

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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Since 2005, the United States has experienced a significant influx of international students from Saudi Arabia, particularly women (Bollang, 2006). The American educational structure is something Saudi women have never experienced due to the vast differences between both cultures in all facets. There is very little to no research conducted on Saudi Arabian women pursuing higher education in an academic culture drastically different from what they are accustomed to.

A review of current literature illustrates the critical need for a more in- depth analysis of this phenomenon. Although there is much research available regarding the subjugation of Saudi women in the past and present, the surge in Saudi women pursuing education in the United States has not been researched. This thesis study explores how Saudi women are adapting to the differences in educational structural between what they have experienced back home and what they are experiencing here at Oregon State University. This study also looks at how Saudi women are adapting to the differences in teaching methods at OSU in comparison to what they are used to

back home. The traditional teacher-centered approach versus that at OSU that heavily incorporates a student-centered approach.

This study utilizes qualitative research methods to find common themes that arose from interviews with the sample group. Findings suggest that the Saudi women studying at Oregon State University developed intercultural competence due to their strong personal desire to succeed in their studies abroad. These Saudi women also proved to have strong levels of motivation and desire to succeed academically in hopes that they will return to their country and assist in improving the status of women.

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Saudi Arabian Women Pursuing Higher Education at Oregon State University

by  
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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Nadya A. Al-Sheikhly, Author

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Women from Saudi Arabia have not been portrayed in a positive light in Western feminist discourses. In western media, Saudi women continue to be depicted as oppressed, subservient, uneducated, and in dire need of Western liberation (Abu-Fadhil, 2005). However, western media fails to understand that Saudi women, just like Western women, are capable of being strong, ambitious, and willing to do what they can in order to advance the status of all women within their own country through higher education. As of 2005, thousands of Saudi women have left their homes and comfort zones to pursue an American education in a wide variety of academic fields. A collaboration to ease relations between Saudis and Americans in a Post 9/11 world, King Abdullah and George W. Bush created a scholarship program allowing Saudi women to enter American campuses in large numbers. Saudi women continue to break the outdated stereotypes that they are oppressed and uneducated by being present on American campuses like Oregon State University.

The education system in Saudi Arabia is different than the academic system in the United States and particularly Oregon State University (OSU). Saudi women are accustomed to a very different teaching and learning style than what they are currently experiencing here at Oregon State. Saudi Arabia still incorporates the teacher-centered method of teaching, requiring students to rely on rote memory to pass examinations (AlMunajjed, 2008). The Saudi women I interviewed in this thesis study expressed their unfamiliarity upon arrival with the academic structure utilized in the United States and OSU in particular, a student-centered methods that allow for more self-teaching.

## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand the academic challenges women from Saudi Arabia face at Oregon State University in regards to the differences in educational structures. While there is no doubt that both the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are completely different in religion, culture, and academic structure, one can wonder how Saudi women are experiencing these differences. I want to know how Saudi women adapt to the differences in academics and what they do to combat the academic challenges, if they face any, here at OSU. I want to know which pedagogical practices are working for them in the classroom and what is not working for them.

An important thing to keep in mind is that the opinions, beliefs, hardships, and successes expressed in this thesis study are unique to each Saudi woman's experience that was involved in this study. All the views and opinions expressed in this study in no way represent the experiences of all Saudi women pursuing higher education at Oregon State University or elsewhere in the United States. Although this study is localized, the findings in this study can inform and complement western education to meet the needs of Saudi women in higher education.

## **Assumptions**

There are many assumptions I had about Saudi women going into this study:

1. All Saudi women are literate in Arabic and English.
2. I did not expect the Saudi women I interview to be native English speakers but expect them to comprehend basic English conversations.

3. The women are of middle class or upper middle class since they are studying abroad.
4. They come from liberal families that believe in the education of women.
5. All the women I interviewed have a specific goal for the future and know what career path they wish to pursue once they graduate.

### **Women's Education in Saudi Arabia**

Western patriarchal frameworks have always maintained an unrealistic understanding of women and uses Islam as a scapegoat for the institutionalized oppression Saudi women face in the past and present. The topic of formal public education for women within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a fairly new endeavor for the country and for women in general (Ghafour, 2007; Berkey, 2004). Although Saudi men have been educated for centuries, women were treated as subjects dominated by patriarchy; their subordination shifted from the power of their fathers and eventually passed on to their husbands (Jawad, 1998). The histories of women's marginalization shows how women have been and continue to be regarded as second-class citizens who exist merely to serve men domestically and sexually (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Afshar, 1993; Alghamdi, 2002). The status of women prior to Islam was less than ideal. This time is referred to as a time of ignorance known as Jahiliyya, where women were "...considered a chattel to be possessed, to be bought, to be sold or to be inherited" (Jawad, 1998, p. 1). Before Islam came and liberated women, men believed that women had no souls and should never be given independence, power, or the ability to be in control over issues that were personal to them. Women were isolated from any participation in social and political affairs within their society. Women

during the time of ignorance were considered a heavy burden on their families resulting in the practice female infanticide in order to save themselves shame and ridicule for keeping a girl (Afshar, 1993). Another social argument to justify female infanticide at this time was to avoid kidnapping of woman for ransom during tribal feuds (Jawad, 1998, p. 3).

Once Islam was introduced to the Middle East, the status of women radically changed in the region. One of the first things Islam prohibited was female infanticide, also giving women other rights and elevating their status within society (Afshar, 1993; AlMunajjed, 1997; Ghafour, 1990; Jawad, 1998). The Islamic holy book, the Quran, gave men and women equal power and did not give males more power than the females, as it is commonly misinterpreted by many followers of Islam and scholars alike (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Afshar, 1993, Jawad, 1998; Alireza, 1987). Islam is also credited for changing the way of thinking for men and women, creating a new relationship between them, based on mutual understanding and respect. According to Jawad (1998), “The status of women was also raised in Islam by granting her the legal right to enter into contracts, to run a business, and to possess property independently from her husband or any kinsman” (p. 6). Islam always stressed that women be given the same opportunities as men so that they too could develop their natural abilities and contribute to the development of society, particularly through education.

Islam stresses the importance of knowledge and the importance of all followers of Islam to constantly pursue knowledge of Islam but also other branches of knowledge (Doumato, 2002). Islam strongly emphasizes women’s education

religiously and socially and does not discourage her education in any way. Every Muslim, man and woman is under moral obligation by Allah to seek knowledge from birth until death (Jawad, 1998). Jawad (1998) says:

Women were allowed to learn all the branches of science. She was free to choose any field of knowledge which interested her...Because Islam recognized that women are in principle wives and mothers, they should also place special emphasis on seeking knowledge in those branches which could help them in those particular spheres. (p. 21).

In Saudi Arabia, there has been a narrow interpretation of the status of women and how women should be allowed to live within the realms of Islam. Many scholars in Saudi Arabia have used religion as the sole reason for confining women to the home and excluding her from receiving an education, a right given to her by Islam (AlMunajjed, 1997; Badawi, 1995; El-Sanabary, 1992).

### **Purpose of Educating Saudi Women**

According to Arebi (1994), El-Sanabary (1992), AlMunajjed (1997), many conservative Islamic scholars strongly believed and continue to believe that educating women would lead to immorality and corrupt thinking, eventually diverting women from their natural duties to be good wives and mothers. Conservative scholars also believed that an educational transformation would create instability within the Kingdom, resulting in a drastic change in the way society functioned. If women left the house for education, they would most likely obtain a career within their educational field and neglect their 'natural duties.' If women left the house, who would take care of the children and complete all the domestic duties? The lack of the

woman's presence in the home would shake the solid foundation Saudi Arabia comfortably has firmly put in place.

King Faisal publically addressed the formal education of women in 1960, a time in history where women demanded rights and recognition, particularly in the West. When public schools for women were established and finally opened, a presence by the National Guard was required due to the protests from extremists who were strongly against the education of women. Although the educational system is around fifty years old, Saudi Arabia began the steps towards implementing women's education and moved it in the right direction. While the universities in Saudi Arabia are mostly for men, there are many female-only sister campuses, which perpetuate the gender segregation within the kingdom (Roy, 1992; Sasso, 1992). Up until 1980, Saudi women were not allowed to study the same academic subjects as men such as medicine or dentistry. Jawad (1998) says, "Three out of the seven universities in the Kingdom do not accept women to these fields" (p. 28). The resources for Saudi women are incredibly limited and many of them rarely think of education as a means of entering a career. How does this history affect the Saudi women studying at Oregon State University and the thousands of women studying throughout the United States? Once these women graduate and eventually return to their homeland, will the resources for Saudi women expand to allow for the surge of Western educated women?

### **Saudi Women and Islam**

The positions taken by secular feminists and scholars on Islamic feminism are various. One group of Islamic scholars "...reject the possibility of co-existence

between Islam and feminism. They are not impressed by Islam's internal variations or the impact of local traditional factors on women's subordination. For them, hostility towards feminism and feminist demands inherent in divine laws, and women's liberation in Islamic societies must therefore start with de-Islamization of every aspect of life" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 29-30). They view Islamic feminism as "...feminism true to its society's traditions" (p. 30), and a resistance to cultural conversion in order to release western women's claim on feminism (El Guindi, 1996). Many Islamic scholars are looking into Islamic texts to find solutions for women's oppression within the religion and are finding that "...we live in an era in Middle Eastern history in which Islamic fundamentalism cannot be challenged. Secular discourse to promote gender equality has been discredited as 'elitist', modernist or 'white' ..." (Moghissi, 1999, p. 36). Leftists and nationals are told to reexamine their own beliefs, politics and theories and must first affirm Islam before speaking of women's oppression in Islamic societies. Moghissi (1999) suggests that the best way to support the female struggle in the Middle East is to erase differences among them or play down the distinctions between secular and Islamist visions (p. 137). The scholars who advocate for Islamic feminism often times ignore the distinction between Islam as a legal and political system and Islam as a spiritual and moral guidance (p. 142). Before determining whether 'Islamic Feminism' is compatible with other theories of feminism, we need to ask what are the limits of feminism and whether or not it is playing a constructive role in the struggle for democracy and liberation for women.

In order to understand the women of Saudi Arabia, one needs a clear understanding of the highly complex religion of Islam. Saudi Arabia is regarded as the most conservative country in the world, clearly illustrated through the treatment of women and their lack of rights in modern civilization (UNDP, 2003). In order to understand the complexities of Saudi Arabian women, one must differentiate in their minds the differences between Islam as a religion and the local customs and social traditions practiced by the people, which are not part of the religion but are erroneously conceived as part of it (AlMunajjed, 1997). Everyday law within the Kingdom segregates men and women in Saudi Arabia, resulting in a full force of patriarchal dominance.

Education for women in Saudi Arabia has allowed women great progress due to the oil boom in the 60's and 70's, which led to considerable development in the status of women. This provided them with knowledge and skills but not necessarily the ability to exercise this knowledge in a way that was beneficial to the social and economic power in society (p. 59). Women in Saudi Arabia are living under extreme patriarchy that has existed for centuries, which are also perpetuated by day-to-day events. The wave of Islamic fundamentalism after the establishment of the Republic of Iran in 1979, allowed Saudi Arabia to reinforce its Islamic identity also contributing to the decline of the status of women. The continued disappointment and outrage of Western influence and continued degradation of Palestine has turned young Arabs and Muslims to the teachings of Islam in order to find a solution for the economic and social climate in the Middle East.



## **Islamic Feminism**

Many women in the Middle East are becoming 'Islamic Feminists' through joining religious groups despite their gender conservatism. Some women have experimented with the concept of a harem as a way to separate themselves from the patriarchy that consumes their life. Separatism is not possible for women in Saudi Arabia, however; some of them are working within the systems that are marginalizing them (Cooke, 2001). Cook (2011) says, "There is an increasingly large gap between women who submit to the patriarchal rules of their chosen religious communities and those who reject such rules and norms outright may not be as great as would at first appear" (p. 57). Muslim women have spoken out against those who try to speak for them and are attempting to help the world understand the complexities that exist in their lives. Cooke (2001) says that Islam and feminism has no "...coherent, self-identified and or/ easily identifiable ideology or movement (p. 58).

Cooke (2001) further explains that those who advocate for Islamic feminism are not women from Muslim societies but rather "...diasporic feminist academics and researchers" of Muslim background living and working in the West (p. 58). She further characterizes these women as, "Exceptionally forgiving, postmodern relativist feminists in the West' whose core ideas of equality are about social equity, sexual democracy and women's control over their sexuality (p. 58). Islamic feminism is not a coherent identity but is rather a contingent and contextually determined in its self-positioning. The term "Islamic feminism" allows us to explore what it means to have a double commitment: a commitment to your Islamic faith and a commitment to women's rights both privately and publically (p. 59). Furthermore, what does it mean

to call yourself an Islamic Feminist? Moghissi (1999) describes it as "...not to describe a fixed identity but to create a new, contingent subject position" (p. 59).

### **Transnational Feminist Perspective on Representations of Muslim Women**

Since 9/11 and the ongoing 'war on terrorism' there has been an astonishing amount of literature aiming to demystify and understanding of Muslim women. Zine, Taylor, and Davis (2007) believe these "...narratives by and about Muslim women have been increasingly commodified, circulated and uncritically consumed, particularly in the West" (p. 272). They continue to claim that this sudden interest in the lives of Muslim women serves nothing more than a voyeuristic invasion deeply rooted in Orientalist and Western feminist obsession with 'unveiling' Muslim women's lives.

Sudbury (2000) problematizes what she calls 'imperialist feminism' that fails to acknowledge the historical and structural conditions that emphasize the East/West stability of power and social structures:

To bemoan the oppression of Third World women without acknowledging the role of racism, colonialism and economic exploitation is to engage in what black British feminist filmmaker Pratibha Parmar calls 'imperial feminism,' a standpoint which claims solidarity with Third World women and women of color, but in actuality contributes to the stereotyping of Third World cultures as 'barbaric' and 'uncivilized' (Sudbury 2000).

Theorists working in the field of transnational feminism such as Mohanty (1991) Amos and Parmer (1984), Lazreg (1988) have critiqued imperialist feminism for its

misrepresentation of Muslim women and categorizing them as 'other.' Imperialist feminism continues to regard Muslim women as subservient by comparing their lives with those of Western sensibilities and democracy (Zine et al 2007). Muslim women continue to be described as lacking agency, voice and "...in need of their First World sisters to become their intellectual vanguards and political advocates" (p. 272). In response to imperialist feminism, transnational feminist discourses have centered their politics of representation on exposing the East/West imbalance of power that has given Western feminists access to demanding authority over women in the East as simply 'objects' of academic enquiry (Zine et al 2007).

### **Muslim Women and Colonialism**

Colonialism was another factor in the subjugation of Muslim women. Muslim Arab women were separated from the spaces where the colonizers were in order to preserve and protect their honor in a time of great instability (Cooke, 2001, Moghissi, 1999). During the time of colonization, Muslim men literally hid the females so that the colonizers could not kidnap them and compromise their chastity. There are no accounts of European men raping Muslim women because they were extremely protected and even the Muslim prostitutes were well protected (2001). Although women were not under direct rule by the Colonizers does not remove colonization as a contributing factor to their oppression (Karmi, 1996).

### **Modern Education of Saudi Women**

Although education for women in Saudi Arabia is not compulsory, there has been a great level of expansion in the last 20 years (Rawaf & Simmons 1991). Despite the fact that men dominate the universities in Saudi Arabia and are provided

with excellent resources and high levels of training, the woman's place is still regarded in the home regardless of the woman's education level (p. 1). According to the Ministry of Planning within the Kingdom, as of 1989 only 5.5% of women were in the work force. While the General Directorate of Education for Boys was established in 1929, the oil boom of the late 60's and 70's provided the necessary capital available for the establishment of women's education. The formal establishment of women's education was enacted in the 1960's but before that, elite Saudi families provided private tutors for the education of their daughters (AlMunajjed, 1997; Rawaf & Simmons, 1991).

Even after the creation of formal education for women was introduced, the outcome was not supported by conservative parents who refused to let their daughters go to school in fear they would lose interest in the traditional home-based role of women (Qanta, 2008). Extremists believed that supporting the education of women would undermine the very foundations of morality and family life encouraged by Islam. The radical notion of implementing education for women encountered many traditional obstacles such as reconciling education with the traditional norms of honor, norms that Saudi conservatives believe require women to protect their virtue by staying at home (Alsuwaigh, 1989).

### **Gender Segregation Within Saudi Education**

According to Al-Shedokhi (1996) this slow progression has led to highly educated women in Saudi Arabia who are now dealing with finding employment within the Kingdom, bringing up the issue of gender segregation. The life of women in Saudi Arabia is perhaps what radical feminists are talking about when they refer to

a separatist state of being, completely isolated from male domination. However, women in Saudi Arabia are experiencing all forms of separatism, from men and from the rest of the society they live in, a society dominated by patriarchy. Al-Shedokhi (1996) says, “unlike schooling, employment may mean a real and far-reaching transformation not only of working women’s roles but of men’s as well and of the whole cultural pattern that is based on sex segregation” (p. 57).

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

The educational background of Saudi Arabia is discussed in order to understand the participants' context before they began their studies in the United States and particularly, at Oregon State University. It is critical to understand that the educational system in Saudi Arabia is heavily influenced by cultural and religious beliefs of Islam (Prokop, 2005). The educational system exists under gender segregated where men and women are not allowed to interact with each other in academic or even social situations. Both males and females have teachers and administrators of the same gender (Baki, 2004). All of the women's schools are enclosed and surrounded by high walls to allow them to move about freely when they are on campus. The way educational system functions is well integrated with the Saudi culture, always going back to Islam.

### **Oral Culture Versus Written Culture**

Saudi Arabia is an oral culture as opposed to a written one like what we see in America and other western countries. Parts of the educational system in Saudi Arabia rely heavily on oral memorization, particularly for religious subjects (Prokop, 2005). Throughout the entire educational system, there is little to no emphasis on writing or thinking critically the way it is heavily emphasized in the American educational system. The Saudi women in this study spent their entire academic careers in a system that depended on rote memory and were expected to quickly adapt to a new way of thinking and learning as soon as they set foot on American campuses.

The differences in learning styles between the United States and Saudi Arabia are drastic. The following quote illustrates the expectations students in American Universities:

...students are expected to be critical thinkers who analyze information in the classroom. They are actively involved in the learning process through small group discussion, cooperative learning, case studies, and short writing exercises. In contrast, the traditional and current style of learning in the Arab countries in general, and the Gulf region, in particular, is memorization and rote learning. (Hamza 2009, p. 156).

Saudi women are used to learning in a different way back home than what is expected of them here in the United States. For many Saudi women, there is no in between stage or orientation to help familiarize them with differences in academic structure and classroom practices. There is little to no research conducted on Saudi women pursuing higher education in the United States that focuses on how they are adapting to these differences and if they are succeeding. There has been some research conducted on the experience of students from Saudi Arabia at Oregon State University but this study focused on success strategies used by Saudi students in general. There has never been a qualitative study that focused specifically on the experience of Saudi women adapting to American higher education.

Some of the students who participated in this study are full time students at INTO Oregon State University (INO OSU), a language-training program at Oregon State University. Students who study at INTO OSU have an opportunity to learn

about and adapt to the American school system before they are fully immersed in academic studies. INTO incorporates the same teaching methods used at Oregon State University.

Coming from a teacher-centered world into one that is student-centered can be daunting for international students. In the Middle Eastern education system, the instructor becomes an authority figure that provides all the information to the students who then rely on memorization to 'learn' the material. This system "...avoids involvement in active learning, class discussion, and individual thinking on academic subjects" (Hamza 2009, p. 129). In this academic situation, students began to expect the instructor to provide all the necessary knowledge they need in order to pass the subject. This approach to education creates students that lack critical thinking skills and ones that depend on the teacher, the authority figure, to fill their minds with the information that will be on the exam as opposed to actually learning and engaging the information they are provided.

Instructors are always concerned with selecting appropriate pedagogical tools to utilize in their classrooms (Ahmed et al 2009). Burt, 2004; Russell, 2004; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005 suggest that the differences in students' learning styles, student and faculty interaction, and classroom culture between the Middle Eastern and Western learning systems imply that the pedagogical tools used in Western classrooms may not be suitable for Middle Eastern classrooms. If Western pedagogical tools are not suitable for Middle Eastern classrooms then can students academically trained in Middle East succeed in Western classrooms? If a student spends their entire academic career in an environment where they are forced to



memorize and regurgitate information, are they able to adapt and learn to think critically?

The pedagogy in the Middle East has always heavily incorporated the teacher-centered approach, which depends solely on rote learning, dictation, and lectures (Chadraba & O'keefe, 2007; Richards, 1992; Tubaishat, Bhatti, El-Qawasmeh, 2006). Within this approach, teaching mainly consists of illustrating concepts and reading from textbooks (Burt, 2004; Russell, 2004). In fact, the entire Middle Eastern education system relies extensively on examinations (Russell, 2004). Students are expected to memorize facts as opposed to applying concepts or employing what they have learned to situations outside of the classroom (Richards, 1992).

This approach in teaching is remarkably different than the pedagogic and assessment systems in the United States and Oregon State University in particular. This creates a problem for students studying in the United States because it "...translates among students a lack of problem-solving and communication skills and little experience of expressing what they think and feel or acting on their curiosity (Mahrous, 2009). If an adult is used to learning through memorization, how can American trained teachers teach these students to think critically? This no doubt creates challenges not only for the student who has to re-learn how to learn but also for the teacher who must aid this student who might otherwise be left behind while other students move forward.

A study conducted by Karns (2005) investigated students' perceptions of teaching tools commonly used by educators in the U.S. This study concluded that the most effective teaching methods were discussion, projects, guest speakers, whereas

the least effective methods were multiple-choice tests and essay papers (2005).

Although these participants were not specifically female Saudi students, there is still much to be learned about these teaching methods. Morrison, Sweeney, and Heffernan (2003) offer a different perspective by stating that student's preference for specific types of pedagogy depends on their learning style.

Morrison et al (2003) identified four learning styles and student preferred pedagogies: the sensate, visual, sequential, and active styles. The sensate students prefer fact-oriented teaching tools such as case projects. Visual students prefer images, diagrams, videos, and group work. Sequential students prefer activities that incorporate a logical progression and finally, active learners prefer active teaching tools, such as discussion, problem solving, group work, and online resources (2009).

Another study argues that the choice of teaching tools should gauge the type of learning objective (Bonner, 1999; Karns, 2005). Learning objectives that require simple skills are easily achieved with passive teaching tools. However, learning objectives that require complex skills require teaching tools that encourage students to learn more actively.

The teaching methods that help Saudi women learn are unknown and depend on each individual student. The dependent learning styles of the Middle East conflicts with the more autonomous habits of American students (Burt, 2004; Richards, 1992; Rugh, 2002). There is no research previously conducted on Saudi Arabian women's perceptions of pedagogical tools incorporated into American higher education classrooms (Mahrous, 2009). Accordingly, this study seeks to explore Saudi Arabian women's experience in the American university system.

Maundeni (1999) conducted a study about African women studying in the United States. Her study concluded that women international students were disadvantaged in general, particularly African women when studying abroad. One of the conflicts found in this study was that Western society encourages women to be independent and assertive which interfered with the way African women are socialized. Participants in this study found internal conflicts with adapting to American social norm while maintaining their cultural identity. Many of the Saudi women who study abroad choose to continue wearing the traditional Saudi Islamic dress and cover their hair. All of the Saudi participants in this study consider themselves veiled.

Schmidtt, Spears, and Branscombe (2003) conducted a study on international students and found that they experienced prejudice and discrimination in the U.S. The study also found that international students often turned to other groups of international students because they shared common feelings of isolation. More recent research on international students by Lee and Rice (2007) found that students are experiencing greater obstacles in obtaining visas in a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> era. In addition to visa delays, international students are experiencing increase in fees, lengthy entrance interviews, and special check-in when leaving the country. As a result of these new obstacles, many international students are choosing to study in England and Australia.

Many of the studies conducted on international students focus on Asian students and not as much as Middle Eastern students, and particularly not women from Saudi Arabia. Lin and Yi (1997) found that Asian students struggled to maintain

a balance between adapting to American culture and maintaining their own culture. In addition to internal conflicts, Lin and Yi found that Asian students battled with succeeding academically, overcoming language barriers, culture shock, financial problems, racial issues and stereotyping. In a Post 9/11 world, Saudi students are more vulnerable to stereotyping and prejudice, particularly veiled women who have become part of the symbol of terrorism (Qanta, 2008).

## CHAPTER III: METHODS

### Development of Instrument

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the academic experience women of Saudi Arabia on the Oregon State University campus. The teaching methods within higher education vary considerably between Saudi Arabia and the United States in general. While Saudi education relies heavily on the teacher-centered method, Oregon State University incorporates a more student-centered teaching approach (Hamza, 2006).

Saudi women attending Oregon State University are expected to facilitate classroom presentations, requiring them to take on the teacher role, participate in classroom discussions, and are being asked to critically analyze the literature they read—all of which is rarely asked of them in Saudi Arabia. Not only are Saudi women adjusting to vast cultural differences, but they are also required to comprehend and accurately utilize the teaching methods utilized in Oregon State University classrooms.

The following research questions are explored:

1. How are Saudi women adapting to the differences in academic structure between Saudi Arabia and the United States?
2. How did they react to the different teaching methods used in American classrooms?

## **Scholarship Program**

Since 2005, the United States has experienced an increase of international students from Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah and George W. Bush along with the Saudi Arabian Culture Mission in Washington D.C. created this program to help ease relations and tension between Saudi Arabia and the United States as a result of the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>. With this program, King Abdullah also wishes to create familiarity between Saudis and Americans (Alomar, 2011).

Throughout Saudi Arabia exists the belief that America has one of the best higher education systems in the world and Saudi's possess a strong desire to pursue higher education degrees in the U.S. Many of the students given a scholarship and are studying in the United States did not necessarily chose the major they are studying now (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The fields offered within the scholarship program only include medicine, engineering, math, science, and computer related fields. Students wishing to pursue majors in the Humanities have no chance of being awarded a scholarship.

The King Abdullah scholarship program has provided Saudi's with access into some of the best universities in the world to pursue degrees in bachelors, masters, and doctoral studies. Academic disciplines available to students depend on the needs of the government ministries, national corporations and the private sectors within Saudi Arabia (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2011). Often times, a student studies a major that is not of personal interest to them but is a field with an open job market in Saudi Arabia. There are currently 20 thousand Saudi students studying in the United States alone, making it about thirty thousand including their dependents (Alomar,

2011). Worldwide, there are over one hundred thousands Saudis pursuing degrees in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Malaysia, and other countries (Ghafour, 2011).

The scholarship program offers undergraduate and graduate students and opportunity to earn a degree abroad and receive a monthly stipend and full health benefits from the Saudi government. Many of the students enter an intensive English program such as INTO OSU for one year and are then expected to matriculate into a degree-seeking program (Redden, 2008). Once students are enrolled in a degree-seeking program, they face the same academic standards and regulations as native speakers such as maintaining good academic standing. According to Redden (2008) the scholarship program has shifted and is now allowing for more graduate and professional students to enter American universities. Graduate students experience more difficult obtaining acceptance from graduate programs due to higher standardized testing requirements among other rigorous admissions procedures (Redden, 2008).

### **Participants and Context**

The participants in this study were seven female students from Saudi Arabia who came to the United States for the purpose of obtaining a degree from Oregon State University. The women in this study are students learning English at INTO OSU and students who are already admitted into the University. Most of the female participants had studied English in Saudi Arabia before they came to the United States. I was able to obtain a list of female Saudi students studying at INTO OSU and ones who already matriculated into a degree program at the university. I emailed the

potential participants explaining the study and asked for a reply if they were interested in partaking in this study. Despite initially receiving 15-20 students who expressed interest in participating in this study, in the end, only seven were available for interviews.

The following character descriptions provide brief insights into each participant with a given pseudonym. I am describing these students because this is a localized and contextualized research study and each woman has her own personal story about why she is pursuing higher education in the United States.

*Sarah*

Sarah is from the capital city of Riyadh and came to the United States to continue her education. She is pursuing a Master of Arts Interdisciplinary degree focusing on Adult Education and minoring in Women's Studies and Political Science at Oregon State University. Sarah a full-time student at Oregon State University. She still has not decided what kind of career path she wants to pursue once she completes her degree.

*Fatimah*

Fatimah is from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and is a freshman at Oregon State University. She recently completed the Academic English training program at INTO OSU. She is in her second term at OSU studying Computer Science. She hopes to complete her degree at OSU and possibly pursue graduate school as well.



*Heely*

Heely is currently studying at INTO OSU and hopes to enter a doctoral program in Human Development and Family Sciences here at OSU. Heely is not on the government scholarship that is provided by the Saudi Cultural Mission like the other participants. Heely moved her family to Corvallis, Oregon to pursue a post-graduate degree at OSU or any accredited University in the United States. Her mission is to complete her degree here and eventually return to her university and share the knowledge she gained with her department, fellow faculty, and future students.

*Ahlam*

Ahlam is from the capital city of Riyadh and is hoping to get accepted into a graduate program at Oregon State University. She is currently a student at INTO OSU and hopes to begin her graduate studies in Information Technology as soon as possible. Ahlam recently gave birth and is balancing a new academic system, graduate school, and motherhood.

*Reema*

Reema is from the Eastern province of Saudi Arabia pursuing a degree in business. She is in her first year at Oregon State University and was a former student at INTO OSU. She is one of few women from Saudi Arabia who are living alone without a husband, father, brother, or a male guardian with her.

*Alaa*

Alaa is from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia hoping to pursue a degree in business with a focus in finance. Alaa is single and here with two siblings, one with

her at INTO OSU and the other already a student at Oregon State University. Alaa hopes to graduate from OSU and eventually open a business in Saudi Arabia.

### *Meedo*

Meedo is from the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia and is in her first year at Oregon State University. She plans to complete the general courses of her bachelor's of science at Oregon State University and then apply to a different school that has her specific major within the medical field. She is currently studying general science until she gets acceptance to a university that has her specific field. Meedo is not married but is accompanied by her older brother who is also a student at Oregon State University.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this study was collected through ethnographic interviews with each participant in an attempt to capture her perception of the experience she is having here at Oregon State University (Charmaz, 2011; Creswell, 2007). The interviews consisted of open-ended questions to allow the participants to speak freely about their academic experience. The questions were structured so that each participant was asked the same question. Participants were encouraged to share stories and memories because this study values the voices of individual student sojourners and because their narratives aid in understanding their experiences studying abroad (Jackson, 2008). The interviews were conducted in English since all of the participants held a strong grasp of the English language and felt like they could express their thoughts and experiences freely. Some of the interviews were recorded, based on the request of the participant and transcribed.

There were two interviews conducted with each participant. The first interview was for the purpose of creating a good rapport with the participant and for the purpose of creating a comfortable atmosphere between the participant and myself. The questions in the first interview were aimed at learning about the participant and understanding where they come from within Saudi Arabia and bringing to light any past history they have with education in the United States. Also, the questions were aimed at their initial reactions upon arriving in Corvallis and the Oregon State University community.

This thesis incorporates qualitative research collected from semi structured one-on-one interviews with female students from Saudi Arabia. The women interviewed were students studying English at INTO Oregon State University and students who are already full time, undergraduate, and graduate degree seeking students. This study attempts to understand the experience of Saudi Arabian women in adapting to the differences in academic structure between education in their home community and their education experience at Oregon State University.

The first interview with each participant was aimed to collect more background information about each individual. It was also important for me to develop trust between the participants and myself. I wanted them to feel comfortable with me so that we could utilize the interview time to the best advantage. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing with me stories and insights about their experiences and feel like they were in a safe place.

The first semi-structured interview included questions aimed at learning about where the student was from within Saudi Arabia and what their educational

experience was before they came to Oregon State University. Brooks (2003) conducted a study, which showed that young women shy away from discussing details about their lives in front of other females. The use of one-on-one interviews creates more privacy for the women to share their personal experience without worrying about any constraints. Throughout both interviews with the participants, I felt like they were comfortable with me and were able to express how they really felt about their academic experience thus far. Perhaps one reason they gave off the impression they were comfortable could be that I come from a similar culture so they knew I could understand their experience to some extent.

While the first interview created trust and allowed for a better understanding between the participant and myself, the second interview was aimed at allowing the Saudi women to discuss their academic experiences at INTO and Oregon State University. I felt that through the first interview, I was able to gain the trust of the participants and get to know them as people and they were able to get to know me and understand the purpose of my research. Through the success of the first round of interviews, I was able to gauge our second conversation on the participant's experience in the classroom and how they are adapting to a completely new academic system.

### **Data Analysis**

Since this study included qualitative data analysis, a grounded content analysis was conducted on the data collected in this study (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Grounded theory is an analytic process involving numerous readings of the data to identify recurring themes that parallel the

study's central research questions. One of the many benefits of grounded content analysis is that it creates an outlet for self-reporting information from participants without "imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 180).

The narrative data collected in the interviews represents the stories that describe the experiences as shared by the participants. The themes that emerged from the data collected reflect each individual female's perception of her own experience in the American educational system.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In this chapter, I offer the results from the two semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant. All the data is in the order of when the interview took place. Some of the data is arranged in tables and some of the questions allowed for narrative answers.

### Semi-Structured Interview #1

The purpose of this initial interview was to create trust between the participants and myself. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable sharing stories and experiences with me. The questions in this interview were aimed at getting to know the participants, learning about where they are from within Saudi Arabia, and why they chose to come to the United States. I also wanted to explore how each Saudi woman felt about American culture and the education system prior to arriving. See Appendix C for the full set of interview questions.

### Participants Background

The participants came from the following areas of Saudi Arabia:

Riyadh (Capital City)

Qatif (Eastern Province)

Jeddah (Western Province)

Al Saihat (Eastern



Province <http://i.infoplease.com/images/msarabia.gif>

Table 1

*Program of Study at INTO and Oregon State University*

Program of Study	% of Total Participants ( <i>n</i> =7)
INTO OSU	15%
Conditionally Admitted Program (CAP)	15%
Undergraduate	42%
Graduate	28%

Although two of the participants were currently enrolled at INTO OSU, the remaining five participants completed the one-year English requirement and matriculated into a degree-seeking program at Oregon State University. One student is studying English at INTO OSU while another is a Conditionally Admitted (CAP) student meaning they have partial admission at Oregon State University but must take courses at INTO in order to meet the language requirement and study full-time in a degree-seeking program.

Table 2

*Majors of Participants*

Type of Major	% of Total Responses ( <i>n</i> =7)
Business	29%
Adult Education	14.2%
Information Technology	14.2%
General Science	14.2%
Computer Science	14.2%
HDFS	14.2%

Although there is a broad range of majors shown here, it is important to make note that the major each student is studying does not necessarily reflect their personal academic interest. The Saudi Arabian Culture Mission awarded scholarships based on

predetermined fields for students. Hendrickson and Wenger (2007) emphasize the goal of the Saudi scholarship program, which was to increase the Saudi presence in the workforce and to decrease dependence on foreign labor within the country.

Table 3

*Level of Education Completed in Saudi Arabia Prior to Studying in the US*

Level of Education	% of Total Responses (n=7)
High School Diploma	57%
Associate Degree	0
Bachelor's Degree	28%
Master's Degree	15%

My interest in asking this question was to gain a better understanding of the education level each participant had upon arrival. If a participant had more experience within higher education, this experience might help them succeed in their studies at Oregon State University.

Table 4

*Number of Terms Spent in English Training Courses*

Number of Terms	% of Total Responses (n=7)
One	0
Two	14%
Three	14%
Four	32%
Five	28%
Six or more	12%



Table 5

*Experience with English Language Classes in Saudi Arabia*

	% of Total Responses ( <i>n</i> =7)
English classes in elementary school	100%
English classes in middle school	100%
English classes in high school	100%
English classes in college only	14%

A large portion of the interviews with each participant focused on their English education prior to arriving in the United States. English is a required subject for all Saudis in the educational system and often times, they begin their English language training in elementary or middle school depending on the school they attended (Al-Nassar, 1982). All the participants emphasized that even though they received English education in Saudi Arabia, the training itself was not adequate to directly enter a degree-seeking program in the United States (Al-Mosharraf, 1990).

Table 6

*Length of Time in the United States*

Time Period	% of Total Participants ( <i>n</i> =7)
0 to 6 months	0
6 months to a year	28%
1 year to 1.5 years	28%
Over 1.5 years	44%

I was curious about the length of time the participants had spent in the United States because it might influence the perception of their feelings and experiences at

Oregon State University. If the participant had been in the United States less than six months, this might bring about only a positive or only a negative perception of their experience depending on each participant's level of culture shock and homesickness they are enduring (Jackson, 2008).

Table 7

*New to the United States (First time in the United States)*

First Time in U.S.	% of Total Participants (n=7)
Yes	58%
No	42%

I wanted to know if the participants are experiencing the United States for the first time or whether they are experiencing America for the first time. The four participants who had been to the United States before beginning their studies at OSU had visited the U.S. for recreational purposes. None of the participants had experienced academics prior to their current program.

Table 8

*Initial Feelings About Corvallis and OSU*

Initial Feelings	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Boring town	15%
Small town	15%
Unfriendly Americans	10%
Murders, crime	45%
Americans hate Muslims	15%

The participants expressed shock upon arrival to Corvallis. They felt that Corvallis was a boring town void of entertainment, including a shopping mall. The participants expressed that even though some of them were from towns small than

Corvallis, they felt like there were many things they can do on the weekends such as go to the shopping mall or museums, both of which are not available in Corvallis.

However, all participants agreed that they also enjoyed the lack of distractions allowing for a more conducive environment for serious studying.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews #2**

The second set of interview questions were geared towards discussing the differences in pedagogical structure from what they are accustomed to in Saudi Arabia and what they are experiencing at Oregon State University. I wanted to ask the participants questions regarding their English education before they arrived to Corvallis and Oregon State University.

Table 9

#### *Initial Feelings about Studying at Oregon State University*

Initial Feelings About OSU	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Classes will be hard	100%
Impossible to learn English	57%
Impossible to get into Graduate school	28%
Teachers and American students will not like Saudis	100%
Teachers hate Muslims	42%
Won't learn as fast in classroom compared to American students	71%
Teachers will be harder on Saudi students	28%

Each participant in this study understands that the United States is operating under a different climate in a post 9/11 world. Three of the participants felt initial fear

about how their instructors would react towards them knowing they were Saudi and female. Despite a cold political climate, all the participants in this study also initially felt that the faculty and their American peers would not like Saudis in general. Their main concern was that Oregon State University faculty would not grade them fairly and their peers would not accept them in the classroom because they are Saudi and Muslim.

Table 10

*Feelings After Arrival at Oregon State University*

Feelings After Arrival	% of Total Responses ( <i>n</i> =7)
Corvallis is clean	100%
Friendly community	100%
Teachers are friendly	71%
The school system is different	100%
Oregon is cold	28%

After discussing their initial feelings before arrival, I wanted to know how the participants felt about Corvallis and the OSU community once they arrived and began their studies. The biggest shock to them was the vast difference in academic culture at Oregon State University. Studying and learning through a teacher-centered approach and then suddenly shifting to a student-centered approach is something the participants needed time to adjust to. Despite the drastic difference in weather between Saudi Arabia and Oregon, the cleanliness and friendly nature of the community has allowed these Saudi women to have a positive experience at OSU.

Table 11

*Difference in Education Between United States and Saudi Arabia*

Difference in Education KSA Versus. USA	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Teachers are more relaxed and less formal	100%
Structure of classes (not just lecture all the time)	100%
Lots of writing essays, projects	100%
Too much reading	100%
Teacher expectations (expect you to understand, not just memorize)	100%
Teachers of opposite gender	100%

Although the participants knew the academic system would be different than what they were used to in Saudi Arabia, they were surprised at the remarkable dissimilarities. The most notable difference was the informal academic environment encouraged by American instructors. The participants were not used to referring to their professor by their first name, as it is simply not done in Saudi Arabia. Despite the informal atmosphere, the participants were surprised at the level of rigorous work American students are required to do and now something required of them as well. The strong emphasis on reading and writing papers was something these Saudi women were not accustomed to back home.

In addition to the strong emphasis on reading and writing, the participants expressed their lack of analytical skills, something the American educational system thrives upon. The students felt relieved to have spent time at INTO OSU where they

could learn and adapt these skills in order to be better prepared once they fully matriculated into a degree-seeking program.

Table 12

*First Exposure with Discussion Groups as a Teaching Method*

First Exposure to Discussion Groups	% of Total Responses ( <i>n</i> =7)
Used discussions before in Saudi Arabian classrooms	42%
Experienced discussions as a teaching method in the US only	58%

The educational system in Saudi Arabia is structured around rote memory as a method for learning and relies heavily on examinations. In order for students to pass their examinations, they must memorize the material as opposed to comprehending it. Students are not given the opportunity to engage in classroom discussions and share their thoughts and experiences with the material.

Table 13

*Find Use of Discussion Groups Beneficial in Classroom*

Benefit of Discussion Groups	% of Total Responses ( <i>n</i> =7)
Find discussion groups beneficial	71%
Don't find them beneficial	29%

Table 14

*First Experience With Technology Prior to Studying at OSU*

	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Used technology in the classroom	15%
Didn't use technology in the classroom	85%

For most of the participants in this study, their experience with technology in the classroom consisted of a computer monitor allowing them to hear the lecture of a male faculty member. Because of gender segregation within Saudi universities, men are not allowed to physically be in the same classroom as the female students. Other than this, the participants do not have experience with technology methods such as Blackboard, a method heavily incorporated at Oregon State University.

Table 15

*Find Use of Technology Beneficial in Classroom*

Use of Technology	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Find technology beneficial	85%
Don't find it beneficial	15%

Table 16

*Created Classroom Presentations Before Arriving to US*

Created Presentations	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Used presentations in classroom in Saudi Arabia	28%
Didn't use presentations in the classroom before	72%

Table 17

*Find Classroom Presentations Useful*

	% of Total Responses (n=7)
Find presentations beneficial	100%
Don't find them beneficial	0

Again, the information shown in this thesis is not representative of all Saudi women studying abroad but rather offers a glimpse into an underrepresented group. The Saudi women in this study came to Oregon State University and were expected to adapt quickly and engage with the material they were presented in classes. The participants were not familiar with the new pedagogical tools utilized in their new academic environment but were able to quickly learn these methods and use them in a successful way.



## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, I will provide a summary of the study and also a discussion of the results and major themes that arose from the study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to observe the interaction women from Saudi Arabia are having and the ways they are adapting to the differences in academic structure between what they are accustomed to back home and what they are experiencing at Oregon State. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven Saudi women aimed at obtaining a glimpse into the experience they are having at Oregon State University.

Although the sample size was small, the interviews provided valuable information about the academic journey these seven Saudi women are experiencing at Oregon State. There were two major themes that emerged through this study. The themes were intercultural competence and motivation.

### **Research Objectives**

The objective of this research was to explore the experience Saudi women are having at Oregon State University, a vastly different academic climate from what they are accustomed to. Below are the main points of my research:

1. Do Saudi women face academic challenges in their studies at Oregon State University?
2. How are Saudi women adapting to the differences in academic structure between Saudi Arabia and the United States?

3. How did they react to the different teaching methods used in American classrooms?

### **Themes**

There were two major themes that emerged from this study. The first theme is intercultural competence because the Saudi women have expressed a great need for being able to adapt to both the Saudi Arabian academic culture and the United States academic culture. Both systems are vastly different and while one emphasizes the use of rote memory, the other places greater value on understanding and developing an analytical view.

The second theme that emerged from this study is motivation and desire to succeed both academically and personally. Although each Saudi woman has a different reason for why she is pursuing an education abroad, each woman shares the same feelings of motivation and the need to succeed academically.

### **Intercultural Competence**

The ability to develop strong intercultural competence is an important asset for women from Saudi Arabia studying abroad. Intercultural competence means having the ability to live successfully in a different country and culture (Baumman & Shelley, 2006; Rathje, 2007). In order for international students to be successful abroad both personally and academically, they need to possess a high level of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). If an international student fails to develop a high level of intercultural competence then this will most likely create problems for that student both personally and academically (Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Sercu, 2004).

Deardorff (2006) notes that intercultural competence begins with attitude.

Once a positive attitude is developed, this eventually leads to knowledge, understanding and acquiring skills. Below is a breakdown of Deardorff's ideas about attitude.

- Respect (not just valuing your own culture, but valuing other cultures as well)
- Openness (refraining from passing judgment upon other cultures)
- Curiosity and discovery

Attitude progresses to knowledge, comprehension, and skills:

- Cultural self-awareness
- Cultural knowledge
- Sociolinguistic awareness
- Listening, observing, and interpreting
- Analyzing, evaluating, and relating

The first three points are knowledge comprehension while the last two are the actual development of skills.

Knowledge, comprehension of skills develops into internal outcomes.

- Adaptability
- Flexibility

Lastly, internal outcomes develop into external outcomes:

- Effective and appropriate communication and behavior in an intercultural situation

I strongly believe the Saudi women in this study have all developed every component of intercultural competence. Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most conservative cultures in the world while the United States is regarded as one of the most liberal countries (Hanley, 2005). Saudi women are accustomed to conservative social regulations such veiling and the requirement of covering in black from head to toe public. The United States and Western culture in general is often regarded as an ally to women in regards to freedom, can create obstacles in adapting and developing a strong sense of intercultural competence (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Baki, 2004; Karmi, 1996;).

Deardorff (2006) brought to focus that intercultural competence begins with attitude: respect, opening, and curiosity & discovery. Below are student's comments regarding their attitude about studying in the United States:

Heely: "When you come here to the United States, you have to be in control of what you are doing and where you are. You can't just always be with Saudi's all the time and only speak in Arabic. You have to change your thinking and think like an American."

Sara: "If you are worried about living here then you will not be successful. You just have to be positive and do everything that you can to learn English and you will be fine."

Meedo: "I left my family and my whole life to come here and study so I have to work hard all the time."

For many Saudi women studying in the United States, there is so much more at stake than just studying English abroad, obtaining a university degree, and adapting to a new culture. There is much more pressure for them to succeed academically and personally while still maintaining their cultural identity. More than half of the participants in my study emphasized the

importance of remaining true to their Saudi heritage while still enjoying the American culture. According to Lin and Yi (1997), and Luzio-Lockett (1998), international students deal with loneliness, depression, adjusting to a new culture, academic demands, food, language, and personal identity. Heely, a PhD candidate says the following:

“We can study English over there but the problem is that the people over there speak in Arabic, but if you come here and practice English and have American friends, talk with your neighbors, go out, don’t be with only Saudis, you can spend a day or weekend with them but not every day, I see a lot of them do that, also they must keep their traditions. Because some of them they lose what they have, our religion, our tradition.”

Not only do Saudi women have to learn to navigate within the American cultural and academic system but they must also make sure they maintain their own identity. Some of them speak about leaving their families and what is most familiar to them is a drastic change in anyone’s life. The conservatism Saudi women must show in their own society is a complete and opposite change from what is expected from women in the United States. However, despite maintaining their culture identity, Saudi women must adopt the every day culture and the academic culture in order to succeed in the United States, giving rise to many other issues Saudi women must contend with. Can Saudi women adapt to all forms of American culture without feeling like they are losing their own?

Secondly, the participants have developed the skills, knowledge and comprehension they need as integral elements of intercultural competence.

Below are comments from participants about acquiring skills and knowledge to help them succeed academically in the United States:

Heely: “When we came here, my husband stopped doing everything and I had to do everything myself. Drive the kids to school, do all the shopping because in Saudi Arabia he does everything so here I can do everything myself without needing him.”

Fatimah: It’s so much easier now, I’ve learned how to write my own idea instead of just taking it from somewhere else.”

Meedo: “Before I came here, I didn’t know how to do research for a paper. But slowly I learned and now I feel like I know what I should do if I have to write a research paper.”

Throughout this entire process, all the Saudi women in this study have acquired the internal outcomes of intercultural competence to reach the external outcomes of behaving and communicating effectively in a different culture (Deardorff, 2006). During my interview with the participants, some of them discussed the skills they have acquired while studying at Oregon State University. Many of the participants discussed academic skills while one participant, Heely, discussed in great detail the fact that while living in Saudi Arabia, she was never able to do things on her own such as registering her children in school, doing all the home shopping. One cannot argue that in the United States, taking children to school and doing the shopping are considered to be the woman’s duty. Although gender roles have drastically changed over the last several decades in the U.S., the idea of the home and taking care of the children is still heavily associated with women. However, due to the gender segregation and limited mobility of women in Saudi Arabia, Heely is experiencing these duties for the first time. This role reversal is interesting to note because many Westerners believe that Saudi women take care of all responsibilities

dealing with children and the home when in fact, Saudi women are not allowed to register their children for school (Abu-Lughod, 2002).

The Saudi women who participated in this study did not arrive to the United States with these skills or knowledge, but rather built upon the skills and knowledge they had prior to arriving and beginning their studies at Oregon State University. The strategies and competencies they had coming here enabled them to complete high school, undergraduate, and even graduate school but was not necessarily enough to directly admit them into a degree-seeking program.

Some of the participants felt they were initially ready prior to arrival and felt well prepared to begin their higher education studies in the U.S. However, once they arrived, they quickly learned they needed to develop their critical thinking skills in order to succeed academically at Oregon State University. The graduate students expressed how even though they felt they were experienced students before they arrived and already had multiple Saudi degrees under their belts; their current academic skills were no match for the rigorous American graduate system.

### **Acquiring Intercultural Competence While Maintaining Personal Identity**

A daily concern for the participants in this study is how do they acquire intercultural competence while remaining true to their culture and religion? For Americans living in a post 9/11 world, many feel that Saudi and Muslim women alike are oppressed and in strong need of Western liberation. Saudi women are also aware of the way Western media tends to demonize western men and invoke pity for Muslim women (Gurel, 2009).

Transnational feminists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty continue to criticize the widely accepted construction that women of the third world and Muslim women are victims of their own cultures (Carby, 1987; Cockburn, 2000; Mohanty, 1991). The participants in this study did not feel like they were victims of their culture regardless of the way Saudi women are depicted in Western media. Other transnational feminists such as Zine, Taylor, and Davis (2007) created literature that supports the measures Saudi women are taking to better their status within their own country and within the world.

As mentioned earlier in the study, Maundeni (1999) conducted a similar study but with women from Africa studying in a system that fosters western social norms. While the women attempted to develop intercultural competence, they faced obstacles in adapting to American social norms. The Saudi women in this study are succeeding academically and therefore reveal a strong grasp of intercultural competence.

### **Adapting to Student-Centered Pedagogy**

The educational system in Saudi Arabia incorporates a teacher-centered approach, allowing the teacher to be at the center of the classroom and the student on the margins (Chadraba & O'Keefe, 2007; Richards, 1992; Tubaishat, Bhatti, El-Qawasmeh, 2006). The Saudi women in this study are required to hold a strong grasp of their own educational system and be able to comprehend and adapt to the American cultural system, something they had never experienced before. Coming from a teacher-centered pedagogy and being fully immersed in a student-centered pedagogy was not something that came natural to these Saudi women from the beginning. When asked about the student-centered approach, the participants



expressed positive reactions to this new educational system they were being exposed to here at Oregon State University. Below are comments from the participants about the student-centered approach:

*Alaa:* This is a good teaching method. It makes the students more like they can say their opinions and ideas. We don't have the chance to say what we think [participant is talking about Saudi Arabia since there is rarely an opportunity to analyze academic material.

*Heely:* They are helpful but sometimes the group discussion is a waste of time, sometimes, but not always, you know when the other students don't want to participate. But I enjoy it and I know feel like I am benefitting from it. But I like that we can talk with each other and share with each other. The teachers here want you to have a brain and think. Back home, we just listen to what we are told, take notes and you go home.

*Sara:* I never thought I would be interested in knowing what my classmates thought about the topics in class because we weren't taught to care about that. But since we have been doing presentations and class discussions, I'm now really interested in hearing their opinion about what we are learning in the class. It's helped to open my eyes to different ideas and I can see how others interpret the same things I'm reading.

*Reema:* We are not taught to ask questions. So this was hard at first when the teacher here asks you what you think. I didn't know what to say and I would always just believe what I read. This was really hard for me to start asking questions about the material. It's so much easier for American's because this is what they do from a young age and basically their whole school life. It's still hard for me but I like it and I see how much I have improved.

*Ahlam:* I think it is useful because we share ideas and we practice speaking, and you now in Saudi Arabia, they started to use this method. About 3 years ago, they used to put one chair and one table and now they put circular table and chairs around the table so you can have a discussion. But Saudi students are still learning how to behave because they lose focus and talk about other things. American students are really focused. They like to teach themselves.

The quotes above are interesting because the participants have seen the differences in the two academic structures. They acknowledge that their difficulty in adapting to the student-centered approach stems from their lack of experience with this method of learning. The participants comprehend how their own academic system in Saudi Arabia encouraged them to memorize and regurgitate information as opposed to thinking critically, analyzing and questioning the course material. Now that they are fully immersed in a new school of thought, they are slowly learning and adapting to this new way of learning.

One of the participants mentioned that the teacher-centered approach, which has been used for so long in Saudi Arabia, is slowly changing as instructors are now incorporating more discussion based activities into their classrooms, allowing students an opportunity to critically engage with the course material. If the education system changes in Saudi Arabia, future Saudis might be better equipped to fully engage in the American classroom upon arrival.

When discussing the student-centered approach, many of the participants used words such as 'freedom' to indicate the ability to speak their mind about the literature they come across in the American classroom. According to Ayers 2003; Darling 1994; Egan 2002; Moore 2004; Oylar 1996; Reinsmith 1993; Strickland and Strickland 2002, student-centered pedagogy is often times coupled with terms such as "democratic," "liberatory," "freedom," "respect," terms that Saudi women are now incorporating into their language when speaking of classroom experience here at Oregon State University.

A recurring obstacle within student-centered pedagogy is that teachers are required to reside to the margins within the classroom. Gomez (2007) and Walkderdine (1990) agree that within student-centered pedagogy, teachers must disguise their authority. Gomez (2007) says, "...student-centered pedagogy requires that students be aware of the teacher's presence, but soon forget about the teacher's presence" (p. 318). The Saudi students expressed admiration for the American students willingness to focus and remain fully engaged in the classroom, particularly when the teacher was not present at all times. One of the participants commented on how American students are accustomed to teaching themselves as opposed to relying on the teacher to teach them important course information. The participants have learned that the student-centered approach is difficult to adjust to particularly when they are used learning a different way.

According to Gomez (2007), the student-centered pedagogy moves from institutional authority to a "self-declared 'ethical stance'" on the part of the teacher and the student (p. 318). As quoted above, one of the participants described the new implementation of student-centered pedagogy in Saudi Arabian classrooms but students' lack of willingness to fully engage in this foreign teaching method. Another participant commented on the authority exhibited in the teacher-centered classroom they were accustomed to in Saudi Arabia. Gomez (2007) says the controversy with student-centered and teacher-centered pedagogy has created an either/or choice in regards to pedagogical power within the classroom. Celia Oyler (1996) suggests a new alternative to the push and pull relationship that exists within teacher-centered and student-centered pedagogy. Oyler (1996) offers an alternative where both

methods can coexist in the classroom, a method she calls ‘being *in* authority and being *an* authority’ (p. 19-20):

When teachers are *in* authority, their authority rests on their institutional positions of power and their status as adults working with youth. In contrast, being *an* authority involves teachers sharing their knowledge and expertise established through study and experience (Oyler 1996, p. 70).

Oyler (1996) is describing an alternative where both pedagogies can exist together in a unified form to benefit the educator and those being educated. Teacher-centered pedagogy does not have to be negative and authoritative and student-centered approach as the opposite, but rather they can both share a presence in the classroom. Oyler views authority as something that has a place for flexibility and responsive to individual needs and the classroom as a whole. The teacher should not rule as authority figure in the classroom, but rather as an experienced educator there to facilitate active learning (Gomez, 2007).

In my discussions with the participants, many of them discussed the attitude of instructors in Saudi Arabia. They felt teachers were often controlling and made it clear to students they were the authority and students are not to challenge anything the instructor says. Saudi students are required to exhibit a certain level of respect towards the instructor since they are teaching the course and ultimately, the expert on that particular topic. Female Saudi students learned from an early age to never question their instructor and to essentially believe all the information given to them.

The participants in this study expressed shock at the relaxed classroom environment incorporated into American classrooms, such as expressing your personal opinions about course material, and calling your professor by their first name, something all Saudi students would never dream of doing. However, a relaxed environment was something the participants quickly adjusted to. Many of the women in this study expressed initial feelings of anxiety upon arrival because they felt they would have to abandon their identity. However, the relaxed campus setting at Oregon State University helped them feel comfortable to be themselves and express their opinions in a classroom.

### **Motivation and Desire**

When speaking to any of the Saudi women studying at Oregon State University, it is quite difficult to ignore the motivation and desire they possess when discussing their academic pursuits. The research of Jarvala, Volet, and Jarvenoja (2010) concludes that motivation in learning is defined as the psychological drive that leads to “cognitive engagement and ultimate achievement” (p. 16). Zimmerman and Schunk (2011) have conceptualized motivation into two complementary ways. First is the direction and drive for self-regulated learning, which is through creating personal goals, motives, and intentions for learning, and second, as an important part of “effective self-directed learning, which needs to be regulated to sustain productive engagement” (p. 16).

All of the Saudi women in this study expressed a great deal of motivation and desire to complete a degree at Oregon State and return to Saudi Arabia to contribute to their society and the advancement of women. Before arriving in the United States,

each Saudi woman in this study has clear goals they want to pursue both personal and academic. Below are excerpts from the participants expressing their feelings and reasons about studying abroad:

*Sara:* For me, education is about ensuring my life now and forever. In case something will happen to me or if I get divorced, I will have my degree and my education to help me survive. Without this, I will have nothing.

*Meedo:* I want to get a good education so I can go back and go back to my country and help the situation for women there. This is important for all the Saudi women studying outside should do.

*Heely:* I feel like there is so much pressure for me to do well because not just my family is depending on me but my school as well. I have my whole department and University waiting for me to finish my PhD and go back and teach them everything that I learned and experienced here in Oregon. I cannot disappoint them. I cannot.

*Fatimah:* I want to be successful in my life. To me this means I will come to America and I will study really hard. Then I will return to my country and work and I hope my future kids will do the same.

The pressure for these women to succeed in the United States is insurmountable. The pressure to succeed personally and academically is something on their mind every single day. For the participants in this study, the decision to leave their life and come to the United States was not an easy decision but was something they feel is necessary in order to ensure their future. Even though each participant has a clear goal in mind for why they are pursuing higher education in the United States, each has a different goal. For Heely, the pressure she feels to succeed here is different than what the other participants feel. Heely is expected to earn a PhD in the United States and return to the department who sent her to OSU. The university she works

for in Saudi Arabia expects her to share the knowledge and experiences she gained during her time here. Heely feels that her success here is not only for her and her family but also for the University she works for, her department, and her students all rely on her.

While some of the participants feel pressure to relay the knowledge and skills they learned here with their colleagues, other participants in the study, expressed desire to ensure their future with a college education. Some of the younger female students felt that a college degree ensured their future in case of divorce in an unstable world.

According to Katzell & Thompson (1992) motivation is constructed through conditions and processes that, "...account for arousal, direction, magnitude, and maintenance of effort in a person's work" (p. 144). Katzell and Thompson (1992) classify motivation in two different categories: exogenous causes or endogenous processes (pg. 144). Below is a break down of these categories and what they mean for Saudi women:

### **Exogenous Theory**

- *Motive/need theory*: Student needs motives or needs that will influence positive behavior
- *Incentives/reward theory*: Student needs incentive to achieve academic success. Student also needs disincentive to keep the motivation going (disincentives help to direct behavior)
- *Reinforcement theory*: Student needs to be rewarded as rewards are stimuli that reinforce and encourage the behavior that produced them

- *Goal theory*: Students will perform better when they have a clear goal that is challenging and difficult for them

### **Endogenous Theory**

- Arousal/activation theory: Focus on internal processes
- Expectancy-valence theory: Students are motivated when they know their effort will result in good performance
- Equity theory: People are motivated by their need for fair treatment
- Attitude theory: People who have positive attitudes are more likely to succeed
- Intention/goal theory: A student's academic performance is determined by the goals they set for themselves
- Attribution/self-efficacy theory: The way people see themselves or what happens to them and around them

In their study, Katzell and Thompson (1990) stressed the need for the student to feel like they are being treated justly and fairly. A recurring comment made by the Saudi participants was that they felt like American instructors do not grade them fairly, particularly when it comes to writing. Below are excerpts from the participants regarding this fairness in grading:

*Reem*: I don't think the professors should grade me like the Americans. This is not my language and they can't expect me to write like them. It's not my first language so they should think of this when they grade my homework.

*Sara*: They should take into consideration that we are trying ten times harder than the Americans do in the class. They can't expect us to be like them because we can't be like them. We learned English as adults so it's much harder for us, I think.



*Ahlam:* I think they should help us a little when they are grading. Writing is too difficult for us, for me.

*Heely:* You know, maybe it will take the American one hour or two hours to write a paper, an essay, but for me, and others like me, we will spend a whole week in the library to make it good, to make it the way the teacher wants it. And maybe it's still not good enough like the American student's paper.

Almost all the participants expressed personal frustration with American instructors grading them under the same standards and regulations as native English speakers. As shown in the above quotes, the participants feel that professors should always take into consideration the fact that these women are not native speakers and they [participants] feel that their writing will never compete with the writing ability of native speakers. Heely emphasized how it takes her much longer to write an essay and complete a product that satisfies the instructor expectations. However, despite countless hours in the library, Heely still feels that her work is not of the same caliber as a native speaker. When I asked the participants why they felt their writing would never be adequate for American university standards, they said that it would work the same way if a native English-speaking student attended university in Saudi Arabia. They explained to me that the native English-speaker would experience the same academic struggles Saudi's face as adult learners and that native English speakers would never truly grasp written Arabic.

### **Feminism and Motivation**

Before theorists in the field of transnational feminism made it clear to the world that despite what colonialist feminist discourses say, not all women of color are the same, not all women are the same, and not all women possess the same goals, hopes, and fears about the world. Western feminists often portrayed Muslim women

as oppressed by the patriarchy that consumes their lives and the religion that perpetuates their oppression. Transnational feminism helped to alleviate the negative stigma associated with Muslim women as victims in their own homes by bringing to light the differences all women have despite their biological identity.

Even though the women in this study are all from the same country, each woman has her own personal reason for wanting to pursue an education abroad. Some of them are sent by their home university, some are here to earn a degree and work, and some are simply here to ensure their future should their marriage result in divorce. Despite these differences, all the women share one goal, which is to better the situation of Saudi women.

In a modern and globalized world, Saudi women are breaking all the barriers that confine them but at home and abroad. In line with Burt, 2004; Maundeni, 1999; Moghissi, 1999; Richards, 1992, and Russell, 2004, Saudi women are no longer looking at themselves as victims. Living in a thriving and modern country, Saudi women are exposed to resources not seen in the West. They no longer have to live within the confines of the patriarchal society because they have learned to navigate within the very system that oppresses them. The presences of Saudi women on college campuses throughout the United States in itself sends a message to the world that Saudi women are taking control of their lives and finding ways to exercise their voice and agency.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I offer a quick overview of the study, the results, conclusions, implications, and future recommendations.

### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this study is to help language programs, colleges, and universities gain a deeper understanding of how Saudi women are adapting to the differences in academic structure between Saudi Arabia and the United States, particularly at Oregon State University. I wanted to look at the different teaching methods used in Saudi Arabia and in comparison to what is used here in the U.S. I also wanted to understand how Saudi women are adjusting to the differences in pedagogical structure at Oregon State University.

Prior to conducting this study, the literature pertaining to international students indicated a large void of information about Saudi Arabian students and Saudi women in particular. This study is unique in that it focuses primarily on the ways in which Saudi women are adapting to the differences in academic structures between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Previous studies about Saudi students focused on success strategies used in the United States but there is an absence of qualitative studies that focus on women and how they are adapting to a this new academic climate.

### **Limitations**

Perhaps the biggest limitation to this study was the small sample size. This qualitative study gave voice to seven Saudi women who came to Oregon State University to pursue a higher education and obtain a degree from the United States.

Because there is a lack of information and studies conducted on Saudi women and Saudi students in general, this study offers a qualitative look at the academic experience of Saudi women and brings to light pertinent information about an underrepresented group.

Another limitation to this study was the openness during the interviews with the Saudi women. Some of them were very vocal about their experiences and were able to share with me both negative and positive experiences they endured and continue to endure at Oregon State University. However, some of the participants only shared positive experiences during their time here. This leads me to believe that perhaps they wanted to filter the information they shared with me to reflect a positive experience or perhaps they have only had a positive experience at Oregon State University.

Lastly, it is important for anyone reading this study to understand that this is a qualitative case study that is both localized and contextual. The experiences shared in this study are not the experiences shared by all Saudi women studying abroad but rather offers an insight into the Saudi women's educational experience at Oregon State University in Corvallis Oregon in the United States. Because this study offers a glimpse into a few women's lives, it contributes to the educational research and the understanding of the Saudi woman's experience in adapting to different academic structures.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

One of the first things I noticed about the women I interviewed for this study, is that other than covering their hair, they look very much Westernized in their

physical appearance, which could perhaps be a contributing factor to their easy integration here in the United States and the Corvallis and Oregon State University community. Because they look very “American” so to speak, this might have influenced the way others in the Oregon State University community to react to them in a positive way.

There are a few Saudi Arabian women at Oregon State University who choose to fully cover their face in the academic setting. I am curious to understand or even get a glimpse of the academic experience these women have experienced at OSU and how they are adapting to the differences in academic structure. Are they having a difficult time adjusting to all aspects of the OSU community due to the fact they are fully veiled? Does the fact they are fully covered hinder their ability to adapt to the differences in academic structure? Does it hinder their ability to vocally communicate and adjust to the differences in pedagogical approaches such as class participation, or conducting presentations within the classroom? Are they fully veiled in on campus their home country or are they only veiled because they are abroad?

Perhaps the biggest recommendation I have for future study is finding ways to make the participants feel more comfortable in an interview setting whether it be formal or informal. Two of the participants were able to give ample information about their experience both positive and negative regarding adapting to the differences in academic structure. However, the majority of the participants only gave positive stories and anecdotes about their experiences here in the United States and at Oregon State University.

Lastly, an interesting observation is that all the participants attended an English training program before they began a degree-seeking program. Because they were enrolled in an English-training program, they were able to acclimate to the American education system before beginning their major studies at the University. In the future, it might be interesting to interview women who are directly admitted into the university. Are they able to adapt quicker since they meet academic requirements right away? Or do they have trouble adapting to the demands of the rigorous American academic system?

### **Implications of this Study**

The women in this study provided several recommendations for future Saudi women coming to study in the United States. The main concern these participants have is they feel that their American instructors need to develop intercultural awareness about who Saudi women are as learners. All the participants in this study emphasized the lack of information their instructors have about who Saudi women are or what kind of academic system they are accustomed to. Although many universities throughout the United States required instructors and staff to attend Saudi culture awareness workshops and seminars, it remains unclear whether Oregon State University created such informational opportunities for their faculty and staff. If Oregon State University staff and instructors are educated about both Saudi culture and academic culture, this might influence the way American instructors interact with adult learners from Saudi Arabia, particularly women from Saudi Arabia.

Aside from a recommendation to educate faculty and staff about the needs of Saudi women, all participants expressed a desire to learn and acquire basic language

skills before they arrive to an American campus. The Saudi women expressed the difficulty in learning basic skills in the United States and expressed a strong need to hone these skills prior to arrival to the United States. Not only do they want to refine their English speaking ability but rather understand the complexities of the American academic system. The participants also explained how they felt the one year language competency requirement placed by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington D.C. is not enough time to adequately learn the skills needed to succeed at the university level.

There are implications concerning intercultural competence and motivation for language programs, colleges, and universities that enroll Saudi female students. All of the Saudi women in this study clearly illustrated a grasp on intercultural competence and all were succeeding academically in the university. Language programs and universities can use this research to look at what teaching styles are working for Saudi women and what is not working.

The ability to attain a strong level of intercultural competence about the American educational system is not something the participants in this study came with but it was rather a set of skills that were developed once they arrived and acclimated to their new academic setting. Universities can implement programs, courses, or workshops that address the elements of intercultural competence by working on the attitudes and skills needed to help Saudi women ease into the American academic system.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent

Title of Research Project: Saudi Arabia Women: Pursuing Higher Education at Oregon State University

Principal Investigator: Dr. Shelley Dubkin-Lee (shelley.dubkin-lee@oregonstate.edu)

Student Researcher: Nadya Al-Sheikhly (alsheikn@onid.orst.edu)

*Please read this form carefully.*

**1. Purpose of this study:** I understand that I am invited to participate in this research study. I fully understand that the project, in which I am participating, involves research. The purpose of the research project is to gain a better understanding of women from Saudi Arabia and how they are acclimating to the differences in educational systems. I understand that this research project aims to understand the differences I see in American and Saudi educational structure and how I, as a Saudi woman, am dealing with these differences academically and personally. The results of this research project will be used for Nadya's Master's thesis and help her complete her degree.

**2. The Purpose of this form:** I understand that this form is to give me the information I need to decide whether I want to participate in this research or not. I may ask any questions I think of regarding this study, what will happen during it, what Nadya's part in the whole process will be, what my part will be, and anything else that is not clear to me. When all my questions are answered and I feel that I completely understand, I can decide if I want to participate in this research study or not.

**3. Why you are invited to be in this study:** I understand that I am invited to be in this study because I am a female student from Saudi Arabia, studying at Oregon State University.

**4. What will happen during this study and how long will it take:** I understand that during this study, I will be interviewed alone, twice. These interviews will take place on the Oregon State University campus, at the Valley Library.

I understand that these individual interviews will be audio taped. I also understand that my refusal to be audio taped does not hinder my participation in this study. In such case, the student researcher will take extensive hand written notes.

**5. Risks:** I understand there are minimal risks in this study, and that the



researcher will do everything possible to insure my confidentiality and comfort during the interview process. All documents, records and tapes connected to your interview will be kept in a locked location for which only the Principal Investigator and the Student Researcher will have access. The student researcher will insure the comfort of the participant by making the interviews at the convenience of the participant and by providing a confidential space in which to conduct the interviews. I understand that I can refuse to take part in this research project at any time with no consequences whatsoever.

**Oregon State Date 01/0**

**6. Benefits:** I understand that this study is designed so that there will be no direct benefits to participants. However, there may be some indirect benefits such as contributing to the current knowledge about the experiences of Saudi women students. This study could also lend itself to other English training programs. I understand that I may also **indirectly** benefit from this unique opportunity to practice my conversational English.

**7. Will I be Paid for participating:** I understand that I will not be paid for participating in this research project.

**8. Confidentiality:** I understand that my identity will remain anonymous throughout this entire research project and my name will not be listed on any publications, written reports, or presentations relating to this research project. I also understand that all notes and audiotapes will be locked in a secure drawer and destroyed after three years.

**9. Voluntary nature of this research project:** I understand that I can take part in this research project because I wish to, and my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable with. Participants can discontinue participation in the project at any time.

**10. Questions:** If I have any questions, I understand that I can contact Dr. Shelley Dubkin-Lee at 541- 737-5963 (shelley.dubkin-lee@oregonstate.edu) or Nadya Al-Sheikhly at 503-998-3195 (alsheikn@onid.orst.edu). If I have additional questions about my rights as a participant, I can contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Protections Administrator, at 541- 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu.

I understand that my signature indicates that this research study has been explained to me, that my questions have been answered, and that I agree to take part in this study that includes two personal interviews.

-----  
Name of Participant

-----  
Signature

-----  
Date

Researcher Statement: I have read and discussed the above points with the participants. It is my understanding that the participant understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research project.

-----  
Signature of Researcher

-----  
Date

**Oregon State University**

**IRB Study # 4799**

**Expiration Date 01/09/2013**

## Appendix B

## Recruitment Materials

The following will be sent to all current INTO OSU students that fit the required demographics required for this study. It will also be sent to former INTO students who are now full time Oregon State University students.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_.

For those of you whom I haven't spoken with, I am conducting my Master's Thesis on the education of Saudi women. Working at the former English Language Institute and now INTO OSU, my interest in the education Saudi women has only intensified. I am also interested in teaching in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the future and want to use this study to help me better understand Saudi women and how they are adapting to the difference in academic structure here at Oregon State University.

I would appreciate if you could be part of this research study. If you agree, you will take part in two individual interviews and one group interview. The maximum amount you will spend is not more than 4 hours.

Although you are receiving this email, you are not required to participate in this research study. Your participation is purely voluntary. If you would like to be a part of this study, please respond to the email or come talk to me. Any information that you can give me could be very helpful to future Saudi women studying at Oregon State University and the throughout the United States.

Thank you,

Nadya Al-Sheikhly

## Appendix C

## Semi Structured Interview #1 Questions

Time:

Fall\_\_\_\_

Place:

Winter\_\_\_\_

Date of Interview:

Spring\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym:

Name:

Telephone Interview?\_\_\_\_\_

## First Interview

1. What is your name?
2. Which city in Saudi Arabia are you from?
3. Do you have any siblings?
4. Has anyone in your family studied in the United States?
5. Do you like it here in Corvallis?
6. Are you enjoying your studies here at Oregon State University?
7. Did you study English before you came to OSU?
8. What did you know about OSU and Corvallis before you decided to study here?
9. What was your first reaction when you arrived?
10. Do you still feel the same way?

## Appendix D

## Semi-Structured Interview Two

1. How was the term for you at OSU?
2. What was the hardest part about your classes?
3. How did you react to discussions in class?
4. How did you react to facilitating classes discussions and giving presentations to your peers?
5. Where there any cultural obstacles you faced as a student?
6. What advice would you give to future Saudi women coming to study at OSU?