Students of Different Minds: Bridging the Gaps of International Students Studying in the US[*]

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International students have constituted a growing population in American higher education in the past few decades. This study presented a case study of six international students' academic, cultural and social experiences during their stay in the US. Data obtained through interviews and the results of content analysis indicate that international students face significant financial, academic, psychological and emotional challenges coping with American academic, professional and social life. Bridging the cultural gaps between schools and international students is recommended for international students to succeed in build a community of learners.

Keywords: cultural gap, internationalization, international students

Introduction

Globalization and internationalization of business, industry and education have increased markedly in recent years. As a result, the numbers of international students enrolled in universities in the United States, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and other European countries increased drastically. Similarly, the number of American students studying abroad is on the rise (IIE (Institute of International Education), 2011; Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003).

There are multiple reasons for one to go overseas to obtain a higher degree. First, many developing countries do not have an adequate higher education infrastructure to support their growing educational needs and they encourage students with the means to seek degrees elsewhere (Trice, 2001). Second, in order to meet personal needs of academic and professional fulfillment, people choose to go abroad. Third, cultural exchange and learning a different language also serve to internationalize higher education as students increasingly go abroad to gain richer life experiences. The number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States exceed 723,000 during the 2010/2011 school years according to IIE (2011). This growth indicates that there are 32% more international students studying at US colleges and universities than there were 10 years ago. Although international student enrollment is increasing, this group of students does face various challenges.

International Students' Challenges in Higher Education

International students have a critical role in the internationalization of education (Arthur, 2004), as many of the international students return to their home countries and influence their countries' economic, political, educational and social situations. Arthur (2004) argued that the internationalization of higher education may

well serve as an important vehicle for individuals, schools and countries to be competitive in the global marketplace. Unquestionably, one positive effect of the globalization is that it "encourages" citizens of the world to learn different cultures and languages and this may explain the reason why more students are increasingly willing to leave their home countries and go abroad to pursue higher degrees or to learn different languages/cultures.

Pursuing a higher degree in America can lead to an overwhelming life and cultural transition for most international students. It is believed that international students experience greater difficulties than their American counterparts, as they adapt to a wide range of social and academic situations within the American academic community (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Curry & Copeman, 2005; Myles & Cheng, 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007), regardless of their high educational aspirations and academic skills (Zhai, 2002). Chief among the cultural differences experienced by international students in America is language (Wang & Frank, 2002). Curry and Copeman (2005) argued that international students came from more than 180 countries, where English was neither an official language nor a medium of instruction. As a result, most international students have to deal with language barriers, and at the same time, face challenges academically, culturally and emotionally (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Lacina (2002) and Zhai (2002) noted that most of the language difficulties were due to differences in accent, slang and use of special words. For that reason, the non-native speakers' academic work was very much affected by their language problems (Tucker, 2003).

In addition to changes associated with a language barrier and academic concerns, international students also face social and cultural changes (Arthur, 2004; Myles & Cheng, 2003). Because their families and social Networks are left behind in their home countries, international students have to build new social Networks and these Networks are often very different from their old ones (Lacina, 2002). Myles and Cheng (2003) stated that forming and maintaining friendships, taking the initiative in conversations and being willing to converse with native-speaking students are all essential for social adjustment. However, international students often experience cultural shocks during their initial years of adjusting to life and studies in a new environment (Wang & Frank, 2002). Because of widely differing past experiences and expectations, many international students feel rejected, have the sense of loss (being away from homes) or feel anxious in interacting with the local people. Some international students experience the phenomenon of alienation. According to Klomegah (2006, p. 304), alienation is the state of "feeling confused, lost, lonely, helpless and desire for dependence". Furthermore, Wang and Frank's (2002) findings suggest that international students' anxiety, confusion and depression can lead to loneliness, insomnia and physical illness.

Cultural differences also affect international students' ability to form social relationships (Lacina, 2002; Yeh & Yang, 2003). Each culture has its norm, beliefs, values and ways of life, and concepts, such as friendship, are viewed differently in different cultures. For example, Asian students typically like to socialize with each other after class, and as a result, they perceive American students to be distant and difficult to approach, because they do not spend time with each other as much as Asian students do. Cultural differences can also contribute to one's perceptions and his/her academic performance. In America, a two-way learning process in higher education has been practiced for decades, and active participation is always encouraged and rewarded. Curry and Copeman (2005, p. 411) noted that "American and Canadian educational environments reward students for participation, questioning and assertiveness in pursuit of independent research and original and creative work". However, this interplay between students and professors can be perceived as a difficulty for students from the cultures where they respect and regard their teachers as unimpeachable authorities. This

suggests that culture norms shape one's perceptions as he/she interacts with people from different cultures.

International students have many challenges to face and overcome while studying at American universities and language- and communication- related problems are seen as the biggest challenge for international students during their adjustment periods. In addition, other cultural differences present major challenges to international students. Previous studies suggested that much of the American higher education community had historically shown little interest in accommodating the special needs of international students (Allameh, 1989; Lacina 2002), although many of the world's top positions in education, politics and business are held by international students who attended American institutions. With the hope to internationalize higher education, several studies have shown that the number of universities that recognized the unique needs of international students is on the rise (Carr et al., 2003; Deardroff, 2009; Zhai, 2002). Many American colleges and universities now actively recruit students from overseas, and hope to increase intercultural awareness on their campuses and to promote intercultural awareness and develop internationalization of higher education. Arthur (2004) argued that many schools have started providing meaningful academic and support programs for international learners to become more involved in international education.

The Purpose of Study and Research Questions

International students face difficult adjustments to new cultural, linguistic and academic environments (Curry & Copeman, 2005). For that reason, this study examined the interplay between academic and non-academic demands to better understand this particular group of students' life experiences. This knowledge can broaden our understanding of the cultural, social, intellectual and personal challenges of international students and suggest means of overcoming the cultural gaps that limit the success of international students studying in the United States. The purpose of this research project is to examine international students' attitudes and perceptions about their academic, cultural and social experiences in America in order to bridge the cultural gaps. As the world is internationalized, it is time for the higher education to address issues of diversity in its policy (Myles & Cheng, 2003) and practice by providing a multicultural learning environment for both local and international students to learn to understand and respect each other. Now is the optimal time for all of us to contribute to the process of internationalization of education. Bridging the relationship between schools and international students is critical to their success and it helps all of us to learn to share our cultures, respect and accept each other. The research questions constructed for this study were: (1) What are international students' experiences while attending an American university; and (2) how do their perceptions, awareness of American cultures and attitudes towards American culture affect these experiences?

Ecological Framework

A person's behavior cannot be separated from his/her environment. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory focuses on the quality and context of the individual's environment. As the individual develops, the interaction within these environments becomes more complex. In order to understand the needs of an individual, attention must be directed to the characteristics of a specific context, setting and the interaction of the individual's immediate and wider environment as they interact continuously. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that human behavior varied by environmental context. International students who come from different countries to study in the US have to learn to survive fairly quickly to succeed academically and socially in a new environment. It is inevitable for international students to change their behavior and to shift their thinking

patterns while attending school in the US. They have to constantly think and rethink about what is appropriate or expected to say and act while referring to their religious practices, family values and traditions and societal norms. In other words, international students' awareness of the local culture and societal norms endlessly interact with their old frames of reference.

This study was intended to understand the lived experiences of international students. The researcher was interested in finding out how international students' adjusted their psychological, social and academic behavior to fit in. Previous researches found various challenges that international students face through surveys (Wang & Frank, 2002) and interviews (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Yeh & Yang, 2003). While many researchers have explored international students' academic achievements and social adaptation processes, they tended to look at these issues separately. In contrast, this study viewed international students' academic, cultural and social experiences as equally important and intertwined. The present study attempted to gain insights into the academic, cultural and social life of both undergraduate and graduate international students attending an American university. Acknowledgement of students' needs and recognition of the challenges they face are hoped to reduce the gap between the international students and the school community.

Methodology

To best answer the research questions, a qualitative research method was employed, specifically, and a case study protocol was utilized. Exploring international students' beliefs, perceptions and feelings about their social and cultural experiences is critical in order to understand how they learn to adapt to the new culture and meet the challenges they face in the process. To gain insights into each participant's experiences of living in America, data for this study were collected through interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Myles and Cheng (2003) suggested that interviewing is the best technique to gather information regarding international students' living experience in America.

Setting

This study was conducted in a suburban area in the Southeast United States. There were more than 2,000 international students enrolling in this research in a public university that has a study body of nearly 45,000. The international students were from more than 100 different countries on its main campus. However, more than half of the international students were from Asia and nearly 70% of the international students were graduate students. The university has an international student center that provides intensive social and academic assistance to all international students.

Participants

The participants were conveniently drawn from the population of international students who regularly attended one of the school's social events. Participants were approached by the researcher and six students agreed to take part in the study. Three male and three female students participated in this study: two undergraduate and four graduate students rang from their early 20s to early 30s (see Table 1). The range of the participants' years of stay in America was from one to seven and all participants were single at the time when the study took place. Participants came from Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and Korea, to Turkey and Spain. Participants' fields of study were education, engineering, international affairs, medicine, information studies and vertebrate paleontology. For confidentiality purposes, students will be referred to with pseudonyms.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Participants

	Name	Country of origin	Year in US	Undergraduate/graduated	Major	Age
1	Kim	Korea	4	G (partially funded[*])	Information studies	32
2	Yunily	Hong Kong	7	U (not funded)	Premed	23
3	Kent	Turkey	5	G (funded[**])	Education	28
4	Noriko	Japan	4	U (not funded)	International affairs	23
5	Robert	Spain	3	G (funded[***])	Vertebrate paleontology	30
6	Charlie	Taiwan	1	G (partially founded[*])	Industrial engineering	26

Notes. [*]partial tuition waiver from his or her department; [**]fully funded by his home government; [***]fully funded by his department.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview protocol was employed in this study. All interviews took place in an informal setting to allow interviewees to speak freely (Bogdan & Biken, 2007). Four interviews were conducted at a community coffee house and two were conducted by a lake in a neighborhood park. Each participant was asked various questions regarding their social, cultural and academic experiences in America. Guided questions were generated based on previous studies (Myles & Cheng, 2003), and on the researcher's own experience of living in America as an international student. Although the researcher generated guided questions before the interview, she did not follow a strict sequence of questions. Rather, depending upon how each individual responded to questions asked, participants were free to take over the lead in continuing the conversation. When the individuals wanted to reveal more of their perspectives, they would not be stopped. Several relevant questions emerged during the interactions dependent upon how engaged each individual was, but participants generally remained on topic throughout the process of answering questions, and redirection was not required. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data obtained from interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed. Memos were written occasionally, while the author was going through their answers. For instance, there was a memo about Robert's (2008) response to cultural shock, "No cultural shock, because he is a white European???". While the author was reading each individual participant's transcripts, phrases, words, thoughts, feelings or patterns that were common or repeated were circled. When similarities on patterns of thoughts appeared, the author jotted down what she thought the messages tried to convey. Very often, the author came across sub-themes, such as perceptions of American culture, learning experience in general, difficulties encountered as a student in America and so forth on the transcripts. In addition, the author tried to group the answers based on the themes that appeared repeatedly. Specifically, participants spoke of themes regarding academic work, social life, cultural experiences and the social services that were considered vital to them.

Participants' home cultures were considered while analyzing the data, as they appeared to affect the ways participants perceive, react to and interact with things and people in a very unique way. In the process of data analysis, the following questions emerged for content analysis:

(1) What things were similar and dissimilar with things back home?

(2) Was age, gender or home culture that caused the participants to react differently to certain situations or problems faced?

(3) How did prior encounters affect their reactions to situations in America?

(4) How much do those previous experiences affect adjustment periods?

(5) How large a factor is personality?

Results

Data of this study revealed that international students faced various challenges. Five main categories created from the data were: (1) academic work; (2) social life; (3) cultural experiences in America; (4) social service/support; and (5) financial support. Each of these categories was instrumental in demarcating the nature of adult international students' experiences in America.

Academic Work

Previous studies suggest that the language barrier is the international students' biggest challenge during their early adjustment periods (Lacina, 2002; Tucker, 2003; Zhai, 2002). The findings of this study suggest that all students experienced significant difficulties academically during their early adjustment stage and the language barrier was the major factor contributed to how well they did academically. This finding is consistent with that of previous research: International students who did not have adequate English language abilities faced tremendous difficulties in school (Zhai, 2002). All six participants in this study reported that, in coming to America to pursue their degrees, getting good grades was their priority. When the participants did not do as well as expected, they felt disappointed and stressed. For example, Kim stated, "The insufficient language skills often make me feel bad. I am not able to generate or write scholarly papers and I have difficulties communicating with my professors and classmates". Charlie also commented,

> I feel like quitting school and going home because I cannot understand my professors talk about in class. I mean (the) language barrier is the biggest challenge for me, because I do not understand many of their (professors) questions so I cannot answer.

In addition to the language problem, international students also faced another challenge that was related to their academic performances. The majority of the participants stated that studying in America was very different because of the different teaching style and interaction with professors. Many of them stated that they often felt stressed and appeared less "smart" as compared to their American peers because of insufficient knowledge about the American educational system and teaching styles. For example, Charlie commented, "I am not used to asking for help from my teachers or talking in class, so sometimes, they think I am dumb!". Research has shown that close teacher/student collaboration can lead to positive outcomes for international students academically (Myles & Cheng, 2003). In this study, many of the international students who worked closely with their professors tended to do better in school, and most of the participants expressed the needs to be close to their teachers in order to do well academically. Those who were not close to their teachers also believed that if they could interact more with their professors, they would do better in school. Noriko and Charlie both agreed that they did not want to disappoint their teachers because of their close interaction. Kim further explained, "My advisor always tries to be warm and understanding though I do not speak English that well. If it were not for her being there for me, I would have had quit the school long time ago".

Social Life

The older participants found it harder to engage in new social circles. Often times, international students feel homesick, lonely and lacking support for mental or/and emotional fulfillment (Lacina, 2002), because they

do not have time or ways to form a new social life. This study has found that the younger the age of the participant was when he/she moved to America, the shorter the period of adaptation process he/she needed. The youngest participant (Yunily) and the oldest participant (Kim) of this study related,

> Lately, I have been hanging out with the break dancers, because I have been learning how to break dance and they are just really fun people to hang out with. They are Americans, Asians, Europeans, too. Then there is also a mixture of old friends, because I do not want to lose contact with them. I mean Asians, because I like to hang out with them to be close to my similar culture and Christians because I need that religion vibe around me (Yunily).

> In the beginning, I did need some Americans to practice my English, but then I did not have time, because I had to study all the time. I felt more comfortable to hang out with my own people. But nowadays, I do not hang out with anyone. Because I do not have time to go out; I do not feel like doing that anymore. Now, I just want to finish my studies and leave (Kim).

Research has revealed that international students tended to associate with people from their own culture for many reasons (Myles & Cheng, 2003). Kent's comment supported that notion,

> Being a student in America must be very nice, but being an international student is no fun. I have difficulties being a part of the social environment. Possible reasons for that are my inadequate English abilities and we have different cultures/customs and the differences in perception of the class. Regarding the differences, in my home country, people always hang out together after class. Here, people do not do that.

Cultural Experiences in America

According to Arthur (2004), international students have the potential ability to develop cultural flexibility, because it is a way to adapt to culture shock. It is, therefore, essential to discover how each participant developed this survival mechanism. Participants in this study had both negative and positive cultural experiences in America; they had different perceptions of American culture based on their previous encounters and preparations prior to their living in America. Noriko, a very outspoken and well-adjusted female student who has been to America for four years, commented,

> Most of them (Americans) are open-minded and nice, or they try to pretend to be, so that they will not look impolite. It is the American culture. They smile at strangers and greet "hi".

> I like this custom. But they do not necessarily accept you as a person but respect you as a person. I really like this perspective of theirs…

Noriko also found that to "act like an American" helped her days go by easier; she had made hundreds of friends, since she came to America. On the contrary, Kent reacted very differently. He tried to avoid many cultural and social events or contacts with the local people and community. He commented, "I have tried to make friends with Americans, but it is not easy. I guess they just do not like to hang out with foreigners".

Participants of this study perceived Americans as nice people and America as a country of diverse cultures. Openness and politeness were addressed by half of the participants. Yunily believed that the culture was diverse in America, because anyone and everyone could be an American. Her perception was echoed by Robert's perception that America was a country of many origins and cultures.

Social Services/Support

Many studies suggest that a supportive campus environment is essential for assisting international students to attain their academic and personal goals of studying in a new culture (Arthur, 2004; Geelhoed et al., 2003). Results of this study indicate that international students were well aware of the services the school provided,

and they believed that the school had done a good job of promoting intercultural awareness and assisting international students in many aspects. Also, they all agreed that they needed a support system to cope with various difficulties. Yunily, who has been in America the longest, suggested that services that helped international students to get to know the place they live in or services that mingled locals with international students, as well as language classes would be most helpful.

Financial Support

Financial support can be extremely critical for the success of international students who have limited financial resources. Half of the participants did not receive financial support from the university or their governments. In spite of the fact was that their parents supported them while attending the school, they had the fear that their parents eventually would not be able to support them. Kim explained that even with an assistantship, she was not able to live with the amount of money offered by the university. She said that, "I still need to ask my parents to send me money, because my salary is not enough to cover my expenses". Among those who did not have full assistantships, two had worked part-time either in the library or the computer lab to make some money. The main reason for that, as Yunily commented, was that, "Even though my mother fully supports me to come to the States to study, it is quite expensive to live in America. So, I have worked in the lab from time to time just to make extra money". Because the living cost in America is usually higher than that of international students' countries, financial support can be crucial.

Discussion

This study looked into various factors that affected international students' academic, cultural and social experiences. Language- and communication- related issues remained the main challenge for international students. This finding was in accordance with what Zhai (2002) suggested that many international students often felt overwhelmed, because they were not familiar with the American active academic teaching and learning style. Additionally, having a close relationship with teachers could also contribute to international students' academic achievement. It was found that Asian students typically regarded their teachers highly and that maintaining a close relationship with their professors motivated them to do well in school. It also became evident that professors play a major role in internationalization of higher education and have a great impact on their students both locally and internationally. This significance of professors in the internationalization process is an important issue to investigate further.

This study found age was an important factor in international students' participation in social events. For example, Yunily and Noriko took the initiative to befriend people they met and engaged themselves more in different social events and meeting friends than older participants. In contrast, Kim literally shut herself off from most social contacts, because she did not have time or desire to socialize with people. Certainly, one's position of being an undergraduate or a graduate student could also explain the reason why younger international students tended to have a bigger social Network than their counterparts. Without question, international students' perceptions about Americans also influenced the ways they saw and built their social circles. This might explain the reason why international students were more likely to socialize with international students (especially from their own country) than with American students, because they not only shared language and culture, but also hardships and experiences.

Many studies suggest that cultural differences are significant challenges for international students who try

to adapt and adjust to the new environment (Arthur, 2004; Lacina, 2002; Zhai, 2002). Results of this study indicated that participants encountered cultural differences in many aspects of their lives in America. Some tried to cope with the differences by assimilating and some chose to stay with their cultures and minimize their interaction with Americans. For example, Robert, a student from Spain, did not see much of the difference between a non-Spaniard friend and Spaniard one, so he would socialize with anyone and everyone. This could well explain how culture influences the socializing of international students. Robert is a white European and does not appear different from his American peers. In addition, because his home culture is relatively similar to American culture, Robert dose not experience as difficult a transition as the other participants. Similarly, when international students adjust themselves by internalizing what they consider is American culture and blending it with their own schema, they can also shorten the transition period. Recognizing norms and customs of mainstream American culture shortly after she arrived in the United States, Noriko assimilated and accommodated her ways of thinking and behaving in order to better fit the society.

This study uncovered the negative survival mechanism of withdrawal in one of the participants. Kent avoided opportunities of meeting new people and learning different cultures, while feeling safe in his own social and cultural circle. By withdrawing himself from social and cultural events and activities, Kent avoided the possibility of becoming a victim of discrimination or rejection by members of the local culture. The pain individuals, who have been victims of discrimination, experienced, can be detrimental and long-lasting, and this psychological phenomenon is an important area of further research. International students' experience of transition provides them with opportunities to learn new ways of relating and responding to cross-cultural experiences (Arthur, 2004), and it is evident that these experiences help transform international students' perceptions about themselves and the world.

This study found that providing social services was critical in terms of helping international students coping with difficulties and this finding was consistent with those of previous studies. Researchers have suggested that program that organizes cultural orientations, cultural events, language classes and peer support groups should be implemented (Arthur, 2004; Carr et al., 2003; Myles & Cheng, 2003), and that, as the world is internationalized, it is time for the higher education to address issues of diversity in its policy and practice by providing a multicultural learning environment for both local and international students to learn to understand and respect each other. These views are supported by what participants of this study perceived about this globe and things that they would like to engage in while living in America.

In addition to the academic, emotional and psychological factors that affect international students' perceptions and experiences, financial constraint can also be an important factor. Participants in the study experienced some anxiety when they did not have any financial support from school. International students have to pay out-of-state tuition throughout their studies and because the cost of living in America is often more expensive than in their home countries, their financial burden could be substantial. This often causes stress for international students and why international students become worried about their financial status, they can lose their focus on studies while working to make ends meet. As a result, they do not have time for social and cultural activities that might otherwise be enriching and beneficial and this partially explains the reason why some students rarely attend social or cultural events organized by the school or community.

The results of this study provided information about international students' experiences, as they interacted with their academic and social communities. The particular experiences each participant encountered surely differed, and that the process uncovered only a partial picture of their complete experience was revealed. The

factors that contributed to their reactions and interactions with American academia and culture were not as simple as they appeared and they were actually much more complex. There were many emotional, psychological and financial components added in their experiences (see Figure 1). Figure 1 indicates that while examining international students' lived experiences, all these factors should be considered.
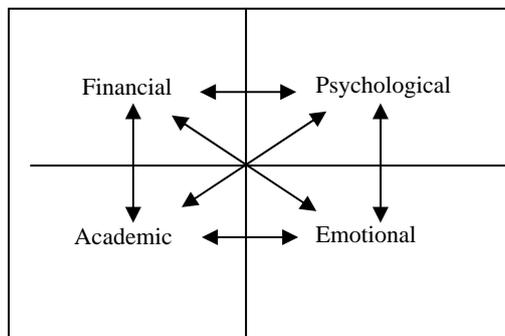

Figure 1. Factors that affect international students' perceptions and attitudes.

This study utilized an ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) to investigate, interpret and analyze the data. It helps us pay attentions to individuals' frame of reference as well as the current cultural, social, political context in which they live. It became clear that attempting to look at these interplayed factors holistically would be a great help to better understand the participants' perceptions, reactions, feelings and critiques about culture during analysis process. These factors helped to explain the reason why international students had particular mindsets and attitudes towards America, American culture, social life and how well they did in school. For that reason, participants' home cultures were considered while interpreting the data, as they appeared to affect the ways participants perceive, react to and interact with things and people in a very unique way. This study indicated that the psychological, financial, academic and emotional factors were intricately intertwined and should not be overlooked. As such, further investigation into the interaction American culture and participants' existing schema (culture) during this new life experience is desirable.

Limitations and Implications

Given that the participants were recruited in one of the school social events, the data may not be representative of the whole group of international students and this study made no attempt to generalize the results to the entire population of international student at American universities. Another limitation is this study took place in a public university in Florida. For that reason, the results may not be representative of other students in other universities and/or other states.

Despite of these limitations, this study rendered useful information about international students' academic, cultural and social experiences in America. Participants' accounts of their respective cultural backgrounds and academic experiences in the US inform a greater understanding of their perspectives. It is hoped that findings from this study can be used to assist international students, while they adapt to academic life in America. Furthermore, findings of this study can be used to assist academic administrators, international center staff and faulty to better understand who the international students are in order to better assist them to adjust and achieve their goals.

As Tucker (2003, p. 3) asked, "How do you really help someone learn if they do not think, read, write or study in the same way that you do?", so should all participate in the process of internationalization of higher

education. No matter how great our contribution to this process, there is an eternal impact on international students' perceptions. Based on Noriko's story, early contact with American culture and influence by "cultural ambassadors" in the academic environment seems to make a significant and lasting impact on international students' perceptions. This study argues that providing social support in the process of assisting international students towards their goals of making a successful life transition is an important topic of future research.

It is important for international students to be informed of the services that are available to them because language, cultural differences and academic pressure often isolate them from the indigenous campus community. The participants of this study emphasize the need academic institutions to reach international students and inform them of the types of services that are available. Learning is an ongoing process for all who are a part of the internationalization of education, and if international students have positive encounters while they are in school, they will be more willingly to share their experiences with others and become effective peer helpers to new comers on all campus.

The increasing interaction between local and international students could also be a rewarding cultural experience for the local teachers, students and staff. Higher education institutions provide an opportunity to meet people from around the world and to gain an understanding of different cultures. In this era of dramatically increasing globalization, it is critical for faculty and staff to be culturally responsive to the international students' different needs. If American college students are not able to travel far, they still can engage in intergroup dialogue in person on a college campus, provided that the environment is safe and pleasant, such an encounter can reduce cultural barriers and prejudice as well as contribute to intercultural competences (Goncalves, 2011). Bridging the relationship between American schools and international students will help international students to succeed as well as encourage faculty, staff and students to share their cultures and respect and accept one another. To conclude, Robert relates,

> I have seen horrible and wonderful things I could only see on TV in Spain. I met an extraordinary diversity of people from many different backgrounds and cultures, and being in touch with many different ways to understand the world and life… So in all aspects, moving out of Spain changed the way I see and understand the world. And it is an ongoing process I am still in.

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