroom experience, it seemed that the professor's contribution was equally significant with 11 out of the 12 students specifically mentioning a negative experience with a professor. Five students give the professor as the main reason that they had a negative experience. Once again, note that even though eleven out of twelve students responded that professors had contributed negatively to their learning, those eleven students often gave multiple reasons. The specific reasons given as to how the professor contributed to this negative experience are listed on the following page and will be explained in the pages that follow.

Table 5

Reasons Given for Negative Professor/Student Relationship

Explanation	No. of Responses 11/12 responded
The professor's explanation of material and assignments was unclear and grading expectations were vague and inconsistent.	6
Cultural and/or linguistic barriers existed between the professor and student.	5
The professor intimidated the students so that they felt insignificant and/or stupid.	4
The professor was unavailable or unwilling to help students outside of class.	4
The professor covered too much content too quickly and had unreasonable work expectations.	3

Unclear explanations and expectations. For half of the students, the professors' lack of clarity significantly contributed to their negative classroom experience. This lack of clarity first connected to the professor's explanation of the material. For many of the students this meant that while the professor presented the material, he/she did not organize it in such a way that made it coherent for the students. Karen summed this up.

She knew the material but there's one thing I've to come to realize that to be a teacher you really have to know how to get the material across. That's part of understanding that, no matter how hard it is you have to break it down in steps to make sure that it is understood. And that's why I did not connect with her.

Several other students reiterated a similar idea that the professor presented the material more globally instead of breaking the material down into discrete digestible chunks and because of this the students were not able to comprehend the material.

Harriet, in relating her negative experience stated that “it was just her way of teaching, and it just didn’t fit what the students wanted because she kind of said things in like a round about way.” Betty further expounded that part of making the material understandable was to apply it in class. She commented that “I don’t think that he goes over the material very well. We don’t do any problems in the class. He expects you to just do it by yourself and look at the answer book.” Yali also stressed that the professor’s organization of the material within the allotted class time was critical to her understanding. She stated that “his lectures weren’t very cohesive. So, it would take forever for him to present his lectures. I mean I don’t think he ever finished any of his lectures.”

When students asked questions to try to gain clarity, it didn’t help either because the professor didn’t or couldn’t answer the question. An exchange with Karen from Kenya illustrated this.

Karen: “...she would explain but I would get lost and if I back tracked and asked her how did you get here, the way she would answer your questions were not the way you expected her to answer.

Researcher: So her initial lectures were confusing?

Karen: Yeah.

Researcher: And when you’d ask for clarification, did you feel like your questions were not really answered?

Karen: They weren’t answered the way....She didn’t give me back what I was looking for. And I know it came down to that teaching technique.

Because of the professor’s seeming inability to answer his questions, Eric lost confidence in the professor. He stated that “She is bad at explaining things and then

if you asked her questions, she wouldn't really answer them. She would kind of start to answer them and then she would confuse herself...because she would stop and then she would like try to think about it and she would say, 'Oh, no it's not that,' and she like, erases something off the board."

The professor's inability to convey the material clearly also manifested in unclear assignments and expectations. Harriet from Korea stated that

When [her professor] talked about something, we wouldn't really understand what she was talking about. When she assigned us homework, you know, like assignments, we would all be confused about what exactly she wanted, like in a paper, what do you want us to write. You know, how many annotated bibliographies do you want us to write? We were kind of confused. She wasn't really clear about the due date for this.

Not only were professors unclear on the assignment expectations but there was also a disjuncture between what was taught in class and what was assigned or tested. Betty, from China, stated "he just lectured on what the chapter was about, but I think it was not in a very specific way. But in his tests, he looks for specific stuff and if you don't actually have the wording right, he takes off points." Candy, from Vietnam, felt that the assignments her in class weren't clear but also were not weighted fairly. She reiterated a time when she did an extra credit assignment which was worth only 1 credit which she did not do well on because she didn't have enough opinions in the piece—something she wasn't clear on from the initial assignment. Her closing comment poignantly summed up her frustration. "It's only 1 credit but why did she make it so hard?" Besides not weighting the work fairly, Candy also found that the professor's grading was inconsistent. She stated that

she didn't clarify what to expect on points. Sometimes she gives 5 and sometimes she gives 10 and I don't know why. You know when I brought back my exam and asked her, then she saw something and then that changed my grade up. If I didn't recognize my points, then I would have failed.

Cultural and linguistic barriers. For five students, culture and language posed problems for them in their relationship with their professors. For three students, this problem resided in the professor having a heavy foreign accent that they couldn't understand. For Eric, he had difficulty understanding his professor's explanations but her "pretty heavy accent" contributed to that lack of clarity. Alice, from China, echoed this. "She's a foreign teacher and her accent confused me...." Karen already struggling with the professor in her class, tried to turn to her TA for help.

Karen: And another problem I had was the TA. He knew the material but he's from another country and his way of explaining things wasn't helpful.

Researcher: So was there a kind of a cultural barrier? (The researcher felt it was necessary to clarify this.)

Karen: Yeah, a cultural barrier...he didn't have the words to [say] 'Okay this is what you do'.....So he wasn't that much help to me.

For the above students, the professors' foreign accent seemed to be the most problematic. For Bill, from China, it was the professor's insensitivity towards or ignorance of the language needs of his ESL students. The following interview excerpt illustrated this.

Researcher: Was there anything about his teaching that made you dislike the class?

Bill: He talked too fast...and used too many big words.....The classroom is 300 students...huge...and he just...he kind of ignored the people from the other countries. He just focused on the students who know English pretty well.

Researcher: Oh...can you give me an example of when you realized that? When did you realize that he was ignoring students who didn't have English as their first language? How did you know that?

Bill: By his way...by his way to talk....When he's giving a lecture, he just always used those big words and [I] don't know what they mean. I think if he is trying to teach, why doesn't he just break down those big words in a simple way? Does using those big words make him feel better?

While the difficulties that Bill had could be attributed to simple ignorance on the part of the professor as to the needs of ESL learners, Mary's experience shows a complete disregard for the cultural sensitivities of her students. Mary related that

My friend took her same class and there was a story where they used the word "nigger" ...in the story....now I can how that's ...not ...verbally calling somebody that, so I can see why that's literature.... But in the class discussions if there's an African American next to you and you're saying "nigger" all the time....I can understand how that can hurt. And she (my friend) raises her hand and she's just like, "Can we not use the word 'nigger' you know, like out loud. I understand how it's in the book but can we change it?" And she (the professor) was like, "No, that's what it is. That's how literature is." And she refused to change it for her knowing that it really, really hurt her.

While the students were bothered by their professors' accents because it interfered with their learning, those students who seemed most frustrated or offended were those who felt that their language needs or cultural identities were not being respected.

Intimidation and lack of respect. Another aspect of disrespect which contributed to four students' negative classroom experience was the attitude the professor displayed towards the students in terms of their intellectual abilities. Some students felt that their ideas were not respected. Mary, from Guatemala, related her experience in this area:

Mary: ...In the beginning it seemed like we were going to take short stories and interpret them, how we saw them, and that was going to be the lesson. Like, read these stories and interpret them how you see them. But every time we go have a class discussion, there's always one way she'll, that she sees it and she'll make the comments. She makes you feel stupid.

Researcher: Like what kind of things will she say?

Mary: She'll be like, what does this line mean and you'll say, "Oh, this is what it means." And she'll be like, "Not that's not what it means." And it's like, that's how I interpreted it.

While Mary's ideas weren't respected in the classroom, Yali was made to feel stupid because she didn't know what the professor thought she should. When she went to see her art history professor about a paper that she wanted to improve, she felt both intellectually inadequate as well as dismissed. She shared that "he made me feel like I should have known."

Karen similarly experienced the feeling that she was "stupid". She explains that "you would ask a question and she (the professor) would either respond 'That's a silly question.' 'You can look that up in the book.' 'That's too simple.' 'You ought to know that by now' and she would also get mad." Harriet, from Korea, felt actual fear towards her teacher because of his inflexibility and unpredictability. She shared that

He was...controlling.... He was this big guy and so, kind of demanding..., and maybe, not even fair, kind of?...It's not he wasn't fair. He kind of acted in a way that, since he was the mentor, he was always right and what he said is correct....We were so intimidated. All of us were kind of intimidated, kind of even frightened....It was so weird. Some days he would be nice to us and the next day he would be like so pissed off.

Karen was equally intimidated because "you know, it kind of makes you fear her [the professor] because you don't want to be put out there in front of everyone and be

told your question is stupid and such.” Once again, the degree of alienation the students experienced in the class varied by degree, from frustration to actual fear, depending on the level of perceived intimidation.

Professor’s unavailability or unwillingness to help. Another aspect which four of the students found problematic was the professor’s lack of availability both in attitude and time. For most students who experienced this, this lack of availability was an attitude that professors projected in class. Alina, from Mexico, never approached her professors because “when a professor is available, she encourages you to see her after class, to e-mail you questions. And these professors just kind of focused on the subject and never really asked if you had any questions....” Candy, from Vietnam, also sensed this unwillingness to talk about an assignment so she didn’t even approach her professor. Bill, on the other hand, did e-mail his professor when he was having difficulties with the way the class was being taught.

Bill: The students...would never ask a question because [they] don’t know the subject. I don’t know what he is talking about so I can’t ask a question. Does he know we are there or not? I try to e-mail him and talk about it.

Researcher: Did he respond?

Bill: He kind of responded but the way he was giving the lecture stayed the same.

Researcher: So he didn’t listen to your e-mail because he didn’t change his behavior?

Bill: I guess.

Yali also tried to talk to her professor about a paper she had written. She shared that “...I wanted to ask him about ‘oh what is this that you wrote because I couldn’t read

it.' I got a B on it. 'Oh,' he said, 'that's a good enough grade.' So I felt like he didn't want to take the time to actually go over the paper. So, I was kind of bothered by that."

Overwhelming content and work expectations. The final area that contributed to students' negative classroom experience was the unrealistic classroom expectations of the professor. These expectations surfaced in the amount of content the professor presented, the fast pace at which she/he presented, and unrealistic grade expectations. Bill commented that "the subject was Biology I and when he tried to teach, you have to memorize all different kinds of names of plants and special types of animals....[I] cannot memorize it. Too much to memorize...whole sections....almost the whole book....It's just too much for me." Alina, from Mexico, felt that her professors moved through the material too fast for her to grasp it. She stated that "it seems to me that it was going really fast and I had no previous knowledge of that so it was kind of hard to stay on the same page." Betty from China, felt that her professor expected too much. "I think he grades too hard. Like, even if you have a general idea of what the answer is he doesn't give you that many points....he wants something really specific."

Student/Student Interaction

As will be discussed next, in addition to the professor/student relationship, student/student relationships also play a role in an immigrant student's positive or negative classroom experience. However, it would seem that the role that other students played was perhaps not as significant as the role of their professors simply

because the frequency with which fellow students were discussed was less. In addition, the participants in the study seemed to be more ambivalent about their attitudes toward fellow students as to whether they were a positive or negative force in the classroom. This will be discussed in the following section.

Focus Group Findings on Student/Student Relationship

Part of this ambivalence towards fellow students surfaced in the focus groups in connection to Scenario Two, a scenario where fellow students created an openly hostile situation for a Mexican student. For eleven out of the twelve students, their initial reaction was that they would stay in the class regardless of the hostile attitude the students were displaying towards them. The main reason iterated by six students was that racism and prejudice was an everyday occurrence and trying to avoid it was pointless. Mary, from Guatemala, stated that "I would stay there...you know you're going to encounter this whether it's in college or outside." Betty, from China, emphasized both the ubiquitous nature of racism and her strategy for countering it.

I would remain in the class. Because, you know, those things happen in any kind of class. I mean, that situation never goes away and it always stays with you because you're an immigrant. You're always different from the general public. So if you drop one class and sign up for another class, the same thing might happen again so why spend the time and go looking for another class when you can just stay in there and focus on your studies instead of worrying about the things around you. You know, getting your education is more important than having friends that agree with you....

Rather than focus on the racism of fellow students, Betty chose to disregard the social aspects of the class and focus on learning. Eric, from Bosnia, also placed his priorities on learning in the classroom. "I would probably try to stick in the class ...'cause I really don't try to take other people's opinions personally when I'm trying

to learn.” For the lone student whose first response was that she would drop the class, her decision was also motivated by the drive to learn. Yali, from Cambodia, would drop the class *because* the atmosphere would interfere with her learning. She stated that “I don’t have to deal with that kind of stuff. It distracts from actually learning what I’m supposed to learn and it wouldn’t be helpful.”

While most students seemed to ignore negative student behavior as a coping mechanism, some, in addition, drew on their immigrant experience as a source of strength to deal with the prejudice. This surfaced in a conversation with Karen from Kenya.

Researcher: So how do you deal with that [prejudice] if you’re in a class and you feel like people aren’t including you and people aren’t listening to your ideas? It’s not going to make you feel good. So how do you overcome that? What allows you to ignore that and be able to stick with the class and do the work?

Karen: My encouragement is when you think of where you come from and it’s what keeps you going.... So what I do is I think of where I come from and...if you understand where I come from you wouldn’t talk to me like that. That just keeps you going and then you focus on where you are and where you want to go and [it] just makes you pass right through that. You don’t even focus on what people say. You focus on the assignments and go.

Another stated reason three of the students would remain in the class would be to outperform these hostile students as a kind of vindication. Harriet from Korea stated that “If I was...good at math then I think I would stay just to kind of...show and prove them wrong and do really good in the class and have them...come to me.” Candy related a real life experience where she did just that. Two students were more defiant in their reasons for staying. Mary and Alvina would confront the students to try and challenge prejudicial thinking. Alvina stated that “I think that I wouldn’t drop

the class either way because...I would be benefiting the people who are saying that.”

Mary stated that “if that were to happen in the classroom, I would probably turn around in the middle of class and say something.”

While eleven students clearly stated initially that they would remain in the class, after further conversation these students admitted that they would drop the class if their grade was in jeopardy. This could potentially manifest in a number of ways: first, if they weren't doing well on the assignments regardless of other students, second, if the class required frequent interaction with these hostile students in order to learn the material and, third, if the class grade was dependent on work done with these students. Once again, learning rather than social dynamics seemed to surface as a major motivation in their decisions. Finally, one student stated that she would drop if she knew there was an identical section where she had specific friends, and another student stated that she might drop if it was an elective rather than a required course. But, all in all, the students seemed to have developed an ability to ignore or resist actions from fellow students that could potentially negatively impact their classroom experience. Perhaps this is due, in part, to a focus which is more on learning rather than developing social relationships.

Individual Interview Findings on Student/Student Relationship

While the focus groups revealed the resiliency of these students in dealing with hostile classroom environments created by fellow students, the individual interviews fleshed out in more detail the positive and negative roles that fellow students have played in these students' classroom experiences. As with the

professor/student relationship, five immigrant students mentioned students as contributing to their overall positive college classroom experience. In particular, it was the diversity of the student body they highlighted more than specific student behavior. This diversity was identified primarily in terms of race/ethnicity and age. Betty felt that when there was diversity in the students “there isn’t any resentment towards students that are from...that are not American.” Tara stated that “people are different, you know, in age and then they have very interesting questions and are very practical.” Sarah, from Sri Lanka, liked that “people are more mature.” Mary summed up the importance of both culture and age differences in creating a positive classroom experience. The students are “more diverse in culture and age. I just get tired of being in the same age group with the same, you know, the same mind set. I like different views and when you get older you have changing views....it’s not necessarily just a cultural view, but the age difference also.”

For those immigrant students who had negative or ambivalent overall classroom experiences, two areas were identified in terms of fellow students. Both Mary and Alice mentioned that immature or inattentive students created a negative atmosphere in the class. Alice stated that “...sometimes there are one or two people just having their own conversation that sort of distracts others.” Mary struggled with students who were “...shallow, only care about themselves and social life type people. I was over that phase halfway through high school.” Harriet strongly felt that her fellow students had contributed to an overall negative college experience

initially. She and her immigrant friends were belittled in a year-long course because of their immigrant status and/or foreign accent. She stated that

...I didn't like the class to begin with ...and then I think most of it was the people in the class ...they were like this group of girls on the other side and they would just kind of laugh and kind of snicker at what like me and my friends said, and then....[name omitted] was also in my Inquiry class and you know how she has a thicker accent so when she said something they would just kind of snicker.

Harriet was irritated with the lack of respect they showed. She stated that "because this is such a diverse campus, you're going to come across people from different parts of the world and people that have just immigrated and you're going to have to learn to deal with that instead of just snickering and laughing at them."

These overall impressions were fleshed out more in the students' discussion of their specific positive and negative classroom experiences. What is interesting to note, however, is that for four immigrant students their fellow students played no role in their positive classroom experience and likewise, four students never mentioned fellow students in their negative classroom experience. Thus, for a full one third of the immigrant students, their classmates seemed to have had a minimal effect on their experience either positively or negatively. This differs significantly from the impact professors had in the classroom experiences as every student mentioned the professor as contributing to their positive classroom experience and every student, except one, mentioned the professor as contributing to the negative classroom experience. A reason for the greater importance of the professor in the classroom might be explained by Tara, from Vietnam. When she was asked to explain why the teacher was the main reason for her positive classroom experience,

she revealed that because of the isolation she has experienced with fellow students, the role of teacher becomes even more important.

Tara: It's not your country, you know. So, all the differences are like a barrier for you.... It's not a natural thing to approach these people and talk and make friends and ask them the way....And probably...other students don't, you know, see it the way I do, but I guess because I isolated myself more than a typical, you know, English speaker....So, I focus more on the teacher.

Researcher: So you think that's what's going on. There's lot of other things in the class, but you might have difficulty with those aspects so you focus on the teacher?

Tara: Right.

Karen, from Kenya, reinforced that there is a tendency to ignore other students by stating "I try not to focus much on the students because they are just people who are there to get the grade....I try not to focus on them because if I do and there's nobody, you know, participating and I'm waiting for somebody else to go first and I want to say something, I'm not going to say it." It is clear that Karen's motivation in the class is to learn and if other students' behavior is not conducive to this learning then they become irrelevant.

For those who mentioned fellow students as contributing to a positive classroom experience, specific reasons were given. Again, even though only eight students named students as positively contributing to their classroom experience, they often gave more than one reason and so more than eight reasons are listed below.

Table 6

Reasons Given for Positive Student/Student Relationship

Explanation	No. of Responses 8/12 responded
The students were respectful and appreciative of each other.	5
The students were motivated to learn.	3
The students were agents for learning.	2
The students had common interests and experiences.	2

Five students commented that students had contributed to their positive classroom experience because they had made them feel included and valued in the class. This manifested itself in several ways. First, both Mary and Yali noted that the students in the class valued diverse opinions and experiences. Yali commented that “they weren’t too into themselves....they had different personalities and it made the class more interesting because...they were quiet but had their own input and they weren’t biased. They were very open-minded. Talking was easy.” Mary also enjoyed her class because the students represented such different viewpoints and everyone was listened to. She stated that in group discussions “we did get into debates but it was never like bitter...I’ll never talk to you again....I don’t know, it just seemed like all of us had our own views but still knew about others and we kind of respected that.” For Betty, this inclusion was more than just being open to different ideas and experiences. It was that the students were interested in developing friendships with her. Alvina felt a part of the class through the

willingness of the students to work with her. She stated that “they were always willing to work with you and that was nice.” Finally, for Harriet, her positive attitude toward the class came through the acknowledgement by other students of her academic excellence. She stated that “I felt like I was appreciated in that class because, like, I would do good on the quizzes...and other people in the class noticed...and so they would like, ‘Hey [Harriet], can you help me with this?’ So I felt like I was appreciated and that, you know, that I kind of stood out. And so that was a really good positive experience.”

Another way that fellow students contributed to the positive classroom experience for three students in the study was in their motivation to learn. Eric enjoyed his anatomy class in part because “most of the students were more into it as opposed to biology....It seems like students are starting to focus more and they’re starting to be more interested, and I think a lot of them have study groups set up, and a lot of them ask questions during class which kind of helped if sometimes you didn’t understand something.” Alvina also experienced this motivation to learn in her class. She stated that “...they wanted to learn as much as I did.” But while fellow students’ motivation was encouraging for both Eric and Alvina, it was central to Sarah’s experience. In her electrical engineering class, the motivation of the students to form study groups was the major factor in her positive classroom experience.

Researcher: So you, as students, just formed your groups?

Sarah: Yes.

Researcher: Wow. On your own?

Sarah: Yes. On our own. It's like a study group which is like sometimes the day before the exam we are here around like 4 am studying for the same exam....It was a great experience because one thing I did do was work in the group [with] junior and senior level people and I'm just a sophomore. So, I get to learn how they are doing.

Researcher: How they study?

Sarah: How they study and then sometimes, you know, when you are a freshman or sophomore you get lazy...but they are always moving on the moment and doing this and doing that so I was like the shadow going with them and then seeing how things are doing.

Sarah's experience not only shows the impact of motivated students but also how students themselves can be wonderful learning agents. The power of fellow students as vehicles for learning was also experienced by Tara. When relating her positive experience, Tara commented on a group project in her business class where fellow students contributed a valuable part to her learning in the class.

Finally, two students felt that their classroom experience had been positive because they had much in common with their fellow classmates. As mentioned earlier, while Eric found his anatomy class a positive experience because students were motivated, much of this motivation stemmed from a common interest in the subject. Betty found her classroom experience positive because students were at the same life stage as her. She stated that in this positive classroom experience

many times I got to hang out with people my own age because in different classes they were mostly older people who worked. So, their schedule was tight and you don't actually get to hang out with them other than in class. And, sometimes the communications between me and older people aren't very good.

In relating their negative classroom experiences, the same number of students—eight—included their fellow students as contributing to that negative experience but once again gave multiple reasons why. Many of these reasons were the reverse of the positive factors stated above. The specific reasons for their negative contribution are stated below in order of frequency.

Table 7

Reasons Given for Negative Student/Student Relationship

Explanation	No. of Responses 8/12 responded
The students had negative attitudes towards the class.	5
The students didn't appreciate or respect one another.	2
There was no personal connection with fellow students.	2

The most frequent way that students contributed to a negative classroom experience was through their attitudes. This most commonly manifested as complaints amongst themselves. This surfaced in a conversation with Candy, from Vietnam.

Researcher: Did the students add to the negative experience at all?

Candy: They were complaining.

Researcher: So do you think that they added to your negative feeling?

Candy: Yeah.

Betty, from China, had a similar experience in her class. Her fellow students' complaining about how hard the class was made her feel that it was too hard. Sometimes this negativity surfaced in the attitude towards the professor. This surfaced in Alice's experience. Please note below that because Alice's English ability was weaker, the researcher had to often provide prompts or ask for clarification.

Researcher: Was there anything about the students in the class that made you not like it?

Alice: The students weren't listening. They didn't show any respect.

Researcher: Did that add to you having a negative experience because the other students didn't seem to respect her. Didn't seem to be listening to her?

Alice: I think other people did say that "She's hard to understand" and that affects me too.

Researcher: Okay. Their attitudes?

Alice: Yeah

Researcher: They influenced you as well?

Alice: Yeah

Researcher: So you heard them complaining and stuff?

Alice: Yeah. So I just go for it.... "Yeah, the professor is hard to understand."

Yali further illustrated the negative impact of fellow students' attitudes on other students by stating that students "felt frustrated about what was being taught....And so, I felt the same as they did." For Eric, from Bosnia, this student negativity surfaced in a lack of motivation. He stated that "I think a lot of students in the class

didn't care all that much....It seemed like a lot of them either taught themselves or something else. There weren't a whole lot of people in the class engaged."

While more immigrant students commented on the attitudes of their fellow students as influencing their negative experience, for most it seemed to be a peripheral influence. However, for two students, the lack of appreciation and respect of some students for their fellow students was a defining aspect of the class. This manifested itself in various kinds of intimidation. Harriet, from Korea, stated that "...students didn't appreciate other students and [their] ideas. It was like students had to find some way to put down the other person's ideas. You know? Their attitude wasn't positive. The atmosphere wasn't positive." While Harriet's intimidation from fellow students was overt, Alina's was more subtle.

Researcher: ...You mentioned that there were a number of students who seemed like they really knew the 19th century and you didn't. Did that add to you feeling kind of negative about the class?

Alina: Yeah. I think it does and that there's always that intimidation like I was afraid to ask a question....You get intimidated when you see that everybody's really up on something and you're not.

Finally, an inability to personally connect with fellow students in the class also contributed to an overall negative experience. Candy, from Vietnam, had wanted to get into a study group connected with her class but couldn't find one that worked with her schedule. She found this bothersome because "you don't know the people that sit next to you" and therefore it was difficult to feel connected to the class. Sarah from Sri Lanka also didn't like classes where she couldn't personally connect with the students. She stated "it's like you don't know anybody to get

together and then study and stuff like that.” This contributed to her feeling disconnected from the class.

Student/Pedagogy

Focus Group Findings on Student/Pedagogy

When examining the role of pedagogy in the immigrant students’ experience both the findings from the focus groups and interviews reinforced each other. It was clear that most of the students in the study preferred small, interactive classrooms that promoted learning. This clearly surfaced in the third focus group scenario. When asked whether they identified with Slavic (who preferred small groups) or Katerina (who wanted lecture)—the two hypothetical characters in the scenario—eight of the twelve students clearly chose small groups. Three students were ambivalent because they saw the value of both small groups and lecture and one student clearly favored lecture.

When asked why they preferred small group discussions, seven students stated that small groups allowed them to learn from more than just the professor. This response challenges the prevailing notion that immigrant or “foreign” students see professors as the most important source of knowledge. Betty from China stated that “...the professor may not always be right so you could add more to it. You might hear from other people because you can see their point of view. The professor might see one thing but others might see from a different angle.” Candy, from Vietnam, echoed this sentiment. “I like to listen to all professors and others—my friends, too—because they have really good information too and maybe they offer

some questions to that professor that he didn't like mention and then they get new ideas in the class from that general idea." Bill, from China, offered a similar response because he feels that "sometimes the professor is too stubborn for one subject. They don't hear other people's opinions. So I would prefer a small group to listen to all the opinions and form my own conclusion."

Because small groups allow for more ideas than just the professor, some students stressed the fact that they actually learn more. Harriet felt that she gained more in a class she took because she was able to hear from her peers. She stated that "I took Family Studies during the summer and that class was mostly small group discussions and I learned a lot...probably more than I learned from the professor...." Tara, from Vietnam, mentioned that small group discussions not only serve an academic function but a cultural one as well, because they also help her learn cultural expectations and behaviors.

Besides the additional learning that small groups generate, four students stated that small groups gave them a greater opportunity to participate and this participation often leads to a better acquisition of the material. Harriet, from Korea, stated that she felt more comfortable participating in small groups. She stated that "when I'm in small groups, I actually feel more comfortable than talking out loud in front of the class, just because it is just a few of us and so I think that I can express myself more in a small group than in a large class." Candy concurred that small groups allowed students to "talk back and forth" with one another and this interchange allowed for greater clarity with the material. Sarah, from Sri Lanka,

mentioned that she used small group discussions to check her own understanding of the material and get further clarification from her peers. She elaborated that “You can get into the group and talk to them and know [you’re] not the only one who doesn’t get the lecture. There are some people (students) that I can ask questions from them and learn from them.” Besides the ability to check your comprehension, Eric stated that small group discussions actually solidified his own learning. He iterated that “...whatever you learned, you’re actually going to put it into words which makes it stick in your head more...when you’re explaining it to somebody else or when you’re putting it in your own ideas. So, it helps a lot to learn that way.”

Small group discussions seemed to not only help in learning the material associated with the class but for three students they also provided a way for them to improve their English. Tara, from Vietnam, stressed that this is the first reason why she liked small groups. They gave her the opportunity to practice her English. Eric, from Bosnia, stressed that “for practicing English, it’ll [small group discussions] help much more than if you’re isolated and just trying to do it on your own.” Sara, from Sri Lanka, believed that small groups were easier for practicing one’s English because you only have to focus on four or five people rather than a whole class.

While the majority of the students favored small group discussions over lectures, upon further discussion the students raised certain conditions that needed to exist for small groups to be successful. First, the small groups need to be comfortable places to participate. For Alice, from China, this was one reason why she preferred lecture over small groups. She related a current experience. “I’m

participating in an inquiry class that is definitely small groups everyday and the most frustrating thing is when native people will just get in groups in one second and I will just sit there waiting for somebody to pick me out, and that's what happens every time." Not only do these students need to feel included in the formation of the groups but, according to Alina, the groups themselves should not be confrontational. In her experience in one class, the small group discussions were "more of a debate than actually learning what you are thinking; so I just sat there and was quiet the whole time." Bill attributed his silence in groups to his comfort level as well. He stressed that "If I know the other people well then I would talk a lot. If I don't know them too well, then I would be quiet sitting there." Besides the potential of feeling isolated in groups, Karen added that interpersonal dynamics in groups can be problematic because of cultural barriers. She stated that

I like to work well by myself and...small groups are a challenge for me....I just feel comfortable just doing it on my own because [it requires] a lot of resiliency when you're working with people. First of all, you feel you are from somewhere else and that is a barrier.

Another condition for small groups to be successful seemed to be the content being addressed. Most students agreed that the content needed to be open-ended as well as draw from students' own experiences. In other words, the small group discussions should not require specialized knowledge. Thus, according to the students, certain subjects such as math and the hard sciences are not necessarily best served by small group discussions. Alice noted that in her class on 19th Century that the small groups didn't work because "students just won't get it because it's like so deep into that subject." Betty stated that "especially in math classes, I would like to

hear from the professor over other people because maybe there is a definite way to solve the problem or question.”

Another danger of small groups the students in the focus group noted is small discussion groups can often lose focus and get off track. Alina, from Mexico, noted that

a lot of times the discussion groups are very successful and you learn a lot but [sometimes] they go off on side conversations and I think that's a waste of time, whereas if the professor is up in front talking to you, even if it has not much meaning you're learning [instead] of side conversations.

Eric had also experienced this and states below that the effectiveness of the small group discussions really depended on how they are organized.

It also really depends on how the professor runs the small groups. For example, if he gives you fifteen minutes to talk about two questions that are going to go by really quick and the rest of the time is just wasted, then there isn't much point because they [the students] are going to go off on tangents pretty quick...[but] if you have a lot of questions and even less time is required then you are going to stay on task and....[try] to get as much done as possible.

Individual Interview Findings on Student/Pedagogy Dynamic

The students' preference for small interactive classrooms also surfaced in the individual interviews. When discussing their overall classroom experience, four students mentioned pedagogy as contributing to their positive experience. No one mentioned pedagogy as a negative force in their classroom experience. This compares with five students in both student/professor and student/student areas that felt these positively contributed to their overall experience. The two main reasons given for how pedagogy had contributed to their overall positive experience was a) small interactive classrooms and b) a variety of teaching tools. Both Candy and Eric

specifically mentioned the small class size as contributing to their overall positive experience. Tara stated that the interactive teaching style as well as a variety of teaching aids acted as a positive force. And finally, Sarah mentioned the wide variety of learning resources used, such as tutoring and online videos, as contributing to her positive experience. These responses were further fleshed out in the specific positive classroom experience as well. Listed below are the ways that pedagogy influenced these students' positive classroom experiences. Again please note that although eight students responded they often identified more than one positive way that pedagogy had contributed.

Table 8

Reasons Given for Effective Classroom Pedagogy

Explanation	No. of Responses 8/12 responded
The class used a variety of teaching/learning aides.	7
The class had activities which encouraged student involvement.	5
The class size was small ranging from 30-50 students.	4
The class had various and frequent assignments.	3

The most frequent pedagogical reason given for a positive classroom experience was that a variety of teaching and/or learning aids were used. This manifested itself within the classroom and without. In Harriet's experience it was the tactile learning that her anatomy lab offered that contributed to the positive experience. She stated that "I liked looking at the bones...." Yali's class would often

break into small groups for peer review. She stated that “we’d go over the paper that we were supposed to ...and answer questions and share our ideas.” Her class also regularly took “field trips to the coast and to the gorge and learned the history of Native Americans that were living there.” Karen mentioned that small activities like engaging in questionnaires made her experience positive.

Other types of pedagogical aids were technological in nature. Tara loved her business class because the professor regularly used movie clips to illustrate ideas in the class and frequently used Power Point presentations. Mary, from Guatemala, agreed. She stated that “I really liked watching movies and videos and she did a lot of that...I’m a visual learner so I like to see things happen as well.” For Sarah, it was the online streaming videos of the lectures which really proved helpful. She stated “...that class...provided streaming media online. We get to listen to the lectures over and over again which is a really good thing because the teacher would mention a small thing and then we had to research about it...” Later on she reiterated that the “streaming video was so important because without the streaming video...we would have never survived.” For Eric, from Bosnia, aids to understanding the lecture were also important. In his class, the professor made lecture notes that he handed out ahead of time. In addition, Eric stated that the class had a web site with “a lot of different places we could go for interactive models that showed how it worked.”

The second closely related pedagogical reason given for a positive classroom experience and one that surfaced in the focus groups as well was that the class was

highly interactive. Alina believed that her classroom experience was positive because “you had to participate in class...it wasn’t all lecture. It involved a lot of students participating.” Candy stated more specifically that the participation in role plays in the class really helped her understand the different perspectives of people involved in the issue. In addition, the class regularly had small group discussions and because of regular seat changes, students were constantly working with new individuals. Alice also found that “activities in small groups....makes people involved” in her class. Mary stated that in her class “we were put in group discussions a lot and my group was always with very different people and I enjoyed that a lot.” Karen also enjoyed classes that are “highly interactive...encouraging students to work in small groups ‘cause I do very well with that.”

In order to have interactive classrooms, the consensus among four students was that they needed to be small in size, ranging from 30-50 students. Betty stated that the class she enjoyed “was a lot smaller...and there were a lot more interactions in the classroom. It wasn’t just like the professor lecturing.” Candy stated specifically that her class of 25-30 people made it positive because she felt comfortable both with her fellow students and her professor. Mary concurred that her class of 40 people made it easier for her to participate. Perhaps Karen stated the importance of small class size most poignantly.

Researcher: And does the size of the class matter or not?

Karen: It does, to a certain extent it does. Classes over 50 people are too big for me....The largest class I have right now is about forty people; so that’s not bad. We still interact in groups and it’s pretty effective.

Researcher: But over 50 doesn't work?

Karen: Over 50, yeah, that's like going to a movie. That's too much 'cause I don't participate, you know, about 50. The teacher stays way over there and I'm way over here....It seems like a movie theater to me. [It] doesn't do anything.

The final design aspect of the class that contributed to the students' positive experience was connected to both the types of assignments and the frequency of those assignments. This sentiment surfaced more strongly in their negative classroom experience but was also present in the positive one as well. Alice appreciated that her professor reduced the stress in the class by having take home quizzes "because she's aware that some people are good at remembering and some people aren't. And I'm those kind that aren't and that makes the class successful." Besides the types of assignments, the frequency was also important. Tara stated that her professor kept the students accountable for doing the reading by posing a question at the beginning of each class from the reading. Karen concurred that regular assignments helped her learn the material better. She stated that "the best way for me, the best form of assignments or quizzes...is having at least an assignment a week."

The students' negative classroom experiences were often the mirror reverse of their positive experiences in terms of classroom pedagogy. The major pedagogical reasons for their negative classroom experiences for eight students are delineated below.

Table 9

Reasons Given for Ineffective Classroom Pedagogy

Explanation	No. of Responses 8/12 responded
The class provided little opportunity for interaction and application.	7
The class had limited graded assignments that only relied on one academic skill.	5

Once again the students' desire for a highly interactive class surfaced in their negative classroom experiences. For some students, this clearly connected to the fact that the class was in a lecture format. Alina comments that she had difficulty critically thinking about the material in her class because it "was just 100% lecture; there was no involvement, nothing. You just went in there and it was taught by two professors....And although I tried to pay attention, it was kind of hard because I had heard about it and I had seen art, but nothing really, really stuck with me." Betty also agreed that the lecture format did not help her learn. She states that "[h]e lectures just about the topics and he...just goes through it without really explaining it." Eric also felt that his experience would have been better if lecture hadn't been the only means of instruction. He commented that his class "was strictly lecture. I guess it would have helped out if there could have been some interactions to see, for example, if you're sitting in a group and just comparing your answers and you have it wrong so they could tell you what you did wrong." But even though most of the other students' negative classroom experiences were in the lecture format, when

asked if it was the lecture style that was problematic, many stated “No.” Rather it was that the lecture format stopped them from being able to interact and learn in the classroom. Sarah stated that “it’s like you don’t know anybody to get together and then study and stuff like that.” Candy supported this idea because in her class, she was not able to connect with fellow students and form study groups. Alice, from China, clearly made the distinction that the lecture format itself was not the problem in her experience as elaborated below.

Researcher: Anything else about that class that didn’t work? Was it the lectures—you said that she lectured all the time—was that a problem?

Alice: I think that’s not a problem because I take other classes which are lecture all the time and I have no problem with that. The material being so difficult, I think it should be just lecture but they have to be clear on the material.

Another contributing factor to these students’ negative classroom experience was the type and frequency of assignments given. For some students, the kind of assignments did not help them learn or allow them to show their learning. Mary stated that

it’s a reading course and there’s no real way to prove how you’re reading except through writing so then it just becomes a writing exam. So, that’s kind of frustrating because I...don’t do a good job at putting down words. I know what I’m feeling. I know what I want to say but I just can’t ever find the right words to say it....

Alice also found that essay exams were problematic for her. She said

the tests itself were asking you questions and you have to write out the answers. On the other [tests I’ve taken] it’s like multiple choice and [it] makes it easier that way...one of the answers must be right. And on hers, basically you have to start with a blank piece of paper where you had to put your own ideas. And that’s pretty hard.

Eric found that it was not his ability to do the work but rather the applicability of the homework to the class content that made the class a negative experience. He commented that “the homework questions...were more related to the text content of the book than opposed to the statistical content. She had word questions....It made me more confused.”

Besides the types of assignments, using a limited amount of assignments was also problematic for three students. Alina didn't like that she had only three assignments in her class and two of them were written papers, which she recognized as a weakness. She commented that “I think that's why I didn't like that there were only three assignments because it was...where you had to put all your knowledge.” Alice echoed this by stating that “the grade was based....[on] two exams in class. The attendance was not calculated and there's no homework, nothing.” From both Alina's and Alice's comments it is clear that these students preferred frequency and variety in the class assignments, particularly ones that occurred outside the pressure of class. As Candy iterated, “I like things like homework to make you participate.” It would seem that the students preferred pedagogy that maximized participation and interaction.

Student/Content

Focus Group Findings on Student/Content Dynamic

In regard to the role specific subject areas played in terms of classroom climate, the students were far less conclusive. Rather, they focused on the nature of the content rather than the specific content area itself. As mentioned in the pedagogy

section, some students in the focus groups expressed content preferences as they connected to pedagogy. For example, Alina stated that she would only participate in small groups if the content was something she felt she knew. This attitude surfaced as well in their attitude toward the usefulness of small group discussions. Alice found her small group discussions unproductive because the content was too challenging. She stated that “we have so many philosophy readings that students just won’t get it because it’s like so deep into that subject....I just sit there.” Betty, from China, felt that math was better taught as lecture because “I would like to hear from the professor over other people because maybe there is a definite way to solve the problem or question.” It seemed that students preferred lecture when the content was not experientially based or was more “factual”.

Besides the connection of content to pedagogy, Tara, from Vietnam, stated that she becomes most frustrated with the content when it draws upon culturally specific information which she doesn’t know. Because of this, she had difficulty understanding the material. She stated that

I can’t really blame...the teacher but when they explain things or, you know, they explain things based on other students’ understanding, like they make references. But, for me, I’ve only been here four years and sometimes I have no idea what...and they keep going and going and I keep being lost because I don’t understand the references. [For example], you (the professor) relate the lecture to something to history that happened here or like a show about four or five years ago and I have no idea about and everybody is just like laughing so hard and I just sit there and sometimes I feel a little dumb....

Individual Interview Findings on Student/Content Dynamic

The interviews yielded more specific information on the role that content played in the classroom climate even though, once again, most students didn’t focus

on the specific content areas but rather the *kind* of content studied. When discussing whether their overall classroom experience had been positive or negative, three students specifically mentioned content as contributing to their positive experience. The two reasons given were that the content, particularly general education classes, have given them a more well rounded perspective and also that the content seemed more practical. Ironically, for one student, the content had contributed to an overall negative classroom experience because he did not find it practical and did not know when he would use it again. These ideas were fleshed out more fully when students explored the second interview question which addressed specific positive classroom experiences. For eight students, they each identified several ways that content played a positive role in the classroom climate.

Table 10

Reasons Given for Effective Content

Explanation	No. of Responses 8/12 responded
The content was personally applicable and relevant to everyday life.	5
The content was student directed.	2
The content expanded the students' understanding beyond their major area of study.	2
The specific subject area was interesting.	1

For five students, the content played a positive role because it could be applied outside of the classroom. Sometimes this application was applied generally

to society and its surroundings. For Eric, he enjoyed his anatomy class because “the professor was trying to make it relative to everyday things you do and how that would relate.” Tara enjoyed her business classes as well because the content is more “practical.” Karen echoed this sentiment.

So far I can say that generally I like the business classes way more than the nursing classes for the fact that...I can tie, I can connect reality with the business classes way more and one connection that I love that makes me so passionate about business is the fact that life is taking risks....I don't know. It's powerful to me. It makes the business classes really interesting.

For those students mentioned above, the content made sense in the workings of everyday life. For Yali, the content was a positive experience because it made her everyday surroundings more meaningful. She stated that the content “made me appreciate Oregon more because of the history and different aspects of Oregon. I didn't really consider Oregon as diverse, just Portland. I used to think of Oregon as just Portland and Beaverton. It's more than that.”

For some students the practical application was more personal in nature. Betty had a positive experience in her freshman inquiry class because “I got the chance to learn about myself, the others and the whole...including other people.” Mary, too, in her class on sexualities felt that her understanding of her identity as a woman was expanded. She stated that “It's kind of interesting to see how, even if you are heterosexual you may judge women....It was just interesting to take all of that into my point of view.”

Besides the applicability of the content, two students also found that content that was student directed contributed to a positive classroom experience. Karen

enjoyed being able to choose classes in college where the content interested her and she felt that this had contributed to an overall positive classroom experience. Alice, from China, found that the class that she enjoyed the most—a speech class—allowed students to choose the topics they studied and she felt that really contributed to the positive experience.

Another two students mentioned the content of their general education classes as a positive because they allowed them to learn and develop outside the content of their major. Sarah, from Sri Lanka, talked positively about University Studies, the general education program at Portland State University.

Another thing is University Studies. I took Media Studies, Leadership for Change and Family Studies and all of those experiences have been really, extremely good because I get to learn about leadership, the media, like totally different [from] my major which...I wouldn't have chosen [but] since it was required, I get to learn more and gain a knowledge of the world.

Karen, from Kenya, also felt positively about the content of general education. She states that even though these classes are required

they turn out to be positive because overall you have to be a well rounded person. So even though you are a computer science person and you take a philosophy class, they may not tie in now, but for some future reference you're going to use some philosophy. So, so far it's been a positive experience.

In terms of a specific area of study, only one student, Bill, mentioned this as contributing to his positive classroom experience. For Bill, the main reason he had experienced a positive classroom experience was because he was able to study his major, computer science. For him, all other aspects of the class seemed irrelevant. This surfaced in the following conversation.

Researcher: I want you to think about one class that you really enjoyed...that you really looked forward to going to every day. Can you think of one?

Bill: My major class?

Researcher: It could be any class. I don't care...just one class that you really enjoyed.

Bill: That would be my major.

Researcher: What was it about the class that made it really enjoyable for you?

Bill: I just love this stuff.

Researcher: So, you're saying the content is really interesting. Was there anything else about the class that made it enjoyable?

Bill: Not really.

When asked if the content of their classes had contributed negatively to their classroom experience, most students clearly stated that content was not the issue. In fact, some stated that in their negative classroom experience that they had actually looked forward to learning the material but other factors in the classroom had made it negative. Of the five students that mentioned content as contributing to their negative experience, the following reasons were given.

Table 11

Reasons Given for Ineffective Content

Explanation	No. of Responses 5/12 responded
The specific content did not interest them.	2
The content was not relevant or important.	2
The content was too culturally specific.	1

For Harriet, one of the main reasons she disliked her freshman inquiry class was the content. She stated that “I just didn’t like the material and it’s just boring.” For Yali, she felt misled about the content of her course. She stated that “at first I thought it was like a history class and I thought, oh great...I love history. But it was more of an art history class and more art than the history part and so I didn’t like that too much.”

Another reason given by two students was that the content didn’t seem relevant or necessary—a mirror opposite to some whom had experienced content positively. Sarah didn’t enjoy her Bachelor of Science classes because, “I’m not going to do anything with economics.” Similarly, Bill didn’t like some classes because “I don’t know when I will use it (the content) in my life again.”

Finally, one student, Tara, did not enjoy a class primarily because she did not have the cultural or linguistic knowledge to grasp the ideas. The following exchange reflects her views.

Tara: I felt very lost in that class. The material...was about film criticism and so many strange words, you know, terminology....So I have a hard time understanding....

Researcher: So do you think the major difficulty in that class was the language or do you think it was...?

Tara: The language and the....It was popular culture....At first my intention was, I was kind of excited to learn some more about this culture, you know. But then...all the references are hard to get to. So all the material, stuff they talk about sometimes, that sometimes she passes out some ads, you know, maybe some psychology analyzing...pictures of the 50s or 60s and all the brand of cigarettes and how the women dress. I have no idea....

Students' Perceptions of Academic Success

The final area examined in the individual interviews tried to ascertain if the participants in the study felt that they had been successful in college and how they defined that success. Even though this question did not directly deal with classroom climate, it would seem logical that each student's experience in the classroom impacted how they perceived of themselves as college students, and this seemed to be the case. When asked whether they had been successful as college students, eight clearly felt that they had been successful, two were ambivalent and two clearly felt that they weren't successful. Of the four who were either ambivalent about their success or felt unsuccessful, three of these students also felt conflicted or negatively towards their overall classroom experience. It is also interesting to note that of the four who did not define themselves as successful, three had the lowest GPAs represented in the research group. Of those who felt successful, all but one had a GPA over 3.0.

When asked to explain why they felt they were successful, the following reasons were given. Once again, please note that students often gave more than one reason why they believed they were successful.

Table 12

Reasons Given for Academic Success

Explanation	No. of Responses
	12/12 responded
I'm receiving good or passing grades.	7
I'm learning new ideas and developing skills.	6
My English abilities have improved.	2
I am personally motivated.	2
My professors have been helpful and caring.	2

The two most frequent reasons given for their success were that they were receiving good or passing grades, i.e. their GPAs were good, and that they felt they were learning new ideas and developing new skills. However, even though more students responded that their grades were a measure of their success, a significant portion of the students stressed that grades were secondary—more of a byproduct—of their learning rather than the main reason for their success. Karen, from Kenya, explained this attitude most eloquently.

There's a difference going to class and getting the material...just because you want an A. I don't go to class for that...okay, there are probably some classes that I go to to get an A, but most of the classes I go [to] because I want to learn and I know what I learn is going to come back to me sometime and I'm going to use something in the future. So [it is] that will to want to learn not to get an A...mostly to get skills that are going to help you get

where you are going is what keeps me [going]...[that] is what I define success as.

Eric stressed that even though his grades were improving that the most important thing for him was that “things are starting to come together and everything is starting to make sense because you can see how one thing relates to another.” For him, “the more you understand, the better your grades get, so I’d define that as successful.” For Harriet, from Korea, success was “getting good grades in the class and enjoying my classes and feeling that I’m getting something out of it.”

A specific area of learning that two students mentioned in relation to their success was the fact that their English abilities were improving. Tara, from Vietnam, stated that after only being in the U.S. for four years she was proud of the English ability that she had achieved. She mentioned that “I think I study English pretty well. I can speak, too, compared to many other friends who have been here way longer than I do, but I think I have better grammar than some of them. I speak even better than them.” Sarah stated that even though other people may not recognize the improvement in her English, she did and that gave her a feeling of success. She stated that “even though people don’t know that I am improving...I know how to arrange the structures and I have improved my vocabulary also and have less grammar mistakes, which is really good because I recognize those things.”

Besides their learning new things and receiving acceptable grades, two students felt that they were successful because of their own personal motivation. Betty stated that she did well in school because high academic expectations from her family motivated her to succeed. Karen adamantly stated that “My success is my

will to learn.” While Karen credited her success only to her internal motivation, Betty as well as Alice also gave credit externally to their professors. Betty stated “that taking the right professors is a big help” in terms of her being successful. Alice stressed the importance of the professor even more as delineated below.

Alice: I think what makes the classes successful, mainly because of the teacher. And if she’s concerned about students and willing to answer students’ questions in a positive way that really helped me express my feelings and questions about the class. And I think if the teacher’s very concerned about the students, they will just keep asking questions and encourage you to ask questions like whatever you don’t understand....

Researcher: So you think that the whole reason you’re successful—correct me if I’m wrong—the whole reason you’re successful in some college classes depends completely on the professor?

Alice: I think so.

Researcher: Not on you?

Alice: No.

Once again, the importance of the professor surfaced in Alice’s response.

When asked what barriers they encountered in terms of being successful in college, a multiple answers from each student surfaced. They are delineated as follows:

Table 13

Reasons Given for Not Succeeding Academically

Explanations	No. of Responses
	12/12 responded
I struggle with lack of motivation or direction.	4
I don't have enough social connections.	3
Some of my study skills need improvement.	2
Outside family pressures/expectations interfere with my success.	2
I struggle to achieve good grades.	2
My English abilities are weak.	2
Discrimination towards my race or immigrant status is a barrier.	2

The most frequently articulated barrier to success was students' own lack of motivation or direction. Alice, from China, stated that when she didn't put in as much effort into her work that she was not successful. Tara concurred that "if I try harder, which I can, I can get an A or I can get...the best grade I could, but I never try." Betty echoed this sentiment. "I guess, sometimes, I don't spend enough time studying maybe. If I study more, I'll do better at school." For Mary, from Guatemala, her issue was more a lack of clarity in her career choice and this frustrated her. She felt that "I haven't been successful in really knowing what I want to do."

Another somewhat surprising area, given the somewhat marginal role that other students seemed to play in their learning, was that three students felt thwarted

in their success because of their lack of social connections at school. While some of these social connections were so that students had a wider study circle from which to succeed academically, others were purely more personal in nature. Harriet felt that her lack of social connections had hindered her academic success because “it has hindered my networking. But that’s how I came to learn to stay by myself and it’s worked out because I do good in my classes, but I think maybe I could do a little bit better if I have a study group.” Yali felt frustrated that she hadn’t been able to develop social relationships in her classes. She stated that “I’ve met a lot of ...people but haven’t been able to develop any kind of relationship as more than an acquaintance. They aren’t a friend yet. They are just somebody I see occasionally.” She went on to say that

I have been successful but maybe not to the degree I want to be. I want to get more involved on campus and I haven’t been able to do that because of the classes I’m taking which require a lot of work. I guess it’s my own...I’m hindering myself in that aspect from preventing myself from becoming more involved in campus. And I think being more involved is more successful than passing your classes. It shows that you’re into the community, your environment.

Sara, from Sri Lanka, also felt that social relationships outside of study groups had hindered her success. She felt that “the only thing I lack is...socializing, like going more out and hanging out with friends. I’m thinking now in a way it’s good I don’t do it. I don’t hang out with friends a lot because it’s time consuming and so much things to do but it’s good once in a while you know....”

Two students also felt that some of their study skills were weak and this proved a barrier to their success. Eric, from Bosnia, stated that “I’m still learning

how to manage my time better and I still waste a lot of time by not doing things. But it gets better. I think it's a long process to become good at that." Alina felt that there are two areas that she needed to work on. She recognized that she wasn't good at critical thinking and analyzing and that this had thwarted her academically. She also stated that "I just need to stop being a procrastinator."

Two other students felt that outside family pressures were barriers to their success in college. Yali, from Cambodia, felt that her family had very high expectations of her but at the same time didn't understand the challenges posed by college. She shared

I mean they didn't go to college...and I bring my backpack home and it has one or two textbooks and I set it down...and they say what do you have in there that is so loud? I say that it's my textbook and I tell her that I have homework and I do it everyday...sometimes they understand that college is hard and you have to work hard but, on the other hand, they expect me to be really, really smart and so I have everything done by a certain time. That kind of puts pressure on me and I'm like well this is hard and I can't do it like every minute of every day. I need a break sometimes.

For Karen, her family pressures were quite different. For her, it seemed that her family saw her school commitment as a lack of commitment to them. She stated that this tension "can take my energy away" from school. Clearly, Karen felt resentment over this "because it's my life and they have their life. I don't tell them what to do. They shouldn't tell me what to do."

Two students also stated that not being able to achieve the grades they needed to be successful had been troubling. Eric, initially, had difficulty getting the grades he needed. He recounted that "I started off struggling pretty much because I was in classes that were the general biology, general chemistry classes....and I just didn't

feel like I was doing well in those classes or that I wasn't going to be able to go in that direction." Because he wasn't able to get the grades he needed, he thought that he would need to change majors. Likewise, Candy felt unsuccessful because she needed to graduate with a 3.5 in order to be able to go to dental school. She stated that "if I want to go to professional school after I get a bachelor's degree I have to graduate with a 3.5, and right now I have a 2.9, so I feel unsuccessful."

For Candy, this sense of being unsuccessful in her GPA was directly linked to her ESL issues. The turmoil Candy felt over her lack of English ability, surfaced in the following conversation.

Researcher: Anything else that you think is making it hard for you to succeed?

Candy: Oh, because, I think English is my Second Language.

Researcher: So you think that interferes a lot with you being successful?

Candy: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you think that it is English that makes the content of the science classes hard?

Candy: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you think that is your number one barrier, English?

Candy: Yeah I think so. In some science classes, I can't understand. Sometimes I understand but it is hard to remember all the writing down and when I take the test, it takes long to read things....

Researcher: So, when you take a test, it takes you longer to read because of the English and then do you run out of time?

Candy: Yeah.

Researcher: And that's why you hate tests in class?

Candy: Yeah, I think so. You know, it's hard for me to read and understand multiple choice. The answer, you've got four choices and they are really similar and it is easy for you to be confused.

Researcher: Because of the English?

Candy: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you know how you're going to overcome this hurdle?

Candy: No.

In talking with Bill, from China, the issue of his English ability was also a problem.

He stated that in English he was unsuccessful because he had "a problem with college level speaking and writing." But he felt that by working harder, he still would be able to succeed. It is important here to note the power that English proficiency has on self perception since both Candy and Bill were two of the four students who did not feel that overall they had been successful in college.

The last barrier articulated in individual interviews by two students was a feeling of discrimination because of their race and/or immigrant status. Tara, from Vietnam, felt that her success was limited by discrimination. She felt that because of her cultural, linguistic, and racial difference that she faced disadvantages in both school and the workplace. Harriet, from Korea, also felt that the racial, cultural divide was problematic to her being successful because it made her self-conscious. She stated that in forming study groups, she had

an easier time going to other minority students and talking with them and approaching them because I feel like there's something common between us, more than approaching a full Caucasian person....That's how it's always been. And basically, even though I've basically grown up here, I don't feel very comfortable...I get kind of self-conscious of just my appearance in itself and I'm always wondering, they probably think I have slanted eyes, you

know, they think I look kind of funny and stuff like that. And so that kind of makes it hard for me to approach things.

Both Tara and Harriet clearly felt a sense of isolation and separation from others because of their minority status. For both, they perceived this as creating problems for them both academically and socially.

Conclusion

After analyzing the data gathered through the focus groups and individual interviews, several interesting observations surfaced. First, more than any other aspect, the professor seemed to play the most significant role in whether the participants perceived their classroom experience as positive or negative. Participants discussed the roles their professors played with much greater frequency than any other research area. Those professors who had created a positive learning environment seemed to be fully invested in the class and their students. The participants in the study seemed to clearly feel that in terms of their positive classroom experience that the professor had created a clear, open and regular communication channel with them both in terms of class material and expectations. It seemed to the students that they *mattered*.

In terms of the role fellow students played in the classroom experience, the participants discussed the role of other students with less frequency. A full one third of the participants never mentioned students in either their specific positive or negative classroom experiences. In addition, the participants' attitudes seemed much more ambivalent. While it seemed that they would prefer a class where other students were inclusive towards them and motivated to learn—as evidenced also by

their preference for small groups and discussions—it did not seem as central as the role of the professor. This was also evidenced by their apparent ability to ignore fellow students when they proved a distraction or negative force in their learning. It was as though they didn't *expect* to be welcomed by other students and when they were it clearly added to their positive classroom experience.

Interesting data also emerged in terms of classroom pedagogy and content. Once again, pedagogy and content were not discussed with the degree of frequency that professors were. However, participants seemed to clearly favor pedagogy which used a variety of teaching and learning styles because this seemed to enable them to learn more successfully. While they did not dislike lecture style, they preferred that it be mixed with other ways to learn such as interactive websites, films and hands-on activities. This desire for interactive learning was also supported in the fact that participants clearly preferred small dynamic classrooms filled with small well directed group discussions where they were able to interact with both the professor and other students in a warm and inviting atmosphere. In terms of content, students did not seem to clearly favor any particular content areas. Instead, they wanted content which was relevant, applicable and would help them expand their understanding of themselves and their world. In other words, the more they were able to grasp and apply the content, the more it seemed to appeal to them.

Finally, those students who felt that their classroom experience had been positive also felt that they were academically successful. The two main indicators for them were the grades they were receiving as well a positive assessment of their

learning. For those who were ambivalent or felt they were unsuccessful, it seemed linked to a variety of factors such as weak study skills, low motivation, poor English, racial/ethnic discrimination as well as family pressures. Another interesting area in which students felt unsuccessful was in their limited ability to connect socially with other students. This seems somewhat ironic seeing that in their discussion of other students in the classroom experience, they seemed to downplay their importance. It is as though they *wanted* other students to be a positive force in their academic and social lives but were dubious of this happening.

Even with that being said, most participants articulated that they had had a mostly positive experience in their college classes. This seemed to be mostly due, in part, to the fact that they felt more connected in the areas researched than alienated. What also seems to rise from the data is an underlying ethos of learning that the participants possessed that allowed them to maximize those areas in the classroom that aided their learning and minimize those areas which impacted that learning. It seemed that this ethos of learning helped mitigate the variety of hurdles they encountered in the classes.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In order to comprehend the significance of the above research, the following discussion will first examine the findings in the light of previous research on classroom climates and minorities. While the study participants' experiences clearly support much of the research on minorities, they also differ in some important ways. The following discussion will also examine new ideas not previously looked at with this specific population that have emerged in the areas of student/professor, student/student, student/pedagogy and student/content. While it is necessary to examine these discrete areas for the specific information they yield, it is equally important to look beyond to larger global ideas which seem to emerge from the data. More specifically, why is it that most participants saw their college classroom as a positive experience when clearly they had encountered hurdles and struggles within some of these classes? Finally, the author will suggest other areas of research that should be pursued in order to more fully understand how immigrant students are experiencing the college classroom.

Comparison with Existing Research

General Theories

Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory. The findings seem to support Ogbu's theory on a basic level. In his research Ogbu states that "voluntary minorities"

(immigrants) would maintain a more positive attitude towards school than “involuntary minorities” (non-immigrants) because they would be more accepting of the expectations of the classroom because of a “tourist” attitude (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Overall, it does seem that immigrant students have a mostly positive attitude towards their college experience. This is indicated in that fact that a majority, eight, stated that their overall classroom college experience had been positive. This also surfaced in the fact that a majority, eight, felt that they were successful in college. These students did demonstrate an overall positive attitude towards American culture and the English language and did not see the classroom expectations as a threat to their identities. Instead, many of the students in this study seemed to demonstrate an ability to be bicultural and to move between the two cultural worlds of their home culture and American culture.

Even though most of these students seemed to be positively oriented to college, Ogbu is perhaps being too simplistic in stating that the difficulty that immigrants have in school is short lived because they will be able to culturally adjust. Even though most participants seemed positively oriented to their classroom experiences, an underlying idea that surfaced with a number of the participants was this feeling that they didn't quite “fit” with other students. This manifested in ongoing ambivalence as to the role that other students played. As connected with Scenario II, many students stated, rather matter of factly, that racism was a common occurrence and one with which they regularly had to deal. Some students went so far as to state that they felt somewhat ostracized because they were racially,

culturally or linguistically different from most students. There seemed to be a nagging feeling of alienation amongst a number of the participants. This seems to mirror Bhatnagar's research as quoted by Berryman (1983) wherein "immigrant children carry the additional burden of being culturally and often racially different, of being part of a visible and/or audible minority" (p. 3).

Another way that Ogbu and Simons (1998) potentially oversimplify the distinction between voluntary and involuntary minorities is in the area of language competency. It is important to note that the majority of the participants in this study who were consistently positive about their classroom and college experience were immigrant students who had been in the U.S. for quite some time and seemed highly acculturated and skilled in English. The majority did not even have an accent. But those students who were ambivalent or negative towards their college classroom experience and their achievement of success tended to be more recent arrivals, had accents, and exhibited some difficulties with English. These students may achieve a level of comfort and fluency in American culture through time, but based on the linguistic phenomenon of fossilization, may never achieve English fluency. Fossilization is the process by which a person learning a new language, in this case English, becomes "frozen" in their language progression and development. There are a variety of contributing factors but one that is clear is the age at which a person begins to learn that second language. It is important that a person begin learning a second language as early as possible, particularly before late childhood and early adolescence, to maximize his/her chances at English fluency. It is these older

immigrant students that Ogbu fails to recognize. For them, language difficulties in school would not be short lived. Gibson (1997) seems accurate in stating that Ogbu focuses on one type of immigrant and ignores others in developing his theory.

Cummins' framework of empowering and disabling. Cummins' (1993, p.104) theory states that immigrant students can be "empowered" or "disabled" through (a) the degree that the student's language and culture are incorporated into school programs, (b) the degree to which minority community participation is encouraged and incorporated into the student's education, (c) the degree to which teaching pedagogy promotes students to use their first language in generating knowledge, and (d) the degree to which professional educators in their assessment of these students are advocates. The findings of the present study did not find any major support for the first three conclusions. However, there is evidence to suggest that for immigrant college students to positively experience the classroom they need to feel that their professors care and empathize with them. This care and empathy is not necessarily directly connected to advocating for the "student's culture," but rather to being an advocate for "the student" in terms of supporting his/her learning and being sensitive to cultural and linguistic issues.

Classroom Climate Studies

Teacher/student interactions. General studies by Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) found that frequent interaction inside and outside the classroom contributed positively to student learning. This study supports this research in regards to immigrant students as well since the professor's availability outside of class

contributed to a positive classroom experience for seven of the twelve participants because it communicated a personal interest in their learning. In relation to minorities specifically, Nettles as quoted in Hurtado et al. (1999) found that professors' out of classroom contact with students contributed to higher GPA's among African American students. It could be the case that higher GPA is indicative of a more positive academic experience. These conclusions seem to be supported in this study. Like the findings of Hurtado et al. (1999), Vasquez (1988), and Trujillo (1986), who found that minority students had more positive attitudes towards the class when their professors held high academic expectations for them, four immigrant students in this study also felt that high academic expectations from professors contributed to a positive classroom experience.

Previous studies conducted by Davidson (1996), Swaminathan and Alfred (2001-2002), Alfred (2003), Kiang (1992) and Pappamihel (2002), which highlighted the importance of teacher's acknowledging and supporting students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds in order to create a positive classroom environment, were not supported in this study in association with participants' positive classroom experience. However, it did surface when they discussed negative classroom experiences. Five participants clearly reported negative classroom experiences they associated with the professor's perceived insensitivity to the student's cultural understandings/experiences or language issues. While professors don't need to be overt in their recognition of an immigrant student's cultural and linguistic background in order to create a positive classroom experience, it seems

critical that professors don't dismiss or disregard the cultural knowledge and linguistic needs of their students.

Student/student interactions. While this study compliments previous studies conducted with minority students in terms of teacher/student interaction and its importance in shaping classroom climate, the data both supports and differs from much of the existing research in terms of the role other students play, particularly in terms of the kind and level of importance that these students play in creating a positive classroom climate. For example, Hurtado et al. (1999) emphasized that other students play a critical role in creating a positive college experience for minority students. In support of this, five students stated that fellow students were factors in their overall positive classroom experience. Some of this stemmed from the diversity of the student body rather than from specific actions of individual students within the classroom. This supports research by Hurtado et al. (1999) which discovered that there needs to be "sufficient racial/ethnic enrollments" (§ 31) of minority populations so that those minorities do not experience tokenism (Kanter, 1977), but instead feel comfortable in their environment. In other words, if minority students are allowed to feel like an individual rather than a racial/ethnic token or symbol in the classroom simply by greater numerical racial/ethnic representations of their race/ethnicity then their overall comfort level increases in the classroom. Besides numerical representations, participants also noted that fellow students had contributed to their positive classroom experiences because they had made them feel included and welcomed in the class through respecting their cultural/linguistic

backgrounds, academic abilities and common interests. These findings support both Hurtado and Kanter's research.

However, what is important to note is the degree to which all other students in the classroom impacted their experience. While other students strongly contributed to a negative overall classroom experience for two participants, these participants were in the minority. In general, the role of fellow students in the classroom seemed to play a more peripheral rather than central role for the research participants. This counters previous research by Hurtado that is also echoed in work by Astin (1993) who states that "the student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). For four students (one third of the total participants), other students were not even mentioned as contributing to either their positive or negative classroom experience. In addition, from the second scenario in the focus groups, it would appear that immigrant students have developed an ability to ignore or disregard negative or unhelpful behavior from fellow students. This clearly surfaced in the second focus group scenario where eight out of twelve students would choose to remain in a class where other students were openly hostile to them. Perhaps Tara, from Vietnam, stated it most effectively when she mentioned that because she had experienced ongoing alienation from American students she had learned to focus her learning on the teacher and ignore her fellow students. This ability to block out negative social situations and continue to pursue a successful college education seemed quite unique from minority students who, according to Richardson and

Skinner (1992), stated that “dissatisfaction with the social and emotional environment is...a frequently cited reason for minority students leaving college and poor performance (p. 36). Perhaps one reason that the participants did not appear to be so strongly influenced by their peers was because of the nature of PSU being a commuter school. Specifically, the nature of a commuter school is that students often have support networks that exist off campus such as family, friends and membership in other cultural groups and, therefore, are not as dependent on fellow students for support.

Student/pedagogy dynamic. The findings from this study also support Hurtado et al. (1999) and Vasquez (1988) who found that minorities prefer collaborative and cooperative learning environments. In populations looking at all college students, Brookfield (1986) also found this to be true with general student populations who need participation and collaboration for effective learning. This surfaced particularly in the participants’ preference for small groups and interactive discussions in the classroom. This was very evident in the third scenario of the focus group where eight students preferred small groups over a lecture format. Upon further examination though, participants clarified that these small groups needed to be places of inclusion where students felt safe. This reinforces Alfred’s (2003) findings where Caribbean women did not prefer small group work because they felt alienated and isolated in the group. Although the students in the present study preferred learning in a collaborative and cooperative setting with small, culturally inclusive groups because they felt it maximized their learning, they did not seem to

oppose the lecture format. In fact, they preferred the lecture format for content areas such as math and science.

Student/content dynamic. The data do not directly support the findings of Davidson (1996) and Kiang (1992), who found that content which includes or explores an immigrant student's cultural or racial identity positively contributes to the classroom climate. In fact, in the aggregate, in relating their most positive classroom experience, participants did not seem to show a preference for specific content areas or disciplines that would include their cultural or racial identities. Conversely, for a few students, their most enjoyable classes were ones where they learned about the surrounding American culture and history. However, one student did struggle with a class—which she originally looked forward to *because* she would learn about American culture—because it assumed knowledge about American pop culture which she didn't possess. However, there was no clear consensus on what content areas created a positive learning environment, as demonstrated by the variety of courses which participants named as their most positive classroom experience. Some of these subjects were Speech, French, Anatomy, Computer Science, Business, Sexualities, and Engineering.

Additional Ideas Emerging from this Study

Student/Teacher Interaction

Other factors not specifically addressed in existing research on classroom climate and minorities that surfaced in this study include the professors' delivery of content and commitment to teaching excellence. For five participants, the professor's

clear delivery and explanation of material and assignments seemed critical to their positive experience. Conversely, for six participants, the professor's unclear explanations and assignments were reported to contribute to their negative classroom experience. Another factor that seemed to contribute to the negative classroom experience for three students was their professor's unreasonable expectations in terms of workload as well as the amount of content covered.

The other major area not directly addressed in previous research that contributed to a positive classroom experience was the professor's attitude and commitment to the students and his/her teaching. For seven students, it was the professor's personal connection with the students that made their experience positive. In addition, the professor seemed committed to an improvement of his/her teaching as well as the students' learning. Conversely, students had negative experiences when the professor created a distance between him/herself either partially through making students feel intellectually intimidated or through insensitivity to the students' cultural or linguistic identities. What seems to emerge from those data is that, for these students, it was critical that the professor was genuinely concerned about students and their learning in the classroom.

Although these kinds of findings have not emerged directly in research on classroom climates and minorities, they have surfaced in more general studies that have examined the role of teacher/student interaction in retention and graduation of undergraduate students. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini (1998) list a number of factors that foster student learning. One of those is "a strong faculty emphasis on

teaching and student development” (p. 151). Brookfield (1986), in his work on learning, addresses specific principles that professors should adhere to promote learning, some of which are mutual respect, praxis, and critical reflection on teaching. Galbraith (1998) echoes Brookfield in his research on adult learners. He states that “authenticity and credibility should be essential elements of the educational encounter” (p.8). Professors need to be authentic and credible with their students for a positive learning experience.

Student/Student Interaction

Another area not noted in previous research is the positive role that other students can play in learning. Some participants felt that other students had made their classroom experience positive because these students had contributed to their learning through a motivation to learn and through interaction with participants about the material being studied. In other words, fellow students aided the participants’ learning in the classroom. Conversely, five participants had experienced the classroom negatively because fellow students’ poor attitudes had impacted their ability to learn. These attitudes manifested in such ways as an apparent lack of motivation, complaints, not paying attention and talking off task. It seems clear from these data that immigrant students want fellow students to aid in rather than deter from their learning process.

Student/Pedagogy Dynamic

While the data on student/pedagogy supports Hurtado et. al’s research that the learning environment needs to be cooperative, it expanded on this understanding.

Participants in the study preferred small groups and small classrooms of 30-50 students because it allowed them to interact more and therefore learn more. Another new area that surfaced was that seven participants identified variety in teaching/learning aids used in the classroom as well as in assignments as contributing to their positive experience. These teaching/learning aides included movies, presentation software, streaming lectures, and class web sites. Participants also enjoyed classes where the assignments were frequent and varied because it was more effective for their learning and it allowed them to apply a variety of skills rather than just one, such as writing. Participants struggled when their grades were based on one or two assignments that only relied upon one academic competency such as essay writing.

Student/Content Dynamic

While the data did not seem to show a student preference for specific disciplinary areas, other valuable information surfaced in terms of the role of content in immigrant students' classroom experiences. From the data, it seems clear that the participants needed to be personally involved in the content taught. This surfaced in the fact that the classes that five participants enjoyed the most made the content relevant to their lives, and two participants had negative experiences because they did not see the relevance of the content. In addition, two participants also enjoyed classes where they were able to have a voice in the content studied. The need to be able to personally direct and apply the content also surfaced in that two participants

enjoyed classes where they were able to expand their own understanding through general education classes.

Assessment of Academic Success

When students were asked to assess if they had been successful so far in college, most responded positively, as Ogbu and Simon's (1998) research predicted they would. What is interesting to note is that both in the reasons given for their success and in the barriers that they encountered, the vast majority were based on their personal motivation or abilities and not on external reasons. In other words, they were succeeding or failing because of themselves and not other outside circumstances. This seems to counter Cummin's (1993) research which shows that societal structures in which minorities are disenfranchised hold significant power in how minorities experience the classroom. However, these research participants seemed to focus on internal capacities and motivations rather than external pressures. This is reflected in the reasons given for success—(a) I'm receiving good grades (b) I'm learning new ideas and developing skills (c) My English skills are improving and (d) I'm personally motivated to succeed. Only two students attributed their success to others, i.e. helpful and caring professors. Likewise, the barriers they encountered also were personally caused—(a) I struggle with motivation and direction (b) I am not connected socially (c) I need to improve my study skills (d) I'm not getting good enough grades (e) My English is weak. The only barriers for success that were external reasons, for two participants in each category, were outside family

pressures/expectations and discrimination based on race/ethnicity and/or immigrant status.

It also interesting to note that three students stated that they needed more social connections in order to be academically successful. These participants felt that more social connections would strengthen their academic performance, although some were ambivalent in that they recognized that more social interaction would detract from the time they had to study and this, in itself, would be problematic. Some participants seemed to experience a tension between wanting more social connections and needing to concentrate on studying.

The Ethos of Learning

While it is important to examine the discrete information emerging from the specific areas of student/professor, student/student, student/pedagogy and student/content as it compares with existing research and for additional data, it is equally important to take a step back and try to ascertain the larger more global ideas which seem to be emerging from the data. It is clear that most students in the study felt positively about their overall college classroom experience and their academic success. As the data emerged and the hurdles caused by racism, cultural alienation, and weak English skills were fleshed out in these students' experiences, their positive feelings towards the college classroom became more and more commendable. The participants seemed to demonstrate a tenacity to succeed that at times seemed extraordinary. They seemed to possess certain intangible qualities that allowed them to overcome the hurdles they experienced.

These personal qualities can be explained through the work done on self efficacy by Bandura (1989). Bandura (1989) states that, “among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people’s belief about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives” (p. 1175). In the participants overall positive assessment of their success, it is clear they felt in control of their learning. In addition, if people have a strong sense of personal agency then they are able to demonstrate a great deal of tenacity in the light of challenging conditions because they have “an optimistic sense of personal efficacy” (p. 1176). For Karen her source of personal efficacy seemed to be connected to her immigrant past. She states that “my encouragement is when you think of where you come from and it’s what keeps you going.” But much more prevalent for Karen as well as the other participants was that this self efficacy seemed manifest more often in an overwhelming desire to learn and succeed. This desire to learn and succeed, this *ethos of learning*, seemed to diminish all of their negative experiences and maximize their positive ones in the classroom.

In fact, this desire to maximize their learning seemed central to every area examined in the study—student/professor, student/student, student/pedagogy and student/content. For example, almost every positive and negative aspect raised about the professors by the participants was discussed within the context of how effectively the professor facilitated their learning. Students were clear that they could learn more effectively when the professor created a comfortable, respectful and inviting atmosphere. They wanted a professor that was available outside of

class, gave clear and reasonable assignments and enjoyed teaching, because all these factors maximized their learning. Perhaps this ethos of learning explains the reason why the professor played a larger role in their classroom experience than originally expected. Focusing on the professor seemed to allow the participants to focus on their learning and nullify common negative influences. This is summed up in Tara's words. "It's not your country, you know. So, all the differences are like a barrier for you....I guess because [of that] I isolated myself more than a typical, you know, English speaker....So, I focus more on the teacher."

This could also potentially explain the mixed feelings participants shared about their fellow students. When discussing positive student influences, once again all the comments were geared toward how effectively fellow students facilitated their learning. For example, the participants could learn more effectively when fellow students created a warm and inviting atmosphere. They also really enjoyed when fellow students were agents for learning through small group discussions and projects. For Sarah, her classroom experience was overwhelmingly positive mainly because fellow students had been effective mediators of learning for her. However, when students were distractions from the participants' learning, they seemed to be ignored or disregarded, as surfaced clearly in Scenario II of the focus groups. Many of the participants mentioned that they were at college primarily to learn, and when students contributed to that they were welcomed, but if they detracted from that they seemed to be essentially dismissed from the immigrant student's learning experiences. This uncertainty as to whether fellow students were going to contribute

to or detract from the participants' learning might have contributed to the diminished role that fellow students seemed to play in their overall experiences—a full one third of the students never mentioned fellow students in their positive or negative classroom experiences.

This ethos of learning surfaced again in the participants' pedagogical preferences. They clearly wanted small interactive classes filled with a variety of teaching aids. They seemed to need to interact with the material either through such activities as small group discussions, online interactive websites, videos, or in-class guided discussion questions. Yet, it did not seem to be the specific pedagogy of these classes that they were wedded to, because even though most students related negative classroom experiences that occurred in lecture style classes, they were not necessarily opposed to lecture itself. Rather, the reason they seemed to prefer the aforementioned class pedagogy is because it facilitated their learning more effectively. Similarly, the participants preferred frequent and diverse assignments in the classes as well because they realized that they learned more when they had to regularly work with the material through a variety of mediums.

Another somewhat surprising result from the study was the participants' preferences in terms of content. Most participants weren't so "narrow minded" in their learning goals that they preferred only classes taught in their major. Instead, there seemed to be an openness to learning in a variety of content areas. It seemed that the only prerequisite was that these areas needed to be knowledge that they could apply. It was as though the participants possessed a thirst for learning about

all things. This might explain the positive attitude that some of the participants had towards their general education classes, which are usually disliked by many students. They enjoyed them because they allowed them to become more “well rounded” in their knowledge and allowed them to gain a greater understanding of themselves and their world. Once again, learning was central to their content preferences.

This ethos of learning also surfaced in the participants’ self assessment of their academic success. Most felt that they had been successful because they were learning new things and developing new skills. While many used their GPA as a measure of this success, grades were not the driving force, learning was. Harriet perhaps best addresses the connection between grades and learning by stating that “the more you understand, the better grades you get, so I’d define that as successful.” Improving English skills were also a measure of success for a few students. Perhaps this ethos of learning is best summed in one of Karen’s statements. “My success is my will to learn.” It is this will to learn, this ethos that seems the driving force behind all of their classroom experiences and the force which seems to enable most of them to experience the classroom more positively than negatively.

Suggestions for Further Research

Because this research is only exploratory, it is critical that the study be replicated on a much larger scale. Any conclusions that surface from this work are tentative at best for a number of reasons. First the number of participants was far too low for any solid conclusions. It was only conducted at one site and so some of the results might be unique to that site. In addition, the participants needed to be much

more representative of the wide variety of immigrant groups in this country and the number of participants needs to be greater. It is interesting to note that, in this study, while there were several white immigrants in the potential pool of participants, only one chose to participate. Is this perhaps because these immigrant students struggle less with the issues of being an immigrant student simply because they are white and can “blend” more easily into the racial majority? This would be an important voice to hear. The study also needed to be spread equally across genders. It is highly likely that because there were only two men involved in this study that their voices and perspectives are not heard adequately.

It is also critical that participants be equally distributed among the three GPA designations, 3.0-4.0, 2.0-2.99 and below 2.0, in any future study. In this exploratory study, eight of the participants had GPAs above 3.0 and four had GPAs from 2.00-2.99. There were no students in the study that fell below a 2.00. Having an equal spread of GPAs might yield very different results since it seemed that those students who had GPAs below 3.0 in this study were more tentative about their classroom experiences and also did not seem to readily see themselves as academically successfully. If this really is a trend, it would be critical to hear from students whose GPA fell below 2.0. They might have a very different perspective on the college classroom. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the above study be replicated on a much larger scale so that all of the above stated areas could be addressed and a more complete picture of the immigrant student’s classroom experience could be determined.

A possible reason that there were no participants whose GPA fell below 2.0 is because those immigrant students who were not doing well academically had already dropped out of school in their freshman year. Therefore, another valuable study would be to examine incoming immigrant students who are freshman to try to understand how they are experiencing the college classroom. This might yield very different results. While the researcher chose sophomore level students because she wanted them to have enough college classroom experiences to be able to talk in depth, she perhaps, by default, had participants who had “made it” by successfully completing their freshman year. Also, on an anecdotal level, the researcher has taught a number of year-long freshman classes and has noticed that immigrant students with particularly weak English abilities and difficult cultural adjustment rarely matriculate beyond their freshman year.

Another possible reason for the lack of representation of students falling below 2.0 in the study is that they chose not to participate was because they wanted to concentrate on their studies and felt they didn't have time to participate in the study. If this is the case, then perhaps this study could be conducted in connection with specific classes as part of the class requirement. This would ensure the participation of as wide an academic spectrum of students as possible. It would be critical though that the research subjects be pulled from a wide range of academic courses and that the content nature of those courses be taken into account.

Along with this, it might also be valuable to conduct studies with students through all four years to ascertain if their perception of the college classroom climate

changes as they matriculate through college. Eric mentioned that his fellow students played a more positive role as he was getting into his major classes. If this holds true for other immigrant students, then fellow students might play an increasingly more important role in the classroom climate and learning as the immigrant student's education progresses. This data could be ascertained by looking at discrete groups of students at each of the levels but also by a longitudinal study that follows one particular group of immigrant students throughout their college career to understand how and if their perception of the college classroom climate changes.

Another worthwhile study would be to look particularly at immigrant students whose English language competencies are low in both reading/writing and speaking. The majority of the participants in this study were fluent in English and many had no accent at all. It might be that because of this, English proficiency didn't surface as a significant hurdle for many of them. However, for those for whom it was an issue, it seemed to color all of their classroom experiences. For example, some articulated that it was a barrier in terms of understanding the material both written and spoken. It also seemed to be a hindrance in terms of the participants' ability to interact with the professor as well as the other students in the class. Their negative perception of their English ability also seemed to influence negatively their assessment of how successful they felt about their college career. Thus, it would be important to look only at low English competency and the role it plays in immigrant students' perceptions of their classroom experiences.

Summary of Major Findings and Lesser Observations

So, in summary, what are the major conclusions that can be drawn from this exploratory study? In terms of the specific areas studied, i.e. professor/student, student/student, student/pedagogy and student/content, some played much more important roles than others. First, professors seemed to play the most critical role in creating a positive or negative classroom climate. This is evidenced in both the frequency and time that the participants devoted to discussing professors and how they influenced the classroom climate. The next two seemingly equally important areas which seemed significant but not as important as the professor in creating a positive classroom climate were the student/student and the student/pedagogy. In each of these areas, two thirds of the participants mentioned them as contributing to the classroom climate. For the participants, fellow students were deemed as positive forces when they helped create an atmosphere of learning through their own motivation to learn and inclusion of other students. The participants also felt that the pedagogy needed to be such that regular interaction with the material occurred and a variety of learning methods were available. The one area that didn't seem as critical to a positive classroom climate was the content. Fewer participants mentioned content as playing a central role than any other specific area and if it was mentioned there was no clear consensus as to specific content areas.

Another significant finding that surfaced was the presence of an ethos of learning amongst the participants. This overwhelming desire to learn allowed them to navigate around barriers to their learning whether it was caused the professor,

fellow students, classroom pedagogy or content of the material. This also seemed to occur in part because the participants saw themselves as the responsible parties for their learning and their academic success. The above findings are summarized as followed:

- For immigrant college students, professors play the most critical role in creating a positive classroom climate.
- For immigrant college students, fellow students play an important role but one that is not essential to creating a positive classroom climate.
- For immigrant college students, in terms of pedagogy, small, interactive classes are preferred but not necessarily required in creating a positive classroom climate.
- For immigrant college students, specific content areas do not play a significant role in creating a positive classroom climate even though the relevance of the content is somewhat important.
- For immigrant college students, they possess an ethos of learning that allows them to overlook negative experiences and perceive their college classroom experiences and academic progress as primarily positive.

Implications of the Study

Based on the data which emerged from this study, higher education should implement certain steps to ensure that immigrant students experience a positive rather than negative classroom experience. Since professors play such a critical role in the classroom, a concerted effort should be made to provide faculty training in

various areas. First, professors should attend training and orientation sessions to enable them be open, personable and accessible with students. Specific tools can be given to allow them to incorporate themselves into their teaching and provide ways that they can be more available with their students. In addition, orientation needs to be provided so that professors understand their immigrant student struggles both academically as well as culturally/linguistically. Then they can, for example, avoid making these students cultural tokens for the class and use vocabulary that accommodates these students linguistic abilities.

Another area where professors could receive specific training is in the area of classroom pedagogy. One of the general shortcomings of higher education is that doctorate programs rarely give training to doctoral students on how to design an effective class by using such tools as small group discussions and other interactive techniques. A campus wide program should be put in place to help faculty develop effective pedagogical strategies.

In addition, in order to aid professors in making their teaching more responsive to these students needs, departments and programs should make regular feedback from the students a required aspect of every class. Now, students usually give feedback at the end of the course, but if professors had regular access to feedback throughout the course, they would be able to adjust their teaching and communicate a concern to their students about their learning. It would be best if this feedback was collected in both oral and written form in order to get a rich amount of information.

It would also be helpful if staff trained in interpreting this information and skilled in classroom pedagogy could meet with faculty regularly to help them make sense of the information and suggest specific changes in the classroom that would be helpful. In light of the changing demographics facing colleges and universities, these various areas of training and feedback would be invaluable not only for immigrant students but also for minority students.

Another area that colleges and universities should be attentive to is the student body. First, admissions need to be diligent in admitting a diverse student body in terms of race, ethnicity and language. Right now, most, if not all colleges, have any idea how many immigrant students are admitted within their ranks. Their admission records do track minority students but not immigrant students. This needs to change. How can an institution be responsive to a specific student population if it doesn't even know how many of this population reside on its campus?

Student orientation needs to include multicultural workshops for incoming students to help them develop a sensitivity to others that may be racially, ethnically and/or linguistically different from them. If we are to have inclusive, positive learning classrooms for immigrant students, we must have students who embrace diversity rather than reject it.

Finally, the administrations at colleges and universities need to make a concerted effort to maintain small class sizes. In the light of growing economic pressures, this is increasingly difficult to do but large lecture halls of 50 or more students is clearly not in the interest of student learning but rather the economic

bottom line. If higher education institutions fail to keep class size small with the increasing numbers of minorities and immigrant students will be disadvantaged further. Immigrant and minority students seem to learn more in smaller more personable classroom settings. Concerns for the need of improved classroom climate are necessary to diminish an increasingly hostile classroom climate for students. If these issues are not adequately addressed, for an increasingly large number of students, learning will become secondary.

Conclusion

This exploratory study has yielded some potentially valuable observations albeit very tentative due to the size and makeup of the study group. While immigrant students parallel many of the experiences of other minorities, they also seem to differ in significant ways. They, too, seemed to prefer classes where professors and fellow students create a warm, comfortable, but academically challenging and engaging atmosphere. They, too, seemed to not want to be tokens for their cultural group and have felt alienated both culturally and linguistically at times. They, too, have struggled with racism both overt and covert in the classroom. And yet, they have seemed to be able to rise above it and mostly experience the classroom climate positively as well as succeed academically. The researcher attributes this positive attitude and success to what she calls an *ethos of learning*. This ethos is a unique ability to overlook the negative influences of the college classroom and focus on those areas that enable them, the immigrant student, to learn. It seems to allow the student to employ personal effective strategies in the

classroom that cause them to succeed rather than fail. These students truly are extraordinary that they can maintain a strong self of self efficacy even though they encounter numerous hurdles. They seem to be academically succeeding despite their experiences. How much more could they achieve if colleges and universities took specific steps to accommodate their classroom climate needs? Hopefully, this study will provide some impetus to do so.

REFERENCES

- Alfred, M. (2003, August). Sociocultural contexts and learning: Anglophone Caribbean immigrant women in U.S. postsecondary education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53(4). Retrieved October 22, 2003, from <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>.
- Astin, A. (1993). *What Matters in College*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44(9) 1175-1184.
- Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. & Tarule, J. (1997). *Women's ways of knowing*. New York: BasicBooks, Inc.
- Berryman, J. (1983, Fall). Immigrant children and the importance of self-esteem in second language acquisition. *TESL Talk*, 14(4) 3-14.
- Bosher, S. & Rowekamp, J. (1998, December). The refugee/immigrant in higher education: The role of educational background. *College ESL*, 8(1) 23-42.
- Brookfield, S. (1986) *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Creswell, J. (1994). *Research design: Qualitative & quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Cummins, J. (1993). Empowering minority students: A framework for intervention. In M. Fine. L. Weis (Eds.), *Beyond silenced voices: class, race, and gender In the United States schools* (pp. 101-118). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Davidson, A. (1996). *Making and molding identity in schools*. New York: State University of New York Press.

- Ellsworth, E. (1994). Representation, self-representation, and the meanings of difference: Questions for educators. In R. Martusewicz, W. Reynolds (Eds.), *Inside/out: Contemporary critical perspectives in education* (pp. 99-108). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Fraser, B. (1998). Classroom environment instruments: development, validity and applications. *Learning Environments Research, 1*, 7-33.
- Galbraith, M. (1998). Becoming an effective teacher of adults. In M.W. Galbraith (Ed.), *Adult Learning Methods* (2nd Ed.) (pp. 3-19). Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Co.
- Gibson, M. (1997, September). Complicating the immigrant/involuntary minority typology. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly, 28*(3) 431-454.
- Gray, M., Rolph, E. & Melamid, E. (1996). *Immigration and higher education: institutional responses to changing demographics*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.
- Harklau, L. (1998, November). Newcomers in U.S. higher education: Questions of access and equity. *Educational Policy, 12*(6). Retrieved July 2, 2001, from <http://ehostvgw>.
- Harklau, L. (1999). Representations of immigrant language minorities in U.S. higher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education, 2*(2), 257-279.
- Hurtado, S. (1994, February). The institutional climate for talented Latino students. *Research in Higher Education, 35*(1), 21-39.
- Hurtado, S., Milem, J., Clayton-Pederson, A., & Allen, W. (1999). Enacting diverse learning environments: Improving the climate for racial/ethnic diversity in higher education. *ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports, 26*(8). Retrieved February 23, 2001, from <http://vwebhwwilsonweb.com>.
- Kanter, R. (1977, March). Some effects of proportions on group life: Skewed sex ratios and Responses to token women. *The American Journal of Sociology, 82*(5), 965-990.
- Kiang, P. (1992, Winter). Issues of curriculum and community for first-generation Asians Americans in college. In L. Zwerling & H. London (Eds.), *First-Generation students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 97-112). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam, S. & Caffarella, R. (1999). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. L. (1990). *The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures* (2nd ed.). New York: The Free Press.
- Ogbu, J., & Simons, H. (1998, June). Voluntary and involuntary minorities: a cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 29(2). Retrieved February 2, 2002, from <http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>.
- Pascarella, E. & Terenzini, P. (1998). Studying college students in the 21st century: Meeting new challenges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 21(2) 151-165.
- Pappamihel, N. (2002, Feb.). English as a second language students and English language anxiety: Issues in the mainstream classroom. *Research in Teaching of English*, 36(3) 327-355.
- Portes, A. (1996). *The new second generation*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Portland State University mission statement. Retrieved January 5, 2008, from <http://www.pdx.edu/mission.html>.
- Richardson, Jr., R., & Skinner, E. (1992, Winter). Helping first-generation minority students achieve degrees. In L. Zwerling & H. London (Eds.), *First-generation students: Confronting the cultural issues* (pp. 29-44). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Swaminathan, R., & Alfred, M. (2001-2002, Fall/Winter). Strangers in the mirror: Immigrant students in the higher education classroom. *Adult Learning*, 12(4) 29-32.
- Treisman, P. (1992). Studying students studying calculus: A look at the lives of minority mathematics students in college. *College Mathematics Journal*, 23(5), 362-372.
- Trujillo, C. (1986, Winter). A comparative examination of classroom interactions between professors and minority and non-minority college students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23(4), 629-642.
- Vasquez, J. (1988, Spring). Contexts of learning for minority students. *The Educational Forum*, 52(3), 243-253.

Vernez, G., & Abrahamse, A. (1996). *How immigrants fare in U.S. education*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.

Wong, S. (1987, Spring). The language learning situation of Asian immigrant students in the U.S. : A socio-and psycholinguistic perspective. *NABE Journal*, 11(3), 203-234.

APPENDIX A
PRIOR LEARNING QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear student,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to learn about your background, skills and interests before you begin the course. This will help your instructor better tailor the course to the needs of the class. Your involvement is completely voluntary and will not affect your performance in the course. You are free to skip any question you do not wish to answer. Your individual responses will be held in the strictest confidence. The results will be made available to you during your next class session. If you have any questions regarding the questionnaire, please contact your instructor. Thank you for your participation.

1) Please enter the course reference number(CRN) for the MAIN class.

Format: 99999

2) Which Inquiry class are you in?

If you selected other please specify:

3) Why did you choose this particular Freshman Inquiry class?

- I liked this theme the most
- Someone recommended the class to me
- The professor's reputation
- It fits best with my schedule
- I have friends in the class
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

4) Use the drop-down arrow to select your professor and mentor for this course.

If you selected other please specify:

5) Please enter your first name.

6) How old are you?

7) What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

8) What were you doing the year before you enrolled at PSU?

- Working
- Attending High School
- Attending Community college
- Attending another 4-year university
- Taking care of family
- Traveling
- Military
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

9) In making your decision to go (or return) to college how important was each of the following for you?

	Very Important		Not Important at All
Advance in current job	<input type="radio"/> Advance in current job Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Advance in current job Not Important at All
Get a better job	<input type="radio"/> Get a better job Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Get a better job Not Important at All
Make yourself a better informed person	<input type="radio"/> Make yourself a better informed person Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Make yourself a better informed person Not Important at All
Gain a general education	<input type="radio"/> Gain a general education Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Gain a general education Not Important at All

Prepare for graduate or professional school	<input type="radio"/> Prepare for graduate or professional school Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Prepare for graduate or professional school Not Important at All
Parents wanted me to go	<input type="radio"/> Parents wanted me to go Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Parents wanted me to go Not Important at All
Make more money	<input type="radio"/> Make more money Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Make more money Not Important at All
Meet new people	<input type="radio"/> Meet new people Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Meet new people Not Important at All

10) How important was each of the following factors in making your decision to attend PSU?

	Very Important		Not Important At All
Cost	<input type="radio"/> Cost Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Cost Not Important At All
Location	<input type="radio"/> Location Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Location Not Important At All
Academic Majors	<input type="radio"/> Academic Majors Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Academic Majors Not Important At All
Admission Requirement	<input type="radio"/> Admission Requirement Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Admission Requirement Not Important At All
Ability to live at home	<input type="radio"/> Ability to live at home Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Ability to live at home Not Important At All
Reputation of the institution	<input type="radio"/> Reputation of the institution Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Reputation of the institution Not Important At All
Reputation of intercollegiate athletics	<input type="radio"/> Reputation of intercollegiate athletics Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Reputation of intercollegiate athletics Not Important At All
Recommendation of family	<input type="radio"/> Recommendation of family Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Recommendation of family Not Important At All
Friends attending this institution	<input type="radio"/> Friends attending this institution Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Friends attending this institution Not Important At All

<input type="radio"/> Diverse student body	<input type="radio"/> Diverse student body Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Diverse student body Not Important At All
<input type="radio"/> Financial aid package	<input type="radio"/> Financial aid package Very Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Financial aid package Not Important At All

11) What do you plan to major in while at PSU. (if undecided, please select other and write in "undecided")

If you selected other please specify:

12) Which of the following best describes your immediate educational plans?

- Earn a Bachelors degree from PSU
- Take courses in order to transfer to another institution
- Take courses for you own interest
- Take courses for professional development
- Take courses to explore career options
- Not sure at this time
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

13) What is the highest degree you expect to earn?

- None
- Associate (AA or AS)
- Bachelors (BA or BS)
- Master's
- Professional (M.D., J.D.)
- PhD.D
- Undecided

14) How many credits do you plan to take PER TERM during this academic year?

15) Where did you receive your academic advising/counseling for this term (circle all that apply)?

- New Student Orientation (July, all day)
- New Student Orientation (Aug-Sept., half day)
- Advising workshop offered by IASC during New Student Week or first week of term
- Information & Academic Support Center (IASC)
- College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (CLAS) Advising Office
- Major Dept.
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

16) Do you think you understand the PSU graduation requirements?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

17) What are your greatest concerns about them?

18) Approximately what grade do you expect to achieve in this class?

- A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D

19) How many hours per week do you plan to work at a job during this academic year?

20) Do you have access to a personal computer at home or at your work place?

- Home
- Work place
- Both
- Neither

21) What was the highest level of education achieved by your father (or equivalent thereof-primary male guardian)?

- Did not graduate from high school
- High school graduate
- High School Equivalency (GED)
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.)
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S)
- J.D. (law)
- M.D. (Medicine)
- Ph.D. or Ed.D.
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

22) What was the highest level of education achieved by your mother (or equivalent thereof-primary female guardian)?

- Did not graduate from high school
- High school graduate
- High School Equivalency (GED)
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S.)
- Master's degree (M.A., M.S)
- J.D. (law)
- M.D. (Medicine)
- Ph.D. or Ed.D.
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

23) Please indicate how often you have done the following activities in the past? I have had experience ...

	Never		3 or 4 times	
Writing a research paper that is between 5 and 10 pages.	<input type="radio"/> Writing a research paper that is between 5 and 10 pages. Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Writing a research paper that is between 5 and 10 pages. 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
writing a research paper that is 10 pages or longer	<input type="radio"/> writing a research paper that is 10 pages or longer. Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> writing a research paper that is 10 pages or longer. 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
participating in school or community activities involving persons or groups who are different from me	<input type="radio"/> participating in school or community activities involving persons or groups who are different from me. Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> participating in school or community activities involving persons or groups who are different from me. 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
using a writing process that required revising one or more drafts	<input type="radio"/> using a writing process that required revising one or more drafts. Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> using a writing process that required revising one or more drafts. 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
Preparing a paper or presentation using graphical tools (charts, diagrams, maps, computer graphics)	<input type="radio"/> Preparing a paper or presentation using graphical tools (charts, diagrams, maps, computer graphics). Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Preparing a paper or presentation using graphical tools (charts, diagrams, maps, computer graphics). 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
Giving oral presentation (speeches or	<input type="radio"/> Giving oral presentations (speeches or oral	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Giving oral presentations (speeches or oral	<input type="radio"/>

oral reports)	reports) Never		reports) 2 or 4 times	
Completing projects or papers that required the use of quantitative reasoning (gathering and analyzing data)	<input type="radio"/> Completing projects or papers that required the use of quantitative reasoning (gathering and analyzing data) Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Completing projects or papers that required the use of quantitative reasoning (gathering and analyzing data) 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
Working in a group to complete an assignment	<input type="radio"/> Working in a group to complete an assignment Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Working in a group to complete an assignment 2 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>
Working on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	<input type="radio"/> Working on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Working on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources 3 or 4 times	<input type="radio"/>

24) During your most recent academic year how many books have you read on your own (not assigned for class) for enjoyment or academic enrichment?

25) During your senior year, did you perform some type of community service that was not required?

- Yes
- No

26) During your senior year in High School, did your school require you to perform some type of community service in order to graduate?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

Go to next question

This online survey is powered by WebSurveyor.

Prior Learning Questionnaire

27) During your senior year in High School only, please list the community service activities you performed. For example, "Tutoring elementary kids after school.

activity 1:

Activity 2:

Activity 3:

Activity 4:

28) On a scale of 1 to 7 how would you rate your experience performing community service during your senior year in High School (circle one only):

- 1 Real waste of time 2 3 4 5 6 7 Really Worthwhile

29) What did you like most about your experience performing community service during your senior year.

30) What did you dislike most about your experience performing community service during your senior year.

31) During the past year, how often have you engaged in the following:

	Never		less than once a month		Weekly
Read a daily newspaper	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watched the news on television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kept up with current events from magazines or online websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Volunteered for a local community organization	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Followed what is going on in city and state government politics?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attended a religious service (church, temple, mosque, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Donated blood	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in a fundraiser to help community (e.g. walkathon)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in organized march or rally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Discussed politics with friends or family	<input type="radio"/>	Discussed politics with friends or family	<input type="radio"/>	Discussed politics with friends or family	<input type="radio"/>	Discussed politics with friends or family	<input type="radio"/>
Participated in school club or student government	<input type="radio"/>	Participated in school club or student government	<input type="radio"/>	Participated in school club or student government	<input type="radio"/>	Participated in school club or student government	<input type="radio"/>
Donated money to charitable or religious organization	<input type="radio"/>	Donated money to charitable or religious organization	<input type="radio"/>	Donated money to charitable or religious organization	<input type="radio"/>	Donated money to charitable or religious organization	<input type="radio"/>
Joined or participated in a chat room	<input type="radio"/>	Joined or participated in a chat room	<input type="radio"/>	Joined or participated in a chat room	<input type="radio"/>	Joined or participated in a chat room	<input type="radio"/>
Use the internet	<input type="radio"/>	Use the internet	<input type="radio"/>	Use the internet	<input type="radio"/>	Use the internet	<input type="radio"/>
Send email	<input type="radio"/>	Send email	<input type="radio"/>	Send email	<input type="radio"/>	Send email	<input type="radio"/>

32) Which of the following is your top concern as you begin this year at PSU?

- Finances
- Academic performance
- Childcare
- Employment
- Family
- Transportation to PSU
- Housing
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

33) How would you rate your ability with the following:

	Know nothing about it		Know the basics		Expert
Microsoft Excel (or other spreadsheet software)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Powerpoint	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Microsoft Word	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using Frontpage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building websites	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

34) Which of the following concerns do you have about taking this class? (select all that apply)

- That I may not be smart enough to do a good job
- That I might fail
- That I may not be able to keep up with the work
- That I may not make friends
- That I may have taken too many credits
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

35) Rate yourself on the following abilities. Try to give the most accurate assessment of how you see yourself.

	Needs much improvement	Needs some improvement	Strong	Very strong
Academic ability	<input type="radio"/> Academic ability Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Academic ability Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Analytical and problem-solving abilities	<input type="radio"/> Analytical and problem-solving abilities Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Analytical and problem-solving abilities Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to think critically	<input type="radio"/> Ability to think critically Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Ability to think critically Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge of people from different racial and ethnic groups	<input type="radio"/> Knowledge of people from different racial and ethnic groups Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Knowledge of people from different racial and ethnic groups Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding the social problems facing your community	<input type="radio"/> Understanding the social problems facing your community Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Understanding the social problems facing your community Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Interpersonal skills	<input type="radio"/> Interpersonal skills Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Interpersonal skills Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Writing ability	<input type="radio"/> Writing ability Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Writing ability Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Public speaking ability	<input type="radio"/> Public speaking ability Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Public speaking ability Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to work cooperatively	<input type="radio"/> Ability to work cooperatively Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Ability to work cooperatively Strong	<input type="radio"/>
Tolerance of others with different beliefs	<input type="radio"/> Tolerance of others with different beliefs Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> Tolerance of others with different beliefs Strong	<input type="radio"/>

Ability to use computers and information technology	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/> Strong
Use Email	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/> Strong
Use online resources to conduct research	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/> Strong
Using the library to conduct research	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Needs much improvement	<input type="radio"/> Strong

36) How often do you expect to use the following methods of transportation to get to school?

Walk	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Primary Method
Drive alone	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Primary Method
Carpool	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Primary Method
Bicycle	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Primary Method
Public transportation	<input type="radio"/> Not at all	<input type="radio"/> Primary Method

37) What kind of housing will you be living in during your first term at PSU?

- University housing (on campus)
- Other private home, apartment, or room
- With parents or relatives
- Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

38) How far (*in miles*) do you live from campus?

miles

39) How long (*in minutes*) is your commute to school?

minutes

40) People use different terms to describe their race, such as Black, White, Asian, or Native American. Which term(s) do you use to describe your race? (You may write more than one.)

Race 1:

Race 2:

Race 3:

41) People use different terms to describe their ethnicity/nationality, such as: Italian, Russian, Korean, Mexican, or Colombian American. Which term(s) do you use to describe yourself? (You may write more than one.)

Ethnicity 1:

Ethnicity 2:

Ethnicity 3:

42) Are you an international student?

Yes No

43) What is your primary language?

English

Other (please specify)

If you selected other please specify:

44) What other languages do you speak?

45) Please answer the following:

	Yes	No	I am under 18 and not eligible to vote
Are you registered to vote?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you vote in the last election you were eligible for?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you intend to vote in the next major election (primary or general election)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you intend to vote in the next minor election (for example, on a school funding measure)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Go to next question

This online survey is powered by WebSurveyor.

Prior Learning Questionnaire

46) Do you intend to register to vote when you are eligible?

- Yes
 No

47) Do you intend to vote when you are eligible?

- Yes, for all elections
 Yes, but for major (primary or general) elections only
 No

We appreciate your participation in completing this questionnaire and want to assure you that your responses will remain confidential. If you have any questions regarding this questionnaire, please contact your instructor. For the Spring follow-up to this questionnaire please provide us with your **PSU email** address in the space below:

Please enter your email address:

Submit Survey

This online survey is powered by WebSurveyor.

APPENDIX B
HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION

I. Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Climate in Higher Education

The project is designed to understand how immigrant students who have matriculated directly from American high schools and for whom English is their second language are experiencing the climate of higher education classrooms. Because of the limited research into this population, the study will be qualitative in nature. Related research has identified several possible factors which may impact classroom climate perception. They are teacher/student relationship, student/peer relationship, curriculum/pedagogy and English proficiency. Subjects will be thirty college sophomores identified through a purposeful sampling who have successfully completed their Freshman Inquiry courses and freshman year at PSU. Each of these students will be contacted individually through the mail and participation will be strictly voluntary. Because the students will be under 21, each student's parent or guardian will sign an informed consent release form and the research participant's anonymity will be strictly guarded. These subjects will participate in taped one-hour focus groups. This data will then be transcribed and codified to uncover how students are experiencing the climate of higher education and if this experience is impacting their academic performance. From this group of 30, 12 subjects will be purposefully chosen to participate in taped in-depth 30-45 minute interviews in order to try to gather additional data based on the ideas which emerge in the focus groups. These interviews will be transcribed and codified as well. Hopefully, from this research, responsible parties in higher education will be able to identify and

implement actions that will help make the experience of higher education more accommodating for all Limited English Proficient immigrant students.

II. Exemption Claim for Waiver of Review

The project is not exempt.

III. Subject Recruitment

A purposeful sample will be drawn from Portland State University sophomores

who have completed their first year as well as the year-long required general education class, Freshman Inquiry. In addition these students will be traditional age college students who have matriculated directly from American highschools and for whom English is their second language. One third of each of these students will have a low, mid or high GPA. These students will be identified through the entering and exit surveys associated with the Freshman Inquiry class and their GPA will be determined through student records at PSU.

The researcher will initially mail letters to all prospective participants and from those who voluntarily choose to participate, thirty will be purposefully selected. Special care will be in the selection process to ensure that participants are equally balanced in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, major and first language spoken so that the information obtained is representative of as wide a range of subjects as possible.

IV. Informed Consent

Once the subjects have been identified, the researcher will mail a letter which

explains the nature of the study and their role within it. Within this letter, the researcher will emphasize that their identities will remain anonymous to everyone except the researcher and those who participate in the focus groups. If the subjects are willing to participate in the study, they will be asked along with their parent or guardian to read the informed consent form and as an agreement between the subject and the researcher, sign it and return it in the envelope provided. (See attached student assent form.)

V. First-Person Scenario

I received a letter in the mail today which asked me to participate in a study to try and understand how immigrant students like myself are experiencing the college classroom atmosphere and if this atmosphere is affecting how I am academically doing in college. She stated that for those of us willing to participate in the study that we would receive gift cards for the Portland State University bookstore. I mailed back the consent form that I signed after my parent said it was okay for me to participate and about one month later I was contacted by phone to participate in a focus group. I came to a small conference room at Portland State University and met with the researcher as well as nine other students and we talked about how we would react to possible scenarios in the classroom. At the conclusion of the group, each of us received a gift card to the PSU bookstore. Later, I was contacted by the researcher again and met with her alone to talk further about my classroom experiences. We met at a quiet café near the university and talked for about 30-45

minutes more about my classroom experiences. At the conclusion of the interview, she thanked me and gave me another gift card to use at the bookstore. Later, she contacted me once more for me to read the data she had gathered from our interviews to make sure that I felt it was accurate.

VI. Potential Risks and Safeguards

There are few risks to the subjects of this study. Their identity and the information from both the focus groups and interviews will be kept confidential from any persons who could affect their success at the university. When the information is published, it will appear under pseudonyms. The researcher will not have any other relationship with the subjects other than that of researcher. The impact this may have on the subject is that there may be some discomfort in sharing their ideas publicly within the focus groups and within the interviews. In addition, this study will demand time from the subjects. Each subject will meet for one hour for the focus groups and ten of these subjects will meet for an additional 30-45 minutes in an in-depth interview. Finally, each will be asked to look over the researcher's data from the focus groups and interviews (for those who are chosen) for accuracy.

VII. Potential Benefits

Each participant in the focus groups and the in-depth interviews will glean a direct benefit by receiving a gift card from the Portland State Bookstore to help his/her purchase needed supplies for school. Each participant may also benefit indirectly. First, the study may validate participants and their experiences by allowing their voices and experiences to be heard. Second, participants may be able

to connect with immigrant students in the focus groups and establish productive and supportive relationships, and finally, the information gained from the study may lead to increased understanding about this population which will be useful to instructors and administrators in higher education.

VIII. Records and Distribution

To maintain subject confidentiality, the researcher will only use pseudonyms for the names of the subjects. In addition, the subjects' responses and statements will be coded either by numeric systems or by words or short phrases. The storage of records and access materials which includes all audio recorded data, students' records or files, and transcribed data will be kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's private office. A desktop computer will be used during the process of the study but it will be in the researcher's private home office, the access to which is only available to the researcher. By federal regulation, all data and records will be kept on file for a minimum of three years after the completion of the study after which they will be destroyed.

IX. Appendices

See Attached.

Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Environment

Dear [*prospective subject's name*]:

My name is Becky Boesch, and I am a Doctoral Student in Postsecondary Education at Portland State University. I am beginning a study on how immigrant students are experiencing the climate of the college classroom and would like to invite you to participate.

You are being asked to take part because you are an immigrant student between the ages of 18-21 who has graduated from an American high school and who speaks English as your second language. As part of the study, I am interested in your opinions and attitudes about how you are experiencing the college classroom. I hope that the information I collect will help us to better understand how immigrant students feel about their college classroom experience. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a focus group with 9 other participants for approximately one hour. In addition, some of you may be asked to participate in an additional 30-45 minute one-on-one interview. These focus groups and interviews will involve answering questions about your college classroom experiences and how these experiences may or may not have impacted your academic performance.

If you choose to participate in this study, you may feel uncertain about sharing your ideas and experiences either with others and/or myself. However, I assure that every effort will be made to make you feel comfortable and safe during the interviews. As a token of appreciation for participating in this study, each student will receive a \$25 gift card from the PSU bookstore. In addition, those that are asked to participate in the one-on-one interviews will receive an additional \$25 gift card from the bookstore.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you or identify you will be kept confidential by the researcher. Subject identities will be kept confidential by using pseudonyms and by coding information using a numerical coding systems or word categories. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on private computer files which only myself, the researcher, will have access to.

Participation is entirely voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the researcher or with Portland State University in any way. If you decide to take part in the study, you may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty. Please keep a copy of this letter for your records.

If you have concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland

State University, (503) 725-4288. If you have questions about the study itself, contact Becky Boesch at 117L Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-5975.

If you would like to participate in this study, please review the attached informed consent form, sign it, and return it in the enclosed envelope.

Sincerely,

Becky Boesch
EdD Doctoral Student
Portland State University

Immigrant Students and the College Classroom Environment In Higher Education

Student's Name _____

You are invited to participate in a research study by Becky Boesch from Portland State University, School of Education. The research is being conducted in partial fulfillment of a doctor of Education degree and is under the supervision of Dr. Joan Strouse. The researcher hopes to learn how immigrant students are experiencing the climate of the higher education classroom and would like to invite you to participate. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an immigrant student between the ages of 18-21 who speaks English as your second language, have graduated from an American high school and have completed your freshman year and FRINQ course.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in a one hour audio taped group interview and possibly a 30-45 minute individual interview as well as look over the researcher's reporting of your information for accuracy at the conclusion of the project. While participating in this study, it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable about some of the information that you will need to share. Also, if you choose to participate in this study, it will require some additional time. The direct benefit you will receive from the study is a gift card or cards from the Portland State bookstore. The study will help increase knowledge which will help others in the future.

Because of the nature of the focus groups, your confidentiality cannot be assured within the group setting. However, the researcher asks that each participant respect the confidentiality of the other participants and that information given during the focus groups as well as the identity of the participants not be shared outside of the session. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be linked to you or identify you will be kept confidential. This information will be kept confidential by attaching pseudonym names and by keeping all data in a locked file or on private computer files. Only the researcher will have access to this data.

Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study, and it will not affect your standing at Portland State University. You may also withdraw from this study at any time without any impact or consequence to you.

If you have any concerns or problems about your participation in this study or your rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects, 111 Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-4288. If you have any questions about the study itself, contact Becky Boesch at 117L Cramer Hall, Portland State University, (503) 725-5975.

Signed _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCENARIOS

Begin by introducing myself, the purposes of my research and my appreciation for their participation in the study. Special note will be made how their identities will be kept confidential and the research materials locked.

1. Warm Up: Could each briefly introduce yourself and tell us a little about your freshman year at PSU? (For example, what subjects have you studied? What kinds of classes did you take?) Explain that they will hear three possible student experiences and they will be asked to respond to each.

Scenario One

Tran and Vinh, Vietnamese immigrants, both attend the same modern American history class. Tran is frustrated by the professor because she never asks for his ideas or questions, even when the class was studying the Vietnam war. In fact, he feels that she barely acknowledges him. Thanh, on the other hand, is glad the professor never asks him questions and lets him sit quietly in the back of the room.

Which student comes closest to how you would feel in this situation? Tran or Thanh? Please explain?

Scenario Two

Serena has been coming to math class for three weeks now. She soon realized that she was the only immigrant student in the class. Her fellow students have started to form friendships and even though she has tried to get to know her fellow students, she has been unsuccessful. Maybe they don't understand her English accent. The

other day, she heard one of her classmates say that Mexicans need to “go back where they came from.” If you were Serena, which of the following choices best reflect what you would do? Please explain

- A. Drop the class and try to find another one with classmates who accept her.
- B. Remain in the class and focus on getting her education.

Scenario Three

Slavic and Katarina are enrolled in a class that regularly has small group discussions. Each student is expected to share their understanding of the readings as well as formulate new ideas to present to the class. Slavic likes that he can explore his ideas with others and practice his English. Katarina is frustrated and intimidated by the class. She is in college to learn expert knowledge from her professor, not talk with her fellow classmates. She also feels that her English is not very good and is afraid to talk in the group.

Which student comes closest to how you would feel? Slavic or Katarina? Please explain.

APPENDIX D
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Introduction:

Introduce myself again and thank the student for coming. Reassure them that all their responses will be kept strictly confidential and any reporting of their comments within the dissertation will be made under a false name. Remind them that they will have an opportunity to read the reporting of their comments in my dissertation and make any changes that they feel were incorrect or misrepresented.

Questions

1. Tell me about your PSU Classroom experiences. Would you say that they have been generally positive or negative? Please explain what factors have contributed to your perception.
2. Please think of a college class that you have taken that you particularly enjoyed. Please explain the specific aspects of the class that made it an enjoyable experience.
 - How, if anything did the professor contribute to this positive experience? What specific things did he/she do to create a positive learning environment for you?
 - How, if anything did your fellow students contribute to this positive experience? What specific things did they do to create a positive learning environment for you?
 - How, if anything, did the classroom pedagogy—lecture, size, small groups, discussions—contribute to this positive experience? What

specific things happened in the class to create a positive learning environment for you?

- How, if anything did the class content contribute to this positive experience? What specific things did you study that created a positive learning environment for you?

3. Please think of a college class that you have taken that you particularly disliked.

Please explain the specific aspects of the class that made it an unpleasant experience.

- How, if anything did the professor contribute to this negative experience? What specific things did he/she do to create a negative learning environment for you?
- How, if anything did your fellow students contribute to this negative experience? What specific things did they do to create a negative learning environment for you?
- How, if anything, did the classroom pedagogy—lecture, size, small groups, discussions—contribute to this negative experience? What specific things happened in the class to create a negative learning environment for you?
- How, if anything did the class content contribute to this negative experience? What specific things did you study that created a negative learning environment for you?

4. Do you think that you have been successful in your college classes? If so, why do you think you have done well? If not, what do you think has hindered your success?