

FIRST-YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEIVED IMPACT
OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE

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Abstract: As international student attendance on college campuses in the US continues to increase in record numbers, International Student Services (ISS) offices across the country are tasked with providing services to aid the growing number and variety of sojourners in their transition to life on campus in the United States. This dissertation is a qualitative investigation into the relationship first-year international students from various regions of the world report having with the ISS office on a large, Midwestern, public university. In this dissertation, I explored how sojourners in their first year of study in the US perceived the impact the ISS office had on their educational experiences. This study aimed to explore these perceptions by interviewing nine international students at the beginning, middle, and end of their first year of study in the US, interviewing the Director of the ISS office, observing three international student events on campus, and analyzing documents produced by the ISS office. The study found that the sojourners were generally adventurous, social, and determined people who had a decreasing amount of contact with the ISS office over the course of the semester. The students reported that the ISS office had an impact on only a few areas of their overall experience in the US, but those areas (travel documents, orientation to the campus, and enrollment) were vital to having a positive experience in the US. The Director of the ISS office reported that their role was to coordinate in the background with entities across campus and the community to help sojourners adjust to campus life while maintaining the role of safety net for the students. The findings suggest that the ISS office had a much larger impact on the lives of sojourners than the students perceived. Given the positive experiences reported by each of the sojourners, the approach taken by the ISS office in this study appeared to work well on their campus.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

International students are attending institutions of higher education in the United States in record numbers. The Institute of International Education (IIE) reports that during the 2012-2013 academic year, 819,644 international students attended colleges and universities in the United States, an increase of 7.2% over the previous year (IIE, 2013b). As international student attendance continues to increase, International Student Services (ISS) offices across the country are tasked with providing services to aid the growing number and variety of sojourners in their transition to life on campus in the United States. Although many institutions are expanding the ISS offices on their campuses in an attempt to better serve their international students, there has been relatively little research devoted to the relationships international students have with the ISS office from the viewpoint of the student. Additionally, some studies show that many ISS services are underutilized by the international student population (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Trice, 2004). This study is a qualitative investigation into the relationship first-year international students from various regions of the world report having with their ISS office, an investigation not found in the review of literature. In addition, this dissertation contributes to research in the area of ISS in the United States, a burgeoning topic of interest due to the increase in international student populations on domestic campuses.

The aim of this dissertation is to better understand how international students perceive the impact their interactions with the ISS office have on their lives as sojourners in the United States. The research contained herein is a case study based on interviews of nine international students, natural observation of three ISS events, and an analysis of documents from a large, public, research university in the Midwest. This introductory chapter provides the background for the research, a problem statement which served as the basis for the research, an explanation of the significance of the study, a brief overview of the methodology, and the delimitations of the study along with definitions of key words. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

Background of the Study

International students have attended American institutions of higher education since 1784 when Francisco de Miranda of South America began his studies at Yale University (Cieslak, 1955). However, international student populations did not begin to show large increases in enrollment until the 20th century following both World War I and World War II. After World War I in 1919, the Institute of International Education (IIE) was established with the purpose of encouraging peace between nations through educational exchange of students and faculty. The IIE's first president, Stephen Duggan, Sr. lobbied successfully for a new category of nonimmigrant student visa that bypassed the immigrant quotas established by the Immigration Act of 1921 (IIE, 2013a). The creation of the IIE and the nonimmigrant student visa provided the first major influx of international students into the United States. Following World War II, The Fulbright Act of 1946 paved the way for the next major increase.

The Fulbright Act of 1946 utilized funds from post-war surplus sales around the globe to increase funding for and expand the IIE's international educational exchange programs (Jeffrey, 1987). With increased governmental support, both legislatively and economically, the United States saw its second surge in international student enrollment; by the end of the 1948-1949 academic year there were 25,464 international students in the United States, accounting for 1.1% of all students (IIE, 2013b). Although the number of international students studying domestically increased steadily after World War II, colleges and universities did not begin to consider many of the effects and responsibilities inherent in this increase until the end of the 20th century (Ping, 1999).

At the end of the 20th century, most services offered to international students involved social programs designed to introduce sojourners to other sojourners as well as domestic students, and counseling services designed to aid in the acculturation process (Trice, 2004; Pedersen, 1991). As well-intentioned as they were, ISS typically involved helping the international student learn how to act more "American" rather than increasing the internationalization of the campus through cultural exchange between sojourners and the institution (Pedersen, 1991). As research into the international student experience increased (e.g., Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Trice, 2004), ISS offices began to have a modest amount of data to guide their practice in serving the growing population of international students on their campuses. However, with another rapid increase in sojourner enrollment on domestic campuses from the turn of the millennium to the present day, a greater understanding of sojourners' experiences became an even greater priority for ISS offices.

In the 2000-2001 academic year, there were 547,867 international students in the United States accounting for 3.7% of all students on U.S. campuses (IIE, 2013b). As stated earlier, the 2012-2013 academic year saw 819,644 international students studying domestically accounting for 3.9% of all students on U.S. campuses. This rapid growth in international student enrollment creates numerous challenges for ISS offices charged with providing a positive college experience to a multi-cultural population that is increasing at a rate never seen previously in the history of American higher education. With a growing knowledge base of the unique needs of sojourners comes a responsibility to address these needs as best as possible. However, the services and programs offered to international students typically must both maximize limited monetary and personnel resources and also provide a positive educational, social, and personal experience for international students who will share with others around the world their experiences on campuses in the United States. If ISS offices are successful, they will fulfill the vision of the IIE and The Fulbright Act of 1946 of providing global diplomacy through international educational exchange.

Problem Statement

With record numbers of international students attending colleges and universities in the United States, many institutions continue to commit significant resources toward ISS to help international students adjust socially, emotionally, and educationally to attending college in the United States. However, research indicates that international students do not report extensive use of the services provided by the ISS office; frequently, a small percentage of international students attend the campus events planned for them (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Trice, 2004). The exponential increase in

international student attendance in recent years suggests that many sojourners have positive experiences on US campuses. Consequently, a more thorough knowledge of how international students view the ISS office and its services would provide a better understanding of the relationship between international students and the ISS office, and the impact that the relationship has on the lives of international students.

Professional Significance of the Study

Increasing the knowledge of the impact of the ISS office on the lives of sojourners will benefit researchers, ISS offices, and the students they serve. Although there are quantitative studies utilizing data typically from student satisfaction surveys (e.g., Korobova & Starobin, 2008), this dissertation represents a view of the ISS office through the eyes of the international student on whom the efforts of the ISS office are focused. This is a unique perspective. By bringing this viewpoint to light, this dissertation expands research into the area of ISS in the United States, for which minimal research is devoted. Research has not kept pace with the dramatic increase in international student enrollment over the last decade. Given the relatively recent attention to the expansion of ISS offices on campuses in the United States, it is not surprising that there is a deficit of research dedicated to international students' interactions with the ISS office. Even less common is a qualitative study on the topic. Clark (2002) and Weller (2012) provide the only two dissertations found during the review of the literature for this study, with Clark's being a pure qualitative study and Weller's utilizing mixed methods. Additionally, Ang and Liamputtong (2008) provide the only journal article found on the topic that utilizes qualitative methods.

Although Clark (2003), Weller (2012), and Ang and Liamputtong (2008) focused mainly on students from China, this dissertation examined the international student experience of sojourners from multiple countries. By doing so, this study investigated a breadth of experiences in the hopes of discovering similarities, differences, and patterns that not only can add to the current knowledge base of ISS but also spur additional research into the needs of students attending US colleges and universities from across the world. A brief overview of the methodology follows.

Overview of Methodology

Epistemology and Theoretical Perspective

For the purposes of this chapter, a concise overview of the methodology for this study is presented. However, a full description of the methodology appears in chapter three. Because I wanted to explore the perceived impact of the ISS office from the perspective of international students, I approached this study with an epistemology of constructionism. A constructionism epistemology asserts that truth and reality are constructed by those who experienced certain phenomena and applied meaning to it (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, to examine the truth and reality of the international students' experiences with the ISS office, this study attempted to understand the meaning international students apply to their experiences. Although a constructionism epistemology could entail multiple theoretical perspectives, the theoretical perspective of this study is interpretivism.

Through an interpretivism perspective, this study examined how international students have interpreted and assigned meaning to their experiences based on their own perceptions (Crotty, 2003). The perceptions of their experiences with others may have

been influenced by many factors, including the settings and contexts of events, their native culture, their own personality, or the overall nature of the social interactions. By investigating deeply and descriptively the sojourners' perceptions and the factors that influenced them, this study describes the sojourners' experiences with the ISS office as accurately as possible. Because this study stemmed from a constructionism epistemology and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, qualitative research methods were utilized to gather and analyze the data.

Qualitative Research and Case Study

Qualitative research is an inductive form of inquiry because it involves immersion in the data to find themes and patterns, by exploring then confirming the data through analytic principles rather than rules. Qualitative research is often used when a researcher proposes to discover and understand phenomena through the meaning that groups or individuals assign to it (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research primarily utilizes interviews, observations, and document analysis to gather data, though other techniques may be employed (Patton, 2002). Although qualitative researchers can utilize a variety of methods, this dissertation is a case study.

Case studies involve deep exploration of a particular phenomenon during a certain period of time using a variety of methods to gain a greater understanding of the phenomenon in depth and detail (Creswell, 2009; Stake, 1995)). This dissertation, more specifically, is an intrinsic case study, which Stake (1995) defines as a case study that focuses on a particular case due to intrinsic interest in the case, not because it will provide information about other phenomena or other cases. Intrinsic case studies differ from instrumental case studies, which aim to gain general understanding of a larger

phenomenon by studying a particular case, and collective case studies, which examine several case studies together to understand a larger phenomenon (Stake, 1995). This study is an intrinsic case study because it stemmed from an intrinsic interest in the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of the nine international students at the university in this study, rather than an interest in using the data to understand a particular phenomenon in ISS or in analyzing multiple case studies to understand a larger ISS phenomenon.

Research questions

Utilizing intrinsic case study methods, this study explored three research questions:

1. What types of experiences with the ISS office do international students in their first year of study in the United States report?
2. What impressions do the international students have of their experiences with the ISS office?
3. How do international students describe the impact that their experiences with the ISS office have on their overall experience of being a college student in the United States?

These questions were explored using the following methods of data collection and analysis, which are consistent with intrinsic case study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected using the qualitative methods of interviews, natural observation, and document collection with particular emphasis placed on the interview data. Interviews of nine international students in their first year of study in the

United States comprise one set of data. Students were interviewed at the beginning, middle, and end of their first semester on campus to gain a broad understanding of their interactions with the ISS office over time. Students were purposefully selected from varying regions around the world to provide a diversity of cultural backgrounds and history. The students in this study were a freshman male from Saudi Arabia, two junior females from China, a freshman male from India, a sophomore male from Malaysia, a freshman male from Uganda, a freshman male from Russia, a senior female from Chile, and a female graduate student from Germany. In this variety of backgrounds lied the possibility for greater breadth of experiences with the ISS office. The interviews were conducted on the campus of a large, public, research university in the Midwest in a private study room in the main library, and each interview lasted roughly 30-60 minutes. After the student interviews were concluded, an interview was conducted with “Jim”, the Director of International Student Services at MU, to better understand his perspective of the role of the ISS office on the lives of sojourners. This interview was conducted following the student interviews to allow the student interviews to proceed without preconception on my part (intentional or otherwise) regarding their experiences with the ISS office. Interviews were recorded for sound and additional notes taken to capture information not found in the audio recordings.

An additional data set was natural observations of three ISS office-sponsored events which included two international student orientations (one in the fall semester and one in the spring semester) and an international bazaar where all international student organizations set up booths in a convention hall to share and celebrate their cultures through playing music, selling food, etc. Students (both international and domestic),

faculty, staff, and administration were invited to attend. The ISS office sponsors events to aid sojourners in their transition to studying in the United States. Observing events sponsored by the ISS provided first-hand knowledge of events that students would possibly discuss during their interviews as well as a greater understanding of how sojourners interact socially during events. The observation of the three ISS events was conducted through the use of video and audio recording via a tablet video recorder and a cell phone, and also initial written field notes taken during and immediately following the events. By using a tablet recorder and cell phone, I was able to make spoken jottings onto the recording without interrupting the activities and review the activities (including peripheral activities that may have been missed otherwise) multiple times in the data analysis process. During the three events, short interviews with attendees who were not of the nine formal interviews discussed previously were conducted to add rich context and additional perspectives to the observations.

In addition to subject interviews and natural observations, public documents created by the ISS office were collected as part of the data. For an international student to learn about an institution in the United States, apply to the institution, and, eventually attend the institution, the institution must produce multiple documents to attract the student and prepare them for their transition to studying in the United States and, in particular, their campus. In addition, when attending a university, a sojourner can find several documents associated with the transition to life as a student in the United States. In this study, a collection of the documents produced by the ISS office provided further understanding of the relationship between the ISS office and the sojourner described during student interviews by showing how the ISS office reaches out to and supports

sojourners along their journey on campus. By interviewing subjects three times during the course of their first semester, interviewing MU's Director of ISS, performing natural observations of ISS events, and collecting ISS documents, I increased the understanding of the phenomenon of interest and the depth and detail of the data (Patton, 2002).

Once data were collected, the process of analysis began. The data analysis process was completed using MAXQDAplus 11 qualitative data analysis software. By uploading interview transcripts, video records, and documents into the MAXQDA program, they could be analyzed, compared, and coded according to the following data analysis process. The first process of data analysis was initial coding. During initial coding, a broad examination of the data occurred and the data were broken down into general themes, similarities, and differences (Saldaña, 2013). Following the initial coding process, the data was further analyzed using pattern coding. In this process, data from the initial coding process was placed into more general groups based on emergent patterns and themes (Saldaña, 2013). Through prolonged engagement with the data using initial and pattern coding processes, a thorough analysis of the data was accomplished. Data analysis was performed for both individual subjects as well as across subjects to provide rich description of both individual student experiences as well as common, shared experiences amongst sojourners. Given that this dissertation is a case study, the analysis of the data is presented as case reports. Chapter four contains narrative descriptions of the case reports of the natural observations and of the interviews with Jim and the nine sojourners. Chapter five contains the findings across the case reports. Chapter six contains the final summary and discussion for this dissertation.

Delimitations and Definitions

Delimitations

There are several delimitations associated with this study. First, this study was conducted at a single site. The site was a large, public, research university in a small, somewhat isolated town in the Midwest. No other data were collected from a separate site. Second, the subjects of the study were purposefully chosen from several regions around the world rather than from a single country or region. Third, the observed ISS events were specifically chosen. Though other ISS events occurred on campus throughout the year, the orientations were chosen due to the required attendance of every new international student, and the International Bazaar was chosen because most ISOs participated in the event. Fourth, the set of interview questions was developed to elicit information regarding the sojourners' relationships with the ISS office. Although the interviews often involved discussion of many aspects of the students' educational experiences, the questions specifically targeted information regarding the ISS office. Finally, the students were in their first semester of study at MU. Students involved in studies at MU past their first semester were not considered. Given these delimitations, this study was a focused investigation into the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of sojourners in their first semester of study at MU.

Definitions

The following definitions are used in this research study.

International students/sojourners: students whose country of origin is not the United States or Canada, who do not hold dual US citizenship, and who are in their first year of

study on a campus in the United States. Canadian citizens are excluded from this study due to Canada's proximity to the United States and similarity of culture.

International Student Services (ISS) office: the group of offices on campus that coordinate services for international students in their first year of study. In this study these were coordinated under a main office in the Student Union.

Summary

International students are attending institutions of higher education in the United States in record numbers. The first connection to the university occurs typically through the ISS office. Therefore, understanding the view that international students have of this office can provide new perspectives in the study of ISS. This dissertation is a qualitative study investigating how nine international students at a large, public, research university in the Midwest perceive the impact that their interactions with the ISS office had on their lives as sojourners studying in the United States. This study aims to help fill a gap in the amount of qualitative research on ISS and to provide insight into the experiences of international students from a variety of regions around the world. The remainder of this dissertation includes a review of the literature, a full description of the methodology used to complete the study, findings for individual subjects, findings across all subjects, and a summary and discussion of the entire dissertation.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter Format

This chapter delineates the review of existing literature on the impressions that international students have of the impact that the ISS office has on their lives as first-year students in the United States. The following section of this chapter is a description of the process utilized to search the literature. Subsequent to the search process is a chronological literature review of student services in higher education. The review is interwoven with major historical documents and research that specifically impacted international student attendance and the provision of ISS in the United States, respectively. Concurrently, the literature review describes major theories in the areas of both student development and ISS as they apply to practice in ISS. The literature review begins with the early role of the faculty in student development and the emergence of the position of Dean of Students followed by the creation of professional organizations dedicated to improving the practice of student services. The next section discusses the major legislation and theories associated with international students. This discussion then leads to the majority of the formal research that occurred in tandem with the increase in the international student population during the late 20th century through the present. By reviewing the literature chronologically, this chapter demonstrates the development of ISS over time and leads logically to the current state of research in the area.

Search Process

The search process began with a broad scan of the student services and international student literature utilizing the databases ERIC and ProQuest along with a search of textbooks, trade publications on both subjects (most especially publications produced by NASPA – the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators), and searching the journals *Review of Research Education* and *Review of Educational Research*. This provided a general overview of the amount of literature available on both topics and a starting point for narrowing the research topic. The search process also introduced the general theories associated with both international students and student services in general.

From this broad scan, a more focused review of literature directed specifically at international students was performed, including chapters in textbooks and trade publications, and ERIC and ProQuest databases. However, for this focused review more detailed searches were performed by entering increasingly specific terms in the search functions of the databases. This rendered a more narrow view of the literature that indicated a great increase in the research appearing in books and journals beginning around the early 1980s. Finally, a comprehensive critique of the literature was performed on the specific topic of international student impressions of the ISS office and on research performed in roughly the last ten years. This focus on the most recent research is due to an overall desire to engage with the latest research and to make the best assessment of where the field may be headed in the future. This final review revealed that there is little qualitative data regarding international students' impressions of the ISS office. This may be due to several factors, including the relatively recent nature of the proliferation of ISS

offices on United States campuses and, therefore, the limited amount of time for the field to collect great quantities of data. Following are the results of this review of the literature in a chronological format designed to provide an historical background and base for the current study of international students' perceived impact of the ISS office on their experiences on United States' campuses.

Establishing a Culture of Student Development

As Rudolph (1962) notes, the early professors at institutions of higher education in the United States were rarely scholars and were often trained clergy hired for their ability to influence positively the moral development of the student body. For example, two-thirds of the professors from Dartmouth between 1828 and 1862 and every faculty member at Lafayette in 1841 was a clergyman (Rudolph, 1962). As student populations continued to grow into the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the emphasis of the professorate changed from moral guide to that of instructor/academician (Rudolph, 1962). To continue the mission of developing students in a holistic manner, including areas outside of academics such as social and personal development, universities found it necessary to create new positions on campus devoted specifically to this purpose.

The Role of the Dean of Students

In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, the role of Dean of Students began to emerge. In 1890, Harvard appointed the first Dean of Student Relations and the University of Illinois appointed their first Dean of Men in 1901 (Bloland, 1991). This trend continued in other institutions across the country through the turn of the century. Although they may have been known under different titles, the main role of the Dean of Students was originally that of campus disciplinarian under the direction of the president

(Ping, 1999). As the position developed into the 20th century, Ping stated that the foci of the Dean became threefold: academic and behavioral discipline, student life/activities, and student services (i.e., counseling, student housing, health services, etc.). These responsibilities would become the foundation on which offices of student affairs/development/services found on today's college campuses were built (Ping, 1999). From this foundation also grew the specialization of ISS which was a necessity due to the growing international student enrollment at the turn of the 20th century.

Formation of the IIE, ACPA, and NASPA

Although most of the students attending the early universities were young men from wealthy American families, a few international students arrived on campuses as well. In 1784, Francisco de Miranda of South America began his studies at Yale University and later Yung Wing became the first student from China to graduate from an American college (also Yale) in 1854 (Cieslak, 1955). As the number of international students attending United States' colleges grew through the early 20th century, organizations designed to research and develop guidelines for helping sojourners, and also to promote international student attendance in the United States, emerged. The Institute of International Education (IIE) was established in 1919 following World War I by Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, Elihu Root, former Secretary of State, and by Stephen Duggan, Sr., Professor of Political Science at the College of the City of New York who would go on to be the IIE's first president (IIE, 2013a). They believed that peace between nations could only be achieved through greater understanding of each other's cultures through educational exchange of students and faculty (IIE, 2013a). To catalyze educational exchange among nations, Stephen Duggan

convinced the U.S. government to create a new category of nonimmigrant student visas thus bypassing sojourner quotas set by the Immigration Act of 1921 (IIE, 2013a). With the creation of the IIE and the nonimmigrant student visa, international student attendance increased sharply.

In the same year that the IIE was formed (1919), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) was founded by Dean Robert Rienow and Dean Thomas Arkle Clark (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2013). NASPA began as the “Conference of Deans and Advisers of Men” which Dean Scott Goodman, who would retroactively become recognized as NASPA’s first president, hosted at the University of Wisconsin (NASPA, 2013). This successful first meeting led to an annual gathering of deans. This was followed in 1924 by the founding of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) by May L. Cheney. The ACPA currently has close to 7,500 members representing nearly 1,200 private and public institutions both domestically and internationally (American College Personnel Association, 2013). NASPA currently boasts a membership of over 13,000 found in all 50 states, 25 countries, and in 8 U.S. territories (NASPA, 2013). Historically, both NASPA and ACPA have emphasized professional development for student service officials, professional practice standards, producing research leading to informed practice, and improving services toward the development of the entire student (ACPA, 2013; NASPA, 2013). These associations remain the two most influential national associations for student services administrators. However, these two associations were not alone in their focus on student services in the early 20th century.

In 1925 L.B. Hopkins, a member of the Committee on Personnel Methods which was established by the National Research Council, administered a survey to many universities and colleges in the interest of assessing the current state of student services (American Council on Education, 1937). After the Hopkins' Report was published in 1926, the Committee on Personnel Methods decided that intensive research outside of the efforts of the ACPA and NASPA into the area of student services was required to identify best practices and establish administrative baselines for student service offices. The research that followed over the next decade led to the American Council on Education's (ACE) 1937 report entitled, *The Student Personnel Point of View*, which became the landmark report by which modern student services is based, though many of the practices contained in the report had been utilized by numerous institutions for decades (ACE, 1937).

The Student Personnel Point of View (ACE, 1937) gives a brief explanation of the natural development of student services in higher education and also provides an historical framework for future development. The document shows that student services began from the assumption that part of higher education's function is to develop the student as an entire person, not just provide educational training. In doing so, student service offices tended to oversee highly varied functions on a campus to help carry out its mission, including advising, vocational counseling, financial aid guidance and assistance, career services, continuing education guidance, student health, extracurricular activities, and social programs (ACE, 1937). With an increasing number of international students attending colleges and universities in the United States, student affairs offices would eventually have to add ISS to these responsibilities as well. In 1945, a piece of legislation

would increase greatly the financial support for international educational exchange, allowing more opportunities for sojourners to study domestically and thereby making the need for structure and vision of ISS even more salient.

The Fulbright Act of 1946

Although the formation and the activities of the IIE in 1919 made it easier for international students to attend colleges and universities in the United States, thereby increasing sojourners numbers on campuses, most international student exchange was carried out with financial and logistical support from private agencies and citizens (Jeffrey, 1987). For international educational exchange to occur on a larger scale, the programs begun by the IIE would require greater financial support and, potentially, greater government support without losing their ability to maintain executive control of the programs. The Fulbright Act of 1946, authored by J. William (Bill) Fulbright of Arkansas, accomplished this feat and led to the first significant increase in international student attendance in the United States.

James William (Bill) Fulbright was the son of two highly successful business people in Fayetteville, Arkansas. As a young man, Fulbright earned a Rhodes Scholarship to the University of Oxford in England. Prior to attending Oxford, Fulbright had never traveled east of the Mississippi River. During this time he saw the great advantages of studying abroad which would have a profound influence on the creation of The Fulbright Act. After winning a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, he became a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee with an interest in post-war planning (Jeffrey, 1987).

At the end of World War II, Fulbright had the same vision found in the creation of the IIE following World War I: peace between nations through international education

exchange (Jeffrey, 1987). The opportunity to act on this vision came with the Surplus Property Act of 1944 which was designed to allocate the funds recovered from surplus war goods and property abroad to social, infrastructure, and economic interests in the United States. Fulbright's first piece of legislation in 1945 was a short amendment to the Surplus Property Act which outlined his basic plan to use funds secured from overseas sales of surplus to fund the IIE's international exchange program (Jeffrey, 1987). Later that year he added another amendment which included making the State Department the single entity in charge of disposal of surplus property outside the United States. President Truman signed it into law on August 1, 1946 (Jeffrey, 1987). That same year, the IIE embarked on administering the Fulbright Graduate Fellowship Program with the financial ability to expand its programs (IIE, 2013a). By the 1948-1949 school year, over 25,000 international students (1.1% of all college students) were studying on domestic campuses (IIE, 2013b). With such a rapid increase in international students on campuses in the United States, the experiences of sojourners began to garner attention by researchers in the fields of social science.

U-Shaped Adjustment and Culture Shock

In 1953, Sverre Lysgaard interviewed 200 Norwegian sojourners studying in the United States to investigate their adjustment to college life away from home. His landmark study, originally published in 1955 in the *International Social Science Bulletin*, showed a three-stage adjustment pattern for most of the international students: *initial adjustment*, *crisis*, and a *regained adjustment* thus creating what he termed a "U-shaped" adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955). In the first stage, internationals' energies were spent on adventurous pursuits in the new culture typically involving feelings of fascination and

wonder. In the second phase, the unfamiliarity of the new environment began to impact negatively the visitors. In the final stage, familiarity with the new environment began to emerge and the initial feelings of satisfaction returned. Lysgaard's study opened the door for the emerging study of the international student experience in the United States and still finds a foothold currently in understanding sojourners' adjustments (Owen, 2008).

The term *culture shock* was first introduced in 1960 by Kalervo Oberg in describing international travelers' reactions to a foreign land (Oberg, 1960; Owen 2008). Oberg defined culture shock as "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). This term became part of the general vernacular for travelers around the world when encountering a new culture. Oberg's (1960) theory states that international travelers go through four stages of culture shock before they finally become functional and effective in the new culture: (1) fascination with the new cultural surroundings, (2) developing an aggressive and hostile attitude toward the host country, (3) beginning to gain mobility and openness toward the new cultural environment as a result of obtaining language skills, and (4) accepting the customs of the host country as another way of living. Both Lysgaard's and Oberg's theories shine a light on the early understandings of the international student experience in the United States. Although both theories are basic in nature and may not apply to all sojourners, elements of both theories are still found in recent studies of international student adjustment and provide the foundation for further study in the field.

As evidence of such, Pedersen (1991) mentions aspects of both Lysgaard's and Oberg's theories in his landmark article on counseling international students. Hayes and Lin's (1994) discussion on developing sojourners' social support systems outlines the U-

shaped adjustment found in Lysgaard's work. Additionally, Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002), in their longitudinal study of domestic and international sojourner adjustment to studying abroad, found a pattern of strain that was curvilinear in nature and peaked roughly three months into the first semester – a clearer description of Lysgaard's theory with Oberg's description of culture shock as an understood principle in the experience of sojourners. With the work of Oberg and Lysgaard, the foundation for the study of services to international students in the late 20th century and into the new millennium was set.

Student Services in the Late 20th Century

From the 1960s through the end of the 20th century, the practice of student services reflected the social changes found in the rest of American society. With the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title IX in 1972, and Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, increasing access for students from populations previously underrepresented on campus became a national priority. This diversity boom was evident in the international student population as well. The steady flow of international students witnessed following World War II and the passage of the Fulbright Act became a deluge in the 1970s accompanied by a shift in the main countries of origin from Europe to a newly more affluent Asia (Ping, 1999). From the 1970-1971 school year to the 1980-1981 school year, the number of international students in the United States jumped from 144,708 to 311,882 (IIE, 2013b). To a large extent, responding to the socio-educational needs of several growing populations on campuses fell to student service professionals who struggled to integrate these diverse populations successfully onto the large variety of college campuses found in the United States.

With these growing struggles and changes to the campus landscape, higher education began to challenge the definitions of “educational effectiveness” and “excellence” on campus (Harper & Quaye, 2009). Astin’s Student Involvement Theory (1985) can be viewed as an initial response of those challenges. He addressed the importance of involving all students, regardless of their background, into the campus life of the college. Astin defined involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 36). Colleges and universities, he believed, defined excellence based on “reputation” and “resources” rather than on maximizing “the intellectual and personal development of its students” (p.35). If universities were to strive for excellence based on the latter definition, then student involvement on campus would have to improve, leading to greater learning and more positive experiences overall for students. Astin’s use of the term *student involvement* became such a mainstream part of the culture in student services that many colleges and universities have a Student Involvement office on campus that reports to a Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO). With colleges and universities devoting more resources to student services and with increasingly diverse populations on campuses, including international students, the study of the modern student experience began to increase and diversify at the end of the twentieth century into the new millennium.

International Students at the Change of Millennia

Internationalization of college campuses occurred through both political and economic means decades before American colleges and universities began to acknowledge this phenomenon and began consciously to consider the effects and responsibilities of having many international students on campus (Ping, 1999).

Throughout the last half of the twentieth century, colleges and universities continued to develop Study Abroad programs, establish ISS offices, and introduce curriculum in International Studies, but research in the area of the international student experience developed slowly and did not show a significant increase until the 1990s.

Much of the research at the end of the twentieth century relating to the international student experience centered on the sojourners' transition to life on campus in the United States. Hayes and Lin (1994) found that although college campuses in the United States offered various programs and services designed to assist all new students in making the transition to college life, the difficulty in successfully making this transition can be amplified for international students who have to adapt to both living away from family and friends (as many US students do) and also living in a culture that may be very different from their native one. Even though many college campuses offered services to international students to help them make this transition (typically an ISS office and a Student Counseling office), Pedersen (1991) reported that relatively few international students sought out social services.

In his landmark article on counseling international students, Pedersen (1991) studied counseling services offered to international students to help with their transition to studying in the United States. He stated that international students were often expected to align within a narrow model of behavior to fit in socially on campus. How well an international student fit into that model, it was believed, the better she would adapt to the campus culture and the more successfully she would integrate into the campus culture. Pedersen noted that the counseling sessions tended to focus on trying to get the international student to abandon their home culture somewhat to adapt to the social rules

of American college culture. In contrast, Pedersen offered four approaches to counseling international students: (1) encouraging support from fellow countrymen, (2) helping international students monitor how much their values have changed as a result of living in the United States, (3) identification of personal skills that may help in specific social situations, and (4) not overemphasizing or underemphasizing the cultural differences between the student's home country and the United States. Pedersen also argued that counseling services for international students should be more person-centered to gain more understanding of and respect for the international student's culture. Rather than attempting to help the student fit into a narrow model of behavior, the counselor should be concerned with helping the sojourner develop their own identity on campus through identifying personal resources the student has to offer others (Pedersen, 1991).

Hayes and Lin (1994) investigated another aspect of social adjustment for international students – *social loss*. Social loss is described as a feeling that comes with losing a connection to one's social identity that is derived from one's home culture. This occurs when one is separated from family and peers. Although domestic students may also feel social loss, international students often experience it to a greater extent because they have to establish a new identity in a culture they may not fully understand, whereas domestic students are forming a new identity in surroundings with which they are more familiar. Hayes and Lin (1994) describe the strategies international students use in an attempt to adjust to life on campus in the United States. The study also offers suggestions for how student development personnel may better serve the international student by understanding the various cultures of which a sojourner may be a member, rather than serving them as a member of a single culture based on their country of origin. This study

and Pedersen's (1991) study denote a progression in research of international students toward a more personal understanding of the individual sojourner rather than simply a broad generalization of all international students.

The study of individual attributes of international students continued in studies by Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Stanton-Salazar (1997). Perrucci and Hu (1995) reported that the satisfaction of international students in their campus experience is largely shaped by their language skills, levels of self-esteem, and feelings of competence. The findings of the study indicated that international students who were able to communicate more effectively with their domestic counterparts were able to engage in more social activities and participate more effectively during class activities which, in turn, increased their feelings of competence. With increased levels of self-esteem, sojourners were also more willing to take more social risks. Taking social risks often requires the ability to communicate effectively with domestic students. Therefore, a combination of both language skills and self-esteem would allow for the highest probability of social interactions with domestic students and, consequently, a higher level of satisfaction with campus life (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). These findings were supported by Stanton-Salazar (1997) who found that international students who have increased contact with domestic students report a higher satisfaction rate of their educational experience than those who have less contact with domestic students and that they also experience less social anxiety. As the new millennium began, research examined more closely the stressors international students experienced and the services institutions provided to international students, focusing primarily on two broad programming areas: counseling services and social programs.

Social Stressors

Supporting Lysgaard's (1955) U-shaped curve theory of social adjustment, Hechanova-Alampay et al. (2002) found that the social strain on sojourners was curvilinear in nature – typically peaking around the third month of the first semester on campus. This stress manifested itself in feelings of loss, loneliness, low self-confidence, increased tension, and dysfunctional behavior specific to their new social surroundings. Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens (2008) also listed other social problems facing international students, some of which are found in Hayes and Lin's (1994) discussion on social loss, including clashes of cultural values, loss of social support systems, feeling different, and loss of identity. Although many different stressors can affect an international student, a key barrier to the social adjustment of international students appears to be language difficulties.

Studying the experiences of students from mainland China whose first language was not English, Ang and Liamputtong (2008) noted that language appeared to be a root cause of most of the students' social issues. In this rare qualitative study of international students, one Chinese student reported that domestic students did not display the patience necessary for a Chinese student to understand both the vocabulary and context of the domestic students' interactions with one another. Therefore, he concluded that the domestic students did not want to take the time to engage socially with the Chinese students. Another student found herself becoming angry at the domestic students who treated her as an inferior due to her lack of English-speaking skills. This led her to avoid social contact with domestic students (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008). Similar social strains were found in the classroom as well. Andrade (2006) explained that international students

cited a rise in stress and anxiety due to poor academic performance that stemmed from language difficulties. Students had difficulty understanding professors due to vocabulary and the pace of their speech, and tutors that went through material too quickly. Andrade also noted that international students expended considerably more energy than their domestic counterparts to succeed in class due to a language barrier. These negative experiences provoked feelings of embarrassment, boredom, frustration, and disappointment. In response to so many stressors that can negatively affect international students' experiences in the United States, many student service offices provide counseling services and social programs to aid the sojourner in his transition to campus life.

Counseling Services and Social Programs

Counseling Services

Many colleges and universities provide counseling services to their students to aid them during times of great stress. Given the social stressors that many international students face, it would seem logical to assume that student counseling offices would be filled with international students. However, Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004) provide several concerns about international student participation in counseling services on campus. Nilsson et al. reported that only 2% of all international students sought counseling services while attending US universities. Those that did so cited depression, lack of assertiveness, course-related difficulties, and anxiety as the main reasons for visiting the counseling center. However, one-third of all international students dropped out of counseling after the initial session. This further reduction in utilization means that almost 99% of international students are not receiving counseling services to aid in

adjustment to living away from their culture and support system. Yakushko et al. (2008) found that this was attributed to cultural differences concerning mental health. Coupled with Pedersen's (1991) research regarding counseling international students, it becomes clear that international student counseling still has progress to make in serving this population effectively. However, as this research continues to grow, the ability of campus counseling services to provide appropriate services for international students and to attract international students to access these services will only increase. To compliment counseling services for sojourners, student service offices also provide social programs to help integrate international students into campus life.

Social Programs

International students' first experience with social programs on college campuses typically begin with the orientation process that nearly all college students participate in prior to attending their first class. Many institutions also offer an additional orientation specifically designed for international students. This is a positive step toward improving the sojourners' transition. However, additional programming may further aid international students through their adjustment process. Trice (2004) applies the theory of *social capital* to improving the social services offered sojourners. Social capital theory states that by supplying access to information about cultural norms and insight into how social groups operate, those from outside the dominant culture will be able to function more effectively within it (Trice, 2004). Trice provides three recommendations to improve international students' satisfaction in the U.S. by improving their social capital. First, institutions should provide opportunities for international and domestic students to interact casually on campus. Second, institutions should provide opportunities for

international students to interact casually with other well-established international student groups from other cultures. Third, institutions should investigate alternative means for international students to access campus services and social opportunities. Lacina (2002) encourages using socialization activities such as international student dances and e-mail contacts to help sojourners make new friends as soon as possible upon arrival on campus. Although these social programs are designed to help facilitate social interaction among domestic and international students, they would be of little value to the international student who does not possess the social or linguistic skills necessary to take advantage of these opportunities. In fact, they could serve to alienate the international student even more than if she did not participate in the program at all. As the research regarding the international student experience continues to grow, the ability of colleges and universities to address effectively the issues facing sojourners as they adjust to life on United States' campuses will hopefully grow as well.

Current Qualitative Studies

Few current qualitative studies have been published regarding international students' experiences on college campuses. Articles analyzing international students' responses to a student satisfaction survey are plentiful. Although these articles provide data regarding sojourners' general feelings about their college experiences in the United States, they do not provide the rich description and depth of understanding found in sojourners' personal experiences with the ISS office. Along with Ang and Liamputtong (2008), the only other qualitative research found for this chapter was a dissertation by Clark (2002) who investigated the experiences of international students from China with their International Student Advisor (ISA), a specific staff member in the ISS office. Clark

found that international students experienced numerous difficulties in coming to the United States, including general adjustment problems, academic concerns, language problems, and isolation and discrimination problems. Clark also found that many of the students had a positive impression of the ISA as an advocate, facilitator of academic and social events, advisor, and resource for international travel and domestic cultural issues though most were either uncertain who their particular ISA was or were unable to describe the ISA's role in specific terms. Although Weller (2012) conducted a dissertation utilizing a mixed-method approach, this study also focused exclusively on Chinese students. Additionally, Weller's (2012) findings mirrored some of those found in Clark (2002) in that sojourners reported having difficulty adjusting socially to life on a college campus in the United States, difficulty succeeding academically, difficulty with the language barrier, and feelings of isolation. Weller (2012) concluded that, although colleges in the United States have done an admirable job recruiting and enrolling international students, most have not provided adequate social support for them. With a lack of qualitative research into the sojourners' view of the ISS office, coupled with an ever-growing population of international students, this dissertation intends to help fill the gap by contributing to research in the area of ISS.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the review of existing literature leading to the development of this study about the relationship between international students and the ISS office from the perspective of the sojourner. This chapter began with a description of the search process of the literature. Following the search process was a chronological literature review of the history of student services in American higher

education meshed with major historical documents and research that specifically impacted international student attendance in the United States leading to the provision of ISS. The literature review also described major theories in the areas of both student development and ISS. By reviewing the literature chronologically, this chapter delineated the development of ISS over time leading to the current state of research. With research into the international student experience beginning in earnest only a few decades ago, higher education has merely scratched the surface in understanding the social, cultural, educational, and emotional needs of international students and the complexity of providing adequate services to meet those needs. Institutions, in turn, have begun to develop programs and even dedicate entire departments to ISS. As research continues to grow, the ability of higher education institutions to improve the college life of international students will likely increase as well.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology that was used to conduct this study that explored the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of international students in their first year of study in the United States at a large, research, public, Midwestern university. Following in this chapter are the general perspective of the study, the study's research context, a description of the participants, a description of the methods used for data collection, and the methods used for data analysis.

General Perspective

Because I sought to understand the perceived impact of the ISS office from the perspective of international students, I approached this study with an epistemology of constructionism which purports philosophically that truth and reality are constructed by those who have experienced certain phenomena and applied meaning to it (Crotty, 2003). Therefore, to understand the truth and reality of the international students' experiences with the ISS office, this study attempted to understand the meaning the international students applied to their experiences. Given that this study focuses on the international students' interpretations of their interactions with the ISS office, the theoretical perspective of *interpretivism* was applied in this study.

Although there are several theoretical perspectives associated with a constructionism epistemology, the theoretical perspective observed in this study is interpretivism, which “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 2003, p. 67). Through an interpretivistic perspective, this study sought to understand how international students interpreted and assigned meaning to their experiences based on their perceptions of their experiences with others, which may have been influenced by various circumstances – including the setting of the event, native culture, their own personality, their social interactions, etc. With a constructionism epistemology and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, the type of research that was conducted for this dissertation was qualitative research.

Qualitative research is often used to explore and understand phenomena through the meaning that others ascribe to it (Creswell, 2009). This is an inductive form of inquiry that assumes knowledge of phenomena can best be found through the experiences of those who are involved personally. In the case of this dissertation, understanding how international students in their first year of study in the US perceived the ISS office was accomplished by allowing sojourners to share their own experiences as deeply and broadly as possible. Qualitative research may utilize several types of data gathering techniques – including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Patton, 2002). Within the framework of qualitative research lies a particular type of methodology called *case study*. Case study involves the researcher exploring a particular phenomenon during a certain period of time in great detail using a variety of methods to gain as much understanding of the phenomenon as possible (Creswell, 2009). Given that this dissertation involved examining the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of

international students, which involved multiple interviews with international students, natural observation of international student events, and collecting documents from the ISS office, this study utilized case study methodology.

Within the general framework of case study methodology are specific types of case studies. This dissertation is an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). Stake defines intrinsic case study as one that focuses on a particular case due to an intrinsic interest in the case. Other forms of case study include instrumental case study and collective case study. Instrumental case studies use information about a certain case to better understand a broader phenomenon (Stake, 1995). For example, an instrumental case study may investigate a single case study of writer's block to better understand how writer's block may affect all those who suffer from it. Collective case studies view or conduct multiple case studies on the same topic (Stake, 1995). This dissertation fits the definition of an intrinsic case study because the purpose is to understand better the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of nine international students from various regions around the world in their first year of study in the US. Although others may find similarities between the experiences of the international students in this study and those on their own campuses, it was not my intention to provide a general understanding of all international student experiences with ISS offices given the variety and scope of ISS offices across the US. Additionally, this dissertation did not view or conduct multiple case studies on the same topic. Therefore, intrinsic case study is the best definition for this dissertation.

Research Context

The research for this study was conducted on the campus of a large, public, research institution in the Midwestern United States. For purposes of confidentiality, the

university will be referred to by the pseudonym Midwestern University (MU). MU is located in a relatively small town where the student population of the campus accounts for over half of the town's total population. This location was chosen due to its diversity of services offered to international students. Interviews were conducted in a private study room in the main library on the main campus of Midwestern University. Natural observations occurred during three international student events – the fall semester international student orientation, the spring semester international student orientation, and an international student bazaar. During these observations, informal interviews lasting only a few minutes were conducted with other international students who were not the nine subjects in this study. This was conducted to provide a broader understanding of these events and immediacy in the data from the perspective of the participants. Document analysis was performed on public recruiting, promotional, and informational documents produced by the ISS office to provide a more complete understanding of their purpose and content. By utilizing these research methods, three research questions were explored:

1. What types of experiences with the ISS office do international students in their first year of study in the United States report?
2. What impressions do the international students have of their experiences with the ISS office?
3. How do international students describe the impact that their experiences with the ISS office have on their overall experience of being a college student in the United States?

The following section describes the participants who were recruited for this study and the rationale for their involvement in the study.

Research Participants

Because the main focus of this study was on the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of international students studying in the United States for the first time, the participants in this research were international students who had not studied in the United States previously. Nine undergraduate international students who were in their first year of study in an institution of higher education in the United States were interviewed three times – at the beginning, middle, and end of their first semester on campus. The students consisted of five first-time freshmen, two transfer students, and two study abroad students. The nine students were purposefully chosen from a variety of regions around the world to provide a broad representation of student backgrounds and culture. To protect the students' identities, they were each given a pseudonym. I selected generic, American pseudonyms to ensure that I did not choose a pseudonym from their home culture that would prove insulting to them. To further ensure that no cultural insensitivity occurred, I also chose nine names that started with the first nine letters of the alphabet. All of the students agreed that choosing their pseudonyms in this manner would not insult them in any way. Additionally, the reasoning behind capturing information from participants while they were within their first year of study was to gather immediate data on their first-year experiences with the ISS office and to see how their experiences changed over the course of their first semester. Finally, the use of international students from a variety of classification levels (freshman, transfer, and study abroad) was to continue to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of international

students in the United States, regardless of age or educational level. To add further depth to the understanding of the sojourners' educational experience, the Director of MU's ISS office, Jim, was interviewed. Jim's insight into the ISS office's intended impact on the sojourners' experiences provided an additional perspective and dimension to the data that could not be given by the sojourners themselves.

Methods of Data Collection

The primary data was collected using open-ended, in-depth interviews of the nine international students described above and an interview with Jim, the Director of ISS at MU, with additional supportive data collected through natural observation and document collection. By interviewing subjects three times during the course of their first semester, member checking previous data during each subsequent interview, interviewing Jim to better understand the perspective of the ISS office on the sojourners' educational experience, performing natural observations of ISS events, and having prolonged engagement with collected data, this study increased the understanding of the phenomenon of interest and the depth and detail of the data. This enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the findings (Patton, 2002). Following are descriptions of the data collection processes of subject interviews, natural observations, and document collection.

Interviews

Nine international students who were in their first year of study in the United States were interviewed one-on-one and face-to-face in a private study room inside the main library on the main campus. Interviews lasted 30-60 minutes and followed an interview guide of eight questions found in Appendix A. By using open-ended questions, personal information about the international students' experiences was gleaned without

leading the students toward any certain response. All interviews were digitally recorded for audio while notes were taken to enhance nuances of the interview process. I and an independent transcriptionist then transcribed the interviews. Students were asked to clarify any information after the initial interview during subsequent interviews. Although the span of time between interviews of different students' first, second, and third interviews was never more than one week, the completion of all interviews was not an easy task.

Arranging the interviews with the nine students often proved to be somewhat difficult. Although each of the three interviews with the students during both semesters was accomplished, this was not always a smooth process. I was required by the library to reserve the study rooms in advance and each room could only be reserved for certain time periods. Depending on the time of the semester, room availability was occasionally difficult to find. Once study rooms were scheduled with the library and interview times confirmed with the student, several sojourners showed up late (or not at all), requiring quick adjustments to the interview schedule or arrangement of new appointments altogether. Once the interviews began, however, the time with the sojourners was enjoyable.

Natural Observation

Although interviews allow students to discuss their interactions with the ISS office from their points of view, natural observation offers the researcher the opportunity to witness students interacting with the ISS office and to form his own interpretation. For this study, three events sponsored by the ISS office were observed and digitally recorded for audio and video using the video camera function on an electronic tablet and a cell

phone – the fall semester international student orientation, the spring semester international student orientation, and the international student bazaar. Video recording allowed me to review the footage from the event multiple times to find a greater amount of data than viewing the event a single time without the aid of a video recorder and making written jottings, which can be distracting. Verbal jottings were made while recording the event to capture initial impressions of the event. Given the sensitivity of the microphone on the tablet and my distance from the students during the orientations, the jottings were made without others in attendance being aware of the practice. This was taken into consideration given the more formal nature of the event and how distracting the practice would have been if I had been in closer proximity to the students. However, verbal jottings were made during the bazaar without regard to my proximity to others given the social nature of the event and the number of students using their own devices to record the event for themselves.

The footage recorded personally was reviewed and analyzed multiple times, as subsequently described, to provide as rich a description of the event from as many different perspectives as possible. Although some qualitative research designs, such as ethnography, necessitate the researcher to become a full participant, the video data collection in this study varied in the amount of researcher participation. During the international student orientations, video was taken of the events without any researcher participation. However, short interviews were conducted with various students after the event to get their perspective of the orientation. During the international student bazaar, I interviewed students from various international student organizations during the event. On one occasion, I was asked to sit with a group of students and join them in their meal.

The variation in the amount of researcher participation of each event was due to the expectations of the participants of the events. Students were expected to sit passively during orientations and take in a great deal of information while occasionally asking questions. However, the bazaar was designed for interaction among participants. Therefore, a higher level of researcher participation at the bazaar seemed more appropriate. The final type of data that was collected was that which was created by the ISS office itself.

Document Collection

To better understand the relationship between the sojourner and the ISS office, documents produced by the ISS office were gathered and reviewed. Documents involved in recruitment and admission of international students, and also those designed to internationalize the entire campus, were of interest. Additionally, documents intended to promote the activities of the ISS office were collected. The number of documents involved in getting a student from another country enrolled in the United States is immense, making this aspect of data collection important. As data were collected the process of data analysis began.

Data Analysis

To facilitate the analysis of a large amount of data, MAXQDApro 11 qualitative data analysis software was used. MAXQDA software was developed by VERBI Software Consult Sozialforschung GmbH of Berlin, Germany. The program allowed me to upload data, including transcripts, pictures, videos, and documents. Once uploaded, all data were coded and re-coded by color, category, and labels I chose. MAXQDA software allowed me to organize the data multiple times and cross-reference it in as many ways as I found

necessary. MAXQDA software does not perform any qualitative functions, including coding or categorizing. However, I was able to organize and perform multiple analyses of the data without degradation of the original data. The following steps were taken in the analysis of data collected in this study.

After conducting the interviews with the nine international students and Jim, conducting natural observations, and gathering relative documents, these data were uploaded into the MAXQDA program. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted four components necessary to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research: (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability. By gathering a broad amount of data through the above methods, using thick descriptions of the data collected, and purposively sampling the international student population, this study intended to maximize the credibility of its findings. The dependability and confirmability of the study was enhanced by performing multiple audits of the data throughout the collection and analysis processes. Trustworthiness was also established through the methods Lincoln and Guba (1985) described as *member checking* and *prolonged engagement*. Member checking refers to ongoing reflective dialogue with the subjects regarding interpretations of events and meanings in the data. Member checking in this study was accomplished by interviewing the students multiple times throughout the semester, following the same interview protocol for each interview, and revisiting past responses to questions multiple times during each subsequent interview. By member checking in this way, the accuracy of the presentation of the data to the intended meaning of the sojourners was maximized. Prolonged engagement involves the researcher returning to the data and site numerous times for data collection and re-examination. During the data analysis process, I revisited

the interviews countless times for over two years coding and re-coding portions of the data as described in the next section. There was rarely more than a few waking hours during that time when I was not considering different aspects of the data and possible meanings to draw out of it. Applying these methods to the entire data analysis process helped to ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

The analysis of interviews proceeded with the following steps in data reduction. First, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Second, the transcriptions were uploaded to the MAXQDA program where they were analyzed using *inductive analysis* (Patton, 2002). Inductive analysis places an importance on discovering patterns, themes, and categories that emerge out of the data through immersion in the details and specifics of the data (Patton, 2002, p. 41). Particular value was placed on *pursuing members' meanings* which emphasizes “sensitively representing in written texts what local people consider meaningful and important” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 129). Using inductive analysis, a first cycle coding method of *initial coding* was performed to seek emergent patterns and themes found in the text (Saldaña, 2013). Saldaña describes initial coding as an open-ended approach to the data analysis where data are broken down into discrete parts, examined, and compared for similarities and differences. *In Vivo* coding—using the subjects' own words as a code—was utilized as often as possible to maintain a closer connection to the members' meaning and to help keep the data fixed to the subjects' own language (Saldaña, 2013). Third, the patterns and themes were grouped into temporary categories as member checking was conducted and categories were adjusted as necessary to best understand the data. Fourth, all data were analyzed using a second cycle coding method of pattern coding, which Saldaña (2013) explains as “explanatory or

inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p. 210). Finally, the findings of the individual interview subjects were organized to lay the foundation for the descriptive case report which is presented in chapter four of this dissertation. The findings of the cross-case analyses of all interview subjects were organized to begin the construction of the descriptive case report found in chapter five.

Data reduction occurred for observational data in a similar manner found in the analysis of interviews. First, the observational videos were uploaded to the MAXQDA program, viewed multiple times, and detailed notes taken to include the verbal jottings found on the audio. Second, the videos and notes were analyzed using the first cycle coding method of initial coding to discover emergent patterns and themes, taking into account any patterns and themes found in the analysis of the interviews but allowing new ones to add to or enhance those identified previously. Third, the patterns and themes were analyzed using the second cycle coding method of pattern coding to organize the data into categories based on emergent patterns (Saldaña, 2013). Finally, the findings of the observational data were synthesized with both the individual and cross-case interview data for the descriptive case reports found in chapters four and five of this dissertation, respectively.

The documents collected followed a similar pattern of data reduction. First, the documents were uploaded to the MAXQDA program where they were reviewed multiple times for emergent patterns and themes using the first cycle coding method of initial coding. This review also took into account patterns and themes found in the other data sources while allowing new ones to enhance those found previously. Second, the patterns and themes were placed into broader categories utilizing the second cycle coding method

of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). Finally, the findings of the document data were integrated with both the interview data and the observational data for the descriptive case reports found in chapters four and five of this dissertation.

By following a similar method of analysis for all types of data, the consistency of analysis was preserved while allowing for comparison and integration of data from different sources. As comparisons between data sources occurred, new patterns and themes emerged. Data analysis was not expected to occur in a linear fashion, but rather remain fluid as patterns and themes emerged through prolonged engagement with the data. By doing so, this study provides a more accurate description of the international students' experiences with the ISS office, thereby preserving the intention of the research.

Summary

To gain a better understanding of the perceptions that international students have of the impact that the international student services office has on their lives, the methodology utilized in this study has its roots in constructionism epistemology and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism. This qualitative study used primarily student interviews with support from natural observations and document analysis to provide broad, thick descriptions of the international students' experiences and their perceptions of the ISS office's methods of outreach and service to sojourners. Through the reduction of the large amount of data that was collected, case reports of the natural observations, the interview with Jim, and the interviews with the nine international students were completed. The narrative descriptions of the case reports are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF OBSERVATIONS AND STUDENT INTERVIEWS

Every semester sojourners from over 100 countries arrive on the campus of Midwestern University (MU) to begin or continue their educational journey in the United States. Though many are returning students, several are in the US for the first time as a full-time college student. The International Student Services (ISS) office is the initial point of contact for every undergraduate international student who arrives at MU. The ISS office aims to make every international student's experience positive. As Jim, the Director of the ISS office at MU stated, "We catch the students and the scholars, the spouses, the children – all that are affiliated with the international students or scholars when they come in here – and we make sure that they are well serviced after they hit the ground." It is a daunting task to provide services for such a diverse population of students. MU's ISS office intends to help each student adjust well to living in the US, show success in their academic endeavors, engage socially on campus, and report positively about their overall experience. If the ISS office is successful, it will have a significant impact on the sojourners' lives at MU. This chapter presents the experiences of some international students at MU and their perception of the impact the ISS office had on their lives in their first semester.

Chapter three stated that the research methodology of this study focused primarily on interviews with nine international students and an interview with Jim, the Director of MU's ISS office, with supporting data collected from observations of three events hosted by the ISS office and documents produced by the ISS office. This chapter consists of narrative descriptions of the interviews with each sojourner across their first semester as well as the interview with Jim. It also includes brief narratives of the observations of the international student events lending additional perspective to the data found during the interviews. The main purposes of this chapter are to describe the individual experience of each of the nine subjects across their first semester in the US and their perception of the impact the ISS office had on their lives. It will also serve as the foundation for chapters five and six which will contain the findings across subjects and the discussion of the entire study, respectively.

This chapter will first discuss the observations of the events sponsored by the ISS office: two international student orientations and the international bazaar. This section will include excerpts from the brief interviews with sojourners at these events who were not part of the nine students in this study. The chapter then moves to the narratives of the interviews beginning with Jim's interview followed by those of the nine international students who are the main focus of the study.

Orientation Day

Within days or hours of arriving on MU's campus, every sojourner is required to attend an orientation specifically designed for new international students. The orientation in the fall of 2014 took place on a Wednesday. The orientation for the following spring semester occurred on a Thursday. Both were scheduled the week prior to classes starting

the following Monday. Though the number of students attending was different (the spring orientation had roughly one third the number of students as the fall), the orientation days were conducted in nearly identical fashion. Both orientations were held in a theater located within the student union building. Table 1 shows the schedule for orientation.

Table 1

Orientation schedule

7:45 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.	Student Check-In
8:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.	Welcome
8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.	Housing
8:45 a.m. – 8:55 a.m.	Off-campus Housing
8:55 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	Immigration
9:45 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	Break
10:00 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.	Writing Center
10:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	Student Conduct
11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Library
11:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.	Counseling Center
11:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.	Academic Integrity
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.	Banking
1:15 p.m. – 1:25 p.m.	ISO
1:25 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.	Cultural Awareness
1:45 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.	Career Services
2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.	Campus Safety
3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Browse Tables
4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Mandatory Undergraduate Meeting

The students made their way to the theater located on the second floor of the student union. Once outside the theater, the students were greeted by cheerful international student volunteers from the ISS office who directed them to information tables inside where the new students picked up an orientation packet, a bottle of water, and a snack. Loud, American, dance music could be heard coming from the theater greeting the sojourners with an atmosphere of fun and excitement.

The theater has two-tiers split into three sections and seats around 400 people. Once inside the theater, the students were directed to sit anywhere in the lower tier which became nearly full during the fall orientation. The students were required to sit in the lower section which was lit much more than the upper tier and closer to the presenters. As one ISS office staff member stated, “We don’t want them to spread out too much. We want them to sit next to each other and participate. We want them to start feeling like a community right away.” Observations were conducted from the upper tier to minimize distraction from the presentations.

Jim’s orientation presentation.

Jim was the first official speaker during orientation. His presentation is described here because he gave the students an overview of orientation day, basic contact information for the ISS office, and a general introduction to the ISS office’s role in their lives as students at MU. After briefly welcoming the students, Jim apologized for how long the day was going to be. However, he explained that the ISS office planned orientation to be one long day rather than taking place over several days to allow the students to take part in the other activities and take care of any business they may have on campus during the rest of the week. Jim then introduced the Vice President for Student Affairs who spoke for less than five minutes. She welcomed the students to MU, encouraged them to complete their Title IX training (a required online course on preventing sexual harassment/violence), and concluded by speaking highly of the experiences most sojourners have at MU. Jim then returned to the podium to continue his presentation. He described the ISS office as “the international services office on this

campus. That means we are your ‘home away from home.’ We are the place you all go to when you don’t know where to go.”

Jim then showed a slide with the ISS staff members’ names, contact numbers, and titles as he informed the students of areas for which each staff member is responsible, including immigration status, travel, employment, international taxes, financial assistance, the Designated School Officials (DSO’s) who must sign much of the sojourners’ paperwork, etc. During this presentation several students took pictures of the slide on the screen with their phones for later reference and most were paying close attention. Jim made a point to encourage the students, when they visit the ISS office, to inform the administrative assistant of the reason for their visit to the office. He stated:

If you say, “I have to see a counselor,” you sit there and it may be 20 minutes before you see a counselor. The counselor may just give you a form and say, “Finish this form and then come back and see me later.” So, tell the administrative assistant why you are there. Most of the time, they can help you and reduce the amount of time you have to be in the office.

Although Jim had previously described the ISS office as the students’ “home away from home,” he gave the impression that providing efficient service to students and minimizing their time in the office was important. In this instance “home” appears to be the place where one takes care of several important issues related to one’s stay in the US rather than a social gathering area. To address the social aspect of the ISS office, Jim discussed the International Student Organization (ISO) next.

Jim stated that the ISO is the student side of ISS that supports all international student clubs on campus and helps put together social events throughout the year. He

specified that the ISO works “in conjunction” with the ISS office, but that the ISO is the “student side” and the ISS office is the “professional entity.”

Jim finished his presentation by stating how positive the atmosphere on MU’s campus is for international students. He stated, “You will never again in your life be in an atmosphere this friendly and this accommodating with this many different cultures in the same place.” Jim reported to the sojourners that there are over 100 countries represented by over 2000 international students on MU’s campus. He encouraged the students to meet both international and domestic students. He also told them to be prepared to encounter a very friendly campus where others will greet them whether they know them or not. He also spoke of how the connections the students make during their time at MU may prove beneficial to them in their professional and personal lives later. He encouraged the students to check their email regularly to receive the weekly email from the ISS office about important immigration news and social opportunities over the weekends. His summation spoke to the experiences the ISS office expects the sojourners to have while at MU – feeling supported by the ISS office, making social connections through the ISO, making social connections informally with both international and domestic students, and taking responsibility for their own success at MU. These are themes that will continue through the interview descriptions with the student subjects later in this chapter.

To conclude his presentation, Jim stated, “That’s the kind of campus we have. We help each other. We get involved. We make sure we don’t leave anyone out. So, please, get involved.” Then, knowing how long orientation day is, he encouraged the students by saying, “Be patient. Be diligent. We’ll get through this all together. You guys will be

through with this by the end of the day. Hope to see you guys on campus. When I do, give a wave and say, ‘Hi.’”

The marathon of information.

Orientation continued after Jim’s presentation for an additional 6 ½ hours as outlined above in Table 1. Students were provided information by way of PowerPoint-assisted lecture, videos produced by both the ISS office and the ISOs, and handouts. The variety of presentations helped keep orientation from becoming altogether tedious. However, it was still a very long day that involved a large amount of information presented at a constant and relatively quick pace.

At a few points, several sojourners appeared bored to the point of falling asleep. However, during other presentations, sojourners appeared highly interested, participated enthusiastically, and seemed to be genuinely entertained. Students were more engaged when presentations involved videos (especially videos with current international students in them) or when current international students were speaking live. Other presentations during which the sojourners paid close attention were those covering immigration status, the various ISOs, culture shock, and safety. In particular, the culture shock and safety presentations appeared most compelling to the students.

The culture shock presentation was given by an upper-level international student from India who spoke in a warm, friendly, and often comedic style about some cultural nuances in the US to which sojourners should pay attention (i.e., sensitivity to cleanliness of clothes/body, friendly gestures given to strangers, the importance of being on time, etc.). The safety presentation was given by a member of the MU police department – also in a warm and friendly tone. The police officer repeatedly spoke about the main job of

the police department as keeping students safe rather than focusing on more negative subjects such as law infractions for which students are commonly cited. The officer spoke of the police department's various campus safety programs and the campus' excellent safety record. The officer answered several questions from the students over topics from campus safety to transportation issues. He concluded by welcoming the international students and inviting them to contact the campus police if they have any additional questions or concerns about campus safety.

At the conclusion of the campus officer's presentation, students were encouraged to browse around information tables outside the theater set up by vendors that provide various services. Though many vendors offered services for both domestic and international students, most had information specifically for international students. Vendors included parcel shipping services, the campus library, country-specific international student organizations, local banking services, and off-campus social organizations that welcome international students. After the browsing time, the first-time international students gathered back in the theater for a final information session. I approached several students after this final session to ask them about their orientation experience.

A male student from India described orientation as "informative and time consuming." A Saudi Arabian male student said, "It was good to meet other students from other countries, but the orientation was so long from this morning all the way to this evening." A female student from China noted, "They consider a lot of special situations. So, I think it's pretty good." A female student from Canada stated, "I liked how they [the speakers] were all funny and nice, and it was, like, playful. It wasn't the whole serious

thing. It made the whole environment more playful.” The male student from India also stated:

We understood that their [MU’s] importance is that we are safe. That’s their main concern. We should be happy that we have chosen this university. It is their concern that we are happy with the things around us. Their socializing is really good.

Several sojourners agreed enthusiastically with the above statement, often noting the obvious concern from the presenters throughout the day for their well-being.

The single negative aspect that several students reported was the length of the orientation. As a male student from Saudi Arabia put it, “The most negative thing is the long course. Orientation is very long. But it is exciting. There is a diversity of cultures and traditions here and this is a really good thing.”

The International Bazaar

The international student bazaar was an opportunity for the eighteen international student organizations on campus to gather together and exhibit their native cultures at booths in the conference center of the School of International Studies. The bazaar was held in the middle of February on an unseasonably sunny day. It was advertised around campus and open to the entire MU community, including the public. Jim described the bazaar as one of the major international student/multi-cultural events on campus. This was evidenced by the large number of people in attendance which included students, faculty, and staff as well as many people from the community. Though the conference center was a large, open area and booths were arranged along the perimeter with a small

seating area in the middle, it was often difficult to maneuver through the large amount of people.

After first arriving at the bazaar, I met Jim at the ISS office's information table located immediately inside the conference center. He encouraged me to have fun and enjoy the bazaar. My observation began with a quick walk-through of the entire conference center to observe the arrangement of the booths in the center and get a general feel for the atmosphere of the bazaar. There were two large video screens on the main wall where pictures and videos from the ISS office were displayed. On the wall immediately inside the hall next to the ISS table was a large map of the world. The map displayed flags of the countries from which students came to MU, with arrows from the flags leading to MU. The map gave a visual representation of the diversity of international students on MU's campus. As I made my way around the building recording the sights of the bazaar, I was repeatedly greeted warmly by students. I was often asked to try the food offered at the booths with the Ethiopian booth asking me to sit down and eat with them. I informed them that I would return to join them after recording each of the booths. I waited until the bazaar was near its completion and the attendance was beginning to decline before doing the brief student interviews. This allowed me to spend more time with the students, get their impressions at a point in time when they had experienced the majority of the event, and not be as much of a disturbance to the students or other attendees during the event.

The atmosphere of the bazaar was one of fun and relaxation. Several booths included maps of their particular international student organization's country/region and items for sale – typically, native food and cultural items. The proceeds from the items

sold helped fund that country's international student organization activities. Many students in the booths could be found dressed in native attire. Additionally, several booths had native music playing from portable stereos to welcome attendees to their area. Occasionally attendees could be seen dancing or singing along with music emanating from the booths. In general, the bazaar appeared to be an inviting display of the cultural diversity found on MU's campus and an opportunity for the community to gather to celebrate that diversity. After enjoying the sights, sounds, and smells of the bazaar, I began interviewing students to discover the meaning the bazaar had for them as sojourners in the US.

I asked two female students from Osaka, Japan, in their first semester in the US, about their experiences thus far. Both appeared somewhat nervous about talking on camera at first, but opened up quickly. The first student was dressed in jeans and a black baseball shirt with "Jordan" written across the front. She stated enthusiastically, "It's nice. I like it here. I like the people here. They are so friendly and kind to me." The second student was dressed in a traditional kimono which was white with black decorations. With a big smile she stated, "So big campus [*sic*]! Much bigger than expected." Both students reported that this was the first international student event they had attended. The first student stated that she was "not sure" of any future international student events she was planning on attending. However, both answered emphatically "yes" when they were asked if they were looking forward to the next event regardless of what it might be.

I then returned to the Ethiopia booth which had a long table with several chairs. The middle of the table had a large platter that contained sections with beef stew, lentils,

and spinach. There was also a package of thin, wheat flatbreads next to the platter. I was asked to join in the meal by three current female students (two from Ethiopia and one from Eritrea) and a female from India who had recently graduated. Each person would tear a piece of flatbread, grab the other ingredients with it, and then place the bite in their mouth. The first Ethiopian student interviewed (who was the one who asked me to eat with them when I did my first recording of the booths) stated, “This is how we eat in Ethiopia. We share the same plate.” I asked all four people at the table what events like the bazaar mean to them as international students in the US. The graduate from India stated:

Sometimes you see people from other places if you’re here. So that makes you feel like you are not the only one. At first, besides seeing the others, more of it is it gives you the exposure for you to express your culture even with Americans. So that gives you a good feeling. It kind of breaks the gap with some people.

The first Ethiopian student added, “It’s an opportunity for us to show who we are and what our culture is. Food tells a lot about the culture. That’s why we bring out the, uh...that’s why we share our food.” The Eritrean student, who is a graduate student studying the culture of food in Africa and China, added, “Food is, like, beyond just eating. It brings cultures together. It determines who you are at the same time, too. It tells history as well. It is a way of sharing communication for us in our culture – in Ethiopia and Eritrean, too.”

When asked what the food said about the culture in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the Eritrean student stated:

For Eritreans, we have to wait for everyone in the family to come together and sit together because we have to share from the same plate. It doesn't mean that there is scarcity, but it's more of sharing love and showing respect. Eating from that same plate, for me as an Eritrean, means you have compassion for your family, for your culture, for your friends, and you love sharing. Personally, I don't want to eat alone, for example. Whatever I am having I want to share it whether it's enough for me or not. That's what it means for me as an Eritrean.

The second Ethiopian student, who was in her first semester in the US, said, "It is almost the same in Ethiopia. We are sharing the same plate. Even [*sic*] we all stand up together before we all sit at the table." In discussing her experiences as an international student at MU, she added with a large smile, "I like being part of this. We have some gatherings and other aspects too, and somehow it's been joyful since I got here. I like being part of this event today." The first Ethiopian student stated that she and the rest of the ISO from Ethiopia took responsibility for showing the second student around the campus and community. She said, "We are a small community. We're not more than 30. So, you know, we're friends. It's important that you know someone when you get here. It's easy to be friends with your countrymate [*sic*]." The second student added:

I think it would be extremely hard if you did not know anybody. I've got to say, though, that the people I don't know – even the Americans and the other cultures, the international students – they were very positive and they were helpful. I think that's necessary for every student who is new. It would be hard coming out here without that.

To complete my time at the Ethiopian table, the first student asked enthusiastically, “Can I share one more thing about our culture? We feed each other!” She then placed a bite of food in the second student’s mouth and stated, “And that is a show of love and care.”

Interviews with Jim and the Nine Sojourners

First, Jim.

Jim, the Director of International Student Services at MU, was interviewed after the nine international students. This was to ensure that the student interviews were conducted without influence by Jim’s responses regarding the role of the ISS office in sojourners’ lives. However, Jim’s interview is presented first to provide the overall philosophy and intent the ISS office has in creating relationships with international students.

Jim’s interview was conducted in his office which is located in a back corner of the ISS office. There was just enough room for his desk and two guest chairs. Several organized stacks of papers could be found across his office indicating that the spring semester was ending and enrollment for the fall semester had begun. His interview began with a general discussion of his views of the role of the ISS office. Jim stated:

The nuts and the bolts of it is: we’re a student affairs division and not an academic affairs division. What that means is that we catch the students and the scholars, the spouses, the children (all that are affiliated with the international students or scholars when they come in here), and we make sure that they are well-serviced after they hit the ground. So, we admit the students and we process the students. We have an admissions function, an issuance function, and, subsequently, a recruitment function.

Describing the impact the ISS office intends to have on the lives of first-year sojourners, Jim stressed the importance of: 1) helping the students focus on their academics, and 2) being aware of the ISS office and other resources available to help them acclimate to the campus:

What we want to do for the first-year kids is to take away all of the outside distractions except for their academics. We want to be able to give them a sheltered existence on campus so that they can fit in – integrate, if you will – into the greater campus and community, and concentrate on their academics. We’re trying to plug them into the right organizations to get them into good study habits. We’re trying to make sure that they know where they should live, that they know who they should be talking to about their academics, that they know to come to our office and talk to us if they don’t know who to talk to about something. So, we’re trying to get them settled in more than anything else, integrated and concentrating on academics. That’s it.

Jim noted three major challenges that international students face in their first semester that can negatively affect their focus on academics and connecting to others on campus. The first is the temptation to spend time going to larger urban areas in the region. MU is a large university in an otherwise small town that is nearly 70 miles to the nearest large city. However, there are four major US cities within a 6-hour drive of campus. Jim spoke about some of the struggles of being a large campus in a small town:

Kids get over here and a lot of them don’t like the fact that they’re in “Small town, USA.” So, one of the first things they do is they go out and buy themselves a car...with the money that mom and dad gave them for tuition and fees. So, now

they're in a bit of a bind. They're wanting to spend their weekends in [one of the major cities in the region] and so that can be a distraction for those kids. The thing is, if they spend one semester, if they get a semester under their belt, 90% plus are happy with the place and that's probably higher retention than we have in any of our domestic student populations. That's probably the most dangerous distraction that we have is kids looking for those bright lights, big city.

The second challenge is the sojourner's proficiency with colloquial English expressions. Jim reported that students will often ask to have a course in colloquial or slang English expressions. He explained why the ISS office does not offer such a course:

That part of their English development needs to be something that they learn on their own. They need to get in with their respective units because slang in the College of Engineering is going to be different than slang in the Marketing department.

Jim suggested that the ISS office could not adequately offer a course to cover the enormous amount of slang used in the English language when taking into account the number of various groups to which international students belong. Finally, the third challenge faced by most international students is the differences in the approach to academics between their home country and the US. Jim stated:

Probably a third factor would be how we do our academics in terms of requirements for study. A lot of the European students struggle with the fact that we do all of these assignments and quizzes and tests on such a frequent basis. They're just not used to it. It's more like grad school where they're from. They're used to getting their assignments and then going away and getting ready for the

final a few months later. But over here you have these constant distractions and interruptions and tests and quizzes and everything. We have to get them used to the new system too.

Jim summed up the ISS office's main goals for first-year international students by saying, "So we get them used to 'Small Town, USA.' We get them used to the English-based stuff. We get them used to the testing side of things, and we're pretty good. That's most of it."

Though Jim makes the process of acculturating students to the campus sound simple, it is not. The international student orientation is the first step the ISS takes once sojourners are on campus. However, the ISOs play an important role after orientation day is complete. Jim said:

[During orientation] we introduce [the international students] to all the resources we have available. We also introduce them to the International Student Organization. We want that student organization to step up and take ownership, a little bit, of connection with those students because...another student from the country or the same region can probably give them better insight than the American staff that we have in here. The ISS American staff is very good...but, we're still Americans. So, we're still going to view things a little differently than a Malaysian's going to view things. So, if you have an older Malaysian talking to a younger Malaysian, they can say, "Okay. Watch out for this or don't do that. You have to know this person...here on campus." So, we get them hooked up with not just the offices that will help them – the academic units – but also student organizations that will help them and guide them in a positive direction outside

the classroom. And that's most of it there, getting them connected with the right people. But we're the safety net, if you will, underneath it all. In case they slip and fall, we catch them and then put them back in the air.

By linking sojourners with other students from their home country through the ISOs, the ISS office passes on the social acculturation of the students to those individuals who will have the most contact with the student throughout the year. However, it is important that the ISS office continues to reach out to sojourners as well.

The ISS office maintains contact with international students through their listserv email system. The emails contain information about upcoming events and important information specific to sojourners. The emails are sent out at least weekly and Jim discussed their effectiveness:

The weekly listservs we send out to them keep us continually in contact. Whether they read them or not, who knows? Well, I know that they do because I see bits and pieces of them copied and thrown into Facebook where I'm sure they read them. So, they may not be reading the listservs, but they're copying them and throwing them out in Facebook and other social media ways. So, at least we're guaranteed that we're pushing the information out there that they need to know. We try and keep everything down to 5 to 7 lines or less and then the [webpage] link to give them more information on it. That way they can get through it quickly and follow up on specific stuff by getting it posted somewhere on our webpages.

The manner in which the ISS office maintains contact with its students is a system that appears to work well for MU. The same may be said of how MU structures its ISS office.

As the interview with Jim concluded, he talked about the structure of MU's ISS office and how it may be different from other universities of comparable size. He gave reasons why he believes the structure is so successful at MU:

Where [MU's] ISS is right now – in student affairs – is not the model that people use in the United States. They've gone to a centralized international college, if you will, or international dean, where the academic and the student affairs are all together in one particular unit. I don't know that we will move in that direction because, quite honestly, our student affairs division is so strong here...because we're light years away from civilization.

So, we developed a strong student affairs unit to help kids live in [MU's town]. They're not commuting. They're living here. That's why we work the way that we do. But if you...go out and compare us to the rest of the nation, they're going to say, "You guys are 30 or 40 years out of date. That's what we used to do in the 60's." That may be, but it works here. Works well here, but I'm not sure it would work well everywhere. It would work well in...a lot of places that are off the beaten path.

Jim said the key to a positive student experience for both international and domestic students is developing a strong connection to the university. This is accomplished by providing the student as many opportunities for social and academic support as possible. He said, "If you don't get them integrated [to the campus], those are the ones you're going to lose most of the time. I don't care if it's international or American. If you integrate students, you stand a much better chance of keeping them." By focusing their efforts toward student services that help first-year international students perform well

academically and support them in their social integration in the community, MU hopes to provide a positive experience for sojourners.

Next, the nine sojourners.

The interviews with the nine international students are presented chronologically in the order of their first interview. This is conducted to dissuade the idea that they are grouped in any manner intentionally (i.e., students from a certain region, students with common experiences, etc.). The students were interviewed in no particular order as well. Students were interviewed when it was convenient for them and me. Each narrative description will begin with a description and background of the student. This will be followed by the content of each interview across the semester – particularly, as it addresses the three research questions of the study. By viewing the three interviews of each student across the semester we will see the development of each sojourner’s relationship with the ISS office. The first student interviewed was “Andy.”

“Andy.”

Andy is a male student from western Saudi Arabia who graduated from a boarding high school in eastern Saudi Arabia. He is a soft-spoken person, but very cordial and outgoing. He typically dressed in casual college attire – shorts or jeans and a t-shirt. His demeanor was always very respectful and he often thanked me for allowing him to be a part of the study. At the time of his first interview, Andy was 19-years-old. His father works for a large oil company and his mother is a homemaker. Andy reported that Saudi students typically work for their family business for a few years prior to attending college, but he wanted to begin college as soon as possible. He and his family discussed it and agreed that he should pursue his education in the US directly after high school. In

preparation for attending college abroad, Andy studied at an English language institute in the US for six months before attending MU.

Andy looked at several US college websites before deciding to apply to MU.

When asked why he eventually chose MU, he stated:

First of all, I wanted to enroll in a university with a small city so that I can concentrate on studying more. Because if you go to cities like New York, Boston, Washington, big cities, there are a lot of attractions and you may not focus on your studies more.

Additionally, he wanted the convenience of a large campus. Regarding the size of MU's campus, he said, "I really like it. It has a big campus and with everything in it – basically everything. And if you are living on campus, you will not have to go outside campus because everything is on campus." Additionally, Andy cited the large number of services offered at MU found on the ISS webpage as well as the active Saudi Arabian ISO as strong factors in his decision to attend MU.

At the time of his first interview Andy had only a few interactions with the ISS office. Regarding the impact he felt the ISS office had on his life at that time, he said, "I can't really judge that because I have only stay [sic] for a couple of weeks." He attended the international student orientation, picked up his class schedule, and processed his travel documents. Of his interactions with the ISS office in his first weeks, he stated, "I think they did like 7, 7 from 10, in the orientation and also from their services in the ISS. They did a good job helping students." However, he wished that the ISS office would arrange more trips to the larger metropolitan areas for international students, which appears to contradict his reported desire to stay away from the distractions of large cities.

Andy was surprised by the friendliness of both the ISS office and the campus as a whole. He stated:

The thing that I like the most here is many students here are friendly. They wish to make friendship [*sic*] a lot. Like, on the first day I was in the international office. I made a friendship with an American guy.

The American student invited Andy to join a soccer team, which he did. Andy said joining the soccer team helped him connect more to the university – “It kind of make [*sic*] me go into the university.”

At the conclusion of the first interview Andy reported that his transition to the US had been “fairly easy” and that attending MU was, so far, “an excellent choice.” In addition to the services provided by the ISS office Andy stated that keeping in contact with his friends and family every day in Saudi Arabia using the phone app *Facetime* made his transition to the US easier with very little homesickness. He anticipated that this would not change much over the course of the semester.

During the final two interviews, Andy reported only a few interactions with the ISS office including processing a few documents and attending two ISO events: the India Night and the International Student Talent Show. He enjoyed both of the ISO events and was proud to say that a Saudi Arabian student won second place in the Talent Show. He had a very positive impression of the ISS office even though they had not played a major part in his experience on campus. He needed help with his travel documents as he planned to go home between semesters and this went “very smoothly.” He reiterated his desire for the ISS office to plan more excursions to larger cities for international students,

but stated that this has not affected his overall experience in the US or his impression of the ISS office.

Overall, Andy stated that the ISS office had its largest impact on his first-semester experience during the first few weeks. He cited the international student orientation and the processing of travel paperwork as significant events. Though their overall impact on his experience touched only a couple of areas, the areas for which they were responsible were quite important to him. Regarding processing paperwork he said, “This is the only thing you want from them – just the paperwork getting done.” This is how he believed it should be. Andy did not expect the ISS office to help him adjust to studying in the US or to help him make social contacts with others. He stated that these are the student’s responsibility. He reported receiving several emails from the ISS office making him aware of activities on campus, but he often chose to engage in other activities with friends such as playing soccer, going to the gym, and playing tennis.

Andy made friends with other international students and domestic students very easily. He stated that he is not shy in initiating conversations with others and values making friendships with others from various countries. His best friend is the American student he met in the ISS office. He said, “I have three very good friends. I made one from China, Ethiopia, Chile – like, from different parts of the world. And I have another one: my roommate. He is American also.” His outgoing personality and sense of personal responsibility appeared to help Andy adjust very well to studying and living in the US. He continued to contact his friends and family in Saudi Arabia by *Facetime* on a nearly daily basis which helped him report no feelings of homesickness at the end of the

semester. In conclusion, when asked if he is looking forward to the next semester, he replied, “Always. Yes, of course. Sure.”

“Betty.”

Betty was a junior majoring in Tourism and Hospitality Management from southeast China. She was part of a 2+2 program with her home university in China, whereby she took her first two years of her degree program in China and came to MU to complete her final two years. At the beginning of the semester she was enrolled in 14 credit hours which she felt was not enough. She added a second major in Mathematics and increased her total credit hours to 20. She often spoke of the importance of staying “very busy.”

Betty was very friendly and outgoing with a bubbly personality. She usually dressed in very stylish clothes. During the first interview she wore a baseball cap backward, denim overall shorts with a brightly decorated t-shirt underneath, and a pair of large sunglasses pushed up on her baseball cap. She described herself as a poor conversationalist both in China and in the US, though this was not apparent as she participated in the interviews quite easily. She hoped that studying Tourism and Hospitality Management in both the US and China will not only prepare her for a career but also have an additional benefit of helping her improve her social skills in both countries.

At the time of her first interview of the semester Betty reported that the international student orientation was the only contact she had with the ISS office up to that point. Most of her travel paperwork, including attaining a visa, was completed through the 2+2 program which precluded her from visiting the ISS office upon arrival.

She described the orientation day as “information overloaded [*sic*].” The information booths outside of the auditorium and the orientation program provided her a great deal of printed material with information about services both on and off campus. Two complaints she had of the information was that it was “quite large” (meaning *detailed*) and that it was not available in Chinese which would have made it easier to read. She also did not remember much of the information presented during orientation except for the information about the *Safe Walk* program described by the campus police officer. When asked if safety was a concern for her prior to coming to the US, she said, “No. But I think that [the Safe Walk program is] quite considerate. I think it’s great.” Betty often remarked during the first interview about how considerate and pleasant she found most Americans to be, including those in the ISS office.

The ISS office did not have a large impact on Betty’s adjustment to the US as of her first interview. She reported that an organization called *Chi Alpha* and Chinese upperclassmen had a much greater impact on helping her adjust to studying and living in the US. Chi Alpha is an off-campus ministry that provides support for international students through social events that bring international and domestic students together. [It is one of the well-established off-campus partners Jim allows access to the international student population.] She reported that she made the majority of her international and domestic friends through Chi Alpha. In accordance with her outgoing personality, Betty volunteered to take part in the *ALS Ice Bucket Challenge* at her first Chi Alpha event. The Ice Bucket Challenge was a fundraiser for ALS research where a participant would allow a bucket of ice water to be poured over their head. She said, “It was great! You do not have this kind of opportunity in China.”

Although Chi Alpha provided Betty with social connections to both domestic and international students, the Chinese upperclassmen provided Betty with the most information about adjusting to living and studying in the US. When the upperclassmen returned to China between semesters they met with the students who were going to the US to help them acclimate. She experienced very little culture shock due to the help she received before arriving in the US. Other than being surprised at how many people go the gym on campus, she reported, "Everything else [is] not so surprising." She also reported experiencing very little homesickness as, like Andy, she contacted her family over the internet as often as necessary using Skype. She reported that she contacted them nearly every day in the first week, but that reduced significantly over the course of the semester to the point of only contacting them a few times a month.

During the second interview, Betty said that she had been to the ISS office to obtain a Social Security card to get a campus job. She also continued to receive emails from the ISS office regarding other activities, but was too busy with her studies and work to attend them. She had no other interaction with the ISS office since the first interview. She only sought out the ISS office for help with documents and continued to approach other Chinese students or other student services offices on campus for help in any other areas. Describing her experience with the ISS office at this point of the semester, she said, "It's positive because the expectation of mine to the ISS is quite limited." The amount of time she would spend in the ISS office and the impact it had on her experience in the US would not change much for the last interview of the semester.

Between the second and third interview Betty went to the ISS office once due to an issue with her transcript from China that resulted in an enrollment hold being placed

on her. She said the issue was resolved later that same day which made her very happy. She said that she will go to the ISS office again to get help with travel arrangements for her parents who were planning to visit her. Overall, she said the impact of the ISS office on her experience in the US was “average.” She continued:

I think it is medium. But, to some point, it was very important. Like, I cannot get my travel approved without the ISS or I get documents that I need. So, at that point, ISS will be very important. But for a long semester, it’s just not important.

Betty expected to adjust to the US with limited help from the ISS. To adjust better, she believed that she needed to place herself in situations where she could not rely on the help of others. This included situations where she would have to speak English and resolve everyday issues with Americans. She discussed an issue she had with her schedule regarding a mathematics course and a problem with her cell phone. She felt compelled to take care of both issues on her own without assistance. Regarding her schedule she said, “Nobody is going to help me. I have to go all on my own to the [mathematics department] and communicate on my own with them.” During her first week on campus, she went to a cell phone store by herself. She said, “I went there nearly every day. I just go alone. So, that exposed myself [*sic*] into the United States – American surviving.” When asked if that was a scary experience advocating for herself in a cell phone store, she said, “Actually, I’m not scared at all. I’m just quite upset.” She reported that the times she had to take care of something on her own were the periods she felt she adjusted fastest to the US.

Betty summed up the impact the ISS office had on her life in her first semester in the US by restating that it was felt in a limited number of areas, but those areas were very

important. She specified travel and work documents as well as orientation to the campus as the main areas of impact. However, she held a very high opinion of the ISS office as a friendly place that she knew would help her in any way they could. She said that Chi Alpha had the greatest impact on her social adjustment to the US by providing her events where she could meet and form friendships with several domestic and international students. By making positive social connections with both foreign and domestic students on campus, keeping busy with her studies and her job, having a self-reliant approach to living in the US, and maintaining an adequate amount of contact with her family in China, Betty was able to report having a “pretty good” first semester and looking forward to the rest of her studies. She adjusted so well to the US with such little homesickness that she did not plan on returning home between semesters. Rather, she planned to meet her parents for a few days of travel to New York City and Florida.

“Carl.”

Carl was a 19-year-old freshman male from Mumbai, India who majored in Computer Science. Carl’s mother holds a fairly prestigious position in the Indian government about which Carl was not more specific. His father works part-time as an insurance agent, but is mainly a stay-at-home father. Carl admitted that it is quite rare in India to have a mother who is the main source of income and a stay-at-home father. However, he stated this is becoming more common to the point of having a popular comedic movie made in 2001 about the subject titled, *Aamdani Atthanni Kharcha Rupaiya*. Carl appeared to be an analytical person who preferred one-on-one interactions with others rather than large group activities. He was quiet, reserved, and often pessimistic in his demeanor, but participated easily during the interviews.

In his first interview, Carl described his relationship with the ISS office in his first few weeks in the US by saying, “You can say that they are very good people. They help me...especially when I was depressed or something.” He received help from the ISS office regarding issues with his transcript, finding groceries, explaining his travel documents, and directing him toward a specific part of the counseling center that specializes in stress reduction. He described his impression of the ISS office by saying:

As I came over here, I said to you the first week, [I] was too much depressed and all. But then the International Student Specialist also started understanding my case. When I went there, she fed me with all the things that could make me positive. Also, she sent me to the gym over here. You can make new friends over there playing and all. [It] can relax you. [It] can build your energy level.

Carl took all of the specialist’s advice and found himself making new friends quickly. He also joined a program at MU that pairs an international student with a domestic student to help introduce the sojourner to activities and people around campus. For purposes in this study, the program will be called *Family Beyond Borders* (FBB). He said, “And that was a good thing. I came to know about a few American friends and all how they were doing. We contact each other.”

Carl said during his first interview that the overall impact that the ISS office had on him in the US was that it helped alleviate his initial homesickness, took care of his academic and travel paperwork, and guided him toward making new friends. He summarized the impact by saying:

Without them I would not be able to figure out where I am right now. They pointed me. “Right now you are here. You have to go all the way to there. And

that's difficult, but you have to do it because you selected this." And in my mind, it's okay. I selected this. I have to do this. I have no other choice.

Even more succinctly, he said the ISS office sent him "in quite proper directions." At the conclusion of the first interview, Carl reported that his hardest adjustment at that point was being a vegetarian in a small, rural town. He was often frustrated trying to find food that he was accustomed to eating in India or getting meals prepared in the cafeteria that were fully vegetarian. However, he minimized the impact this had on him calling it "a little bit of a conflict."

Carl continued to visit the ISS office during the semester. By the second interview Carl had visited the ISS office to obtain a Social Security number to find a job on campus, though he had not completed the process at that time. He continued to receive emails from the ISS office inviting him to various activities, but he reported being too busy with school to attend very many events. He did attend *India Night* – an evening of performances, dancing, and food presented by the India ISO. "It was a pretty good time," he said. At the mid-point of the semester he said the impact of the ISS office on his adjustment remained about the same. He felt that he had adjusted fairly well and he appreciated the emails he received regularly.

At the end of the semester Carl did not have any new experiences with the ISS office since the second interview. He continued to attend FBB events (which he enjoyed greatly) with his counterpart who was a female business major. His high regard for the ISS office had not changed from the first interview. His opinion of the impact the ISS office had on him over the course of the semester was that the ISS office "played quite a great role" in his adjustment to the US in the beginning, but the impact lessened as the

semester continued. The ISS office appeared to help guide him initially toward those campus offices and activities that he needed to make a smooth adjustment to the campus both academically and socially. Although Carl continued to appear somewhat pessimistic and reserved he reported having a positive first semester. He explained that the semester came with struggles that he did not enjoy, but he felt good about his adjustment. He said, “I mean even though I enjoyed [it]...there were more pains. Kind of like, at least I’m able to learn how to tackle those pains. I’m alone around here. So sadly, it’s a positive thing – a positive outcome.”

“Denise.”

Denise was a 20-year-old, junior, female student from China majoring in Hotel and Restaurant Management Major in the same 2+2 program as Betty. Unlike Betty, Denise had a quiet demeanor and appeared somewhat shy. She smiled easily and appeared to enjoy the interviews a great deal. She came to the US because she wanted to experience a culture different than that of China’s. She said, “I think it’s really nice to experience [a] different culture. Especially, China and America has [sic] really different things.” She described the differences in cultures as “exciting.” She learned about American culture from watching movies and listening to music. The movies she enjoyed most growing up were *Forrest Gump*, the *X-Men* movies, and Disney animated movies with her favorite being *The Lion King*. She said of the movies:

I think that it’s a common point in American movies...that no matter how rich are you [sic] or how poor are you [sic], you can always fight for your dreams and make your dreams come true. It encouraged me a lot.

Her main reasons for choosing MU was for her major and the 2+2 program. She stated that the US is known for having great hotels. Therefore, the 2+2 program would allow her to study in the US and learn how to manage those types of hotels, while improving her English and learning the culture. Her biggest fear was the language barrier. However, her grammar and speech were good during the first interview and improved noticeably throughout the semester.

Similarly to Betty, Denise did not report at the time of the first interview having much contact with the ISS office other than the international student orientation. She stated that the 2+2 program took care of her travel documents, enrollment, and schedule prior to her arrival in the US. She described the impact the ISS office had on her overall experience at MU as “very little.” Denise appreciated the amount of information that was presented during orientation though. She said that orientation helped “build up confidence” in sojourners. She also noted how well international students are treated on campus. However, the greatest impact on her experience so far came from attending events through Chi Alpha (like Betty) and a Christian organization on campus called (for the purposes of this study), *The Bridge*. Overall, her impressions of the impact the ISS office had on her during her first few weeks was limited but very positive.

During her second and third interviews Denise said that her only new contacts with the ISS office was when she went there to apply for a Social Security card to get a campus job and the emails she received informing her of upcoming events. She stated that her academics and job kept her too busy to attend the events described in the emails. She said she did not even have time to attend as many events with Chi Alpha or The Bridge other than a Halloween party and Thanksgiving dinner. She also attended a dinner

during the Thanksgiving holiday break with five other international students from four different countries where the only traditional Thanksgiving food was a pumpkin pie from Wal-Mart. She described that event as “more like a party among friends. It was interesting.” Although she reported no change in the impact the ISS office had on her experiences in the US, she continued to have a positive impression of them.

At the conclusion of our final interview Denise said that the impact of the ISS office on her experience at MU was “very small.” The biggest areas of impact were helping her with documents and orientation. She said her adjustment to the US was “pretty much forced by the environment. You have to improve your English. You have to know more about the American news to get involved in the groups or the community.” She enjoyed the time she spent with Chi Alpha and The Bridge, but found frustration at her job. She wanted to interact more personally with Americans, but it proved difficult sometimes. “I want to be kidding with the customers sometimes because I’m the cashier. Sometimes they will say something really fun or tell you a joke, but I can’t get them. I am so embarrassed.” Her overall assessment of her first semester was overwhelmingly positive though.

About studying in the US she said, “It’s totally new and there are lots of things to discover. I feel really excited about that.” She felt her adjustment was good considering the language barrier. She also reported very little homesickness other than when she found out that her grandparents moved in with her parents. She wished she could have been home at that time. However, she stayed in contact with her parents about once a month which felt appropriate for her. She reported at the end of the final interview that she attended a boarding school during her middle and high school years where she would

travel back home to see her parents about once a month. Her first two years of the 2+2 program were also at a university away from home. Therefore, living away from her parents for the majority of the year was normal to her. In her final comments she stated that she wished she had become involved with the FBB program and that the program was expanded to help pair more sojourners with domestic students on an individual basis. She felt this would have helped her improve her social skills and confidence.

“Eddie.”

Eddie was a 20-year-old, male, sophomore from Penang, Malaysia. He transferred to MU after completing courses as a business major at American University in Penang. He heard about MU from some of his friends who were seniors at the time at MU. They encouraged him to follow them to MU after completing his freshman year at American University. He speaks two dialects of Mandarin, English, and Malaysian. He is the youngest of three brothers. One brother was studying at another university in a different state. The other brother was working in a restaurant in New York City and was helping support Eddie financially. He reported that neither one of his brothers gave him any advice about studying or living in the US prior to his arrival at MU. He described his family as “very strict” which did not allow him a great deal of freedom growing up. He came to MU to enjoy independence from his family and the freedoms of being a college student in the US. He had a calm demeanor, was extremely friendly, and had a great sense of humor. He enjoyed making witty comments and telling entertaining stories throughout the interviews. He described himself as a shy person, but nothing in our interactions throughout the semester supported that claim. He was excited to be in the US and was looking forward to “everything” during his first semester.

Asked during his first interview about his interactions with the ISS office, Eddie said he had gone there to take care of his travel documents. While there he met the president of the Malaysian ISO as well as students from China, Singapore, Korea, Uganda, and Nepal. He also attended a social event for Asian students where they provided food and played games to get to know one another. At the event he was informed of upcoming events such as the international student bazaar and various culture nights. He attended the international student orientation as well. "Orientation was kind of boring. You have to go through a lot of things. And most of the time we know all that." However, he was impressed with how efficiently the ISS office handled all of his paperwork. He said they also played a large part in helping sojourners meet new people by linking them with the ISO. Given his outgoing personality, an opportunity to make friends is all Eddie needed to form relationships quickly.

At the end of the first interview Eddie said the largest impact the ISS office had on him up to that point was helping him meet new people, which was a high priority for him coming to the US. He reported that his adjustment to the US had gone very smoothly, but that was due in large part to the older Malaysian students who helped take care of most of his social and academic needs. He said:

They give us a lot of advice and suggestions – the residential problems and culture shocks [*sic*]. What to do. What not to do. And just some tips on studying, like getting textbooks from Amazon and, like, rent a textbook online so it's cheaper. Some of them...just give us their textbooks and their notes. And they fetch us around. They have cars so they drive us around. They pick us up from Wal-Mart and we have a couple of dinners together.

Asked if the older students gave him advice on studying in the US, he said, “Yeah. They even ask us to join them [in] study groups because, some of the subjects, they are [the] same.” To conclude the interview Eddie said he had not utilized the ISS office very much, but knew they were a resource for international students who were in need of help. An additional service that he wished the ISS office provided was more opportunities for international students to meet domestic students. It seemed that he could not meet enough new people.

During the second interview Eddie reported not going to the ISS office very often but being highly involved with the Malaysian ISO. He participated in the international student bazaar, helping run the booth for the ISO. He said:

I was the first one to [get there] in the Malaysian society... because I would kind of get excited and I wake [*sic*] up, like, pretty early and I just went there. I just sleep early Saturday night. I don't know what Malaysian students are going to do because I'm new so I didn't go to the, like, meetings. So, I don't know what they are going to sell. I just show up there and I just feel awkward because I'm the first one. I just stand there. I think the event starts at like 10:30 or 11. I show up around 9:30 or 10. So, they start setting up and they come and ask me to help them set up. And I don't know why, I was like, become [*sic*] one of the ones who has to sell. I was like doing the whole thing.

He was excited to attend the *International Student Culture Night* that occurred the evening of the interview. Although he had not visited the ISS office much since the first interview he held a very favorable opinion of them due to his involvement in the Malaysian ISO.

The third interview was much like the second in that Eddie had not visited the ISS office at all but still had a high opinion of the office and attended the culture night as previously stated. He had forgotten to tell me previously that he had won tickets to the culture night during the ISO icebreaker event discussed in the first interview. He continued to enjoy as many social events as possible. The impact the ISS office had on his experience was that it helped him meet new people. He added that it helped to “unite” the international students with a sharing of cultures and made MU “feel more like home.” He said that the greatest impact on his life as a sojourner in the US came from casually spending time with friends he met at ISS events. Therefore, the ISS office had a positive effect on him “indirectly.” In summary, Eddie was a highly social person who valued friendship and community over everything else including academics (although he passed his classes). He enjoyed becoming involved with the Malaysian ISO and helping others whenever he could. He greatly enjoyed his first semester in the US and could not be more excited about continuing his time at MU.

“Frank.”

Frank was a 19-year-old, freshman male from Jinja, Uganda. His major course of study was aerospace engineering. He had a warm, soft-spoken yet confident demeanor. Physically, he was somewhat diminutive with a thin frame. His economic sponsor was a family friend who fell ill from an unknown illness shortly before Frank came to the US. Additionally, both of Frank’s parents died of AIDS a few years prior to his arrival in the US. He reported being hypoglycemic which made his dietary adjustment to the US important. He is the oldest of four siblings. He has a 17-year old sister, a 12-year-old sister, and a brother who is 8-years-old. His oldest sister was in charge of caring for the

other two siblings while Frank came to the US. Frank came to the US to complete his education so that he can get a good job and finance his siblings' educations. He speaks nine languages – English, French, Swahili, and six dialects in Uganda.

Frank stated that because he had the opportunity to come to the US to study it was his responsibility to do so no matter the difficulties he might face, including homesickness, physical ailments, and academic difficulties. He stated:

I believe since I was able to come, then that means a lot to me too. I say, yeah, we can be better if we work hard. Nothing is for free in this world. You have to struggle. Struggling is part of the deal, and also persisting.

He also reported having a strong Christian faith and credited God with helping him make it to the US. He was able to get his student visa in only one week – a process that usually takes at least three months. He said, “It took me one week. So that’s why I say, ‘You have to send God to do some things.’” Frank’s use of language was often philosophical and ethereal in nature. His strong sense of purpose in studying in the US at MU was evident throughout the interviews.

Frank stated during the first interview that he goes to the ISS office 3-4 times per week. It was his main resource for any question he had about studying in the US, but he also enjoyed socializing with the ISS staff. The only ISS event he had attended at the time was the international student orientation, although he planned to attend a welcoming party for sojourners the next day. His impression of the ISS office was that they were “always quite patient” and they showed “good hospitality.” He described the impact the ISS office had on his overall experiences thus far as “great.” He said, “Wow! Is there anything bigger than awesome?” He described how the ISS office helped him research

scholarships, took care of his travel documents, and directed him toward social events.

However, taking part in social activities was not high on Frank's priority list:

It is better I sweat now than sweating [*sic*] in the future. So what do I mean? It is better I suffer now. Then, I'm enjoying [*sic*] my future. I will enjoy every type of party when I'm grown up – when I'm rich. Parties are just inviting.

He stated that although he enjoys chatting with others often he would rather watch a science fiction or action movie than go to a social event.

During the first interview Frank also spoke about his adjustment to the US. Frank was not able to Skype with his family and friends in Uganda due to the poor internet connection at his home and his family not being very computer literate. He occasionally talked to his friends or family on his cell phone for about a minute or so and that was enough for him. When he got homesick he would tell stories about Uganda to other students and it would comfort him. Although he said that he enjoyed American food (Chick-fil-a, in particular) he also had a digestive issue that reduced him to eating only an occasional biscuit and drinking a lot of water. He looked forward to possibly taking part in many other activities while in the US, including learning Spanish so that he could speak it to other international students. He was also interested in travelling to other US states and possibly serving in the US military. It became clear during Frank's first interview that he saw few limitations in life and never wanted an opportunity to pass him by.

Frank's second interview showed little change in his experience on campus. He attended the ISS office's *Africa Night* and enjoyed it a great deal. He continued routinely to go to the ISS office to see some of the staff, but rarely for any official reason other

than to help a friend from Uganda complete his application to MU. He maintained a highly positive impression of the ISS office into the middle of the semester. The impact that the ISS office had on his life had not changed since the first interview. He stated that his social and academic needs were being met. He reported that his adjustment to the US has been very smooth and he continued to enjoy his time at MU.

During Frank's third interview he said he had not attended any ISS events since the previous interview. He stated that he had been too busy preparing for finals to attend any social events at all. His impression of the ISS office continued to be very positive at the end of the semester. Asked to describe the impact the ISS office events had on his overall experience at MU, he stated:

Attending such functions, first and foremost, it leads to the popularity of your country. And the more your country is popular in this university, the more friends you get. It will come to [others] specifically [being] interested in knowing your home country. "Hey. How do things work in your country? How do they live?" And, you know, this motivates you academically, socially. Actually, you don't feel out of place once you take part in such events and, especially, they embrace your culture. That's one of the most exciting things. Because, initially, before you expose your culture, you're still suspicious or you're still skeptical. You are like, "Maybe these guys will not love my culture. Maybe these guys will comment negatively." But when you are given a chance to expose your culture and people embrace it, that's the happiest moment. Every friend of mine I meet, by the time we finish the conversation, the note is, "I would like to visit Uganda." and I'm like, "Sure. We are welcoming."

So, in simple terms, we are getting globalized the more such events happen. The more people unite. You see, when you are on the outside, sometimes...you happen to get...only hard things about America. Not until you come here by yourself and experience it, you will make a final conclusion. Therefore, I usually say, "America is a land of opportunity." So, if you don't see an opportunity, just know you have a problem and fix it.

"Greg."

Greg was an 18-year-old male from Moscow, Russia in his freshman year at MU. During the previous semester he was enrolled in MU's *English Language Institute* because his English language skills were not high enough for him to be enrolled in official coursework. He is the youngest of three siblings having two older sisters. One of his sisters graduated from MU ten years prior to Greg's first interview and she still lived in the US with her husband and children. He also had an aunt and uncle who studied at MU and lived in a town nearby. Unfortunately, his aunt passed away in a car accident the same year that his sister started to attend MU. Greg's father is a politician who also owns "alcohol factories" in Russia and his mother is a homemaker. Greg came to MU on the advice of his family members who attended MU, with his main interest being becoming a member of the wrestling team. Although Greg was friendly, cooperative, and forthcoming during the interviews, he did not show a great deal of emotion and spoke in a low tone most of the time. Unlike Frank, Greg's answers were typically short and to the point, with his stories lacking details. However, he spoke with confidence and a great deal of candor during the interviews.

At the time of his first interview Greg's only interactions with the ISS office were much like the other international students. He went to the international student orientation and visited the ISS office to take care of his travel documents. He was happy to have met a student from the country of Georgia who worked in the ISS office. She was a female student who, he thought, was a junior. He enjoyed talking with her in Russian and had stopped by the ISS office a couple of times just to talk to her. His impression of the ISS office was that they were very efficient with his travel documents, even when he made a surprise trip to see his sister who lives in the US. Through the student from Georgia he also met two other female Russian students who were also athletes. Asked if he planned on attending any other ISS events, Greg said he did not. He did not enjoy large group activities and preferred to spend time with the wrestling team over other international students. He said that he had more in common with the wrestlers than any other students, although most of the other wrestlers were Americans. They helped him adjust to the US more than any other group or individual on campus. He reported little impact of the ISS office on his experiences in the US other than to take care of his travel documents and meeting the student from Georgia.

At the time of his second interview Greg had no other interactions with the ISS office since the first interview except to visit his Russian friends. He continued to report having a positive impression of the ISS office. Asked how his adjustment to the US was going, he said, "Difficult. I don't know exactly. It's a little bit too difficult and a little too easy." He said making friends was very easy for him. He initiated conversations with others "everywhere. It's not difficult for me to make friends." One of the reasons it has been so easy to make friends is due to the general friendliness of other students. He said,

“Honestly, people in America are so different unlike [*sic*] in Russia – like, character, temper, anything. In Russia, like, if you go to anywhere, people don’t smile to you. In America, everybody smiles.” His adjustment to the difference in academics was more difficult, but he thought he had improved academically since the first interview:

Yeah, I got total experience. At first I didn’t understand anything. But now I got everything. Like, homework...it’s so difficult. Like, some assignments, it was so difficult because there were a lot of different words which I didn’t know and, like, since those [*sic*] time, my English improved and now it’s not so difficult. So, we don’t have homework in Russia. We just have lectures and every month just tests. So, our grades counted and if we have good grades, we don’t have to take final exam. Every class...you must write [a] paper [over] the whole course. It’s like 25 pages.

Greg said his study habits improved greatly since the first interview due to the additional assignments in his coursework. During the third interview he explained further why he was becoming more disciplined academically.

Greg stated during the third interview that his transition to the US was going well, but that he was somewhat nervous about his finals. He said, “I’m not ready for finals – not prepared. None of my friends are prepared.” He said he would be ready for them because he had developed better study habits. He said:

I’m learning about studying in the US. It’s different than in Russia. In Russia, if you want a higher grade, then you just give the professor or teacher some money or gift and you just ask for a higher grade and get a higher grade.

He learned that he could not rely on giving gifts, but rather would have to learn the material to get a better grade in the US.

Greg utilized the services in the ISS office one time since his second interview to have his I-20 form completed for his trip during spring break. However, he would stop by occasionally to see the friends he made. He said, "I stop by to talk every now and then. Just to talk. Not for anything in particular. But everyone there always says 'hi' to me. Everyone makes me feel really good. They are very happy to see me." He was complimentary of the ISS office. Describing the impact the ISS office had on his overall experience as a sojourner in the US, he said:

I think they are very good. They have really helped me out with all of my documents. They are all in order. There was one time I went in there to get my documents and the minute before I left they yelled at me, "[Greg]! Do you remember that you have to have this document signed before you come back?" That was in March when I was leaving. And so they made sure. If I didn't have that document coming back, I would have had trouble coming back to the United States. They were thinking about my documents.

He said it was good to know that they are there for him even if he did not go to the ISS-sponsored events.

Greg described his transition to the US over the course of his first semester as, "Really good." He said, "I think I've really adjusted to the United States very well. I have made some good friends through the wrestling program. That's where I have made most of my friends." He said he experienced significant homesickness during the first month at MU, but that changed over the course of the semester. He said:

Oh yes. For the first month, almost every day, I call my friends. I would call my friends telling them I hate it here. I hated [the town in which MU's located]. I argued with parents every day. "Why did you send me here? Why couldn't I just study in Russia? Why can't I be home?" They said...I can't because my brother and my sister studied here and they told my parents that I needed to come here.

Originally, Greg said it was his idea to study in the US. He continued:

About three years ago, that's what I told them [my parents]. I wanted to come to the United States. Right before, weeks before I came here I told them that...I wanted to study in Russia. I don't want to go the United States and they said, "No. You go to the United States." My sister told them and told me I need to study here because, if I get an education here, then I will be able to get a better job than if I just studied in Russia. So, that's why I had to study here. And I'm glad I did. I learned there are good people. Not all people are the same. I thought all Americans were one type of person. Everybody is their own individual.

He stated that he matured a great deal over the course of the semester, which was noticeable to his family when he travelled back to Russia during spring break. They told him that he had grown up and they were happy to see the changes in him. He could tell that he had become more independent and self-reliant, which was a good feeling for him. Additionally, when he heard that other Russian students were discussing starting their own ISO, he said he would be very interested in getting involved. This was a significant change from being a student who initially did not want to attend any events to being one who wanted to help plan and lead those events in the future.

“Holly.”

Holly was a very outgoing 21-year-old female student from Valparaiso, Chile in her senior year of study. She was an Agricultural Business major who often rode her skateboard to interviews and dressed in stylish skateboard apparel – loose-fitting jeans and t-shirts, a baseball cap askew the top of her head, skater shoes, and a large jacket. She always kept a short, modern haircut. As a child, she grew up in Puerto Valas, Chile with her mother. She did not speak of her father. At the age of 12 she was expelled from school for bullying, bringing alcohol to school, and breaking rules on a regular basis which put a large strain on her relationship with her mother. At that point she made the decision to improve her behavior and her academics. She was able to become a very good student and saw her relationship with her mother improve significantly. After finishing high school she lived in Valparaiso with her uncle while attending college.

It was shortly before starting college at the age of 17 that Holly came out as a lesbian to her family and friends. She had never experienced any discrimination for being lesbian, but said that Chile, in general, is a more traditional country that is not openly supportive of LGBTQ people. She stated this is seen more in the older generations and very little, if at all, in people her own age. She found more conflict with the culture in Chile in her adventurous, outgoing personality. She cited this as a reason she enjoys America so much. She said:

I’m a really different person from the rest of the Chilean people. You know? In Chile, my friends look at me like, “Yeah, you are crazy. You’re a wild person.” And, I don’t know, “You are just different.” But we have to love too. You know? I know I’m different, but when I came here and I know [*sic*] all new people and

American people, I was like, “Yeah! I’m pretty much like you guys – my thoughts, my everything, the way I tell things.” You know?

Throughout her interviews Holly emphasized the importance of self-improvement and finding new experiences. However, she often stated that performing well academically was her top priority. A theme throughout her interviews was the importance of getting the most out of life. She took pride in taking risks others may not.

Holly was socially conscious and wanted to live in various parts of the world using her education in agriculture to help underprivileged areas find new food sources to alleviate hunger. She made friends very easily and cared deeply about them. While describing her close relationship with family members she often became emotional. Holly was always an engaging person to interview. We often had to stop our conversations short to keep from running over time in the study rooms.

Holly stated during her first interview that she had a few interactions with the ISS office. In addition to attending orientation and adjusting her schedule, she went to the ISS office to help some US students who were interested in travelling to Chile find out more about her country. She enjoyed meeting the American students and was hoping that the encounter would lead to some new friendships. She was mildly disappointed when it did not. She also went to the ISS office for help finding a job on campus. With the ISS office’s help she was able to get a job working in MU’s Student Union. Her impressions of the ISS office were positive, although she felt she did not have many interactions with them. When she described the impact the ISS office had on her experience in the US so far she initially thought they had little impact on her life. However, that idea changed the more she thought. She said:

Maybe I have, like, the wrong impression, but for now, they don't do a lot of things for me. But maybe they did and I just can't realize because I have, like, other things that I fill in the balance, you know? But maybe, yeah, I'm sure they helped me a lot with everything. I am working in the Student Union and they helped me with that too. You should know that I think they help with a lot of stuff.

Holly reported a few more interactions with the ISS office during her second interview. She mentioned the emails that she received every week from the ISS office. Additionally, she went to the ISS office to speak to more US students interested in visiting Chile. She also attended the international bazaar with some of her international friends and had a great time sampling all the different types of food. Her impression of her experiences with the ISS office remained very positive from the first interview. She reported that the ISS office had little impact on her experiences at MU since the last interview. The biggest impact on her experiences in the US came from making friends in her classes. After being paired with an American student on a class project she was invited on a spring break trip. She described how the trip came about:

We had to do like a presentation in the class and we become [*sic*] friends. She introduced me to her friends and suddenly she tell [*sic*] me, "Hey, you want to go to spring break with us? We're going camping and to New Orleans." And I was like, "Yeah. Of course I want to go to New Orleans." It was really good. I was with six girls. It was five days and I didn't know these six girls at all. I was really, like, nervous about it, but it was really cool. We never fight. They were really cool with me – like help [*sic*] me with my English.

Holly's adjustment to the US after the first interview appeared to develop more from her outgoing personality than from ISS events. She was aware of the various culture nights from other ISOs (Africa Night, China Night, etc.), but she was not interested in attending those events. She was more interested in meeting American students.

Although there was not a mixer event with American students Holly met another American student in botany class. She said:

She's older than me and she has a husband and two kids. She was, like, really cool. [I] met the kids and everything and I know more about the American culture. And for my birthday, they invited me to their home [to] have dinner and prepare me a birthday cake. That was really cool. I call her (I didn't say that to her, but to my friend) my American mom. She's more my friend, but she's cool with everything. I know if I have a problem I can, like, ask her, "You can help me please with this?"

Holly said that her classmate helped her through many adjustments in the US, including grocery shopping, studying, and a breakup with her girlfriend in Chile. Again, her adjustment to the US developed because of her ability to make friends easily.

During the final interview Holly reported that she had only been to the ISS office to help a student who planned to study abroad in Chile. However, she maintained a positive impression of the ISS office. Looking back over the entire semester Holly said that the ISS office was "not so important, really. But, I know if I have a problem, I can come talk to them and they are going to do everything to help me. But that hasn't happened too much this semester." She added, "It's like a safe place. It's cool." She stated that living in the international student dorm helped her adjustment to the US the

most this semester, along with her relationship with her married classmate. She talked about how having both international and domestic friends helped her:

International friends, they're living the same that I'm living now. So, we have kind of the same feelings and everything. If I [am] sad or something because of my family, they can understand me. Americans can try to understand, but they can't understand me because it's not the same situation. But, I came here to America to know American culture. So, my American friends help me a lot with that.

To sum up her experiences as an international student at MU she stated, "I'm really proud of it. Other people ask me, 'Why you don't study in another country – another university in America?' I thought about a big city, but I like being here. I enjoy it. It's pretty cool."

"Ivy."

Ivy was a 23-year-old graduate student from Germany who was taking junior and senior level classes at MU as a study abroad student for one semester only. This was her third time to study abroad, but her first time in the US. She was studying to be an interpreter and felt that the experience in the US would help her English language proficiency. In interpretation studies, language proficiency is described in alphabetic terms with *A* being the native language, *B* being the next most proficient, etc. Ivy's *A* language is German while her *B* and *C* languages are French and English, respectively. She is the oldest of four siblings. She had a 21-year-old sister who was studying education, a 20-year-old brother studying law, and a 5-year-old brother. Her father is an engineer and her mother is a homemaker. Ivy had a bright, inquisitive, and energetic personality. She spoke optimistically about a variety of subjects at a rapid pace and

appeared curious about many things. She often started phrases with “What I find interesting about...” or “I find it interesting that...” During her first interview she used the word *interesting* 31 times. She reported that she likes meeting people from different cultures who share her same views and personality traits, but appreciates differences between people. One of her favorite activities was being part of MU’s open chorus – a choir for non-music majors. She described herself as an impulsive person who is not very organized, but wishes she were. At the conclusion of the semester she planned to take a bus by herself from MU to Los Angeles, then to San Francisco, and finally to Chicago.

During Ivy’s first interview she said that she enjoyed the international student orientation because it was very easy to follow due to the clear handouts provided. Her interactions with the ISS office up to that point had been getting a shuttle from the airport to campus, going to one international student mixer event, and receiving several emails for additional services and activities. She said that she did not attend many of the activities because they usually occurred on Friday nights when she was going out with friends or calling home. Her impression of the ISS office was very positive. She said:

I found that they really took care of us. For example, that they had the shuttle buses from the airport to the university. It was really nice. I wouldn’t really have known what I should take. And they also tell you, “Well, if you can’t take the shuttle bus, these are all the options that you should take.” I found it nice the offer that they would take us from the airport to [campus], and also that they knew exactly who we were because there was some problem I had when I landed. They knew exactly where I was and what I needed.

Ivy stated several times during the interview that her interactions with the ISS office were always “so nice” and her questions were answered quickly and thoroughly. At the conclusion of her first interview she said that the biggest impact the ISS office had on her overall experience in the US was making her transition to the US very easy and answering her emails prior to her arrival at MU. She had many questions for them before she arrived and emailed them nearly every day. She said that she always received a friendly response swiftly. Otherwise, the ISS office did not have a large impact on her experience after she arrived in the US. She stated:

I suppose the good impact is that I always know that if I have a problem, I can go up to them and they know the problem because they understand. But, I also have to admit that they kind of always [look at things from] the American side. So, I don't necessarily go to the ISS office to become fully immersed in culture. What I'm saying is...I very often, actually, find myself more in class with American students and I take the ISS office when I need to – when I have questions or when I really have a problem. I wouldn't say, actually, they had a lot of impact as a student because all the issues have been resolved more or less. So, I could just be a student here. It was not like before I came because I sent e-mails kind of every day or so.

Due to her frequent correspondence with the ISS office prior to her arrival she felt prepared to study in the US after she was on campus. She stated, “That actually is a good thing if you are arriving here and you don't need to go to the ISS office every day.”

During the second interview Ivy reported that she had two interactions with the ISS office since the first weeks of the semester. She bought tickets to the Culture Night

and attended a luncheon during which European students discussed the Study Abroad program with domestic students. Her impression of the ISS office did not change from the first interview. She said, "It's very nice because I know that if I have a problem, I know exactly where to go." However, her transition to the US was going very well with few problems of note. She described the impact the ISS office had on her since the first interview as "not a large impact." Conversely, she could not think of any additional service that she needed them to provide.

During the third interview Ivy said that she had not been to the ISS office since the second interview except to tell everyone, "goodbye." Her final impression of the ISS office was that they were all very good at their jobs, helpful, and extremely nice. She enjoyed the efficiency of the office in responses to any of the few needs she had. When I asked her if the ISS had any additional impact on her experiences in the US since her previous interview, she answered simply, "No." She summed up her experience in the US in the following way:

I really liked it. Yes, because I learned a lot. For example,...one time Charles De Gaulle (that was the French President) said he would like to have the United States of Europe. He was actually well known to be for the National Sovereign States. I remember thinking, at first, that doesn't make sense because the United States is a united country. So, basically what you would like to have is a Europe that has basically one government for all the different countries. And then I realized that that's the image that the United States portrays to the exterior. That they're a united country, but if you're in there you realize, "Oh, it's 50 states who are doing 50 different things." Basically, if it's not 50 states, you have at least the

northern parts that are different than the southern parts. Well, I do find Americans are very nice.

Ivy concluded her final interview saying that she enjoyed her time in the US and at MU, in particular. She reported having no problems during her semester, including not experiencing homesickness. She was thankful for the ISS making her adjustment to the US as smooth as it was by supplying her with a large amount of information prior to her arrival on campus.

Summary

This chapter provided narrative descriptions of the observations of the ISS events as well as the interviews with the director of the ISS office and the nine sojourners chosen for this study. Through the reduction of this data, themes and patterns emerged that provided insight into the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of international students from the perspective of the sojourners. Chapter Five is the case report of the findings from the data collected.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

Chapter Four presented narrative descriptions of the observations of three International Student Services events and of interviews conducted with nine international students as well as the director of the ISS office at MU. Chapter Five discusses the themes that emerged from the observations and interviews. Data were analyzed using the processes of initial coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013) described in chapter three with the aid of MAXQDAplus 11 software. Because this study is based in interpretivism and constructionism (Crotty, 2003), the narrative descriptions sought to portray the experiences of the sojourners from their point of view to better understand the perceived impact the ISS office had on their lives in their first semester in the US. This chapter begins with a discussion of my own perspective regarding international students prior to beginning this study. It then transitions to the emergent themes found across the data before concluding with a summary of the chapter.

My Perspective

My interest in studying international students comes from a handful of personal experiences traveling abroad as a youth and young adult. Although the trips were no longer than two weeks in duration, I often wondered what it would be like to live in those countries and how well I would adjust to living there. This fascination often led me to choose international students as a topic for assignments in my doctoral studies. My

preconceived notions of international students were that they would most likely be adventurous, ambitious, excited by change rather than fearful of it, independent, and highly sociable. I did not expect students without many of these qualities to even consider leaving their home country to study abroad.

Conversely, I was completely unsure what type of relationship sojourners would report having with the ISS office. This was a significant curiosity that led to this study. Although I had chosen international students as a topic several times in my graduate work prior to this study, I found little information about sojourners' relationships with the ISS office that would cause me to develop preconceived notions about how they would describe the impact the ISS office had on their educational experience in the US.

Emergent Themes

The themes that emerged through the analysis of data found in Chapter Four are presented in the order of personal traits of the students, their adjustment to the US, their impressions of the ISS office, their use of the ISS office, and their perceived impact of the ISS office on their lives in the US. The sub-headings for each section are taken from words spoken by the international students during their interviews.

It's Really Nice to Experience a Different Culture

The adventurous, social, and determined natures of the sojourners were evident throughout this study. Many of the international students spoke about travelling or studying internationally before coming to the US to study. Andy studied in Italy and Egypt prior to coming to the US. When traveling with his parents Carl would be given an extra four or five days to travel alone in the same area before returning home. He stated,

“They said, ‘You go. Whatever you’re going to do, you do. And try to connect with other people.’” He spent time in Thailand and Hong Kong in this manner and enjoyed both a great deal. Ivy participated in study abroad programs three times in different countries prior to coming to the US. Holly visited several countries in South America, the Dominican Republic, and the US before enrolling at MU. Greg would often go to Dubai for vacations on his own because it was only a two hour flight from his home in Russia. With travel in other cultures away from family a common occurrence for most of the sojourners it is easy to see how making the decision to study in the US would not be difficult for them.

The students also spoke often of coming to the US to receive an exceptional education and to meet new people, alluding to their ambitious and social nature. Frank chose to study in the US because “the top research institutions, universities, are all in the United States. And above all...the major that I want is best done in the US. So...that’s how I come to choose to come to the US.” He chose MU specifically because of the breadth of programs for international students. He said:

It’s the wide ISO – the International Students Organization. I think you guys (MU) have the biggest ISO. I saw there are very many different international cultures gathered here. And I was surprised. I didn’t expect to see anything from my country, but I found my flag at the ISO office and so they excited me.

Denise chose MU for the excellent hotel management program and the chance to experience US culture firsthand. She said, “I watch a lot of American movie [*sic*] growing up when I was young. I always dream [*sic*] of going to America and have a

couple of months or years living here.” She enjoyed the friendliness of the campus and the opportunity to meet new people. She stated that the amount of hospitality and opportunity for social connection found on MU’s campus are not often seen in Chinese culture. Each international student reported finding it easy to make social connections with other students – both international and domestic – in a variety of settings.

I Have Made a Lot of Friends from Different Countries

Sojourners were able to make social connections on campus based on their personal interests, whether the connections were made through events coordinated by the ISS office, through joining activities involving their personal interests, or through casual contact with other students. Andy joined a campus soccer team by making friends with a domestic student who worked in the ISS office. Betty and Denise met other international students and domestic students by attending events organized by the off-campus group Chi Alpha. Both also found jobs on campus quickly, which increased their social circles even more. Carl participated in MU’s Family Beyond Borders program, allowing him to connect with domestic students and attend campus events with both international and domestic students. Eddie joined the Malaysian ISO, made friends in his dorm, and talked easily with anyone he met on campus. In the same manner Holly formed close friendships quickly and easily in a variety of settings around campus. Other sojourners desired fewer but stronger social contacts.

Frank was less interested in forming a large number of social contacts because his main focus was his studies. He wanted to make connections to a few select people. He was comfortable visiting the ISS office staff 3-4 times a week for his social contacts.

Greg made a few acquaintances in his classes and around campus, but he formed his closest friendships by being a member of the wrestling team. Likewise, Ivy made friendships by joining a campus choir and meeting others in her academic program. Sojourners had a variety of means to meet both international and domestic students through activities that matched their individual social needs. This allowed each of them to feel fulfilled in their social experiences as an international student at MU.

Nobody is Going to Help Me

A theme through several of the interviews was the sojourners' expectation of encountering several struggles in their adjustment to the US and a determination to overcome them. Betty reported having an issue when she needed to talk to her advisor about adding a second major. She was proud that she had learned how to email her professors and set up an appointment with her advisor. Asked how these difficulties helped her adjust to the US she said, "Because nobody is going to help me. No Chinese going [*sic*] to help me because this is my personal decision. So I have to go all on my own to the mathematics and communicate on my own with them." Asked if being self-reliant made her transition easier she said enthusiastically, "Yes. Yes. Yes." Carl had a darker view of the difficulties he expected to encounter. He said:

Once the rat is in the trap it has to try to, like, search the way in the trap itself rather than thinking who will open the trap or something like that. I say, "Just forget about things... you are here and...you just need to figure it out." I mean, since I am alone no one is my backup around here. I'm the only backup of myself

unless...until I meet some good friends. That's the thing. But until then I have to rely on myself.

Frank offered a more philosophical view of his determination to overcome obstacles and to be successful in the US. He stated:

I say, "Yeah, we can be better if we work hard." Nothing is for free in this world. You have to struggle. Struggling is part of the deal, and also persisting... No matter what type of objection comes in between [*sic*] me I believe I have to finish my university.

Other sojourners found the necessity of doing things on their own a means to their personal development.

Denise, Eddie, and Greg spoke about the advantages of becoming more self-reliant. Denise stated in her interviews that, though she did not immerse herself in American culture as much as she felt she should have, being forced to learn English and interact with others helped her. She said, "I think my adjustment [was] pretty much forced by the environment. You have to improve your English. You have to know more about the American news to get involved in the groups or the community." Although Denise may not agree, her English skills appeared to improve significantly with every interview. Eddie and Greg both stated that they felt they had matured during their first semester which helped them in their adjustment to the US. Asked what helped him adjust to the US the most Eddie said:

I think being alone – becoming more independent. Yeah. I have to do everything by myself: go to the bank, buy groceries, do the laundry and everything. Because

I didn't do laundry back...home and I have to do it myself. So I have learned a lot.

Greg's statement about his transition to the US was similar to Eddie's, and the pride he felt in his maturity was evident. He said:

I always live [*sic*] with my family – with my mother and my father. Now I live alone. And now, like, I can take responsibility for me. I became, like, serious. I became, like, a little more mature.... My mother, my father always make [*sic*] things like documents. But now I do this myself. It's good.

All sojourners were asked about their families during their interviews. Another theme that developed was the amount of homesickness each student experienced and how they managed it.

If It Happened, It Didn't Last More than 10 Minutes

The majority of the students interviewed experienced little homesickness during their first semester in the US. Nearly all of the students reported that the main reason they felt such little homesickness was due to the ability to contact family and friends back home. Many of the sojourners stated that travelling internationally prior to coming to MU helped make leaving home easier, but none of them cited this as the main reason for not experiencing much homesickness after arriving in the US. When feeling homesick the students often used video chatting applications such as Skype or Facetime to contact friends and family. Contact was maintained less frequently through social media, texting, and phone calls. The amount of time that sojourners spent contacting people in their home country varied from a few times a week to around once a month, but decreased for

every student as the semester progressed. The immediacy with which students could contact friends and family meant that the amount of time students spent contacting home was dictated by their individual emotional needs.

Most of the sojourners described their homesickness in the same manner as Eddie. Asked during his second interview if he experienced homesickness he said, “Never. I don’t know. Maybe it’s still new? It’s still new and fresh and [I am] still trying to learn things and get to know more about the US. So it’s still fun. I haven’t experienced homesickness yet.” He said that he contacts friends and family at home “seldom. Maybe...once a week. Skype. Message sometimes...when I need money.” Ivy described her homesickness in the following way. “I wouldn’t call it homesickness. More like...now I can look at both things and I can say, ‘Okay. This is what I like in the United States because this and this. And this is good. Maybe we should do this too in Germany. And this is what I like in Germany.’” Frank explained during his third interview how he dealt with his occasional homesickness. Asked if he had been homesick he said:

Yes, but to a very, very small extent, and, if it happened, it didn’t last more than 10 minutes because I know what I want. I know where I am coming from. I know where I am heading. So there are some things which should not come my way to obstruct me. That’s why, yeah, sometimes it can come, but since I know what I want, I say, “Go away.” I’m focused. So I wouldn’t put that in my mind.

Their Customer Service is Good

Every sojourner mentioned two things as the best aspects of the ISS office: the friendliness of the staff and the efficiency with which the staff processed paperwork.

Many of the students mentioned that they had confidence in the ISS office as a resource if they had a problem they could not solve on their own. However, sojourners rarely turned to the ISS office for campus information. Instead, they turned to friends or other academic offices. Only Frank and Greg visited the ISS office on a regular basis throughout the semester, but this was only to visit friends they had made in the office. Both the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office were instrumental in helping the students feel welcome and making their transition to living in the US easier.

Friendliness

The impact of the friendliness of the ISS staff (as well as MU's campus overall) on the international students in this study was evident. Some mentioned this as a major factor in choosing to attend MU. Frank said:

And what I won't forget, their customer service is good when you call. For other universities, when you call them you get [a live person] on a rare basis. But with MU, always at least someone was there to answer their phone. That motivated me even more [to choose MU].

As mentioned in previous chapters, the international students were informed of the friendliness of the campus during their orientation. For students coming from other cultures it could have been unnerving to have a stranger smile at them and greet them if they had not been forewarned. After being instructed on the cultural norms of greetings on MU's campus and surrounding community the sojourners found the friendliness comforting and inviting. Betty discussed how this helped her develop conversational skills for both Chinese and American cultures. She said:

Actually I think America is much [*sic*] friendly. With the Chinese our people are stranger [*sic*] to each other. So it's not that difficult to say "hello" or the basic social [things] with the American students like, "So what's your name? Nice to meet you. Where you come [*sic*] from?"... I was want [*sic*] to talk with them more, but I don't know how to find the topic to communicate with them because I'm not a good communicator even in Chinese. I'm not good at leading the conversation. But I think it is a positive sign because it kind of lets me meet new people – many new people – and try to talk to them and finding [*sic*] the topics which I'm really not good at in China. I don't have the opportunity to practice this skill in China because in China the people are told not to talk with strangers.

Yeah, it's a positive side.

Denise stated how the ISS staff helped her feel more at ease when first arriving on campus. "I think the people there are all very nice," she said. She discussed how, prior to orientation, an ISS staff member meticulously walked her and her roommate through the process of moving into their apartment and very patiently answered all of their questions. She said, "It makes me reliable, really, because you know nothing when you are here."

Ivy stated that the friendliness of the ISS office helped her transition to the US. She said:

Well, friendliness really did help with the transition. It's easier because, you know, it makes the day friendlier when people are polite.... Well, I really did enjoy [going to the ISS office] because it's so nice when you are going in and they smile at you....And they're very enthusiastic and say, "How can we help you?"

Greg found making friends in the US very easy. He stated that he is naturally an outgoing person, but the friendliness of the ISS office and MU's campus was different than that of Russian culture. He said:

It's not difficult for me to make friends.... Honestly, people in America are so different, unlike [*sic*] in Russia – like, character, temper, anything. In Russia, like, if you go to anywhere or just walking, people don't smile to you like all this... this face (circling his face with his finger). In America everybody smiles. And this is different.

Efficiency

In addition to the friendliness of the ISS office the sojourners were impressed with how efficiently the ISS office processed their paperwork, including travel documents, employment paperwork, and enrollment in classes. Andy emphasized that, in his opinion, this was the most important function of the ISS office. He stated, "This is the only thing you want from them – just the paperwork getting done. Everything getting done." Betty, Denise, and Holly all mentioned how the ISS office helped them acquire a Social Security card in a matter of days so they could gain part-time employment on campus. Carl discussed at length how the ISS office helped him settle an issue with his high school transcript and enrollment at MU, and quickly enrolled him in the Family Beyond Borders program. All of the sojourners made statements similar to Greg's and Ivy's regarding the efficiency of the ISS office. Greg said:

I think they [*sic*] very good. They have really helped me out with all of my documents. They are all in order. There was one time I went in there to get my

documents and the minute before I left they yell [*sic*] at me, “Greg, do you remember that you have to have this document signed before you come back?”

That was in March when I was leaving and so they made sure. If I didn’t have that document coming back, I would have had trouble coming back to the United States. They were thinking about my documents.

Ivy was impressed with how MU organized the ISS office to help international students receive help as quickly as possible. She stated:

I like the fact that I always knew what they were saying so you could really come up to them and they knew what it was and you didn’t need to explain it. And I also liked the fact that when you enter you have a fill-out form and they would try to find somebody who is for you as soon as possible....They would write down “my problem has to do with my I-20,” and they would say, “Good, ‘Chris’ will be with you shortly.” I mean, I never had a problem.

As the international students described the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office it became apparent that the majority of their contact with the ISS office occurred prior to their arrival in the US and in their first few weeks on MU’s campus. Subsequently, a theme emerged of students reporting decreasing contact with the ISS office throughout the semester.

I Think at the Very First Month of the Semester ISS are Quite Important

Over the course of the three interviews with each student a theme emerged of decreasing contact with the ISS office after the first few weeks of the semester. The sojourners typically contacted the ISS office prior to the beginning of the semester to

arrange their travel to MU's campus, attended the international student orientation, and visited the ISS office if there was a problem with their class schedule. A few of the students attended ISS events such as the Culture Night and the International Bazaar. However, most did not attend these events and only contacted the ISS office after the first month of the semester to make travel arrangements for themselves or their families.

Students stated that the assistance provided by the ISS office early on gave way to self-reliance. Asked during her final interview how large of an impact the ISS office had on her first semester in the US Betty said:

I think at the very first month of the semester ISS are quite important: the documents... the document part... and the leading, introduce [*sic*] the campus to us. Like that. But after the first month ...I'm not sure how to say...depend [*sic*] on the individual of the student. The student gets [a] little bit of independence after the first month. They are knowing [*sic*] here better.

Carl echoed the same sentiment as Betty. He described how the ISS office helped him during his first semester this way:

Like, first of all, getting the admission [*sic*]. I mean, all the procedures and all. Secondly, getting information around here [*sic*] – especially during the orientation weeks or something. I mean, ISS has had a great impact...let's say... September or something... mid-September. But after that I don't think so....Once the kind of, like, hatchling is free in the pond and after that...the hatchling will know.

Although the amount of contact with the ISS office decreased during the first semester for every sojourner, they all stated that the areas the ISS office affected were extremely important.

They Don't Do...a Lot of Things for Me. But Maybe They Do and I...Can't Realize

The final theme presented in this chapter addresses how the sojourners described the overall impact the ISS office had on their educational experience. The students reported that the ISS office had an impact on a limited number of areas in their lives as students in the US, but the areas that were influenced were vital to having a positive experience. As seen in statements by sojourners previously in this chapter, the areas of greatest impact were gaining admission to MU, facilitating the completion of travel documents, orientation to the university and the community, assisting with employment, and being a back-up resource if other sources of information (mainly friends and professors) proved unhelpful.

Asked how big an impact the ISS office had on her first semester in the US Betty said:

How big of an impact? Average. I think it [*sic*] medium, but to some point it was very important. Like, I cannot get my travel approved without the ISS or I get documents that I need to do. If I'm not sure how to do that with the advisor ... then I need to go to ISS. So...at that point ISS will be very important. But for a long semester, it's just not important.

Frank made a stronger statement about the importance of the ISS office that still supported Betty's assessment:

I would say it played a big impact. Fact being, if they weren't in existence, I would have not have made it here [to MU]. That's one. Two, if they were not user-friendly, I would hesitate going to ask any questions I had. That means I'll end up misfiling things. Then the next [*sic*] on the agenda would be deportation. So I would say they played a very big role. They keep reminding me of what I am supposed to do and what I'm not supposed to do and how life moves.

Eddie stated simply the impact the ISS office had on his experience in the US. He said, "For me? Not really much. I've been there only once during the orientation.... I just need my I-20 from them. The events they organize? Not much [*sic*] events during the spring. So they have little impression [*sic*]." Denise described the impact of the ISS office on her experience as "really not a lot." She said that the biggest impact was that they "help us to be legal to study and live in America. I think they may...house some international activities at the beginning of the semester." Holly had difficulty citing specific things with which the ISS office helped her, but she believed they most likely did several things for her. She said:

Maybe I have, like, the wrong impression. I don't know. But for now I think they don't do...a lot of things for me. But maybe they did and I just can't realize because I have, like, other things that I can fill in the balance, you know? But maybe...yeah, I'm sure they helped me a lot with everything.

Holly then remembered how the ISS office helped her get a job in the Student Union. She said, "I am working in the Student Union and they helped me with that, too. You should know that I think they help with a lot of stuff."

The majority of the students did not spend a great deal of time in direct contact with the ISS office throughout the course of their first semester. They may not have viewed the ISS office as having the biggest impact on their overall experience as an international student at MU. However, they understood that the ISS office served several functions that were essential to making their experience at MU a positive one. All students were appreciative of the ISS office staff and had positive things to say about their interactions with them. Every sojourner stated that the ISS office provided them with a solid foundation of information and hospitality that set them on a course of success at MU.

Summary

This chapter contained the findings from the data collected in this study and presented the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Student interviews, natural observations of ISS events, and ISS documents were analyzed using the processes of initial and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013) described in Chapter Three, with the aid of MAXQDAplus 11 software. As large amounts of data were categorized several themes emerged that were further refined into the main themes discussed in this chapter. The first two themes illuminated the backgrounds of the students and laid the foundation for the final three themes that addressed the research questions of this study more directly. The first two themes that emerged were: (1) the adventurous, social, and determined personalities of the sojourners, and (2) the limited amount of homesickness experienced by the sojourners due to technology. The third theme discussed in this chapter was the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office staff. The next theme presented was that the students had a decreasing amount of contact with the ISS office over the course of the

semester. The final theme from the data was that the students reported the ISS office had an impact on only a few areas in their lives at MU. However, the impact in those areas was significant and vital to making their experience at MU a positive one. The examination of these themes sets the stage for the final chapter of this study.

Chapter Six will begin with a review of the problem statement, research questions, and methodology of this study. Following the review of the findings found in this chapter, it will provide a discussion and analysis of the emergent themes. The discussion will include the relationship of the findings to previous research and theory as well as implications of the findings in future practice. Chapter Six will then discuss the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research. The chapter will close with a summary and a conclusion to the dissertation.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Chapter Five presented the findings of the emergent themes found in the data collected from the interviews with nine international students across their first semester of study in the United States, with additional data from observations of International Student Services (ISS) office events and an interview with the Director of ISS at MU. This chapter begins by revisiting the problem statement and research questions of the study, providing a review of the methodology, and summarizing the findings from Chapter Five. It then offers a discussion of the findings in relation to previous research and theory along with implications of the findings in future practice of ISS. This chapter then discusses the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research. Chapter Six concludes with a summary of both the chapter and the entire dissertation.

Problem Statement

Record numbers of international students are attending colleges and universities in the United States with many of the institutions committing significant resources toward ISS to help international students adjust socially, emotionally, and educationally to attending college in the United States. However, research shows that international students do not report extensive use of the services provided by the ISS office. Often,

only a small percentage of international students attend events planned for them (Ang & Liamputtong, 2008; Trice, 2004). The exponential increase in international student attendance on US campuses in recent years suggests that sojourners often have positive educational experiences. Therefore, a more thorough knowledge of how international students view the ISS office and its services would provide greater understanding of the relationship between international students and the ISS office, and the impact that the relationship has on the lives of the sojourners.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to better understand, from the sojourner viewpoint, the relationship international students at Midwestern University (MU) had with the ISS office and the perceived impact this relationship had on their experiences as an international student in the US. The research questions posed in this study were:

1. What types of experiences with the ISS office do international students in their first year of study in the United States report?
2. What impressions do the international students have of their experiences with the ISS office?
3. How do international students describe the impact that their experiences with the ISS office have on their overall experience of being a college student in the United States?

Review of Methodology

The research methodology of this study focused primarily on interviews with nine international students and an interview with Jim, the Director of MU's ISS office. Supporting data were collected from observations of three events hosted by the ISS office and documents produced by the ISS office. The main participants in the study were nine international students from various regions around the world who were in their first semester of study at a university in the US. The students were interviewed at the beginning, middle, and end of their first semester on campus to gain a broad understanding of their interactions with the ISS office over time. Jim was interviewed after all student interviews were completed to allow the student interviews to proceed without preconception on my part of the relationship the ISS office intended to develop with international students during their first semester. All interviews were transcribed verbatim into individual documents.

The collected data were uploaded to the MAXQDAplus 11 software and analyzed using the processes of initial coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2013). After several themes emerged from the data they were reduced further into the major themes that addressed the research questions of this study. The findings of the themes found across the subjects were presented and summarized in Chapter Five.

Summary of Findings

The findings showed that the differences between the nine sojourners in this study diminished due to the commonality they shared while adjusting to their first semester of study in the US. As varied as their backgrounds were, they came together in the singular

experience of adjusting to the same environment – MU’s campus. The findings revealed five major themes concerning the perceived impact of the ISS office on the nine international students. The first two themes addressed: (1) the personal attributes of the students, and (2) homesickness – a major concern of ISS offices in the US according to the review of literature. The final three themes addressed the research questions of this study more directly. The first theme that emerged was the adventurous, social, and determined personalities of the sojourners. The next theme was the limited amount of homesickness experienced by the sojourners due to technology. The third theme was how impressed the students were with the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office staff. The fourth theme was that the students reported a decreasing amount of contact with the ISS office over the course of the semester. The final theme from the data was that the students reported the ISS office having an impact on very few areas in their lives, but the impact in those areas was substantial and critical to having a positive experience at MU. The relationships between the emergent themes found in Chapter Five to research and theory are discussed in the subsequent sections, followed by the implications of the findings for future practice of international student services.

Discussion

Chapter Two presented an overview of the history of international student attendance on college campuses in the United States, including the establishment of ISS offices. The origins of ISS offices began with the formation of the Institute of International Education in 1919, which proffered that peace between nations could only be achieved through greater understanding of each other’s cultures via educational exchange of students and faculty (IIE, 2013a). The rapid increases in sojourner

attendance on US campuses (most notably following the enactment of the Fulbright Act of 1946 and at the end of the 20th century through present day) brought several challenges to ISS offices tasked with helping international students adjust to living and studying in the US. The following section of this chapter discusses the findings in Chapter Five and their relationship to the research and theory presented in Chapter Two, as well as implications of the findings toward future practice.

Relationship of Findings to Previous Research

Adventurous, social, and determined natures of sojourners.

Although this study is unique in its qualitative approach to the relationship between sojourners from many regions of the world and the ISS office, there were several findings supported by prior research. Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) studied individual attributes and experiences of international students. Perrucci and Hu (1995) reported that the satisfaction in the campus experience of sojourners was largely shaped by their language skills, levels of self-esteem, and feelings of competence. These factors influenced the students' ability to engage socially on campus and interact more with domestic students as well as professors and other sojourners. Stanton-Salazar's (1997) research also found that students who had increased contact with domestic students reported having a better educational experience than those with less contact with domestic students. Several of the adjustment factors found in the research of both Perrucci and Hu (1995), and Stanton-Salazar (1997) align with the findings of this study.

As noted in Chapter Five, the sojourners in this study were adventurous, social, and determined. All of the students in this study reported having a very positive

experience over the course of their first semester in the US, which would be expected given the attributes Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) noted as being helpful in adjusting well to the US. All international students at MU are required to pass an English language proficiency test before beginning formal classes. This ensured that the students in this study had a foundation of English proficiency that allowed them to communicate sufficiently with others on MU's campus. Most of the students reported being very social people by nature. The students in this study enjoyed the friendliness of the MU campus and interacted with both domestic and other international students to varying degrees. Greg favored interaction with domestic students on the wrestling team but made domestic and foreign friends in other areas. Betty and Denise both reported that they should have spent less time socializing with other Chinese students, but both took jobs in customer service working alongside domestic and international students. Carl enrolled in and enjoyed greatly MU's Family Beyond Borders program. Holly made several friends on campus, including close friendships with a female classmate who was married with young children and with a group of domestic students with whom she travelled on spring break. All of these experiences reported by the students of this study support the research of Perrucci and Hu (1995) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) that sojourners who possessed feelings of competence and interacted with domestic students reported a higher level of satisfaction in their educational experiences in the US.

Homesickness.

Not long after the enactment of the Fulbright Act of 1946, Sverre Lysgaard (1955) published his study regarding sojourners' "U-shaped" adjustment to living away from home. Lysgaard's research showed a three-stage pattern for most international students

wherein they experienced positive feelings soon after arriving in the US followed by severe homesickness and other negative feelings before experiencing positive feelings again after adjusting to their new environment. The U-shaped adjustment of international students continued to be found in research into the 21st century. Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, and Van Horn (2002) noted a pattern of strain felt by sojourners that was curvilinear in nature and peaked roughly two-thirds the way through the students' first semester. In 1960, Kalervo Oberg coined the term *culture shock* in reference to "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse" (p. 177). However, recent technological advances appear to have had a large influence on the culture shock and homesickness experienced by the students in this study.

International students in this study often reported little to no homesickness or culture shock. Asked how they were able to keep homesickness from having a negative effect on their lives, the sojourners stated that they were able to contact friends and family back home as often as they wanted through the use of technology. Andy reported that he contacted his family "Always. Everyday." He used Facetime or another phone application, *WhatsApp*, to speak with his family for "...an hour. Sometimes it takes 45 minutes. It depends." Students reported using internet websites and phone applications such as Facetime or Skype the most to contact family and friends. These tools allowed students to both see and speak to whomever they wanted as often as desired. Students also reported using social media, such as Facebook, to keep up with events back home, share events occurring in their own lives at MU, and send messages to their loved ones. Phone calls and text messages were the least reported methods of contact. This level of social connection may have interrupted the aspect of social adjustment that Hayes and

Lin (1994) called *social loss* in which sojourners described a feeling of losing a connection to one's social identity that is derived from one's home culture. Advances in telecommunication in the last few years allowed the students in this study to maintain a level of social connection with their home culture and loved ones not available to sojourners in the review of literature.

Friendliness and efficiency.

The international students in this study all remarked that the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office at MU had a positive impact on their campus experience. They understood the role of the ISS office on campus as the office to visit regarding travel arrangements, any enrollment issues, and information about living in the US not provided by friends or professors. The sojourners were aware of the emails they received on a regular basis from the ISS office about events on campus, academic resources, and paperwork deadlines. Clark (2002) found that the Chinese students in her study also had a positive impression of their ISA (International Student Advisor), but were unable to describe the specific role of their ISA or identify who their ISA was. MU's international student orientation left little doubt about the role of the ISS office. As Jim stated during his orientation presentation, "We are the place you all go to when you don't know where to go." Frank echoed Jim's statement during his interviews. He said:

When you go to the ISS office inquiring [about] anything they are always quite patient. Usually...I visit that place 3 times or 4 times a week. I go to inquire about how [*sic*] my studies are going to be like. I go there to inquire in case they have any scholarships. I go there also to inquire if I can get any student part-time job

with the ISS. So, I've often gone there even to inquire more about my stay here. As in, "How am I meant to do things when I am here?" Yes. I often visit the ISS. And I appreciate everyone....Sometimes I go there to say "Hi" to them because the majority of them know me. They knew me even before I came because I really give them plenty [of] calls.

Although most of the students in this study did not visit the ISS office as regularly as Frank, they all understood the ISS office's critical role in handling their travel documents and any other issue they may have on campus. Every sojourner also concurred with Frank regarding the friendliness and the welcoming feeling they received from the ISS office. The feelings fostered by the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office are what Rendón (1994) described as *validation* – a feeling that they (the sojourners) are accepted and recognized as valuable (p.44). This is in contrast to the students in Clark (2002) who reported receiving little contact from their ISAs and, when they were contacted, did not report a warm interaction with them. One student in Clark (2002) summarized her interactions with her ISA in the statement, "Treat me as a person, not as a student" (p. 105).

Decreasing amount of contact with the ISS office.

The Chinese students who were the focus of the study by Clark (2002) reported a decrease in contact with their ISA over the course of their entire education in the US. The students in this study reported a decrease in contact with the ISS office over the course of their first semester as well. Most of the sojourners in this study only visited the ISS office regarding travel or employment documents. These documents are naturally processed

prior to and at the beginning of the semester (unless the student is travelling internationally at the conclusion of the semester). Therefore, it is understandable that most international students spend the majority of their time in the ISS office at the beginning of the semester and with decreasing frequency throughout the semester.

Impact on only a few areas.

The final major theme from the findings of this study was that the students reported that the ISS office had an impact on relatively few areas of their entire educational experience in the US. However, the areas in which it had an impact were vital to the students having a positive experience in the US. This theme was similar to the research of Clark (2002), wherein the sojourners reported that they viewed the ISA as an advocate, facilitator of academic and social events, advisor, and resource for international travel and domestic culture issues, but rarely saw their ISA or could even identify them. Thus, the ISAs did not have an impact in many areas of the sojourners' lives in Clark's study in the same manner the ISS office affected few areas in the lives of the sojourners in this study. A difference was seen, though, in that the sojourners in my study reported that the ISS office played a significantly important role in the few areas in which it had an impact. Given that the sojourners in both Clark (2002) and this study were reporting about the same services offered by the ISAs and the ISS office, respectively, it is possible the ISAs in Clark's study also had a significant impact in those areas. However, this was not reported by the students in Clark's study and, therefore, noted here as a difference between the two studies. Overall, the international students in my study understood the role of the ISS office as their initial connection to the MU campus and a touchstone of a quality educational experience. The friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office

displayed a consideration and concern for their well-being, and represented a validation of their presence on MU's campus.

Relationship of Findings to Theory

The review of literature in Chapter Two introduced two theories that provide depth to the findings in Chapter Five: Trice's (2004) application of social capital theory to improving social services for international students and Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1985). The revelation that applying Astin's theory to the data would proffer a richer understanding of the experiences of the sojourners emerged through prolonged engagement with the data during the analysis process. Additionally, Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory provided insight into the sojourners' experiences at MU. The following section discusses the relationship of the findings to each of these theories.

Social capital theory.

Trice (2004) applied the theory of social capital to improving the social services offered sojourners. She stated that supplying sojourners access to information about cultural norms and insight into how US social groups operate would allow students to function more effectively on college campuses. Trice (2004) provided three recommendations to improve international students' satisfaction with their educational experience in the US: (1) institutions should provide opportunities for international and domestic students to interact casually on campus, (2) institutions should provide opportunities for international students to interact casually with other well-established international student groups from other cultures, and (3) institutions should investigate alternative means for international students to access campus services and social

opportunities. Two of the five overarching themes presented in Chapter Five address the tenets of Trice's application of social capital theory: (1) the adventurous, social, and determined personalities of the sojourners, and (2) the ISS office had an impact on only a few areas of the sojourners lives, but the impact in those areas was vital to making their experience at MU a positive one.

Applying social capital theory in the same manner as Trice (2004), the international students in this study were provided social capital after arriving in the US through the combination of the opportunity for social connection given them by the ISS office during their first few weeks on campus and their adventurous, social personalities. The purpose of the ISS office during the first few weeks of the semester was to provide sojourners with information about the basic cultural norms on campus for all students, social groups available to them on and off campus, and general social norms of the US. As Jim, the Director of ISS at MU, stated:

We're trying to plug them into the right organizations to get them into good study habits, which our international kids already have good study habits. We're trying to make sure that they know where they should live, that they know who they should be talking to about their academics, that they know to come to our office and talk to us if they don't know who to talk to about something. So, we're trying to get them settled in more than anything else, integrated and concentrating on academics. That's it. We [have] our mandatory orientation program that we do the Tuesday and Wednesday before classes begin each semester. We introduce them to all the resources we have available out there too. We also introduce them to the International Student Organization.... So we get them hooked up with not just

the offices that will help them – the academic units – but also student organizations that will help them and guide them in a positive direction outside the classroom. And that’s most of it there – getting them connected with the right people. But we’re the safety net, if you will, underneath it all, so that in case they slip and fall, we catch them and then put them back in the air.

Armed with this amount of social information and their self-reported social natures, the students in this study found it easy to make connections with domestic students, foreign students, and academic officials.

Additionally, providing sojourners with a variety of opportunities to make social connections allowed them to engage in activities that matched their interests and preferred level of social interaction. For example, Carl preferred one-on-one interactions to large groups. Therefore, he signed up for the Family Beyond Borders program that paired him with a domestic student who introduced him to other students and took him to various activities. Greg preferred to socialize mainly with the other members of the wrestling team and did not attend ISS-sponsored events. Denise and Betty both participated in events sponsored by the off-campus group Chi Alpha and attended a few ISS-sponsored events when they were not too busy with their jobs. Eddie immediately got involved with the Malaysia ISO and attended most ISS events. All students in this study reported having a positive experience in their first semester at MU, which could be due to the level of social capital the ISS office provided them in their first weeks on campus in the same manner recommended by Trice (2004).

Student Involvement Theory.

The application of Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1985) in research involving the international student experience in the US was not found in the review of literature for this study. However, it provided two postulates that addressed this study's research questions. The first postulate stated that the amount of personal development attributed to a program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the program. The second postulate stated that the effectiveness of an educational practice is directly related to how well that practice increases student involvement. The relationship between the findings of this study and each of the postulates are examined in this section.

According to the first postulate, much of the personal development of the international students in this study would be attributed to the ISS office if the students reported a high quality and quantity of involvement in ISS programs. Although the sojourners reported that their interactions with the ISS office were of high quality, nearly all of them reported a small quantity of involvement with the ISS office. This would seem to negate attributing the personal development of the sojourners to the ISS office. However, several areas of the international students' personal development were influenced indirectly by the efforts of the ISS office. The ISS office contributed to student involvement in other programs by providing information about these programs during orientation and coordinating international student involvement in these programs throughout the year. Sojourners were unaware of the coordination efforts of the ISS office with the ISOs, off-campus organizations, and other divisions of the Student Affairs office. Consequently, sojourners reported the ISS office having little impact on their

educational experience when, in fact, the ISS office played a much larger role than they knew.

Jim stated that it is because the ISS office is a division of Student Affairs at MU that they can coordinate with other areas and provide a better experience for their students while remaining less visible. Although many other universities the size of MU have moved to creating a centralized International Student Services unit that handles all academic and student affairs business for sojourners, the structure at MU remains due to the strength of the Student Affairs office that developed over time in response to having a large university located in a small, somewhat isolated town. Jim said:

Where ISS is right now in Student Affairs is not the model that people use in the United States. They've gone to a centralized international college, if you will, or international dean where the academic and the Student Affairs are all together in one particular unit. We haven't moved in that direction. I don't know that we will move in that direction because, quite honestly, our Student Affairs division is so strong here in comparison to other places because we're light years away from civilization. So we developed a strong Student Affairs unit to help kids live in (MU's town). They're not commuting. They're living here. And so that's why we work the way that we do....If you tell people, "This is the model,"...they're going to say, "You guys are 30 or 40 years out of date. That's what we used to do in the 60's." That may be, but it works here...a large university in a small town in the middle of nowhere. Works well here, but I'm not sure it would work well everywhere. It would work well in...a lot of places that are off the beaten path.

In MU's case, the findings aligned indirectly with the first postulate in that the amount of personal development attributed to the ISS office is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in the outside programs/resources coordinated by the ISS office. MU's success at fulfilling the second postulate was more direct.

The second postulate of Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1985) stated "...the effectiveness of an educational practice is directly related to how well that practice increases student involvement" (p.36). In this definition of effectiveness MU's ISS office excelled. Every student in this study mentioned activities that they took part in regularly that were either coordinated by the ISS office or in which the ISS office helped them become involved. Given that every student reported being involved in as many activities on campus as they wanted and having an overwhelmingly positive experience in their first semester, the effectiveness of the ISS office in increasing student involvement was evident.

Validation Theory.

Rendón (1994) defined validation as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). She continued, "When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they, and everything that they bring to the college experience, are accepted and recognized as valuable" (p. 44). Rendón found a similarity between student involvement and validation in that both are prerequisites to student development. Validation theory purported that the more students are validated, the richer their overall educational experiences will be.

The international students in this study overwhelmingly reported feeling validated by both the ISS office and the MU campus as a whole. The ISS office validated the sojourners by patiently answering numerous questions prior to their arrival on campus, displaying hospitality when greeting them at the airport and taking them to MU, having numerous presenters at the international student orientation say that the staff at MU's is there to help sojourners have the best educational experience possible, reaching out to them consistently through email, etc. The sojourners also found validation in indirect ways. Students spoke about how the number of international events on campus made them feel valued as part of the MU campus. Even when they were unable to attend the events, many of the sojourners stated that seeing the advertisements for various events around campus reinforced the idea that their presence on campus was important and worth celebrating.

Greg noted the importance that the international events on campus had on sojourners feeling validated as a student at MU. He said, "They have different...events that all the kids go to – all the international students go to. I think that's really good. It makes them feel a lot better. Makes them feel good about being here." Of his feelings about the ISS office overall, Greg said, "They are always there for me to talk to. They help out with the documents. It's nice that they are there to help out with those. And it's just good to know that they are there for anything even though I don't go to any of the events."

Greg's experiences and the experiences of the other students in this study supported Rendón's (1994) Validation theory in that students who felt enabled, confirmed, and supported by agents on campus had a richer academic and interpersonal

experience. The sojourners of my study unanimously reported feeling validated by the ISS office and MU's campus as a whole and having a positive educational experience during their first semester.

Implications of Findings in Future Practice

The previous sections discussed the findings in this study as they related to previous research and theory. The following section explores the implications of the findings from this study for future practice, as well as offer recommendations for practice in the area of ISS.

Friendly and efficient service.

As stated previously in this chapter and in Chapter Five, the friendliness of MU's ISS staff and the campus as a whole made a great impression on the students in this study. The sojourners reported that the hospitable environment at MU made them feel validated as members of both MU's campus and the community. The sojourners also mentioned repeatedly how impressed they were with the efficiency of the ISS staff to address any need they had. The sojourners reported feeling welcomed, cared for, and confident in their choice of MU due to the warmth and efficiency of the ISS office. This had a significant impact on their overall experience as international students in the US.

Clark (2002) and Weller (2012) reported that Chinese students in their studies did not have a positive experience. Weller (2012) reported that, while most of the undergraduate sojourners expressed general satisfaction with their educational experiences, some students were unhappy with several aspects of campus life, including campus safety, campus employment, and lack of integration with American students (pp.

147-151). Clark (2002) reported that most Chinese students in her study expected “friendly and personalized approaches” from their ISA but were not treated in this manner (p. 104). Students in Clark’s study also stated that their ISA rarely made casual conversation with them or showed any interest in their experiences on campus. This is in contrast to the experiences of the sojourners at MU who reported that many of the ISS staff knew their names and situations prior to their arrival and expressed happiness in seeing them on campus.

The first implication for this study to future practice is that ISS staff should provide friendly and efficient service that validates the sojourners’ presence on campus. Therefore, the first recommendation is that ISS offices offer highly personalized service to sojourners and emphasize staff members getting to know first-year international students as individuals while assisting them with their social and educational needs. Additionally, it is vitally important that the ISS office is organized in such a manner that potential issues can be resolved as quickly as possible. This gives the sojourner confidence in the ISS office as the place they can rely on as a personal resource. As the ISS staff is the first contact with international students, it is important that the first impression the student forms is that the ISS staff is warm, helpful, and a place where they can receive the help they need no matter the issue. Though the manner of welcoming international students may vary by institution, the function of the ISS office as a symbolic place of validation and safety must remain steadfast.

Technology.

A major concern for many international students is culture shock and homesickness. Sojourners in this study reported having little to no homesickness due to the availability of reliable telecommunication that allowed them to contact their family and friends back home as often as necessary. Modern students are connecting more often through video applications on a variety of electronic devices, which requires a greater amount of technology to run smoothly. New technology is also developing at a very fast rate. Therefore, universities must anticipate rather than respond to the technological needs of students to help them stay connected with their friends and families.

The second implication is that reliable telecommunication technology is necessary to help international students reduce their homesickness. Therefore, the second recommendation is that universities should provide international students reliable high-speed internet access through hard-wired connections and Wi-Fi networks with enough bandwidth to allow students to communicate effortlessly across a variety of digital platforms on their personal devices (i.e., phones, tablets, and laptops). Although reliable internet access is important for students in most areas across campuses, it is especially necessary for international students in their personal living spaces, such as dorm rooms and apartments, where most of their personal communication to their family and friends back home occurs. By giving sojourners the ability to contact friends and family as often as needed, the university can help sojourners reduce the effects of homesickness – one of the major concerns of international students studying in the US.

Connecting students to resources.

The findings in Chapter Five noted that the majority of the contact that sojourners had with the ISS office was during the first few weeks of the semester. During these weeks sojourners received a great amount of information about resources on campus to help them with every aspect of their educational experience, with the majority of the information given to them during the international student orientation. In his presentation during the orientation, Jim informed the students that the orientation was one long day rather than several shorter days to allow the students to take part in other activities on campus and complete any other business they had on campus during the rest of the week. This statement encouraged the students to take part in other activities on campus with domestic students and to begin to become self-reliant regarding their educational needs. However, Jim concluded his presentation with the statement that the ISS office is “the place you all go to when you don’t know where to go.” This statement was designed to reassure the students that, although they were expected to be self-reliant, they were never without support if needed. Several presenters throughout the orientation day emphasized that they were there to help sojourners have the best experience possible while on MU’s campus. After orientation the ISS office maintained contact with the international students during the semester through weekly listserv emails that contained information specifically for sojourners, informing international students about campus-wide events and encouraging them to attend, or promoting upcoming ISS office-sponsored events.

Although many of the resources provided to the sojourners during orientation related to information about businesses both on and off campus, Jim stated in his interview that the main resource he wanted the new students to connect with were other

international students and academic offices. Jim stated that the ISOs helped provide a safe environment for the new international students to connect to the larger student body within the safe confines of fellow countrymen. He also stated that another student from the sojourner's home country has a better perspective of the student experience than an ISS staff member would have. Jim also wanted students to make connections in their own academic departments because each department had their own sub-culture with which the sojourner needed to become familiar to be successful academically.

The implication of these findings is that if an ISS office is successful at orienting the international students early in the semester, sojourners will become more involved in campus activities, have a better chance at academic success, and become more self-reliant. Consequently, the first-year international students will rely less on the ISS office for social and educational support and more on other resources both on and off campus. According to the findings in this study, students who became involved in areas of personal interest on campus, advocated for themselves academically, and became more self-reliant throughout the semester reported a positive first-year experience.

The third recommendation is that ISS offices should connect students to as many resources outside of the ISS office during orientation as possible, while maintaining the role of "safety net" should a sojourner not know where to turn in an emergency. A special emphasis should be placed on connecting the ISO's with incoming students. Students from a sojourner's home country provide support, encouragement, and a social connection on campus that cannot be duplicated by a domestic student or ISS staff member. Additionally, ISS offices (and campuses, in general) should maintain a message to the international students that they are there to help the sojourners have the best

educational experience possible. This message communicates to sojourners that the university values them and has their best interests in mind. The message is an additional opportunity to validate them as international students on a US campus. The impact this message can have on a sojourner's experience can be immense.

As much or as little involvement as needed.

The final implication of the findings from this study for future practice was the importance of international students becoming involved in campus and community activities to the extent that they are comfortable. Every student in this study reported having a positive experience in their first semester on MU's campus. Although they all reported varying levels of involvement with campus activities (including ISS-sponsored events), each sojourner reported being involved in activities that were of interest to them at a level that was comfortable for them. Greg mainly attended casual events around campus with his friends from the wrestling team. Eddie became highly involved in the Malaysia ISO and took part in ISS-sponsored events. Carl was involved with MU's Family Beyond Borders program, but often preferred to keep to himself. Denise and Betty both attended several events through Chi Alpha, an off-campus organization, but were often too busy with work to attend other events. A few sojourners were highly involved in ISS-sponsored events, while others did not attend any. However, students in this study often remarked that they felt support and recognition as international students because the ISS office sponsored activities on campus, i.e., the International Bazaar and International Student Culture Night.

The findings in this study suggest that international students need to have a variety of activities available and that campus-sponsored international student events help sojourners feel welcomed and appreciated, even if they do not attend the event. Providing information about a variety of activities gives the best chance for sojourners to participate in an activity they enjoy at a level of involvement that is comfortable for them, thus increasing the possibility that they will report having a positive campus experience.

The final recommendation for future practice is that colleges and universities should provide information for as many activities as possible, whether on or off campus, to enable sojourners to participate in activities they enjoy at a level of involvement with which they are comfortable. Astin's Student Involvement Theory (1985) would serve as a robust framework in this practice. Using the two postulates of Astin's theory, ISS offices should provide information about activities that impact both the personal development and involvement of sojourners. In the case of campuses like MU that are located in an area with few entertainment options, the Student Affairs division would need to take a lead role in providing activities for students. The ISS office would then facilitate sojourner access to those activities, coordinate additional international student events, and link sojourners to other social organizations both on and off campus. At universities in large cities, the ISS office may serve mainly as a source of information of activities in the area (including on-campus events) that sojourners may enjoy. However, in either case, it is important that universities continue to sponsor international events on campus to show support for their international students and their cultures and maintain a connection between sojourners and the university. ISS offices show their interest in helping sojourners have the best possible educational experience when they provide them with

opportunities to take part in activities they enjoy. This necessitates the ISS office becoming familiar with the sojourners on their campus and their interests. ISS offices can do this by having sojourners report their hobbies and interests prior to arriving on campus and regularly sending out targeted information regarding upcoming community or campus events.

Delimitations and Limitations

In Chapter One I discussed five delimitations of this study. First, this study was conducted at a single site. No other data were collected from a different site. Second, the subjects of the study were purposefully chosen from several areas of the world rather than from a specific country or region. Third, the observed ISS events were specifically chosen due to the required attendance by sojourners at orientation and ISO involvement at the International Bazaar. Fourth, the interview questions were developed to elicit information regarding the sojourners' relationships with the ISS office. Finally, only international students in their first semester of study were considered. Therefore, this study focused on the perceived impact of the ISS office on the lives of sojourners in their first semester of study at MU.

The limitations of my study were: (1) the lack of generalizability of the findings, (2) qualitative research involves purposefully selected sites and individuals, and (3) this dissertation is bound by time.

First, qualitative studies, unlike quantitative studies, do not utilize methods to test for cause and effect relationships. Therefore, the findings of qualitative studies may provide insight into a particular phenomenon, but are not intended to predict outcomes of

specific behavior. Qualitative studies seek to understand specific phenomena in depth and are bound by the time and context in which the data are collected. For this dissertation, the findings are applicable only to the large, public, research university in the Midwest in which the study was conducted. Nevertheless, they may produce insights that could be helpful when considering similar phenomena at other ISS sites.

Second, qualitative research involves purposefully selected sites and individuals. This study focuses purposefully on the experiences of nine international students in their first year on the campus of a large, public, research university in the Midwest. Though similarities may be seen in sojourners on other campuses, the perceptions and experiences explored in this study are not generalizable to populations on other campuses. However, as with the first delimitation, similarities may be found that could be transferrable to other ISS sites.

Third, this dissertation is bound by time because it examined the experiences of sojourners who were in their first semester of study on the campus of MU. Sojourners who were on campus longer than one year were not included in this study because their recollection of experiences during their first semester on campus may have been influenced either positively or negatively by their own adjustment to living in the United States. Interviewing students during their first semester of study was designed to obtain their insights as near in time to their original experiences with the ISS office as possible.

Recommendations for Future Research

As this study progressed several indications of possible future research emerged. The research in this study utilized qualitative methods and focused on the perceived

impact of the ISS office on the lives of nine international students from various regions around the world in their first year of study at a large, Midwestern, research university. Although several quantitative studies existed regarding international student experiences in the US, very few qualitative studies have been conducted. The qualitative studies found in the review of literature in Chapter Two focused on students from China. Based on the limited amount of qualitative studies on the international student experience of students from other areas of the world, there was opportunity to study populations of students whose enrollment in the US continues to increase. This study identified three specific areas that would benefit from additional research: the role of campus “friendliness” in the experiences of international students, the perceived impact of the ISS office on sojourners’ lives based on the role of the ISS office in the university structure, and the perceived effectiveness of the ISS office based on the organization of staff roles within the office.

The Role of Campus “Friendliness”

Each student in this study noted the friendliness of the ISS office staff and how this helped them have a positive experience on MU’s campus. Clark (2002) found that many of the sojourners in her study had a positive impression of their ISA in a professional capacity, but did not feel that the ISAs or the campus were particularly friendly to international students. Weller (2012) stated that sojourners in his study had difficulty adjusting to the US and, like Clark (2002), did not have a positive relationship with the ISS office staff. As this study progressed, potential areas of future research emerged that could improve services in ISS offices.

Future research should investigate specific actions of ISS offices that make sojourners feel the most welcome to campuses in the US. Research in this area would help ISS offices develop intentional outreach protocols to help sojourners develop a positive first impression of the campus. This line of research should extend to investigate protocols that have the greatest impact on sojourners from various regions around the world. Various cultures may place greater (or lesser) value on different gestures made by ISS offices. Research into culture-based outreach protocols would help improve the ISS office's ability to initiate a positive relationship with international students.

Impact of the ISS Office Based on the University Structure

During his interview Jim stated that the place held by the ISS office in MU's university structure as a division of Student Affairs resembles more a structure from 30-40 years ago than the current trend of ISS offices today as stand-alone entities. MU continued to keep the ISS office under the umbrella of the Student Affairs division because of the effectiveness with which it served sojourners from that position. Due to the fact that MU is located in a small, somewhat isolated town with relatively few entertainment options for students, the Student Affairs division at MU developed exceptional services to students to help them have active social lives on campus. The sojourners in this study reported being very satisfied with their social opportunities at MU and felt very connected to the university. The sojourners in Clark (2002) and Weller (2012) had the opposite experiences. Most sojourners in those studies reported having difficulty adjusting to campus life and feeling isolated from the domestic students. The differences between the studies opened areas for possible research.

Future research should investigate the effectiveness of ISS offices to serve students based on the placement of the office within the university structure. Jim stated in his interview that the placement of the ISS office in the Student Affairs division may work for other universities that are similar to MU in size and location. Research should investigate the differences in effectiveness between ISS offices that are placed within the Student Affairs division (like MU), those in other divisions, and those that are independent entities. This research would help universities consider the best placement of their ISS office within the university structure to maximize its effectiveness in serving international students.

Effectiveness of the ISS Office Based on Office Organization

Ivy, a sojourner from Germany in this study, stated that she was impressed with how quickly the ISS office answered her questions whenever she went to their office. She stated that she would sign in and write down the area of her concern. Her name would then be given to the staff person who specialized in the area of Ivy's concern and usually her issue was dealt with very quickly. In Clark (2002), the structure of the ISS office was to have an issue from a sojourner given to an ISA who would deal with the issue. Many of the students in Clark's study did not know exactly what the role of an ISA was or which staff member was an ISA. Often students would refer to whoever helped them as an ISA, whether they were one or not. The students in Clark's study had a less favorable opinion of the ISA than the sojourners in this study had of the ISS office staff at MU. The difference in student experiences showed the need for additional study in the area of ISS office organization.

Future research should investigate the impact that the organization of the ISS office has on the experiences of international students. A study into the effectiveness of having multiple ISAs who manage all sojourner concerns, as opposed to having various ISS staff who are assigned to specific tasks, would allow universities to maximize the efficiency of the ISS office. Research into the organization of ISS offices may reveal that the effectiveness of personnel structures and responsibilities varies based on the size of the institution or the number of international students. Further research in the area of ISS office organization would help universities improve the efficiency of their ISS offices, thereby improving the educational experiences of their sojourners.

Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings presented in Chapter 5. The findings were discussed as they related to previous research and theory along with implications for future practice and recommendations for future research. The findings of this study indicated that the international students at MU were very impressed with the friendliness and efficiency of the ISS office staff. This produced feelings of validation in the sojourners and gave them confidence in MU to solve any problem that may have arisen. The students reported that the ISS office did not have a significant impact on many areas of their lives on campus, but the areas they did have an impact were vital to having a positive educational experience at MU. The areas that the students felt the greatest impact from the ISS office were orientation to the campus, enrollment in classes, and processing travel paperwork. However, the ISS office played a large role behind the scenes connecting sojourners to individuals, programs, campus offices, and events that had large impacts on their experiences at MU. The ISS office intentionally coordinated

support services for sojourners in the background to allow the students to develop independently while maintaining the role of safety net if a student needed help but was unsure where to turn. Given that every student in this study reported experiencing a considerably positive first semester at MU, the approach the ISS office at MU took to aid their international students was quite successful.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experiences attending this university as an international student.
2. What experiences have had the greatest impact on your adjustment to attending school in the United States?
3. What has been most surprising about attending school in the United States?
4. Tell me about your interactions with the ISS office.
5. What types of events and services has the ISS office provided you?
6. What was the impact of these services and events for you personally?
7. What is your overall impression of the impact that the ISS office has had on your life as a student in the United States?
8. What additional services or events, if any, would be helpful to you?

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form

ADULT CONSENT FORM OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT: First-Year International Students' Perceived Impact of the International Student Services Office

INVESTIGATORS:

**David Chissoe, M.Ed., LPC, Doctoral Candidate at Oklahoma State University
Advisor: Dr. Steve Wanger, Oklahoma State University**

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand how first-year international students perceive the impact their interactions with the ISS office have on their lives as sojourners in the United States.

PROCEDURES:

For this research study you will participate in three interviews during your first year of study. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences as an international student on campus. These questions will involve the recruiting process as well. The interviews will be recorded for sound and transcribed. These interviews will be stored on a password-protected computer until the research study is complete and will be kept in the primary investigator's home office when not on his person. All hard-copy material will be kept in the primary investigator's home office for at least three years.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

The benefits of this project include the field of higher education gaining knowledge regarding the impact of the ISS office on the lives of international students in the US which, in turn, will add to the body of knowledge regarding the international student experience in the US.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people who participate in research.

You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

David Chissoe, M.Ed., LPC, 5300 SE 87th Street, OKC, OK 73135, (405) 473-4981, david.chissoe@okstate.edu

Dr. Steve Wanger, 309 Willard Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405)744-3982, steve.wanger@okstate.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX C

IRB Approval Letter

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, June 10, 2014
IRB Application No ED1496
Proposal Title: First-year International Students' Perceptions of the Impact of the International Student Services Office

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 6/9/2017

Principal Investigator(s):

David H. Chissoe	Stephen P. Wanger
5300 SE 87th St.	309 Willard
Oklahoma City, OK 73135	Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,


Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

David H. Chisoe

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: FIRST-YEAR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEIVED IMPACT
OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES OFFICE

Major Field: Higher Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in Higher Education at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2017.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Community Counseling at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1996.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1993.

Experience:

School Counselor, Mid-Del Public Schools, 2013 – present

Vice President and Dean of Student Affairs, Southwestern Christian University, 2011 – 2013

School Counselor, Moore Public Schools, 2008 – 2011

School Counselor, Mid-Del Public Schools, 2004 – 2008

Program Director – Project REACH, Oklahoma State University – OKC, 2003 – 2004

Professional Memberships:

National and Oklahoma School Counselor Associations

National and Oklahoma Education Associations