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A Phenomenological Study of International Students
in a Florida University Ph.D. Program

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Abstract

Shifts in demographics of the international graduate student population in the United States since 2002 suggest universities should analyze and evaluate the academic, social, and cultural elements of their doctoral programs, to ensure students from previously underrepresented global regions experience needed adjustment support. The Investigator followed the journeys of 3 female Asian doctoral students enrolled in a doctoral program over a 2 year period and discovered challenges and obstacles faced beyond what was previously known. The phenomenological study highlights the students' perspectives of academic and social experiences affecting their adjustment and concludes with a list of questions to consider.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the adversities international students face when enrolled in U.S. doctoral programs and the adjustments they must make to succeed academically and socially.

A shift is taking place in the attributes of the United States' higher education international student population. Prior to 2001, students from the Middle East were a substantial population in doctoral programs. Now, for several reasons, doctoral students from Asia represent 55% of the international student population in U.S. higher education (Altbach, 2004).

International students contribute 12 billion dollars a year to U.S. higher education and attracting them to particular programs is high-stakes. Prior research has warranted the potential economic value of attracting international students to such programs and confirmed steady growth in international student enrollment numbers since the 1950's (Zikopoulos, 1986; Paige, 1990; Snyder, Hoffman & Deddes, 1996). Now, universities hosting international students face the most significant challenges ever (Kuh, 1990). Best practice insists upon the emergence of a multicultural imperative (Grieger, 1996). The U.S. has enjoyed the distinction of being first in the world in hosting international students (Paige, 1990). If U.S. universities want to maintain this distinction, they must meet the needs of doctoral students who represent the new majority of international students.

This phenomenological study explores the academic, social, and cultural experiences of three female Asian doctoral students, from one country, across two years in a U.S. university doctor of philosophy program, with ancillary data sought from their larger international student group. Prior studies have concluded that international students from different places have different needs (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). Additionally, female international students

encounter more obstacles in adjusting to U.S. higher education than males (Lee, Abd-Ella & Burke, 1981).

Shifts in the attributes of international student populations invite higher education institutions in the U.S. to examine and evaluate their attempts at accommodating students from cultures new to their graduate programs.

Historically, quantitative needs assessments of international students have been utilized to measure international student adjustment, but the literature contains nothing regarding knowing the challenges faced by these students qualitatively (Hanassah & Tidwell, 2002).

Items needing further study that come to mind after reviewing the research regarding international students include: What kinds of challenges do international students face and how do these challenges vary among students within particular groups from different regions of the world? Also, is there really a gender difference in the types of problems faced by international students and the intensity of these challenges?

Prior studies have asserted that Asian students keep problems they face largely to themselves (Cheng, 2001; Futa, Hsu, & Hansen, 2001; Parker, Gladstone & Tsee Chee, 2001). This should concern researchers when it comes to measuring this particular student group's adjustment in traditional ways. If a specific group of international students are reluctant to share problems they face with others, will they be complete in their disclosures on surveys? Or, will they keep some things to themselves and not fully disclose? Relative to data potentially received, what differences are there between survey results and long term observations of the students? Are the greatest challenges faced by these students really visa and immigration issues? (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002).

How can we best know how particular groups of international students adjust to U.S. higher education? To be sure, there are many ways to measure international student adjustment to U.S. doctoral programs.

Although Asian students experience less stereotyping and discrimination when compared to other international student groups (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992), their adjustment to U.S. higher education has been documented as being among student regional groups requiring the greatest adjustments (Hanassab & Tidwell, 2002). Why are Asian students among those groups facing the greatest adjustments to U.S. higher education and how do these adjustments impact the students and the institutions? Data like these have become vital since Asian students now represent the majority of international students in U.S. higher education doctoral programs.

Entrance into a U.S. higher education program by an international student can be extremely stressful and anxiety-filled to the point that problems faced can be overwhelming (Selvadurai, 1992). What kinds of problems do these students face? Which problems are overwhelming? How can we best discover the problems? What can we do to reduce the problems and ease the adjustment of these students? Can a phenomenological study, over the life of doctoral course work by a few female Asian students, shed light on some of the problems faced? Will a qualitative study contribute to the literature regarding challenges faced by international students?

Stress experienced by international graduate students is substantial and real. Cultural distance, students' social support networks, and their role competencies vary greatly (Biggs, Chapman, and Wan, 1992). The literature suggests Asian students are among the global region groups possessing the greatest cultural distance (Wehrly, 1988).

International students can contribute much to U.S. degree programs beyond added revenue (Barnes, 1991).

Perhaps through the eyes of particular Asian students in a doctoral program we can capture some perceptions of international student higher education experiences that cannot be gained in other ways. The data can be gathered and then placed aside the existing literature for comparison sake. We can affirm or discount prior assumptions about particular challenges faced by international students, and their importance, or perhaps affirm or discount the merit of the findings in this study.

Study Design and Methodology

The Investigator followed the journeys of three female Asian students in a doctoral program over a two year period. During the study, the students completed their course work and gained candidacy to the doctor of philosophy degree. The students were enrolled in a doctoral program at a university located in the southeastern region of the United States. The sample is one of convenience. Names of the students, university, locations, etc. are replaced with fictional ones to protect the privacy of all concerned. Additionally, the Investigator is not an employee of the university studied.

The study is descriptive in nature and qualitative. It utilizes the phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach strives to seek perspectives free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). Although the Investigator did develop questions prior to the study, based on the literature review, no plan was devised to deviate from the open-ended study participant perspective approach.

The Investigator contends qualitative studies should not be generalized beyond particular students in groups per se, but there are ways to enhance inferential possibilities. Having multiple

students in the study enhances inferential opportunities (Myles & Huberman, 1994). Still, there is no attempt to promote inferences and generalizations beyond the individuals studied. However, the multiple-participant approach does enhance opportunities for making inferences regarding the academic, social, and cultural needs of the students in the particular doctoral program.

It is important to acknowledge differences between, and within, qualitative and statistical validity (Eisner, 1981). While phenomenological research can shed light on program elements and participants' perceptions therein, such findings may or may not be relative to the larger international student population across U.S. universities.

Triangulation of data was utilized in the study. The merit of triangulating data in education studies has been validated through a variety of sources (Hossler & Vesper, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Foster, 2002; Seabrook, 2003). One prior study in particular with a focus on gaining perspectives from students, families, and teachers in urban school settings, attracted the interest of the Investigator when contemplating this study's design (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000). Thus, data in this study were gathered through formal and informal student observations in program courses and various social settings, program instructors, and other program students.. Multiple student interviews were completed, as were analyses of student produced work for program courses.

Data Results

Student Adjustment

Annie, Elaine, and Valerie hesitantly appeared on the university campus in August of 2004 to begin their doctoral journeys. They had already assumed "American names" since they had been cautioned by other international students in the doctoral program that faculty and staff on campus would not attempt to pronounce their given names or use them in any way.

Annie was soft-spoken, articulate, and fashionably dressed. She had spent several years in the U.S. in higher education prior to this doctoral program and she spoke English well. Elaine had been a successful business person in her home country and was viewed by others in the program as an organizer and leader. Her English-speaking skills were quite limited early in her doctoral journey but they improved over time. Valerie was very outspoken, intelligent, and verbalized her perceptions of the doctoral program often. She possessed strong English writing and speaking skills.

All students in the program had to secure living accommodations on their own. There was no university housing available to students. There was also no student housing placement service. In attempting to save money, to stay on carefully planned budgets, some of the students secured housing in less than desirable locations. Concurrent with the arrival to the doctoral program of the students in the study, a newly-arrived male Asian student was robbed in his off campus residence. He exhibited great anxiety while sharing the incident with the Investigator and others. He reported placing quarters on his desk in his apartment in a certain way and then returning to discover their disappearance several times, prior to the large scale theft of his laptop, passport, cash, and other personal items. Other students in the international student's particular region group came to the student's rescue by counseling him to relocate to a safer residence. Although program directors were notified, the university did not take any action after this event and international students continued to secure housing arrangements on their own, through the life of the study.

Annie, Elaine, and Valerie endured a variety of housing experiences during the study. For most of her doctoral course experience, Annie lived farthest from campus, in another county, due to lower rent rates being available in the hinterland. She moved from one distant rental to

another after a year and a half in the program. The landlord in her second remote residence demanded the typical month's rent and security deposit in advance. Then, two weeks into the verbal agreement, the landlord gave Annie 24 hours in which to vacate, while keeping the month's rent and security deposit. She told Annie her things would be thrown into the street if she was not out by the next day. Annie had no documentation regarding the rental arrangement. It was evident that Annie's landlord took advantage of her based on her lack of understanding regarding landlord/tenant laws. Annie had no choice but to vacate with no where to go. She spent a night in the 24 hour lounge at the university library and then contacted the Investigator to share her plight. The Investigator counseled her to contact the university's administration and arrangements were made for her to be taken in by a professor outside of the doctoral program for a generous monthly fee. At the end of the study Annie told the Investigator that the professor who provided housing accused her of placing something in the residence's garbage disposal that should not have gone in. She was given a half-day time limit to secure a new garbage disposal and have it installed or face being put on the street. She would be removed from the residence that day if she did not complete the task. Fortunately, Annie was able to secure the needed disposal and installation in the prescribed window but the cost for same was extraordinary. Upon reaching candidacy in the doctoral program, Annie returned to her home country. She plans to complete her dissertation study in her native land.

Elaine secured housing in a county adjacent to the university location and, like Annie, purchased a vehicle to commute. Elaine had saved a considerable amount of money over her years as a business person for living expenses during her doctoral program. Elaine began her off campus residential experience in a safe, but costly, neighborhood. Some unanticipated expenses over the life of her two year course program caused Elaine to have to secure more affordable

housing. Elaine was able to accept a nanny position with a family in the same city as the university. While this living arrangement did reduce costs, it caused Elaine to have to spend many hours a day supervising the family's children. Elaine was not able to continue to invest all of her time to her doctoral coursework and research. Her housing situation hindered her doctoral journey. Elaine did complete the course work in the program and she is a candidate for the Ph.D. Elaine plans to perform her dissertation study in the U.S. but her planned timeline for gathering data has been delayed due to methodology issues as cited by her Institutional Review Board. The delay is having a substantial impact on Elaine's financial budget.

Valerie seemed to be from the most humble background, economically, of the three students in the study. She rented a room in a house in the same city as the university and worked part-time at two Chinese restaurants, washing dishes and taking phone orders. Valerie's housing arrangement seemed to be the most placid among the three students in the study. Her landlord was from South America and several rooms in the residence were rented to international students for \$450.00 U.S. each per month. Valerie and the other tenants were allowed to use the living room area to watch television and socialize, especially when the landlord was absent. Tenants had to secure meals on their own and harmony was evident in the kitchen area at the residence. For a qualitative research course assignment in the doctoral program, Valerie wrote an observation paper about her room. The Investigator read this paper prior to visiting the residence, for triangulation purposes. Valerie recently completed program course work and gained candidacy. She has returned to her home country where she plans to conduct her dissertation study.

In each case, the Asian female students in the study experienced some level of anxiety regarding housing while in the doctoral program. They, and their larger particular student group,

experienced such things as petty and extreme burglary, threats of having one's possessions thrown out of houses, problems with automobiles purchased from unscrupulous used car dealers, and sharing space with families as servants. Shelter is a basic need among all humans (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Negative experiences such as these must impact international student adjustment to U.S. higher education.

Academic Experiences

On a number of occasions across the life of the study, the three Asian female students discussed their behaviors in classes across the program with the Investigator. Their behavior was received in a variety of ways by program instructors. The students were accustomed to not speaking in class because in their culture it was disrespectful for them to do anything more than stay quiet and be receptive to lecture.

Some instructors in the program did lecture in their classes while others insisted on active student learning environments. Early in the doctoral experience, the students in the study felt uneasy about voicing their opinions in classes since they had been reinforced not to do this for most of their lives. It was easiest for Valerie to express herself in classes because she was naturally outspoken. Annie had the greatest difficulty in participating and professors often berated her for whispering answers and responses. Elaine's charming personality and smile offset instructor concerns about her difficulty with English and her tendency to not participate in class discussions.

There was no training evident for instructors in the program regarding diversity and the potentials of pluralism in the classroom. All students, regardless of origin, were expected to assimilate to the instructors' ways of operating their courses. A substantial number of students in

the doctoral program (approximately 17%) were from the Asian country that was home to the students in the study.

Students of the dominant U.S. culture in the program complained to several instructors about how these particular international students were slowing the classes down. They claimed the Asian student group could barely speak English and it was difficult to understand what they were saying when they did express themselves in class. Some of the U.S. doctoral students talked about how these students should have never been admitted into the program in the first place.

A few instructors were at a loss about how to teach the international students, including those students in this study. One professor simply lectured during all classes and taught the students how to shout, "Go Union!" (the professor's alma mater) in unison. The professor had come to the conclusion that student evaluations were directly correlated with grades given. In the early stages of this study, the professor simply gave top grades to all students in the classes and passed them on. This satisfied both the international students and the university administration, in an evaluation sense. The professor was revered by the Asian students during the early portion of the study.

After being called on grade inflation by colleagues, the professor eventually began telling the international students, during the first week of class each term, to not expect top grades in his courses because of problems with their writing. No additional clarity was provided regarding how they could attain top grades and the Asian students began receiving lower grades en masse when compared with their U.S. native student peers. The instructor would underline each line of a student's paper to indicate he had read it but there was little feedback regarding the paper written or otherwise. The Asian students' admiration for the professor rapidly diminished.

In retaliation to the apparent grade inflation of the one instructor, another instructor infused a writing test in their class that was to be administered to all doctoral students. The instructor insisted that the other instructor was giving students top grades even though they could barely write. The instructor took it upon herself to ensure that all students in the program could write adequately. During the first episode of the newly implemented writing test, a female Asian student beyond the students in this study, stood up during the surprise test and raised her voice to the other Asian students, in Mandarin, and said something about the test being a trap. She encouraged the other Asian students to refuse to complete the exercise prior to walking out of class. She claimed the test was a device to expel the Asian doctoral students from the program. This open protest caused quite a stir in the course and beyond. The protesting student was a professor in her home country and very outspoken regarding the rights of the international students in the program.

Valerie was also a member of this same class and her outspoken nature caused her to be implicated in the supposed international student insubordination plot. The Asian students then called a meeting for themselves and subsequently requested a meeting with top university officials regarding the arbitrary nature of the new writing test. Their contention was they had passed TOEFL examinations in order to be admitted to the doctoral program so it was arbitrary to test them again, once they had been admitted to the program. University officials advised the program coordinators to meet with the students but the new writing test remained in place after the meeting and across the life of this study.

Several of the instructors in the program believed the Asian students continuously attempted to take shortcuts in their work. A software package designed to catch students plagiarizing was put in place and requirements were imposed whereby student papers would be

submitted to the software service for inspection by instructors. On more than one occasion the Asian students' papers were determined to contain substantial portions of pre-existing literature without proper referencing. Through conversations with instructors, it was apparent that some of them came to conclude that all of the Asian students were engaged in the practice of cheating. When confronted, students whose papers contained content borrowed from others told instructors they should not accuse them of "cheating" since that is an extreme term in their culture. Some instructors reciprocated with this request by avoiding the "cheating" term in their discussions with students regarding plagiarism issues while others did not. Other students, when confronted about plagiarizing, said that it was a misunderstanding based on language barriers.

Some instructors expressed concerns about the Asian students' personal habits. One instructor was concerned about the students' hygiene. The instructor particularly expressed concern about students' greasy hair and lack of teeth brushing. The instructor asked other instructors in the program if they had similar concerns. Another instructor was surprised by the belching of students while in conferences with them. In the instructors' culture it was impolite to publicly burp and it was discomfiting to hear repeated belching during meetings with the students. The instructor reported that he would stop talking and stare at the students in disbelief while the students seemed to have no understanding of the taboo behavior in which they were engaged.

All doctoral programs have procedures. Timelines for review of qualifying papers submitted to advisors, proposals submitted, dissertation drafts submitted, etc. In several instances instructors became perturbed with the Asian students because they did not comply with the timelines for paper review. In some cases students would appear on instructors' office doorsteps within a couple of days after submitting papers and proposals that were supposed to

have a two week professor review time window. Valerie expressed repeated concerns to the Investigator about being in trouble for not following timeline policy. The students' financial budgets and planned timelines seemed to conflict with the procedural timelines in the program. In many cases the Asian students' qualifying papers and dissertation proposal submissions took the longest time to be approved and this seemed to exacerbate the procedural and financial issues.

Students in the study, as well as other Asian students in the program, expressed concerns to the Investigator about their ability to write papers and high-stakes proposals in English and APA. Some of the students opted to pay considerable amounts of cash to editors and ghostwriters to ensure needed paper quality.

In one instance a student paid \$2,000.00 U.S. to a ghost writer for rewriting their dissertation proposal. Although the university had a writing center, relatively little support was provided to the Asian students early on in their writing pursuits. It should be noted that writing center support did increase during the life of the study but it was limited to aiding the students while in the program courses. Once a student attained doctoral candidacy, there was no writing help offered by the center for the dissertation. Paying editors and ghostwriters large sums of cash, in exchange for satisfactory qualifying papers and proposals, was evident across the life of the study.

Certain instructors in the program attracted substantial numbers of the Asian students for advisement of their qualifying papers and dissertation chairing. In some cases the instructors who were selected by the students did little to no work in guiding the students in the process. The students often found themselves having to go to junior professors in the program for needed help. Occasionally students would not disclose they had already selected a chair for their dissertation,

while costing the junior professors considerable amounts of time in editing and refining their qualifying papers. This perceived, or actual, deception on the part of some of the students in the program caused hard feelings between these students and junior faculty.

In some cases students had paid an Asian agent considerable amounts of money for his help in placing them in the U.S. doctoral program. Apparently the university had hired the same Asian agent and was paying him for students attracted to the program, while he was charging the Asian students concurrently. The agent was being paid twice for providing a single service.

Additionally, the professor who had originally located the Asian agent was reportedly receiving free trips to Asia; including at least one full expense paid trip for the spouse as well, valuable artwork, boxes of Cuban cigars, and other expensive gifts from the agent and affiliated students. Another instructor became involved in the scheme and had received two free trips to Asia which allegedly led to significant income potential for consulting and other activities. The second instructor went so far as to patch his phone into a stateside location in the central U.S. so it would appear as though he was in the U.S. when he called the program office while away, when in fact he was in Asia. The second instructor told another program instructor that he could not share details but he was very close to securing a deal worth two million dollars, based on his trips to Asia as a guest of the agent.

To be fair to the university, it should be disclosed that the first professor described was told their contract would not be renewed and the second instructor resigned prior to the date when the university could opt to notify him of contract non-renewal. The university, however, did not disclose the reason(s) why the professor's annual contract would not be renewed.

Although the university administration advised the Asian students they owed nothing to the Asian agent, the agent continued to charge students substantial fees for his alleged expenses

incurred through their doctoral journeys. The professor who had been told their contract would not be renewed moved on to another university but continued to work with the Asian agent in expediting completion of the students' dissertations at the university. Unfortunately the departed professor's e-mail at the university was not deactivated for a period of time beyond their departure and the professor allegedly used that e-mail address to conduct questionable activities with the Asian agent. Asian students who were attempting to complete their dissertations were receiving e-mails from the Asian agent stating that more money was needed to ensure successful completion of the process, while the suspended professor was sending faxes to Asia saying student dissertation work was near completion, or complete, when in fact it was not. Unfortunately some of the Asian students complied with requests to deliver additional money to the Asian agent because they were convinced that if they failed to send money to the agent they would not realize successful completion of the degree program. The agent made it clear to the students that this would be the case.

In reviewing the data regarding the academic dimension of the study, through the students' perspectives, it seems reasonable to conclude that a great deal of polarization existed across several groups in the program. Some faculty members labeled the Asian student group, from the one particular country, as students who were always looking for shortcuts in the process, dishonest in their scholarly work, unclean, unscrupulous, and unethical. Their American student peers complained about how the Asian group slowed the learning process and complained that those students should not be in the program. Perhaps, too, a lack of clarity or language barriers regarding program procedures and expectations exacerbated the relational problems between the Asian student group, instructors, and other students in the program. Not to mention the lack of training for faculty in planning and facilitating diverse and pluralistic

classrooms. Some of the polarization was most likely the fault of particular students among the Asian group, for such things as occasional plagiarism, but much of the polarization of the Asian group appeared to be the result of faulty perceptions and beliefs of others in the program.

There was also a good deal of animosity evident among instructors in the program as some benefited financially beyond traditional ethical bounds, while other instructors benefited little and seemed to do the bulk of the work with the students in the program. The data gathered for this portion of the study was quite shocking and disturbing to the Investigator. The data went beyond anything the Investigator could have imagined prior to collection. Academic episodes such as these, as perceived by the students, must have an impact on their adjustment in U.S. doctoral programs. Perhaps a phenomenological study design does reveal program anomalies not visible through traditional survey research, or perhaps this particular doctoral program had extreme features not evident in other U.S. doctoral programs, or both.

Social Aspects

The university did not provide sponsored social activities for the doctoral students. In addition to formal and informal campus observations, the Investigator coordinated several off campus social gatherings for the Asian doctoral students, accepted invitations to dinners with groups of the students, and conducted many interviews with the particular students in the study.

The study students and their larger, particular Asian country group spent most of their time collectively in the university library, beyond time in classes. Typically there was no interaction with other doctoral students beyond the group and no other regional international group in the program devoted as much time to collectively being on campus. The Investigator devoted time to observing the international students in the library. Most of the time the student group made attempts at deciphering assignments and explaining to each other what particular

instructor's expectations were. A considerable amount of time was devoted by the group to translating each program assignments before work commenced on them. This added time constraint experienced by the international students was not acknowledged by instructors in the program. On one occasion Elaine left her laptop computer at a study table while she traveled to another part of the library to retrieve a publication. Upon returning to her workspace the laptop computer was gone. Fortunately, a couple of weeks later the police retrieved the computer and returned it to her. Still, the theft of Elaine's laptop hindered her doctoral journey progress.

Most of the students lived in an adjacent county and all of the students purchased cars and commuted to campus. Often the students shared apartments with other students from the particular student region group and students would socialize with each other in their apartments. Annie socialized the least with students in her regional group since she lived farthest from the group and campus. Valerie seldom had students visit her residence since she rented a room in a house. Elaine organized the students in the group often to socialize within the group and the Investigator.

On three different occasions during the study, the Investigator coordinated outings for the Asian doctoral group. It was interesting to note the hierarchy within the group. Valerie seemed to be a leader in the group and Elaine ensured everyone was on time and equipped with refreshments and food. Annie was unable to attend any of the organized outings. Although the Investigator's intent was to provide an opportunity for the students to experience the local culture, it felt as though the students were trying to please the Investigator by engaging in these activities.

On many occasions a group of the students would invite the Investigator to meet them at restaurants for dinner. Typically the students selected Asian buffets for entertaining the

Investigator. The personnel at the eating establishments seemed to know the Asian students well. It was apparent that the students frequented the buffets often. In one instance, a female Asian student beyond the study group stood during the entire dining episode and cracked crab legs for people to be perceived as important at the table. She told the Investigator that in her home country students would wash professors' cars, clean their homes, and perform other menial tasks. On most occasions Elaine would assemble dessert plates for people at the table. No matter the number of students eating together, they requested one table. On one occasion, where the Investigator joined the group for dinner, a table for 24 was secured. Group cohesion was paramount to the students.

One of the students within the group was shunned by others. During the first outing Sam and John were very close. Often off to the side as a close pair, they had others in the group take pictures of them together. Something happened between Sam and John between the first and second outing. During the second outing John would have nothing to do with Sam. No one else in the group wanted to be near Sam either. One of the female Asian students explained to the Investigator that Sam's dialect was of a lower class than the other students in the group. She said Sam claimed to be from a very wealthy and prominent family but his dialect and word selections revealed he was from a lower socioeconomic level than others in the group. Late in the study Sam expressed to the Investigator he had no one to work with in the program and he seemed depressed.

The student group always welcomed the opportunity to attend outings planned by the Investigator and they always wanted to pay for all costs incurred. The Investigator resisted the group's charity as much as possible but accepted a variety of gifts including food from the students' home country and rudimentary symbols of friendship. The students took small gifts to

program instructors often. Some instructors felt as though the gifts were attempts at bribing them. The U.S. students in the program never provided any kinds of gifts to the instructors. Perhaps gifts of some kind were given to dissertation committee members upon completion of successful defenses by some U.S. students, but beyond the Asian student group gifts were not given to instructors across program course work. There was a culture clash when it came to these students constantly bringing rudimentary gifts to instructors in the program.

One of the female Asian students, in the larger student group, reported that the largest male in her regional student group was demanding that she sleep with him, even though he was married. She seemed very upset about this. She approached the program director and he notified authorities. The female student was accommodated by registering for courses outside of those the male student attended. The female student departed from the university shortly after the incident only to return and gain candidacy status, after the male student had returned to his home country to conduct his dissertation study. A female instructor in the program insisted that the female student was not completely innocent when it came to attracting the attention of the male who demanded sex. On one occasion the female student happened to be among those joining the Investigator for dinner. The student had a purse with “69” in large numbers on its sides. The Investigator wondered if the Asian female student realized what that number meant in the U.S. dominant culture but avoided asking.

Doctoral students’ ages ranged from the early 30’s to 50 in the particular Asian group. One master’s student was also from the same country. Carol was 25 and very eager to tell the Investigator about the differences among students from the one country based on age. Carol reported students in their 30’s and 40’s thought differently than students from the same country in their 20’s. The Investigator asked the older doctoral students about this difference in thinking

among students in their regional group and they confirmed there were differences by age. The younger people were considered by the doctoral students to be much more social and independent. They were also perceived to be more free thinking, open, and promiscuous.

To summarize, the Asian doctoral students were socially isolated, welcomed opportunities to be a part of organized outings, enjoyed entertaining people perceived to be powerful at their favorite eating establishments, and valued the group more than individuals in it. There was tension within the group regarding socioeconomic status and ways of thinking and seeing across age groups therein. Most of the students in the group seemed to possess a need to deliver gifts to program instructors often. There was tension between the Asian student group, other student groups in the program, and instructors regarding the incessant gift giving. Student adjustment issues were evident in the social paradigm as the Asian students were isolated from other students in the program.

Results and Conclusions

The Investigator collected and analyzed student perspectives over two years and three themes emerged: student adjustment, academic experiences, and social aspects. Detailed descriptions of the students' experiences were gathered and analyzed. Items in the data that responded to prior studies and theory were highlighted as data results.

The phenomenological study design yielded data that had not been garnered in previous studies about international students' adjustment to U.S. higher education. Regardless of gender, Asian students struggled with housing needs to different degrees while in the doctoral program. Although previous studies suggested differences by gender in adjusting to U.S. higher education, the Investigator discovered the intensity of challenges faced across gender were similar and students' reactions to challenges faced, across gender, seemed comparable. Perhaps in survey

research female international students share more than males. This could skew results and cause researchers to believe female international students have greater adjustment issues than males. More research should be conducted regarding this possibility. Or, the challenges faced by the students in this study, and their larger particular region student group, were so extreme that any difference by gender was not apparent, as all students seemed to face formidable adjustment challenges.

Some students among the group committed plagiarism while in the program which prompted several instructors to stereotype the entire student group as one that is always looking for shortcuts. Students repeatedly told instructors that language barrier was the culprit when they were approached about academic activities that were questionable.

Many students in the group had paid a Chinese agent considerable amounts of money to be placed in the U.S. doctoral program, while the agent also collected commissions from the university for his placing students until he was dismissed. Some students continued to send the Asian agent money on his command despite university officials telling the students there was no need to send money to him.

Particular instructors reportedly received several all expense paid trips to Asia, expensive original artwork, boxes of Cuban cigars, other expensive gifts, and questionable opportunities from the Asian agent. One instructor who was told his contract would not be renewed continued to do business with the agent and entities in Asia, acting as though he was still affiliated with the university, beyond his departure.

Some of the students paid large sums of cash to have their qualifying papers and dissertation proposals edited or ghost written by people outside of the university. Nearly all students in the group delivered gifts of food and trinkets to program instructors often, causing

awkward feelings between the group, other program student groups, and the instructors. Student hygiene and personal habits possessed by the particular international student group caused uneasiness among some program instructors.

The student group was polarized and isolated in large part because of some questionable academic behaviors of group members and because of negative stereotyping displayed by instructors and other students in the program. The student group caused some of the polarization by purposely isolating themselves from other student groups in the program, while some polarization resulted from beliefs and actions possessed by people in the program beyond the student group.

Attracting international students to U.S. doctoral programs is high stakes, economically. Currently two million students venture from their homes to obtain degrees in other countries. By 2025 it is estimated that eight million students will be seeking degrees beyond their countries of origin (Altbach, 2004).

There is a shift in the U.S. international student population and universities must consider academic, social, and cultural elements that affect students from countries that were previously underrepresented. Additionally, the Investigator discovered there are differences within this particular international student group by age. In other words, the international students who have not yet entered U.S. doctoral programs are much different than the international students currently in programs, per the perceptions of the students in the group studied.

The literature suggests U.S. education must shift to a multicultural, pluralistic paradigm (Bennett, 2007). Training should be in place for instructors to incorporate diverse perspectives in the classroom. International students should be made aware of the social mores and taboos of

the university's dominant culture. Training and awareness should lead to a multicultural covenant among all students and instructors in doctoral programs.

Doctoral programs can be enhanced by the cultural mosaic evident in many of them. Instead of the traditional melting pot approach to assimilating international students in U.S. higher education programs, a "mixed salad" approach of multiculturalism and pluralism should be considered and implemented (Bennett, 2007). Perhaps some programs already have such ideals in place but, in this particular program, basic needs of the international students were not being met.

International students cannot begin to think about how they contribute to a multicultural program while worrying about things like shelter and safety. Also, there was no organized effort to train instructors to utilize the diversity evident in the program. Any acceptance, on the part of the instructors, of the international students was accidental. The students often were targets of scorn by instructors in the program, whether it was warranted or not. Across the life of the study, it became evident the students studied felt as though the international students were in the program to enhance revenue for the university and nothing more.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, phenomenological studies shed light on program elements, and participants' perceptions therein, but it is important to acknowledge that such findings may or may not be applicable to the larger student population in the program and beyond.

Implications

Upon completion of the study the Investigator realized more questions were generated from the study than answers. Based on the study's findings, the Investigator believes the

following questions should be contemplated for further research by those interested in the complexities of U.S. universities hosting international students:

- How involved should the university be in securing safe and stable housing for international students in the program?
- What are the pedagogies of the professors in the program and how do they complement the international students in the program?
- What kind of training programs for faculty and staff will enhance the experiences of international students and others in the program?
- What sort of university orientation program should be in place to ease adjustment anxieties among international students?
- How competent do international program students need to be in their ability to speak and write English?
- How consistent do program professors need to be when evaluating writing mechanics and grammar in submitted international student and dominant culture student work?
- Should there be alternative forms of assessment for international students?
- Should measures be taken to cause English as first language program students in programs to be more empathic regarding the international students?
- How many international students from a particular country should be accepted into a particular doctoral program and what kind of impact does this have on the program and its students?
- To what extent should the university plan social gatherings for the international students?
- Should student honesty policies be the same for international students as American students in programs?

- Should policies be in place regarding gifts offered by international students and their agents to program professors?
- What policies should be in place regarding placement agents of international students?
- How can universities provide international students the best program experience possible?

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