

**Saudi Student Integration in Southeastern U.S. Institutions: A Study on the Impact of Academic, Social, and Cultural Adjustments Related to Academic Success**

by

Carrie Marie Melius

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Approved by

Maria Witte, Chair, Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology  
James Witte, Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology  
David DiRamio, Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology  
Leslie Cordie, Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology

## Abstract

Saudi student enrollment in U.S. higher education institutions has been increasing due to factors like the rising enrollment of international students in the U.S. Another major reason includes the King Abdullah Scholarship Program, which implemented efforts to promote peace and improve international relations as well as boost the economy of Saudi Arabia (Alqahtani, 2014; Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015; Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). There is a lack of mixed methods data on Saudi students' social and cultural integration issues and how this impacts academic success. The purpose of this study was to examine these adjustment issues and how they relate to students' abilities to succeed academically in U.S. universities. This study incorporated Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Tinto's Student Departure Theory into the theoretical framework.

Data was collected using quantitative and qualitative mixed methods, including the Needs Assessment of International Students (NAIS) (Reynolds & Suh, 2005), the College Student Report by the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2001a), and follow-up interviews. The student population focused on Saudi undergraduate students studying in Southeastern universities in the U.S.

This study employed a mixed methods approach to analyzing the collected data. Data analysis was conducted using several methods. The online survey results were analyzed by inputting data into IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The researcher used SPSS to analyze data and show descriptive data and relationships between academic, social, and cultural adjustment issues with academic success using Pearson  $r$  correlations, t-tests, and one-way ANOVA analysis. The follow-up

interview responses were analyzed through a phenomenological lens (Moustaka, 1994). Based on the interview responses, common themes were identified and expanded on for this study.

Some of the findings from this study related to academic challenges revealed that participants found the amount of academic reading difficult and limited language skills and fear of making mistakes when speaking English as somewhat difficult. According to the qualitative results, most students shared that they did not feel adequately prepared in English and critical thinking skills prior to arrival in the United States. Participants indicated that they struggled to make American friends but had little difficulty making friends from their own culture.

Depression and homesickness were acknowledged by participants in this study. Students also had difficulty with American students' lack of understanding of their culture which led to cultural misconceptions and instances of discrimination. Most participants noted that their institutions should do more to support international students studying in the U.S. by providing specialized services for academic success. The results were concluded with a section on how self-reflection has assisted students with being successful and overcoming challenges through self-discovery and understanding.

This study is significant because it investigated Saudi student perspectives in the entire Southeastern region of the U.S. The student population included both male and female perspectives on adjustment issues and incorporated a comprehensive analysis by use of the quantitative and qualitative results. The need for this study is appropriate to educate higher education institutions on the adjustment challenges faced by this growing student population within the Southeastern region of the U.S. to improve their overall experiences.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

The United States is still the leading choice for thousands of international students pursuing higher education degrees. In the 2015-2016 school year, 1,043,839 international undergraduate students were enrolled in U.S. universities with a 7.1% increase from the previous year (IIE, 2016a). New international student enrollment grew with 300,743 new students studying in the U.S. during the 2015-16 school year (IIE, 2016a). According to a report by the Institute of International Education (IIE) which surveyed 15,902 international students on the importance of studying in the U.S., 78.3% respondents stated they wanted to study in the U.S. due to a wide range of schools and programs, 77% responded because of a high quality higher education system, and 67.9% want to study in the U.S. because they believe it's welcoming to international students (IIE, 2015). It is apparent based on recent data that international student admissions into U.S. higher education institutions will likely continue to increase.

Among international student populations, students from Saudi Arabia have shown great growth in enrollment at U.S. universities in recent years. According to IIE (2016a), Saudi students are ranked third in the U.S. based on enrollment. In the 2015-16 academic year, 61,287 students from Saudi Arabia were enrolled in higher education institutions in the U.S., which was a 2.2% increase from the previous year with ten consecutive years of increases (see Table 1). Saudi undergraduates included 55.4% of the total number of Saudi student enrollment in the United States, making them the majority group. Saudi Arabian students contributed \$2.06 billion towards the U.S. economy in 2016 (IIE, 2016b).

Table 1

*Top Places of Origin of International Students*

<b>Rank Order</b>		<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>% of total</b>	<b>% of change</b>
1.	China	304,040	328,547	31.5	8.1
2.	India	132,888	165,918	15.9	24.9
3.	Saudi Arabia	59,945	61,287	5.9	2.2
4.	South Korea	63,710	61,007	5.8	-4.2
5.	Canada	27,240	26,973	2.6	-1.0

*Note.* Data taken from IIE (2016a).

The opportunity for most Saudi students to study in the U.S. has been made possible by the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), initiated by the government of Saudi Arabia in 2005 (Hofer, 2009; Heyn, 2013). In 2010, KASP funding provided over 70,000 scholarships in the previous five years to Saudi students to study in U.S. higher education institutions as well as in other countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). The United States will most likely continue to be the top recipient of KASP students until at least 2020 based on an extension made by King Abdullah (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). The possibility of further extension of the scholarship is expected based on previous decision patterns. KASP has been beneficial to many by giving students the chance to study abroad while promoting positive relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

**Statement of Problem**

There are many benefits for Saudi students to study higher education in the United States. However, differences in language, social norms, and culture expose the need for further



investigation on how to provide proper support for this specific student population to ensure academic success. Even with the increase in Saudi student enrollment, there is a lack of descriptive data on this student population regarding integration in U.S. higher education systems (Heyn, 2013). Most current research explores the adjustment issues of international students as a whole, including issues such as English language proficiency (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Poyrazli et al., 2004;), social support (Poyrazli et al., 2004; Sumer et al., 2008) and perceived discrimination or prejudice (Araujo, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007;), but few studies provide evidence of how students from Saudi Arabia are affected by adjustment issues in U.S. universities and how this relates to academic success. The following study will provide insight to this specific student population's social and cultural adjustment and how it relates to their academic achievements and will conclude with ways in which higher education institutions can better assist these students during their transition into U.S. universities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adapted Mezirow's transformative learning theory as part of the theoretical framework. Mezirow (1991) defines transformative learning as "learning that has learners face some sort of a disorienting dilemma causing them to see the world differently from the way they did in the past" (p. 3). Mezirow (1996) additionally described the theory as involving the use of "a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162). Mezirow's theory involves rethinking a frame of reference, or "assumptions or expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions" (Taylor, 2008, p. 5), and is based on critical self-reflection in order to create a perspective transformation. The transformation of perspective usually happens when there is a significant personal or social issue which can force

individuals to reconsider their existence and experiences (Taylor, 2008). When students are introduced to new values, attitudes, and cultural patterns, it should not necessarily result in negative outcomes. In actuality, it can lead to a transformative experience which may assist international students with coping with other stressful life events (Leong, Mallinckrodt, & Krolj, 1990; Parr, 1992). This study is a relevant example of the utilization of transformative learning as it involves students in the process of learning second language while studying in academic programs in a different country, which involves a specific set of challenges that would likely cause students to become disoriented from a change in academic, social, and cultural norms.

According to Mezirow (1996), the perspective transformation involved in the transformative learning theory promotes “a more fully developed frame of reference.... that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience” (p. 163). Mezirow (1990) indicated that when we create meaning (i.e. an interpretation) from a lived experience, that interpretation guides our decision making, which in turn develops into learning and problem solving. Critical reflection occurs when we “correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving.. involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built” (p. 1). The transformative learning theory is pertinent to this study because the participants are asked to self-reflect on experiences that may have caused personal stress or uncomfortable feelings, by using previous knowledge, in order to understand the core of the issue and how it can be resolved.

Elements of Tinto’s student departure theory were also considered as part of this study’s theoretical framework. Tinto’s theory claims that students will have a stronger chance of persistence in college if they are successfully integrated socially and academically at the institution (Mamiseishvili, 2012; Tinto, 1975, 1993). According to Metz (2002), “Tinto’s theory

suggests that students arrive to college with certain expectations and aspirations. The integration or lack thereof, into the college environment, affected students' outcomes (e.g. degree attainment)" (p. 6). Tinto indicated that students who were not successfully integrated into the social and academic systems of the institution would likely leave the institution (Kwai, 2009). Although Tinto's theory did not focus specifically on international students, it implies the need for specialized support services for international students at U.S. universities (Mamiseishvili, 2012).

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to examine the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. This research investigated student perspectives about studying in the U.S., academic challenges, social and cultural issues, and university support services as well as success strategies used by this student population. The study examined how these adjustment issues affect students' academic success. The goal of this study was to uncover solutions to these barriers to promote a positive academic experience for students from Saudi Arabia. The results from this study can benefit international student orientations and other groups that work specifically with Saudi students, such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), international student advisors, instructors, and administrators.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were used in this study:

1. What are the perspectives of Saudi students about the United States upon/post arrival?
2. What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States?

3. Is there a relationship between social/personal adjustment issues and academic success?
4. Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?
5. How do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?
6. What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?

These questions focus on topics such as student perspectives, adjustment issues, involvement in international support organizations, and ways to resolve challenges faced by the Saudi student population in order to be more successful in academia. Self-reflection was a significant element within the data collection process in order to aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' frame of reference related to change (Taylor, 2008).

### **Significance of the Study**

With an increasing number of Saudi Arabian students studying in U.S. universities, it is relevant to study their adjustment issues and how they can be better supported during their transition. Based on future recommendations from current literature, there is a need to focus on Saudi students' experiences and academic progress in a broader geographical context. Previous studies (Heyn, 2013; Rundles, 2013) collected data from specific institutions in the U.S. whereas this study concentrated on the southeast region of the U.S. The results from this study can be used to assist with region-specific orientations that will benefit students transitioning from their home countries. Most current research focuses on Saudi male perspectives (Rundles, 2013), but

this study focused on both Saudi male and female viewpoints. Also apparent was the need for more studies that use mixed quantitative and qualitative research methods when examining Saudi student adjustment issues in the U.S. (Heyn, 2013). The need for this study was appropriate in order to provide information for higher education institutions on the adjustment challenges faced by this growing student population in order to improve their overall experiences.

### **Limitations**

The following limitations were included in this study:

1. This study was limited to undergraduate Saudi students studying in four-year U.S. institutions.
2. This study was conducted with Saudi students from universities located in the Southeast region of the U.S.
3. The sample was limited to students who participate in the study for both the online surveys and follow-up interviews.

### **Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made for the purpose of this study:

1. Participants understood the survey questions and openly and honestly answered them.
2. Participants who volunteered for the follow-up interviews answered the questions openly and honestly.
3. The NSSE College Student Report and Needs Assessment of International Students (NAIS) were appropriate and reliable instruments to investigate Saudi students' adjustment issues in U.S. higher education institutions.
4. Students from Saudi Arabia face social and cultural adjustment issues, which may have an impact on their academic success in U.S. universities.

5. Participants' results likely varied due to individual factors such as gender, length of stay, year of study, and personality traits.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are used specifically throughout this dissertation:

1. Adjustment: The process of adapting or becoming used to a new situation or environment.
2. Cross-cultural: Of or relating to different cultures or comparisons between them.
3. Domestic: Existing or occurring inside a particular country; not foreign or international.
4. English as a Second Language (ESL): English as a Second Language refers to the use or study of English by speakers of different native languages.
5. Intensive English Program (IEP): Intensive English Programs are English language courses or programs specifically offered for avocational purposes to students at the high school and postsecondary level, with an emphasis on postsecondary students.
6. International Student: An international student is an individual who is enrolled for credit at an accredited higher education institution in the U.S. on a temporary student visa.
7. Middle East: The Middle East is a region of the world that is centered on Western Asia and Egypt.
8. National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE): The National Survey of Student Engagement uses *The College Study Report* to annually collect data at four-year institutions about freshman and senior students' participation in programs and events that universities offer for their learning and personal growth. The results provide an estimate of undergraduate progress and how their time is spent in college (Kuh, 2001).
9. Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM): The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission is a specialized agency created by the Saudi government to administer programs and policies in

order to meet the educational and cultural needs of Saudi students studying in the U.S.

10. Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): The Test of English as a Foreign Language is a standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers wanting to enroll in U.S. universities.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to Saudi student adjustment issues in U.S. higher education systems. This chapter also provided the background to the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations of the study, and the definition of terms. Chapter 2 presented a review of relevant literature about adjustment issues of international students, background on Saudi students, and adjustment issues of Saudi students. Chapter 3 described the research design, the instruments, the participants, the data collection, and the data analysis. Chapter 4 presented the results of the data analysis and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 provided the discussion of the findings of the study, the conclusion, the implications for U.S. higher education institutions, and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter provides a review of the literature to contextualize the adjustment issues of Saudi students studying in the U.S. The first section covers general college adjustment, including academic, social, and cultural factors. The second section focuses on the social, cultural, and academic adjustment issues and support of international students as well as discrimination issues. The third section provides a general background of Saudi students, including major topics such as culture and education in Saudi Arabia. The fourth section covers adjustment issues specific to Saudi students studying in the U.S. This chapter concludes with the benefits of educating Saudi students in the U.S.

### **Purpose of Study**

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## **Research Questions**

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5. How do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?
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These questions focus on topics such as student perspectives, adjustment issues, involvement in international support organizations, and ways to resolve challenges faced by the Saudi student population in order to be more successful in academia. Self-reflection was a significant element within the data collection process in order to aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' frame of reference related to change (Taylor, 2008).

## **College Student Adjustment**

The introduction to college life is a major transitional period for students, including life-changing transformations and challenges throughout the journey (Buote, 2006; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Wang, Chen, Zhao & Xu, 2006;). It is a time for

discovery, personal growth, and opportunity interwoven with difficulties ranging based on the level of adjustment (Wang et al., 2006). Aside from the academic demands, students must become oriented to their new institution's culture, develop independence with new responsibilities, adapt to new social spheres, as well as take care of personal concerns (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). Mesidor and Sly (2016) defined adjustment as “the process by which one balances needs and the obstacles in his or her environment” (p. 263). Research over the last half decade provides evidence that the ability to successfully adjust to college life is a significant determiner to whether or not a student will continue into the next year and graduate (Astin, 1975, 1985, 1993, 1999; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Estrada, Dupoux & Wolman, 2005; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1993; Watson, 2009). Overall adjustment includes a variety of variables, such as academic, social, personal-emotional, and institutional attachment adjustments (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Lenz, 2014; Watson, 2009). Studies have also indicated that other non-academic factors, such as self-identity, self-appraisal, goal orientation, and the ability to handle discrimination, may be more accurate in determining college student adjustment compared with academic factors (Astin, 1984, 1993; Chickering & Gamson, 1973; Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998; Tinto, 1975; Watson, 2009).

### **Student Engagement and Adjustment**

The adjustment to academic life in higher education is a complex issue. When examining academic adjustment concerns, many researchers point to student engagement as one factor determining academic success. Student engagement studies in relation to persistent rates have been widespread across college campuses (Antaramian, 2015; Astin, 1975, 1984, 1993, 1999; Backhaus, 2009; Carini, Kuh, & Zhao, 2005; Krause & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2001a; Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998; Neumann & Finaly-Neumann, 1989; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006).

Student engagement was defined as “the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes” (Hu & Kuh, 2001, p. 3). While student engagement is based on the foundation that students build on their own knowledge, its emphasis focuses on how institutions create an academic environment that promotes high quality learning opportunities (Davis & Murrell, 1993; Krause & Coates, 2008; Tinto, 2006). Researchers of student engagement conclude that students who are more engaged at their institution have a much higher graduation rate compared to their less engaged counterparts and usually graduate a semester earlier (Astin, 1993; Svanum & Bigatti, 2009; Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2006).

Researchers such as Tinto (1975, 1993, 2006), Astin (1975, 1984, 1993, 1999) and Chickering and Gamson (1987) contributed significant research towards the development and success of post-secondary students. Tinto’s work focused on how student demographics, involvement, and the institution’s environment correlate with academic success. Tinto’s student departure theory focuses on academic and social support systems in higher education and the positive relationship those have on student persistence, which has provided researchers with a theoretical model to build on in future studies. Tinto’s theory suggested that students’ backgrounds (i.e. individual attributes, educational experience, family background) along with the institutional environment (i.e. academic/social support systems and integration) play a major role in determining if a student will be persistent into the next school year (Tinto, 1975, 1993,

2006) (see Figure 1).

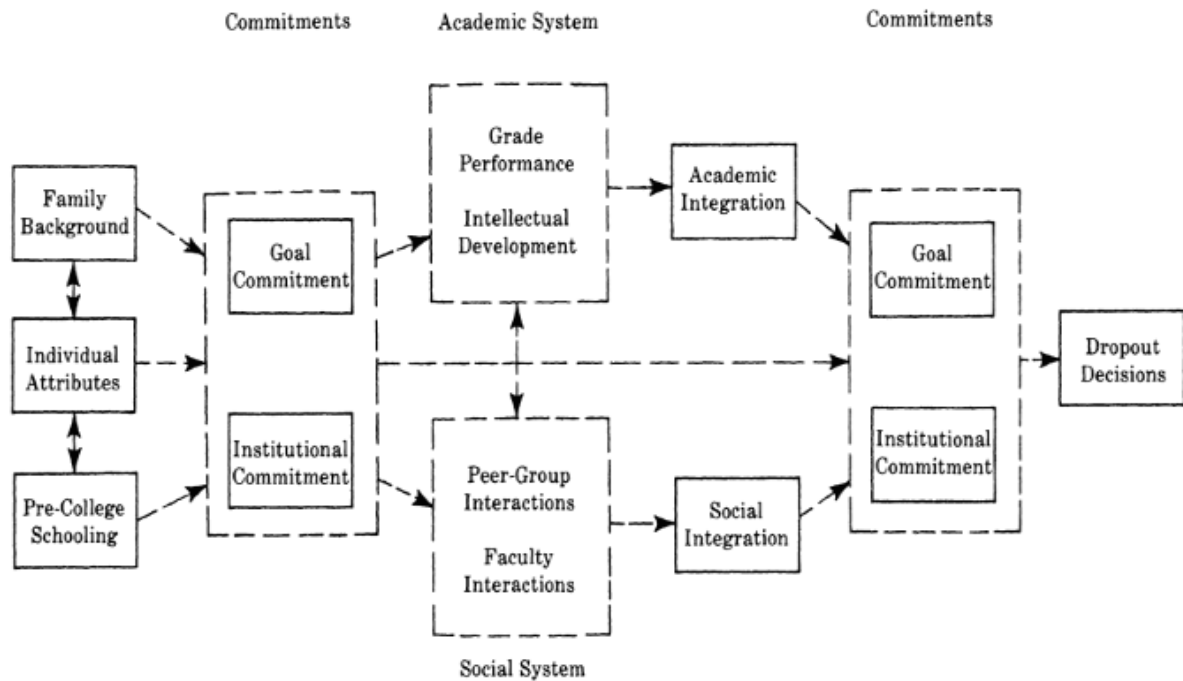


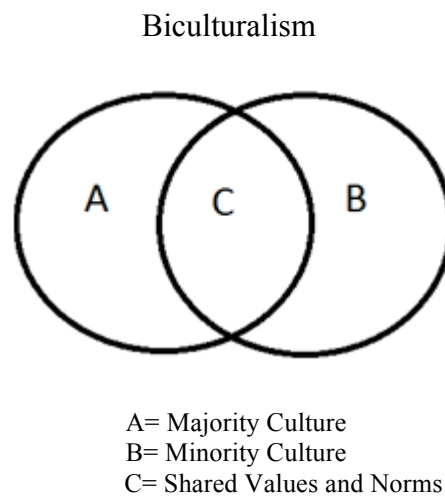
Figure 1. Tinto's Student Departure Theory  
Source: Tinto, 1975

In order for students to persist, they must be involved in the student culture (Tinto, 1975, 1998).

Tinto's student departure theory (1975) initially focused on the concept that experiences students have in their first year in college will have a strong influence over their pursuit of long-term educational goals, such as degree attainment. Since then, there have been studies conducted using Tinto's model to look within other contributing factors, such as student background (Rendon, Jaloma, & Nora, 1994; Tinto, 2006) and institutional setting, including two-year and four-year institutions (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2008; Tinto, 2006).

While Vincent Tinto's framework of student persistence included valid academic and social support, it also indicated a need for revision in that it fails to provide support specifically for ethnic and racial minority groups (Mamiseishvili, 2012). Tinto did not address international student adjustment issues and how intercultural communication has a positive correlation with

successful student integration. Mamiseishvili included that little research has been conducted to show the relationships between international students' academic and social integration related to persistence. Tierney (1992) shared this viewpoint by noting the imperfections of Tinto's framework which suggests that students must become disconnected from their native cultures in order to persist within the institution. Additionally, de Anda (1984) as cited in Rendon, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) discussed the use of biculturalism as a method to unite cultures rather than replacing one's home culture, including this would be more beneficial to student success rates (See Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* Biculturalism  
Source: de Anda, 1984

Valentine defined the biculturalization process as when “a human group is simultaneously enculturated or socialized in two different cultural systems” (p. 3). De Anda further elaborated on Valentine's points of biculturalization as a “dual socialization process for minority groups, consisting primarily of enculturation experiences within their own cultural group, along with less comprehensive but significant exposure to socialization agents in the majority culture—in other words, cross-cultural socialization” (de Anda, 1984, p. 101). Tierney (2012) emphasized the

need to shed light on the importance of cultural diversity when he questioned “Is it not possible to suggest that an understanding of culture is useful? If the answer is that an understanding of culture is useful, then we return to perhaps, not what to understand or how to act, but how to understand” (p. 169). Researchers such as Tierney (2012) and Mamiseishvili (2012) support the concept of providing campus support services that allow for interconnected academic, social, and cultural relationships. Aside from the academic benefits, students, both domestic and international, will reap the rewards of global understanding (Melius, 2014).

Astin (1984) defined student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Astin’s (1984) student involvement theory includes five assumptions: (1) students invest physical and mental energy in different objects, such as academic experiences, (2) the amount of involvement changes depending on the students, objects, and particular time, (3) involvement can be measured through quantitative and qualitative lenses, (4) the level of learning and personal development in an academic program is related to the quality and amount of student involvement in the program, (5) the success of academic practices and policies correlates to that practice or policy’s capability to increase student involvement. Astin’s theory provides insight into how student development within a co-curricular and extra-curricular setting connected with the institutions’ desired outcomes. In Astin’s (1975) study of college dropouts, which built the foundation for his student involvement theory, he concluded that student residency on campus was one of the most significant environmental factors that affected persistence. In essence, Astin concludes that the more involved a student is with campus-related activities and programs, the more likely the student will be successful throughout the college experience.

Chickering and Gamson (1987) developed a comprehensive set of engagement indicators in “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.” These guidelines are intended for university students, faculty, and administrators to increase learning and teaching success. The study supports frequent student-faculty contact inside and out of the classroom, which allows for added support and commitment. Teachers should encourage collaborative and active learning as well as timely feedback in order for students to reflect on their work. Effective time management is key for both students and professionals and will create a foundation of high performance. The study also indicates that setting high standards can assist students with expectation building. This is essential to the success of any institution because when individuals are held to higher standards, they will likely have higher expectations for themselves as well. It also supports a multitude of learning and teaching strategies as well as giving students the opportunities to showcase their unique individual abilities. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), these guidelines can help empower students while maintaining standards of excellence for any institution.

Research involving college academic adjustment has taken a holistic approach when considering the different factors that influence students’ abilities to be successful (Baker & Siryk, 1989; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995). Baker and Siryk (1986) developed a theoretical classification for adjustment based on related literature, including four areas: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment. Along with their taxonomy, they created the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), which measure levels of adjustment in college students based on the four categories (Baker & Siryk, 1986, 1999; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Hutz, Martin, & Beitel, 2007; Lenz, 2014; Martin, Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, &

Madson, 1999; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). According to this conceptualization, when students do not do well in one area (e.g. academic adjustment), it will impact their ability to do well in other areas (e.g. social adjustment). For example, a student lacking appropriate personal-emotional or social adjustment may be less likely to pursue support when faced with academic challenges (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). This theoretical model supports similar theories and research from Tinto (1975), Astin (1984) and Chickering and Gamson (1987). Antaramian's (2015) study provided further evidence to this model with results showing that college students who reported higher levels of student engagement, or who were better adjusted overall, had the highest GPAs.

Other studies have showcased academic adjustment by looking at the relationship between adjustment levels and academic performance. For example, students with lower levels of academic adjustment performed below their previous or potential performance (Borow, 1947; Popham & Moore; 1960). One study by Robbins et al. (2004) used a meta-analytic review of over 100 studies to determine the level that engagement behaviors predicted college success. The study outcomes were categorized by college academic performance based on GPA as well as retention and persistence to graduate. The results showed that academic-related skills, which include the tasks done to stay organized, complete assignments, study strategies, and test-taking skills, had strong validity in the ability to predict retention over other factors (Robbins et al., 2004). Another study by Svanum and Bigatti (2009) focused on another academic construct, academic course engagement, and how it related to degree obtainment, length of time needed to obtain the degree, and cumulative GPA. The results indicated that the degree to which students are engaged in academic coursework (i.e. attending class, reading, reviewing course notes, etc.) had an impact on course success based on final grades as well as an increased chance of graduation at a faster rate. These studies revealed that it was important to consider the different



constructs within academic engagement in order to have sound measurement of academic adjustment.

Along with Baker and Siryk's (1986) adjustment domains, there are other factors that contribute to the overall success to students in academia. Academic self-efficacy has proven to be a significant component to academic success in recent research (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Gaylon, Blondin, Yaw, Nalls, & Williams, 2012; Khan, 2013; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995; Robbins, Lauver, Le, Davis, Langley, & Carlstrom, 2004; Martin Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999). Self-efficacy is defined as "one's belief in their lives, which determines how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (Bandura, 1994, p. 1). Studies show that students who have high levels of self-efficacy or confidence have better academic performance over those who do not (Khan, 2013). Chemers et al. (2001) conducted a study on college students using the Academic Self-Efficacy Scale to determine self-efficacy and found that students with high levels of academic self-efficacy had higher GPAs. Galyon et al. (2012) surveyed 165 undergraduate students to examine the relationships between academic self-efficacy and students' class participation as well as exam performance and GPA. The study revealed that there was a stronger correlation between academic self-efficacy and exam scores over class participation. A meta-analysis by Robbins et al. (2004) covering over 109 studies related to psychosocial and study skill aspects discovered that academic efficacy was the strongest influencer on GPA. Additionally, a study performed by Martin Jr. et al. (1999), looked at the implications for college counselors indicated that academic self-confidence greatly predicted better adjustment as well as persistence throughout college. These studies provided further evidence that student success in higher education is not solely determined by academic performance.

Coping skills and styles can also play a large role in overall student success (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Jorgensen & Dusek, 1990; Khan, 2013). College life introduces many stresses to students and how they are able to handle these and cope can affect student outcomes (Feenstra, Banyard, Rines, & Hopkins, 2001; Jorgensen & Dusek, 1990; Khan, 2015; Pajares, 2002; Wang, Chen, Zhao, & Xu, 2006; Yalam, 2007). Earnest and Dwyer (2010) defined coping skills as “the ability to apply strategies that minimize and manage stress response” (p. 3). According to Aspinwall and Taylor (1992), there were two main kinds of coping styles: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-focused coping involves individuals explicitly handling the stress source whereas emotion-focused coping includes individuals dealing with their emotional reaction to stress (Khan, 2013; Lenz, 2010). Problem-focused coping, or active coping, is defined by Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) as “the process of taking active steps to try and remove or circumvent the stressor or to ameliorate its effects” (p. 268). One example of active coping is time management. In a study conducted by Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, & Phillips (1990) on 165 college students to assess their time management skills and perception of time, results indicated that while time management did not have a major impact on stress reduction, those who felt that they had better control over their time had better coping abilities and were under the perception that they better academic performance. Additionally, individuals who had a clearer perception of their goals were more satisfied and perceived better performance (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Locke & Lantham, 1990; Macan et al., 1990; Pizzolato, 2004).

Emotion-focused coping is a type of avoidant coping (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992), which involves “evading or distancing one from the source of the stress” (Lenz, 2010, p. 69). Substance abuse falls under the category of emotion-focused coping. Ruthig, Marrone, Hladkyj, and

Robinson-Epp (2011) led a study on 203 college students and discovered a negative relationship between binge drinking and academic performance among women. In men, there was a negative relationship between tobacco use and academic performance. Aspinwall and Taylor's (1992) longitudinal study on first year students showed that individuals who used active coping strategies instead of avoidant coping strategies had more successful adjustment overall. While researchers have noted the important implications of using either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping, Carver et al. (1989) believed that there were not only two categories for coping styles due to the wide spectrum of stressors and coping mechanisms involved. Additionally, Carver et al. (1989) described a third kind of coping strategy called disengagement. Those who use this strategy will deny that the stress exists and will use distraction tactics to avoid it. For example, students who fear facing the workforce after college may use their undergraduate years as a way to postpone or escape from adult responsibilities. Students can overcome academic issues that may occur from disengagement due to stress by utilizing different coping strategies (Krypel & Henderson-King, 2010). Studies support the claim that students who have a high level of conscientiousness regarding appropriate coping strategies and are self-disciplined (i.e. set their own goals) are more likely to be engaged and perform better academically (Locke & Lantham, 1990; Macan et al., 1990; Perera, McIlveen, & Oliver, 2015).

Research indicates it is vital to reinforce coping mechanisms that produce a higher level of tolerance towards stress (Bland, Melton, Welle, & Biham, 2012). Stress tolerance is defined as "the ability of an individual to handle stressors without succumbing to their effects" (Welle & Graf, 2011, p. 98). Along with coping strategies, the ability to tolerate stress is influenced by factors such as genetics and lifestyle choices. In Welle and Graf's (2011) study designed to determine the effectiveness of lifestyle habits coping strategies on stress tolerance involving 470

college freshman, results showed that younger students displayed many stressors over a short time period. These stressors included academic demands, like pressure to do well and increased workload, as well as social environment difficulties, such as difficulty fitting in. The study indicated that high stress tolerance factors included feeling well supported, adequate social interaction, regular contact with family, getting 8+ hours of sleep per night, a balanced diet, exercise, and being involved in extra-curricular sports. Additionally, students who felt in control of their problems usually used problem-focused, or active, coping strategies.

Studies support that the ability to tolerate stress is largely connected to solid social networks, which can have a positive impact on social adjustment on campuses, especially among millennials (Ainslie & Shafer, 1996; Bland et al., 2012; Luthar, 1991; Welle & Graf, 2011). Social adjustment is defined as “the degree to which students have integrated themselves into the social structures of university residencies and the broader university, are taking part in campus activities, meeting new people and making friends” (Credé & Niehorster, 2012, p. 135). Some studies have found that social adjustment factors are better indicators of undergraduate student retention over academic adjustment factors and that those who do not socially adapt to the university lifestyle are likely to have intrapersonal issues as well as drop out (Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Martin et al., 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; 2005). Peer relationships add significant value to academic success (Fass & Tubman, 2002; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Hiester, 2008). According to Astin (1993), student peer groups, or groups of closely-knit friends, are the most effective influencers of student growth and development. The peer environment, as defined by Terenzini and Reason (2005) is “the system of dominant and normative values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that characterize a campus’ student body” (p. 12), is a broader concept that may not have much direct impact on the individual student; however, there is

evidence that students likely shift towards the leading values and beliefs by students within an institution, so the peer environment does assist in understanding student values and expectations (Terenzini & Reason, 2005).

According to Tokuno (1986), friendships may be a tool used to reduce the burden and stresses related to significant life changes, like college adjustment. A friend has the capability to satisfy a number of roles essential to the accommodation of a new environment, including an advisor, role model, critic, listener, and support system. Friends also give meaningful guidance, reassurance, encouragement, and a sense of belonging (Tokuno, 1986; Weiss, 1974). Buote et al. (2007) conducted a study on the importance of friendships and adjustment among first-year university students. Buote et al.'s study results showed a substantial positive correlation between the quality of new friendships and university adjustment. Another significant finding was that first-year students were able to share and relate their unexpected difficulties with new friends and create a sense of normalcy during a period of major adjustment. Not only did the friendships serve to fulfill the aforementioned roles, but the research also showed that they assisted in increasing social networks by the introduction to other potential friendships. Along with a strong association to social adjustment, new friendships also indicated a strong connection with students' attachment to the university and academic adjustment (Buote et al., 2007).

In connection with social and academic adjustment, research also indicates that there is a positive relationship between mentoring and academic success (Lenz, 2014; McGuire & Reger, 2003). McGuire and Reger (2003) reveal that mentoring relationships assist students when adjusting to the demands of college life. According to Liang et al. (2002), relationships that involve mentoring give students essential mental/emotional, social, and cultural support as well as positive reinforcement. Mentorship roles that exist within faculty, staff, advisors, counselors,

and family members can provide meaningful relationships that support goal attainment (Lenz, 2014). Peer mentoring, such as with older or more experienced students, can also be key component to successful mentoring relationships because it aides students who may have a difficult time seeking support through formal systems. Pizzaolato's study (2004) indicated that students referred to upperclassmen peers as key to their growth and adjustment, especially if they felt uncomfortable asking for help in a large-group setting. According to Reason (2009), the student peer environment also plays a major role in the "shaping of students' sense of place" by giving students an understanding of the expectations and values of other members in the social and academic schema within a university (p. 670). Ultimately, mentoring can help students stay resistant to the negative effects of university adjustment (Lenz, 2014).

### **Institutional Environment**

College environment is another factor that impacts student adjustment and success. Campus environment can be defined in a variety of ways, but Pike and Kuh (2006) offer the definition of "the extent to which students believe that their institutions are committed to their success and report that the social and working relationships among different group on campus are positive" (p. 432). According to Braunstein and McGrath (1997), perspectives on college setting, including aspects like course options, tuition pricing, and housing, helped predict first-year student attrition within the university. Research also supports that students who had a positive impression regarding college atmosphere were more likely to stay enrolled in that institution (Hu & Kuh, 2002; Johnson, 1997; Martin, Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999; Wilder, 1983).

Some studies specify two organizational areas pertaining to college environment that can influence student outcomes: structural-demographic traits and organizational behavior (Berger &

Milem, 2000; Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). Reason (2009) states that research involving structural-demographic traits “examines the influences of such institutional traits as source of support (public vs. private), size, curricular mission, or admissions selectivity” while organizational traits include “organizational behavior, culture, and climate” (p. 666). Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) suggest that while it is important to consider how these categories can affect student retention (i.e. students who attend a small, private institution may have a higher chance of persistence), it is more imperative to consider the student and his/her actions at the institution. Studies also indicate that the internal structures and organizational behaviors can have powerful effects on student’s first year experience at an institution (Berger 2001-2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini & Reason, 2005). For example, Berger’s (2001-2002) study on institutions’ organizational nature and student persistence showed that universities that display more collegial organizational behaviors increase student satisfaction and engagement. Additionally, organizational behaviors that involve a systematic approach can result in higher student persistence rates.

Faculty support is another significant structural feature within an institution that can impact a student’s ability to adjust. Studies related to academic adjustment and institutional environment show that relationships with faculty and teaching methods have a substantial impact on student success (Astin, 1984, 1993; Chickering & McCormick, 1973; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Heath, Skok, & McLaughlin, 1991; Ladd & Ruby, 2010; Laanan, 2001; Mamisheshvili, 2012; Martin, Jr., Swartz-Kulstad, & Madson, 1999; Mlynarczyk & Babbitt, 2002; Mohr, Eiche, & Sedlacek, 1998; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Neumann & Finaly-Neumann, 1989; Pace, 1984; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; 1980; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014; Spady, 1971; Tinto, 1987, 1993). The faculty members of an institution serve as representatives of that

institution's values and culture along with their own individual ideals (Berger & Milem, 2000). In a study conducted by Sevinç and Gizir (2014), which looked at factors that had a negative impact on the university adjustment of first-year college students, the results showed that faculty relationships as well as quality of teaching had a negative influence on first-year students' academic adjustment. Students who had poor academic adjustment viewed faculty members as "less caring, warm, and supportive" (p. 1303). The study also revealed that formal and informal student-faculty involvement was fairly infrequent. The indication of irregular formal and informal student-faculty interaction negatively influencing academic adjustment coincides with previous studies (Chickering & Gamson, 1973; Endo & Harpel, 1982; Karp et al., 2008; Lacy, 1978; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1978; Sevinç & Gizir, 2014). In another study focusing on attrition predictors in university junior and seniors, Neumann and Finaly-Neumann (1989) noted that student-faculty relationships as well as the course material and teaching methods were high predictors of student persistence. Terenzini and Reason (2005) made some suggestions for improving student-faculty relationships, such as having assigned groups of faculty members and other staff on campus to coordinate and implement academic and co-curricular programming and services that will provide first-year student more support.

### **Adjustment of International Students**

International students on college campuses contribute to much of the diversity that is so highly valued in the United States. The benefits are two-fold in that it provides international students with the chance to receive an education and other related opportunities in the United States, while it also gives domestic students the opportunity to learn about intercultural communication and awareness of different cultures. This allows both international and domestic students the chance to become highly qualified employees in the future workforce because they



will be equipped with the skillset necessary to work with people from diverse backgrounds (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). In order to understand college student adjustment, it is pertinent to examine at how adjustment issues affect international students specifically as they face unique challenges upon their arrival and during the course of their studies in U.S. institutions.

### **Academic/Social Adjustment**

Current research indicates there is a correlation between academic involvement, social networks, and student adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1999; Lenz, 2012; Watson, 2009). Baker and Siryk (1999) define academic adjustment as a measure of a student's ability to handle different demands of academic life. This includes factors like motivation, application, performance and satisfaction within the setting. Social integration encompasses how successfully students can handle activities that involve working with others. Rienties et al. (2011) conducted a study to compare academic and social integration among international and local students from nine universities in the Netherlands, focusing on freshman undergraduate students majoring in business and economic programs. The study used Baker and Siryk's (1999) Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, which measures integration by focusing on academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment. The results showed that social integration variables positively correlated with academic integration variables. One major finding showed that international students scored lower on personal and emotional adjustment than local students, probably due to not being acclimated to a new culture (Klomegah, 2006; Rientes, 2011; Skyrme, 2005). Another key finding indicated that international students lived in different social environments than domestic students. For example, international students were less likely to be involved with local students. The significance of the study showed the linkage between academic/social integration and academic achievement and found a beneficial

connection between academic and social adjustment and study performance (Rientes et al., 2012). In another study by Owens and Loomes (2010), over 90% of international students at various universities in Australia stated that they think university social activities help them succeed in their studies. This demonstrates the need for institutions to implement and facilitate specialized support services, both academic and social, to ensure international student success.

Academic learning communities are one way of incorporating academic and social adjustment support to achieve higher success rates among international students. One example of this type of program was administered by Kingsborough Community College due to concern with the length of time it took ESL students to successfully finish their English courses (Mlynarczyk & Babbitt, 2002). Their ESL program was designed to meet the specialized needs of students by providing credit-bearing academic English courses with ESL language support and speech courses. Students reported a more positive academic experience by being a part of a learning community where students had additional academic support as well as social support provided through a cohort atmosphere. Mlynarczyk and Babbitt (2002) explained how students had 25 contact hours per week with other students in classes and how this allowed them to develop positive connections and friendships through their academic coursework. The collaborative program was compared with control groups in traditional programs and resulted in “a statistically significant higher rate of persistence into the next academic year (66.7 versus 52.0 percent the following fall semester at Seattle Central Community College)” (p. 74). The program also improved levels of self-efficacy among students. One student remarked on how it increased her confidence level because she felt comfortable learning with familiar students. Academic learning communities assist with diminishing a competitive nature among social and academic life and combine the two for a better learning and life experience for international students.

Mamiseishvili (2012) conducted another study on the profiles of international students studying in U.S. higher education, including the degree students are involved academically and socially and how it relates to their persistence rates. The study included 240 international students, 120 attended four-year universities and the other 120 were enrolled in two-year colleges. The results revealed that students enrolled in four-year institutions met more frequently with academic advisors and attended student groups. International students at two-year institutions had more informal interactions with faculty. Most students in both four-year and two-year institutions were not involved in university-sponsored events, like clubs, sports or fine arts activities. It was noted in the study that the level of participation was lower in two-year institutions. Persistence rates were also higher for students attending four-year institutions. Mamiseishvili's study indicated that students who had more interactions with academic advisors and faculty members had a higher probability of persistence into the next academic year (Mamisheshvili, 2012).

Poyrazli and Grahame's (2007) study also discussed the significance of faculty and advisor support related to academic success for international students in higher education. The study involved focus groups with 15 post-secondary students enrolled in a U.S. institution. The students represented a variety of majors, nationalities, and amount of time spent in the U.S. The interviews included topics like initial transition, academic and social life, and psychological experiences. According to the study, meaningful faculty and international student interaction warrants a higher level of academic success. Due to the language barriers that students may face, individual rapport with faculty and administration is crucial in order for students to better manage possible areas of difficulty, like classroom discussion due to lack of oral communication skills. Myles and Cheng (2003) conducted a study that demonstrated similar results with twelve

international students at a small Canadian university. The study revealed that students who were not close to their professors felt that they would have been more successful academically had they had more opportunity for interactions. Similar results were discovered for advisors where some students remarked that their positive relationships with advisors helped with persistence.

Myles and Cheng's (2003) study indicated that international students felt that studying was difficult due to the academic culture in U.S. institutions. For example, participants felt that classes were challenging due to different teaching styles and interactions with professors. Many students were not accustomed to asking for help from their teachers. According to a study by Ladd & Ruby (1999) in which 35 international students completed the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory, a self-report questionnaire that detects preference of learning styles based on affective behaviors, students' preferred way of learning was the opposite of the method they were exposed to in reality. Students preferred direct, authentic learning experiences but instead were being taught primarily through lecture mode. Some suggestions to improve teaching and learning style effectiveness include having the instructor broaden their teaching methods to meet the needs of all students. It is vital for the instructor to open up the dialogue among students to build trust and give tips on how students can benefit from different types of instruction. The study also recommended that faculty members spend more time helping international students adjust through acculturation rather than assimilation in order for students to maintain their cultural identities. It's also important that certain cultural topics related to academic success be addressed when necessary. For example, plagiarism is considered more acceptable by some cultures as the information is viewed as public knowledge, so it's crucial for instructors to give proper explanation why this is intolerable in the United States and the repercussions of not following university policies. Instructors should use this opportunity to provide assignments that assist

students with forming their own perspectives, paraphrasing, and using published works within their own (Bamford & Sergiou, 2005; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Robinson, 1992).

### **Social/ Cultural Adjustment**

Another key point of cultural adjustment is identified in Poyrazli & Grahame (2007)'s study which focused on an ecological perspective by examining not only the individual but also the community experience. The study determined that "the ability for the student to adjust depends not just on the individual but also on many aspects of their physical and social context" (p. 39). International students' levels of social support have a major impact on their academic success, psychological well-being, and persistence rate (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Students will have differing reactions to the new culture and environment depending on factors such as individual personality and home culture, so it's key to provide opportunities for students to form relationships with people from the host country in order to have a more positive experience (Ying, 2002).

The study results of Poyrazli & Grahame (2007) also suggest peer networking to aid in the adjustment of international students socially and culturally, as well as academically. Along with providing student clubs and organizations, some institutions offer peer-mentoring programs where students are matched up with more acclimated international students or domestic students upon arrival. Conversation partners and classes are a great informal way for students to build relationships with others while practicing English language skills in a risk-free environment. It can also alleviate sociolinguistic issues, which according to Mlynarczk & Babbitt (2002), involve "dealing with the social and cultural aspects of language learning such as language attitudes, and psycholinguistic issues involving language acquisition (which in turn is influenced by sociolinguistic factors" (p. 75). One example of how this can be done is by focusing on informal,

social language used by students, such as slang and idioms. By addressing these types of issues, students' academic achievement and university life will be improved.

Institutions also use cultural buddy programs to provide opportunities for international and domestic students to exchange cultural perspectives. Campbell (2012) implemented a buddy project as part of requirement for a university course. The project objectives were:

(1) provide the host students with a practical and meaningful experience in intercultural communication, in that process, would help them understand concepts and theories covered in class and develop an understanding of their own intercultural communication competence

(2) help make international students' transition and adaptation in the early stages a more positive experience by reaching out and offering a helping hand. (p. 208)

During the buddy project, Campbell's students engaged in social events with their matched buddies and other buddies as a way to increase their social networks. The buddy project reaped positive rewards for both international and domestic students. It gave international students a sense of belonging while providing domestic students with a better understanding of international student adjustment issues. The buddy project allowed students to learn more about themselves by evaluating their own beliefs about self-identity and culture.

### **Significance of Integrating Support Systems**

With the inevitable increase of international student enrollment in the U.S., research suggests that institutions consider the necessary support services for academic success, including social and cultural opportunities (Karp et al., 2008). Academic support builds academic relationships, which can lead to social relationships. Academic relationships are ingrained in academic development, and according to Mamiseishvili (2012), first-year international students

can create these academic friendships from the classroom, which can then “extend beyond academics to the social spheres of their lives” (p. 25). Academic, social, and cultural support programs can ultimately enhance international students’ abilities for success in the future by perpetuating growth in all areas of campus development.

## **Background of Saudi Arabia**

### **History of Saudi Arabia**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a fairly new country, established on September 23, 1932, but the history of the region dates back for over 6,000 years (Long, 2005). The contemporary history of the country began around the eighteenth century with the House of Saud in Najd (Long, 2005). Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, a Muslim reformer who believed that Muslims were not abiding by the true teachings of Islam, sought refuge in Dir’iyyah from those who had banished him (Caldwell, 2013; Long 2005; Wynbrandt, 2004). Muhammad ibn Saud was the ruler of Dir’iyyah during this time and became part of the Wahhabi movement in 1744. Saud’s family, the House of Saud, became the first family to rule Saudi Arabia (Long, 2005; Wynbrandt, 2004). Saud’s son, Abd al-Aziz, and grandson, Saud, captured the majority of Saudi Arabia, including Makkah and al-Madinah. Privateers of Wahhabi forcefully attacked non-believers at sail off the coast of what is now the United Arab Emirates and the British intervened (Long, 2005). The Ottoman Sultan, along with Muhammad Ali of Egypt, took down the Al Saud in 1811 (Caldwel, 2013; Long, 2005).

In 1824, Turki ibn Abdullah, a descendant of the Saud family, began to grow in power with an army and was able to drive out the Egyptians from Najd. Abdullah established the capital city, Riyadh, while the second Saudi state prospered (Caldwell, 2013; Long, 2005). However, in 1834, Abdullah was assassinated by a family member, leaving his son, Faysal ibn Turk, to regain

power to the region. When Faysal died in 1865, another opposing clan, the Al Rashid, overpowered the Al Saud and took control of Riyadh which ended the second Saudi state (Caldwell, 2013; Long, 2005).

The third Saudi state prospered due to the control of oil as well as the influences of King Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd al-Rahman Al Saud or Ibn Saud. Ibn Saud was able to regain control of Riyadh with his army and then later the Hijaz region. In 1932, Ibn Saud renamed the country the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Caldwell, 2013; Long, 2005). King Abd al-Aziz, who was also a follower of then Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, realized the challenge of “modernization without secularization” (p. 13) would not be a simple task with the changing atmosphere to the Kingdom due to accumulating wealth from the oil industry (Long; 2005). In 1964, Faysal, Abd al-Aziz’s brother, became ruler where he initiated economic development plans as well as the foundation of public education, including women’s education, in Saudi Arabia. In 1975, Faysal was killed and the royal line continued to be carried out by the sons of King Abd al-Aziz. The rulers since King Faysal have maintained foreign and domestic policies of their father, King Abd al-Aziz (Caldwell, 2013; Long, 2005; Wynbrandt, 2004).

## **Land**

Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Middle East, covering approximately 80 percent of the Arabian Peninsula and one-fifth the size of the United States. Its bordering countries included Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates. The Persian/Arabian Gulf borders Saudi Arabia to the east and the Red Sea borders to the west. The country of Bahrain is connected to the eastern border of Saudi Arabia (Long, 2005). The landscape of Saudi Arabia consists of sand deserts, stretches of seacoast, and mountain ranges in the southwest (Hofer, 2009; Long, 2005). In the southern region of Saudi Arabia, bordered by



Yemen, Oman, and U.A.E., exists the *Rub' Al-Khali* (Empty Quarter) desert, which is the world's largest sand desert. The climate of Saudi Arabia is typically dry with extreme temperatures. In the summertime, temperatures can extend over 110 degrees Fahrenheit and drop below freezing in the night (Long, 2005; Wynbrandt, 2004).

There are six major land regions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, each with its own unique history and culture. These six regions include: Najd, The Hijaz, Asir, Eastern Province, Al-Jawf, and Najran. Najd is referred to as the “heartland” of Saudi Arabia regarding demographics, political, and geographical aspects (Long, 2005; Wynbrandt, 2004). The capital city of Saudi Arabia, Riyadh, is located in this region. Najd is considered a more socially conservative area of the country and it was not until the mid-1970s that Riyadh was accessible to foreigners due to unwillingness by King Abd al-Aziz to allow modernization to the region (Long, 2005). The holy cities of Makkah and al-Madinah are located in in the Hijaz region on the western side of the country. Makkah is the annual destination during Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage which serves as one of the five pillars of Islam. Jiddah is the second largest city in Saudi Arabia and holds the main commercial port and was the leading business focus prior to Riyadh being open to non-Saudis (Long, 2005). The city of al-Ta'if, located in the Hijaz Mountains, serves as the country's unofficial summer capital and is famous for its grapes, pomegranate, figs, roses, and honey. The southern region of Asir is located as a barrier between Yemen and the Hijaz region. Jaizan serves as the major seaport city of this area. The landscape consists of plains, salt marshes, coast, and mountains and is considered the most abundant agricultural region with crops such as millet, wheat, barley, coffee beans, bananas, citrus, mangos, and papayas (Long, 2005). The Eastern Province is home to the nation's oil company, Saudi Aramco, and other oil industries and is considered the most Westernized region due to

large number of foreign workers. While Saudi Arabia contains about 25% of the world's oil reserve, it is projected that this the petroleum profit per capita will continue dropping as the oil prices drop and the country's population increases (Pharaon, 2005). Al-Jawf, located below Iraq and Jordan, has a rich history of formally being an essential trade route to the east. Finally, Najran, the southern region, is culturally unique in its fusion of central Arabian and Yemeni traditions. The majority of the population resides along the area's bountiful valley and stream, the Wadi Najran (Long 2005).

## **Religion**

The religion of Islam, founded in Saudi Arabia, is the driving force of the country's history and culture. Islam began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and is currently the fastest growing religion with approximately 1.8 billion followers (Lipka, 2017). Muslims believe that there is one God, Allah, and the Prophet Muhammad, born in Mecca in 570 A.D., is the Messenger of God. According to Islam, Muhammad verbally received the Islamic religious text of the Qur'an by God through the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years (Armstrong, 2002; Long, 2005). There are two different denominations of Islam: Sunni and Shi'a. The contrast lies in a debate over the Prophet Muhammad's successor. Sunnis believe that the Prophet Muhammad never made a clear designation for the future successor, so they followed his Sunnah, or teachings, and elected Abu Bakr, his father-in-law, as the first caliph. Shi'a Muslims believe that Muhammad envisioned Ali ibn Abi Talib, his son-in-law and cousin, to be the next successor. This disagreement has led to conflict between the two subgroups throughout the religion's history (Armstrong, 2002; Lipka, 2017; Long, 2005). One strict form of Islam referred to as Wahhabism, meaning "a puritan religion based on a strictly literal interpretation of scripture and early Islamic tradition" (Armstrong, 2002, p. 135) is still practiced in the Kingdom today.

Islam consists of five pillars: affirmation of faith, daily prayer, giving alms, fasting during Ramadan, and the pilgrimage (Wynbrandt, 2004). The affirmation of faith, or testimony, expresses the central belief of Islam, which is there is no God but God (Allah) and Muhammad is his Messenger. There are five daily prayers, occurring at sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night. Mosque towers will typically sound a call to prayer in order to call on worshipers throughout the day. Almsgiving, or zakat, is mandatory for those who are capable of giving alms, first to those in need within the family's clan and then to the community. Fasting occurs during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, and represents a time of piety. Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah, should be done at least once in one's lifetime and is considered a major milestone once accomplished (Armstrong, 2002; Wynbrandt, 2004).

## **People**

There are 28.1 million people currently living in Saudi Arabia. More than 30% of the total population are immigrants ("World Factbook", 2016). Aside from the expatriates, Saudi Arabia's population is very homogenous with the majority of citizens being Arab and Muslim (Long, 2005). Arabs are generally defined as any citizen from an Arab state. The majority of Saudi citizens are Sunni Muslims (85-90%), but there are large Shi'a Muslim populations in the Eastern Province (Long, 2005; "World Factbook", 2012). Bloodlines and tribes hold high significance in the Kingdom. Tradition holds that Arabian tribes originated from two ancestors, Adnan (from Ismail, the son of Ibrahim) and Qahtan (the grandson of Shem and the grandson of Noah). The northern Arabian tribes are Adnanis and the southern tribes are Qahtanis (Long, 2005). Arabic is the official language spoken in Saudi Arabia ("World Factbook", 2016).

## **Culture**

Saudi Arabia is rich in tradition and values. The fusion of Arabian culture and religion found the basis for all aspects of life in the Kingdom (Long, 2005; Pharaon, 2004; Wynbrandt, 2004). The Kingdom is a monarchy and has been ruled by the Al Saud family since the country's establishment in 1932, including a council of ministers (Baki, 2004; Royal Embassy, 2012). Islamic law, or Shari'a law, has major influence on the culture and is claimed to be a man-made development that originated as an interpretation from the Prophet's messages (Baki, 2004). The Shari'a was supported by the principles and attitudes of Muslim men until it was decided that the laws were settled and could not be further negotiated by average Muslim men. There has been dispute among scholars and literature in regards to how women are treated based on Shari'a law. Baki (2004) states that one should avoid making generalizations about women and Islam and that "to understand first, what is the actual teaching of Islam and second, what is the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam" (p. 2). As noted previously, Wahhabism is a strict fundamental interpretation of the Qur'an which has major impact on the lifestyle of the Saudi people. For example, the Qu'ran warns against men and women mixing but the Wahhabi interpretation is to the strictest degree of prohibiting any unrelated men and women to interact. The Qu'ran never stated that women should not be allowed to be part of public life (Baki, 2004), but this strict interpretation has made it difficult for women to have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Along with separation of gender, other Wahhabi restrictions include: women prohibited from driving, women restricted from traveling without consent from a male guardian or relative, women covering and women prohibited from using public transportation in front of men (Del Castillo, 2003; Jerichow, 1998; Yamami, 1996). In regards to women covering, the Qu'ran only

encouraged modest clothing and never specifically states that women should cover their faces. In fact, none of the Prophet's wives covered their faces (Al Munajjed, 1997; Yamami, 1996).

Ultimately, the rationale behind these restrictions placed on women is that it is a way to protect the traditional Saudi culture of family honor. Family honor equates to a woman's chastity, or *ird*, which is so significant that it has impacted the Saudi lifestyle on many levels. By drawing severe boundaries on women, it is believed no opportunities could arise for women to risk losing their honor, but in turn, women are losing out on equal opportunities as men (Baki, 2004; Mackey, 2002; Pharaon, 2004).

In the Qur'an, it is strongly believed that men and women should be educated and that women have the right to work in any field, as long as it does not harm themselves or their family (AlMunajjed, 1997; Pharaon, 2004), which is contrary to the reality that women were restricted from formal schooling until 1956 (Alsuwaida, 2016). Baki (2004) indicated that while Saudi women are now allowed to become educated, their education is still controlled by Wahabbi principles. According to AlMunajjed (1997), men and women take different educational routes based on the societal expectations. The role of most Saudi women is still identified as homemaker. Those who do pursue higher education are limited to specific majors and work in all-female settings (Alsuwaida, 2016). Research indicates, however, that this segregation of women in Saudi Arabia is a fairly new occurrence taken on by the Saudi government in the past few decades to protect the Kingdom's legitimacy due to Islamic movements and therefore the country implemented a force of religious police to ensure strict measures were followed. Prior to this, women were allowed to participate in all areas of life similarly to men (Gorney, 2016; Hamdan, 2005).

The role of the extended family is one of the most important and cherished aspects of Saudi culture. Families in Saudi Arabia consist of strong ties, emphasizing tradition and values (Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Long, 2005). The traditional extended family had five unique characteristics: patriarchal, patrilineal, patrilocal, endogamous, and sometimes polygamous (Long, 2005). Traditional families were patriarchal in that the authority belonged to the elders, including both male and female, and patrilineal in that the family descent is followed through the male line. Families were patrilocal by living in close distance from one another. And finally, endogamous by choosing spouses in the same tribe, extended family, or local group and polygamous by having multiple wives (Long, 2005). In Islam, men are permitted to have up to four wives if they are able to provide enough support equally among them. Men served as the protectors and providers while women were the nurturers and managed the household (Long, 2005; Pharaon, 2004).

In the contemporary Saudi family, modernization within the country has impacted the family dynamics. The patriarchal characteristic is still intact but the role has evolved with the current business practices in the Kingdom. Senior members of the extended family are serving as the heads of businesses and in executive positions (Long, 2005). Elders within the extended family can also carry influence in bureaucratic and public affairs through networking and business operations but it is also discussed that transparency and accountability are now becoming more prevalent factors in regulating practices in the public and private sector (Long, 2005). Urbanization and a demographic shift due to foreign workers entering the country for oil-related positions caused many Saudi extended families to become further distanced (Long, 2005). Marriages still continue to be endogamous, or between family members within the same tribe, but these seem to be decreasing due to urbanization and an increase in the population

(Long, 2005). Polygamy is also decreasing due to a higher desire for joint compatibility and interests among couples (Long, 2005). While divorce is still highly discouraged, the rate of divorce is increasing. It is also much easier for the husband to divorce his wife as well as obtain custody of the children (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Heyn, 2013; Pharaon, 2004). According to Long (2005), the patrilineal trait is the only trait that has not evolved from the traditional sense.

Prior to the twentieth century, Saudi Arabia was one of the most secluded nations on the planet. The Kingdom started opening up as the oil industry began in the 1930's (Long, 2005). During this time, many Europeans and Americans came to Saudi Arabia to work for Saudi Aramco and other petroleum industries (Almunajjed, 1997; Baki, 2004; Long, 2005). According to Long (2005), "Saudi Arabia has experienced as much change in the past seven decades as Western civilization has experienced since the Middle Ages" (p. 27). By the 1970's, urbanization and modernization were highly prevalent, which led a group of religious extremists to dispute that the Kingdom was not enforcing a strict lifestyle based on religious teachings. Consequently, the Saudi government gave more authority to the institution of religion (Alhussein, 2017). This religious authority, known as the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, or Haia, oversaw daily functions and regulated a strictly conservative lifestyle for Saudis. The Mutawa, or religious police, patrolled in public and stopped people who did not abide, or seemingly did not abide, by their strict standards. They were authorized to individuals, which was a major factor of shame for the families involved (Alhussein, 2017; Doucet, 2017; Holmes, 2012).

The current phenomenon in Saudi Arabia is on how to balance modernization of the country while still preserving the traditional Saudi culture. From an economical perspective Saudi Arabia's oil revenues are dropping quickly, yet the country relies on oil and gas for 90% of

its income (Doucet, 2017; Pharaon, 2004). Concurrently, about 70% of the Saudi population is 30 years old or younger and there are around 1.2 million Saudis unemployed (Holmes, 2012). In order to boost the economy, the Kingdom will need to give jobs to the unemployed and hundreds of thousands of Saudi graduates returning home to begin their careers (Doucet, 2017; Holmes, 2012). The idea of “Saudization”, or replacing foreign workers with Saudi nationals, will demand more participation from both Saudi men and women (Almunajjed, 1997; Baki, 2004). Some view gender roles slowly changing while others believe the Kingdom will fight to preserve the traditional principles. One illustration of this reform depicted:

The patient...a man...The doctor, a female physician who makes house calls. The scene reflects how gender roles are slowly changing in the medical profession—women not only work elbow-to-elbow with men, but treat them too. Yet other norms haven't changed at all (Kingdom on Edge, 2002).

There are some recent actions that support the idea of social reform. In 2013, the late King Abdullah appointed 30 women to join the municipal council elections, allowing women to vote and run as candidates for the first time (Beckerel, 2016). In 2016, the Saudi government acted to lessen the authority and role of the Haia, taking away their right to question or detain anyone; however, they can still report individuals to the Saudi police (Alhuessin, 2017). The Human Rights Watch organization has outwardly pressured the Kingdom over removing the male guardianship system over Saudi women and until doing so it will remain a violation against the country's human rights obligations (Beckerel, 2016). After two hearings in 2009 and 2013 at the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Saudi government is making baby steps, such as not requiring a male guardian's approval for a women to seek specialized services; however, the guardian system still stands (Alhusein, 2017; Beckerel, 2016). In 2017, King Salman made an unexpected announcement that his 31 year-old son, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman, will become the reigning heir instead of former heir-apparent, Crown Prince Mohamed



bin Nayef (Abrams, 2017). Mohammad Bin Salman has been the driving force for new and upcoming strategic planning, named Vision 2030, which envisions the support of social reform of women's rights and lessening the strictness of the lifestyle, for example, by providing new forms of entertainment to the Kingdom, such as movie theaters (Doucet, 2017; Norris, 2016). Mohammad Bin Salman is well aware that the oil will run out and that representing his younger generation will involve change (Doucet, 2017). Slow change, but change nonetheless.

### **Educational System in Saudi Arabia**

As with the culture of Saudi Arabia, the government of Saudi Arabia mirrors the societal and cultural regulations within the educational system (Baki, 2004). Education in Saudi Arabia is highly influenced by the Islamic faith, from the curriculum to the teaching methodology (Algarni & Male, 2014; Blincoe, & Garris, 2017; Caldwell, 2013; Long, 2005; Rugh, 2002). The Saudi government has had great control over the education system in the Kingdom ever since King Abdulaziz created a Directorate of Education in 1925. This Directorate mandated that the government regulate all educational areas aside from military education (Rugh, 2002). The Directorate became the Ministry of Education in 1925 including a structure of six years of elementary school and five years of secondary school for K-12 education. This structure was later changed in 1958 to include 6 years of elementary school followed by 3 years each of intermediate and secondary school (Rugh, 2002). Saudi education, similarly to its economy, mainly consists of foreign workers (Hamdan, 2014; Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Education, 2012; Rugh, 2002). The government of Saudi Arabia subsidizes education making it free to all students.

The K-12 and higher education systems are largely founded on Islamic studies. In the past, it was the only study as part of the kuttab, or religious, schools (Algarni, & Male, 2014;

Rugh, 2002). The amount of teaching time given to Islam varies among institutions, but it is still remains the core of the curriculum. This focus, along with the following issues, has become the subject of criticism in assessment of the educational system in Saudi Arabia schools (Algarni, & Male, 2014; Rugh, 2002). The Saudi government largely controls textbooks and classrooms resources and require educators to follow strict curriculum guidelines (Algarni, & Male, 2014; Mahrous, & Ahmed, 2010; Rugh, 2002). Additionally, the pedagogical methods involve rote memorization and lack of using critical thinking skills. While instruction in some post-secondary institutions is beginning to put more emphasis on non-Islamic subjects, the general learning environment discourages higher order thinking or questioning of the teaching material (Allamnakrah, 2013; Algarni, & Male, 2014; Blincoe, & Garris, 2017; Hamdan, 2014; Mahrous, & Ahmed, 2010; Rugh, 2002).

In line with the societal regulations of gender separation, Saudi schools have also operated consistently by separation of the sexes (Baki, 2004). Schooling for girls was historically limited to only few schools and private tutoring opportunities (Caldwell, 2013; Rugh, 2002). Saudi women were not formally allowed to be educated until 1956 (Alsuwaida, 2016). The number of women enrolled in higher education in Saudi Arabia is growing. According to Cordesman (2003), the number of Saudi women graduating from universities is increasing 2.5 times that of male students graduating from the previous decade. However, there is still a large gender gap between different academic fields, which reflects gender roles in society. Saudi women have been restricted from studying certain majors, such as engineering and law, placing limits on their prospects in the job market. Female students are more likely to study education, nursing, and social work (Alsuwaida, 2016; Baki, 2004; Cordesman, 2003). Those who support equal education opportunities for women in Saudi Arabia see a strong need for reevaluation of

conservative values within the society in order to close the gap (Baki, 2004). Researchers also add that this is imperative to the future economy of Saudi Arabia as efforts to build the economy includes replacing foreign labors by both men and women (Alsuwaida, 2016; Baki, 2004).

The educational system of Saudi Arabia has undergone a transformation in recent years. There has been an increase in the number of schools and branches for post-secondary schooling due to an increase in enrollment demands. Additionally, there is more focus now on science and technological fields due to economical demands (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Education, 2012; Rugh, 2002). The Kingdom is also implementing western trends in education, such as the credit hour and semester structure. English language instruction is another area that has been on the rise in Saudi Arabia. This is due to the recognition that being proficient in the English language is necessary for successfully operating in a global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Al-Seghaver, 2014; Rugh, 2002). The government has also more recently permitted the development and increase in private institutions. Lastly, there has been a growth in the number of Saudi students studying in the United States in recent years to benefit the economy with higher standards in appropriate fields of employment (Rugh, 2002).

### **King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP)**

The number of Saudi students studying higher education in the United States began to increase in the late 1970's-early 1980's to 10,440 students (IIE, 2016b). The enrollment numbers in the U.S. following fluctuated until 2005 due to economic reasons in Saudi Arabia following the Gulf War and then subsequently from the impact of the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> which strained the relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia (Ramadan, 2016).

The opportunity for more Saudi students to study in the U.S. was made possible by the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), initiated by the government of Saudi Arabia in

2005 (Hofer, 2009; Heyn, 2013). There are three essential reasons offered as to why King Abdullah initiated KASP. First, it was done in efforts to promote peace and improve international relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States as well as other influential countries (Alqahtani, 2014; Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015; Hilal & Denman, 2013). Second, KASP was introduced as a tool to boost the economic landscape of Saudi Arabia by better preparing Saudi graduates to compete in a global market and increase academic and professional standards in Saudi Arabia (Alqahtani, 2014; Bukhari, & Denman, B., 2013; Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015). Third, it gives the opportunity for cultural exchange and education for Saudi students abroad (Alqahtani, 2014, Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015; Hilal & Denman, 2013). To assist with the operations of KASP, the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) was implemented by the Saudi government in 1951 to serve as a support agency in maintaining that Saudi students' academic requirements and cultural needs were being addressed and met and also to work as a liaison between the Saudi government and U.S. institutions (Taylor & Albasri, 2014). Table 2 shows the student enrollment data of Saudi students studying in the U.S. since the implementation of KASP.

Table 2  
*Saudi Student Enrollment in U.S. Institutions*

<b>Year</b>	<b># of Saudi Students in U.S.</b>	<b>% Change from Previous Year</b>
2015/16	61,287	2.2%
2014/15	59,945	11.2%
2013/14	53,919	21.0%
2012/13	44,566	30.5%
2011/12	34,139	50.4%
2010/11	22,704	43.6%
2009/10	15,810	24.9%
2008/09	12,661	28.2%
2007/08	9,873	25.2%
2006/07	7,886	128.7%
2005/06	3,448	13.6%

*Note.* Data taken from IIE (2016b).

In 2010, KASP funding provided over 70,000 scholarships in the previous five years to Saudi students to study in U.S. higher education institutions as well as in other countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

### **Change in Leadership**

While KASP has had a great impact on graduates and the country as a whole, it is unclear what the future may hold for the program. A change in leadership due to the death of King Abdullah as well as current economic trends, such as the drop in oil prices, are causing Saudi Arabia to reconsider the budget. King Salman, who took King Abdullah's position at the time of his death in 2015, has already begun to make some changes, which have impacted KASP. KASP is noticeably shrinking in student enrollment. Intensive English Programs (IEPs), an initial touch point for many Saudi students enrolling in U.S. institutions who first need to improve their English proficiency, are reporting a recent decline in the enrollment of Saudi students (Reddon, 2016). KASP is now more selective in accepting students to study abroad as well as only supporting students attending top institutions. The revised policies are in efforts to help with the country's current spending and budget reform and work to ensure that their future college graduates will be able to contribute to fields that will boost the economy ("Saudi Scholarship", 2016).

### **Adjustment of Saudi Students in the U.S.**

#### **Academic Adjustment**

Students from Saudi Arabia face unique academic challenges due to the differences within the Saudi educational system. One area that has been researched related to Saudi Arabian student adjustment in the United States is how student perceptions, attitudes, and expectations affect academic adjustment (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Almotery, 2009; Al-nusair, 2000; Heyn, 2013;

Hofer, 2009; Mustafa, 1985; Shaw, 2009). Mustafa (1985) conducted a study based on the perceptions of Saudi students studying at Western Michigan University. This study focused on differences in perception related to academic challenges based on age, marital status, academic level and length of stay in the U.S. The results indicated that students considered giving oral reports, participating in classroom discussion, writing, and English pronunciation as more difficult areas. The participants of the study included students, faculty members, administrators, and academic advisors. Students were less likely to report that specific questionnaire items were more difficult in comparison to what faculty and administrators perceived. Married Saudi students reported taking longer on tests than domestic students and having difficulty understanding test wording as more difficult. Students who had been in the U.S. for less time indicated having more difficulty with writing essays on exams, note-taking, time management, and being enrolled in too many credits, along with lack of understanding of the U.S. educational system, as being most challenging.

Akhtarkhavari (1994) studied the educational perception of Saudi students studying in the U.S. by comparing 123 Saudi Arabian male students who studied in the U.S. with Saudi students who graduated from universities in Saudi Arabia. According to her results, 96% of the Saudi graduates from American institutions were satisfied with the academic knowledge and technical skills (95%) received from studying in the U.S. Participants credited their satisfaction the U.S. to the “high quality of education and instructors” which in turn had positive influences on “broadening their mind and understanding of other cultures, and its positive influence on social awareness, work ethics, personal discipline, knowledge and experience” (p. 167). Participants were also happy with the knowledge, skills, experience, social and financial status they received due to high quality of education and teachers. They also stated that higher education in the

United States taught them how to be “flexible and innovative, to have a positive attitude toward tests, to become independent in their thinking and learning, and to select a discipline based on personal preference” (p. 168). Additionally, students shared that they were able to understand subjects and ideas more extensively than simply memorization of the material, learned new ways for gaining knowledge and conducting research as well as new, effective teaching and learning methods. Finally, studying in the U.S. broadened Saudi students’ perspectives and gave them more cultural understanding while making their own religious beliefs and loyalty to their country stronger.

The Saudi graduates from Saudi institutions in Akhtarkhavari’s study (1994) differed in comparison to the Saudi graduates from U.S. universities. The satisfaction rate was lower with 80% stating satisfaction with the development of their academic knowledge, 78% for social skills, and only 63% with technical skills. The satisfaction rate for cultural understanding was lower with 68% satisfied. Overall, 60% of graduates were overall satisfied with their education in Saudi Arabia and 17% very satisfied. Of the Saudi graduates in Saudi Arabia, 23% were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied with their education. Reasons for dissatisfaction included disappointment with the quality of education and instructors as well as a lack of supervision and evaluation within Saudi institutions.

Rundles’ (2012) study shared similar results to Akhtarkhavari’s study involving the perspective of the teacher and teaching methods. Some students shared that they particularly appreciated the open, interactive relationship between students and teachers and felt that professors were usually helpful towards their academic success. However, some participants reported that the difference in academics, such as teaching style and amount of schoolwork, tended to be an adjustment challenge. Some students shared that they avoided courses involving

a lot of note taking and chose courses based on the feedback of other international students. Kampman's study (2011) shared similar results in that participants had difficulty adjusting to the academic life in the U.S. Two specifics mentioned were becoming accustomed to active learning in the classroom as well as appropriate methods for note taking and textbook reading to prepare for exams.

Another study conducted by Al-nusair (2000) included 278 randomly selected Saudi students at American universities to measure their perceptions of the college experience, college environment, and educational gains. Al-nusair used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) for data collection and had a response rate of 62%. According to his results, Saudi participants were more involved in "academic, scholarly, and conversational activities" (p. 92) and are less involved in "writing experiences, art, music, & theater, personal experiences, student acquaintances, clubs & organizations, and campus facilities" (p. 93) in comparison with the national data of the CSEQ. Al-nusair posed the reasoning for students being more engaged academically because family expectations may have a greater effect. Less involvement in writing experiences could be related to cultural differences in writing style and composition as well English being a second language to Saudi students. Results also indicated higher scores in science and technology gains while studying in the U.S. Overall, Saudi students were significantly less satisfied with their universities compared to the national data, likely because of the specific adjustment challenges they face (Al-nusair, 2000). Additionally, students who dedicated more effort to their college experiences reported higher education gains, which show consistency with the student involvement theory (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1984).

Shaw's (2009) qualitative study focused on 25 Saudi students' perceptions of their American learning environment at an Oregon university and how it was different from Saudi



Arabia as well as the success strategies used to reach their goals academically. The results from the study indicated that participants struggled with the lack of negotiation as a tool in an academic setting. For example, if a student missed an exam, they found it more difficult in the U.S. to make it up. This led students to feeling resentment and misunderstood. The following list included all of the success strategies participants used to be academically successful: time management/goal setting, developing/using study skills, forming study groups, taking advantage of campus resources, working hard and persisting, taking advantage of Oregon's natural environment as a stress reliever, interacting with students from other cultures, and developing a sense of community with the student body. Resilience and intercultural competence were two emerging themes related to success strategies from this study.

Almotery (2009) conducted a qualitative study researching Saudi students' expectations, motivations, and experiences studying at a university in Wisconsin. The study included four female undergraduates, six male undergraduates, and three male graduate students and all had been studying in the U.S. for more than two years. Participants' expectations prior to arrival included worry over their new educational environment. Those with low GPAs had negative experiences while those who had friends or family in the area reported having more positive academic expectations. English language difficulty was also a shared negative expectation prior to coming. Overall, most students were satisfied with their academic experiences, with an exception being lack of preparedness for academic studies after completing the ESL program.

Along with Alomtery (2009) and Akhtarkhavari (1994), Hofer's (2009) study shared similar results in that students were generally satisfied with their educational experiences at their institution. Hofer's study included 81 participants at a Missouri institution and used the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) as the survey instrument for the study. The

findings revealed that English language was a minor problem, along with financial aid and living-dining. Single students faced more adjustment issues compared with married students as well as those who had been living in the U.S. for two years or less. Additionally, students who studied in smaller institutions (10,000 students or less) had fewer problems with English than those who studied at large institutions. Most participants had positive feedback overall, stating that if they had any challenges that they first sought out the help of a friend from their home country, then their international advisor and academic advisor.

A study by Heyn (2013) examined the lived experiences of nine male Saudi students studying in the U.S., focusing on their pre/post arrival perceptions, experiences while in the U.S., success strategies employed and barriers, and cross-cultural impact. The pre-arrival perceptions were mixed. Positive perceptions included “perceiving the United States as having a strong educational system and offering advanced technology” (p. 119). Language was one of the biggest challenges for academic adjustment. In relation to motivation, the results revealed that students felt motivated to do well in order to not let their family and government down, as presented in Al-nusair’s study. Resiliency, along with being driven, structured, organized and disciplined, were shared by participants as personal strengths necessary to be successful, similarly to Shaw’s study. Participants sought support from professors, other Saudi students, their faith, and their families. Overall, students stated that their experiences, while challenging, were helpful to their overall understanding of themselves, other people, and the United States.

### **English Language Concerns**

Studies on Saudi students in the United States presented that conquering the English language was one of the most difficult challenges faced at U.S. institutions (Al Morshedi, 2011; Almotery, 2009; Al-Shehry, 1989; Heyn, 2013; Jammaz, 1972; Rabia, 2015; Rundles, 2012;

Shabeeb, 1996). Writing assignments are indicated in studies to be one of the main difficulties for Saudi students taking academic courses in English (Al Morshedi, 2011; Alsahafi & Shin, 2017; Al-nusair, 2000; Al Murshidi, 2014; Rabia, 2015). Similarly to Al-nusair's (2000) study, Al Murshidi (2014) also discovered that writing challenges were a major difficulty academically for Saudi and Emirati students studying in the U.S. universities. In a mixed methods study involving 219 participants, only 30.8% of Saudi students shared they felt comfortable completing writing assignments. English vocabulary, grammar, and sentence construction were reported as two of the top concerns for Saudi students. Many participants also stated that they preferred working with native English speakers when doing collaborative work so that they could assist or take responsibility for the writing portion of the assignments. In agreement with Caldwell's (2013) study, Al Murshidi's results indicated a need for more support from the U.S. institutions, such as increasing the hours of the campus writing center and providing more writing workshops for students.

A study conducted on the financial and academic problems perceived by Saudi graduate students in the U.S. by Al-Shehry (1989) included 354 Saudi graduate students by use of the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) also revealed that English language was the greatest concern while studying at their institution with writing also being the central issue. Of the total participants, 41.52% of participants shared concerns specifically with writing term papers. Additionally, 43.50% found giving oral reports to be most challenging, followed by approximately 30% expressing writing difficulties. Other difficulties included pronunciation (27.68%), limited vocabulary (24.85%), and understanding slang (20.33%). In this particular study, more female participants perceived having more issues with reciting in class. Participants who had their English training after arriving in the U.S. had more problems than Saudi students

who already had their English training prior to coming to the U.S. in these English language categories: understanding lectures in English, reading textbooks in English, and limited English vocabulary. Saudi students obtaining master's degrees had more challenges with giving oral reports an understanding class lectures in English language categories compared with Saudi students seeking Ph.D.'s.

Shabeeb's (1996) study also highlighted English language concerns as being the top perceived difficulty among participants. This study identified adjustment problems and concerns of Saudi and Arabian Gulf students in higher education institutions in Eastern Washington. Out of 104 participants, male students reported more English language difficulties than female students. Students on scholarships also reported more problems and concerns with English language difficulty than those without scholarships. Similarly to Al –Shehry's study, the top areas of difficulty with English included giving oral reports, vocabulary, slang, writing, and reading English textbooks.

Rabia (2015) conducted a qualitative exploratory study focusing on Arab international students, which included students from Saudi Arabia, and their adjustment experiences while studying in U.S. higher education institutions. The English language barrier was revealed as one of the most noticeable challenges among the participants of Rabia's study. According to the study, whole language in general was a major problem as well as writing and communication obstacles. Students reported varying levels of language difficulty, with one participant stating that the English taught in high school was not adequate for having “a good enough grasp of the language” (p. 129). Seven out of 11 participants shared that they had issues writing in English and that it was the most difficult area.

Caldwell's (2013) study on the examination of the experiences and adjustment challenges

of Saudi Arabian students in California discovered that English language was not ranked as a major difficulty towards adjustment and academic success as compared with other studies (Al Morshedi, 2011; Almotery, 2009; Al-Shehry, 1989; Heyn, 2013; Jammaz, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996). Caldwell's mixed methods study utilized the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory which included 245 participants as well as focus groups involving 31 participants. The participants ranked English language as the sixth most problematic category with a total mean score of 1.61. The specific challenges related to English included "difficulties moving from one level to another in Intensive English Programs (IEP), frustrations over the inability to attain TOEFL and IELTS admission requirements, challenges with speaking broken language, and problems with reading." (p. 171). Additionally contrasting with other studies, writing was not mentioned as one of the major challenges for participants (Al Morshedi, 2011; Alsaahfi & Shin, 2017; Al-nusair, 2000; Al Murshidi, 2014).

Caldwell noted that students may have had initial difficulties with English due because some students arrive with low English abilities which may require additional tutoring as well as extra study time before have the skills to pass the TOEFL or IELTS tests. Furthermore, Caldwell stated that the amount of assigned reading by professors and the difficulty of the reading assignments could be due to a lack of English reading requirements within the educational system of Saudi Arabia in addition subject matter gaps with the English tests. Caldwell suggests that academic expectations such as this should be covered in a pre-departure orientation in order to better prepare students prior to arrival.

### **Social Adjustment**

Previous studies on Saudi student adjustment in higher education have indicated the importance of social connections and support systems towards academic success (Al Ramadan,

2016; Jammaz, 1972; Mustafa, 1985; Rundles, 2012; Shaw, 2009). In Shaw's (2009) study, participants reported that a major contributor to their success was feeling like a member of the campus community. While students shared that they did not interact with Americans very much, they did feel that their interactions were helpful to their success. This idea supports previous research on international students in general, which suggests that social encounters with domestic students can lead to overall student success (Hull, 1978).

Saudi participants in Rundles' (2012) research stated that social relationships were one of the most significant aspects to their experiences in the U.S. and that social support was beneficial and necessary for successful adjustment. Students in the study shared that being with people in social contexts creates a better experience compared with being isolated and that social support makes it less difficult to be successful. Social support helped participants get over their homesickness and be happier during their adjustment. Overall, students reported that they likely would have had a less positive experience if they hadn't had social support during their transition to the U.S. as well as being able to have shared experiences with other people to cope (Aldeman, 1988; Rundles, 2012). Heyn (2013) reported from her study similar findings from other students that developing meaningful social relationships with individuals in the campus community was helpful towards the comfort and well-being of participants (Al Ramadan, 2016; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Rundles, 2012).

Other studies also reported how the lack of social contact has had negative effects on overall. Jammaz (1972) reported in his study that casual social relationships between Saudis and Americans do not usually fully become friends and the friendships are often times felt to be ingenuine and superficial which resulted in Saudis being less satisfied with Americans. 22% of the participants in Jammaz's student found Americans outside of the university to be warm, kind,

and pleasant and 43% found Americans were polite. Over 21% of subjects believed Americans to be withdrawn and reserved while 13% found Americans to be cold and unfriendly. Only around 17% stated to have had no social relationships with Americans outside of the campus and institution.

Alreshoud & Koeske (1997) focused on the social contact between Saudi and American students and used different scales for measurement categories. On a scale from *never* (1) to *often* (4), the results from his questionnaire indicated that Saudi students seldom had contact with Americans. On a scale from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (5) and including nine social activities, such as speaking and talking to Americans and playing games, students were asked to rate how much they would like to engage with Americans. The responses fell between *a little* and *somewhat* desirable for Saudis to socialize with Americans. Participants still had a generally favorable perception of Americans even though they did not report having a lot of contact with Americans or the desire to do so. As family is such a major element in Saudi culture, it is suggested by the study that participants may have recreated their own sense of family and community with other Arab students, which may have had an impact on the amount and desire of contact with domestic students (Al-Jasir, 1993; Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997).

While some studies (Al-Jasir, 1993; Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997; Jammaz, 1972) reported that Saudi students were probably more comfortable and content with socializing with individuals from their home country, Rundles' study differed in that the participants reported that it was beneficial to have a wide range of support including with domestics. By receiving extra support from the host country, students were able to improve their English proficiency and shared multicultural understanding. Rundles found that more research is required to better understand this area due to his subjects being divided on the significance of befriending

Americans, even though all stated they enjoyed interacting with Americans. Additionally, social support systems can further assist students towards academic success. Students can utilize the assistance of domestics for a more successful academic adjustment by talking with American students about expectations and available campus resources to become more oriented to campus life (Abel, 2002; Jammaz, 1972).

A study by Razek and Coyner (2014) on the impact of self-efficacy related to Saudi student college performance in the United States discusses how Saudi students coming to the U.S. are leaving behind a closed conservative society where it is not the individual's duty to make change. Adjustment to college life can be more challenging coming from a collectivist culture to one that places more emphasis on the individual. According to the study, self-efficacy played a significant role in the success of Saudi students in the U.S. by learning how to control their own environment in a different culture by seeking assistance and opportunities as needed. One student from the study shared their experience by doing this:

I took that as a learning experience. Now, whenever there is something that is against my religion, I go to the professor directly. Some other times, I call two of my American friends and ask them what to do. Another help I usually try is the lady in the international office. It is not her job, but she usually helps me when I go to her for a question about what to do.

Results from this study reveal that after being on campus for one or two semesters, participants were able to “change their initial conception of their abilities and begin to utilize their experiences to bring out a systematic change in their beliefs about their abilities” (p. 91). While the study indicated benefits related to self-efficacy and usage of social support, it also suggested that participants still spent more time with other Saudi students outside of classes.



## **Cultural Adjustment**

Cross-cultural adjustment is a central factor in the cultural adjustment of Saudi students in the U.S. as the culture of Saudi Arabia varies significantly compared with that of the United States. El Banyan (1974) conducted a study focusing on the influence of cross-cultural education on the attitudes of Saudi students studying in the U.S. and discovered that there was a correlation between length of stay in the U.S. and change in traditional attitudes. For example, participants who had been in the U.S. for a longer period developed more open and positive attitudes to women's liberation. Students who had lived in America for more than two years disagreed with the traditional governing values of family in Saudi Arabia compared with those who had been in the U.S. for less than two years. Similarly, Heyn (2013) and Oweidat (1981) found that participants within their studies also had some changes in their personal beliefs and values after being in the United States for an extended period. In Heyn's study, students stated that they wanted to show their families back home that cultural differences are acceptable by sharing their knowledge of what they have learned by being in the United States. Furthermore, the male Saudi students from her study also indicated that they would not be taking their previous traditional views of women in Saudi Arabia with them when they returned home. They asserted that women should have the same opportunities as men and be treated as equal, as found Alshaya's study (2005) as well.

Al Khedaire's study (1978) on cultural perception and student attitude had different results from El Banyan and Heyn. While participants in his study who had been in the United States for at least three years presented a clearer cultural view of American culture, there was no significance related to length of stay and differences in attitude. However, the study suggested that length of stay did have impact on clarity of students' perceptions of the United States. Major

or chosen field influenced students' cultural perspectives towards the United States. Those who majored in science revealed a clearer cultural perception of the United States' culture compared with those majoring in social sciences. Academic classification was also an indication of cultural perception. Graduate students presented a clearer cultural view of the United States. Similarly to Jammaz (1972), Al Khedaire found that students who attended smaller colleges revealed that they had a more favorable attitude of the U.S. compared with those who attended larger universities.

Intercultural competence was one of the emerging themes of Shaw's study (2009) and can play a crucial role in the cultural adjustment of Saudi students in the U.S. According to Deardorff (2006), the components of cultural competence include: respect, openness, curiosity and discovery, cultural self-awareness, deep cultural knowledge, sociolinguistic awareness, skills such as listening, observing, interpreting, analyzing, evaluating, and relating, adaptability, flexibility, empathy, and ultimately, effective and appropriate communication and behavior in any intercultural scenario. Shaw stated that the participants in her study exhibited the makeup of intercultural competence, which aided in their success. In the qualitative findings, students emphasized being self-motivated, open-minded, and overall having a positive outlook towards any adjustment difficulties they faced.

Kampman's study (2011) focused on the cultural adjustment of five undergraduate Saudi female students at a university in Portland, Oregon. One of the adjustment issues faced for the participants was taking courses for the first time with male students. Students shared that they preferred taking courses with only women but that a negative result from it made them less confident in classes with men, for example, when asked to give a class presentation. While it was an adjustment concern, participants minimized it by understanding the importance of being able

to successfully interact professionally with men in the workplace. Kampman noted that it was not the students' nor faculty's individual responsibility in developing intercultural awareness and understanding and suggested that institutions should develop more training opportunities for faculty members to better serve the international student population. This can be done by researching other intercultural workshop programs and deciding what is best for the specific institution.

In Al Ramadan's (2016) unique study on married Saudi couples studying in the U.S., he found that being in a new host environment brought couples together as they could not rely on other family members for support. The couples also experienced an essential change in the traditional Saudi family roles while living in the United States. For example, the role of breadwinner traditionally given to the man was lessened since both men and women were on the scholarship together. Additionally, women, used to taking on the responsibilities of the household, were able to relinquish some of those duties to the men if she was the full-time student. If both the husband and wife were full-time students, they negotiated the household chores together. These results were similar to those in Akhtarkhavari's study (1994). Participants also indicated the stress of not having their extended families available to support them, especially if they had young children.

Al Ramadan's study also highlighted that Saudi women faced unique adjustments in the United States. One factor was related to covering or wearing the hijab and abaya. Veiling is a cultural and religious practice held by Muslims and it varies in the use, style, and tradition depending on the country and specific region (Ahmed, 1992). In a study by Cole & Ahmadi (2003) on the perspectives and experiences of Muslim women who veiled on college campuses, the findings supported the following six emerging themes related to Muslim women covering:

(1) being a good Muslim, (2) a Muslim identity, (3) stereotypes and misconceptions, (4) social reinforcement, (5) modesty without the veil, and (6) religious obligation. Some participants shared that they covered due to societal pressure and family expectations while others did it to be considered more modest, respectable, or closer to their religion. Participants found that outsiders had misunderstandings about veiling and viewed it as symbolic of women's inferiority to men. This was suggested to be the result of a lack in education on the practice itself. One participant shared that when she wore her headscarf with western clothes, she felt others sometimes perceived her with fear or suspicion. However, when she wore her headscarf with traditional dress people saw it as cool and exotic. One participant from Al Ramadan's study stated that his wife was verbally attacked and insulted based on her outside appearance and dress. This perception of fear or rejection can cause feelings of isolation, and in some cases has caused some women to remove the hijab in efforts to feel less alienated. Speck (1997) had shared findings from his study in which members of a U.S. community had negative misconceptions about Muslim women who veiled. Participants also felt they were viewed as oppressed and docile. In Cole & Ahmadi's study, those who did feel alienated on campus were more likely to reevaluate their rationale for wearing the veil. As one participant put it when discussing the relationship between covering and modesty, "if we were going to be punished for not wearing it, I don't understand why the men didn't have to cover" (p. 61).

### **Discrimination**

In correlation with the social and cultural adjustment areas, many studies involving students from Saudi Arabia in the United States have reported prejudiced and discriminatory findings (Almotery, 2009; Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Rabia, 2015; Rundles, 2012; Shaw, 2009). Saudi students in these studies have experienced acts of

discrimination on campus and off, by people in their local communities, American friends, classmates, and even professors. Barker's neo-racism theory (1981) describes and explains the direct and indirect forms of racism and discrimination exposed in university settings. Neo-racism is defined as rationalizing "the subordination of people of color on the basis of culture, which is of course acquired through acculturation within an ethnic group...it functions to maintain hierarchies of oppression" (Spears, 1999, p. 12). According to Lee and Rice (2007), neo-racism links cultural and national supremacy with growing motivation for marginalizing groups in a globalizing world. The Patriot Act is described as an example of national discrimination because it "allows for the detention without limit and denial of due process for some and other violations of personal freedoms, cumbersome yet ineffective foreign student tracking procedures..." (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389). A more specific and relevant example includes "mistreatment of Middle Eastern peoples in the U.S., who have endured longer security checks at airports, questionings and detainments without charge, and insults, accusations, and physical violence for the terrorist attacks of 9/11" (Lee & Rice, 2007, p. 389). Neo-racism is evident in the higher education setting, which creates obstacles to establishing positive relationships and friendships among international students and the host society.

Events such as September 11, 2001, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and terror-related activity around the world have created an environment built on increasing fear and suspicion towards Middle-Easterners in the United States (Denman & Hilal, 2011). The media has played a crucial role in the emphasis of negative stereotypes and portrayals of Arabs and Muslims. In a survey supported by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, "25% of Americans believed negative stereotypes about Muslims to be true and that Muslims 'teach their children to hate'" (Abu-Fadil, 2005, p. 4). Numerous websites and blogs continue to post false information as well

as anti-Muslim and anti-Arab stereotypes. Additionally, faith-based media outlets, specifically from U.S. evangelical Christian sources, control various national television broadcasts as well as thousands of radio stations and continue to instill fear into the American people while damaging the reputation of Muslims and Arabs worldwide (Abu-Fadil, 2005). Even prior to current events in the past two decades, the Western media and Hollywood portrayed Arabs as mysterious villains and this biased depiction is further maintained today by lack of exposure to the Arab world (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006).

A study conducted to examine 607 American college students' attitudes towards Arabs found that American college students have very little knowledge of the Middle East or Arabs. Furthermore, participants who scored the lowest on the knowledge scale of the questionnaire also rated Arabs negatively (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006). The study suggests that media coverage of Arabs in a negative light is devised as a coercive strategy used against Arabs and towards U.S. foreign policy, as television and media news are central sources in developing political awareness by members of society in the U.S., especially youth (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006). Recommendations to eliminate biased stereotypes include more Arab presence in the U.S. media with specific attention paid to the history, culture, religion, and people in the Middle East to properly education Americans.

Studies involving discrimination or negative views towards Saudi Arabians also reported participants expressing an obligation to act as a representative and role model for their home country (Rayzek & Coyner, 2013; Rundles, 2012). According to Caldwell's (2013) study, Saudi students reported that the terrorist attack at the Boston Marathon in 2013 perpetuated fear by westerners, even though the perpetrators were Chechens. In an article by Zuniga- Brown, she

described Saudi students' reactions in her ESL classroom in the U.S. upon discovering the news of the Boston Marathon bombings:

'Don't be Saudi. Don't be Saudi. Don't be Saudi' repeated a visibly shaken student standing very close to my left. His voice was trembling, but his tone was almost trance like. I turned to look at him sharply, and in that split instant, the expression on his face said it all. All at once, a tremendous sense of anxiety, apprehension, tension and fear mixed with compassion and sadness filled the room. 'Teacher, please say it wasn't a Saudi who did this'.

One student remarked in Rayzek and Coyner's study, "I care a lot about how Americans would look at me. We have the responsibility for our country and religion. If I do something wrong, they will say Saudi are bad or Muslims are not good. I think we represent Islam while we are here" (p. 109). Rundles' study reported the same findings, stating that participants chose to "counter stereotypes by educating the people around them and serving as a Saudi representative" (p. 113). Caldwell (2013) also suggested that U.S. public schools lack a strong multicultural curriculum, which may have an impact on the level of discrimination in the U.S.

### **Benefits of Saudi Students in the U.S.**

There are many benefits to the educational, social, and cultural exchange opportunities by hosting Saudi students at American universities. Saudi students may provide American students with a wider global awareness while giving Saudi students the chance to learn more about life in the United States. In both cases, it can assist with reducing stereotypes held prior to the exchange by educating both populations (Heyn, 2013). From an economic standpoint, the continued enrollment of Saudi students in U.S. higher education institutions supports the U.S. economy by generating revenue through tuition and living expenses. The continued opportunity can give Saudis and Americans an expanded worldview while increasing cultural sensitivity and respect for both countries (Al Ramadan, 2016). The experience can also make Saudi students more marketable in the workforce once they return to their home country. Ultimately, this exchange

can promote positive foreign relations when students have positive experiences that they can take back and share with their families in Saudi Arabia.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the literature to provide context to the adjustment issues of Saudi students studying in the U.S. The first section covered college adjustment, such as academic, social, and cultural aspects. The second section focused on international student social, cultural, and academic adjustment issues as well as discrimination. The third section provided a general background of Saudi students, such as the history, culture, and educational system in Saudi Arabia. The fourth section covered adjustment issues specific to Saudi students studying in the U.S. Finally, this chapter concluded with the benefits of Saudi students studying in the U.S. higher education system.



## **CHAPTER 3: METHODS**

This chapter covers the methods for conducting this study. This includes a background and description of the research design, a review of the instrument used for the study, and a description of the sample population. The instrument used involves a combination of the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2001) from the College Student Report and the Needs Assessment for International Students (NAIS) (Reynolds & Suh, 2005), along with follow-up interviews. Data analysis study will be included to address the research questions followed by a summary of the chapter.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to examine the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. This research investigated student perspectives about studying in the U.S., academic challenges, social and cultural issues, and university support services as well as success strategies used by this student population. The study examined how these adjustment issues affect students' academic success. The goal of this study is to uncover solutions to these barriers to promote a positive academic experience for students from Saudi Arabia. The results from this study can benefit international student orientations and other groups that work specifically with Saudi students, such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), international student advisors, instructors, and administrators.

## **Research Question**

The following research questions were included:

1. What are the perspectives of Saudi students about the United States upon/post arrival?
2. What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States?
3. Is there a relationship between social/personal adjustment issues and academic success?
4. Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?
5. How do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?
6. What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?

These questions focus on topics such as student perspectives, adjustment issues, involvement in international support organizations, and ways to resolve challenges faced by the Saudi student population in order to be more successful in academia. Self-reflection was a significant element within the data collection process in order to aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' frame of reference related to change (Taylor, 2008).

## **Research Design**

The research design for this study involved a mixed methods approach of both qualitative and quantitative methods by including a survey and follow-up interviews. Most studies relating to Saudi student adjustment issues focus on either qualitative or quantitative methods (Akhtarkhavari, 2004; Alandejani, 2013; Alanazy, 2013; Alhajjaj, 2016; Alhazmi, & Nyland, 2010; Al-Jasir, 1993; Alkarni, 2012; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Almotery, 2009; Al-Mulla, 1996; Al-

Musalamy, 1999; Al-nusair, 2000; Alraddadi, n.d.; Al Ramadan, 2016; Alreshoud, & Koeske, 1997; Alshaya, 2005; Al Shedoki, 1986; Davis, 2014; Giroir, 2014; Hakami, 2012; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Kampman, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis, & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Mahrous, & Ahmed, 2010; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b; Mustafa, 1985; Rabia, 2015; Razek, 2012; Razek, & Coyner, 2011, 2013, 2014; Rundles, 2012; Sandekian, Weddington, Birnbaum, & Keen, 2015; Shaw, 2009; Unruh, & Obeidat, 2015; Yakaboski, Perez-Velez, & Almutairi, 2017). Fewer studies on Saudi student adjustment have utilized a mixed methods approach (Al Morshedi, 2011; Al-Qahtani, 2016; Alsaahfi & Shin, 2017; Caldwell, 2013; Murshidi, 2014a, 2014b).

A research method is defined by Bailey (1994) as “the research technique or tool used to gather data” (p. 34). Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) define research methods not only by data collection, but also the “ways, techniques or strategies for manipulating those data” (p.494), or data analysis. It is the job of the researcher to determine the most suitable method for their particular purpose and study (Almalki, 2016; Dawson, 2002; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2002). According to Dawson (2002), research methodology is the “philosophy or the general principle which will guide your research” (p.14). Bailey (1994) includes that a research methodology involves “the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards or criteria the researcher uses for interpreting data and reaching conclusions” (p.34). Even further, research is also influenced and guided by different paradigms or world views (Bailey, 1994).

Dawson (2002) refers to research design as “the logic or master plan of a research that throws light on how the study is to be conducted” (p. 308). Research design includes “the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation, and report writing” (Creswell, 2013, p. 5). Researchers ultimately bring individual perspectives and ideas into research design, so it is necessary to

consider potential bias related to the study by questioning and reflecting upon personal claims. (Almalki, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Hakim, 2000). Research design involves use of three different types of approaches: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.

Quantitative research is “designed to address questions that hypothesize relationships among variables that are measured frequently in numerical and objective ways” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 170). Quantitative research involves “a focus on deduction, confirmation, theory/hypothesis testing, explanation, prediction, standardized data collection, and statistical analysis” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; p. 18). The purpose for quantitative data include “precise measurement and comparison of variables, establishing relationships between variables, identifying patterns . . . and making inferences from the sample to some population” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 253). Quantitative methods rely on statistical evidence provided through the use of surveys and questionnaires (Dawson, 2002). The results of quantitative research are independent of the investigator and can take less time to obtain and complete (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Boddan-Taylor (1975) refer to qualitative research as “research procedures which produce descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken words and observable behavior” (p. 4). The process of qualitative research are described as “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 22). According to Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003), qualitative data are used to:

understand the context, process, and meaning for participants in the phenomena studied; discovering unanticipated events, influences, and conditions; inductively developing theory; and understanding a single case. (p. 253)

The researcher is considered the “primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (p. 18) in qualitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Mixed methods research design involves “research in which the investigator collects and

analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draw inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry” (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4). By integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods, it allows the researcher to capture the strengths of both approaches while offsetting the weaknesses of using only quantitative or qualitative approaches. The mixed method approach allows for a more comprehensive level of understanding and justification within a study (Almalki, 2016; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Dawson, 2002; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

According to Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), there are five main aims for the support of mixed methods in research. These include triangulation, complementary, development, initiation, and expansion. Triangulation seeks to converge and corroborate results from different methods researching the same phenomenon. Complementary elicits the opportunity to elaborate, enhance, illustrate, and clarify results from one method to the other method. Development involves the researcher using the outcomes from one method to assist and develop the other method. Initiation looks into possible contradictions or inconsistencies from the results. Expansion seeks to increase the breadth of examination by using a variety of methods for different inquiry components.

The research design for this study utilized a mixed methods design including quantitative methods, a survey questionnaire, followed by qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews. The researcher employed a phenomenological methodology as a framework for the qualitative portion of this study. Phenomenology gives a basis for “describing the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). A phenomenological framework provides meaning by sharing the commonalities among participants during these shared experiences of the phenomenon. It requires the investigator to

“leave his or her own world behind and enter fully, through the written description, into the situations of the participants” (Wertz, 2005, p. 167). An epoche, or procedure of “abstaining from incorporating (“brackets”) natural scientific theories, explanations, hypothesis, and conceptualizations of the subject matter”, is one of the guiding principles within phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013; Husserl, 1954; Moustakas, 1994; Wertz, 2005). Ultimately, within the phenomenological approach, the researcher’s goal is to describe the “universal essence” based on the lived experiences of the participants in regards to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). In this study, the phenomenon involved the lived experiences of Saudi Arabian undergraduate students studying in the Southeast United States, specifically how academic, social/personal, and cultural adjustment issues affected academic performance. This study incorporated a mixed methods design to gain a deeper, more comprehensive awareness of the adjustment issues of Saudi students studying in the Southeast United States.

### **Population and Participants**

The sample population for the survey included undergraduate students from Saudi Arabia studying in Southeastern four-year universities in the U.S. Participants included male and female students from a variety of majors as well as institutional classifications who were 18 years of age or older. Students were identified using Saudi Student Clubs and Associations affiliated with institutions in the Southeastern U.S. as well as other student groups related to this specific population. The investigator began data collection through the permission of the Saudi Student Club presidents of five four-year institutions, followed by the use of social media for continued data collection. The total number of undergraduate Saudi students studying in the Southeast United States was inaccessible to the investigator so there was no exact determination of the total

number of possible participants for this study. The follow-up interviews were conducted with identified Saudi students across the Southeast region who previously completed the online survey. Students under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate in the online survey or the follow-up interview.

The investigator sent out emails to Saudi Club presidents and through social media sites to invite participants (see Appendix A). The email included a link to the initial survey, which included the information letter to the study (see Appendix B), as well as a link to the follow-up interview. The investigator sent out a final reminder email (see Appendix C) thanking participants and inviting others to complete the surveys and participate in the follow-up interview.

### **Instrumentation**

The methods for data collection in this study included three different instruments: (1) National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) items developed by George D. Kuh of Indiana University (Kuh, 2001), (2) Needs Assessment of International Students (NAIS) created by Glenda Reynolds of Auburn University in Montgomery and Suhyun Suh of Auburn University (2005), (3) follow-up interviews developed by the investigator to obtain a deeper understanding of the students' experiences and opinions based on the content from the initial survey.

#### **Needs Assessment of International Students (NAIS)**

Reynolds and Suh's (2005) NAIS survey was created and implemented in order to measure the relationship between life difficulties and self-concept of international students studying in the southeastern U.S. The initial portion of the NAIS survey included demographic information, including information such as gender, age, education level, length of residence in United States, and country of citizenship. The second portion of the needs assessment requested

responses in the format of a 5-point Likert scale (5 being extremely difficult and 1 being not at all difficult). Question 1 and 2 in the second portion of the NAIS involve student satisfaction, overall at the university and within different academic areas. Items for question 3 were based on seven domains for perceived difficulties in Reynold and Suh's (2005) study: (a) Language Difficulty, (b) Socio-cultural Concerns, (c) Psychological Distress, (d) Relationship Difficulty, (e) Academic Difficulty, (f) Limited Access to Resources, and (g) Physical Illness. Question 4 included items related to university services and programs students would like to see on campus. The third portion of the NAIS allowed the opportunity for the participants to leave any comments or additional thoughts regarding any of their personal experiences (positive or negative) as well as requests any suggestions to help improve the lives and adjustment issues of international students at the institution. The investigator used all portions of Reynolds and Suh's NAIS but modifications were made to Question 4 in which the investigator added an option for participants to additionally indicate if specific items related to university services/programs were already in place at the participant's current institution.

Suh and Reynolds conducted a preliminary study at a smaller campus of an institution in the Southeastern United States, which included interviews and a questionnaire. This preliminary study assisted Suh and Reynolds in identifying the needs of international students. Suh and Reynolds used these identified needs to develop the needs assessment instrument for their 2005 study. Suh and Reynolds collaborated with the Office of International Student Life and the Office of International Education in the larger institution in the Southeastern United States to create a questionnaire for the 2005 study. A pilot study was conducted with the recruitment of ten international students who answered the questionnaire and gave feedback based on the appropriateness of the questions and any additional feedback for revisions. No revisions were



necessary based on the feedback from the participants. Of the 920 international students attending the larger institution, 6.3% of the students responded and only 38 responses were complete and used for the 2005 study. The reliability rating using Cronbach's alpha for the 2005 study sample was .87. Concurrent validity was achieved through testing the relationship between subscale scores on the NAIS scale with subscale scores on another assessment used in their study, the Dimensions of Self-Concept Form H-College (DOSCF Form H; Michael, Smith, & Michael, 1989). Content validity was attained via ratings by professional evaluators and pilot studies with international students.

### **National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)**

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) instrument was originally developed to survey first-year and senior students to determine the level of participation by students in educational applications in which former literature has shown to be connected to valued college outcomes (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Kuh, 2001). Researchers and institutions have extensively used the NSSE instrument and data collected to study the overall engagement experiences of undergraduate students in higher education (Abdul-Alim, 2016; Alvarez, 2015; Anderson, Anson, Gonyea, & Paine, 2016; Balfour, 2013; Banta, 2013; Bazan, 2015; Bottenfield, 2013; Brown, & Burdsal, 2012; Buckley, 2013; Burkart, 2013; Campbell, & Cabrera, 2014; Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006; Christie, 2015; Corbin, & Cabrera, 2014; Dexter, 2015; Di Maggio, 2016; Draeger, del Prado Hill, Hunter, & Mahler, 2013; Fauria, 2015; Ferrante, 2016; Fiorite, 2015; Fosnacht, 2014; Galladian, 2013; Ghusson, 2016; Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2015; Hale, 2016; Healey, 2016; Hendrickson, Therrien, Weeden, Pascarella, & Hosp, 2015; Hopper, 2016; Hsieh, 2013; Ike, 2016; Jackson, 2015; Johnson, 2015; Johnson, Edgar, Shoulders, Graham, & Rucker, 2016; Jordan, 2016; Khaira, 2016; Korobova, & Starobin, 2015;

Krause, & Coates, 2008; Kuh, 2001, 2003; Kuh, & Hu, 2001; Law, 2015; Lundberg, & Lowe, 2016; Mallet, 2015; Martinez, 2016; McCormick, Gonyea, & Kinzie, 2013; McCaul, 2015; Newmark, 2016; NSSE, 2017; Osagie, 2016; Palmer, 2015; Phillips, 2013; Pike, 2003, 2006, 2012; Pike, & Kuh, 2005, 2006; Rettig, & Hu, 2016; Ricks, 2013; Rosier, 2016; Saunders, 2016; Schwarz, 2016; Simmons, 2015; Smith, 2015; Sullivan, 2016; Sun, 2016; Takeda, 2014; Thomas, 2015; Touchette, 2013; Turi, 2012; Williams, 2014; Wong, 2015; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005; Ziswiler, 2014). There are collectively 650 institutions in the United States who participate in the administering of the NSSE survey annually (NSSE, 2017).

The NSSE initially included five benchmark areas organized by question type, which provided a deeper understanding of student and institutional performance based on national and institutional levels (Kuh, 2003). The benchmark areas included: level of academic challenge, enriching educational experiences, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment. The benchmark areas have been modified into four themes and includes ten engagement indicators categorized within each theme. These four themes include academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment (NSSE, 2014). The results also include demographic variables such as race, gender, age, transfer status, institutional class, major, and enrollment status which provides data to see specific patterns among different student groups (Kuh, 2003).

NSSE (2017) indicated that validity is not based on the instrument alone but on the inferences that are developed from the results. It is the level in which “the evidence and rationale supporting the trustworthiness of score interpretation” (Messick, 1995, p. 743). NSSE has conducted corresponding studies regarding different forms of validity. NSSE led cognitive interviews and focus groups to address response process validity, or the level that actions and

thoughts of survey responders show they understand the item in the way it was defined by researchers. Factor analysis was conducted to check construct validity, the extent a measure correlates with the construct it intends to measure, by using the results based on the deep learning scale and engagement indicators. Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency among different engagement indicators and all resulted in .76 or higher.

For this study, the researcher used the NAIS (see Appendix D) and items 20.1-20.5 and 21 from the NSSE survey to include with the NAIS survey (See Appendix E). The researcher had to significantly reduce the number of items from the NSSE survey in order to receive permission from NSSE. This was agreed upon because NSSE did not want the administering of the survey for this study to interfere with the annual administering of the survey by the participating institutions. Therefore, the researcher chose to incorporate items from NSSE to supplement the academic component of this research.

### **Follow-up interviews**

The qualitative portion included a follow up interview which was emphasized in this study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives related to the research questions. Participants from the online survey were invited to participate in the follow-up interview by clicking on a second survey link in the email (see Appendix F). Prior to conducting the interview, participants were asked to sign an informed letter of consent (see Appendix G). The follow up interview included 28 questions (see Appendix H). The interview procedures were conducted in a semi-structured format, allowing opportunities to expand on responses or further questioning. Questions 1-6 focused on general student perspectives, including areas such as expectations prior to coming/after coming to the U.S. and student satisfaction. Questions 7-11 centered on academic challenges, including questions related to

preparation level prior to coming to study in the U.S. and academic success strategies. Questions 12-17 focused on social challenges with questions related to who students generally socialize with, level of comfort when interacting with domestic students and locals, and discrimination. Questions 18-24 targeted cultural challenges and focused on cultural adjustment issues while studying in the U.S. Questions 25-28 centered on institutional support, including what support services students use as well as recommendations to improve international student support within the institution.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this mixed methods study consisted of two parts: the quantitative portion involving the online survey followed by the qualitative portion with the follow-up interviews.

#### **Online Surveys**

The NAIS and items from the NSSE were used in this study to understand relationships among academic, social, and cultural adjustment issues of Saudi students studying in the Southeast U.S. and if those adjustments have any impact on academic success. The researcher received approval from the developers of the NAIS and NSSE instruments (Appendix I and J). The survey was accessible online via qualtrics.com and the participants were undergraduate students from Saudi Arabia studying in Southeastern institutions in the United States. In efforts to distribute the online survey, the researcher received permission from various Saudi student clubs via email as well as through social media. The Saudi clubs sent out emails to all club members on their campus to invite them to complete the survey, remind/thank participants on the 21<sup>st</sup> day, and finally remind/thank participants for completing the survey on the 42<sup>nd</sup> day. Due to low return rates, the deadline for administering the survey was extended upon receiving

permission from NSSE (see Appendix K). NSSE only allowed the survey to be extended until 2/17 due to participating institutions beginning distribution of the NSSE in 3/17, which allowed for a shorter period of extension that was available to the researcher.

When participants clicked on the link for the survey, they were directed to the information letter for the survey. From there, participants were asked to click stating whether or not they agreed to participate in the survey as well as if they were eighteen years of age or older. The survey was anonymous, but a second survey, which was not linked to the first survey, was available for participants to leave their email addresses to either enter a drawing to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards for participating in the survey and/or to participate in the follow-up interview.

### **Follow Up Interviews**

The researcher contacted participants who provided their emails and agreed to participate in the follow-up interview. The researcher met with the follow-up interview participants face-to-face as well as via video chat apps such as Face time and Imo to conduct the interviews. During the individual interviews, participants gave recorded responses to the 28 interview questions, focusing on general student perspectives, academic, social and cultural challenges faced while studying in the U.S. as well as institutional support. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to two hours, depending on the participant's willingness to elaborate on responses. Once the researcher transcribed the interviews, the participants received a complete copy of the interview via email to review and confirm the accuracy of the responses. To protect the privacy of the participants, pseudonyms were offered to those who chose to use one.

The researcher placed more emphasis on the qualitative portion of this study as the level of saturation was more conducive to support the overall essence of participant responses within

the study. The quantitative portion was used as a preliminary step in data collection prior to the interviews. According to previous studies conducted on the Saudi student population, a low return rate on completed surveys is not uncommon with return rates between 17-51.5% (Al Shedokhi, 1986; El Banyan, 1974; Hofer, 2009; Kershaw, 1973). The researcher made many attempts to collect more completed online surveys for this study. Along with approval from NSSE to file an extension to continue data collection, the researcher also extensively contacted Saudi student groups in the Southeastern U.S. on social media to gain as many completed responses as possible.

### **Data Analysis**

This study incorporated a mixed methods approach to analyzing the collected data. Data analysis was conducted in two stages, including analysis of the online surveys followed by analysis of the transcribed follow-up interviews. The online survey results were analyzed by inputting data into IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The researcher used SPSS to analyze data and show descriptive data, Pearson r correlations, T-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The follow-up interview responses were analyzed through a phenomenological lens (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Emerging themes were identified, coded, and expanded on from the interview content. The researcher conducted horizontalization by including meaningful statements from the transcriptions to help build a deeper understanding of Saudi undergraduate adjustment issues related to academic success in the Southeast U.S. The results from the quantitative portion were then embedded and integrated with the qualitative results.

Research question 1 “What are the general expectations of Saudi students pre/post arrival?” and research question 2 “What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States were analyzed using descriptive data from the online survey and

follow-up interview data. Research question 3 “Is there a relationship between personal/social adjustment issues and academic success?” and research question 4 “Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?” were analyzed by use of Pearson r correlations and follow-up interview data. Research question #5 “Do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?” was analyzed using T-tests, one-way ANOVA, and follow-up interview data. Research question #6 “What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?” was analyzed using follow-up interview data.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are both essential when considering data quality, or “the degree to which the collected data (results of measurement or observation) meet the standards of quality to be considered valid (trustworthy) and reliable (dependable)” (Tashakkori, & Teddlie, 2003, p. 706). According to Carmines and Zeller (1979), validity is defined as “the extent to which any measuring instrument measures what it is intended to measure” (p.17) while reliability involves “the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials” (p.11) Both NAIS and NSSE instruments have established validity and reliability (NSSE, 2010; Suh, & Reynolds, 2005). Data were collected from various participants and locations to ensure validity and reliability within this study.

Creswell (2013) refers to validity in qualitative research as “an attempt to assess the accuracy of the finds, as best described by the researcher and the participants...made through extensive time spent in the field, detailed thick description, and closeness of the researchers to participants” (p. 249). The researcher employed specific validation strategies to ensure validity

of the study. During the interview process, the researcher built trust with the participants by engaging with them in order to learn more about the culture while also checking for any potential misrepresentations in responses. The researcher conducted member checking by emailing each participant the interview transcript and asked participants to verify their responses in efforts to eliminate any misinformation (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation was employed by use of multiple methods of data collection and analysis. The researcher also provided rich, thick description of the participants' accounts related to the study. Reliability was maintained by use of accurate and detailed interview notes and transcriptions by use of a quality-recording device. The audio recording were fully transcribed, capturing every detail, pause, and overlap (Creswell, 2013).

### **Ethics**

The researcher followed the approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol (see Appendix L) from Auburn University to ensure all ethical concerns were addressed as well permission for the IRB extension to collect data (see Appendix M). The IRB approval was submitted to give necessary information about this research project, such as the research methods and potential risks to participants for being involved in this study. In compliance with the IRB, the researcher submitted the information letter, email invitation for participants, instruments used for the study, as well as permission to do so by the originators of NAIS and NSSE, and the authorization emails from the Saudi club presidents. The data for this study were collected anonymously. Interview participants were also asked to use pseudonyms. Participants were notified that they could opt out of the study at any point in time. After completing the study, all data, such as audio files, transcripts, and notes, were destroyed.



## **Summary**

This chapter explained the research design used for this study, including the two instruments used for data collection (online survey and follow-up interview), the data collection protocol, and an introduction to the data analysis. The data analysis for this study included descriptive data, Pearson r correlations, T-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The researcher used a phenomenological approach to analyze the qualitative data from the follow-up interviews. This chapter also discussed the validity and reliability of this study as well as how ethical concerns were addressed.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

This chapter contains the results from this study, including both qualitative and quantitative data. The first section covers return rate and demographic results. The second section focuses on the discussion of findings followed by a summary. The study incorporated a mixed methods design for data collection and analysis by use of the online survey component and follow up interviews.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to examine the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. This research investigated student perspectives about studying in the U.S., academic challenges, social and cultural issues, and university support services as well as success strategies used by this student population. The study examined how these adjustment issues affect students' academic success. The goal of this study is to uncover solutions to these barriers to promote a positive academic experience for students from Saudi Arabia. The results from this study can benefit international student orientations and other groups that work specifically with Saudi students, such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), international student advisors, instructors, and administrators.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were included:

1. What are the perspectives of Saudi students about the United States upon/post arrival?

2. What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States?
3. Is there a relationship between social/personal adjustment issues and academic success?
4. Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?
5. How do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?
6. What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?

These questions focus on topics such as student perspectives, adjustment issues, involvement in international support organizations, and ways to resolve challenges faced by the Saudi student population in order to be more successful in academia. Self-reflection was a significant element within the data collection process in order to aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' frame of reference related to change (Taylor, 2008).

## **Demographic Results**

### **Online Survey**

Participants for this study included undergraduate students from Saudi Arabia studying in the Southeastern region of the United States. After the researcher sent out email invitations to Saudi Student Club presidents at institutions in the region as well as via social media and filed and received approval for an extension to collect data through the IRB and NSSE/NAIS, the total number of attempted online surveys was 166. Of those 166 responses, 48 were eligible to use in this study.

The completed return rate for the online survey portion of this study was low which is relatively common for studies involving Saudi students studying in the United States (Al

Shedokhi, 1986; El Banyan, 1974; Hofer, 2009; Kershaw, 1973). There are several factors that influence this among Saudi participants. The culture within Saudi Arabia is very exclusive and does not easily promote expression of individual opinions. The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington, DC informs Saudi students to be mindful of not drawing attention to themselves while studying abroad as a way to avoid any opportunity for negative perceptions of the student group to be perpetuated (Al Shehry, 1989; Hofer, 2009). This could be due to the culture and also from biased portrayal through the media. Due to these factors, it is possible that some students felt apprehensive about participating in the survey, even with it being anonymous.

According to Fosnacht, Sarraf, Howe, and Peck (2017), comparatively low response rates from the NSSE survey can still offer reliable estimates among institutions; specifically, rates ranging from 25-75 participants can be adequate for reliability. Another study conducted by Pike (2012) found that rates as low as 50 respondents can still measure dependable estimates. The concern with NSSE's reliability stems more from having enough students within a subpopulation to analyze (NSSE, 2016). For this study, the researcher only collected responses from one student subpopulation, so the study was in compliance with the recommendations from NSSE.

Table 3 includes the frequency distribution of 48 online survey participants based on each demographic group. Out of the 48 participants, 14 (29.2%) were between the ages of 20-21, 10 (20.8%) were between the ages of 22-23, and 24 (50%) were 24 years old or older. There were 43 (89.6%) male and 5 (10.4%) female participants. The majority of students in this study were 24+ years of age and male. Regarding the length of stay in the U.S., 5 (10.4%) of the participants have been in the U.S. for less than 6 months; 8 (16.7%) 6 months-1 year; 15 (31.3%) 1-2 years, 7 (14.6%) 2-3 years; 12 (25.0%) for 3 or more years. One participant did not record a response for length of stay. Out of the 48 participants, 10 (20.8%) identified as freshman; 14 (29.2%) as

sophomore; 7 (14.6%) as junior; and 12 (25.0%) as senior. There were five participants who did not record a response for year of study. There were 16 (33.3%) participants enrolled in less than 12 hours in the semester; 6 (12.6%) 12-13 hours; 15 (31.2%) 14-15 hours; and 11 (22.9%) 16 or more hours. Due to the disparity of majors recorded from participants, the researcher grouped individual majors based on general fields. There were 11 (23.1%) students in business-related majors; 21 (44.1%) students in engineering-related majors; 10 (21%) students in science and math-related majors; 2 (4.2%) students in English-related majors; 1 (2.1%) student in education-related major; 1 (2.1%) student in nursing-related major; 1 student (2.1%) in architecture-related major; and 1 (2.1%) student in liberal arts-related major. There were 16 different institutions represented in this study.

### **Follow-up Interview**

Seven participants responded to the email invitation to volunteer for the follow up interview (see Table 4). While the researcher attempted to maintain balance among gender, the follow up interview volunteers reflected the online survey participants in that very few women participated. Low return rates among women may have been influenced by traditional Saudi culture (Al-Shehry, 1989), but the researcher has no way of knowing the actual reasons behind lack of participation. One female student did volunteer for the follow-up interview, but she was ineligible to participate due to being a graduate student. Out of the seven follow-up interview participants, five identified as 24+ years of age and two identified as within 22-23 years of age. They all had been in the United States for 3+ years. Six of the participants classified as seniors and two classified as sophomores. There were 3 (42.9%) participants were enrolled in 12 or fewer credit hours in the semester; 1 (14.3%) in 12-13 credit hours; 2 (28.6%) in 14-15 credit hours; and 1 (14.3%) in 16+ credit hours. Their majors ranged from engineering to professional

flight management. The follow-up interview participants were enrolled in three different institutions in the Southeastern United States.

Table 3

*Frequency Distribution of Online Survey Participants for Each Demographic Category*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>%</b>
Age	20-21	14	29.2
	22-23	10	20.8
	24+	24	50
Gender	Male	43	89.6
	Female	5	10.4
Length of Stay*	Less than 6 months	5	10.4
	6 months-1 year	8	16.7
	1-2 years	15	31.3
	2-3 years	7	14.6
	3+ years	12	25.0
Class Level**	Freshman	10	20.8
	Sophomore	14	29.2
	Junior	7	14.6
	Senior	12	25.0
Hours enrolled in semester	Less than 12 hours	16	33.3
	12-13 hours	6	12.6
	14-15	15	31.2
	16+ hours	11	22.9
Major	Business	11	23.1
	Engineering	21	44.1
	Science and Math	10	21
	English	2	4.2
	Education	1	2.1
	Nursing	1	2.1
	Architecture	1	2.1
	Liberal Arts	1	2.1

*N=48, \*n= 47, \*\*n=43*

Table 4

*Frequency Distribution of Follow Up Interview Participants for Each Demographic Category*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Age	22-23	2	28.6
	24+	5	71.4
Gender	Male	7	100
Length of Stay	3+ years	7	100
Class Level	Sophomore	2	28.6
	Senior	5	71.4
Hours enrolled in semester	Less than 12 hours	3	42.9
	12-13 hours	1	14.3
	14-15	2	28.6
	16+ hours	1	14.3
Major	Business	4	57.1
	Engineering	3	43.8

*N*=7

## **Discussion of Findings**

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question for this study was “What are the general expectations of Saudi students upon/post arrival?” This question focused on students’ perspectives about what to expect prior/upon coming to the United States and after arriving here. The data for this question was collected from the follow-up interview.

### **Pre/Upon Arrival Expectations**

Five participants shared feelings of excitement when they found out they would be would studying in undergraduate programs in the United States.

I was excited. I wanted to go to the U.S., but there wasn’t a chance to go. I got the chance to go, so I was very happy to go there. I was excited because I’m going to do something I love and do it in a place where I wanted to be. (Zaidan)

I was really excited that I would be going to the United States as the first time outside the country. I would have the chance to be exposed to another culture, another country. (Skyhawk)

I was excited being in America. It's a public country and has a lot of things...movies, video games, the peak on everything, so I was excited to be in the United States. And also, studying aviation is good in United States...it's the best in aviation as far as studying. So I was excited. (Willy)

It's kind of mixed emotions. Excited to explore the world. Nervous that I don't know how I can speak. I don't know how I'm going to respond. Excited because I'm going to explore the world, you know, what we see about the U.S. in in the movies...with action, New York, Atlanta, Miami. But when you come here, it's totally not was the media stays it's true. It's totally different but it's a good experience. (Moath)

I was excited to be in a different country and different culture. At the same time, I was afraid that it was gonna be hard and be a mistake. (Black Hound)

Two participants shared feelings of apprehension rather than excitement, partially due to how they felt Americans might view them.

There was [sic] a lot of stories about being a Saudi in a foreign country. They will look at me, so I've been told that you will be in a dangerous place with people walking with guns and these things.... It was based on the movies. Each country has a stereotype for other countries, so we have that stereotype... The people here has [sic] one stereotype of us; they think we are terrorists, walking with guns in the street, killing whoever we want...because there's [sic] a lot of bad people unfortunately from Saudi Arabia who were involved in 911...but it's totally different. (Tariq)

It was challenging at that time. I didn't think it was going to be easy. I thought I will face a lot of problems here, even with racists. Saudi Arabia is not like India or European countries; when you say Saudi Arabia it's related to things like terrorists or bad people who are Muslims. It's not good ideas or thoughts about Saudi Arabia because if they have background about Saudi Arabia, it's bad, so I just worry about this situation. How can I deal with classmates, stuff like that. How will my professors treat me? Will they treat me as human or will they treat me based on the country where I am from? And I thought the people here are very strict; you have to be on time if you have a meeting or for your job and you have to be almost perfect to be partners or work with them to get the job done. That's my thoughts; that's what the people told me before I came. (Kemo)

Most of the participants expressed initial worry because it was their first time travelling to the United States and they did not have a lot of experience of independence at this point in their lives.



## Post Arrival Expectations

Overall the participants' post arrival expectations were all positive. Tariq and Kemo commented on the people in the U.S. were friendly towards them.

It's not the same...I found there's a lot of flexibility. The people here are nice. It's not like what I thought the first time. They love to make friends from other cultures. I didn't go to them to make friends; they just came to me. (Kemo).

I've seen a lot of nice people.... that has helped me change a lot of things in my mind. (Tariq)

While Kemo described his post arrival experiences interacting with people as friendly, he and Skyhawk made the observation that they felt some local students did not was to have authentic friendships.

They are nice people, I think, but some people don't expand the relationship. (Kemo)

I wasn't expecting some stuff, for example, when I think about making friends in the school environment, the classmates, I had no idea how is the friendship going inside the school, how to make friends. I thought it was just like ours, usually you just talk with them, make friends in class, and this relationship will go. When I came here, maybe it's because my English wasn't that good and also I'm kind of a shy person, I don't go forward from the first time—maybe this is the reason I didn't have that much friends from school (Skyhawk).

English difficulty also played a prominent theme throughout the interviews. In regards to first arriving, along with Skyhawk, Moath and Willy also faced similar challenges when it came to interacting with domestic students.

I thought because I don't know how to speak English, everyone is going to ignore me. I'm not going to spend more time trying to understand what you are saying. I thought they are not going to talk to me so I'm not gonna learn. But, it turns out. People here started helping. People are friendly. Their time really means a lot, but you as a human being mean more to them that time, which I found fascinating. (Moath)

I was kind of overwhelmed a little bit. As far as the expectation, I used to think that it would be much easier to communicate with people, and when I got here I realized I was scared to communicate. I have seen many people who were confident in speaking but

they didn't have the English to speak confidently. I realized that I have to get more vocabularies, listening and communication so it will get easier for me. (Willy)

Zaidan noted that there was not much difference in what he expected prior to coming to the U.S.

However, he did mention that he was surprised by the amount of Christians who lived in the area. Black Hound even stated that his expectations improved upon arriving to the U.S.:

My expectation is better after coming here...my perspectives, I mean being in school would change your perspective, begin in a different culture will change your perspective, so I can say I totally changed after coming here...It's not good or bad. It's change. Of course it feels good because I made these changes. Just the idea of being open minded. Being more skeptical. Being more critical thinker.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question for this study was "What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States"? This question focused on the specific academic challenges students had while studying in their institution and was collected from the online survey and follow-up interview. For this analysis, the researcher first grouped the online survey sub items from question #18 based on academic sub item categories (see Table 5) to show the level of difficulty among different academic areas. Question #18 from the online survey asked, "What are the areas in which you find, or have found, difficulties in promoting your well-being at your current U.S. university?" and included a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all Difficult" to "Extremely Difficult". An academic scoring scale was created based on the responses recorded for question #18 to measure adjustment levels. The scoring includes 0= Not at all Difficult; 1= Somewhat Difficult; 2= Neutral; 3=Difficult; and 4=Extremely Difficult. The median and mode scores have been recorded in Table 5. Limited language skills and fear of making mistakes when speaking English were reported as somewhat difficult while amount of reading material was reported as difficult by online survey participants.

Table 5

*Academic Sub Item Categories*

Category	Sub Item #	Description	Mdn	Mo
Academic	Q18.1	Limited language skills	1.50	1
	Q18.2	Fear of making mistakes when speaking English	2.00	1
	Q18.9	Feeling left out in classes	2.00	0
	Q18.10	Feeling left out at own department	1.00	0
	Q18.12	Difficulty speaking with professors in department/major	1.00	0
	Q18.13	Difficulty speaking with professors outside of department/ major	1.00	0
	Q18.14	Difficulty speaking with academic advisors	1.00	0
	Q18.15	Difficulty speaking with immigration advisors	1.00	0
	Q18.19	Difficulty of working on group projects in major classes	2.00	2
	Q18.20	Difficulty of working on group projects outside of your major	1.50	2
	Q18.29	Academic performance/achievement expectations	2.00	2
	Q18.30	Feeling guilt if not meeting academic goals	2.00	2
	Q18.34	Understanding of lectures	2.00	2
	Q18.35	In-class discussions and presentations	1.50	2
	Q18.36	Group work	2.00	2
	Q18.37	Amount of reading materials	2.00	3
	Q18.38	Amount of written assignments	2.00	2

*N=48*

In addition to reporting on the academic sub-item categories, there were several relevant items used to supplement the academic findings. Table 6 presented frequency results from each sub item of item #20 of the online survey which included different descriptors related to academics and critical thinking.

Table 6

*Frequency Distribution of Online Survey Q 20 Item*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Come to class without completing readings or assignments	Very often	3	6.3
	Often	7	14.6
	Sometimes	26	54.2
	Never	12	25.0
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	Very Often	17	35.4
	Often	13	27.1
	Sometimes	14	29.2
	Never	4	8.3
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	Very Often	11	22.9
	Often	20	41.7
	Sometimes	16	33.3
	Never	1	2.1
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	Very Often	14	29.2
	Often	20	41.7
	Sometimes	13	27.1
	Never	1	2.1
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	Very Often	5	10.4
	Often	18	37.5
	Sometimes	19	39.6
	Never	6	12.5

*N*=48

According to these results, most participants from the online survey reported in varying degrees that they came to class without completing assignments or readings, the majority being sometimes and next being never. Participants stated that they used the help of other peers to prepare for exams. Participants also tried to better understand other people's views by seeing things from their perspective as well as had learning experiences that change their way of

understanding an issue or idea. Most students utilized opportunities to discuss their performance with faculty but with varying degrees.

The researcher began the qualitative portion by asking participants about the level of preparation they felt they received in Saudi Arabia prior to coming to the United States and how they may have affected their academic success followed by the academic adjustment issues encountered at U.S. institutions. There were several emerging themes throughout this section, which included: level of academic preparation in Saudi Arabia, English language barriers, interactions with instructors, and interactions with domestic students.

### **Level of Academic Preparation in Saudi Arabia**

Participants' responses varied regarding their perspectives on if their educational experiences in Saudi Arabia helped to better prepare them for academic life in the United States. Three participants expressed similar sentiments that they did not feel they received adequate preparation prior to studying in the United States. Three participants stated they overall felt they did receive enough preparation while studying in Saudi Arabia and one participant was indifferent. English preparation, lack of study skills, and lack of critical thinking skills were prominent themes addressed among all participants.

### **English Preparation in Saudi Arabia**

English preparation was a major factor to student success prior to coming to the United States. Black Hound confirmed feeling inadequately prepared in English from the Saudi schools:

Saudi Schools' English courses are not really good to prepare you to speak the language. It helps you to know a little bit about the language. What helped me was being in an English institution after school and having a tutor at home.

Tariq mentioned the amount of English being taught in high school had previously been less than what is expected currently:

If I graduated from high school in 2014, it would be so easy for me to study in the U.S., but I graduated in 2012 and at that time we studied every subject in Arabic, everything... even English we will describe in Arabic. The Ministry of Education decided to change the science subjects to English, like chemistry, physics, and math, all of these subjects you will study in English. At that time, we used to study in Arabic, so now I have to translate each thing to restudy it, so it didn't help me.

Skyhawk added to this point regarding the policy changes within the school systems:

The main subject that I really needed I wasn't so prepared which was in English. We had English courses in my generation (they changed the rules now). We started learning English in 7<sup>th</sup> grade and now they are starting in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The rules, when I had those courses all the way from 7<sup>th</sup> grade pretty much until I started the university, from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. We didn't really have the proper ways to teach English. For example, the teachers will speak the native language in class which I think isn't going to help because students need the practice.

Moath had a similar story when discussing this change in the English policy and how it has had a negative impact for him in other content areas as well. He compared his previous schooling with his little sister and brother's and revealed differences in that they are now being taught math content, such as sign, cosign, and geometry, in English whereas he was not. When he took a math test in the U.S., he did very poorly because he used the "greater than" and "less than" symbols incorrectly. In Arabic, he stated that the symbols' meanings are reversed which caused him to miss many test questions. He expressed how lucky his siblings are now that they are being prepared in this way. Moath studied in a university in Saudi Arabia for two months prior to coming to the U.S. and noted they only used English for 55 minutes per day during that time.

### **Lack of Critical Thinking Skills**

Many participants had shared feelings that the way subjects were taught in Saudi Arabia was not beneficial to them in that the instructors did not use a variety of teaching methods to improve instruction nor provide opportunities for higher order thinking skills. This made adjusting to college life in the U.S. challenging for most participants. The lack of learning how to use study skills also surfaced among some students.

In Saudi Arabia, it's more about feeding information so I just memorized a bunch of information. But in college, you need to have the skills to study more than knowing information... During my school in Saudi Arabia, I can't think of a time when study skills were taught, even told by the teachers because they have the method of just feeding information and like you read the books and do certain homeworks and listen to the teachers' notes and the exam is gonna come from those notes. So, there's not much of a skill you need to have. I don't feel the school prepared me for college. (Black Hound)

Furthermore, many students stated that the teachers in Saudi Arabia were stricter than the teachers in the United States and were viewed as the expert on the subject matter, which coincided with the hindrance of thinking critically or questioning authority. Kemo brought this up by stating:

They (teachers in Saudi Arabia) are more formal. I don't know if it's from the teachers or from the entire system in Saudi Arabia. But I think they are stricter. I think here (in the U.S.) it is more flexible; you can speak with the professor, you can have a conversation and fix something. But there, even if you have the right, the teacher says "No" or "Yes". From his perspective, he has the right no matter what.

Moath agreed with his account:

In math, here (the U.S.) I can ask why. How come pi equals 3.14? In Saudi, pi is equal to 3.14. Why? How? "Hey, are you trying to waste time, so you don't want to learn?" (from the teacher's perspective). I don't blame the teacher because the teacher didn't know how did that pi came [sic]; he just learned it. I don't blame him, but when I started learning math I blamed him a lot. Then I thought, maybe it's not his fault. Maybe I should just learn by myself and so here I am. Now I learn.

When asked if debate was discouraged in classes in Saudi Arabia, Moath answered:

Yes, because the teacher is not used to it. He's going to think that I'm trying to waste the class time, so we're not going to get anything out of today's class.

Skyhawk additionally added:

I think in Saudi it's something about the culture; it came from respecting the teacher. Students would consider the information coming from the teacher as accurate and helpful for the student so they would listen to the instructions/directions. It's different from here. If you have anything that you think is different than the instructor's view, you can debate that. You might get a chance to adjust his/her view.

Skyhawk also mentioned how teaching methods differed in Saudi Arabia:

Here in the States, teachers use all kinds of methods, like interacting with your classmates. We really didn't have those methods back in Saudi. Again, I think it's because of the way the English program in high school/elementary school was represented to us. It wasn't that good of a program or the methods. I think here they are more capable and have more resources. They also have the chance for gathering many different people, like students from different cultures, which helps the students have the desire to talk about different things and practice English.

Willy furthermore stated:

We experienced in high school one way of doing homework. The one in the books and that's it. In the university, sometimes you need to do projects, analyzing, give your idea about what you think. Also group projects is something new. We used to do it in high school, but not to the level in the university, just different, especially in the United States. The quizzes, tests, projects...many variety of homeworks. It was different than back home.

### **English Language Barriers**

When asked about the areas in which students found they needed the most improvement academically while studying in the U.S., the majority of the participants' responses related to English. Specifically, many students said they found writing, reading, and presentation/speaking skills in English challenging. Skyhawk expanded on this:

I could focus more on writing, not exactly writing as the rules. I sometimes, much of the time, face problems especially if I'm given a topic and most of the time I have problem with the start...Another thing I faced a problem when I had literature class. Reading too much [sic] materials gave me a hard time, maybe because my reading is not as quick as the natives so this amount of reading would fit for the natives but for me, for example, one assignment would be 100 pages to read for the next class. I would finish 50-60 max and not have any idea about the rest because of my ability to read, use techniques on readings just to get it done real quick, grab the big picture of the reading. I think those are the two I need more improvement.

Zaidan and most other participants agreed that the core course requirements were more difficult than their major coursework, mainly in part due to the English component within the classes.

Willy also shared this sentiment related to the core curriculum:

Some subjects, like philosophy, it was just hard. I like the subject because there is no right or wrong in writing answers, but maybe it was a lack of English language... how to express what you are thinking about in the paper. Writing wasn't good. Writing and



reading back home is not emphasized as much as in the United States, even in Arabic, so it's a skill we needed to work on in the United States and I'm still working on it.

### **Interactions with Instructors**

Overall, students shared positive feedback on their relationships with instructors in the U.S. Zaidan and others mentioned how referring to the teachers often was really helpful towards their academic success. Kemo expressed his confidence when asking for help from instructors by stating "There is no one who can stop me to do that...even with the language. It's easy to ask, but after that if you don't understand, that's the hard part". Willy and others observed a positive difference in their instructors who had more exposure working with international students. Willy expressed this when he commented on the differences he experienced between two Southeastern institutions where one had more diversity than the other:

But the academics was hard in (institution), but in (institution) I would say with the diversity, even the instructors have more experience with international students than (institution) I would say...chemistry, physics, the aviation classes, the business classes, like they see me as not the first international student they've had. I know what you're thinking, what you've been through, and what you need to do. When I see my instructor, he's like "You need to come visit me more because I know that is the solution. I might tell you something but I'm not sure if that's going to work for you". The instructors are more aware of international students and they have more tolerance towards the grading, but they are still strict on homework and time. You have to do your homework on time, participate in class, so I (the instructor) can see you're trying. They want push you to try so I (the instructor) can give you the grade you deserve...I wasn't experiencing that at (institution), not all classes to be honest.

Moath also discussed feeling comforted by his instructor when overcoming his challenges of public speaking in English:

I used to act... I've been in a play in middle school. It was fine because I would come up with sentences or jokes on my own in Arabic but not in English. Because I know the teacher is going to precise with how do I look, how do I speak, what kind of words do I use, are they academic words? So that makes me more stressed. I felt sweating, my knees start shaking, the words were hard to come out...The teacher said I may be stressed; I said yes I am. Take your time and she helped me. If she didn't help me and didn't let me come back after the other group, I would be successful. So I'm really grateful that she knows how to handle stress and people like us.

## **Interactions with Domestic Students**

This portion covered the interactions that participants experienced with domestic students at their U.S. institution. There were two prominent areas discussed in this section: group work and sharing information with students.

### **Group Work**

When asked about their experiences working in groups with other domestic students, four participants shared that they had had both positive and negative experiences doing collaborative work with other students. Black Hound recounted:

It was a good experience because the load is not all on you. Especially at first working with domestic students was kind of different because when you study by yourself, you're not engaging but in this case you are engaging with them and seeing how they think and prepare which you can learn from it and I always take it as a way to learn and how people deal with their lives.

Skyhawk added similar sentiments stating:

I think group projects are really helpful because it brings up a lot of thoughts from different people. I think there is a minimal chance of getting stuck in such an environment.

When asked whether all of his group work experiences had been positive, Black Hound continued:

Not really. Like I've been in a group where nobody wants to work and everybody is depending on others to do the work. We ended up preparing for the project, which was a study we need to do with a presentation after, in the last day. We felt rushed but it was fine in the end, but it wasn't a good experience.

Skyhawk furthered this notion by mentioning that the main issue he had on group assignments was that some students would not show up or participate, especially if the meetings were outside of class. Kemo's experiences with group work were also positive and negative. He recalled a very positive account working with an African American student in his chemistry class that

extended to a friendship outside of class. However, he also described a more negative experience when working with two American students:

There is one guy and girl; they are completely different. They just want to do the job and and sometimes they just ignore me. There is no person here. They just speak together. It's nice and it's bad. It's nice if they got the job done and it's bad—you feel like you're not something, like a chair. You have to do something about that. But I think this happened in the first two classes and then I start speaking with them, reading and understanding the problem before I come to class. I communicated with them from one side, but if I didn't speak to them they would not speak to me at all.

Zaidan stated that his experiences working collaboratively with domestic students were not positive in the beginning and made him feel uncomfortable, but he felt it got easier with time.

### **Sharing Information**

Another prevalent theme that surfaced during the interviews involved the domestic students' manner of communicating in class with other students and the lack of sharing information among students. Some participants noticed that it was difficult to interact with domestic students in classes simply because there was a lack of general communication overall.

Kemo pointed this out by saying:

The first time I thought it was all about the nationality and stuff like that. But I found out it's even between each other...they (domestic students) don't speak...The American people just sit there and they are not open with each other, unless you go and ask and start a conversation. Maybe after you start a conversation, they like the conversation you are having with them, but some people are not. I don't know what's the reason for that...In my home country, everyone speaks with each other. Everyone participates with each other. This is the big thing I've noticed here. It's different.

Willy included his thoughts on how students act differently in the United States towards helping and sharing their class information with other students:

I think it would be much easier to ask a friend in class (for help), but it's hard to do that in here. Back home in Saudi Arabia, students like to share about their homeworks and assignments. We haven't been exposed to plagiarism as much as in the United States. In the United States, maybe the students here like to keep their answers for themselves and they don't like to share as much as we are used to back home. You feel sometimes left

out because you don't know what's going on. Sometimes you seek that help but there are barriers and gaps between international students and students from the United States.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question for this study was “Is there a relationship between personal/social adjustment issues and academic success?” This question, along with Research Question 4, was analyzed using the quantitative data collected from the online survey results and the qualitative data from the follow-up interviews. The first section of the results included the quantitative analysis followed by the qualitative portion. Pearson's *r* correlation analysis was used to determine if there were relationships between personal and social adjustment issues and academic success among participants. For this analysis, the researcher first grouped the online survey sub items from question #18 based on personal and social adjustments. Question #18 from the online survey asked, “What are the areas in which you find, or have found, difficulties in promoting your well-being at your current U.S. university?” and included a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Not at all Difficult” to “Extremely Difficult”. A personal and social scoring scale was created based on the 5-point Likert scale responses recorded for question #18 to measure adjustment levels. The scoring includes 0= Not at all Difficult; 1= Somewhat Difficult; 2= Neutral; 3=Difficult; and 4=Extremely Difficult. The median and mode scores have been recorded to show level of difficulty per question sub item (see Table 7 and 8). Most of the personal sub item category results for Table 7 reported neutral responses with the exception of loneliness being somewhat of a difficulty for students. The social sub item category results for Table 8 indicated that most students had no difficulty with making friends from their own culture but a difficult time with making American friends.

Table 7

*Personal Sub Item Categories*

Category	Sub Item #	Description	Mdn	Mo
Personal	Q18.7	Loneliness	1.50	1
	Q18.21	Support in meeting shopping needs	2.00	2
	Q18.22	Support in finding place to worship	2.00	2
	Q18.23	Support in finding utilities and other community services	2.00	2
	Q18.24	Support in finding health related services	2.00	2
	Q18.27	Feelings of insecurity	2.00	2
	Q18.28	Feelings of inadequacy	2.00	2
	Q18.32	Mental health concerns (like stress, depression and anxiety)	2.00	2
	Q18.33	Physical illness	2.00	2

*N*=48

Table 8

*Social Sub Item Categories*

Category	Sub Item #	Description	Mdn	Mo
Social	Q18.11	Feeling left out of extracurricular activities	2.00	2
	Q18.16	Opportunities to develop friendships with students from other cultures	1.00	2
	Q18.17	Opportunities to develop friendships with students from your own culture	0.00	0
	Q18.18	Opportunities to develop friendships with American students	2.00	3
	Q18.25	Orientation to university community	2.00	2
	Q18.26	Family oriented campus activities	2.00	2

*N*=48

Table 9 presents descriptive statistics showing the personal adjustment total score based on the formulated scoring scale and GPA from SPSS software.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for GPA and Personal Adjustment Total Score*

	M	SD
GPA	3.21	.670
Personal Total Score	14.35	5.68

*N=48*

Table 10 shows the correlation between personal adjustment based on the scoring scale and GPA. Academic success was measured based on current GPA. The total mean score for personal and social adjustment was correlated with GPA to show any relationships. According to the analysis, there was no statistical significance between personal adjustment issues and GPA ( $r=-.019$ ,  $p=.448$ ).

Table 10

*Correlations between GPA and Personal Adjustment*

		GPA	PersonalTotal
GPA	Pearson Correlation	1	-.019
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.448
PersonalTotal	Sig. (1-tailed)	.448	

*N=48*

Table 11 presents descriptive statistics showing the social adjustment total score based on the formulated scoring scale and GPA from SPSS.

Table 11

*Descriptive Statistics for GPA and Social Adjustment Total Score*

	M	SD
GPA	3.21	.670
SocialTotal	8.96	4.17

*N=48*

Table 12 shows the correlation between social adjustment based on scale and GPA.

Table 12

*Correlations between GPA and Social Adjustment*

		GPA	PersonalTotal
GPA	Pearson Correlation	1	.163
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.134
SocialTotal	Sig. (1-tailed)	.134	

*N=48*

The analysis shows there was no statistical significance between social adjustment issues and GPA ( $r=.163$ ,  $p=.134$ ).

The second portion of the results for Research Question 3 included the qualitative responses, first focusing on the personal and social challenges of the participants and then answering the question of if these particular challenges had an impact on their overall academic success. Three emerging themes from this section included personal wellness, difficulty interacting with domestic students and inauthenticity of domestic friendships.

### **Personal Wellness**

All of the participants stated that they had experienced depression or homesickness since their arrival in the United States. Willy spoke about his experiences:

Depression and homesick is common in international students. Even if you got depressed or homesick, you need to overcome it because it's not doing any good to you. But having some friends around you and some people from the same country, same place, same town, or maybe other international students who feel the same way so when you speak with them they have the same depression or reason for that depression. When you speak with them, it will help you out to get away and out of that. If you're asking what's the reason for the depression, sometimes not doing good in school because that's the reason I came to the United States, to study. If I wasn't doing good in my studies, everything is bad too.

Kemo shared he had homesickness and feelings of guilt knowing how much his family missed him. When the point was made how this could spark motivation, Kemo responded, "when you get bad grades, it has the opposite effect".

Tariq's experiences with homesickness and depression were connected to the feeling of missing out on his life back home:

No, it has nothing to do with the life here, but it has to do with the school. So sometimes when I'm speaking with some of my cousins, I will know that "Oh, that guy got married... I just have been in that wedding." Sometimes my dad will go on a hunting trip and I will tell myself, "I should have been there"... I'm missing a lot. I'm missing a lot of freedom because it's a studying time; it's a school time. There is not much freedom. There's not much [sic] things to do. I used to be a free guy. I would do whatever I want, when I want. Yeah, so now, no. Being far away from home, I would say it's homesick. I even miss the dust storms.

Skyhawk expressed similar sentiments:

In the beginning, just missing the lifestyle back there in Saudi. You know, there is a huge difference in the lifestyle and the culture between Saudi and here. I've had homesick [sic] most of the time, especially in the first year here. But it was still temporary issues that went away after the time passed.

Black Hound related his feelings of depression to the overall adjustment he was facing with college life in the U.S.:

After a while I felt down because of all the challenges I'm going through—the difficulties in college. Just like adjustment and trying to understand life better. That altogether came and I was so overwhelmed and that made me like think about the time I spent here and I reached a point where I wanted to give up and not doing this anymore.



Zaidan and Black Hound shared that their depression got better with time as well. Moath stated that he didn't feel homesick because his brothers were with him studying but he did face depression due to health-related issues.

### **Difficulty Interacting with Domestic Students**

Most of the interview participants stated that they initially spent most of their time in the U.S. socializing with other Saudi students. The majority of students also shared that they faced difficulty when trying to socialize or build friendships with domestic students and that they were more comfortable making friends with other international students. Black Hound elaborated on this:

At first, it was somehow difficult to blend in with the locals and local students, so mainly it was people from my country, Saudi Arabia. We would hang out. And also people from Korea, Brazil, all international students. We found ourselves closer in being here. So whenever I got into college and started taking courses there with local students, I got to know some of them which we hang out together sometimes after school.

Kemo also expressed the difficulties faced when considering friendships with domestic students:

I don't know if it's because it's closed. I think that in order to be friends with them, they're friends already; they got from high school. I think here in the south, their families are more...they are not open to everyone but maybe he knows his cousin or from high school. They just get here in the university and get his classes and leave. I think that's it. Most of the people that I make friends with are not from the university...it's from Starbucks or playing soccer. It's not from classes. It's outside of classes (they're students), but I met them outside the university.

Zaidan also believed it was difficult to form friendships with the domestic students due to the area in which he lived:

I think if I'm in a different area it would be different. But I think the area in general, it is not easy to get along with the domestic students. They're not used to the international students.

Skyhawk and Tariq had similar experiences initiating friendships with domestics when they started at the university. Both students chose to live with domestic students upon arrival to

the university. They also felt that the difficulties forming friendships were due to lower English proficiency. Skyhawk shared that this was a major reason why he wanted to live with native English speakers so that he could improve his language skills. Once his language improved, Skyhawk stated that he didn't care to live with domestic students anymore. Tariq stated that interacting with the domestic students helped him build his confidence regarding his language skills once he was able to get past feeling uncomfortable trying to speak in English.

### **Inauthenticity of Domestic Friendships**

Participants shared that even with the success of developing friendships with domestic students, they discovered that many times these friendships were not genuine or involved ulterior motives. One area where this was specifically noticed was when initiating friendships with classmates. Based on responses, it appears that some participants felt that the relationships with classmates in class were Skyhawk shared his story regarding this:

I sometimes think when I have some experience such as a classmate that I initiated, I talk with him and we talked during the class period and then the semester ends and then I meet him another time. He wouldn't say hi or try to recognize me. So I was thinking maybe this is like their culture. If you are not with them or there is nothing that connects your relationship—relatives or workplace—if you're not so close to them, the relationship is not going to last...I don't go to most of the places that native Americans (students) go to, so maybe this is another reason why the relationship doesn't last.

When asked about the differences in forming friendships back home, Skyhawk noted:

I think what made the relationship—it's not the going out thing or spending some time—I think it's much of a cultural thing and we understand each other. We tried to focus on this stuff and keep the relationship lasting.

Black Hound had similar experiences with some domestic classmates:

It is difficult and I think it's still because they are... I don't know it's hard to say for everyone. I find some of them selfish because they refuse to help with the stuff (notes) they have. And some of them would say, "Yeah, I'm going to send this this to you and they just ignore".

## Religion

Another aspect that surfaced from the participant responses was the experience of being befriended by domestic students only to have students attempt to proselytize them. These scenarios usually began with domestic students initiating friendships with participants and making it appear to genuinely be interested in them, but then later students discovered that the attempts for friendships by domestic students were followed by invitations to church or discussions regarding religion. Black Hound clearly captured this:

I think most of my relationships with domestic students are not sincere. I found a lot of students would get closer to me to introduce me to Christianity and they try to convince me about changing religion and being Christian and joining them. So I don't think that's a healthy reaction between people...to just get closer to convince about religion.

When asked why he felt they were only attempting to convert him to Christianity, instead of sincerely befriending him, Black Hound replied:

They come and like after a few minutes of spending time together or the next time I see them they are talking about Christianity and telling me about Jesus and their beliefs. And yeah, just asking me questions and telling me about stuff...Most of the friendships that people would follow up on or see you more they are trying to convince me about their religion. Most of them.

Willy shared similar experiences:

There were some gatherings the (ESL program) used to do and the international dinners. It helps a lot. They are nice people. It was good in the beginning, but then people had some issues. You attend in the beginning, and then you don't. You some of them, you feel the purpose of the international dinner is to try and make people Christian. I liked it in the beginning, but when I know the idea, I hesitated going.

Skyhawk also commented on this related experience:

I wouldn't believe that individuals, especially in the beginning, were trying to persuade me in other stuff that is really different, such as religion, and they would try to get to me by making friendships/relationships, inviting me to their place just to get a chance to sit with me, discuss some stuff about that specific aspect or subject in order to...even some of them would show me that they are interested in my beliefs and would ask me about it. They start with that and then they change the subject, what they really want, and I can see

it from their talking. They want just to persuade me with their beliefs, either convert to their ideas or some stuff like that.

Zaidan was very surprised by the large number of Christians in his area:

I didn't know that there were a lot of Christian people in America. When I went to (name of city), the people were more religious than other areas. We were facing some times were people were talking about religion a lot, especially maybe at the (ESL Program).

When asked if he felt like anyone was trying to get him to convert to Christianity or attend their church, Zaidan's replied, "Yeah, I have. Many times actually."

The majority of participants stated that their personal and social adjustment issues affected their academic success. Skyhawk's response included:

Yes, I believe so. Most of my beliefs...I came from a really hard working family. Most of my family, like brothers, my parents, they are hard workers. They always encourage me on studying and achieve my goals, get the best grades just to be successful in the future. This lifestyle in the beginning, especially in the early stages of my education, influenced me here in the States when I faced some difficulties language barriers and different culture barriers, and influenced me to just keep up, fight, look for solutions and figure out a way through to success.

Zaidan elaborated on how making more friendships with domestic students would have benefitted him with his coursework:

Yeah, I think if I'm getting along with domestic students more, I think academically I will be better because I think it's obvious when you know some older students who have been through the same thing you've been in, things will be easier for you. But when you go and you don't know any students who have felt the same way you've felt or in the same situation you've been in, it's obvious it will be difficult. So if I'm getting along with more students, I would talk with them more about situations I was facing.

Black Hound shared the same feelings as Zaidan, and stated he found the support of his Saudi friends who were in the same situation to be extremely helpful for him academically. Willy believed that he would have done better academically if he had more social interactions with domestic students. Moath stated that for him, his personal adjustments related to health issues

had a negative impact on his academics but not his social adjustment. Kemo summed up the relationship of social adjustment on his life:

The people around you will impact everything; you are not living alone. The decision is not from one side—it's controlled from other sides, from background, the people who you talk with before, the people who will share. Even if it's bad, social is one of the biggest impacts on the people.

#### **Research Question 4**

The fourth research question for this study was “Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success? The first portion of this question was answered using quantitative results from the online surveys and the second portion included themes from qualitative responses from the follow-up interviews. Pearson's  $r$  correlation analysis was used to determine if there were relationships between cultural adjustment issues and academic success among participants. A scoring scale was similarly conducted from Research Question 3 based on the related cultural sub items of the online survey from question #18 (see Table 13). The same Likert scale was used (0= Not at all Difficult; 1= Somewhat Difficult; 2= Neutral; 3=Difficult; and 4=Extremely Difficult) to measure the level of cultural adjustment. The median and mode were included in Table 13. The reported mode for Q18.5 indicated that participants had difficulty with American students' lack of understanding of their culture.

Table 13

*Culture Sub Item Categories*

Category	Sub Item #	Description	Mdn	Mo
Culture	Q18.3	Cultural Conflicts	2.00	2
	Q18.4	Understanding the host culture	2.00	2
	Q18.5	American students' lack of understanding your culture	2.00	3
	Q18.6	Students of other cultures lack of understanding your culture	2.00	2
	Q18.8	Isolation from host culture	2.00	2
	Q18.31	Racial discrimination and prejudice	2.00	2

*N=48*

Table 14 presents descriptive statistics showing the cultural adjustment total score based on the formulated scoring scale and GPA from SPSS.

Table 14

*Descriptive Statistics for GPA and Cultural Adjustment Total Score*

	M	SD
GPA	3.21	.670
Cultural Total Score	10.94	4.68

*N=48*

Table 15 shows the correlation between cultural adjustment based on the scoring scale and GPA. The analysis revealed there was no statistical significance between cultural adjustment issues and GPA ( $r=-.090$ ,  $p=.272$ ).

Table 15

*Correlations between Cultural Adjustment and GPA*

		GPA	CulturalTotal
GPA	Pearson Correlation	1	-.090
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.272
CulturalTotal	Sig. (1-tailed)	.272	

*N*=48

The second section of this analysis for Research Question 4 included the qualitative results from the follow-up interviews. There were two prominent themes from this section, including lack of cultural understanding/cultural misconceptions by domestics and discrimination.

**Lack of Knowledge/Cultural Misconceptions by Domestics**

Many participants reported that they experienced that domestic students and residents were not knowledgeable about the culture in Saudi Arabia and also did not seem understanding. If students did have some knowledge about Saudi Arabia, it was often times misinformed. Black Hound described his experiences regarding this:

Yeah, every often you will meet somebody who will have some information about where I came from and they would share it. Some of it is right and some of it is wrong... I met people telling me how Saudi Arabian people are rich and that's not true. There's a lot of poor people and like really in poor condition people living there. And I find people know a little bit about women's life living in Saudi Arabia and they pretend that they know it all and they start to say about their rights and stuff like this which they don't really know what their life really is but anyways, I let them speak.

Some participants commented on the lack of geographical knowledge of students based on their interactions. Moath explained:

I remember when I was in the (ESL program), they wanted us to interact with the American students. Go and ask what do they know about your country. I asked "Do you know where is Saudi Arabia?" and he said, "Is that part of India?" I said I will not say

anything about it because we look alike probably he couldn't say anything. I saw another guy and asked him if he knows where is Saudi Arabia, and he said, "Yes, I passed through Saudi Arabia." I said, "Wow, really, how?!" He said, "When I was coming through Texas, I drove through Saudi Arabia. I told him, "No, you're wrong, Saudi Arabia is just nearby Colorado, not near Texas." The people who knows [sic] about Saudi ask, "Is it where Dubai is at?" Okay, now I can explain it. Or if they were in the military.

Kemo had similar encounters with domestic students:

Generally, they don't know about Saudi Arabia. What is this country? It's not one person or two; it's a lot of people. When I will say, "Okay you don't know my country, do you know Dubai?" they immediately know this city... The people who don't know about Saudi Arabia, there is a lot. Some people know they are just rich; some people don't know there is a country called Saudi Arabia at all.

Zaiden also perceived that domestic students were not knowledgeable or understanding of Saudi culture.

### **Discrimination**

Most of the participants also witnessed or experienced negative encounters with domestics, which resulted in acts of discrimination and negative stereotyping. Black Hound shared a couple of his experiences regarding this:

I went to Subway one time to get a sandwich in the morning with a friend and while we were ordering the sandwich the guy asked, "Where are you from," and I answered, "Saudi Arabia". He said, "Nice. If you guys came here and want to shoot me, I'm going to shoot you first". It was really weird for a person who's asking to get a sandwich to get this reaction. And one time, I was at my neighbor's sitting with friends and a drunk guy came and said, "There's nothing personal between us guys, but if you wanna shoot me, if you guys wanna shoot us here, we're gonna shoot you first". It's kind of the same reaction from both stories.

In Black Hound's encounters, both people became defensive when it was only mentioned where he was from or based on his outer appearance. Tariq encountered a similar case when he was walking downtown one evening and was asked by a drunk man if he was a member of ISIS.

Kemo described an experience he had when he decided to wear his traditional Saudi clothing out downtown one evening:



I was wearing my cultural dress, the thobe and houtra and we stepped by (name of place). One of them start [sic] yelling, “Guys, guys,” for his friends and said, “the son of Bin Laden is here”. I didn’t get it at that time, but (Kemo’s friend) told me and then he said it again. I start [sic] laughing and at the time I felt afraid. I felt afraid because I didn’t think mine looked like Osama Bin Laden because it’s not like our traditional clothing. On the other hand, there’s a lot of people who wanted to take pictures with me, girls and boys. There was a woman with two young, pretty girls and she told me to grab them and she wanted to take a picture for them with you. I don’t know why. It was both sides. I think the good side is more than the bad. It’s just one that night.

When asked if he would feel comfortable wearing his traditional clothing again, Kemo replied:

Some people think about it...it’s not about traditional; it’s not about do you like to wear this. Some people think they just want to make us bad or mad. They don’t respect our culture; they didn’t see our culture. That’s the side I’m afraid of...that it will get bad attention and maybe they will hurt me eventually. Some people will not say it to you, but they will do anything stupid to you...because it’s stupid decision, it’s not necessary to wear it.

Kemo had another story in which his sister, who was also living in the same city, experienced an act of discrimination on campus:

She was sitting with her friends from Saudi Arabia on campus and someone took a picture of them and uploaded it on a local social media site and he said, “They’re just trying to make a bomb”... She get surprised and the first time she was mad. How can they say this about us?

Kemo also described a time when he was leaving a local Starbucks and an elderly couple’s car had a flat tire. At first they refused his help when he offered, but then Kemo went ahead and changed their tire because he knew they could not do it. They were surprised and tried to get him money, but he refused. When the woman asked where he was from, she was very surprised when he said, “Saudi Arabia”. Kemo expressed a lot of happiness from that experience. Similarly, Zaiden shared that he felt he would be more respected by domestics if he were American.

Moath shared an experience his brother had which ended in him being denied services at a hair salon simply based on the way his brother looked:

Before I came, right after the Boston marathon, my brother went to get a haircut at (name of salon) and the woman there said she would not cut his hair. He said why, she said because you guys are dangerous. When I heard this, I thought, why didn't you call the police; you had the right to do a lot of things. He said, "I don't want to cause a problem, then I just left"... My other one from my brother, he used to play pool. He had a lot of discrimination, but not for me personally.

While Moath has never personally experienced any discrimination that he is aware of, he said it has happened to his other Saudi friends. He gave one example of when his friend got physically hurt playing soccer. Someone told him that it happened because he was an Arab.

Willy attributed a lot of the negative experiences to age and immaturity, at least among the domestic students:

It's more about the age range at that time, 18-24. At that time, I was discovering myself and I bet others were, too. I don't want to say it was discrimination, but maybe they wasn't [sic] thinking right. They didn't know what to do. They didn't know how to deal with internationals or people because at that age, you start to learn how to deal with people, to be professional, to be polite. That age range is where you discover and learn these things. As far as students, I don't pay attention or judge them for that. As far as instructors, not really. All of my instructors as I remember, they were good.

Willy continued that it is important to interact with students in class so that "you will not feel like I will not give them a chance to discriminate you, but if you do not socialize or interact with the students around you, you give them a chance to make a discrimination". He also added that when faced with people who had negative stereotypes, he would generally stay away from them:

I've seen many of them. They've shown themselves, but I don't like to be with these people because I know somehow they are ignorant and they cannot accept other people, how they live, their religion. There's also some Saudi people who are ignorant, who believe that people can't wear whatever they like or speak what language they like, so it's a human issue, not an American issue, of being ignorant and not accepting other people.

Willy expanded on the topic of ignorance and where it stemmed:

I would say it's a little bit geographic, family oriented. Some families teach their sons and daughters that there are people different from us with different religion, different perspectives. Not they are wrong or right; they are just different. To build that expectation that you're going to meet people from everywhere. So sometimes, it depends

on family, how they teach that person how to accept or not accept it. More of the geographic because you haven't experienced it.

Willy shared his ground rules to follow to help diminish negative experiences with others:

Do not discuss religion. Do not discuss political ideas. Do not discuss about the way you're living or used to live in Saudi Arabia because people might not accept it. The way you lived and see it is right, but people even from Saudi Arabia won't accept the way you live, anything. So sometimes you have to keep whatever you're saying in general, don't be specific or specify certain groups or ideas. You don't have to prove something even to the American people or other international people that you're right or wrong.

## **Media**

In response to the negative stereotyping and discrimination, many students attribute the misconceptions held by domestics to the media. Black Hound explained:

Well, that's all that they know about the Middle East. The media is just showing negativity about the Middle East, focusing on terrorism, which there is [sic] a lot of terrorists coming from the Middle East, but that doesn't mean Middle Eastern people are terrorists. I blame it on the media and the knowledge of the people.

Willy shared his viewpoint on how the result of 9/11 still gives a negative perspective on the Middle East, specifically Saudi Arabia, and how the media still plays a role in these feelings:

People who were born in 1988-1998, they are suffering from the stereotyping of what Middle East are because of the 9/11 tragedy... We were scared from how people were going to look at us. Imagine if that never happened and then coming to the United States. It would be much easier for them. At the same time, media wasn't helping because sometimes there's a channel on, CNN, and they are discussing Arabs while you're eating and people will just stare at you.

Skyhawk also blamed the media for any feelings of discrimination he faced from domestics:

I've some looks on some people's faces in some specific situation that has no meaning but discrimination or maybe a little bit of racism, but I don't really get hurt by that because I know some people get affected by the media or some other stuff... I think they had views of people who look like Middle Eastern or something like that. Maybe they have some ideas or people who look like me—they are not good or who doesn't have the ethics or doesn't have different things.

When asked where the root of the issue came from, Skyhawk responded that most of the time it is the media. Moath expressed the same feelings and had some illuminating insight on this topic:

I think because of the media. I cannot say about a large group of people, but probably several of them are scum. But the media say it's one of them and you cannot say that all Americans are bad because of what they did in Baghdad or Afghanistan. I cannot say are really terrible because of what happened in WWII. I cannot say most Americans are horrible after what happened in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. I cannot say this. I can say some, but not all. Some of them are really, extremely awesome but some are not good. One thing is the media and the other is they believe everything they receive is true. Why don't you investigate the knowledge? Do not trust everything. Just investigate a little bit. It's their fault and the media.

Tariq shared the same sentiments regarding the media but also included the need for proper education by the Saudi community:

I would blame the media and us. I'm blaming us as Saudis because we didn't participate to give them the right picture to us. So there's two stereotypes about Saudis: being crazy rich or being terrorists. Unfortunately, there's [sic] a lot of guys who are claiming that they're rich, they will be renting a lot of cars, which is helping the stereotype go on. And there's a lot of guys, too, who have been involved in a lot of fights, which helps the other stereotype. But, if we gathered and socialized and spoke, the way that people look at us will change. Because the media, since the 80's, do you remember the 80's cartoons? They will show the Arab guy as the angry guy all the time with a rifle trying to kill everybody.

Other students also agreed with the idea that education of the culture is the best way to diminish negative perspectives and stereotypes and included that they, along with other Saudi students at their institution, share the responsibility of explaining how they live back home to educate the locals. Willy commented further in saying that he did feel hopeful that these negative perspectives were changing due to more relationships being built between Americans and Saudis as well as more people understanding that the media isn't always showing the real picture. Black Hound's perspective took it a step further than merely becoming educated on the culture:

I think the best way to deal with it is going with the culture and see and understand it, observe it, be a part of it, learn it. You don't need anyone to tell you about it then.

The majority of participants stated that they did not feel that cultural adjustment had any impact on their academic success. Moath did state, though, that having to follow the restrictions of being an international student studying in the U.S., such as finishing his degree in a certain

amount of time and following immigration policies, made the academic process less smooth for him. Willy also added that it did cultural adjustment did affect him academically because it was a distraction. Kemo concluded:

Everybody want [sic] to go to the side that feel [sic] comfortable. It's not [sic] get comfortable easily without a hard time. As you know, we (Saudi students) are from one country and culture and we share a lot of things that are the same. Even here, my American friends who are having a bad time will go to their family or friends (those they feel comfortable with). If they have a time where they don't have to do anything, they will meet with me or someone from a different country. It's a personal issue. But if you get involved with a lot of cultures, it will be easy.

### **Research Question 5**

The fifth research question for this study was “Do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?” To answer this question, SPSS software was used to conduct independent sample T-tests and one-way ANOVA from the quantitative data to examine the relationships between each demographic variable and GPA as well as adjustment.

Table 16 shows the descriptive frequencies and independent t-test results examining the relationship between age, gender, hours/credits per semester, and class with academic success (GPA). In this analysis, age grouping was collapsed according to traditional (20-23 years old) and non-traditional (24+ years old) ages due to the disparity between the age group demographics from the online survey. Year of study was divided by underclassman (freshman and sophomore) and upperclassman (junior and senior) for a more even distribution. According to the results, there was no statistical significance between age ( $p=.324$ ), gender ( $p=.054$ ), hours per semester ( $p=.408$ ), or year of study ( $p=.842$ ).

Table 16

*T-Test Descriptives and Results Comparing Age, Gender, Hours per Semester, and Class with GPA*

Category	Description	N	M	SD	df	F	Sig.
Age	20-23	24	3.12	.675	46	.781	.324
	24+	24	3.31	.664			
Gender	Male	43	3.15	.652	46	.048	.054
	Female	5	3.76	.632			
Hours per semester	less than 12	16	3.33	.798	46	.190	.408
	12 or more	32	3.16	.601			
Year of Study*	Underclassman	24	3.21	.767	41	.915	.842
	Upperclassman	19	3.16	.602			

*N=48, \*n=43*

Table 17 presents the ANOVA descriptives and results indicating the relationship between the length of stay with academic success (GPA). In this analysis, length of stay demographics were also collapsed and grouped due to disparity among online survey results. The length of stay groupings included: 0-12 months, 1-3 years, and 3 or more years. The results of the ANOVA analysis revealed no statistical significance between length of stay with GPA ( $p=.236$ ).

Table 17

*ANOVA Descriptives and Results Comparing Length of Stay with GPA*

Category	Description	N	M	SD	df	F	Sig.
Length of Stay	0-12 months	13	3.28	.812	2	1.49	.236
	1-3 years	22	3.34	.606			
	3 or more years	12	2.94	.604			

*n=47*

Table 18 includes the descriptive results and relationship between age, gender, hours/credits per semester, and year of study with the total adjustment score using independent t-

tests. The total adjustment score is based on the scoring scale created to represent the total possible score of personal, social, and cultural adjustment among participants. According to the results, statistical significance was not reached among age ( $p=.317$ ), gender ( $p=.165$ ), hours per semester ( $p=.368$ ), or year of study ( $p=.135$ ).

Table 18

*T-Test Descriptives and Results Comparing Age, Gender, Hours per Semester, and Class with Total Adjustment Score*

Category	Description	N	M	SD	df	F	Sig.
Age	20-23	24	32.33	14.00	46	.277	.317
	24+	24	36.17	12.17			
Gender	Male	43	33.35	13.30	46	.810	.165
	Female	5	42.00	9.11			
Hours per Semester	Less than 12	16	31.81	12.88	46	1.03	.368
	12 or more	32	35.47	13.27			
Year of Study*	Underclassman	24	31.42	14.07	41	.094	.135
	Upperclassman	19	37.74	12.75			

$N=48$ ,  $*n=43$

Table 19 presents the ANOVA descriptives and results indicating the relationship between the length of stay with the total adjustment score.

Table 19

*ANOVA Descriptives and Results Comparing Length of Stay with Total Adjustment Score*

Category	Description	N	M	SD	df	F	Sig.
Length of Stay	0-12 months	13	30.08	16.07	2	1.85	.169
	1-3 years	22	33.82	12.86			
	3 or more years	12	40.00	8.85			

$n=47$

The results of the ANOVA analysis revealed there was no statistical significance between the length of stay and the total adjustment score. Major was not included in the analysis due to the disparity of participants results recorded for major. A post hoc test was not conducted due to lack of statistical significance.

### **Research Question 6**

The sixth research question for this study was “What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?” This question was analyzed by using the qualitative data from the follow up interview. This two-part question will first focus on the responses regarding university support services used at U.S. institutions followed by success strategies used by students.

The question “What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States?” revealed the emerging theme of providing specialized support for international students. The majority of students said that they utilized the academic support services on campus, like content area tutoring and the writing center. The majority of students found these services helpful. Skyhawk indicated this by saying:

I think these two methods (tutoring/writing center) are pretty helpful for students, especially tutoring. You get the chance to view the material you are having a hard time with from another perspective. They have a lot of teaching methods from tutors and teachers. The (name of writing center) is a really great center that provides me with hints, ideas about writing; even they would go as specific as like grammar errors, choosing of synonyms of words. They would do a lot of great work.

When asked what university support services he used, Moath included:

Everything. For me, I enhance all my friends to go. Tutoring, for writing in English, for math, chemistry, biology, physics, every single thing. Engineering courses.



## Specialized Support for International Students

In regards to tutoring, some students felt that their institution should provide more support specifically for international students. Zaidan stated:

I think the university should have more tutoring and tutoring for international students especially, separate from other tutoring.

Zaidan also claimed that his institution should put more emphasis on the domestic end when it comes to supporting international students:

I think it would be more to make the domestic students more helping them to be more to be used to international students. But I think it would be more to do with the domestic students than the international students because the international students are the people who need help, not the domestics. They need help not from the (name of English program) but from everybody in the city.

Willy added to this perspective:

The international student office sometimes do [sic] good, but it depends how the students react to these services or help...they try their best but their best is not enough, so I think it needs a [sic] skills to deal with international students, especially Americans. As a person, play soccer with them, interact with them outside of the university would make it much easier for the international office to know these students and how to give them good services and so on.

Additionally, Zaidan considered the area in which the school was located as a contributing factor to the lack of international support. He also compared his previous experiences interacting with people in the university's ESL program as more positive than the experiences in his undergraduate program:

I think the area is not used to international students. When the international students come, they understand each other more than when you talk with others. I think one thing that is very important how students get along with international students. I find it in the (name of English program). They are listening more to you than other students. I don't know if it's a skill, but I think it's a skill to talk with international students. There is a way that you understand them. I don't know how to explain, but you can help them speak more, to talk more, to understand more. But with the domestic students, they just want to get the things very fast. They don't wait for you to deliver what you're going to say.

Skyhawk and others shared similar sentiments with Zaidan in that beginning in his institution's ESL program had a positive effect on his transition to his undergraduate program:

If I start with, which I did, different people from different countries who doesn't speak English, I would really have the chance to be interested and talking with them, which at the end, improved my English, which at the end, gave me the opportunity to apply to the university and get accepted. But if I was to apply directly into the university, I would face the difficulty of initiating friends, having stuff in common/things I'm interested in to talk about with domestic people. I think the English program was a good transition, a good step for me to prepare me into the life of the university here.

Aside from academic support, Tariq brought up how his university could have provided more support for his religious practice. When the Saudi student organization asked their institution to make a space on campus for the daily Islamic prayers, Tariq said there had been quite a delay in any change:

Sometimes, we will be praying while there are songs going on in the (name of center), so that's not comfortable to us. We've tried to talk to the university with the president and he promised that the university will get them a room that is separated so they can pray but nothing yet. So each Friday when we have the Friday prayer we have to walk all the way to the Islamic Center to pray.

### **Conflicting Perspectives on Receiving Support**

Another aspect brought up by some students was the conflicting idea of the need for more support for international students while at the same time stating that they didn't want to receive any unfair treatment compared with other students. For example, Kemo discussed this idea and how it related to instructors on campus:

More support is needed for international students. Some professors don't realize there is [sic] international students in the big classes, so he just deal [sic] with everybody equal. Some people need more explanation, make the words more clear, to make everyone understand.

While Kemo felt that his institution should provide more support to international students, he also stated that students should not receive any special treatment simply because they are international students:

For me, I didn't use any support for international people. I just go to the class like everybody else. In my chemistry class, the instructor gave me another chance because I was an international student. You are a student, so you have to do what everybody has to do. It's not equal for everybody, so if you think you are special, it's not fair for the American people. You shouldn't get special treatment.

Willy included additional reasons why it was not always beneficial to receive specialized support as an international student:

Sometimes, when I think about going between (the international writing center vs. the university's writing center), I just need sometimes for people to deal with me like I'm any student who's confused and not finding the right information or how to pursue that information. So sometimes if I go to the international, they're going to take into consideration that my language is weak, I'm from a different culture, so there's a lot of filters. I appreciate that they have these filters so that they can make the information get across smoothly, but sometimes I don't need that. I just need to get to the point of what needs to be done for this English paper.

Black Hound shared an opposing viewpoint from Kemo in that his institution could have done more to assist international students on campus:

The university didn't do any adjustment or integration help for international students for me. I think the university can do something which is, we have some difficult courses that require a lot of reading which is kind of hard for international students, especially if they are just coming in, like history, literature, English composition. These all need advanced English and I think international students should have a little advantage of locals so they can blend in better and get good grades. For example, I think international students should have more (grade adjustment policies) than local students. Also, the university can permit the international students in their first year to ask for notes for classes from their teachers if they are doing it in class. That would help them to blend in.

The second part of Research Question 6 asked, "What success strategies have students employed?" This question uncovered several themes, including controlling the environment, communication/collaboration with others, self-motivation, and self-reflection. These themes played a significant role in the participants' ability to overcome challenges and succeed within their institution.

## **Controlling the Environment**

Students indicated that being able to adjust their environments assisted with their overall success. Skyhawk elaborated:

Working as a group would help. Staying here and in a studying environment such as the library. Sometimes when I start doing an assignment at home, I don't know how to do it, especially writing assignments...those assignments that doesn't [sic] have math, physics. When I try to do them at home, I feel distracted, not concentrating on the idea of doing the assignment and ending up not able to finish the assignment. But when I go to an environment when I see all the people are doing their homework or studying or stuff like that, I jet into the motion of doing the assignment and getting started with the assignment.

Willy shared similar sentiments when it came to strategies he used to become more successful academically:

You know I controlled my environment more than I used to...sleeping time, going to the gym and back, sleeping early, waking early, doing like the Americans so I can get to their level....I controlled my environment to stick to the plan and graduate.

Other students also commented on how managing time had a positive impact on their success.

## **Collaboration/Communication with Others**

All students commented that collaborating and communicating with other people on campus had a positive effect on their ability to be successful at their institution.

### **Collaborating with other Students**

Collaborating with students was a major benefit for participants. Moath described his experiences forming peer study groups:

I use every resource I can get. I use helping friends. I usually make a study group, so I enhance my friends to come. They help me more than I can because even if I know the material, but when I review it to them, that makes me...before when I review it to them, I have to make it as simple as it is. It's going to help me first before it's going to help them. I used a record tape in the class that helps.

Moath also specified his preference in attending major-based tutoring provided by his institution:

But as you move on, you have to have your own group of major mates. The engineering department offers its own math tutoring besides (name of institution)'s tutoring department. It's totally different; so we're all engineers and we help each other. I would

prefer to go to the engineering one because I will see classmates and have a relationship with them.

Kemo recapped on the importance of reaching out for help when you need it:

Ask the people. If there are (student-led study sessions), you have to go there. Ask the people who had the same class before; maybe they will be able to help me with that...your roommates, anybody. You will not lose anything if you ask. There's [sic] a lot of things. There's [sic] a lot of people here to help the students.

Skyhawk, Willy, and Tariq also shared similar experiences in how seeking help from other students has been beneficial to them.

### **Communicating with Instructors**

Most of the participants also had positive experiences related to success strategies and communication with instructors. Zaiden emphasized this when asked what kinds of academic success strategies he used:

I would say in some classes tutoring plus asking the teachers was really helping of understanding some missing stuff. Referring to the teachers a lot.

Kemo echoed this feeling with his description about feeling comfortable asking for help:

Yes, a lot of times. I will go to office hours and (peer-led tutoring sessions). I have no problem with asking; I feel confident. There is no one can stop me to do that... even with language. It's easy to ask, but after that if you don't understand, that's the hard part.

Moath also mentioned that if he is having difficulty in his class, he would first visit his instructor's office hours. Black Hound gave an example of how speaking with the instructor can aid in understanding course material:

Sometimes in big classes a student would take notes and the teacher would send it to the students who are disabled which is going to be done anyways, so I asked for taking the notes because my English limitations and I got approved and that really helped me in the class.

## Self-Motivation

Self-motivation was another common theme related to research question #6. The majority of participants shared their stories of how their personal determination led to success, regardless of the challenges they faced. Kemo captured this with his own personal depiction of how he coped when handling difficulties with coursework:

It's different. There's [sic] a lot of hard things. Sometimes you just get mad... "How can I solve this?", but give up? No. You know, I feel that it sometimes gives me power... opposite of what you think about giving up. I say, "I will not give up. I will come back and do it even if it's wrong eventually, it's okay—it doesn't matter. I won't give up".

Kemo additionally shared how his perspective changed from studying previously in an ESL program before his undergraduate studies and how outside factors may have influenced his ability to become more focused:

I changed when I finished the ESL program. A lot of things changed with me. I started thinking, "How can I focus on my classes more?" because it's completely different. My brother in law told me that I changed a lot. I didn't spend a lot of time studying when I was in the ESL program. In (name of institution), you have to be serious because it's not an easy institution to graduate from. You have to be dedicated. I had a conversation with my brother in law when the ESL was done and he said the university is not the same. It's completely different and you wanna get good grades, to get a degree, you have to be serious... He helped me a lot in my first semester that I came. By the time, my ideas and interests changed... Yeah, and my mom told me not to get back without a degree.

Moath discussed how having his brothers with him during his undergraduate studies has helped a lot, but ultimately it was own determination and reasoning that led him to success:

As an adult, you have to figure that (time management) out by your own. You're on your self, not on anybody's... You have a bunch of time you have to figure out where to study, how to study, study for the quiz, and do your homework. You have to manage your own time. You are an adult because tomorrow you're going to a field or a college where they are not going to say, "Hey, we're going to organize your time". No, you have to figure this out and I think it's good and bad at the same time. It's good because I have to figure this out in my own way. It's bad to throw the heavy responsibility on me if I have a new experience, at least help me step by step. My brothers told me the best way to do it. They told me what they started doing, what they changed, and what they struggled with. So I

know what they struggled with and if what they are doing is right or not. I didn't say that whatever they are doing is correct; it didn't work for them but it may work for me.

Black Hound captured the essence of self-motivation with his personal description:

I don't give up because I'm here for a purpose of learning. And if I gave up, I would get bad grades or fail a course and eventually I need to do it. So, it was hard the first two years, just getting the idea of being a critical thinker and not just doing a ritual of homework but how to do it critically.

He further added how he sought out resources on youtube.com and used his phone and technology in class to aid him with skills such as time management. He also mentioned that his time in an ESL program prior to undergraduate studies assisted him with other beneficial skills like skimming and reading strategies, which helped him in his classes.

### **Self-Reflection**

The final portion of this chapter focuses on students' reflections of how the transformation of their own personal understanding and beliefs through discovery has impacted their adjustment. Willy elaborated on this point when asked if he was satisfied with his decision to study in the U.S.:

Yes, I am because I think the physical things, the degree, is [sic] less than the things you discover about yourself, other people, other [sic] country. You just realize a lot of things about yourself. I think being in the United States all by myself I realized how to develop myself, to see what's my strengths, my weaknesses.

Additionally, Willy shared how his personal understanding influenced his interactions with different people:

I've learned how to accept people, how they are. You don't have to change the people around you, you just have to accept them, the diversity of people and ideas, to some limit at least. Because you have the right to do and think about anything, but also with some limits, without breaking rules, cussing, overcoming barriers of insult... Lately I've discovered about myself to know more about yourself than people. If you know more about yourself, what makes you frustrated or doesn't, it will make you much better when dealing with other people. Most people spend more time understanding people than themselves. For me, it's just understanding myself... these ways you develop yourself, you understand yourself, you make it general to people to understand you.

Black Hound echoed these sentiments as well:

I'm kind of person who likes to think about my life, meditate, and look at myself, understand myself, and yeah, with understanding myself I can understand people knowing that each person has their own problems and their own philosophy in life.

Skyhawk further explained how the idea of self- reflection changed the way he viewed other people and issues:

Most of the time when I face problems, either social or academic, I would in the beginning think about "Am I seeing it right? Does my belief or perspective or previous experience help me in this situation?" Or is it, "That's it, that's the way it is, you have to deal with it?". Most of the time I discuss this with myself.

When asked how his experiences studying at his institution influenced his personal beliefs, Kemo brought up the aspect of decision-making:

Yes, absolutely... a lot of changes here. It's in general, but you think every day you have your way of thinking of specific problems. I think in every side of my life has changed. How can I deal with this person? Before I came, I take my decision real quick and then it was my decision... Right now I don't make any decisions quickly. I thought about it once or twice until I do it, so it's one of the things that I've changed. Also, I didn't make any decisions about anybody the first time I see them.

Zaidan mentioned that self-reflecting on his experiences has also made him more patient than he used to be and agreed that it has changed his way of viewing other people and issues.

Moath discussed how self-reflection helped him to become more informed and positive within his life:

Totally, yes. I changed my views about everything. I read a lot. I started to know that not everything is how I think it is. Whenever you ask me a question, I have three views: one in Arabic, one in English, and each one has a positive and negative way. Logic, a positive and negative way... I always, always go positive. I used to choose negative and now I choose positive... Personally, reading more and knowing more about philosophy and where we came from, who we are, what we are, changes a lot, and especially to ask every single thing... That's why I read more about psychology or philosophy... They (my friends) say America changed me and I say yes, America changed me and showed me how dumb I used to be.



Black Hound shared similar thoughts regarding how his experiences at his institution influenced his personal beliefs:

Yeah, I mean, having more knowledge will help you better understand the world and if you understand the world better you will find you have a lot of ignorant thoughts on your mind which you are carrying on. Yeah, so it definitely changed it.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, results from the quantitative and qualitative data were presented to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the general perspectives of Saudi students upon/post arrival?, (2) What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States?, (3) Is there a relationship between social/personal adjustment issues and academic success?, (4) Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?, (5) How do demographic variables, such as age, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?, and (6) What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?

To answer Research Question 1, most students stated their pre-arrival expectations included feeling excited about studying in the United States while some still had feelings of apprehension. Most participants were pleasantly surprised regarding their upon arrival expectations, but also shared that communication was an issue initially due to English language barriers. It was also noted that initiating friendships with domestic students originally proved to be a challenge for most participants.

Research Question 2 analysis indicated that limited language skills and fear of making mistakes when speaking English were reported as somewhat difficult while amount of reading material was reported as difficult by online survey participants. There were several emerging

themes from the qualitative data, including level of academic preparation in Saudi Arabia, English language barriers, interactions with instructors, and interactions with domestic students.

To answer Research Question 3, Pearson's  $r$  correlation analysis determined that there was no statistically significant correlation between personal ( $r=-.019$ ,  $p=.448$ ) and/or social ( $r=.163$ ,  $p=.134$ ) adjustment issues and academic success (GPA). Most of the personal sub item category results reported neutral responses with the exception of loneliness being somewhat of a difficulty for students. The social sub item category results indicated that most students had no difficulty with making friends from their own culture but a difficult time with making American friends. Three emerging themes from the qualitative portion included personal wellness, difficulty interacting with domestic students and inauthenticity of domestic friendships.

To answer Research Question 4, Pearson's  $r$  correlation analysis revealed there was no statistical significance between cultural adjustment issues and GPA ( $r=-.090$ ,  $p=.272$ ). The reported mode for Q18.5 indicated that participants had difficulty with American students' lack of understanding of their culture. Two prominent themes from the qualitative data included lack of cultural understanding/cultural misconceptions by domestics and discrimination.

Analysis of Research Question 5 found no statistical significance among demographic variables, including age, gender, credit hours per semester, year of study, and length of stay, with academic success or the total adjustment score.

To answer Research Question 6, qualitative data uncovered the theme of providing specialized support for international students to answer the first portion of the question, "What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States?" The second part of Research Question 6 asked, "What success strategies have students employed?" and revealed several themes, including controlling the environment,

communication/collaboration with others, self-motivation, and self-reflection. These themes attributed to the participants' ability to overcome challenges and succeed within their institution.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter presents a discussion and concluding thoughts from the data analysis, implications regarding the findings and results as well as further recommendations for future research on the Saudi student population studying in the United States.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research was to examine the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. This research investigated student perspectives about studying in the U.S., academic challenges, social and cultural issues, and university support services as well as success strategies used by this student population. The study examined how these adjustment issues affect students' academic success. The goal of this study is to uncover solutions to these barriers to promote a positive academic experience for students from Saudi Arabia. The results from this study can benefit international student orientations and other groups that work specifically with Saudi students, such as the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM), international student advisors, instructors, and administrators.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were included:

1. What are the perspectives of Saudi students about the United States upon/post arrival?
2. What are the academic challenges faced by Saudi students studying in the United States?

3. Is there a relationship between social/personal adjustment issues and academic success?
4. Is there a relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success?
5. How do demographic variables, such as age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major impact social/cultural adjustments and academic success?
6. What university support services have Saudi students used while studying in the United States? What success strategies have students employed?

These questions focus on topics such as student perspectives, adjustment issues, involvement in international support organizations, and ways to resolve challenges faced by the Saudi student population in order to be more successful in academia. Self-reflection was a significant element within the data collection process in order to aid in a deeper understanding of the participants' frame of reference related to change (Taylor, 2008).

## **Discussion**

### **Research Question 1.**

The first research question uncovered the perspectives of Saudi students upon and after arriving in the United States. Most students felt excitement before arriving in the United States because they were coming to a new place and culture as well as having a lot of advantages, “the peak of everything” as Willy put it. Some students expressed excitement pre-arrival because they thought the United States would be like the Hollywood film version because it was the only exposure they had to the culture of the United States, similarly to Almotery’s study (2009). Participants were also excited because they viewed the U.S. as one of the top choices for education which coincides with results from previous research (Almotery, 2009; Heyn, 2013, NAFSA, 2015).

There was initial worry thinking about the challenges they may face. Two participants felt apprehensive about how they would be perceived by Americans. These results matched those of Heyn's (2013) study due to having mixed feelings during pre-arrival to the United States. Her study also indicated that Saudi students worried about the negative perceptions they may face by Americans and perhaps would not be welcomed by them. Some participants in this study did make it a point that they felt that being from Saudi Arabia would create challenges from them due to how Americans may view the Middle-East and Saudi Arabia specifically, similarly to Almotery's study (2009). Some participants in this study were also concerned that they would have difficulty adjusting due to their level of English proficiency. Almotery (2009) also found that his participants shared the same worry of not having adequate English skills to successfully adjust. Some participants had previously based on their expectations on what they had seen in Hollywood movies and found that was not the real picture of America. For example, Tariq shared that he perceived the United States as dangerous from watching movies. While he acknowledged this to be a stereotype, he said he felt nervous prior to arriving in the U.S., similarly to other studies (Almotery, 2009; Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013).

The post arrival expectations from this study were overall positive. Students found that Americans were typically friendlier than they had originally anticipated. These results agreed with other similar studies (Heyn, 2013; Jammaz, 1972). However, participants did share that they found it more difficult to make authentic friendships after arriving in the United States. In some cases, it was expressed that this was due to English barriers or that they felt they did not have a good enough grasp of the social and cultural norms in the U.S. yet. Black Hound mentioned that his perspective changed, not for better or worse, but he became more open minded and more of a

critical thinker after being in the U.S. Almotery's (2009) results were similar in participants found personal growth after coming to the United States.

### **Research Question 2.**

Research question two addressed academic issues faced by participants during their undergraduate studies. One of the major themes related to academic performance of Saudi students in the United States was based on the level of academic preparation in Saudi Arabia. The online survey presented limited language skills and fear of making mistakes when speaking English as somewhat difficult and amount of reading material as difficult by participants. Participants shared in varied responses that they did not feel that they were adequately prepared for their U.S. academic studies while in Saudi Arabia. Themes related to this broad theme were inadequate English preparation and lack of critical thinking skills. These themes matched the results from the academic difficulties sub item categories reported from the online survey.

Lack of English preparation was indicated as one of the major academic challenges for participants in this study which coincides with previous literature (Al Jasir, 1993; Al Morshedi, 2011; Almotery, 2009; Al-Shehry, 1989; Heyn, 2013; Jammaz, 1972; Rabia, 2015; Rundles, 2012; Shabeeb, 1996). Some students stated that they felt as though they were not appropriately prepared by their Saudi institutions for the command of English required in an academic setting in U.S. universities. It was suggested that this could be due to the specific school in Saudi Arabia as well as that this specific group of participants were not included in the recent revisions made to the curriculum to start including English instruction in earlier grade levels. One of Al Morshedi's (2011) themes from his study included inadequacy within the Saudi schools' and universities' English preparation. One of the participant's from his study shared that it does depend on the school which students are enrolled to determine the quality of the English

instruction and that while private schools do a better job of language instruction, the expensive tuition prices blocks many students from this opportunity. It was also mentioned that most English instructors generally speak Arabic in class and that students only receive the basics in English. The student added, “The students care only about passing not learning English at the end of the year” (p. 129).

As a result of having less English proficiency prior to studying in academic programs in the United States, the amount of academic reading was one specific difficulty for Saudi students. This was a discussed in the qualitative portion of the study as well as in the online surveys where the majority of student reported that they sometimes came to class without completing the readings or assignments followed by never. Previous studies related to Saudi students’ academic adjustment found that amount of assigned class reading in the U.S. proved to be challenging. Caldwell (2013) discovered that his participants were not prepared for the quantity or difficulty of outside reading assigned by professors which led students to feel inadequate and overwhelmed. Caldwell suggested that this could be due to the lack of reading requirement, specifically in English, within the Saudi school systems. Gaps in content matter as well as less exposure to the pre-departure orientations informing students of the academic expectations may also support this indication.

Lack of learning critical thinking skills in the Saudi Arabian educational system was another area in which Saudi students felt created more challenges during their academic studies. Participants mentioned that instructors did not use a variety of teaching methods as found in the United States and that instruction in Saudi Arabia was mainly based on rote memorization of the subject material. While students mentioned in this study that having varied instructional styles was beneficial to their learning, it also took some adjustment, which coincided with prior



literature (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Hofer, 2003; Rundles, 2012). Students also expressed that they were not taught study skills, such as note-taking and studying for tests, and that most of the instructors in Saudi Arabia gave students the exact information that would be on the test. Active learning from an individualistic perspective took some adjustment for participants who were used to being taught in a collective setting where there was less responsibility placed on the individual and more on the teacher's expertise and the students. Akhtarkhavari (1994) found similar results in his comparison study between Saudi graduates in the United States versus Saudi Arabia. The Saudi who graduated from U.S. universities had a higher satisfaction rate with the academic knowledge received in the United States compared with Saudi Arabia (96% vs. 80%). Participants from Akhtarkhavari's study expressed that the high quality of instruction in the U.S. by use of a variety of teaching and learning methods allowed students to widen their knowledge base. Additionally, the opportunities, such as classroom discussion and debate, provided more cultural/social understanding as well as aiding in becoming more independent thinkers and learners.

Participants from this study shared that the relationships and communication they had with professors in the U.S. was overall positive. Students also mentioned that instructors who had more experience working with international students were more beneficial to them. Most students said they felt generally comfortable with asking instructors for help or visiting their office hours when needed which was also reflected in the online survey results from Table 6. Contrary to previous studies that reported difficulties with the lack of negotiation by faculty members (Caldwell, 2013; Shaw, 2009), participants in this study generally found instructors to be flexible and more willing to help if possible. The results from this study differed from other previous literature which indicated that Saudi students had a more difficult time adjusting to the

student-teacher relationship in the United States (Meleis, 1982; Rundles, 2012). However, students had mixed feelings about their interactions with domestic students in the classroom. Table 6 from the online survey reported that most students used the help of peers when preparing for exams, but the online survey does not specify whether that includes domestic students or other Saudi students. While some experienced positive encounters, they also shared experiences of uneasiness and lack of communication when working on collaborative assignments. Many participants found domestic students to be very closed off from them and when it came to sharing information, which is very common in the Saudi school system. It could be suggested that the lack of active learning in the Saudi educational system made the interactions with domestic students more challenging during group work and other collaborative projects (Kampman, 2011). It appeared, however, that many participants from this study displayed outward attempts to work with others but in a lot of cases were left feeling the attempts were not reciprocated among the domestic students.

### **Research Question 3.**

Research Question 3 focused on the relationship between personal and social adjustment issues and academic success. According to the responses from the personal sub items from the online survey, students found loneliness as being somewhat a difficulty towards their adjustment. This related to the qualitative responses in that participants discussed being depressed and homesick which can cause feelings of loneliness, in accordance with other studies (Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Rundles, 2012; Shabeeb, 1996). Rundles (2012) noted in his study, along with former studies (Abu-Hilal, 1986; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Dubois, 1956; Ward & Kennedy, 1996; Zhou & Todman, 2009), that feelings of depression, loneliness, and homesickness for international students improved over time which agreed with the results from

this study. Some of the participants shared that their feelings of depression were connected to not doing well academically because they came to the U.S. with the main goal of being successful in their studies.

The social sub items from the online survey indicated that participants had no difficulty with making friends from their own culture but a difficult time with making American friends. Again, these results coincide with qualitative responses because most of the students in the interviews responded that they spent more time socializing with other Saudi students and had more difficulties with building authentic and meaningful friendships with domestic students. In Shaw's (2009) study, participants shared that they did not interact with domestic students that much, but they did feel that socializing with Americans contributed to their overall student success. Some students from this study stated that they made more attempts to become friends with American students to improve their English skills upon arrival. Most participants in this study agreed that most attempts to make friendships with Americans was not easy and often felt insincere. Jammaz (1972) emphasized the importance of social connections when adjusting to a new environment; however, the results from his study indicated that Saudi and American students rarely had fully formed friendships and that the relationships were more superficial than those with others from their country. Most of the participants from this study felt that having meaningful and authentic friendships with Americans would only benefit their academic adjustment.

One prominent theme related to insincerity of friendships with Americans was the influence of religion on the relationship between the Saudi and domestic students. Many students experienced situations, especially during their initial arrival in the U.S., where American students were befriending them and then later found out it was only to be taught about Christianity and

for many, they felt the domestic students were on a mission to proselytize or convert them. Caldwell (2013) revealed similar results where one of his participants was being proselytized by his landlord because he would not rent his property to a Muslim. The subjects of the current study shared that once they discovered the true religious motives of Americans in these cases, they would discontinue socializing with them. Zaidan commented that he was shocked by the number of Christians in his area and shared it was more condensed than in other places he's been in the U.S., which might suggest that region plays a role in the degree to which students are exposed to these encounters.

Previous related studies discovered that initiating co-national groups is considered one of the strongest forms of connection and familiarity for international students (Al-Jasir, 1993; Alreshoud & Koeske, 1997; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Rundles, 2012). Participants in this study expressed that they were more comfortable interacting with other students from their culture, or even other international students, as opposed to Americans. Some students found Americans to be too withdrawn or focused on their own personal lives instead of initiating friendships with the Saudi students. Due to the collective nature of the Saudi culture, Saudi students may prefer spending time with their own Saudi friends to fill the missing familial bonds whereas American students may not understand the value in this tradition. Razeq and Coyner (2013) reported similar findings that Saudi students are naturally likely to provide support to other Saudi students due to their culture. While building a collective support group among Saudis can be beneficial to individual's adjustment in the U.S., Razeq and Coyner suggests that it may also strengthen the division of Saudi students from other student groups on campus.

In any case, and as previously mentioned, similar studies revealed that students who take advantage of socializing and studying with peers are more likely to have higher academic

achievement (Zimmerman & Pons, 1986) and many participants from this study share similar sentiments. Additionally, support by friends was the highest noncognitive predictor of academic success for international students (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988). These findings support Tinto's student departure theory (1975; 1993) in that the social factors play a contributing role to academic success. Additionally, the results indicated that integrating academic and social support, as discussed by Karp, Hughes, and O'Gara (2008), would likely assist international students with overall success in U.S. institutions.

#### **Research Question 4.**

Research question 4 examined the relationship between cultural adjustment issues and academic success. Based on the cultural sub items from the online survey, participants reported having difficulty with American students' lack of understanding of their culture. The qualitative findings once again complimented these results by one of the emerging themes being lack of knowledge and cultural misconceptions by domestics. Most Saudi participants felt that American students were not knowledgeable of Saudi culture and did not seem understanding. Those who did seem to express knowledge regarding the culture were usually misinformed. These results aligned with other studies (Almotery, 2009; Heyn, 2013) where participants also found that there were cultural misunderstandings from Americans, which may have made adjustment more challenging.

Specifically related to cultural adjustment was the theme of discrimination within the qualitative results. Discrimination among Saudi students in U.S. institutions is not uncommon (Almotery, 2009; Caldwell, 2013; Heyn, 2013; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Rabia, 2015; Rundles, 2012; Shaw, 2009). Many participants from this study encountered discrimination and negative perspectives from domestics on campus and off due based on being from Saudi Arabia

as well as outer appearance. In every instance mentioned during the qualitative portion, none of the students provoked or instigated anyone but instead were the ones who were being targeted. Caldwell's study (2013) provided similar results, citing different instances where students faced discrimination not only on college campuses but more often in off campus locations, such as restaurants, train stations, and even by local police officers. Students from this study also reported more acts of discrimination off campus or nearby campus. For example, there was the case of Black Hound ordering his food at Subway where he was told he would be shot first by the worker and Kemo being called Osama bin Laden by college students in a downtown area nearby campus while dressed in his traditional clothing. It seems noteworthy to mention that most forms of direct discrimination discussed in this study and Caldwell's were off-campus or nearby whereas indirect forms occurred on campus. It could be suggested that there is a higher level of respect to uphold on university campuses towards different student populations since institutions' missions should have a no tolerance policy towards discrimination and to empower students to become more globally aware and culturally sensitive.

The media was highlighted as a significant influence on the negative perspectives and discrimination discovered from participants as well as previous literature. As Tariq put it, Arabs have been portrayed in a negative light even since cartoons of the 1980s where they are made out to be mysterious and villain-like. Suleiman (1999) revealed over 900 Hollywood movies that depicted Arabs and Muslims negatively and as terrorists. American media outlets often portray Middle-Easterners and the culture very negatively and have been charged with being info-biased, according to Abouchedid and Nasser (2006). Most participants in this study blame the media specifically for perpetuating an unauthentic illustration of Middle-Easterners and the culture and instilling fear into the Western world. It is suggested that American media produces biased

depictions of Arabs and Muslims in collusion with U.S. foreign policy (Abouchedid & Nasser, 2006). In order to properly inform and educate Westerners on the society and culture in the Middle- East, journalists and media outlets should be more responsible with media coverage.

In relationship to the cultural misunderstandings and discrimination revealed from participants in this study, some students discussed the personal obligation they felt to educate others about their culture. This was also apparent in Heyn's (2013) study, where she described that acting in an ambassador role may have relieved some of the negative encounters for participants. Razek and Coyner (2013) reported that Saudi students wanted to be positive ambassadors to domestics because they are representing Saudi Arabia while studying in the U.S. Participants in Rundles' (2012) study stated that they would choose to either ignore the stereotypes or work to counteract the stereotypes by informing and educating domestics, which was found true in this current study too. Some students reported stress with having to be an agent of change or representative to help diminish the discrimination and cultural misunderstandings, but others were happy to teach and expose their culture to those who were interested (Rundles, 2012). Students overall believed that that education of the culture is one of the most effective ways to dissolve the negative cultural views of Saudi Arabia.

Most participants from this study did not feel that their cultural adjustment had any major impact on their academic success. Willy and Moath did express general concern and distraction over studying as an international student in the U.S. For example, following immigration policies and the amount of time given to study in the U.S. added stress and distraction from academic studies. Other studies have indicated similar stress felt by Saudi students in regards to their specific adjustment needs related to immigration policies and restrictions (Alzamil, 2004; Denman & Hilhal, 2011). On a positive note related to cultural adjustment, Tariq commented

that having classes with female students was beneficial for him to learn how to interact with women outside of his extended family, but there is no indication if they impacted his academic success.

### **Research Question 5.**

Research question five focused on the demographic relationships of age, gender, length of stay, year of study, # of hours/credits per semester, and major with social/cultural adjustments and academic success. While there was no statistical significance among the demographic variables and social/cultural adjustment and/or GPA (academic success) from the online surveys, other studies provided results related to demographics of Saudi students in the U.S which agreed to the qualitative data from this study. As expected, previous studies found that Saudi students who had lived in the U.S. for a shorter period had more general adjustment issues as well as more difficulties with academics (Hofer, 2009; Mustafa, 1985). Participants from the qualitative portion of this study revealed generally similar results that adjustment and coursework became easier the longer they were in the U.S. Almotery's (2009) study indicated that students who had lower academic success, or GPA, reported more negative expectations about major choice than those with higher GPAs. Shabeeb's (1996) study on Saudi demographics reported female students having less difficulty with English than male students. Additionally, undergraduate students as well as younger students had more difficulty adjusting compared with graduate students. Participants who majored in arts and humanities faced more challenges than those who majored in science fields. While the current study's demographic results on major was too disparate to measure, participants in the qualitative portion did share overall that the required core courses, such as history and humanities, were more difficult than the major courses.



## **Research Question 6.**

Research question 6 included reported on the different kinds of university support services used by students as well as success strategies employed. Most students utilized academic support services on campus, both content based and for English instruction. Participants mentioned tutoring specifically as being very beneficial. Abel (2002) reported on the importance of finding the right kind of tutoring for the individual and how the Office of Student Services should direct students to the appropriate resources. Some participants believed there should be more specialized support for international students. Al Murshidi (2014)'s study focused on English writing challenges and revealed that U.S. institutions need to improve writing center accessibility as well as provide writing workshops for students. Based on this study, institutions would benefit their students by specially training their writing consultants in working with students whose first language is not English. This study suggests that there is a fine line between being too specialized and treating the student as any other domestic student as there were conflicting perspectives on what kind of tutoring was effective. Willy mentioned that when he met with English tutors who specifically worked with international students, he sometimes felt like there were too many filters in place, which steered him further away from meeting the goals of the assignment.

One emerging theme coinciding with success strategies from this study included the ability to control one's environment. This included everything from whom students studied with to where they studied. By having control over their environment, students were able to focus on and prioritize their goals. Time management played a major role within this theme. Abel (2002) provided the following time management tips:

1. Use a weekly calendar to organize study/recreational time

2. Plan two hours of study time per hour of class time
3. Study during the day
4. Study in one hour blocks
5. Set specific goals for study time and allocate more time than needed to accomplish those set goals
6. Prioritize homework assignments based on difficulty and importance
7. Take breaks
8. Schedule review and reading times for each day

Self-regulation through time management is a powerful tool, and according to Zimmerman & Schunk (1989), illustrates the self-regulated student as one who is able to maximize on learning goals, use of effective organizational strategies and resources, and track performance by self-monitoring through meta-cognitive methods and use of self-regulation plans. Boyer and Sedlacek (1988) additionally discovered that international students who had long range plans and goals as well as persistence, self-confidence, realistic self-appraisal and a strong support person were more likely to succeed academically.

Self-motivation was another prevalent theme for student success, which ties in with controlling one's environment. Students found that they were able to navigate through their specific challenges by staying determined to obtain their end goal. Furthermore, resilience was a major factor for success for many participants. For example, Kemo mentioned that when he did not do as well as he had hoped in a class, it only pushed him further to try even harder than he had before. Shaw (2009) found resilience to be an indicator of success for Saudi participants in her study. Her resilience traits included:

1. Goal orientation

2. Self-confidence
3. Strong support systems
4. Optimism
5. Motivation
6. Self-Discipline
7. Organization for challenges

Students from the current study depicted most of these qualities in order to be overall successful.

Self-reflection was incorporated into this study as a way to analyze how participants have processed their journey studying in the U.S. This includes how they have reacted and changed within from their specific adjustments and how those relate to academic success. Mezirow (1990) discussed how an individual's perception of an experience is highly influenced by "habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference, that is, a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences" (p.1). Furthermore, he includes 'meaning perspectives' as "criteria for making value judgments and for belief systems" (p. 3) which are developed as youth undergo socialization and is contextualized based on emotional relationships one has with loved ones, teachers, and other close contacts. Mezirow states that meaning perspective is strengthened based on the level of intensity of the 'context of learning', which shapes an individual's values, principles, belief system, and goals.

Transformative learning can take place when an individual is subjected to a type of crisis or exposed to a phenomenon, such as studying in a completely different culture with a particular set of adjustments. According to Mezirow (1990), if a new experience is perceived as too different or strange for an individual, along with feeling anxious and threatened, the individual may attempt to block it out or use mental defense mechanisms to create an interpretation that

works for the individual. An alternative to this would be taking reflective action, or thoughtfully assessing an experience to consider the best approach or solution to a problem. In this case, one would create new ‘meaning schemes’, which Mezirow defined as “sets of related and habitual expectations governing if-then, cause-effect, and category relationships as well as event sequences...meaning schemes are habitual, implicit rules for interpreting” (p. 2). Mezirow suggested that by creating new meaning schemes, individuals transform their understanding through critical self-reflection.

This study illustrates critical self-reflection during the phenomenon participants have experienced which is made up by the challenges and adjustments they faced by studying in the U.S. Participants in this current study have provided evidence of reflective thinking during the qualitative portion of the study when asked two specific questions from the follow-up interview, (1) How have your experiences at this institution influenced your personal beliefs and (2) Do you think that self-reflection helps you change the way you view other people or issues that you face? The majority of participants revealed that their experiences at their institutions have influenced their personal beliefs. Zaidan shared that his experiences provided clarity of his view of the United States. Prior to arrival, he thought the U.S. was considered the best country, but after his transition he found it to be more difficult than expected. Tariq was initially shy to talk about the culture and lifestyle back in Saudi Arabia with when he first arrived in the U.S. but now says he is proud to share his nation’s traditions. Kemo explained how studying at a U. S. institution has allowed him to rethink his decision-making process including having more confidence to make thoughtful decisions. Moath and Black Hound shared that expanding their knowledge base in the U.S. has changed the way they perceive the world. And finally, Willy stated that his experiences

in the U.S. taught him how to become more acceptance and tolerant of other people and different views.

All participants in the qualitative portion said they used self-reflection to find solutions to issues and see things in a new perspective when needed. Students were self-checking through reflection to determine how to handle an experience or solve a problem. Many agreed that seeking solutions from within themselves has helped when dealing with exterior issues. Willy revealed that when he encountered something that to him would be considered wrong he has to find a way to understand even if it makes him frustrated. He suggested listening and discussing through appropriate communication before blocking someone or something out of your life. Listening to others can be key in this case. Zaidan shared that he has developed more patience with people and unknown situations since coming to the U.S. Moath emphasized the power of positive thinking through his self-reflection. Additionally, his transition to the U.S. seemed related to his desire to deepen his knowledge base, which changed his perception from his previous way of thinking. Based on these comments, it could be suggested that students have more tolerance towards new situations and may take more time to acknowledge and try to understand differences by reflecting on their own perceptions of an experience and perhaps transforming their previous frame of reference, i.e. assumptions and expectations, for more open and well-rounded ones. Table 6 from the online survey also reported that the majority of students often tried to imagine how the perspective looks from someone else's point of view to provide a better understand as well as having learned something that changed their concept or point of view of an issue. This also reports back to Research Question 2 by suggesting that students did actively attempt to think critically in new situations or with different people.

Heyn's (2013) study also included discussion of a change in participant's personal beliefs and values related to cross-cultural impact. For example, students in her study believed that it was their job to educate others on Saudi Arabia and promote a positive reflection of the culture as way to diminish any negative perceptions or misconceptions by Americans of the Saudi way of life. By taking on this role, it seems students would have reduced negative encounters in the U.S. In this study, many students also shared that they acted as ambassadors of their country in order to build positive relations and understanding with Americans. Similarly to Heyn's study, it may be suggested that students in this study would have to transform their way of thinking about negative situations in order to find a solution to the barriers.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The rich qualitative data from this study through the interviews provided an inside account into the lives of Saudi undergraduate students studying in the U.S. Since most of the interviews lasted at least one hour and some over two hours, it gave the opportunity to create a comfortable and trusting setting for participants to be open in their responses in a risk-free environment. Students were very candid about the challenges and adjustments they faced and these results will help contribute to the existing data on Saudi students studying in the U.S. Additionally, this study focused on Saudi students studying in a specific region of the U.S., which has not been introduced into the current literature yet.

One limitation of this study was the sample size, which makes it difficult to generalize the reporting to other studies. Another limitation is that the interviews were not conducted in the students' native language of Arabic. While communication was clear during the interview process, it is unknown how the responses may have differed if students were able to express themselves in their native language as opposed to English. The imbalance in demographics of

gender is also a limitation to this study as having more female participants could have impacted the results.

### **Implications for U.S. Higher Education Institutions**

The implications portion of this dissertation incorporates observations from previous literature and the results of this study as well as student feedback. U.S. higher education institutions promote diversity and higher international enrollment within their campuses, but it is crucial that administrators make more conscious efforts to ensure that once students arrive on campus that they receive the appropriate support to be successful in the institution. In order to provide appropriate resources, it is important that administrators know their students, their educational backgrounds, and culture from which they are coming from. Academic support resources and writing centers could join forces with the institution's English as a Second Language program and resources, if available, to collaborate on best practices for international students in an academic setting, which could also include sessions on study skills and testing taking. Administrators should provide more faculty training and workshops, beginning with cultural sensitivity, to better prepare instructors for working with specific student populations on campus. Academic advisors should also be included in these trainings as they are a major support role for students as they progress through their coursework. Higher education institutions in the U.S. could also work with the local communities in efforts to build positive relationships with community members and Saudi students on campus. For example, universities can partner with Islamic centers and mosques to plan events for gathering community members with students as an opportunity for education and unity. Additionally, institutions should work to increase opportunities for socialization between Saudi and domestic students on and off campus.

Instructors should be mindful of how student diversity affects learning in the classroom, positively and negatively if not appropriately addressed. Take advantage of opportunities to use diversity as a teaching tool by creating assignments that promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. Instructors also need to be educated on the differences in teaching styles in the Saudi educational system so that they are aware of the adjustment it may require from students. Introductory critical thinking and active learning assignments could be introduced in freshman courses to expose students to the different styles. It is also important for domestic students to understand the reality that the future workforce will be a global one and the benefits of having a jump-start working with students from different backgrounds in the university. Additionally, it should not be in the hands of Saudi students alone to build understanding of their culture and who they are. Institutions, including administrators, faculty, and domestic students, should also be held accountable for support and promoting positive relationships. This will likely not happen until institutions comprehensively educate members of the institution on the importance of understanding and working with different student groups.

The results from this study can also be used to provide better insight to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to effectively prepare students through a pre-arrival orientation. Some of the topics that should be addressed include: differing teaching methods in the United States, expectations of coursework (ex. amount of extensive reading), expectations of communication with faculty, best practices for SACM advisors working with students, and consideration of English requirements prior to being accepted to study in the United States. Furthermore, it would be helpful if the Saudi government would collaborate more with U.S. institutions and consider on-campus lectures and workshops so administrators can become more knowledgeable on this



specific student group. SACM and U.S. institutions could also consider some of the following advice from interview participants in this study to future Saudi students:

1. Stick to conversation topics aside from politics and religion.
2. Try to be yourself. You don't have anything to prove to the American people.
3. Work on communication with others by learning more about the way Americans life and deal with each other.
4. Try to make American friends because it makes things easier.
5. Respect. Do not wait for others to respect you because once you do they will. If they do not, that's their problem.
6. Don't be afraid of mistakes (specifically in English) because that is how you learn.

The following is advice for U.S. institutions from the online survey participants:

1. Let the American trust us
2. Show more love
3. Provide opportunities to live with families; more activities inside and outside campus
4. Prepare the city and the state for international students including media and all possibilities to change Americans views about internationals and Saudis
5. The media must prepare people around U.S. universities about the international student diversity and differences in culture so we can get understood somehow
6. Make a special place that Muslim people can practice their religion in
7. Stop racism; all students avoid us

8. Make a booth on campus where people get to meet with people from different religion, sexuality, and race. They can communicate and ask each to have more knowledge about other backgrounds.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several recommendations for further research to be made based on the results of this study:

1. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) could incorporate a new survey specifically designed for international students. The 2017 NSSE has questions related to diversity and one item asking participants if they are international students, but it is not in-depth or targeted specifically for international students. While this survey is being designed, an item could be added to the NSSE asking which country students are from if they check they are international to examine student results based on country of origin.
2. More instruments could be designed to effectively and efficiently collect data related to international student adjustment issues on U.S. college campuses that include less lengthy surveys to increase the likelihood of a higher return rate as students are less likely to spend a lot of time completing surveys.
3. In efforts to gain a higher return rate, future researchers could include undergraduate and graduate students and do a comparative study.
4. Different U.S. regions could be represented in future studies and comparative studies could be done on different regional findings.
5. Future research could include a study on effective academic support by examining the relationship between academic support personnel and the strategies they use and the perceptions of these strategies by Saudi and other international students.

6. Further studies could be conducted on the perspectives of other university members who work with Saudi students, such as faculty members, administrators, and students, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their adjustment issues.

7. It would be beneficial to further research the perspectives of female Saudi students studying in the U.S. due to the specific nature of their adjustment issues as there is limited current research available.

8. Research including the perspectives of the families of Saudi students and their viewpoints on studying in the U.S. might offer more insight and solutions to barriers.

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## Appendix A

### Initial Email Invitation



"My name is Carrie Melius, a graduate student from the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to investigate the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. You may participate if you are 18 years old or older. Please do not participate if you are 17 years old or younger. As a participant, you will be asked to complete an online survey which will not take more than 25 minutes to complete. Your responses to the survey questions will be anonymous, and completing this survey will not in any way influence your grade of the classes in which you are enrolled. There is no cost for your participation. At the end of this survey, there is a separate survey follow-up link where you will have the choice to enter a random drawing for a chance to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards. You will also have a choice to participate in a follow-up interview where I plan to learn more details about individual experiences. If you would like to participate in this research study, please click on the link in this email and check on "I am 18 years old or older AND agree to participate." If you have questions later, please contact me at meliucm@aubum.edu or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Maria M. Witte, at [wittemm@aubum.edu](mailto:wittemm@aubum.edu).

[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_43gBWtnNNEQvXil](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_43gBWtnNNEQvXil)

[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_ahodzdtAzHeeidT](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_ahodzdtAzHeeidT)

Sincerely,

Carrie Melius"

## Appendix B

### Information Letter

## INFORMATION LETTER FOR

“Saudi student integration in southeastern U.S. institutions: A study on the impact of academic, social, and cultural adjustments related to academic success”

You are invited to participate in a research study on Saudi student integration in Southeastern U.S. institutions with a focus on academic, social, and cultural adjustment issues related to academic success to be conducted by Carrie Melius, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology at Auburn University. I hope to learn more about the adjustment issues of Saudi undergraduate students in the Southeast and how these issues impact academic success.

If you are 18 years old or older AND agree to participate, I ask that you click on “I am 18 years old or older AND agree to participate”. Upon your consent, you will be directed to complete an online survey, which will ask about your satisfaction and difficulties with certain areas of campus life, services and programs at your institution, and your academic practices. I estimate that it will take about 25 minutes to complete the survey. Your responses will be anonymous, and completing the survey will not in any way influence your grades in any of the courses in which you are enrolled. If you are 17 years old or younger OR decide not to participate, I ask that you simply close the browser to leave this site.

After completing this survey, you will find an additional separate survey follow-up link in the email where you will have the opportunity to submit your email address for a chance to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards for completing the survey. You will also have the separate option to participate in a follow-up interview by choosing “Yes” if willing or “No” if not. The follow-up interview will provide more details about your individual experiences and can be done in-person or via FaceTime or Skype. If you choose “Yes”, I will ask you to enter your email address, which will be retained only so I can contact you once requesting your follow-up participation. After interview responses have been collected, I will delete your email address from my records. Your responses to the follow-up interview will be confidential.

I plan to disclose the results of the study at professional conferences and in articles published in scholarly journals. Any information presented will be aggregated so that your individual responses remain confidential. You may choose not to participate at any time. However, once I have collected your survey responses, I will be unable to remove your previously submitted information from the database.

If you have any questions before, during, or after this research, contact Carrie Melius by phone at 334-744-0929, by email at [meliucm@auburn.edu](mailto:meliucm@auburn.edu), or by regular mail at the address: English as a Second Language, 309 Foy Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849. For more information regarding your rights as a participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional

Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu) or [irbchair@auburn.edu](mailto:irbchair@auburn.edu).

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO OFFER YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH AND ALLOW THE INVESTIGATOR ACCESS TO YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION FOR THE FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW. IF YOU AGREE TO DO SO, PLEASE CHECK ON “I am 18 years old or older AND agree to participate.”

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from 5/24/2016 to 5/23/2017. Protocol #16-092.

## Appendix C

### Final Email Invitation Reminder

This is my final reminder regarding distribution of my survey. I would like to thank you again for your time and efforts in assisting me with my data collection. The number of completed surveys is lower than what I anticipated, so I appreciate any additional assistance you can provide by sending it out through social media as well.

Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Carrie Melius

"My name is Carrie Melius, a graduate student from the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to investigate the academic, social, and cultural adjustments of undergraduate Saudi students at four-year institutions in the Southeast region of the United States. You may participate if you are 18 years old or older. Please do not participate if you are 17 years old or younger. As a participant, you will be asked to complete an online survey which will not take more than 25 minutes to complete. Your responses to the survey questions will be anonymous, and completing this survey will not in any way influence your grade of the classes in which you are enrolled. There is no cost for your participation. At the end of this survey, there is a separate survey follow-up link where you will have the choice to enter a random drawing for a chance to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards. You will also have a choice to participate in a follow-up interview where I plan to learn more details about individual experiences. If you would like to participate in this research study, please click on the link in this email and check on "I am 18 years old or older AND agree to participate." If you have questions later, please contact me at meliucm@aubum.edu or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Maria M. Witte, at [wittemm@aubum.edu](mailto:wittemm@aubum.edu).

[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_43gBWtnNNEQvXil](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_43gBWtnNNEQvXil)

[https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_ahodzdtAzHeeidT](https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_ahodzdtAzHeeidT)

Sincerely,

Carrie Melius

## Appendix D

### Needs Assessment of International Students

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Q1

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- 

Q2

What is your age?

- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24+
- 

Q3

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- 

Q4

If married, do you have any children?

- Yes
- No
-



Q5

What is the name of your current institution where you are studying?

Q6

What is your major?

Q7

What is your class level?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Q8

What is the length of residence at your current institution?

Less than 6 months

6 months - less than 1 year

1 year - less than 2 years

2 years - less than 3 years

3 or more years

Q9

Did you transfer from another institution in the United States for your undergraduate studies? If yes, why?

Q10

What is your cumulative GPA?

Q11

How many academic hours/credits are you enrolled in this current semester?

less than 12

12

13

14

15

16 or more

Q12

What is your country of citizenship?

Q13

How do you receive financial support? Please check all that apply.

From my current institution

From my family

From my scholarship

Q14

What kind of transportation do you use currently? Please check all that apply.

Own car

Public Transportation

Car pool

Needs Assessment of International Students (NAIS)

Q15

Please choose the answer that best corresponds to your reply.

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your life and experiences at your current institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16

Please choose the answer that best corresponds to your reply.

	Not at all	Very little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	Very much
To what degree do you feel that your past educational experiences in Saudi Arabia prepared you for academic studies in the U.S.?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q17

Please rate your satisfaction with each of the following areas of your life at your current U.S. university.

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	N/A (Not Applicable)
Academic Life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial Support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1. Scholarships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Assistantships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Work Study	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Very Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied	N/A (Not Applicable)
Administrative support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1. International student services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Campus-wide services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting health concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1. Healthcare Facilities (doctors, dentists, clinics)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Health Insurance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Mental Health services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adjustment support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1. Living conditions/Housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Public Transportation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Community resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18

What are the areas in which you find, or have found, difficulties in promoting your well being at your current U.S. university?

	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Neutral	Difficult	Extremely Difficult
Limited language skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fear of making mistakes when speaking English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural conflicts	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding the host culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
American students' lack of understanding your culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Students of other cultures lack of understanding your	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Neutral	Difficult	Extremely Difficult
culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loneliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Isolation from host culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling left out in classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling left out at own department	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling left out of extracurricular activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty speaking with professors in department/major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty speaking with professors outside of department/major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty speaking with academic advisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty speaking with immigration advisors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to develop friendships with students from other cultures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to develop friendships with students from your own culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to develop friendships with American students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty of working on group projects in major classes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Difficulty of working on group projects in classes outside of your major	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all Difficult	Somewhat Difficult	Neutral	Difficult	Extremely Difficult
Support in meeting shopping needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support in finding place to worship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support in finding utilities and other community services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support in finding health related facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Orientation to university community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family oriented campus activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feelings of insecurity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feelings of inadequacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic performance/ achievement expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling guilt if not meeting academic goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Racial discrimination and prejudice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mental health concerns (like stress, depression and anxiety)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Physical illness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Understanding of lectures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In-class discussions and presentations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Amount of reading materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Amount of written assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19

What services or programs do you want to see in place at your current U.S. university?  
Please type "Y" for Yes or "N" for No under each statement to show if your university currently provides any of the following services.

	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Important	Extremely important
Group activities among students with same nationality <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group activities with students from diverse national backgrounds <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family oriented campus activities <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job Opportunities <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Temporary work permit (Internship/Research) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practical ways for dealing with possible racial discrimination <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counseling for international students <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Workshops <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support Groups <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer-Pairing programs (with a host culture peer) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English learning center	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Neutral	Important	Extremely important
<input type="text"/> Culturally sensitive services from administrative personnel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/> Culturally sensitive teaching and guidance by professors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/> Translation services and resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="text"/>					

Comments and Experiences (Optional)

Block Options

Q22

Please feel free to offer any additional thoughts and ideas that you think might help improve the lives and adjustment of Saudi students attending U.S. institutions.

Q23

Please describe any personal experiences you might want to share concerning positive or negative issues confronting you on campus. Please be specific.



## Appendix E

### National Survey of Student Engagement items

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

□

Q20

During the current school year, about how often have you done the following?

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Never
Come to class without completing readings or assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussed your academic performance with a faculty member	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

□

Q21

About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing the following?

	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	More than 30
Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other academic activities)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix F

### Invitation to participate in Follow-up Interview

## Survey Follow-Up

Q1

If you would like an opportunity to enter in a drawing to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards, please answer "yes" and include your email. If not, answer "no".

Yes

No

Q2

If you would like to volunteer to participate in a follow-up interview, please answer "yes" and include your email. If not, answer "no".

Yes

No

## Appendix G

Consent form for Follow-up interview



The Auburn University Institutional  
Review Board has approved this  
Document for use from  
05/24/2016 to 05/23/2017  
Protocol # 16-092 EP 1605

## AUBURN UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

### INFORMED CONSENT

for a Research Study entitled

“Saudi student integration in southeastern U.S. institutions: A study on the impact of academic, social, and cultural adjustments related to academic success”

You are invited to participate in a research study on “Saudi student integration in Southeastern U.S. institutions with a focus on academic, social, and cultural adjustment issues related to academic success” to be conducted by Carrie Melius, a graduate student in the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology at Auburn University. The purpose of this study is to learn more about the adjustment issues of Saudi undergraduate students in the Southeast and how these issues impact academic success. You were selected as a possible participant because you have completed the online survey and included your willingness to participate at the end of the survey.

If you are 18 years old or older AND agree to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed. The interview consists of 28 questions with follow-up questions, and should take no more than an hour. The interview will be recorded, and the recordings will be destroyed within a year of the conclusion of the study. The recordings will be transcribed without any of your identifying information, which will make your responses confidential. The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal and include the potential for a breach of confidentiality. Please note that breach of confidentiality is always a risk when using or accessing confidential or identifiable data. Whether you participate in the interview or not, it will not influence your grades in any of your courses nor will it affect your relationship with Auburn University, now or in the future. Upon completion of the online survey you had an opportunity to enter a drawing for the chance to win one of four \$50 Starbucks gift cards; however, there will be no additional compensation for participating in the follow-up interview. There is no cost to participate in the follow-up interview. If you change your mind about participating and wish to withdraw, we will conclude the interview and I will destroy the tape. If you wish to withdraw later, I will destroy any data associated with you that is still identifiable. Your privacy will be protected and any information used in connection with this study will remain confidential. The results of the study will be presented at professional conferences and in published articles in scholarly journals. The information will be aggregated so that your individual responses will remain confidential.

Participant's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Page 1 of 2

4036 Haley Center, Auburn, AL 3684-5221; Telephone: 334-844-4460; Fax: 334-844-3072

w w w . a u b u r n . e d u



The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from 05/24/2016 to 05/23/2017  
Protocol # 16-092 EP 1605

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY**

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, LEADERSHIP AND TECHNOLOGY

If you have any questions before, during, or after this research, contact Carrie Melius by phone at 334-744-0929, by email at [melium@auburn.edu](mailto:melium@auburn.edu), or by regular mail at the address: English as a Second Language, 309 Foy Hall, Auburn University, AL 36849. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Maria Witte, at [wittemm@auburn.edu](mailto:wittemm@auburn.edu) if you have further questions.

For more information regarding your rights as a participant you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email at [hsubjec@auburn.edu](mailto:hsubjec@auburn.edu) or [irbchair@auburn.edu](mailto:irbchair@auburn.edu).

**HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.**

_____	_____	_____	_____
Participant's signature	Date	Investigator obtaining consent	Date
_____		_____	
Printed Name		Printed Name	

## Appendix H

### Follow-up Interview Questions



## **General Student Perspectives**

1. What made you decide to study at a university in the U.S.?
2. How did you feel about studying in the U.S. prior to coming?
3. How did you prepare for coming to the U.S.?
4. How have your expectations or your perspective changed since coming to the U.S.?
5. Are you overall satisfied with your decision to study in the U.S.?
6. Reflecting back on your experiences at this institution, would you recommend any friends or family to attend college in the U.S.?

## **Academic Challenges**

7. Do you feel that your education experience in Saudi Arabia helped prepare you for academic studies in the U.S.? In what ways is it different studying here?
8. Do you find it difficult when doing projects at school or homework? Do you easily give up? Do you ask for help when you need it?
9. Do you have many opportunities for collaborative group work with other students? What are those experiences like?
10. In what academic areas do you feel you need more improvement and why?
11. What kinds of strategies have helped you become more successful academically?

## **Social Challenges**

12. Who have you been socializing with during your time at this institution?
13. Do you find it difficult or uncomfortable to interact with domestic students? If yes, why do you think you feel this way? How could this be resolved?

14. Have you ever experienced any discrimination/negative experiences from other people in the U.S.? Please tell me about it. Why do you think this happened? What advice can you give to change this from happening in the future?
15. Do you feel like you are viewed or treated by others the way you should be?
16. How have your experiences at this institution influenced your personal beliefs?
17. How have social or personal challenges affected your academic success, if at all?

### **Cultural Challenges**

18. Have you experienced times of depression or frustration since you arrived here?
19. Do you feel that people in the U.S. understand your perceptions and culture?
20. What things in U.S. culture are you not familiar or comfortable with?
21. Do you think it would be helpful to receive assistance when dealing with cultural differences? If so, what kind of help would be beneficial?
22. Are you interested in learning more about American culture?
23. How have cultural adjustments affected your academic success, if at all?
24. Do think that self-reflection helps you change the way you view other people or issues that you face?

### **Institutional Support**

25. Do you use any university support services, like tutoring or social programs? Please describe the experiences.
26. What are your experiences like when visiting/communicating with your institution's international student office?
27. What do you like the most about your institution? the least?

28. Do you think the university does enough to support international student integration? In what ways could the university make your transition easier?

Appendix I

Authorization Letter from Dr. Suhyun Suh



Suhyun Suh

Tue 11/17/2015 10:34 AM

To: Carrie Melius;

Cc: Glenda Reynolds;

You replied on 11/17/2015 10:54 AM.

Hi Carrie,

Thanks for your interest in our scale. Yes, you can use the scale and can modify it as you see fit. When you write-up your study, just make sure that you cite our article and indicate how you modified the scale. Good luck with your research! Best, Suhyun Suh

## Appendix J

Approval Letter from National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)



*The College Student Report*  
Item Usage Agreement

The National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) survey instrument, *The College Student Report*, is copyrighted and the copyright is owned by The Trustees of Indiana University. Any use of survey items contained within *The College Student Report* is prohibited without prior written permission from Indiana University. When fully executed, this Agreement constitutes written permission from the University, on behalf of NSSE, for the party named below to use an item or items from *The College Student Report* in accordance with the terms of this Agreement.

In consideration of the mutual promises below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

- 1) The University hereby grants **Carrie Melius** ("Licensee") a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable license to use, reproduce, distribute, publicly display and perform, and create derivatives from, in all media now known or hereafter developed, the item(s) listed in the proposal attached as Exhibit A, solely for the purpose of including such item(s) in the survey activity described in Exhibit A, which is incorporated by reference into this Agreement. This license does not include any right to sublicense others. This license only covers the survey instrument, time frame, population, and other terms described in Exhibit A. Any different or repeated use of the item(s) shall require an additional license.
- 2) "National Survey of Student Engagement", "NSSE", and the NSSE logo are registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Except as provided in part 3c below, these elements may not be incorporated without permission in materials developed under this agreement, including but not limited to surveys, Web sites, reports, and promotional materials.
- 3) In exchange for the license granted in section 1, Licensee agrees:
  - a) there will be no licensing fee to use NSSE items for the purposes described in Exhibit A;
  - b) to provide to NSSE frequency distributions and means on the licensed item(s);
  - c) on the survey form itself, and in all publications or presentations of data obtained through the licensed item(s), to include the following citation: "Items xx and xx used with permission from *The College Student Report*, National Survey of Student Engagement, Copyright 2001-16 The Trustees of Indiana University";
  - d) to provide to NSSE a copy of any derivatives of, or alterations to, the item(s) that Licensee makes for the purpose of Licensee's survey ("modified items"), for NSSE's own nonprofit, educational purposes, which shall include the use of the modified items in *The College Student Report* or any other survey instruments, reports, or other educational or professional materials that NSSE may develop or use in the future. Licensee hereby grants the University a nonexclusive, worldwide, irrevocable, royalty-free license to use,

Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research  
1900 East Tenth Street • Eigenmann Hall, Suite 419 • Bloomington, IN 47406  
Phone: (812) 856-6824 • Fax: (812) 856-5150 • E-mail: nsse@indiana.edu • Web Address: www.nsse.iub.edu



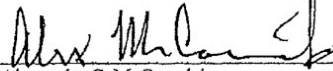
reproduce, distribute, create derivatives from, and publicly display and perform the modified items, in any media now known or hereafter developed; and

- e) to provide to NSSE, for its own nonprofit, educational purposes, a copy of all reports, presentations, analyses, or other materials in which the item(s) licensed under this Agreement, or modified items, and any responses to licensed or modified items, are presented, discussed, or analyzed. NSSE shall not make public any data it obtains under this subsection in a manner that identifies specific institutions or individuals, except with the consent of the Licensee.

4) This Agreement expires on September 30, 2016.

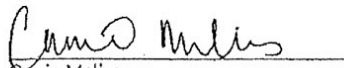
The undersigned hereby consent to the terms of this Agreement and confirm that they have all necessary authority to enter into this Agreement.

For The Trustees of Indiana University:

  
Alexander C. McCormick  
Director  
National Survey of Student Engagement

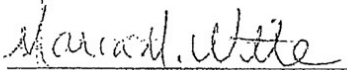
1/5/2016  
Date

For Licensee:

  
Carrie Mellus  
Ph.D. Student  
Auburn University

12/19/2015  
Date

For Advisor:

  
Dr. Maria Witte  
Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology  
Auburn University

Dec 19, 2015  
Date



## Appendix K

### Approval of Extension from National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

RE: permission to use NSSE instrument

X DELETE   ← REPLY   ⇐ REPLY ALL   → FORWARD   ...



Brooks, Jennifer Lynn <brooksjl@indiana.edu> on behalf c Mark as unread

Mon 10/24/2016 1:42 PM

To: Carrie Melius; CPR Item Usage Agreements <cpritems@indiana.edu>;

You replied on 10/24/2016 1:50 PM.

Hi, Carrie. This email constitutes written permission to extend your licensing agreement through February 2017. Recall, however, our concern about overlapping with NSSE administrations. NSSE goes into the field in February so we will not be able to extend this agreement beyond that date.

I hope this helps – good luck!

Best,  
Jennifer

Appendix L

Approval Form from Office of Research Compliance of Auburn University



Office of Research Compliance  
334-844-5966  
115 Ramsay Hall, basement  
334-844-4391  
Auburn University, AL 36849

[auburn.edu](http://auburn.edu)

Telephone:

Fax:

[IRBadmin@](mailto:IRBadmin@auburn.edu)

[IRBsubmit@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBsubmit@auburn.edu)

July 06, 2017

MEMORANDUM TO: Ms. Carrie Melius  
College of Education

PROTOCOL TITLE: “Saudi Student Integration in Southeastern U.S. Institutions: A Study on the Impact of Academic, Social, and Cultural Adjustments Related to Academic Success”

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO: 16-092 EP 1605

APPROVAL DATE: May 24, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: May 23, 2017

The referenced protocol was approved as “Expedited” by the IRB under Sections 45 CFR 46.110 (6 and 7) of the Code of Federal Regulations

(<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html>)

When you accepted this approval, you agreed to the following:

1. **Changes to your protocol** *must* be approved in advance by submitting a modification request to the IRB. The use of any unauthorized procedures may result in penalties.
2. **Unanticipated problems** involving risk to participants *must* be reported *immediately* to the IRB.
3. A **renewal request** *must* be submitted three weeks before your protocol expires.
4. A **final report** *must* be submitted when you complete your study, along with copies of any consents used.
5. **Expiration** – If you allow your protocol to expire without contacting the IRB, it will be administratively closed. The project will be suspended. You will then need to submit a new protocol to resume your research.
6. You must **use only the approved, stamped version** of your **information letter**. A copy must be given to participants.

Per memo dated 5/9/2017 from Howard Gobstein, Executive Vice President, Association of Public & Land- Grant Universities, APLU activities will follow the approved AU IRB protocol.

All forms can be found at <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm>. Questions concerning this Board action may be directed to the Office of Research Compliance

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Research Compliance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bernie R. Olin, Ph.D.", written in a cursive style.

Bernie R. Olin, Phar. D.  
Chair of Institutional Review Board #2  
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research

Appendix M

Approval of Extension from Office of Research Compliance of Auburn University



*Office of Research Compliance  
115 Ramsay Hall, basement  
Auburn University, AL 36849*

*Telephone: 334-844-5966  
Fax: 334-844-4391  
[IRBadmin@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBadmin@auburn.edu)  
[IRBsubmit@auburn.edu](mailto:IRBsubmit@auburn.edu)*

July 06, 2017

MEMORANDUM TO: Ms. Carrie Melius  
College of Education

PROTOCOL TITLE: “Saudi Student Integration in Southeastern U.S.  
Institutions: A Study on the Impact of Academic, Social,  
and Cultural Adjustments Related to Academic Success”

IRB AUTHORIZATION NO: 16-092 EP 1605

MODIFICATION APPROVAL: November 13, 2016  
EXPIRATION DATE: May 23, 2017

Your protocol was approved and modified as “Expedited” by the IRB under 45

CFR 46.110(6,7): Note the following:

1. RECORDS: Keep this and all protocol approval documents in your files. Please reference the complete protocol number in any correspondence.
2. MODIFICATIONS: You must request approval of any other changes to your protocol before implementation. Some changes may affect the assigned review category.
3. RENEWAL: Submit a renewal a month before expiration. If your protocol expires and is administratively closed, you will have to submit a new protocol to continue your research.
4. FINAL REPORT: When your study is complete, please submit a final report to the Office of Research Compliance, Human Subjects.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Research Compliance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bernie Olin, Pharm.D.", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Dr. Bernie Olin, Phar.D.  
Chair of the Institutional Review Board #2  
for the Use of Human Subjects in Research