

COMING TO AMERICA:
EXAMINING WHY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
CHOOSE TO PURSUE A DEGREE
AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Burkina Faso. That was his answer. It was written on his passport. That was the answer to my question, “What country are you from?” That simple answer was the impetus for this study. In order for one to understand how the mere utterance of the name of a small, landlocked African country led me on a qualitative research journey, it is important to know what events had transpired in my life prior to that particular moment.

I have spent almost my entire life in Oklahoma, a very homogenous state. I am a Native American, and of course there are many Native Americans in Oklahoma; however, other minorities are not as plentiful.

I have been an educator for most of my adult life. I have worked in five different schools, but my experiences have not given me the chance to encounter many diverse populations. Although Mexican immigrants continue to come to Oklahoma, their presence is still overshadowed by the majority white population in the state. It was not until I came to work at Oklahoma State University (OSU) that I encountered people from countries all over the world who were actually living and studying in Oklahoma. In July 2005, I became the manager of the testing center at Oklahoma State University. Part of my job entailed administering many different types of tests to students who wished to study at OSU. These tests are designed to measure the English proficiency of

potential students. I administered the following tests: the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), the Test of Spoken English (TSE), and the Test of English Language Proficiency (TELP).

Since I administered these tests, I became fascinated with the people who take them. I met hundreds of people from countries all over the world who chose to come to OSU to obtain an undergraduate or graduate degree. I expected these students to originate from just a handful of large, industrial countries; yet, I was continually amazed at the diverse group of students who traveled many miles to study at a mid-western public university such as OSU.

Each time I met one of these students, I inquired about their home country. Each of these individuals was unique. Some were very young, while some were in their fifties and sixties. Having been a college student for many years, I was aware that while many Americans supplement their studies with overseas sojourns, most of these trips are only for a semester, or perhaps a year. Very rarely does one find an American student who chooses to obtain an entire degree from a foreign institution. The people I met on a daily basis are not in America just to gain the experience of studying for a semester abroad—they are here to obtain a degree. Many times I have wondered what it must be like to leave behind family and friends to come to America for what may be up to four years of study. These people seemed very brave to me, and I wanted to understand what motivated them to come here.

The other fascinating element of this wonderment had to do with Oklahoma State University in particular. Why come here? What are the factors that motivate students from other countries to study at a mid-western public university such as OSU?

Statement of the Problem

Exhaustive research of this topic yielded very few scholarly publications regarding why foreign students choose to study in the United States. In fact, I was able to find only four dissertations that dealt with the topic (Bornsztajn, 1987; Hwang, 1998; Klieger, 2005; Storholm, 2005); three were quantitative studies. It is problematic to have so few studies dealing with this very important topic; however, it is even more problematic that only one of these studies is qualitative in design. While these quantitative studies yielded significant findings from robust data, I believe that it is imperative that foreign students' motivations to attend universities in the United States be examined at a greater depth than is traditionally accomplished by a survey.

One of the main reasons that educators should seek to understand these students better is that competition for international students has been increasing, not only among institutions of higher education in the United States, but also between the United States and the rest of the world.

The total number of international students in the U.S. is expected to increase to 8 million by 2025, causing the landscape of international higher education to change dramatically (Altbach & Bassett, 2004). This solid growth in international education can be attributed to two things—the magnetic power of the world's top universities and the under-supply of universities in the developing world. The world's brightest students continually seek out the best places to study while half the world's students live in developing countries where the supply of university places cannot keep up with the demand. Two other significant factors have helped to speed this growth in recent years—

competition for talent and competition for tuition fees that foreign students have to pay (“Wandering Scholars,” 2005).

International education has become a big business that the United States has dominated without trying very hard. Foreign students annually contribute \$13 billion to the American economy. American universities are suddenly facing intense competition as higher education undergoes rapid globalization and are challenged by many other countries such as England, Australia, and New Zealand as well as Asian centers such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. The competitors are streamlining their higher education system and offering American-style degree programs taught in English. China has made it a national priority to transform their universities into world-class research institutions in order to persuade top Chinese scholars to return home from American universities (Dillon, 2004).

As of 2005, Australia had eclipsed the United States and Britain as the destination of choice among fee-paying foreign students. While the prevailing sentiment among foreign students is that American institutions of higher learning lead the world in the quality of both their teaching and research, there exists a widespread perception that the United States is not as welcoming as it once was (Cohen, 2005). This possibly attributed to the shift in attitudes and governmental policies toward foreign citizens that occurred in the United States after the September 11 terrorist attacks of 2001. This idea will be addressed in chapter two of this research.

Global mobility in higher education has become a driving force in national competitiveness and has caused the U.S. government and U.S. campuses to rethink their strategic plans for addressing the heightened competition among host countries for the

global science and technology talent pool (“New Online Resources...,” 2005). It is this global mobility and heightened competition among countries that demonstrates a need for a better understanding of the factors that motivate foreign students’ decision-making when they are deciding where to pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree.

Purpose of the Study

This study is focused on the factors that caused international students to choose to seek a degree at Oklahoma State University. The primary research question is: “What are the factors that influenced your decision to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University?” This line of inquiry has the potential to open up many undiscovered ideas related to the understanding of foreign students and the factors that motivate them to come to OSU. By asking a sample of these students about these factors, I believe that many themes will emerge with implications toward international recruitment on OSU’s campus. I also believe that I will discover more about international students’ perceptions of American higher education. I believe that OSU and other American universities will stand to benefit from gaining insightful knowledge from currently enrolled international students that will help the university improve in the areas of recruiting and providing services to the international student population.

College presidents continue to call for diversity and internationalization on their campuses. Oklahoma State University made headlines in 2006 when it was one of the first universities in the United States to open its doors to Libyan students. Then president David Schmidly stated, “We believe internationalizing the education of students is very important” (Radia, 2006).

While international students benefit from their experiences in America, American students are equal beneficiaries of this cultural experience (Barber, 2003). Many college administrators have recognized the benefit that international students bring to campus. Kerry Bolgone, Vice President of International Programs at the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges agreed. He stated:

I have heard from so many students about the benefits of international classmates and how they lower cultural barriers and foster a less parochial understanding of the world, which is so important in a globalized economy. It gives us such a well-rounded perspective, especially if local colleges cannot afford to host exchange programs and send their students abroad for a different cultural experience, at least they can allow for cultural interaction with the college campuses and let students benefit from the interaction. (Hussain, 2006)

Other administrators see internationalization of their campuses as a way to increase diversity. Tom Harvey, a spokesman for the Institute of International Education believes that diversity on campus improves the caliber of education for everyone. He stated, “You teach differently; it makes you a better teacher and your class a better class. You are having to think through and articulate premises that you wouldn’t have to if you were just teaching Americans” (Lane, 2001, p. 6).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it is one of two existing qualitative studies examining why international students choose to attend a university in the United States. Of those two studies, this study is the only one that focuses solely on the factors that

determined school selection. The discovery of a limited amount of quantitative data was the impetus for this researcher to begin a qualitative investigation seeking to understand the factors that international students consider when choosing to study at a particular American university.

This study is significant because the data can possibly yield implications for American higher education as a whole. My research, combined with earlier quantitative dissertations, will enable educators to enrich the study of international students who are studying in American colleges and universities. By gaining a better understanding of the factors that influence international students' decision-making, other American institutions of higher education may be able to make decisions that enhance their ability to recruit and retain international students. An increased enrollment of international students will increase the diversity and internationalization of these universities resulting in a better experience for all students.

For Oklahoma State University in particular, this study should be of great benefit to the entities that have a vested interest in maintaining a strong international student presence on their campus.

Research Questions

The primary research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. What are the factors that influenced international students' decisions to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University?
2. How do international students perceive higher education in the United States?

Research Design

Qualitative design was selected for this study because it is a better fit for asking international students to explain their decision-making process. Because English is not the first language of these students, it is expected that quantitative questionnaires could cause confusion on the subject's part. Written questions are always open to interpretation. Interviewing the subjects and providing a forum in which follow-up questions were posed and feedback occurred increased the likelihood of gaining more in-depth understanding of the factors affecting the decision-making process of the international student.

Qualitative methods facilitate study of issues in depth and detail. These studies typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. The qualitative researcher is able to talk with people about their perceptions and experiences (Patton, 2002). The focus of this study was to talk with international students about the factors that affected their decision to study at OSU. These students reflected upon their perceptions and experiences to relate to the researcher why they chose to come to OSU.

This research is a case study. Creswell (1994) described a case study as a study in which the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon. He also described the case as being bounded by time and activity and gives examples of a program, event, process, institution, or social group. The international experience at a particular university fits in this framework. Creswell (1994) added that the researcher collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time. This study falls within that description.

Stake (1995) described case study as “the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). The single case in this study is the sample of international students who currently attend Oklahoma State University. This study attempts to understand the complexity of the typical international student who attends OSU. According to Stake (1995), cases of interest in education center on people and programs. This case study seeks to understand the participants and hear their stories.

Cohen and Manion (1994) asserted that there are many advantages to case study. One of these advantages is that case studies are a step to action because they begin in a world of action and contribute to it. The insights garnered from case study can be directly interpreted and put to use for within-institutional feedback and in educational policy-making. This case study can contribute to the university as well as to the policy-makers who have interests in international student recruitment in the United States.

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on a particular institution in the mid-western United States. The findings are limited in the following ways:

1. The criteria for the study were provided to the researcher by the manager of the International Students and Scholars department on campus. The manager selected students who fulfilled the criteria to participate in the study. The students in the sample may tend to be outgoing, confident, and self-assured, thus causing their selection and willingness to participate. This possibility could skew the findings because students who are uncomfortable being at the university and may not be

succeeding academically or linguistically may be unwilling to participate in such a study.

2. A broad limitation of the study may be that the data collected at OSU is relevant only to the particular university, public universities in the mid-west, or public universities; however, these findings may well be useable to all institutions of higher education in the United States.
3. The nature of the data-collecting instruments used (interview, narrative, or questionnaire) is that some topics related to this line of questioning may be considered sensitive in nature. When students are asked questions about their personal life and the decisions they have made, they may not give true responses if they feel uncomfortable with the topic.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I presents an introduction to the subject and the reasoning behind the study. It also states the problem being investigated as well as the purpose and significance of the study. Finally, it addresses introductory issues concerning the research questions, design, and basic methodology.

Chapter II reviews the available literature concerning the topic. The first section addresses the recent history of international students in higher education institutions in the United States. The available data concerning enrollment of international students in the U.S. is presented starting with the year 1995/96. In section two, international enrollment at Oklahoma State University is discussed. In section three, the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and their effects on international student recruitment and

enrollment are addressed. In section four, the findings from the current available research on this topic are presented. In section five, the researcher draws conclusions from the available findings.

Chapter III offers a detailed description of the research design and procedures of the study. Included in this chapter are discussions of: sample, methods, theoretical framework, ethical considerations, validity, and reliability.

Chapter IV reports the data collected and analyzes the findings of the research organized according to the emerging themes.

Finally, Chapter V presents the conclusions and implications of the data. The researcher gives recommendations for additional research and institutional courses of action.

Definition of Terms

Higher education: (United States) The term “institution of higher education” means an educational institution in any state that is legally authorized to provide a program of education beyond secondary education and is accredited or pre-accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association (*H.R. 3039*, 108th Congress, September 9, 2003).

International student: An individual who is enrolled in coursework at a U.S. institution of higher education under a temporary student visa. These individuals can include spouses and dependents who arrive in the U.S. with the student if they also take coursework. This does not include immigrants, refugees, and permanent residents. In this study, the term shall be interchangeable with “foreign student.”

Oklahoma State University: A coeducational comprehensive land-grant university located in Stillwater, Oklahoma, U.S.A. The university has an enrollment of over 20,000 students on its main campus (Oklahoma State University, 2006). In this study, the term shall be interchangeable with “OSU.”

Recruitment: The act of adding new individuals to a population or sub-population (Merriam-Webster, 2006).

Conclusion

Clearly, the overwhelming feeling among college administrators is that the internationalization of American campuses is important. A campus with a diverse culture will enrich all of the students in the college environment. Because of America’s goal to embrace diversity and internationalization, it is important that Americans have a better understanding of what influences an international student to choose to come to the United States to pursue a degree. This understanding will allow college administrators to continue to recruit students and maintain the current levels that we enjoy.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I. International students in U.S. institutions of higher education: 1995-2006

This section examines an eleven-year period of international student enrollment in higher education institutions in the United States. I chose this time frame because of the availability of existing data and because it was necessary to gain a perspective relevant to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks which are addressed in section III of this chapter. I believe that a thorough examination of the data from the six years before the attacks, as well as the available data in the four subsequent years paints a comprehensive picture of what the enrollment pattern was like before, immediately after, and several years following the attacks. While this research is not solely dedicated to the effect of the attacks on international student recruitment and enrollment, addressing the issue is relevant to the literature review due to its profound impact on international students and their decision to study in the U.S.

The majority of the raw data in this section is derived from a publication entitled *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange* by the Institute of International Education (IIE). The IIE was founded in 1919 to promote peace and understanding through cultural and educational exchanges. In 1946, the IIE began assisting the U.S. government in administering the Fulbright Graduate Fellowship

Program. Currently, the IIE is the largest and most active nonprofit organization in the field of international education exchange (IIE, 1996). The IIE publishes the *Open Doors* report annually, and most institutions of higher education in the U.S. are members of IIE and receive these reports. These reports are invaluable resources for institutions that want to discover trends in international student enrollment in the U.S.

1995-1996

The earliest report of foreign enrollment in the United States was published in 1955. That year there were 34,232 foreign students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education. By 1965 this number had more than doubled to 82,045 and ten years later it had almost doubled again to 154,580. By 1991, there were over 400,000 foreign students studying in the U.S. For 1995-96 that number reached 453,787. The largest number of students, 45,531, came from Japan. In fact, the Asian continent accounted for more than half of the total number of students (Davis, 1996).

When it came to choosing a college, foreign students put more emphasis on academics than did their U.S. counterparts. Sixty-two percent of foreign students based their college selection on academic reputation compared to 49% for Americans (Davis, 1996).

Foreign students tended to be aggregated in clusters around major metropolitan areas. California, New York, and Texas were the top three states in international student enrollment. Oklahoma State University ranked 40th among institutions with 1,000 or more foreign students; 1,992 students comprised 10.4% of its total enrollment (Davis, 1996).

1996-97

Total foreign student enrollment remained rather flat for the third straight year by increasing only 0.9%. This continued a seven-year trend of decelerating foreign student enrollments. Japan was still the leading country in U.S. enrollment, followed closely by China. The number of students from Thailand saw the biggest increase in enrollment with a 10.8% jump. Business and Management, and Engineering remained the most popular choices of study for all international students (Davis, 1997).

IIE studies found long-term trends that suggested that as nations became wealthier and developed strong post-baccalaureate educational infrastructures, a U.S. graduate education became less attractive than home grown opportunities. Over two-thirds of all foreign students received funding for U.S. study from personal and family sources. Oklahoma State's rank in international student enrollment remained relatively the same, and its total foreign enrollment actually decreased by 16. Male students still continued to outnumber female students; however, by 1997, the female contingent of international students had increased to 41% (Davis, 1997).

1997-98

By 1997, Dr. Allan E. Goodman, President and CEO of the IIE, began to lobby for U.S. institutions of higher education and the federal government to increase available funding for foreign students who wished to study in the U.S. He argued that international educational exchange was one of the surest ways to make the world a less dangerous place and that the presence of foreign students in U.S. classrooms represented perhaps the

only chance for most American students to hear an international perspective and learn how to interact with persons from a foreign culture (Davis, 1998).

The U.S. finally saw a significant increase in foreign enrollment with an increase of 5.1%. Japan barely led China in U.S. enrollment, while the Republic of South Korea experienced the most significant single increase of 15.5%. Business and management and engineering remained the most popular choices of study; however, business and management increased more significantly than engineering. Math, computer science, and intensive English language programs all increased by over 12%. Australia also began to show competitive signs for the enrollment of international students and made great strides in becoming one of the main competitors for the enrollment of Asian students. Oklahoma State University ranked 37th among research institutions and 42nd among institutions with 1,000 or more foreign students. The total foreign student enrollment at OSU increased by 73 to 2,049 (Davis, 1998).

1998-1999

By 1999, international students contributed over \$13 billion to the U.S. economy. International enrollment at community colleges grew over 32% in the previous five years. Foreign enrollment in the U.S. rose to 490,933—an increase of 2%. China finally surpassed Japan in enrollment after inching closer over the past few years. The country with the most significant increase in U.S. enrollment was Brazil, with a 15.3% increase. Business and management, and engineering remained the top two fields of study, while intensive English language study suffered a significant drop of -18.1%. Oklahoma State

University's position among other institutions remained relatively unchanged as the university experienced a drop in enrollment of 56 students down to 1,993 (Davis, 1999).

1999-2000

The U.S. saw a dramatic increase of 4.8% in international student enrollment that pushed the country past the half-million mark for the first time. For the second year in a row, China represented the highest percentage of international enrollment. The most dramatic increase was 13% by India. These two countries sent overwhelming percentages of their students as graduate students. Business and management and engineering remained the top two fields of study, while the area of mathematics and computer science increased by 18.7%. Oklahoma State's enrollment dropped dramatically by 135 students to 1,858 causing it to slip to 47th in the rankings of institutions with 1,000 or more foreign students (Davis, 2000).

2000-2001

The U.S. continued a sharp rising trend in international student enrollment with a 6.4% increase to 547,867. This was the most significant increase since 1980. China ranked first in U.S. enrollment; however, India skyrocketed to second place over Japan with a dramatic 29.1% increase. Malaysia continued its third consecutive double-digit percentage decrease as its total U.S. enrollment had been cut almost in half since 1997. This drop can be directly attributed to the increased presence of Australia on the global market of international education. Business and management and engineering remained the top two fields of study; however, mathematics and computer science made another

significant gain of 18.4%, solidifying its position at number three. Oklahoma State University continued a significant downward trend as it reported 1,802 students—a decrease of 56 from the previous year. This signified 8.9% of total school enrollment, which was also a drop from over 10% in 1996. This dropped OSU to 59th on the list of institutions with 1,000 or more foreign students (Chin, 2001).

2001-2002

The U.S. continued to increase international enrollment with another 6.4% increase to 582,996. India surpassed China as the leading place of origin with another dramatic increase of 22.3%. Japan remained stagnant and dropped to fourth, while Mexico, Turkey, Pakistan, and Columbia all saw significant double-digit increases. Asia continued to dominate U.S. enrollment with 56% of all international students, while Europe was next with 14%. Mathematics and computer science increased 13.2% in the field of study ranking, but continued to be ranked third behind business and management and engineering. Oklahoma State University increased international student enrollment by 193 students to 1,995, yet its ranking remained practically the same at 56th (Chin, 2002).

2002-2003

After significant increases over the previous five years, international enrollment increased by only 0.6% in 2003. India continued to be the leading country of origin, with an increase of 11.6% from the previous year. Kenya was the only other country with a double-digit increase. Since the events of September 11, 2001, stricter visa application

requirements and other reasons negatively affected flows of international students, especially from the Middle East, which experienced a 10% decrease for the entire region. Community colleges also experienced a decrease in international enrollment with a loss of -2.1%. Fields of study rankings remained the same, with health professions showing the biggest increase of 17%. Enrollment in Intensive English Language programs suffered a massive decrease of -34.8%. Oklahoma State University surged to 45th in the rankings of institutions with 1,000 or more international students by adding 326 students for a total of 2,321. This made OSU's foreign enrollment account for 14% of total enrollment (Chin, 2003).

The prevailing wisdom concerning the decreases in international student enrollment centered on the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. One factor related to this tragedy that contributed to this decrease was the more stringent visa requirements placed on foreign students by the U.S. government. By 2003, many academics deemed the situation serious enough to issue policy statements addressing the perceived crisis in international student access to U.S. higher education. NAFSA: Association of International Educators published a report entitled, *In America's Interest: Welcoming International Students* (2003) identifying major barriers to international student access, such as the failure of relevant U.S. government agencies to make international student recruitment a priority and the burdensome U.S. government visa and student-tracking regulations.

2003-2004

For the first time in over 30 years, the number of international students studying in the U.S. declined. The total of 572,509 students represented a decline of -2.4%. The IIE (2004) continued to blame the post-September 11 security-related changes in visa policy for generating perceptions abroad that the United States was closing its doors to international students and scholars.

Many scholars saw these recent reports as a wake-up call that pointed to the need for urgent action. The Council of Graduate Schools reported a 6% decline in new foreign enrollments in the fall of 2003, the third year in a row with a substantial drop. Victor Johnson, NAFSA's associate director for public policy, stated: "Perceptions abroad are lagging behind reality. The word is out on the street in China: You can't get a visa to study in the United States" (Bollag, Bender, & Mooney, 2004, p. A41).

India remained the top country of origin for international students and actually experienced an increase of 6.4%; however, most other countries experienced decreases in numbers. The three most popular fields of study—business and management, engineering, and mathematics and computer sciences—all experienced declines. The number of students enrolled in Intensive English Programs (IEPs) continued to decline. In fact, the decline in enrollment in IEPs had dropped almost 50% since 2000. Global competition with the United States also began to increase as the U.S. continued to see its market share of international students decline. While the U.S. continued to maintain its position as the leading destination for international students, trends indicated that its lead was shrinking. Oklahoma State University dropped to 49th in the ranking of institutions

with 1,000 or more international students as its international population decreased by 153 to a total of 2,168 (Chin, 2004).

2004-2005

The United States continued to experience a decline in international student enrollment. The decline of -1.3% brought the total number of students to 565,039, lower than the total in 2001-02. IIE (Chin, 2005) continued to blame the post-September 11th restrictions as well as strong competition from other countries, especially the U.K. and Australia. Increased higher education capacity in several leading sending countries such as India, China, and Korea were also seen as contributing factors to the declining enrollment. The only countries to experience double-digit increases in international student enrollment in the U.S. were India and China. These two countries remained the top two countries of origin for international students. While business and management and engineering experienced increases and remained in the top two in the field of study ranking, mathematics and computer science experienced a 25% decrease and slipped to 4th place behind “other.” The U.S. share of international enrollments also continued to decrease. Oklahoma State University’s international student enrollment decreased by 169 to 1,999 causing it to drop to 56th in the ranking of institutions with 1,000 or more international students (Chin, 2005).

2005-2006

After two years of modest decline, the number of international students studying in the U.S. finally stabilized in 2005/06 at 564,766. India and China remained the

leading places of origin for international students. The Republic of Korea, in third place, experienced a 10.6% increase in students. The rest of the top twenty did not experience any double-digit increase or decrease, with the exception of 19th place Nepal, which increased by 24.7%. Business and management and engineering remained the most popular fields of study. Oklahoma State University experienced a tremendous drop in international student enrollment. OSU dropped from 56th in the previous year's rankings down to 70th. OSU's international student enrollment decreased from 1,999 students to 1,734 students—a decrease of over 13% (Chin, 2006).

The present

While a slight increase in international student enrollment is welcoming news, that has not stopped many pundits and scholars from calling for intense overhauls of the U.S.'s international recruitment strategies (Anderson, 2005). An October 2005 survey of international student enrollments conducted by several higher education and international education organizations suggested a leveling off of overall international student enrollments at universities and colleges in the fall of 2005 (“Survey: International Student Enrollment...,” 2005).

By early 2006, there was discussion of the decline in international student enrollment slowing down. Allan Goodman, President of IIE, stated: “Colleges and universities have been proactive in reaching out to international students to let them know that they are welcome here” (Maloney, 2006, p. 6). The State Department also invited 120 college leaders to a summit to discuss how to make American higher education more engaged with the world and to counter the perception that the U.S. no longer welcomes

foreign students. Some college leaders were heartened by the administration's attempts to fix the problems dealing with international student enrollment; however, many academic leaders were disappointed that barriers still exist for international students and that the administration has not developed a strategic plan (Bollag & Field, 2006).

By August 2006, more positive signs occurred, such as the release of the results of a survey by the Council of Graduate Schools (2006) that demonstrated that the number of foreign students admitted to American graduate schools rose in 2006 for the second straight year. The 12% increase for the 2006-07 academic year is consistent with the rise in applications reported in March and could herald a significant growth in international enrollment in graduate studies.

The data on international student enrollment over the last two years mirrors many political and economic factors of the global economy, including the emergence of India and China as dominant market forces as well as the profound effects of 9/11 on the foreign policy of the United States. The literature and data also suggest that Australia and Great Britain are primed to continue to gain an increasing share of international students each year. The prevailing wisdom among higher education institutions throughout the world is that international students are an economic asset and the competition for them will continue to increase (McMurtrie, 2005).

II. International students at Oklahoma State University

This section addresses the most recent available demographics concerning international students at OSU. Oklahoma State University strives for diversity within its campus. The university offers degrees to international students as well as an intensive

English program designed to help students at any level attain the proficiency necessary to enter a degree program (OSU, 2006). Between 1975 and 2003, OSU granted 11,444 degrees to international students, with a high of 597 granted in 1999.

The top ten countries represented at OSU in the fall 2004 class are representative of the national trend with India ranking the highest, followed by Japan and China. Males continue to outnumber females by a margin of almost 2 to 1 (OSU, 2004).

I conclude that OSU is representative of the national trends in international student enrollment in relation to all areas, including total student percentages by year, country of origin, plan of study, and gender.

III. The impact of 9/11 on international student enrollment in America

There is considerable debate as to the impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks upon international student recruitment and enrollment in America. This section will present evidence of its impact.

The initial impact of the attacks was felt when Senator Diane Feinstein of California proposed a six-month moratorium on foreign student visas. Although this moratorium never occurred, the politic rhetoric became increasingly divisive and protectionist, allowing for the implementation of the Patriot Act and the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security. Each of these governmental acts brought greater scrutiny to the visa-granting process of the United States. The U.S. government made it clear that policy failures in border security would be addressed and major changes would be made in the areas of national security policy and intelligence policy (Reeves, 2005).

Many advocates of international education braced for the possible effects of potential barriers to international student access to American higher education.

The result of this post-9/11 governmental action resulted in delays in processing visas for international students. This impact was especially felt by scholars in science and technology who were subject to additional background checks because their areas of study or research drew governmental attention (Reeves, 2005).

By 2003, the loss of market share in international student enrollment began to be felt by the United States—especially the scholarly community in science and technology. Many advocates of international education asserted that the United States should continue to seek out the best minds throughout the world in order to keep pace with other countries—especially in the areas of science and technology. The National Academy of Engineering issued a statement on December 13, 2002, citing the recent efforts of the U.S. government to constrain the flow of international visitors in the name of national security. The scientific community agreed that these efforts had serious unintended consequences for American science, engineering, and medicine. These scientists believed that it was in the United States' best economic interests to maintain U.S. global leadership in science and technology. The influx of foreign-born scientists and engineers were said to have laid the foundations of America's position as a global leader on the scientific frontier. The scientists commended the State Department's efforts to scrutinize entering international students; however, they called for a streamlining of the visa process and an end to the unnecessary delays and additional background checks (Wulf & Fineberg, 2003).

Many other leaders in the scientific community echoed the sentiments of the National Academy of Engineering. The Council of Graduate Schools cited a possible long term problem, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science issued a statement citing that not improving the visa situation would do irreparable harm to scientific progress. Additionally, twenty-five higher education, science, and engineering groups issued a joint statement cautioning that visa-related problems were discouraging international students and scholars from studying in the U.S. (Bollag, 2004; Censer, 2004). The Association for International Scholars (NAFSA) also called on the U.S. government to take new steps to streamline the visa-approval process and to renew efforts to increase international exchange (Bagnato, 2004; NAFSA, 2003). Despite these numerous calls from the science community and from international student advocacy groups, scholars continued to note the decline of foreign enrollment in U.S. institutions of higher education while placing the blame squarely on post-9/11 visa restrictions (Ebersole, 2004; Maloney, 2005).

Recently, the U.S. has begun to increase international student enrollment as evidenced by the data from the past two years. In fact, a 2006-07 survey by the Council of Graduate Schools demonstrated a 12% increase in the number of international graduate students (McCormack, 2006). This increase in enrollment could be attributed to the Department of Homeland Security's recent proposal to relax some of the more stringent visa policies for foreign scientists and students (Bagnato, 2005; "DHS" 2004). Whether these changes have come at a time of "too little, too late" remains to be seen.

IV. Findings from previous studies concerning factors affecting international students' decisions to study in the United States

This section will present findings in chronological order of several studies that address issues such as factors in decision-making or motivations for international students to study at institutions of higher education in the United States. This researcher feels that it is important to present these studies in chronological order so that the representation of the students' comments and the findings of the studies will be relevant to the particular timeframe in which they were presented. In essence, this researcher believes that a study conducted in 1987 may yield different findings than a study conducted in 2005 because a significant amount of time would have elapsed and the world would be drastically different; however, the findings and student comments taken as a whole have relevance in the understanding of why international students choose to study in the U.S.

A 1987 study by Benjamin Bornshtein was undertaken to generate data that would help the U.S. in the recruitment and admission of international students to U.S. higher education institutions. The data from 632 respondents revealed that the highest mean rating of importance among subjective and objective reasons to apply was "opportunity to increase professional and academic growth" followed by "availability of advanced educational resources and instructional technology equipment materials."

Bornshtein's (1987) study also revealed the concept that American institutions of higher education were perceived to be better than institutions of other countries. Students cited "outstanding curriculum" and "the very high quality of faculty" as reasons for choosing a particular institution. These students also discounted recruitment efforts of

American institutions citing only “scholarships and financial assistance” as relevant recruiting tools.

One aspect of a 1998 study sought to identify the factors that contributed to the motives of foreign students to study at a particular institution. This study yielded data that was particular to the institution being studied. The attractiveness of the campus and the area combined with the proximity to the specific group of international students being studied were the main factors affecting school choice of this specific international population. Other factors listed included: dissatisfaction with the home country and its higher education institutions, intention for future emigration, exploring a new country, and influence of others. A key factor in this particular study related to political instability of the country of origin. Most students in this study also believed that the future benefits of investing in an overseas education outweighed the present costs. Overseas experiences in countries that were English-speaking were much desired and highly regarded. It was interesting to note that this study noted the increasing popularity of Australia in attracting international students from Asia (Hwang, 1998).

A 1999 text contained various narratives written by international students concerning life and culture in the United States. These international students were attending a private ivy-league college and a few of them gave insight as to why they chose to study in the U.S (Garrod & Davis, 1999).

A Bulgarian student noted that he was unable to obtain a good liberal arts education in his country. He perceived good institutions in the U.S. as offering everything that a student could want, including limitless opportunities. He saw professors as engaged with the material and interested in their students. He also believed

that American students took many things about American colleges for granted, such as computers connected to the Internet, small classes, and libraries with thousands of books and journals. This Bulgarian student described coming to the U.S. as an educational opportunity (Garrod & Davis, 1999).

A non-white student from England claimed that opportunities in England were essentially closed to foreign citizens. The idea of the immigrant heritage, the ethos of self-advancement, and the sheer size and diversity of the U.S. were enough to convince this student to come to America even if the American reality sometimes fell short of his lofty idealism (Garrod & Davis, 1999).

A Chinese student saw America as a place where she could discuss ideas freely and where feminism was widely understood. She also cited the rigid Chinese curriculum in which she had no personal say in her major as a major influence on her decision to study in America (Garrod & Davis, 1999).

In a 2001 study, one student stressed the importance of coming to America for the purpose of improving his language. In many countries, fluency in English is an asset in the job market. This student noted the importance of coming to America to get the best education in the English language. Other students in this study stressed the benefit of “cultural sharing” in coming to America. They believed that coming to America expanded their worldview (Crawford III).

A 2005 study of international students and internationalization at an American university yielded data in regard to factors influencing school choice. This study was conducted at a liberal arts institution, a unique type of American institution of higher learning. The international population interviewed cited influential factors such as

location, size, safety, financial packages and the opportunity to study abroad. These students also cited their families as influential in their decision-making. Many of these students cited the proximity of relatives near the campus as a benefit and a factor that influenced their decisions. These students stated that their parents felt more comfortable sending them to an institution abroad if they knew some family members were nearby. Another aspect of location was that if relatives were already in the area, the fact that familiar people already knew something about the university made it that much more appealing; the international student's family could take comfort in knowing that it was a good school in a safe place (Klieger, 2005).

Safety played an important role in affecting decision-making in Klieger's (2005) study. After 9/11, some students had heard of mistreatment and discrimination against international students. Many families of international students wanted their children to study in safe environments where they would not be harassed or mistreated.

The final factor in Klieger's (2005) study concerned financial support. International students were inclined to accept offers to study in the U.S. if they received a financial aid package. One student shared that it was "definitely money" that influenced her decision. An Indian student explained, "That's why I came, because they bartered with me, they gave me money, and they wanted diversity" (p. 79).

The final available study was a 2005 empirical study of 300 students who were enrolled at small private colleges and universities in the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors causing foreign students to decide to come to the United States to attend small private colleges and universities. One of the findings refuted previous evidence that most international students came from wealthy families.

With 56% of the students claiming to be from below the top third bracket in income, the question was raised as to whether there was a shift in persons attending a college or university in the U.S. from wealthy to not so wealthy (Jacobson, 2005).

Jacobson's (2005) study also found that prestige of the university, available academic majors, and price of tuition of the university were significant factors in determining school choice. In addition, the study noted that 42.6% of the students indicated that they were not attending the school of their first choice.

V. Trends from available research

From trends developed over the past twenty years I constructed seven groupings of significant contributing factors that affect an international student's decision to study in the United States. While this list may not include all factors, I have identified trends in the findings of previous research. It should be noted that a combination of one, many, or all of these factors can contribute to the student's decision. Also, the research presented in the previous section was conducted at many different types of institutions in many types of studies. One should expect that there are other reasons not listed that may contribute to an international student's decision to study in the U.S. This list is only a generalization of themes that emerged from reading a number of studies that occurred over a twenty-year period.

1. High international regard of American higher education institutions

Many countries regard the American higher educational system as the best in the world (Altbach, Gumport, & Johnstone, 2001). This is shown through students'

comments that cite the quality of the faculty and the quality of the curriculum at American institutions (Bornsztajn, 1987). Many international students believe that coming to the United States to study will increase their academic growth (Bornsztajn, 1987).

2. The American dream

The ideal of the “American dream” still exists in the minds of many international students. These students recall the history of U.S. immigration and the “melting pot” concept, and see America as a place that values diversity and welcomes people from all nations. Students spoke of concepts such as “limitless opportunity” and “culture sharing” when speaking of this American ideal. “Opportunity” was a word used frequently by international students when citing reasons to study in America (Bornsztajn, 1987).

3. Costs

International students frequently cited the cost of attending college in the United States. Some students were not able to attend the college of their first choice because they could not afford it and/or they did not receive offers of financial assistance. Many students cited receiving financial assistance and scholarships as motivating factors to attend their American college of choice (Bornsztajn, 1987).

4. Learning English

Many international students come to America with the specific intent of becoming more proficient in the English language (Crawford III, 2001). Many students attend an intensive English language program first and then enroll in a regular academic program. Fluency in English has become extremely important in the global economy since English has become the preferred language of the international scientific and business

communities (Hwang, 1998). My assumption is that the importance of learning English is a sub-area of the broader concept of international students wanting to become more proficient in the American way of doing business. I believe that this concept is perpetuated by the current American influence on the world and the presence of the United States as *the* dominant country in the global political economy.

5. Issues within the home country

Some students cited political instability and unfavorable opinions of their country's higher education systems as reasons to come to the United States to pursue a degree (Hwang, 1998). A few students spoke of prejudices that exist within their home country or barriers to advancement that led them to seek a better opportunity in America. Some students used the word "escape" to describe the desire to leave their home country and come to America. Another student spoke eloquently of how desperate he was to leave his country and what he would do to be able to come to America to study.

6. Location/Convenience

Some students cited the weather and location of the school as reasons to study at select institutions. Some areas are especially conducive to this way of thinking, such as southern California. The west coast is also more convenient than the east coast for students from Asia. A few students cited pleasure and leisure as important, such as the student who enjoyed skiing in Colorado and the students who enjoyed the climate of southern California.

7. Familiarity/Safety

Some students cited their parents' concern for a safe and familiar environment as factors that affected their decision (Klieger, 2005). Some students spoke of choosing a

college because they had relatives nearby and that made them, and their parents, feel safe. I believe that American universities may benefit from having a contingent of people from a certain country located nearby. This contingent is seen as an established support group and causes families from that country to feel comfortable in sending their children to that area.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I will discuss the rationale for qualitative methodology and case study for this research. Sampling, methods of data collection, methods of analysis, validity, and ethical considerations will also be addressed.

Introduction: The qualitative paradigm

According to Creswell (1994), “Qualitative researchers are interested in *meaning*—how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (p. 145). Creswell’s emphasis on *meaning* guides this research. When examining the motivations behind decision-making processes, one may find it difficult to gain a rich understanding through a questionnaire. A researcher who seeks to understand *how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world* can benefit by choosing the qualitative paradigm. The qualitative style of inquiry is unique because of the closeness of the researcher to the subject. The fundamental research question in this study—*Why did international students come to America?*—is inherently complex and probes the subject’s innermost feelings. The type of qualitative research used in this study is naturalistic inquiry. Guba (1978), defined “naturalistic inquiry” as a

“discovery-oriented” approach that minimizes investigator manipulation of the study setting and places no prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be (p. 39). Patton (2002) asserted that the phenomenon of interest unfolds naturally, and the observations take place in real-world settings. The people in these studies were interviewed with open-ended questions in places and under conditions that were comfortable and familiar to them. There was no attempt to manipulate any pre-determined variables.

By using qualitative inquiry, I can provide a framework within which the international students can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view (Patton, 2002).

The case study

Unlike the experimenter who manipulates variables or the surveyor who asks standardized questions of large, representative samples of individuals, the case study researcher typically observes the characteristics of an individual unit. The purpose of this type of study is to analyze the phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view of establishing generalizations about the wider populations to which the unit belongs (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

This is a case study. Case studies explore a single entity or phenomenon bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 1994). The single phenomenon that is explored is the motivation to study at a particular institution in the United States. The single entity explored is the population of international students at Oklahoma State University. This case is bound by time in that the life cycle of the unit consists of students who are

currently studying at the university for the 06-07 school year. Through this particular unit, my research will generate implications about the international student population at OSU and possibly the international student population in the United States.

Stake (1995) asserted that a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case. This is true for this particular study because the international population at OSU is very complex. While the population is considered a unit for this study, this particular unit is made up of many different people. The wide variety of the subjects—age, gender, country of origin, academic program, undergraduate/graduate status, motivations, and financial status—demonstrates the complexity of this single case. Stake added: “Each (case) is similar to other persons and programs in many ways and unique in many ways. We are interested in them both for their uniqueness and commonality. We seek to understand them. We would like to hear their stories” (p. 1). Stake’s goals for case study guide this research. This researcher is interested in the uniqueness and commonality of the international student population at OSU. This researcher seeks to understand them and *to hear their stories*.

Theoretical framework

According to Crotty (2004), epistemology is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective. Of three types of epistemologies (objectivism, constructionism, subjectivism), I am guided by a constructionist lens. Crotty (2004) defines constructionism as the view that “all knowledge is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42).

Through this lens, I seek to understand how international students see the world and themselves in the social context of a particular institution in the United States. I hold the constructionist view that these students construct their own knowledge and meaning in the world, thus making each of their experiences unique to the social context.

The theoretical perspective of this research is interpretivism. Crotty (2002) cited Max Weber who suggested that individuals in the human sciences are concerned with understanding. Interpretivism relates to social constructions of human beings and is distinctly anti-positivist. According to Crotty (2002), “the interpretivist approach...looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (p. 67). Within this perspective exists the methodology of phenomenology.

The methodology of this study is phenomenological research. Creswell (1994) described phenomenological studies as those that examine experiences through the detailed description of the people being studied. Creswell cited “understanding the lived experience” as a hallmark of the philosophy based on the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Schuler, Sartre, and Merleu-Ponty (p. 12). Eichelberger (1989) described phenomenologists as using “human thinking, feeling, perceiving, and other mental and physiological acts to describe and understand human experiences” (p. 5). This study seeks to understand the lived experiences of international students. The researcher will ask them to describe their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions in relation to the guiding research question. This type of methodology should yield deep, detailed descriptions of the people being studied.

Van Manen (1990) saw the lived experience as the starting point and end point of phenomenological research. He stated: “A phenomenological description is always *one*

interpretation, and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially *richer* or *deeper* description” (p. 31). The nature of this study is guided by Van Manen’s assertion that the researcher’s interpretation of human experience will be that of the researcher and the subject. This is the inherent beauty of phenomenological research—it is open to interpretation, and the data can yield the possibility of even richer or deeper description.

Population and sampling procedure

The population of this study consisted of all currently enrolled international undergraduate and graduate students at Oklahoma State University during the spring 2007 semester. This population consisted of males and females from over one-hundred countries.

The sampling procedure in this study was purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) stated, “qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (N=1), selected purposively” (p. 230). Patton described typical case sampling as cases selected with the cooperation of key informants such as program staff who can help identify who and what are typical. In this case, I used this type of sampling by asking the manager of the International Students and Scholars department to provide a sample of international students at Oklahoma State University. The interview sample (N=12) consisted of six males and six females, six undergraduates and six graduates, representing ten different countries. They also represented a diverse group of academic programs. Two samples (N=12 + N=2) were used, with the first group participating in an

interview and the other group (N=2) providing an anonymous narrative in response to a written protocol.

Methods of data collection

There were two primary instruments of data collection: the interview (appendix B) with open-ended questions and the personal narrative (appendix C). Patton (2002) described the interview as an attempt to observe thoughts, feelings, and intentions. He added:

The purpose of interviewing...is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit.

We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

The interview in this case study was used to find out the perspective of the international student and to gather his or her story. These stories are unique; Stake (1995) stated: "Qualitative case study seldom proceeds as a survey with the same questions asked of each respondent; rather, each interviewee is expected to have had unique experiences, special stories to tell" (p. 65). My objective was to bring out these special stories from international students that will help increase the understanding of factors that affect their decision to study at OSU.

I used open-ended questions for the interview. Open-ended questioning is in great contrast with the typical quantitative style of closed-end questioning. Qualitative findings from open-ended interviews tend to be longer, more detailed, and variable in

content. The open-ended response permits one to understand the world as seen by the respondent. The open-ended question allows the researcher to provide a framework for the respondent to respond in a way that accurately represents their point of view (Patton, 2002).

Narrative analysis was used for one sample. According to Patton (2002), “Narrative studies are influenced by phenomenology’s emphasis on understanding lived experience and perceptions of the experience” (p. 115). Van Manen (1990) referred to narratives as “anecdotes” and asserted that this type of method allows the writer to reflect and measure his or her thoughtfulness. I believe that by asking international students to write a personal narrative detailing the factors that influenced their decision to study at OSU, that each student will reflect thoughtfully and will be able to identify these important factors.

Methods of analysis

I coded all of my data by hand. After transcribing my interviews, I went through them individually searching for factors that influenced the international students’ decision to come to the United States to study at OSU. When I found a factor, I named it and gave it a color code. Whenever that same factor appeared again, I highlighted it with the same color. This type of analysis required over twenty different colored markers. After I finished reading each transcribed interview, I wrote the name and number of every factor within that interview on the first page of the interview. I performed that same analysis for both narratives.

I had already developed an initial list of named factors after I transcribed Quan's interview. For Quan only, I cut and pasted quotes from the interview and put them onto note cards. I categorized all the cards until I came up with ten to fifteen unrefined factors. After reading all twelve interviews and both narratives multiple times, I was prepared for my final coding when I went through each transcription with my markers. The initial analysis of Quan's interview helped me develop emerging themes.

Every time I found a new factor, I wrote it down on a piece of paper, numbered it, and noted what highlighter color was used to code it. After I had gone through all fourteen student's responses, I had a list of nineteen factors. I then went through each interview and noted how many times the factor occurred per respondent. I ranked the factors from highest to lowest. I decided that any factor that appeared in more than one interview or narrative would be considered a primary factor and any factor that appeared only once would be a secondary factor.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (1994) described internal validity as a measurement of "the accuracy of the information and whether it matches reality" (p. 158). He presented "triangulation" and "member checks" as two ways to insure internal validity in a qualitative study.

According to Patton (2002), triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. In this study, I used two basic types of triangulation as identified by Patton (2002): data triangulation and methodological triangulation. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identified data triangulation as the use of a variety of data sources in a study and methodological triangulation as the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or

program. I used data triangulation by using two different samples methods to acquire data from different data sources. Each of the two samples was purposefully selected by the manager of the department of International Students and Scholars. This type of sampling yielded different pools of data. I demonstrated methodological triangulation by using two types of instruments—an individual interview and a written protocol that would be analyzed through narrative analysis.

For the interview sample, I was successful in gaining some equal divisions. Of the twelve students, six were graduate students and six were undergraduate students. Also, six were men and six were women. The twelve students came from ten different countries, representing the continents of North America, South America, Asia, Europe, and Africa.

For the sample that was given the written protocol, the manager of International Students and Scholars attended a meeting of the International Student Organization. I gave him thirty written protocols along with thirty consent forms. It was stated on the informed consent form that a signature was not necessary. I also included thirty self-addressed stamped envelopes in my written protocol packet. The manager gave a short speech to the attendees at the meeting who were all eligible for my sample. He then passed out the envelopes and told them that they needed to send the completed package within a month. Although I only received two responses to my written protocol, these two responses were well-written, and I was able to garner some data from them.

I used a member check as the second type of triangulation to demonstrate internal validity. Creswell (1994) described “member checks” as receiving feedback from the respondents by taking the categories or themes back to the informants and asking whether

the conclusions are accurate. After transcribing my interviews, I emailed the transcriptions to all twelve interviewees and asked them to check the transcriptions for accuracy and to add anything they felt was relevant. Only two of the students responded and their responses were minimal.

Creswell (1994) described external validity of a qualitative study as “limited generalizability” (p. 158). While the qualitative researcher’s main goal is not to generalize findings, but to find a unique interpretation of events, there still exists an attempt of limited generalizability in a qualitative study. The findings and implications of this study may resonate not only with those interested in international students at OSU, but also with a larger audience concerned with international students at other higher education institutions in the United States.

Ethical considerations

I followed the proper Institutional Review Board procedures at the university. I maintained confidentiality of the data, preserved the anonymity of the informants, and used the research for the intended purpose.

The nature of this study was to examine the personal feelings and thoughts of international students. I took the following things into consideration during this study:

1. The questions were inherently sensitive in nature
2. The questions and line of inquiry may have been highly sensitive to certain cultures and certain genders.
3. I considered that women from certain countries were not comfortable being in a one-on-one setting with an American man (the researcher). I considered

conducting interviews with potentially sensitive subjects in a public area with other people nearby.

4. I considered that some subjects may not have been comfortable talking to me if there were other people nearby.
5. I insured that the potential participants provided by the manager of International Students and Scholars did not feel coerced in any way to participate in either the interview study or narrative study.
6. I insured that students would be able to complete the narrative on their own time and mail the narrative back in a stamped envelope provided for them.
7. I insured that the sample selected for the narrative study that was selected by the manager of International Students and Scholars was provided with an anonymous way to submit the narrative.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Before I discuss the findings of my interviews, I believe that it is important to discuss the background of each member of my interview sample. I interviewed twelve students, and each one of them had unique characteristics that added rich flavor to my data. Without these twelve people and without their willingness to open up about their feelings—some of which were very personal—this study could not have been completed.

A brief biological sketch of the respondents in the sample:

Quan, 24, Male, Vietnam, Undergraduate, International Business and Marketing

Quan was born in Ho Chi Minh City, the capital of Vietnam. Quan is a typical young urban male in that he is very cosmopolitan and very in touch with technology. Quan is the older of two children. His younger sister also attends Oklahoma State University, and is an example of what will be discussed further concerning initial pioneers setting the stage for more students to follow in the footsteps of those who have had success. Quan's parents are both educated. His father is a veterinarian, and his mother has the American equivalent of a 2-year vocational degree in mechanics. Quan's

parents own two machine shops in Vietnam and seem to enjoy a measure of financial success.

Quan attended Vietnam National University (VNU) and graduated from the 2+2 program which is specifically focused on sending their graduates to American universities to finish their bachelor's degrees. VNU acts as somewhat of a junior college in that it gives the students the opportunity to complete two years of general education requirements in Vietnam and then grants the students the opportunity to attend the American university of their choice. VNU has ties to many different American universities. While Quan's parents are successful business owners, he did mention that the amount of tuition was a factor in his decision concerning which American university to attend.

Quan's father's dream was for Quan to attend an American university. Quan's father attended college in Vietnam; however, Quan's uncle was able to attend college in California in the early 1970s. This set the stage for both Quan's father and Quan's uncle to encourage Quan to go to the United States to receive what they considered to be *the best education in the world*. Quan's family has been very supportive of his decision to attend an American university, and this support continues to the point that they have also sent Quan's younger sister to the United States to attend OSU with Quan.

Quan is not receiving any type of financial aid to attend OSU; therefore, his parents are paying the entire bill. Quan's father has been active in helping him make decisions concerning his education. Quan believes that his father has been an excellent advisor; however, according to Quan, he ultimately made the final decision concerning where he would attend college.

Kalpana, 24, Female, United Arab Emirates/India, Graduate, Industrial Engineering

Kalpana is from Abu Dhabi of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Because of her Indian heritage (both her parents are from India), she also considers herself to be from India. In fact, she attended an Indian school in what is considered an Arab country.

Kalpana is a unique individual. She feels that she is more worldly than most people her age because she lives in a country that is very international. There are many Indians, as well as other nationalities, who live in the UAE.

Kalpana attended the American University of Sharjah for her undergraduate degree. An “American” university is one that is modeled after the American style of education. The instruction at this university is given in English. Kalpana completed one and a half years of study at Sharjah before transferring to Oklahoma State to complete her bachelor’s degree.

Kalpana’s parents are both educated. Kalpana’s father is a high school graduate who obtained a technical degree and through his work experience has done very well in the UAE. Kalpana’s mother has a graduate degree in teaching; however, according to Kalpana, she is a “beauty salesman.”

Kalpana made a reference toward the highly competitive nature of higher education in India. Kalpana went to India to write her common entrance exam. In India, because the population is so dense, there are only a certain number of “seats” in the college system. The people who do the best on their common exam get to pick the major field that they want to pursue. Those who are not successful in their exams can pay money to procure the seat for their major field. Therefore, many students in India are not able to major in the field of their first or even second choice. Kalpana had more options

because although she was an Indian citizen, she was still able to go to school in the UAE where she was able to choose the major of her choice.

Kalpana's parents have a business in the UAE and were surprised when she did not come back to manage it after she obtained her bachelors degree; however, they support her emotionally and financially in her graduate school endeavors.

Amadi, 19, Male, Nigeria, Undergraduate, Mechanical Engineering

Amadi is from Lagos, Nigeria, the second largest city on the African continent. Amadi expressed sentiments that the K-12 education system in Nigeria is much better than America's K-12 system; however, he holds the American higher education system in very high regard.

Amadi's father studied philosophy in Italy, but his mother only finished high school. His mother worked as a secretary in a prestigious bank in India until she married Amadi's father.

Amadi seems to come from an upper class background. He attended private school for five years and even skipped a grade because he was so academically advanced. Amadi impressed upon me that his father wants him to have as many opportunities as possible to become a well-rounded individual, and it seems that he has made the effort to provide Amadi with the resources necessary to achieve academic success.

Amadi's father gave him three options when selecting a university: Nigerian, American, or British. Amadi stated that his father's first preference was an American university. Amadi took the SAT test to get into an American university as well as the Cambridge Entrance Exam to get into a British university.

Amadi mentioned that coming to OSU was a very “petrifying” experience for him because he had never been there before, and the only things he had ever heard about Oklahoma were the Oklahoma City bombing, a Miss America from Oklahoma, and *American Idol*’s Carrie Underwood. Amadi described in detail how his very “macho” father broke down crying and got very emotional when he was about to leave Amadi in Oklahoma and go back to Nigeria. Amadi thought to himself, “How the hell am I going to do this on my own?”

Amadi’s mother is scared about his decision to study in the United States. She hopes that when he finishes his degree he will come back home.

Hua, 27, Female, China, Graduate, Higher Education Leadership Studies

Hua is from Shanghai, which she points out, is much larger than Stillwater, Oklahoma. Hua believes that the entire Chinese higher education system is very test-oriented and that the Chinese curriculum is very rigid.

Hua’s father is a mathematics professor in college, and her mother is a retired veterinarian. Hua’s little brother is preparing for his college entrance examination which is very important because in China students only get one chance to pass and get accepted into the public education system. Hua refers to this “one shot” as a very stressful time in a young student’s life.

Hua mentioned the Cultural Revolution its effect on her family. At one point, her father had to retreat to the countryside because of the political climate.

Hua attended Shanghai's Teaching University and graduated with a degree in English Education. She worked briefly upon graduation and then came to OSU for her master's degree in 2004.

Hua believes that education is very highly valued in her country. She stated, "It is kind of like education is the only hope for you...for your future life. If you don't have higher education, your life will be tough. Even the whole society values education--especially higher education. And the family fully supports educational life."

Hua's husband is also a graduate student at OSU. Hua stated that despite how low the tuition might be at OSU, it is always high when it is translated into Chinese currency.

Kasoke, 22, Female, Republic of Congo, Undergraduate, International Business

Kasoke is from Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo (which should not be confused with the Democratic Republic of Congo—formerly Zaire). Kasoke lived in the Republic of Congo for nine years until she moved to France. She lived in France until she was sixteen and then came to the United States.

Kasoke reflected on her time in the Congo as very family-oriented and very traditional. A unique aspect of this traditional behavior is the Congolese notion that women are not allowed to marry any man who is not as highly educated as they are. Congolese society sees it as an insult for a woman to be more educated than her husband. In other words, a marriage between a man with a high school diploma and a woman with a bachelor's degree is just not possible.

When Kasoke lived in France, she lived in a suburb of Paris. She speaks fondly of both France and the Republic of Congo; however, she emphasizes that her time in France was spent being raised with an African heritage. She stated, “It’s not like once I got to France all of that became things of my past because even here I still have to follow my tradition because I live with my parents still and it’s still a reminder from time to time. I might live in a different country, but you remember your roots.”

Kasoke believes that the higher education system in the Congo is rather shaky because there is a continuous war. She mentioned the low teacher pay and the lack of supplies. She mentioned that sometimes four children have to share one book. Kasoke’s family left for France because of these problems caused by the war. Half of her extended family already lived in France; therefore, it was easier for her immediate family to move there. Kasoke stated that there are many Congolese who have emigrated to France because the Republic of Congo was originally a French colony.

Kasoke also reflected on the French higher education system. She said that in France many of the males stop going to school at age sixteen and will then find a job. She also mentioned that the majors are very broad, such as literature, science, and social studies.

Kasoke constantly referred to the opportunities in America as compared to the broken down system of the Republic of Congo. She also mentioned that because of English colonization, many people in Africa speak English and seek degrees from English-speaking universities.

Fidencio, 42, Male, Mexico, Graduate (PhD), Crop Production

Fidencio is from the city and state of Durango and comes from a middle class family. His mother attended elementary school and his father finished ninth grade. Fidencio has four siblings: one brother and three sisters. His brother has a bachelor's degree in forestry; however, Fidencio remarks that "he got it unfortunately from one of those not-so-good schools, so he's working in the United States in construction." All three of Fidencio's sisters are elementary school teachers.

Fidencio seems very driven to succeed academically and has made many sacrifices to achieve academic success. He received his bachelor's degree in agriculture from the Instituto Tecnológico Agropecuario and then, on what he refers to as "very poor financial assistantship," obtained a master's degree from a very prestigious school in Monterrey. He mentioned that the public education in Mexico is basically free from kindergarten to the graduate level of college.

Fidencio believes that education in Mexico is very highly valued and similar to the United States in that there are some bad schools and some good schools. He added, however, that the best schools in the United States, (i.e. Harvard and Stanford), are on a completely different level from that of the best universities in Mexico.

Fidencio brought his wife and children with him to the United States. He mentioned how daunting it was and that his wife had no clue what kind of experience it was going to be here in America. Fidencio added that his wife was the one who worked and took care of the household in Mexico when he was studying for his Master's degree. They both agreed that it was a worthwhile endeavor for them to come here while

Fidencio obtained his Ph.D. In fact, Fidencio has already been promised a position as a professor at a university in Mexico after he finishes his doctoral program.

Roberto, 55, Male, Mexico, Graduate (PhD), Natural Resources Ecology & Management

Roberto is from Chihuahua City, the capital of the state of Chihuahua. According to Roberto, Chihuahua is a very modern city with a lot of educational opportunities.

Roberto mentioned that some people complain that it is too expensive to attend school in Mexico, but at approximately \$300 per semester, he believes that it is very cheap.

Roberto's parents do not have a formal education because "when it was their time, things were more difficult"; however, each of Roberto's three siblings and many of his cousins have degrees, including some with PhDs.

Roberto has been involved in agricultural research for his entire adult life. His first job after receiving his bachelor's degree was at an experimental station doing research, working for the Secretary of Agriculture. After working there for a few years, he was sent to the University of Arizona to obtain his master's degree. He is now a part of a cohort of researchers from Chihuahua who are completing their doctoral degrees at OSU.

Roberto believes that education is valued in Mexico; however, he notes that there are people who believe that one can get a nice job in business or private enterprise without obtaining a formal education. Roberto believes that globalization is causing a lot more competition and that Mexicans are beginning to realize that they must learn to compete economically with other countries in the world.

Lastri, 22, Female, Indonesia, Graduate, Food Science

Lastri is from the very large capital city of Jakarta. At the age of thirteen she moved to Perth, Australia, and then two years later she moved to Stillwater, Oklahoma. Every move she has made has been related to obtaining a better education. When she moved to Australia, she stayed with some of her cousins and now lives with some her friends in Stillwater.

Lastri is an independent person, and since her teen years, she has basically been on her own. She describes the Indonesian view of education as somewhat valued; however, she also notes that for women, most of society assumes that they are going to get married and have kids anyway, so an education is not that important.

Lastri's parents have been very supportive of her traveling in search of a good education. It is hard for her mother financially and emotionally, but she still understands the importance of obtaining a quality education. Lastri's mother has encouraged her to continue with her education abroad during times when Lastri was homesick. During these times her mother has stated, "Well, you better just stay there (in the US), because it is all better there and there's nothing to do here anyways."

The financial struggle is evident for Lastri. Her parents help her out some, but she also has to work part-time and obtain assistantships throughout her graduate study. At various times, her parents have called her and stated that they didn't think they could afford to pay for her school anymore, but inevitably it has always worked out. Lastri has described the possibility of her not being able to continue her studies as a "nightmare." It is because of these periodic episodes that Lastri strongly values what she has now more than ever before.

Alexa, 19, Female, Venezuela, Undergraduate, Interior Design

Alexa is from San Antonio de Los Altos, a town with a population of 120,000 high above the city of Caracas. According to Alexa, the higher education system in Venezuela is comprised of two systems: a public system that requires good grades and high test scores in order to be admitted, and a private system which only requires money.

Alexa has an interesting family. Her mother is Venezuelan and her father is Hungarian. Her father worked in the oil business and that is what brought him to Venezuela where he met Alexa's mother. Her mother has a high school education and a little bit of technical education. Her father has a Ph.D. in chemical engineering. Alexa has a brother who also attends OSU, and she has a younger sister who is still in school in Venezuela.

Alexa refers often to the turmoil that is occurring in Venezuela due to the outspoken leader, Hugo Chavez. She said that learning English used to be important in Venezuelan schools, but now it is not. Alexa said that the political situation is affecting her daily. She wants to go back to Venezuela to visit; however, she is scared that she will not be able to come back to the United States if she leaves.

Because of Venezuela's immense oil riches, Alexa says that many of her peers don't even go to college. She mentioned a 17-year-old friend who didn't even finish high school who, because of a family friendship with Chavez, was able to secure a lucrative job with the state-run oil company. Despite this situation, Alexa still values her education and thinks that it is important to obtain a college degree.

Alexa's father, who graduated from OSU, has a strong fondness for OSU. He was very happy that she chose to come here. He was a former resident advisor and also participated on the now-defunct fencing team.

When Alexa arrived in Stillwater, she spent her first year at the English Language Institute in order to learn English. Her brother, who is also at OSU, spent his first year in Oklahoma at Northeastern A&M college in Miami, Oklahoma, before transferring to OSU.

Zhi, 33, Female, China, Graduate (PhD), Education

Zhi is from Guang Hou, formerly known as Canton. She is from a working class family. She describes her parents as very ordinary working class people whose ability to obtain education was hampered by the political climate of China during the Cultural Revolution.

When Zhi received her bachelor's degree she got a job teaching English. After doing that for several years she went back to school and obtained her master's degree.

Zhi believes that the Chinese value education very much. Education is so important that poor peasants will spend all their money just to send their children to school. Zhi stated that the poor will even borrow money to send their children to school because they think that is the only way for their children to have a better life.

Zhi has made the ultimate sacrifice to come to the United States by leaving her husband and young daughter behind in China. Her husband encouraged her to come here, but he felt that she should have gone to a university in a bigger city so that she could experience "real American life," but that is not important to Zhi.

Zhi mentioned that many of her colleagues and friends went to Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to obtain their degrees because, according to her, it is easier to get into those universities. Zhi, however, prefers the United States. Also, some of Zhi's friends have attended universities in France and Germany, but have found learning a third language to be quite a daunting barrier.

Zhi believes that learning English is integral to academic success. She mentions that English is the international language and that language dominance is a reflection of economic power. Thus, Chinese people feel compelled to learn English in order to keep up economically.

Welson, 20, Male, Malaysia, Undergraduate, Industrial Engineering & Management

Welson is from Penang, a very modernized city with a lot of technological industry such as Intel, Seagate, and Agilent Technologies. Welson's family is middle-class. His father is the general manager at a packaging company, and his mother is a housewife. Neither of his parents have a college degree.

An interesting fact about Welson is that he considers himself to be Chinese. This is despite the fact that neither he, nor his parents, was born in China. Welson believes that his grandfather was born in China. When I probed Welson about why he considered himself to be Chinese, despite not being born in that country, he stated the following:

The thing is...in Malaysia...Malaysia is a multiracial country. So the Chinese and Indians actually...they come from China and India during the old times when they came over for business for the tin mining activities, so they are like expatriates, so to say, or maybe cheaper labor. So when they came over to

Malaysia, they started working and setting up factories and at that time Malaysia was not really an independent country yet. So in 1957, when Malaysia gained independence and became an independent country, that means that they are no longer under control of the British government, there was an agreement between these three races. We have our representatives. Then these three representatives formed a country. So the constitution is written based on the three races.

Welson stated that the higher education system in Malaysia is good. It is similar to many other Southeast Asian countries in that it is competitive, and a student must sit for a comprehensive exam in order to gain a seat in the public university system. There are also American programs that allow students to transfer to American universities after studying for the first two years in Malaysia.

Welson believes that education is valued very highly in Malaysia. He stated:

It's becoming a trend that you need to have at least a bachelor's degree in order to compete for jobs. The generation before me—which is like my parents—during their time, having a bachelor's degree is just a plus point. So if you want to go into the workforce you don't really need a degree as long as you have maybe work experience or you're willing to learn, you get the job. But in this few years, they are stressing that at least you need a bachelor's degree even if you want a low-ranking job. So most people are now pushing for at least to have a bachelor's degree.

Welson's brother is also a student at OSU and his family is very supportive of his pursuit of an American degree.

Abdullah, 24, Male, Saudi Arabia, Undergraduate, Electrical Engineering

Abdullah is from Al Khobar, in the eastern part of Saudi Arabia. Abdullah's father is seventy-three, and his mother is sixty-three. Neither of them obtained any education past high school. Abdullah has four brothers and one sister. One of his brothers graduated from California State.

Abdullah believes that education is highly valued in Saudi Arabia. There is a strong need for engineers in the country because of the oil industry. In the past, people needed only a high school diploma to work for the oil industry, but now competition has caused the companies to require at least an associate's degree in order to be employed. This type of competition has motivated Abdullah to pursue his bachelor's degree.

Abdullah's parents are very supportive of his academic endeavors. Abdullah's father doesn't care where he studies; he just wants his son to get his degree, make really good grades, and come back to Saudi Arabia and get a good job.

Abdullah believes that the engineering programs in America are much better than Saudi Arabia's programs. He believes that American universities have all the latest technology. While the institutions in Saudi Arabia have quality instructors, the delay in acquiring the latest technology causes Saudi Arabian universities to fall behind their American counterparts.

Abdullah attends OSU because he has a scholarship through the Saudi Arabian embassy. Without this scholarship, he would not be able to afford to study in the United States.

Narrative Analysis Sample

A written protocol was sent out to thirty respondents. This protocol was used for triangulation purposes. A narrative analysis was performed on each received sample and was incorporated into the findings of the study. Only two respondents mailed in their completed written protocols. The two respondents in the narrative analysis aspect of this study were:

Female, 21, Vietnam, Undergraduate, Advertising & Public Relations

Female, 28, India, Graduate (PhD), Geography

Analysis of the data

A total of fourteen students participated in this study. Upon coding of the data, I delineated two categories of factors that were mentioned as relevant to the respondents' decision to come to the United States to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University. I found fifteen factors that were mentioned by more than one respondent. I categorized each of these responses as *primary* factors. Any response that was mentioned only once, yet was singularly unique and worth noting, was categorized as a *secondary* factor. The data is presented here in order, with the factors that were mentioned the most listed first and then descending in order of the amount of times each factor was mentioned by the respondents.

It should also be noted that the respondents' statements have not been edited in any way. English is not the first language for any of these students, and while it may sometimes be difficult to follow what they are saying, it is important that the responses

are as authentic as possible. I believe that these unedited responses reinforce the validity of the study.

PRIMARY FACTORS

1. The value and reputation of an American degree

This factor was mentioned twelve times among the fourteen students. It was overwhelmingly the most predominant factor mentioned, with the second most-mentioned factor being mentioned eight times.

I believe that many Americans are perceived to be the best in the world in many areas. Because of America's economic power, this claim can be made in regard to many of our products, and degrees from American universities can be considered a product (Tierney, 1999). I was curious to find out if international students held American higher education in high regard and my data demonstrated that indeed they did.

Setting the benchmark

It is widely held that the United States has the most successful system of higher education in the world (Altbach, Gumport, and Johnstone, 2001). One Malaysian respondent noted how this influenced his perception of all American universities:

Welson: I think there are just a few universities that are really famous in the U.S. and have set the benchmark for general higher education. For example, like Harvard or Princeton, those top universities in the world. Those universities have set sort of a benchmark in the

mindset of most Malaysians. So people regard the U.S. higher education as somewhat good.

Chris: So do you think that because of Harvard and Princeton and those types of universities, that they kind of make American universities look good in a way? Is that what you're trying to imply?

Welson: Yeah. Like, you know, if you say that *I'm a U.S. graduate*, the first thing they will think is *oh, okay*, you know because of the benchmark that has been set by those high-ranking universities.

One Congolese respondent was extremely forthright in her assessment of American higher education. She gave a resounding endorsement of the benefit of having an American degree:

Kasoke: So, for us to come here and get a degree because the United States has come to a point where it's one of the...no...most dominant country in the world. If people hear that you went to America in school, everybody's like, *oh wait, well, it's true that she doesn't have all of the qualifications, but come on, she's from America. She graduated there.* So you have more opportunity. People consider you more when they hear that you got your degree from an American school rather than an African school or a European school. Like I said before, the United States has become the main power of the world. And, at least to a certain level, to a certain extent, to the point where when people hear that you come from the United States they tend to give you more attention and more

consideration than somebody who says, *oh I got my degree in France* or *I got my degree in Morocco*, or somewhere. They be like, *oh that's nice*. But, and that's something I've really noticed when you travel, and even when you travel and they look at your passport and they see an American stamp. Depending on where you are, some people might give you a hard time, but they be like, *oh, okay*. They look at you a little longer. They look at your passport again and they're like, *oh well, let her go*.

Chris: So do you believe that obtaining a degree in the United States is beneficial?

Kasoke: It's like people just bow down to you when they hear that you got a degree from the United States. It's totally different because not many people have the opportunity to come to the United States to get a degree here. And, for the rest of us who have that chance, which as far as I'm concerned, it's a blessing. It's something totally different. And, I can go back home and I already know that people will not look at which field I actually got my studies in. They will look at where I got my degree. And they will say, *oh!* I know a lot of people back home that hear about New York and all that. Not many people know about Oklahoma, but if they see that it's from the United States I already have a job. And, matter of fact, I might even end up being the right hand of the president!

While elements of Kasoke's statement may lean toward hyperbole, she makes a strong case for the high regard of an American degree.

Help on the job market

Many of the respondents discussed how an American degree can help them get a good job in their home country. The high regard of American degrees factored into this equation. Amadi stated that she would be hired "in the blink of an eye" if she went back to her country with an American degree.

Quan stated:

If I go back to Vietnam, I have a very competitive advantage to those students who study in Singapore and from Thailand or even Australia. Because I say, once it's from the U.S., it's always determined with a high quality from Vietnam. The competitive student comes back to Vietnam to look for a job and one from the U.S. and one from Australia or from Singapore. Probably the interviewer...they determine that the student from the U.S. is higher than the student from other countries.

Kalpana commented concerning the Indian perception of a person with an American degree:

If someone else has a degree from the U.S. and another has a degree from India, the person with the U.S. degree will get hired over the other guy. I don't know why that is. The education is the same, but I just don't know why. A U.S. degree is worth a lot in India and in the United Arab Emirates and many other countries.

If you have a U.S. degree they sometimes don't even ask which university it's from.

Welson mentioned that employers in Malaysia expressed the same feelings toward an American degree:

You know, like, a U.S. degree...if I were to go back to Malaysia, the first thing that employers will see is that degree. It's not really what experience you have and all that or what activities you participated in high school or university. The first thing they will notice is your degree.

Lastri stated that the feeling is the same in Indonesia. She said:

First, from what I heard is when you went to school here (U.S.), and then you go home, go back to your own country...you will ultimately have a better opportunity of getting a job compared to other people there who graduated from the school in your home country. And, you probably get a higher payment too.

This higher "payment" is also mentioned by Zhi from China:

Zhi: I think for most Chinese people that come to the United States because they want to seek a better life in the United States. Although some of them just want to get a degree and have several years of work experience and then after they come back they will have more advantages than others.

Chris: Advantages like on the job market?

Zhi: Yes.

Chris: Do you think those advantages are significant?

Zhi: Yes, very significant, because in China people just value those who come back and have a degree in the United States. They will have a higher salary.

The influence of an economic power

Respondents mentioned the status of the United States as an economic power. They often drew parallels between the prominence and quality of American products and higher education. To them, higher education was similar to a business in that the product was a degree. Quan alluded that his peers in Vietnam already know “about the quality of American products.” Welson cited the United States’ “very huge reputation for being the leader in everything.”

If American higher education is a product and international students perceive that product is as superior, one might wonder where they get that perception. Lastri gave some insight into that question:

Since we were little we were just so used to being taught in English and we’re exposed to TV shows about, you know, Americans and then everything was so...even though they go to the mall and see, *oh it’s made in the U.S.A.*, and it’s always a lot better. So they think, *oh, okay*, everything is made in the United States so they might have something that’s a lot better than what we have. So, *why don’t you just send your kids over there, and then learn over there, and then come back and bring, you know, whatever education you have here.*

Comparing the American higher education system with their own

Zhi made a stark comparison between the Chinese higher education system and the American higher education system. While many other respondents alluded to the

notion that their own country's higher education system was inferior to the U.S. in the minds of many, Zhi did not mince any words in stating it clearly:

Zhi: I think because the education of the universities in the United States is prestigious. Especially in China, people feel and think very positively of education in the United States.

Chris: Why do you think that is?

Zhi: Just because people's general perception. For example, if one person gets a PhD in China, they think *oh, it is just a PhD*, but if somebody gets a PhD from the United States they think you are so great. There is a perception.

Chris: Why is that?

Zhi: Because in China the education system is frequently under criticism. People just think not so popular about it. They just say if somebody gets a PhD, they just think that they got it without a lot of effort.

Value and Quality

Respondents used the terms *value* and *quality* often in their description of American higher education. Quan mentioned that the Vietnamese perceive an American degree to be of very high quality and that the education in America is *the best*. Amadi echoed the Nigerian sentiment:

Amadi: If I go back to my country with a United States degree, they will respect me.

Chris: Do you have an opinion why you think they do?

Amadi:I think the reason why is because they know the upper education system in America is absolutely brilliant. Because everyone thinks that America is top notch...is the best.

The high *value* of an American degree was also mentioned by both an Indian and a Chinese student. A Vietnamese female summed it up best when she stated: "It's better than in my country, that's why I pay lots of money to study here."

Parental perceptions

Many of the students were encouraged by their parents to pursue a degree in the United States. Some of these students mentioned how their parents held an American degree and/or American products in very high regard. Quan remarked how his uncle had come to the U.S. in the early 1970s and his father did not have the chance to go. Since that time it had been one of his dad's dreams for Quan to go to America to pursue a degree. Quan said that his father "already knew that in the U.S. they offer the best education in the world."

Amadi's father also encouraged him to study in the U.S. He saw studying in the U.S. as an opportunity. Amadi added, "My father will go the extra mile to let his kids get the best education in the world."

Other opinions

I interviewed two male doctoral students from Mexico, and each of them had an opinion concerning the high regard of American higher education. Fidencio referred to American universities having more resources than universities in his country. He also mentioned that graduates from the United States always seemed more prepared.

Roberto, however, believed that the higher education system in Mexico was “the same or just as good as the American version.”

2. Campus Environment

The campus environment was mentioned by eight of the students. The international student has unique perspective on the campus environment, and to them, it is very important.

Peaceful, friendly, and secure

A student arriving from a foreign country is faced with the overwhelming task of adjusting to a new culture and a new environment. It is hard to imagine what it would be like to leave the safety and security of my family and home to travel halfway around the world to go to college with people who are oftentimes very different from me. This is why it is so important for the international student to feel comfortable in their new college environment. Quan stated that OSU is “a very peaceful place.” He liked the people here and believed that they are very friendly and helpful. Quan’s prior knowledge of such an environment weighed heavily in his decision to attend OSU. Amadi added that he feels very safe and secure on the campus.

Boring...but good for studying

Many of the students I interviewed came from large urban areas in their home countries. Coming from huge cities such as Jakarta and Shanghai would obviously contrast with such a small city as Stillwater, Oklahoma. Indeed, seven of the fourteen students commented on how boring Stillwater was in relation to the city in which they were from. When I first heard these comments, I did not think that they would be

relevant to the study; however, each of these seven students mentioned that this “boring” aspect of Stillwater was a positive aspect because either the student, their parents or both agreed that such an environment would be conducive to focusing on academics. Hua reflected on when she first arrived in Stillwater:

The first time when I arrived, I was like *oh, this is a really small town*. And we were used to living in a big city. But after I studied here two years—and this is the third year—I really like it. I mean it is a really nice place for the study.

Welson had heard from his brother and some of the staff at his home college about how boring Stillwater was, but he considered the lack of attractions as a benefit “because it’s more conducive for studying...less interference and all that.” Lastri reflected on the same experience when a friend’s brother told her about OSU. She stated, “He said basically you don’t have anything to do but studying. You know it’s more positive instead of in Australia because it’s [Perth] a bigger city, you have friends, but then you also, since it’s a bigger city, it’s a worse influence on you.” She added that the environment at OSU causes her to have fewer distractions from studying. Lastri’s parents are equally happy about her living in Stillwater because it is a small city and she does not have distractions. She stated, “All I do is just study, go to school, and work. So they’re pretty happy. They’re not worried.” Zhi even spoke of receiving this information from another professor in China:

Zhi: And also one of my professors he visited this university once.

Chris: Did you talk to him about it?

Zhi: Yes, he told me that Stillwater is a quiet place and he said that it is a very good place to study.

Amadi's father also relayed to his son that OSU was a conducive environment for education. Amadi agreed, adding that "you have no excuse because you're not out partying."

Finally, Kalpana summed up the difference between her former big city environment and that of Stillwater:

I liked OSU very much. I know many friends who were disappointed, but I wasn't. I was happy with the environment and I was happy with the education because it was better than what I had done in Dubai. Because Sharjah and Dubai are big cities with lots of stuff to do, you know, and lots of malls and lots of clubs...and, you know, like a lot of fun stuff which you want to do when you're a freshman. So they [her friends] all wanted to move to bigger cities. I liked it [OSU] because I was kind of a nerd and I wanted to study. So this gave me like the perfect environment to study and stuff.

The importance of diversity

Two students mentioned the diverse campus environment of OSU as a factor in their decision to attend. Each of them stressed the importance of organizations for international students. Kasoke stated:

The diversity here is really what really attracted me. Just the diversity...people from different places. We came here for one of the events of the international students and I was just blown away because I've never seen that anywhere. I lived in France for six years and never...we've visited universities, but never somewhere where you had people from different countries get together and do something different.

Amadi stated:

I love diversity! One reason why I attend OSU now down here is the kind of diversity that we have. I am the treasurer for the international student organization and I love every minute of doing my job! I don't want to go to TU [The University of Tulsa] because I've gone online and they don't have enough. They don't have an organization for international students. They don't have an African student organization.

3. Tuition

As is the case for American students, the cost to attend the school of their choice is almost always a factor in whether or not they can afford to attend. It is no surprise that seven international students mentioned the cost of tuition as a factor in their decision to attend OSU. In general, it can be said that OSU's tuition is indeed relatively modest in relation to the tuition of other American universities. Also, it is important to note how relative this comparison is in relation to each student. In many cases, each of these students were comparing OSU's tuition with that of schools in the same conference, in the same area of the country, or just in the United States as a whole. In all of these instances, while the discrepancies may be large, OSU's tuition still remains relatively modest in comparison.

All of the students who mentioned tuition as a factor stated that they researched the tuition before they made their decision. Kalpana liked what she saw and said the fees were "just right." Quan said that because of the low tuition, he did not have to go out and find a job to cover his expenses. Hua and her husband noticed in a brochure that the

tuition at OSU was “really low.” In fact, Hua had a book that had the tuition of all the U.S. colleges listed together and noted that OSU “is really famous for the low tuition.”

Many students did direct cost comparisons with other American universities. Zhi and Lastri noted that OSU’s tuition in relation to other American universities was comparatively low. Welson said that he thought that OSU “is one of the cheapest universities that I’ve considered.” Kasoke went a step further and proclaimed that OSU was “the cheapest school in the whole nation.”

Some students noticed that OSU had raised the tuition significantly since they first arrived. Kalpana remembered that OSU’s tuition wasn’t as high as other universities in the Big 12 conference, but did not know if that was the case anymore, and Quan added with a smile, “The tuition fee is already raised, but it’s still lower than the tuition fee from the University of Houston-Clear Lake.”

4. Internet research

Before the advent of the internet, potential college students either looked up possible college choices in various books and brochures, or they perused whatever printed resources their advisor had on hand. Often, they would write specific colleges asking for a brochure to be sent to them. This was a time-consuming process and most likely limited the choices of students due to the sheer amount of work involved. In today’s digital society, any student around the globe who has access to the internet can research hundreds of colleges in a much shorter time by accessing the college websites or other materials available online. Seven of the students in this study noted that they had

used the internet while researching OSU and other potential college choices. What they found during their research factored into their decision to attend OSU.

Lastri casually mentioned that when she asked her friends how they found out about OSU they “were just like, *well, we were looking it up on computers.*” In contrast, Fidencio stated, “I certainly spend many hours, uh, many, many hours sitting in the internet looking for programs that would feed my necessities...my interests.”

General searches

Zhi mentioned that she searched the internet and found multiple resources that informed her that her chosen program was very good. Abdullah was much more aggressive in his search and used multiple internet resources. He stated:

I searched and I went to the chatting stuff and I was asking people from Oklahoma. I did that. I went to the Apple messenger chatting stuff. I went to Oklahoma State and tried to talk to the people there and they told me that it was really good. On those public sites for chatting and there were students and I asked them, *Can you tell me about Stillwater? Can you tell me about engineering?*

And he told me that it was really good—that it was one of the best. Because he told me that the engineering was first...industrial engineering and he told me that it was better than Oregon. And I needed a really good education, so I came here.

Obviously it is significant that one of the main reasons that Abdullah attended OSU was the recommendation of an anonymous person in a chat room. That significance could possibly be somewhat disconcerting to administrators who recruit international students.

The college website

Many students used the OSU website as a resource for gaining information about the university. Hua found an email address on the website that allowed her to request a brochure. Welson, who was attending an American university in Malaysia, wanted to know how many of his credits would transfer to OSU. Fortunately, he was able to locate an equivalency table on the OSU website. In fact, the table was the only one uploaded on the OSU website and it was from his school—Inti College. This also reinforced his notion that the relationship between Inti and OSU was very good.

5. Rankings

To many American students, the annual college rankings of American colleges by *U.S. News & World Report* are important factors in their decision-making process. The magazine not only ranks the colleges as a whole, but also ranks each specific program. There are also numerous other organizations that publish similar rankings, and many international students indicated that they used any guide that was at their disposal. Six students indicated that the rank of the college and/or the program was a factor in their decision-making process.

The ranking process is controversial and oftentimes subject to accusations that the criteria are subjective. What should also be noted is that rankings are relative to the specific program and what each individual's needs may be. For instance, a university may have several programs that are rated as top-tier and several programs that are rated as low-tier. Therefore, one could easily put the university as a whole in either category.

For most of these international students who considered OSU's rank as important, it was typically their specific program's rank that was most important to them.

For some students, like Quan, using the ranking process was a very simple task. Quan had narrowed down his college selection to two choices—OSU and the University of Houston-Clear Lake. Quan noted that OSU was ranked higher in the rankings. Kalpana and Abdullah each checked *US News & World Report* rankings and ascertained that OSU was a “good” university. Zhi considered that ranking as important to her, but not of utmost importance. She only wanted for OSU to be in the top 200 because she believed that any American university in the top 200 was good. She mentioned that her program was fifth in the nation in the ranking that she used. Fidencio also found that OSU's agriculture program was very highly regarded.

Kalpana, when deciding between OSU and the University of Texas, noted that the industrial engineering program was just as good at OSU as it was at Texas. She believed that the rankings were not overly important, but she would definitely want to know if her chosen school was “horrible” or not.

One interesting fact was that Welson did not initially have a good impression of OSU because the ranking was “not too impressive.” But obviously that did not dissuade him from choosing to attend OSU.

6. The difficulty of getting into college in their home country

Six students referred to the difficulty of getting into a good college in their home country as a factor that caused them to consider seeking a degree in the United States. Many of these students came from countries with dense populations. These countries

typically do not have enough resources in their higher education system to allow them to admit all the students in the country. This causes many countries to raise the requirements to be admitted to certain programs and this, in turn, increases the competition among the students of that particular country.

China and India, for example, each require potential students to sit for common exams. There are only a certain number of slots available in each major. The most popular majors are the most competitive and many students are left out and faced with the choice of either not attending college at all or enrolling in a program that is not their first choice. Many of these students who do not get into the program of their choice have the option of going to a private college if they can afford it, but some opt to spend that money by going to the United States to get their degree. Because of this situation, there exists a significant population of international students who are studying in the United States because they could not get into the program of their choice in the highly competitive system of their home country.

Because of his GPA of 2.5, Abdullah could not qualify for the program of his choice in Saudi Arabia. He attempted to qualify in the neighboring country of Bahrain, but they had a limit on international students.

Alexa had a high GPA, but because college in Venezuela is free, the admission test score requirements are very high. There were 247 spots available in the college of her choice and her position was 257th.

Kasoke claimed that in France, if one is over the age of 26, that one is basically done if one has not already started a degree program. She stated that the only programs available for people 26 and older were technical classes such as welding and mechanics.

Finally, Welson seemed to suffer from the most restrictive measures. He relayed this anecdote concerning the Malaysian higher education system:

I believe there is a quota system where, because Malaysia is made up of three races—main races—which are Malay, Chinese, and Indians. So the majority race is Malay and they have a certain number of seats that are reserved for Malays, so basically if—we are Chinese, so we are not the majority of people there. So there are kind of like limited seats for popular majors, such as medicine, law, or engineering. So in order to get into those programs you need to have really good GPAs. And maybe to the Malays, they might substitute their education competency with other factors such as maybe sports or family condition...that sort of thing. For Welson, a second-generation Malaysian with Chinese ethnicity, this system may seem harsh and discriminatory.

7. Financial assistance

Not all international students come from wealthy families. Many of them rely on parents who work hard to afford to send them to school in the United States, or the students finance their own schooling. Some students would not be able to study in the United States were it not for a scholarship, assistantship, or other type of financial assistance they might receive. Six of the students in this study mentioned financial incentives as an important factor in their decision to study at OSU. Of these six, four of these students were at the graduate level. The incentives that these students received fell into two categories: financial assistance from OSU or financial assistance from their country's government.

Financial assistance from OSU

Five students specifically mentioned that they received financial assistance from OSU. Hua and Zhi—each from China—spoke of receiving graduate assistantships. In fact, for Zhi, of the four American universities that accepted her, only OSU gave her an assistantship. These assistantships are very important because they are often the only form of income that an international student receives. These assistantships typically cover most or all of the tuition as well as providing some type of health insurance.

Hua also mentioned a unique incentive that OSU offers to spouses of graduate students. Since Hua's husband was already a graduate student at OSU, she received the benefit of having to only pay in-state tuition, as opposed to the out-of-state tuition which is significantly higher. She commented on this:

Chris: Do spouses get any kind of tuition benefits if they come over too?

Hua: Yeah, if the husband has the tuition waived, you will get tuition waived.

Chris: Do you think that is a big plus that is appealing about OSU?

Hua: Yes it is. Most of the universities will not have this policy.

Chris: Okay...and I had just heard about that. That is why I am asking you so you can correct me if I'm wrong. But anybody who comes over here to study, if they have a tuition waiver, then their spouse gets a tuition waiver?

Hua: Yes, but the spouse has to be on the graduate level—not undergraduate.

Chris: Okay.

Hua: So a lot of people I know will not get their undergraduate tuition waived. We are talking about the out-of-state tuition waived—not the in-state tuition.

Chris: Oh, okay, I see. They still pay the in-state tuition. They just do not have to pay the out-of-state tuition.

Hua: Yes.

Fidencio stated that he was looking for “financial support as a first priority.” When OSU offered him a paid assistantship for twenty hours per week--that was a very significant factor in his decision.

Roberto also received a benefit from OSU in that the university gave him an opportunity to receive health insurance. Kasoke received a tuition waiver because her father graduated from OSU.

Financial assistance from their country’s government

Three students specifically mentioned financial assistance that they received from their own government as a factor in their decision to come to the United States to pursue a degree. Roberto and Fidencio each relied on the Mexican government for financial assistance for their doctoral degrees. For Roberto, the Mexican government paid for half of his master’s degree at the University of Arizona and for all of his doctoral degree at OSU.

Fidencio gave a more detailed description of his government’s assistance:

Fidencio: In my case, since I have a financial support from my government.

Chris: You do?

Fidencio: Yes.

Chris: Okay, I didn't know that. Why don't you tell me about that a little bit?

Fidencio: Sure. When I started the process to come to OSU, I have applied to the Mexican government for financial assistantship, but Oklahoma State University offered me to come. I was accepted to Texas A&M with an interview personally with the professors and I told them that I had my own money thinking that the Mexican government...the only thing that they required of us was the acceptance from a foreign university. Well, it wasn't the case because I was going to pursue a master's degree. The Mexican government told me, okay, you want money, you make your master's here in Mexico and finish and if you want to go ahead and pursue your PhD, we'll talk about it again. So when I was accepted in Texas A&M and Oregon State I didn't ask them for an assistantship because I was counting on the assistantship from Coneset, which is the organization that finances it.

Chris: Were they expecting you to come back to Mexico?

Fidencio: Yes.

Chris: Okay. I can't imagine they would just give you the money and say *bye*.

Fidencio: Well you're not going to believe this but things changed. When I came, I have to sign a document obligating me to it. It was a credit so if I was going to go back and start working, really by start

working, my loan was going to disappear. In other words, I was going to pay by working for any public entity in Mexico. But now they've changed the criteria for some reason. Now the scholarships that they offer are a gift now. The only thing that you need to accomplish is getting the degree. In other words, as soon as I graduate from here, as soon as I send my degree or diploma, they are going to forget about the money that they gave me.

Chris: So you have assistance from the Mexican government to come here to OSU to get a PhD and they're not expecting anything in return?

Fidencio: Right. For some reason they changed the criteria. Talking about globalization again...they found, I think that the argument was that students working anywhere in the world somehow equally would transfer benefits to Mexico. The reality of the thing is, I think, is that they don't have a way to employ all the people.

Abdullah also received financial assistance from the government of Saudi Arabia. He stated that he only had to have a 2.0 GPA to receive this assistance from his embassy.

8. The recommendation of friends and family

International students may travel a long way to come to the United States. Sometimes the students have very little prior knowledge of the school in which they decide to enroll. Often these students rely on the recommendations of friends and/or family members to help them decide which school to choose. Six of the students

mentioned this factor. While the reasoning for the recommendations may have varied greatly, the common element among all the students was the strong degree of trust that they felt in regard to the person giving the recommendation.

Quan stated that his two top choices besides OSU were schools in the Tampa Bay area—the University of South Florida and the University of Tampa. When I asked him the reasoning behind these choices his only rationale was that his parents had some friends who lived in Tampa Bay, and they told his father that those two schools were pretty good.

Sometimes, as in Lastri's case, the only recommendation that the parents make is just to go to the United States. Lastri's mother did not give her a specific recommendation; she just encouraged her daughter to go the United States to get her degree. When Lastri did decide to make the move, she placed a strong degree of trust in her friends that recommended that she leave Australia for the United States. She trusted one friend so much that she moved with her to Oklahoma. Lastri stated, "I didn't know anything about it [OSU]. I just trusted. I moved here based on trust."

The recommendation from people who have been here before

One of the strongest and most trusted recommendations can come from people who have attended OSU and obtained a degree. A recommendation from an alumnus tends to carry more weight than a recommendation from someone who is only vaguely familiar with the school.

Abdullah mentioned a discussion he had with a relative in Saudi Arabia:

I remember that I discussed this matter with my friends. You know, my relatives.

One of them mentioned OSU. He said that one of his friends...that he was here

for mechanical engineering and he has graduated and he has a really good job now. And I was like *okay*, so one of the discussions at the time was that he mentioned OSU.

Alexa had an even stronger tie to the people who recommended OSU to her—her father and her uncle. She stated that her Hungarian father had graduated from OSU and that he had a great experience. I asked her if he was forceful in his recommendation, and she said that he was very flexible, so she didn't feel like she *had* to attend OSU. Her father's recommendation, however, was very compelling, and it inevitably made her comfortable in her choice to attend OSU.

The recommendation from people who are already here

Some students were encouraged to come to OSU by friends who were currently attending OSU or other schools in the area. Kalpana and Zhi each referred to an element of *comfort* that they felt in knowing that they had friends nearby. Perhaps it was not necessarily the recommendation about OSU, but possibly the feeling of comfort and security that they felt when they heard a friend say “come to OSU, it's okay, you will like it here.” Once again, there exists a strong element of trust between these international students and the friends who encourage them to come to OSU.

Kalpana relayed her feelings concerning some friends that she already knew at OSU prior to her enrollment:

I think the fact that they were here was kind of comforting because you come here from so far away. I knew one guy for sure, very well, who was here, who helped me when I came and he knew I was coming before I came. So I contacted him. The others, I met them after I came here. I just, you know, was happy to see

them. I knew that there were four or five of my friends from, who were seniors of mine in high school who were here. I knew that they were here. Yeah, that's one of the reasons.

Judging by Kalpana's statement, while she initially was recommended to OSU by one friend, it could be argued that the existence at OSU of people, whom she already knew, could have been seen as an inherent, understood recommendation.

Zhi mentioned a Chinese friend she knew who was already attending the University of Oklahoma (OU) before Zhi decided to come to OSU. This friend knew Zhi's interests and recommended OSU, only two hours from OU. Zhi based many of her college choices on the recommendation of friends who already attended colleges in the United States:

Chris: It sounds like some of the schools you considered were based on the fact that you had friends in the area.

Zhi: Yes, that is true.

Chris: Was it important to get their recommendation or to have the comfort of knowing that they knew the area or university?

Zhi: Yes, because before I came here I didn't know much about the life here. I think maybe if I can be close to my friends I can get their help.

9. Living with friends or family

A very compelling reason to choose a specific university in the United States is the ability to live with friends or family at the same institution or in that area. This is obviously a financial benefit, but it can also provide significant support to the

international student in many areas. Six students noted this factor as important in their decision-making process.

Quan referenced the friends of his parents who lived in the Tampa Bay area and offered him the opportunity to live with them if he attended a college in the area. Amadi had Nigerian relatives all over the country who were willing to welcome him into their homes. He mentioned relatives that he had in Houston, Minnesota, and New York; and he considered colleges in all three of those areas.

One of the primary reasons that Lastri came to OSU was because she moved here with a friend and that friend's parents. She didn't know anything about Oklahoma or OSU, but the support that she would receive if she were able to live with people in the area was a very important factor in her choosing OSU.

Some students were able to live directly with family members. Abdullah came to OSU and lived with his brother, who was already attending. Welson also noted the same factor. He stated, "The first thing that I considered is...because my brother is studying here. He is currently studying here, so it's definitely easier for me to come over here."

Kasoke followed her father here when he got a scholarship and pursued his graduate degree. She decided to stay at OSU because she was able to live with her parents.

10. The type of instruction at American universities

Five students noted that the type of instruction received in American universities was an important factor in their decision to study in America. The aspects of the instruction that Americans receive may sometimes be taken for granted by our citizens.

It should be noted that the differences between the instruction in America and other countries—especially African and Southeast Asian—are sometimes very great.

Applying what you learn

Some students referred to the dichotomy of application versus theory in regards to comparing instruction in America and instruction in their home country. These students remarked that the instruction given in the United States is more practical and that the students were able to see how it was used in the field. They resented the fact that the college instruction in their home country was mostly based on theory and rote memorization.

Quan highlighted this fact: “In Vietnam, we study something, we just try to remember. We don’t understand how we apply...so nothing to the life, but here, the teachers teach us, you learn this, and how you can apply.”

Amadi echoed this same sentiment:

Amadi: We normally have more experience like the way we’ve been taught here is with more experience and you actually do stuff. In Nigeria, it’s more theoretical. You just keep writing numbers. In America, here we practice it.

Chris: And it’s like applied?

Amadi: --like applied, where in Nigeria it’s just more about writing. You know the stuff but you don’t have the opportunity to practice it, so that’s the reason why if I go back to Nigeria with my MS certificate, they have an

appropriate opportunity for me because they know that I probably practiced what I did. Like I said, you practice what you do. You have more opportunities to do...just do the stuff that you want. Back in Nigeria, like I said, it's always theoretical. It's about theory, theory, theory. Write everything down. You don't really get to apply what we learned.

Hua noticed the same type of focus on applied learning in the United States. She noted this when comparing the Chinese system to the American system:

It is a different education system. Like I said before, we were just focusing on studying for the test. Once you pass the test, you get the degree. But here it is your capability—how you learn the skills and how you really study and learn something. I was amazed about our work-study in our office—how she is doing her project seemed really interesting, regarding whether we should have transportation like weekly, daily transportation from Stillwater to Oklahoma City. And she is doing this project like this big brochure regarding why she thinks it is necessary. She is doing the survey and considering all the budgets and all the issues--which amazed me because she showed me all of the stuff. So I am thinking if in my time in college I never even thought of doing research like this. And she is really doing some practical research. So I think just people always over there...Chinese people always think that people always focus on academics...focus really on a different way of study, I think.

Open dialogue, encouragement, independent thinking, and the freedom to choose

Kalpana and Hua noted the interaction between the instructors and the students. They saw the classroom dialogue as vastly different than that of their home country's typical college classroom.

Kalpana remarked upon this difference:

Okay, when I first came here, I was kind of shocked because of in our syllabus and our mode of education, how they encourage you is the professor teaches and you kind of just like listen and get it all in. You never question. You can question, but you can never argue with the professor or anything like that, you know. It's very, um, it's not respectful to do that. And I found it very hard to do that once I came here because I felt like I was disrespecting the professor if I ever asked anything, but I kind of saw it around me that everybody would challenge when they thought that what they were saying was right. You can question—not rudely—but challenge the professor and like have a conversation with him, or a discussion with him. That was different to me. Now I like it. I like it because it helps you know the person. I've never been to college in India, so I don't know how college is in India, but in US too, this kind of education is encouraged—the interactive kind of education because it's the American system. But in high school I couldn't. Indian syllabus high school I couldn't. You can get punished for saying something against the teacher; you know like stand up and go sit in the corner or something like that.

Hua related how her husband noted the same type of difference between the classroom dialogue in China compared with the United States when he first arrived:

- Hua: The professors, my husband told me all of the things about how the professors are nice in class and also the way to have class and the activities and the seminar class is going.
- Chris: Okay.
- Hua: And why he has to speak up. If he doesn't speak up the professor won't point at you saying like *what is your opinion* or something like that. If he doesn't speak up then he will lose the chance to speak.
- Chris: Is that different than in China?
- Hua: Yeah, we don't really. We just really lay back and sit there and waiting for the professors. He point at you asking *what is your opinion* and if that works for you then I have to say something.
- Chris: So not as much raising your hand and giving opinions?
- Hua: No, not really many interactions between professor and the students. And I was thinking about this point like most of the students here really want to ask the questions and have interaction here in class. But somehow in China, I think we like the interaction after class. We don't really like to ask the question in public in class. Somehow we feel like *okay, what if my question is stupid or awkward*. Or maybe I feel embarrassed. But they do ask questions a lot after class. I think it is interesting.

Hua noted that this type of openness of dialogue extended beyond the classroom and into the campus culture as a whole. She relayed a poignant anecdote which illustrated the vast difference between the dialogue on American campuses as compared to the dialogue on Chinese campuses:

I was amazed actually in the O'Colly (*Daily O'Collegian*) last week talked about how the president was going to leave and how the O'Colly polled all of the students' opinions regarding some students saying *I don't like him anyway, let him go*. And some regarding, the O'Colly--just a student newspaper, already pulled out all the information regarding the procedure in choosing a president and who are the other candidates and what if he left, what is going to happen here, and how the other professors, presidents, and students feel regarding this issue. So I was amazed. In China we are never going to have this happen. Even if the president is going to change, we won't talk about that. At least the students won't talk about that because it is none of our business and we cannot control it anyway. And they won't inform us anyway. But here I was really amazed about how the president sent everybody emails saying he is going to leave, and how the second day in the O'Colly pulled out the information. I kept that newspaper and I even called my parents saying *see it is really interesting*. I just feel like they let students do, I mean just give you the chance to do whatever you want.

Hua and Zhi remarked upon how they had heard how many of the American instructors motivated and encouraged students to succeed in and out of the classroom. Hua noted how great it was that American instructors motivate students to study and how they focus on student development. Zhi added that her professors encourage students to study hard and always give positive comments to students. When asked if that was different than in China, she stated:

Yes, that is different from China. In China, for example, if the students don't work hard the teacher will be like *I will not let him pass the class*. That is kind of punishment. But in the United States the teacher just encourage. So I think that is very different. And also here the professors here encourage students to think independently. Different ideas from others, but in China the teacher just want the students to have the standard answer. That is one I don't like. Therefore the students every time, they just try to figure out what is the standard answer so everybody just thinks the same.

Hua also noted how the general impression of American college campuses was that students had the freedom to express themselves not only in the classroom, but by their freedom to make choices outside of it—especially in relation to how they completed their assignments and how they chose their field of study. She remarked:

Here it is all based on your interest. You can choose whatever class you want to go to. If you want to do intern, then yeah, we will offer you that. They have student affairs there ready to help you and support you for your academic career life. The professors always encourage you to go to the counselors and what to wear and how to submit your proposals and to be there ready for you. I just feel like that way once you have any questions you will find somebody to ask for help. I think I really get a lot of confidence after I have studied here.

Zhi emphasized these American concepts by stating: “I like the classes here because the professors can encourage us to think independently and critically. That is very different from the Chinese way of teaching.”

11. Relationships between OSU and foreign schools

Many U.S. colleges are noticing the benefit of establishing a relationship with a school from another country. Many of these relationships are established for the transfer of knowledge and the benefit of research. Oklahoma State University has been very active in establishing relationships with universities and colleges in other countries for the promotion of cultural exchange and academic exchange. In some cases, OSU has entered into specific agreements with two-year schools in other countries that have “American” programs. These programs allow the students to transfer to OSU very easily because OSU has made an agreement specifically noting which credits they will accept from the sending school. As we will see in the next factor addressed—this is a very important aspect of the decision of an international student to come to OSU.

Four students noted the relationship between OSU and their sending school as an important factor in their decision to study at OSU. Three of these students specifically referred to the relationship or agreement between the two schools. Welson, from Malaysia, shed light on the “American” programs and how their relationships with American schools encourage their graduates to choose those schools:

Chris: So, you talked about, what was it—an *Amerian* plan or something?

Welson: Yeah.

Chris: That’s for students who plan to go to America to study?

Welson: Right.

Chris: So there are already universities that have...or there are colleges that have that?

Welson: There are a few colleges that offer American programs, which is a transfer program. What it means is that those colleges will offer maybe freshmen or sophomore courses and students can take all that and transfer over to a U.S. university. If those students are like...they are very sure that they are going to come to the U.S., it is advisable for them to take up this program—this American program—because one thing is for sure...their credits will be accepted and they won't lose any time. Besides if they come over to the U.S., I mean, they transfer over, the duration of study in the U.S. will be shorter. So, in a way, they will save more money than, you know, coming as a freshman. After high school I went to a college named Inti. Inti College is a private college that offers the Australian high school certificate program. They have diploma programs and the American program. So I chose to enroll into the American program. And between Inti College and OSU there is a tie...an agreement so that credits are transferred and there is an equivalency table that shows what courses in Inti is equivalent to OSU so...you have some sort of security...you know, like you expect how many credits that can be transferred so you can have a clearer predication of how long you're going to study here and all that.

Chris: You considered other universities...you mentioned. What were the other universities and why did you consider them.

Welson: I considered Ohio State University, which is in the Columbus campus, Nebraska-Lincoln, SUNY-Buffalo...and I think those were the few universities.

Chris: Did those universities all have an agreement with Inti?

Welson: Um...some of them, yes. I think Nebraska-Lincoln may have one. But generally Inti has a set of equivalency tables that roughly shows which subjects are equivalent to the other.

Chris: Were there a lot of universities in America that had an agreement with Inti?

Welson: Yeah, there are many that have the agreement.

Quan had essentially the same type of experience in Vietnam as Welson had in Malaysia. Quan came to OSU three years ago from Vietnam National University (VNU), which also had an American program. According to Quan, at that time, VNU had “agreements” with only two schools—OSU and the University of Houston-Clear Lake. These agreements basically outlined that these two schools would accept all of the credits from VNU as long as the student took the necessary coursework as outlined in the agreement. Quan referred to VNU’s American program as a “2+2 program” in which the student spent two years at VNU and then two years in America. One of the key factors in Quan choosing OSU instead of Tampa Bay, Florida area schools where he had friends, was that OSU accepted all of his credits because of the established relationship between OSU and VNU.

Quan highlighted the tremendous effect that the relationship or agreement had upon students at VNU: “It’s because like if the Vietnamese University don’t have any

agreement with the U.S. university, it means close the door. The international student doesn't have any chance to go to the U.S.”

He also mentioned how these agreements can result in an American university establishing a virtual pipeline of incoming students from certain American schools. Quan was the first student from VNU to come to OSU. I asked him if his success caused others to come. He agreed emphatically:

Quan: Yeah. That's what happened and after the first group of Vietnamese students go to OSU, some group after us, they also go to the academic advisor and the advisor same thing and they also say *we already send some Vietnamese students to OSU already.*

Chris: Okay.

Quan: And so we create the relationship.

There are other types of relationships between OSU and schools from other countries. Roberto spoke of the relationship between OSU and his university in Chihuahua, Mexico. Roberto had never been to Oklahoma before and he cited the relationship between his school and OSU as the primary reason for his enrollment at OSU.

Roberto had a master's degree and taught at the University of Chihuahua. He and two of his colleagues recently began work to complete a PhD through OSU via a newly established relationship between his university and OSU. Roberto explained this relationship:

Chris: So your plan of study...that was obviously a big influence to come to OSU because they had the cooperative and the degree.

Roberto: Right.

Chris: Okay. So how long has the cooperative been going on between OSU and Chihuahua?

Roberto: Not long. This is the first time. So we are just doing the first experiment.

Chris: Is this cooperative just to exchange students or to exchange research, or both?

Roberto: Yes, both. We want to exchange everything.

Chris: Do you know who initiated that? Did Chihuahua initiate it or did OSU initiate it?

Roberto: Well, we initiated because we wanted to do this cooperative with some other universities. We started looking at some other universities and OSU, but finally we got a better deal with OSU.

Chris: Is OSU offering classes in Chihuahua or do you have to come up here?

Roberto: Yes, also there is a mixture of the plan. We started doing some classes in Spanish with our people, Mexican people from down there. We receive the OSU people for three semesters. We used to have two classes from OSU professors in the summer sessions. We came to OSU to finish up our thirty credits and the research piece.

Chris: Is your government paying for that?

Roberto: Yes.

12. The acceptance of transfer credits

This particular factor is very closely related to the previous factor concerning relationships between OSU and foreign schools. This factor was specifically mentioned by three students. Each of these students attended American programs in their home country. I felt that this factor deserved its own category because it was mentioned separately on many different occasions and it was not always mentioned at the same time that the “relationship” factor was mentioned. However, it should be noted that the benefit of the acceptance of transfer credits was always mentioned as a benefit from the relationship factor. Another reason that I have given this factor its own category is because not all the relationships were the American program type of relationship and also, the benefit received from the relationships was not only the acceptance of transfer credits. Very often, the students who were in the American programs also noted the benefit of close ties to OSU as well as knowledgeable advisors. Advisors who recommended OSU is also a separate factor. While I list these factors separately in my findings because they were mentioned so specifically in distinct ways, it is my intention to discuss these factors together in the conclusion section of my study.

Welson and Quan were two students who previously discussed the relationship between their college’s American program and OSU. Welson, who was in Malaysia’s Inti College American program, and Quan, who was in Vietnam National University’s American program, each expressed their strong consideration toward OSU because of the established relationship between OSU and their respective schools. What was specifically mentioned at different points in their interviews was the importance of the acceptance of transfer credits. While each of these individuals wanted to study in the

United States, they were not willing to go to a university that was not going to accept the majority of their transfer credits. It was not worth it for them to potentially lose a year or more of study solely for the benefit of being able to complete a degree in the U.S. Quan affirmed the importance of this by stating, “But to go, for going to OSU or going to Houston-Clear Lake (another school with an agreement with VNU) all the credit that I earned from Vietnam—they all accept here.”

The third student, Kalpana from the United Arab Emirates, who stressed the importance of transfer credits, did not mention the relationship between her university’s American program and OSU as important; however, she repeatedly stressed the importance of OSU’s acceptance of her previously earned credits at the University of Sharjah’s American program. Kalpana stated, “The primary reason I came here was because it (OSU) accepted more of my credits because I would have to repeat those subjects.” In fact, Kalpana chose OSU over the University of Texas, which is generally ranked higher than OSU in most programs. Her reason for choosing OSU over Texas was simple—had she taken Texas’s offer, she would have lost a year of study. She told me about how strongly she felt concerning this matter:

Chris: Did you consider other universities besides Oklahoma State?

Kalpana: I applied to just Austin.

Chris: Just Texas? And you got accepted there?

Kalpana: Yeah, I got the acceptance letter, yes.

Chris: Okay, and why did you not go there?

Kalpana: Because more of my credits, of about 35 credits, 27 or so were accepted here.

Chris: And how many were accepted at Texas?

Kalpana: Only like about 19.

Chris: And what is that equal too? How far would that have put you behind?
What would you have lost?

Kalpana: A lot—a year at least.

13. The influence of advisors

Three students mentioned that they received recommendations about OSU from people affiliated with education in their country. For this study, I have categorized this informed advice as coming from “advisors.” An advisor, for the purpose of this categorized factor, is any adult who is not a parent or relative who gave an informed opinion about OSU to the student. In the case of the three students who mentioned being advised while in their home country, these advisors were: the advisory staff at Vietnam National University, a liaison at a Nigerian high school, and a Chinese professor who had visited OSU.

Quan, who attended Vietnam National University’s 2+2 American program, spoke of staff members at VNU who strongly recommended that he go to OSU or the University of Houston-Clear Lake. Throughout Quan’s interview he continually referred to these schools, and only these two schools, as his only real choices. I asked him repeatedly why he felt that those were his only two choices. He stated, “It was not two choices, but two schools which the staff recommended to me. Because the staff...they went to this school—the University of Houston-Clear Lake and OSU and they recommended to me those as good schools.” I continued to probe Quan as to why the

staff at VNU was so strongly supportive of those two schools. According to Quan, it may have been because they actually visited those schools. He stated, “I’m not sure if they get the degree. Probably they get the short training...some invitation from Houston-Clear Lake or some from OSU invite them here and after the trip went to OSU or went to Houston-Clear Lake, they come back and they...they advise us.”

Obviously, the advice that the VNU staff gave to Quan had a profound effect.

Zhi discussed a professor of hers who had visited OSU. She looked to him for advice when deciding where to pursue her graduate degree:

Zhi: And also when I was in China there was also some...and one of my professors, he visited this university (OSU) once.

Chris: So one of your professors visited?

Zhi: Yes.

Chris: Okay. Did you talk to him about it?

Zhi: Yes. He told me that Stillwater is a quiet place and he said that it is a very good place to study. So I feel that kind of connection.

Amadi received advice about OSU from an advisor while he was in high school in Nigeria. I asked him about this person and Amadi explained who this person was and how he was influenced by him:

Amadi: We had this American liaison kind of thing in my high school. So they normally come and talk to you about schools and what not.

Chris: The American liaison...who are they representing? I mean, is that the government?

Amadi: No. It is not really like an American liaison, but they specialize in taking SAT exams and knowing the kind of schools we are supposed to come here in America.

Chris: Do you think they were employed by SAT?

Amadi: No.

Chris: Okay. Go ahead.

Amadi: So basically he said his son, the main person that knew my dad and his son went to Wichita State University, which is in Kansas.

Chris: Who knew your dad—the liaison?

Amadi: The liaison guy so to speak. He knew my dad and his son goes to Wichita. And his son was talking about Oklahoma State University...when he's going to go down and take a look around and look at Mechanical Engineering and look at...and then, we heard that Oklahoma State is very good for mechanical engineers.

Chris: How did you hear that?

Amadi: We have staff books, and these kind of books that...compliments of...given to us by SAT—the College Board...yeah.

Chris: The College Board?

Amadi: The College Board lists the kind of opportunities that different schools give us.

While we may never know the true affiliation of Amadi's advisor, it is still important to note that Amadi felt like he was receiving an informed opinion from someone in his

country who advised him that OSU was a good school and had a great Mechanical Engineering program.

14. Cost of living

The low cost of living in Stillwater, Oklahoma, was mentioned by two students. Zhi cited the low tuition fee at OSU as well as the low cost of living in Stillwater. She specifically compared the cost of living in Stillwater with cities on the East coast. Her friend who was already attending the University of Oklahoma told her that it was much cheaper to live in the Midwest than it was on the East coast of the United States—which was the location of many of the other universities under consideration by Zhi.

Kalpana also heard about the low cost of living in Oklahoma. She referred to a contingent of students from the United Arab Emirates who were promoting Oklahoma State's status as a good value:

Kalpana: It's because the cost of living is not that high over here but it's a good university. It's not a bad university. Okay, it's not the best university, but, if you notice, there are a lot of Indians in Industrial Engineering. It's because that program is really good in the U.S. It used to place among the top ten and now it's twenty or something. It's just not bad at all.

Chris: Okay, so how did you know the cost of living was good here? How did you find out?

Kalpana: Hmm...I think I just heard by word of mouth...oh, I know how I found the cost of living to be. I looked at all the application packages and it tells you exactly how much it costs for your degree, room and board, and

miscellaneous expenses. And the one at Oklahoma State wasn't so bad. The packets...this is what like everybody could afford at the time. You know they can't afford like too much so they were thinking of it like a good education.

So for Kalpana and Zhi, value was definitely an important aspect of OSU.

15. Contact with an OSU professor

Each of the Mexican doctoral students in agriculture cited contact with an OSU professor as a significant factor in their decision to attend OSU. Each of these students; however, were unique in their dealings with OSU faculty. While each of these students were from the same country and in the same area of study—their stories were very different.

Roberto cited encouragement from an OSU professor as a factor in his decision to come to OSU. Roberto was part of a cooperative in which students from Mexico completed their PhDs partly in Mexico and partly at OSU. Roberto initially contacted an OSU professor only because he was coordinating the program. He relayed that exchange:

Well for me I wasn't thinking I wanted to come study here. But as we started doing this process I got involved because I work at the university. I worked on coordinating the cooperative program. One person from here from the university pushed me very hard to finish and to come back here. He gave me some advice because I didn't want to finish and so he pushed in a good sense in order for me to come and finish my degree.

Fidencio, who is also a doctoral student in agriculture, had a more involved experience with an OSU professor. Initially, Fidencio started searching on the internet for people who shared his academic interests. Fidencio had some very defined academic interests in the areas of alfalfa and forage crops. In the beginning of his search, Fidencio located a professor at OSU who had the same interests as he did. The professor started giving him some tips, and in Fidencio's opinion, "we started developing, little by little, some kind of relationship." Once Fidencio's research interests started leading him toward entering a doctoral program, he began to write numerous emails to many institutions. According to Fidencio, he was "trying to have a feeling as who was more or less open to accept a student like me, especially searching for financial assistantship. So I got accepted by Texas A&M and by Oregon State University, but they wouldn't offer financial assistance."

Fidencio's persistence eventually paid off and he was offered an assistantship by OSU; however, it was his relationship with the OSU professor that caused him to finally commit to OSU. Fidencio's research into the agriculture program at OSU was very extensive. He relayed this to me:

Fidencio: I remember the professor told me to come...seeing the professor's vita from the agronomy journal which is recognize...an internationally recognized journal. *Agronomy Journal* is the name of the journal. I asked the professor, *being you're a part of the editorial committee of the Agronomy Journal, what are the universities that generate the most publications*, because that was kind of an index to me. The universities that would generate more papers about forage production or forage

management, that would be targets for me. And he openly told me that procedures that I had but also, he said, well in Oklahoma State we're looking for good students so I need your credentials. I need a letter of intention and transcripts and I will see if you want to...if you could be a candidate to come to Oklahoma State. So yeah, this professor, I think we developed a mutual love somehow because at the beginning it was a mutual interest from his part. It was just a question about his field of specialty and I made him three or four questions and then I opened myself to him that I wanted to pursue a PhD. And neither at that time, I wasn't expecting him to make me that kind of invitation because he was of a very prestigious journal. So being in that position, I asked him what was the university that published the most forage issues and that's when he invited me to come to OSU.

Fidencio felt that the actions of the professor were a very important factor in his decision to attend OSU. I asked him if he felt like he was recruited by OSU:

Fidencio: I was. I was recruited by OSU through the professor that I had referral.

Chris: So you think that when you started email conversations with your professor...you think his actions after getting to know you was an act of recruiting you or *we want you to come here?*

Fidencio: I believe so.

SECONDARY FACTORS

Secondary factors were those that were only mentioned once, but were included in this study because I felt that they were worthy of mentioning. Keeping in mind that I interviewed twelve students and received two responses from my written protocol, I felt that there was a possibility that factors that were only mentioned once could possibly have a more significant place in a larger sample. Also, some of these responses were so unique that I felt they were worth mentioning, regardless of how often they would have been repeated in a much larger sample. I outlined these secondary factors in the following section and they are delineated by the student who cited them. In total, there were five different students who cited unique factors that I categorized as “secondary.”

Hua, China

Hua cited two factors that were very unique. The first one she cited concerned a book that had information about American colleges. I probed her about this book:

Chris: Who has that book? Is it in China?

Hua: Uh-hmm.

Chris: What is the book called?

Hua: I don't know...some general information about all of the US colleges and universities. It is a small book--the Chinese version. They introduce Harvard and all of the universities. OSU is saying like the party—night parties--and the tuition is really low and it is a really nice small college town.

Needless to say, I have never been able to find out any more information about the specific book that Hua mentioned.

Hua mentioned another interesting factor—not wanting to be in a place in America that was just like China. In other words, Hua wished to have a true international experience. She did not want to go to a university that would give her the same experience that she could have gotten at home. She wanted an authentic American experience. Hua described this situation:

Hua: A lot of universities like in New York and California...like half the campus is full of Chinese. And you barely need to speak English. You can do whatever you want. They have a Chinese bank, Chinese supermarket and whatever. You don't really need to speak English.

Chris: So it is not like studying abroad?

Hua: Yeah, it's not like that at all. So I thought that it is good to be somewhere with really a foreign culture—not somewhere full of Chinatown.

Chris: That is interesting because I have interviewed some people who were from countries that were not as big as China and they wanted to come to school where there was a big network of people. That is kind of opposite of you.

Hua: Yeah. For me I would say, but some people they would prefer...it depends on the person, like language skills. Some would prefer that way so that it is a lot easier for their lives and study. What is their purpose to study abroad and come over here? We really want to practice our English and evolve and emerge to the culture here. So this really is the best place

we can learn and experience all of the culture and language and all of this stuff.

Anonymous, India (taken from one of the written protocols)

As noted earlier, one factor was “contact with an OSU professor.” This student noted the influence of a professor; however, it was slightly different. When asked to discuss the factors that influenced her decision to come to OSU, she wrote, “After one semester, my professor transferred to OSU and brought me along with him to OSU.” This 28-year-old graduate student obviously placed a high importance on the professor that she was working with.

Quan, Vietnam

Quan cited two unique factors that determined his attendance at OSU. As mentioned previously, Quan had the opportunity to attend college in the Tampa Bay, Florida area because his parents had some friends who lived there. Quan stated that he did not want to live there because he wanted his freedom. Quan is an example of an international student who strives for freedom and independence as opposed to comfort and familiarity.

Quan also mentioned the size of the university as a factor. Quan, like so many of the international students that I interviewed, came from a very large city—in this case, Ho Chi Minh City. Quan had the opinion that the bigger schools were better than the smaller schools. Since OSU is a comprehensive research university with an enrollment

of over 20,000, it is considered a large university. I asked Quan why he felt that bigger universities were better. He stated:

I don't know, probably because I was influenced in that opinion when I was in Vietnam. In Vietnam, the bigger universities are always better than the smaller universities. I have more friends, more opportunity, more choice. To me—with all the people, I mean...I don't know how to say it, but between the small one and the big one, I like to be at the big one.

Amadi, Nigeria

Amadi had an interesting anecdote to share concerning the Nigerian higher education system:

Chris: Tell me about the universities in Nigeria.

Amadi: Well, the universities in Nigeria...well, essentially they are very, very good. But because of the, should I say, sometimes because of the economic instability we have in our country, that we have difficulties sometimes, the school goes on strike.

Chris: The school goes on strike?

Amadi: Yeah, just imagine OSU going off for like three months and sometimes the reasoning and sometimes the students don't have the full potential like, they're supposed to have. That's a major problem. The schooling...the education system is good, but based on the fact that we have economic instability, like maybe the union goes on strike and things like that...that's

why it's so difficult. It costs a lot for it and I think that's the key, because the school keeps going off and on and off and on.

Chris: Are you talking about the professors or administrators or just everybody?

Amadi: Professors specifically—they're not getting paid well.

In Amadi's case, political instability in his home country is a strong factor in his decision not only to study at OSU, but to study anywhere besides Nigeria.

Alexa, Venezuela

Alexa, like Amadi, also felt political problems were strong reasons to consider studying outside her home country. She shared a story similar to Amadi's:

Alexa: And I want to stay in Venezuela because when I was graduating, many things was going on at the time like protesting and people stopped working for like a whole month and that was affecting education because people were not going to school for like a month or sometimes school was scheduled for like three days because of teachers protesting and stuff like that.

Chris: So you're saying that the political situation in Venezuela was part of the reason why you didn't want to go to college in Venezuela?

Alexa: Yeah, that was one of the reasons.

Conclusion

I was pleased to find so many interesting factors that caused an international student to seek a degree at Oklahoma State University. After I completed the interviews I

realized that these factors fell into two categories—factors that focused on studying in the United States in a general sense and factors that focused specifically on OSU. For instance, factors such as cheap tuition and the acceptance of transfer credits were directly related to OSU, while factors such as the type of instruction in the United States and the difficulty of getting into college in their home country, only related to the decision to study in the United States in general. From these findings, American universities can benefit by understanding what specifically about the United States appeals to international students and also what specifically appeals to them about OSU. If OSU and other American institutions of higher education are able to understand the factors that influence college choice among international students, then they will be able to focus on improving their deficiencies and reinforcing their strong points in order to continue to recruit talented international students to the United States to seek a degree.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine why international students choose to study at OSU. The primary research question was: “What factors influenced international students to come to the United States to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University?” Chapter I presented the background to the study as well as general information about international students in the United States. Chapter II presented a review of the literature including the history of international students studying in the United States and specifically at OSU. Chapter III explained the research methodology used and how the sample was chosen. This chapter also included a discussion of the theoretical framework that guided this line of inquiry. Chapter IV presented the findings from the interviews. Included in this chapter were brief biographical sketches of all the students in the sample. Chapter V presents a summary of the findings along with a discussion of the results. The implications of the findings are also discussed with an emphasis on recommendations for OSU and other American institutions of higher education that wish to recruit more international students to their campus. Finally, recommendations for further research are presented.

Reflections from the interviews with international students

I was very excited to undertake this study. I was thrilled to speak with students from all over the world about who they were and why they were here. I was not disappointed in the results. My study yielded hundreds of pages of data from in-depth interviews with twelve international students. I was disappointed in the lack of response to the written protocol. I used the written protocol for triangulation purposes and I expected to get more responses; but I only received two. Nonetheless, the two written protocols that I received were very well-written and I was able to gain a significant amount of data from my narrative analysis.

My first interview was with Quan and it lasted over an hour. After I had interviewed all twelve students, it was still Quan's interview that yielded the most data. Of the fifteen primary factors that I delineated, Quan's responses fit into over two-thirds of the categories. The other interesting thing about Quan was that his English-speaking skills were not that strong. This was definitely a sign of things to come. It was a rare occasion that I did not have trouble understanding what a student was saying. It was even more difficult to transcribe these interviews and very often there were chunks of data that I was unable to interpret. I had hoped that the member checks that I did with each of the twelve students would help me interpret more of my data; however, I received very little feedback on the member checks. Thus, some of the data was unfortunately lost due to my inability to translate it from the recordings.

This study changed me as a person. I was able to break down preconceived notions and stereotypes about other cultures. Most importantly, I was able to understand and address some of my own ethnocentric ways of thinking. Of course, I heard many

interesting stories that I will never forget. I have never stopped thinking about Amadi's anecdote about Nigerian professors going on strike. Perhaps it doesn't seem like something out of the ordinary—it even happens in the United States. What I wasn't able to recreate in this study was Amadi's nonchalant and somewhat dry-humored way of relaying the story to me. It was a very profound experience for me to listen to him tell me about that and for my reaction to be one of utter disbelief, while he seemingly blew it off—just another day in the life of a Nigerian.

Another anecdote that I reflect on was Welson's explanation of the constitutionally-endorsed racial preferences in Malaysia. I never did give Welson an indication that the concept troubled me and I just listened as he relayed the situation to me; however, I wished that I had probed more on his feelings about it.

Finally, the most profoundly unsettling experience for me during one of my interviews was when Zhi told me about what she left behind in China while she studied at OSU for five years:

Chris: What does your family think about your decision to study in the United States?

Zhi: I have a husband and a daughter. My husband supported my decision because he knows that I have great pressures in my work.

Chris: Okay, so they are in China?

Zhi: Yes, they are in China. But my daughter can't understand. She just wants me to come back with her.

I learned more about Chinese culture in that interview than I had ever known. Having recently had a child, I was amazed that Zhi would choose to leave her daughter

for such an extended period of time. At first, I thought she was selfish, or perhaps her husband coerced her to leave. After reflecting on this dilemma for many days, I came to realize that I was placing my own American values on Zhi and that the sacrifice that she was making didn't necessarily mean she loved her daughter less than I loved my son. In fact, it might be possible that she studied in the United States *because* she loved her daughter so much. It was moments like these, that reflections on my study enabled me to learn more about myself *and* other cultures in the world.

The results of my study yielded many different emerging themes. I was able to categorize all of these themes as factors that influenced the international student's college selection process. Some of the factors reinforced perceptions that I already held, such as the high regard of American higher education and the use of the internet to research American colleges. Other factors that emerged were completely new to me and really opened my eyes. One of the factors that stood out concerned the agreements that some American universities had with foreign schools. I had never heard of such an agreement, and once I learned of them through Quan—my first interview—I proceeded to research these agreements and indeed I learned quite a bit about how American colleges recruit international students by establishing these agreements. Another factor that was new to me was the unique way that many students in my study explained how the environment at OSU influenced their decision to study here. As an OSU student and a Stillwater resident, I am fully aware of what the campus lacks in excitement; however, I was not prepared to hear international students explain to me that the “boring” environment was appealing to them because it was so conducive to studying. I do not believe that the OSU admissions office will use that perception to entice the American students to enroll.

Implications

International students have become savvy consumers. They understand that there is an increasing demand for their presence on American college campuses. Many of the students in my study indicated that they had done quite a bit of research about America and OSU. They were informed and were willing to research any piece of information that they could get their hands on. Of course, in this age of the internet, these students are better able to find the most appropriate American university that fits their needs.

International students who study in the United States are viewed in one of two ways by their respective countries. They are viewed positively because these countries are happy to have their students go to the United States to receive a great education and then come back to make the country better. Also, the respective countries may not have the resources to educate their entire population; therefore, obtaining an education in America is a necessity. Other countries may hold a negative view of this exodus of some of their brightest students. These countries may use this exodus as motivation to improve their own higher education system.

The results of this study have many implications on the higher education system in the United States. Because of the high regard of American universities, these universities may continue to put pressure on themselves to maintain their top-tier status. Also, the reference to college rankings—which already resonates with American students—may begin to take on even more importance in our rapidly globalizing world.

Finally, the instruction in American universities and the instruction in other countries were mentioned in many contrasting ways. What these students said about the style of instruction in American universities may compel other countries to seek to

improve their mode of instruction. Perhaps they will attempt to Americanize their colleges, or perhaps they will address their perceived deficiencies and hope that will keep their students from leaving the country to go to college.

Recommendations for Oklahoma State University

Based on the findings of my study, I have many recommendations for OSU. These recommendations center on continuing to recruit international students and maintaining a quality experience for them while they are here. OSU has developed a strong reputation for recruiting international students. Kalpana, from the United Arab Emirates, stated, “I think they (OSU) want international students. They make it very—they make our life here very nice, I have to admit. The international services here is very good. They are like understaffed a little. They have a lot of work, all of them, but they make us feel very happy.” In order to continue maintaining the high standard that OSU has set in the area of international student enrollment, I suggest the following:

1. Emphasize value and quality

The words “value” and “quality” were mentioned by many of the students I interviewed. While some of these students are desperate to get into any college in America, they still take pride in citing OSU as a school that gives them a high quality education for a good value. I believe that any promotional materials for OSU should emphasize these concepts.

2. *Promote the campus environment*

As was previously discussed, the concept of campus environment for an international student can be vastly different than an American student's concept. From an international student's standpoint, the fact that OSU has a peaceful environment that is conducive for studying is a big plus for international students who are seeking a purely academic experience. Because of the enormous effort that it takes to leave their country and come to OSU, some international students refer to the stress of the high stakes involved in this decision. If OSU promotes itself as a place that is secure, peaceful, and conducive to academic success, that will surely resonate with the international student.

3. *Promote the diversity of the campus*

Many students noted that OSU does have a diverse campus and that the International Student Organization is very important to their experience. OSU should continue to promote the ISO and other events that the university plans for international students. If international students are informed that OSU has a diverse campus and sponsors events that promote diversity, these students might be enticed to enroll at OSU. Also, if the currently enrolled international students have a positive experience and agree that OSU has a diverse campus, they might tell other potential students in their home countries.

4. *Maintain an affordable tuition in relation to other universities*

Many students cited the "cheap" tuition at OSU. OSU has raised its tuition recently and that was noted by some of these same students. OSU should attempt to

maintain a competitive tuition within the framework of the Big 12 conference and in relation to other comparable universities in the United States.

5. *Maintain a strong internet presence*

I believe that one of the most important recommendations that I can make to OSU in the recruitment of international students is to maintain a comprehensive and current website. Many students mentioned that they researched OSU on the internet. OSU must understand that very often what is on that website can be the key factor in the international student's decision to study at OSU. Welson noted that he found information about his transfer credits on the OSU website. I also looked and found the same equivalency table that he referred to, but unfortunately, that was the only one on the site. OSU should focus on putting more of these equivalency tables detailing equivalencies with various international universities on their website, because being able to see an equivalency table could encourage a student to choose OSU.

6. *Emphasize all ranked programs*

International students study the rankings just like American students do. Since each organization that ranks colleges and their programs have different criteria, it would benefit OSU to promote any program that is ranked highly by any ranking organization. The international students did not note that they differentiated between the ranking organizations such as *U.S. News & World Report* or *The Princeton Review*. In fact, no student who mentioned a highly ranked OSU program was able to tell me what ranking publication that they read. In my opinion, OSU should just cull the good things written

about OSU from each individual ranking organization and promote them in their publications aimed toward international students.

7. *Offer competitive financial aid opportunities*

Contrary to my preconceived notion before I began this study—not all international students are rich. Many students cited the financial assistance that they were offered from OSU as an important factor in their decision-making process. OSU should offer as many competitive scholarships, graduate assistantship opportunities, and tuition waivers as possible in order to entice international students to attend.

8. *Insure that the international student has a positive experience*

This is a very important recommendation. Many students noted the recommendations of friends, family, former OSU students, advisors, and other people who were familiar with OSU. The university must understand that if they can provide a great experience to the initial pioneer from a specific country, then it is highly likely that a connection will be made with that country and a pipeline of international students will be established. This connection occurs because that first student may go back to his country and tell his friends, family, and former schoolmates that he or she had a fantastic experience. The students who have a good experience tend to recommend that college to people from their country. Alexa agreed:

Because if people like to be here they will tell their friends and then if they, their family, like their children, when they have their children, they will make them come here, like, I'm trying to make my friend come here because I know she will

have like better opportunities to be here than over there. And my sister, I want her to come here too.

Welson added, “I think OSU is a good place and I will definitely recommend it to other Malaysians when I go back.”

Some students have such a great experience that they become virtual advertisements for the university. Fidencio spoke of his efforts to promote OSU:

Chris: Do you believe that coming to the U.S. to study has been worth it?

Fidencio: Oh sure. As a tool of that, I’m using all possible free minutes to promote OSU in Mexico—in particularly Durango. I even wrote to a local newspaper to ask how much it would cost me to put an advertisement to open the eyes of students to try to come to OSU.

Chris: So you’ve had such a great experience at OSU that you wanted to put an advertisement in your hometown newspaper talking about how great it was?

Fidencio: Right. With my own money. There are a group of students from Chihuahua. They are teachers from the University of Chihuahua that I remember they came to OSU with some sort of program between the College of Agriculture and the University of Chihuahua. So this one guy came to visit with me and he wasn’t sure at that point about attending Oklahoma State University. He says that he decided to come here just because of the encouragement that I gave him. So that truly tells of my

strong condition about recommending people to attend Oklahoma State or at least anywhere else, but my first word is Oklahoma State University because that's what I know.

Clearly, OSU should want to continue insuring that students like Fidencio have a great experience, because international students have made it clear that they will recommend the college to other people in their home country.

9. *Emphasize all the applied instruction at OSU*

Many students noted that they were enticed to come to OSU by the opportunities to gain practical experience. They cited internships and other ways in which they could apply what they learned. I believe that OSU should focus on that aspect of the curriculum when recruiting international students because many of them come from countries that do not offer such opportunities. Many Asian students cited theory-based instruction that was performed in a lecture style of instruction. They agreed that American universities offered them more opportunities to apply what they learned. Oklahoma State University has many opportunities for international students to practice their instruction and the university should promote all of these opportunities.

10. *Continue to establish agreements with other countries*

The agreements between OSU and foreign colleges with American programs were cited often by students in this study. OSU should continue to build these relationships with schools that send their students to American universities after spending two years in their American program. During the course of this study, the manager of International

Students & Scholars at OSU went on two promotional/recruitment trips—one to China and one to Vietnam. Hua, one of the students I interviewed, went as a representative to China for one of these trips. For the Chinese trip, the OSU delegation went to four cities and approximately twelve universities. I was able to view the promotional materials they used, which included brochures in different languages and a power point presentation. I believe that OSU should continue to fund these types of trips in order to continue building relationships with other countries. Currently OSU has established agreements with over two-hundred universities (*School of International Studies...*, 2005).

11. *Promote the low cost of living*

The state of Oklahoma has a very low cost of living. Some students mentioned that as a factor in their decision. When promoting the university to international students, OSU should mention the low cost of living, especially in comparison with other universities.

12. *Promote the English Language Institute (ELI)*

Only one student mentioned the intensive English study program at the English Language Institute at OSU; however, I believe that it is valuable recruiting tool for the university. NAFSA (2005) noted the importance of intensive English programs in relation to the downward trend in international student enrollment in the United States:

A little-noticed factor that exacerbates these trends concerns the demise of the intensive English industry in the United States. Intensive English programs are a gateway to U.S. degree programs. Students who learn English here are more

likely to pursue their university education here, and indeed, one of the ways that many universities have recruited international students is by attracting them to their English-language programs. Yet international student enrollments in U.S. intensive English programs have declined by almost 50 percent since 2000, and many schools offering these programs have closed. This is due primarily to the vastly increased difficulty in obtaining a visa for the specific purpose of studying English in the United States. One would be hard pressed to think of another major power in the world that discourages the study of its language.

Because OSU has the English Language Institute on its campus, it would be beneficial to include it in any promotional materials geared toward international students.

OSU's efforts to recruit international students

In August of 2005, the International Student Recruitment Task Force at OSU issued recommendations. The provost recommended that the director of International Education and Outreach begin to implement the recommendations of the task force. I read this study after I completed my data analysis, therefore I was not influenced by the recommendations when I developed my own themes and recommendations for OSU and the U.S. Some of those recommendations of the OSU task force were similar to my stated recommendations. I have noted some of the relevant recommendations below:

*OSU webpage should be in different languages

*Expand efforts to market OSU

*Provide increased financial incentives for international students such as in-state tuition waivers and scholarships.

*Expand opportunities for academic program cooperation with universities in other countries—Develop and enhance articulation agreements.

*Support targeted recruitment in countries with high potential student yield.

*Provisionally admit international graduate students with less than satisfactory TOEFL score and refer them to the ELI.

The recommendations by this task force prove that OSU does care about internationalizing the campus through the intensive recruitment of international students. Hopefully, OSU will successfully implement the recommendations of the committee and begin to see the enrollment of international students increase.

Recommendations for American higher education

In the race to recruit international students, American universities face two problems—the increasing global competition for international students and the myriad of visa issues that still linger from post 9/11 restrictions. I recommend that American universities take these two issues seriously and take steps to address them.

Increasing global competition

For a long time, the assumption was that American colleges didn't need to work to attract foreign students (McMurtrie, 2005). This assumption was based on America's sustained economic dominance. McMurtrie (2005) described how American recruiters worried that after they left a recruitment fair at a foreign school that "university recruiters from Australia or Canada may parachute into town, promising a cheaper education and easier access to student visas" (p. A10).

The increase in global competition for international students has caused many universities to step up their recruiting efforts. Countries, like China and India, that used to send a lot of students overseas are now seeing the need to improve their higher education system so those students will stay in the country. Two of the students that I interviewed, one from India and one from China, each referred to this situation. An Indian student described her feelings on the subject:

Kalpana: I don't know if in the future, after five years, if the U.S. degree will be viewed as highly as it is now. I don't know. It may go up or go down but I just think that now in today's world now like ever since the twenty-first century, every country is now getting like its own...like...you know what I mean...

Chris: They're waking up?

Kalpana: Yeah. And people are taking notice of, and it's especially in India and like China, you know. I don't know. I just read the news and I see it. Like India is like growing all the skill and all the good things about India are coming out now. I know that many of my professors talk highly of India and the education system. I think that those everywhere are becoming more competitive and it's become like a big global market now, you know, not just one country or two countries that everybody is kind of like dying to become a part of. And I know that after the next five years or so, there won't be as much pressure on Indian students to get a foreign degree. They will be able to be just as successful with an Indian degree. I think so.

Zhi referred to the internal improvements that China has made in the hope to lure Chinese students back to their higher education system:

I think, also this year because of many reforms take place in China in the economic field and also the education field because I worked at the university. So as far as I know, great changes have taken place. When I was an undergraduate student, the university was very traditional. The teacher just gave a lecture and the students just listened. Now the university focuses more on developing the student's critical thinking and also develop their ability—problem-solving ability instead of just inputting information into their students.

This is obviously a step for the Chinese in beginning to model their instruction in the way of American instruction; and it just might make a difference.

Continual visa problems

“American higher education is currently seriously disadvantaged in the international recruiting marketplace by the lack of a coherent federal policy that encourages foreign student enrollment” (Farnsworth, 2005, p 6). This disadvantage can be attributed to the post-9/11 restrictions on visa requirements for international students and the subsequent inability of the federal government to create a workable system. NAFSA (2006) referred to the disengagement of the United States government in addressing this problem. NAFSA cited the global competition for the best and brightest around the globe, referring to them as a “sought-after commodity.” NAFSA quoted a senior Microsoft official who stated, “We have really dramatically shut down the pipeline of very smart people coming to the United States” (p. 1).

Two students in my study directly referred to the problems created by the lack of U.S. immigration reform since September 11, 2001. One Indonesian student described her perception:

Lastri: Because now it's getting harder and harder to go to school here.

Chris: Why is that?

Lastri: First, because of what happened September 11th. It is really hard to get a visa—especially for guys. For girls it's not so much, but for males it's really hard to get a visa and go to school here. It's just more complicated. Yeah, we used to have a lot more students who went to school here before and now we have about twenty. Before, we had about two-hundred.

As many entities with vested interests in international student recruitment try to persuade the U.S. State Department to implement a more streamlined and cohesive policy, many countries are taking advantage of the situation and stepping up their recruitment of international students. As enrollment in American colleges continues to decline, organizations such as NAFSA and IIE, as well as many American corporations continue to plead with the government to change the policies discouraging international students before U.S. universities effectively lose this stream of students, valuable both financially and in terms of the academic and social richness.

Recommendations for further research

I believe that I have filled a void in this line of inquiry by adding a rich amount of qualitative data to the body of knowledge. My research has yielded themes that previous studies had mentioned and I have also found new themes that contribute to an

understanding of international students and their decisions to attend college in the United States. I have also closely examined the OSU task force recommendations to expand efforts to market OSU. I believe that further research could be accomplished in the following areas:

1. Understanding the long-term effects of the post 9/11 visa restrictions.
2. Interviewing students in urban areas of the United States to see if they gave the same answers as my respondents. It would also be particularly useful to perform a regional and a national study.
3. Performing program evaluations on American colleges that are successful in maintaining or increasing their international student population—what are they doing right?

Final Thoughts

International students continue to come to America in droves. However, their numbers have decreased dramatically, and that is a cause for concern among many in America who believe that international students bring the benefit of diversity and internationalization to our college campuses. As rapid globalization and a market economy continue to flourish in all parts of the world, educational leaders have begun to see higher education as a big business and the degrees as products. Tierney (1999) stated:

If our degrees are *products*, then we surely do a better job with our global consumers than virtually every other business in the United States. Foreigners, for example, do not buy our cars or computers with anything close to the market

share we receive from foreign students who flock to our shores to purchase bachelor's and graduate degrees. (p. 15)

The problem with what Tierney stated in 1999, is that in America's post 9/11 world, it is no longer true. America does not have that tremendous market share any more. If university presidents continue their call for diversity and internationalization of their campuses, then they should also get serious about examining the factors that I have outlined in this study and using them to understand how to better recruit international students to our campuses. Diversity and internationalization are good things, and we should do what we can to promote them at every campus on America. Without international students on our campuses, our students will be denied the benefit of a diverse, multicultural education and a better understanding of the world.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

Consent Form for Interview

- Project Title:** Coming to America: Examining Why International Students Choose to Pursue a Degree at Oklahoma State University
- Investigator:** Chris Jenkins, Ph.D. student in Curriculum & Social Foundations, Oklahoma State University
- Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that contribute to the international student's decision to study at Oklahoma State University. This study will fulfill the requirements for a dissertation.
- Procedures:** The subject can expect to be interviewed for approximately one hour. There is the possibility of a one-hour follow-up interview. The interview will be recorded on audio cassette and all data will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for the subjects in this study. The participant will receive a \$10 gift certificate as compensation for participating in the interview. The topic areas of the interview will focus on factors contributing to the decision to study at OSU as well as their perceptions of higher education in the U.S.
- Risks of Participation:**
- There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.
- Benefits:**
- There are no expected benefits from this research beyond contribution to the field of study. The contributions to the field of study include a better understanding of: international students at OSU and in the U.S., multicultural education, diversity in higher education, and higher education in the United States.
- Confidentiality:**
- The data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked closet in the investigator's office and the only person with access to this data will be the investigator. The data will be destroyed after it is transcribed by the researcher. Pseudonyms will be used in the final paper. This consent form will be stored separately from the data. The data will be coded with no other identifying information. The transcribed interviews will be kept for one year after the study is completed.

Contacts:

Chris Jenkins, Primary Investigator
1624 S. Celia Lane
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405-744-9650
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Dr. Pam Brown, Advisor
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Stillwater, OK 74078
405-744-8004

If you have questions about the research and your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Sue C. Jacobs, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights:

Participation is voluntary and subjects can discontinue the research activity at any time without reprisal or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

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 B

Interview Questions

Information obtained before interview:

Gender

Age

Home country

Undergraduate/Graduate

Plan of study

1. Tell me about your home country and the city/town where you are from.
2. Tell me about the higher education system in your home country.
3. Tell me about your family and your background.
4. Tell me about your education history.
5. Explain to me how education is valued in your country.
6. Explain how you decided to come to Oklahoma State University.
7. What were all the factors that affected your decision?
8. Did you consider other universities and why?
9. Why did you choose OSU over the other universities?
10. Has OSU lived up to the expectations you had before you came? What are the similarities/differences?
11. Tell me about your plan of study and if that had an influence on your decision to come to OSU?
12. How did you hear about OSU?
13. Before you came to OSU had you heard any good things or bad things? What were they?
14. Did you know anybody who had come to OSU before you and did you have a conversation with them about the university? If so, tell me about it.
15. What does your family think about your decision to study in the U.S.? At OSU?
16. Explain what led to your decision to study in the United States? What were the factors that you had to consider?
17. Do have friends from your home country that also chose to study in the United States? If so, did you have conversations about it this decision? Did they influence you and how?
18. Do you believe obtaining a degree in the United States is beneficial? Why?
19. What advantages do you think you have obtained by choosing to study in the U.S? At OSU?
20. What is your perception of higher education in the United States?
21. How is American higher education regarded in your country?

- 22. Are you familiar with the term “globalization” and if so, what does it mean to you? (Talk about globalization in terms of international students studying in the United States.**
- 23. Was the location of OSU a factor in your decision to study here? If so, why?**
- 24. Were you recruited by OSU? If so, explain.**
- 25. Did OSU provide you with any financial incentives to study here, such as financial aid or scholarships? If so, discuss.**
- 26. How did your financial status influence your decision to study at OSU?**
- 27. Does OSU offer any advantages over universities or colleges in your home country? If so, what are they?**
- 28. How long have you been in the United States?**
- 29. How long have you been at OSU?**
- 30. What are your plans after graduating from OSU?**

Appendix C

Written Protocol

Home Country _____
Gender _____ Age _____ Plan of
Study _____
Graduate or Undergraduate (circle one)

Please explain, in a narrative form, why you decided to come to the United States and study at Oklahoma State University. Please discuss all the factors that influenced your decision.

Discuss your perceptions of American higher education. Discuss how you would compare American higher education with the higher education institutions in your country.

Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, January 04, 2007
IRB Application No ED06220
Proposal Title: Coming to America: Examining Why International Students Choose to Pursue a Degree at Oklahoma State University

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 1/3/2008

Principal Investigator(s)

Chris Jenkins	Pamela Brown
1624 S. Celia Lane	237 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74074	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.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. 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 this 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 Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Christopher James Jenkins

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: COMING TO AMERICA: EXAMINING WHY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CHOOSE TO PURSUE A DEGREE AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Education:

Graduated from Union High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, May, 1990; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, December, 1996; received a Master of Science in Educational Administration from the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, July 2000. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Social Foundations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2007.

Experience: Manager, University Testing Services, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, June 2005-July 2007; Assistant Professor of Secondary Education, Metropolitan State College of Denver, Denver, Colorado, August 2007 to present.

Professional Memberships: American Educational Research Association, Association for Curriculum, Supervision, and Development, and Comparative International Education Society

Name: Christopher Jenkins

Date of Degree: December, 2007

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: COMING TO AMERICA: EXAMINING WHY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS CHOOSE TO PURSUE A DEGREE AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

Pages in Study: 155

Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Curriculum and Social Foundations

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced the decision of international students to attend Oklahoma State University. The participants were fourteen international students who were currently enrolled at Oklahoma State University. Twelve of these students participated in an interview with the researcher and two of them submitted a response to a written protocol. The students were asked about their life history and their reasons for coming to the United States to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University. The researcher looked for emerging themes from these interviews that yielded implications for the study of international students in higher education in the United States.

Findings and Conclusions: Findings revealed that there were fifteen primary factors that influenced the international student's decision to pursue a degree at Oklahoma State University. The top four factors that were mentioned by at least half of the participants were: 1) The value and reputation of an American degree 2) Campus environment 3) Tuition and 4) Internet research. The researcher concluded that while the United States continued to be highly competitive in attracting international students, the perception of the United States as the destination of choice for international students is slipping significantly. The researcher offered suggestions to American institutions of higher education and Oklahoma State University for the recruitment of international students that will possibly lead to continued diversity and internationalization at college campuses in the United States, and specifically at Oklahoma State University.

ADVISOR'S APPROVAL: _____

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