INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES DEVELOPING FRIENDSHIPS IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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(Under the Direction of GEORGIANNA MARTIN)

ABSTRACT

Learning outcomes for twenty-first century higher education in the U.S. include graduating students capable of functioning effectively across cultures. The growth in campus internationalization efforts stems from an emphasis on graduates’ ability to navigate a complex and rapidly changing world. Strategies to achieve internationalization goals focus on expanding student participation in educational programs outside of the U.S. and enrolling greater numbers of international students. Although, research shows global learning on-campus is possible, resources and attention targeted toward intercultural learning on campus are more limited. Using narrative inquiry, this study explores international college students’ experiences making friends in the first year of college in the U.S. as well as the influence, benefits, and challenges of making friends. The findings highlight the value of friendship development for international students and the opportunity to revisit internationalization strategies and goals. Each student expressed worry about making friends in the U.S., that making friends in college was different, that they pursued friendships based on their perception of commonalities, and the benefit of reflecting about the experience of making friends. The majority also expressed desire to develop intercultural friendships. Their experiences making friends were associated with a wide variety curricular or
co-curricular activities, with a few occurring before arriving to the U.S. Most students shared positive overall experiences, conveyed satisfaction with their experiences making friends, and developed intercultural friendships. Most students also expressed their friendships enriched their overall college experience, their experiences making friends was connected to stress or mental health experiences, and their intercultural friendship experiences were both rewarding and challenging. A few students with less successful friendship development experiences conveyed a negative impact on their overall college experience and their overall emotional wellbeing. This study highlights the value for institutions to be aware of international students’ expectations and experiences making friends, gauge their intercultural skills, and their experiences making friends early in their academic career as well as the necessity to promote a culture of inclusion on campus and provide ample opportunities and adequate support for students to develop intercultural relationships. Their experiences reinforce that intercultural friendships can stimulate global learning for all students.

INDEX WORDS: International students, Internationalization, Friendships, Global learning, Intercultural skills development, Intergroup contact theory, Global student mobility, Social networks, Narrative inquiry
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HIGHER EDUCATION

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.”

~ Woodrow T. Wilson

To achieve the desired learning outcomes outlined in the *College Learning for the New Global Century* report (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2014), every student – regardless of institution type, financial ability, or personal desire – must have access to frequent and sustained opportunities to interact collaboratively with individuals who have different experiences, worldviews, and assumptions from their own. Enrolling a diverse student population, hiring more diverse faculty and administrators, and implementing curricular enhancements are strategies for promoting diverse learning environments (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) yet increasing numbers of diverse students alone is not sufficient to meet goals for pluralistic and global learning (Chun & Evans, 2016). Colleges and universities must demonstrate a full commitment to providing, promoting, and supporting opportunities for students to engage across differences with a focus on how students learn from these experiences (Chen and Evans, 2016). Educators benefit from understanding students’ social networks and connections and from scholarship emphasizing the importance of peers on student learning and development (Astin, 1993b; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1993b) affirmed that individual students’ interaction with a diversity of other students has positive effects on cultural awareness and a commitment to promoting racial understanding.
Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) pointed out that learning is relational and requires informal interactions and engagement between peers and educators (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Research on social network theory likewise reinforces the importance of the composition of our social networks and the significance of social networks on our lives (Christakis & Fowler, 2011). Given the importance of social networks on living and learning, I argue that using qualitative methods to explore lived experiences developing friendships – including experiences students have establishing relationships with diverse peers in college – is a worthy endeavor. A lifetime of experience exploring cultures, forming cross-cultural relationships, and reflecting on the cultural learning that occurs through these relationships, in addition to nearly twenty years of professional work supporting international students on college campuses, informed this research and fuels my desire to focus on exploring international students’ experiences developing friendships while in college.

International students leave their social networks behind, which includes their family and friends, when they begin their studies in the U.S. (Kashyap, 2011; Kim, 2012). Although technology has improved students’ ability to maintain close relationships despite distance (Kashyap, 2011), it is critical international students develop new social networks in their new environment. Developing friendships in the new environment, especially with U.S. students, is something most are eager to do when they decide to pursue education abroad (Kovtun, 2011; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Leong, 2015; Montgomery, 2010). International students must develop new friendships in a setting that can be very different than where they originated. The social network that students develop has a tremendous influence during their time college and into the future (Astin, 1993b; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Christakis & Fowler, 2011; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016). Given
the importance of these relationships, this study explores international students’ experiences
developing friendships in a U.S. higher education setting and to share their stories in an effort to
promote greater understanding and capacity for colleges to offer support to all students in respect
to developing intercultural friendships.

**Statement of the Problem**

Institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century are expected to graduate
individuals capable of working effectively across cultures and across borders, with the ability to
navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world. The fast-paced evolution of the global
environment in higher education presents both challenges and opportunities to reach twenty-first
century education goals. Organizations like the American Council on Education (ACE), the
Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), and the Association for
International Educators (NAFSA) have introduced models for “comprehensive
internationalization” to aid institutions in global student mobility and global education efforts
exchange in U.S. higher education is not a new phenomenon, although it continues to gain
prominence as demonstrated by the continued growth in international student enrollment and
U.S. study abroad participation (American Council on Education, 2017; Institute of International
Education [IIE], 2016). Nearly 50% of institutions have developed mission and vision statements
or are executing strategic plans that include terms such as “internationalization,” “global
Offering immersive and sustained intercultural opportunities is increasingly a fundamental part
of preparing students for the world in which they will live and work. Since the middle of the
twentieth century, the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) annual *Open Doors Report* has
documented the growth in the number of U.S. students participating in educational experiences abroad and foreign students enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities, often using the term “global student mobility” (IIEa, 2016). Both outgoing and incoming exchange are expanding on U.S. campuses in an effort to achieve internationalization goals (IIE, 2015). However, a variety of barriers thwart some students from studying abroad, including cost, faculty support, and curriculum demands. Despite government funding and numerous nationwide programs which contribute considerable investment of resources and engage a growing number of institutions in offering and promoting study abroad opportunities, less than 15% of students enrolled in U.S. higher education will participate in study abroad or similar immersive intercultural experiences (ACE, 2011).

Although study abroad has experienced commendable growth, more significant growth has occurred with international student enrollment during the last twenty years. The number of international students studying in the United States has increased 85% since 2006/07 (IIEb, 2016). During academic year 2015-2016, the total number of international students in the U.S. exceeded 1 million for the first time in history (IIEa, 2016). While the total number of international students in post-secondary education has grown nationwide, considerable variation exists among institutions’ motivations for recruiting and enrolling international students (Glass & Westmont, 2013; Roy et al., 2016). Institutions may enroll international students to generate tuition revenue, grow graduate level research capacity, increase enrollment in STEM programs, or support a comprehensive internationalization or diversity strategy (Glass & Westmount, 2013; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Roy, Lu, & Loo, 2016). These differences in motivations among institutions result in noticeable variation in enrollment patterns at different types of institutions, across fields of study, and most
importantly, with international students’ experiences (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Roy, et al., 2016). International student enrollment is uneven across accredited U.S. higher education institutions as demonstrated in IIE Open Doors Reports and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) annual Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) by the numbers reports. International student enrollment overwhelmingly dominates in STEM fields with more than 60% studying for a degree in engineering, business, math, computer science, or physical sciences (IIEa, 2016; Student Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). Considerable variability exists in the total number, origin, and academic pursuits of international students enrolled in Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) schools authorized to enroll international students which includes data from K-12, postsecondary, flight, vocational, and language schools (Student Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). Focusing only on postsecondary education, more than 20% of international students are enrolled at the top 25 hosting institutions. Interestingly, the number of institutions hosting more than 1000 students has grown from 156 ten years ago to approximately 250 institutions in 2015-2016 (IIEa, 2016). It is not surprising to read reports highlighting considerable variability in international students’ experiences.

An imbalance exists between, on one hand, the attention, resources, and programs devoted to creating a campus culture that promotes intercultural learning and on-campus internationalization efforts and, on the other, those targeted to sending students abroad to engage in intercultural learning (ACE, 2011). In many instances, the resources and attention given to creating a campus culture that embraces cultural differences, promotes learning across differences, and supports international students to successfully integrate and engage on campus with their domestic peers is inadequate in comparison to the resources and attention placed on sending students abroad. More recently, literature has begun highlighting the insufficient
attention institutions place on promoting cross-cultural contact as a method of promoting global learning on U.S. college and university campuses (ACE, 2011; American Council on Education, 2017; Hovland, 2014; Ward, 2015). Institutions are more likely to focus on student mobility – including sending students abroad or recruiting students from outside of the U.S.– and are less likely to devote resources to ensure opportunities exist for all students to gain intercultural skills in on their campus (Aba, 2016; Soria & Troisi, 2013).

Despite the imbalance, progress is occurring, according to a 2017 American Council on Education report. The report analyzed data from the campus internationalization survey and identified growth in academic and co-curricular policies and programming that facilitate on-campus global learning. Likewise, NAFSA has included a more prominent focus in recent years in their professional development activities and publications on internationalization at home and abroad. Additionally, the intersection of intercultural and multicultural learning is being explored by Sorrells (2016), who developed an intercultural praxis model that serves as a theoretical framework for visualizing the synergies between intercultural educational efforts and multicultural education and social justice efforts. Recent efforts by individuals and organizations to focus on global learning which is both desired and achievable on our campuses are promising.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore international students’ experiences making friends during their first year of higher education in the U.S. I sought to explore the lived experiences of undergraduate international students using narrative inquiry. I chose a narrative methodology for this study because I hope to represent the human experience of making friends through stories nine international students. Through their experiences, I gained insight on the challenges and benefits these students faced making friends in their first year of college as well
as the influences friends have on their lives. In line with employing a narrative methodology, the researcher maintains focus on forming a research puzzle that starts with their own positionality and forms from their relationship with the participants (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The research puzzle includes elements of both the researcher and participants’ lived experiences and the participants’ stories of their lives in relation to time and place (Burke, Johnson, & Christensen, 2014; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Literature across several disciplines compares international students to their domestic peers and focuses on what are perceived as international students’ deficiencies with regard to academic learning, cultural adjustment, and social connectedness (Hanassab, 2006). I desired to counter what is prevalent in the literature, and align this study with Jones (2017), who posited that comparing heterogeneous subgroups using native and non-native nationality as criteria is problematic and does not take into account intersectionality across identities. Research using nationality as a criterion involves using broad generalizations about an individual’s cultural norms, values, and primary language – minimizing the unique experiences of individuals. Additionally, using U.S. cultural norms as the accepted standard over differing ways of being perpetuates power or influence of U.S. norms over the comparison group. While commonalities based on national culture should not be ignored, I hope through talking with individual students and hearing their stories to provide greater depth of understanding to support existing literature and offer new possibilities for further study.

Stories of international students, who struggle to make host national friends and who are isolated from their U.S. peers on college campuses, make national news headlines (Fischer, 2014; Fischer, 2012). Supporting these news claims, researchers’ findings show that international students’ social networks tend to include more co-national and multi-national relationships than
those of host national peers (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Chavajay, 2013; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). While the above reports and findings are important, they lack attention to the actual experiences international students have making friends. Our ability as educators to encourage international students to engage in cross-cultural friendships is limited without a deep understanding of their experiences. I intend to elicit perspectives from the students’ experience to illuminate the shared responsibility of colleges and universities to aid students in the process of re-creating their social networks in the U.S.

**Theoretical Foundations**

Strategic goals or learning outcomes that emphasize graduating global citizens or global learners motivate several types of internationalization efforts. Yet, an operational definition and standardized assessment of global learning that is commonly accepted across U.S. higher education has not been developed. King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) Developmental Model of Intercultural Maturity and Deardorff’s (2006) Intercultural Competence Framework provide theoretical foundations for understanding intercultural learning and development. The American Council on Education (ACE) has also led efforts to develop common learning outcomes using rubrics. Various assessment tools exist to measure intercultural skills and competencies, including the AAC&U Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics and a number of global learning, global perspective, and intercultural competency assessment measures (Deardorff, 2006). While tools to measure intercultural skills and competencies are flourishing, institutional efforts to determine operational definitions, develop
programs to promote learning, and use existing tools to assess those efforts are lagging (Chun & Evans, 2016).

Instead, most institutions continue to focus primarily on reporting participation data on outbound study, campus programming, curriculum internationalization, and international student enrollment to demonstrate they offer global learning opportunities, without providing evidence of what is being learned (Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2009; Glass & Westmount, 2013; Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). These efforts continue to be the primary focus of institutions, despite awareness among campus leaders that intercultural maturity does not automatically develop among students simply through sending them abroad or bringing international students to campus (McGill, Peterson, & Helms, 2013). Similarly, institutions often fail to assess interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive skills and competencies that students, both U.S. and international, are purported to develop as an outcome of internationalization (American Council on Education, 2017; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011). A focus on counting participation over assessing learning outcomes persists, despite the growing number of models and best practices for curricular and co-curricular programs explicitly intended to develop students who possess the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive skills needed to succeed in a global environment (Peterson & Helms, 2013).

While a more complete exploration of international student experiences in U.S. post-secondary institutions will be covered in the next chapter, overwhelmingly, the literature on international students focuses on comparing their experience to that of U.S. students, comparing their curricular or co-curricular engagement patterns, and addressing this subgroup’s unique needs in relation to academic learning, cultural adjustment, and transition to a U.S. college or university (Korobova, Starobin, & Suspitsyna, 2013; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Less prevalent
is research exploring international students’ experiences developing relationships with their peers (Hendrickson, et al., 2011; McFaul, 2016; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Suspitsyna, 2013; Trice, 2004).

**Significance of the Study**

Intercultural interactions and friendships aid students’ transition and adjustment to a U.S. university environment (McFaul, 2016; Trice, 2004), and U.S. students benefit from opportunities to engage with and learn from diverse peers (Arthur, 2016; Braskamp, Braskamp, & Glass, 2015). Yet these relationships are often less common than friendships among students of the same nationality, except when both students demonstrate interest in developing intercultural relationships (Sias, et al., 2008; Ting-Toomey, 2005). A few studies have focused on the lack of interest on the part of U.S. students to engage with their international student peers and highlight the challenge that educators have in developing an environment where cross-cultural learning is valued by all members of the community (Kashyap, 2011; Williams & Johnson, 2010). Intercultural maturity and competence promotes meaningful and mutually beneficial intercultural interactions (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2009; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). However, readiness for intercultural learning is impacted when curricular and co-curricular interventions and internationalization of the curriculum are not a priority (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014).

My decision to explore international students’ experiences developing friendships on a U.S. college campus stems from my own experience, as well as a desire to contribute to the literature on this topic and deepen the awareness and understanding educators have of international students’ experiences. The study centered on a specific time period: the students’ first year on a U.S. college campus. I highlight the benefits of friendships for the international
students in the study, explore the affirming and challenging experiences they have making friends, and explore the substance of their friendships. Through this study, there is an opportunity to augment the limited research on international students’ experiences and expand the knowledge of educators beyond the stories of international students living in isolation on U.S. college campuses (Fischer, 2014; Fischer, 2012). Additionally, through concentrating on international students’ lived experiences forming friendships, I hope to illuminate and promote greater understanding of this growing demographic and make a case for institutions to revisit internationalization goals, focus on global learning outcomes, and evaluate on-campus internationalization objectives achieved through stimulating and nurturing intercultural friendships.

Research has identified the benefits for all learners resulting from positive experiences with diversity, inclusive practices, and welcoming environments (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Strayhorn, 2012). International students are an especially heterogeneous group, despite commonly being treated as one subpopulation with regard to academic research, programs, and policies (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015; Jones, 2017). A recent analysis of higher education journals worldwide showed that a majority of the nearly 500 relevant research articles over the last 30 years use primarily quantitative data to address questions about international student experiences with academic and social transitions (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014). Their analysis found that quantitative research on international students worldwide focuses on adjustment, retention, and variations in academic learning experiences and outcomes. The analysis also identified that, through 2012, qualitative research on international students’ experiences in higher education is limited (Abdullah et al., 2014).
Therefore, there is a clear opportunity to conduct further research to understand international students’ experiences developing friendships. I hope to counter narratives of isolation, identify and better understand successful examples of strong intercultural friendships, and highlight the role that international students’ colleges and U.S. peers can play to enhance the experience international students have making friends, understanding that intercultural friendships promote global learning for all students. Acknowledging the experiences international students have developing relationships through their narratives provides educators the ability to improve existing support. Ideally, this greater awareness will inspire institutions to identify opportunities to enhance the campus environment and culture to provide necessary support for developing cross-cultural friendships – including those between U.S. and international students – thereby promoting opportunities for global learning on campus and abroad.

**Definition of Terms Used**

Comprehensive internationalization was introduced by the American Council on Education (ACE) Center for International Initiatives (CIGE) as “a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected” (American Council on Education, 2017, p. 2).

Intercultural maturity as defined by King & Baxter Magolda (2005) is the capability a person has to understand and act in ways that demonstrate intercultural awareness and appropriateness based on three interconnected developmental dimensions (cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal).
International student, in this study, refers to a student holding foreign nationality and a temporary student visa while pursuing post-secondary education outside of their country of origin, which mirrors the Institute of International Education [IIE] definition used in collecting data for *Open Doors Reports* (IIE, 2016).

Friendships are a universal phenomenon, rooted in cultural values and norms. Developing social relationships, including friendships, is an aspect of being human that transcends cultures and involves interactions that are sustained over time and have a degree of intimacy, allowing for self-disclosure (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977).

The terms co-national, multi-national, and host national are used to talk about three categories of friendships based on research conducted by Bochner, McLeod, & Lin (1977).

Co-national is used when a friendship is mono-cultural, meaning with a student from the same national background.

Multi-national is used when the student’s friendship is with someone not from the student’s own country or nationality and also not from the host country.

Host-national is used to describe a friendship the student has formed with a national from the host country.

**Cross-cultural Friendships Support Healing: A Student’s Perspective**

Before I started this study, an international student shared their traumatizing experience of being a target of aggressive, verbal harassment based on their nationality, something that is becoming more prevalent on our campuses and in our community (Bauman, 2016). Their story reinforces the importance of a strong social network and the significant influence of friends, as well as the benefits of cross-cultural friendships. A prominent aspect of their narrative was the impact their friends had on helping them process this traumatic experience. Initially, the student
chose to isolate themselves in fear and shame. After a few hours, they decided to go to their research lab, hoping to take their mind off the event and focus on something routine. A lab mate engaged them in conversation, inquired about their day, and commented they were acting out of character. This gesture, they said, helped them overcome their initial emotions and open up enough to share their traumatizing experience. In their conversation with me, they recalled a noticeable shift at this point in their emotional state and desire to talk with friends to seek companionship and support.

Through our conversation, they pointed out that spending time and talking with their multi-national friends contributed significantly to their ability to process emotions. They were particularly impacted by hearing their friends’ intense support and condemnation of the actions through their reactions and guidance. The student reflected on the words their U.S. friends used when demonstrating empathy and how their friends emphasized the valuable research contributions and the impact they had on their lives. The student’s act of engaging with their friends helped them to shift their emotional response from shame and anger to feeling sorry for the man who harassed them. They also reflected on their increased motivation to make a difference through their research. The student told me that their U.S. friends urged them to call me to ensure the University was aware of their experience and to report the incident to the public transportation authority. While the focus of my conversation with this student was not about making friends, hearing their experience and the influence their friends had on processing the trauma and the actions they took afterward reinforced for me the importance of this study to understand international students’ lived experiences making friends in a U.S. higher education setting.
Developing a greater understanding of the experiences international students have developing friendships in their new environment on a U.S. campus will arm educators with the critical information needed to support international students as they pursue ways to develop new social networks that impact their college experience. Additionally, understanding international student experiences will inform the work that must be done to create and promote a culture on campus that values intercultural learning through cross cultural friendships. The growing number of international students on U.S. campuses creates an enormous opportunity to provide impactful intercultural experiences that promote global learning for all students.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

"We will never understand racism, class, social justice, international development, or the person sitting next to us without quietly listening to the stories of those who experience the world in different ways" (Bennett & Salonen, 2007, p. 46).

The following literature review focuses on the twenty-first century higher education frameworks that ground educational practices that promote and assess 1) intercultural skills development and global learning, 2) intergroup contact on a college campus, 3) international student curricular and co-curricular engagement patterns, and 4) international students’ friend network configurations. Through this literature review, I offer a glimpse into campus internationalization and intercultural skills development efforts as well as highlight the existing literature on international students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences. There is a gap in the literature between the understanding institutions have of international students’ experiences on their campus and promotion of cross-cultural engagement as a means to promote intercultural skills development for all students. The literature points to the missed opportunities institutions experience in attempting to achieve campus internationalization and intercultural skills development goals when they do not sufficiently understand international students’ experiences, take responsibility for developing a campus culture that promotes cross-cultural engagement, nor adequately support all students through the challenges of developing relationships across cultures.

colleges and universities based on increasing numbers of institutions engaging in internationalization activities or deepening participation in activities outlined in the Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) campus internationalization model (AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION, 2017). Just under half of the nearly 2,000 institutions that participated in the self-reported study are guided by mission statements and learning outcomes promoting campus internationalization by improving student preparedness for living in a global environment (American Council on Education, 2017). Importantly, multiple tools exist to measure how institutions achieve desired global learning outcomes for both U.S. and international students, yet they are not widely used (Deardorff, 2006; Glass & Westmount-Campbell, 2014; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Whitehead, 2015).

The enrollment of greater numbers of international students in the U.S. and the increasing focus on global learning generate a plethora of topics that deserve exploration (American Council on Education, 2017; IIE, 2016). Student affairs literature includes studies exploring international student adjustment and engagement patterns (Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Others focus on developing intercultural skills and pluralistic orientation, cross-cultural contact, and the positive outcomes of diversity experiences (Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Braskamp, Braskamp, & Glass, 2015; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Goodman & Bowman, 2014; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011). Minimal literature explicitly explores international students’ experiences making friends in U.S. institutions of higher learning (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Leong, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013).
Across academic disciplines, the literature tends to treat international students as a homogeneous subpopulation on U.S. college campuses, despite this subgroup’s clear diversity (Arthur, 2016; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Hanassab, 2006; Jones, 2017). Research spanning several decades explores the ways college student learning outcomes are associated with both classroom and co-curricular environments (Astin, 1993; Astin, 1999; Kuh, 1991; Kuh, 1993; Kuh, 1995). Considerable research also underscores the role that diversity experiences have on promoting learning outcomes desired by colleges and universities as emphasized in mission and values statements (Goodman & Bowman, 2014; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013). However, treating international students as a homogeneous subgroup and comparing them to their U.S. peers tends to reinforce a deficit perspective (Hanassab, 2006; Jones, 2017).

Understanding international students’ experiences adjusting to the academic and cultural environment is particularly important with regard to acculturation experiences and to international student retention, mental health, and academic performance. Overwhelmingly, research shows international students’ adjustment is related to the development and composition of their social support network in the new environment (Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Arthur, 2016; Arthur, 2017; Baba & Hosada, 2014; Bai, 2016; Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Chavajay, 2013; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Trice, 2004). Additionally, literature points to the importance of understanding international student curricular and co-curricular engagement patterns in order to identify and implement culturally applicable strategies to promote achievement of academic and personal goals (Arthur 2017; Glass, et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buss,
Considerable literature exists from Australia, Canada, Europe, and Asia on the personal and academic benefits of friendships for international students, the makeup of international students’ social networks, and international students’ experiences developing friendships (Aba, 2016; Arthur, 2016; Arthur, 2017; Chen, 2015; Cheung & Xiao, 2013; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Taha & Cox, 2016). Less prominent is research in the U.S on enrolled international students’ friendships or the potential for the intercultural relationships to support intercultural skill development (McFaul, 2016; Williams & Johnson, 2011). I connect a wide array of literature that highlights how diverse friendships support international students’ adjustment and well-being, how positive contact with diversity promotes learning, and how intercultural friendships have the potential to reduce prejudice and open up opportunities for intercultural learning – a primary global learning outcome desired for twenty-first century college graduates.

**Internationalization in U.S. Higher Education**

International educational exchange in higher education is not a new phenomenon. The 2011 American Council on Education (ACE), Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement (CIGE) published a blue ribbon panel report on global education and described higher education in the twenty-first century as “explicitly, and fundamentally, a global enterprise” (2011, p. 1). Not surprisingly, the evolution of global engagement in higher education presents a myriad of challenges and opportunities, including adequately supporting international students with academic and personal matters; ensuring adequate intercultural training for students, staff, and faculty exists; providing global learning opportunities in the
classrooms and beyond; and leveraging the diversity of international students’ experiences and knowledge to support intercultural learning for all students (ACE, 2011; Arthur, 2017; Bennett, & Salonen, 2007; Bok, 2006; Deardorff, 2011; Glass, Buus, & Braskamp, 2013; Fischer, 2014; Jones, 2017; Kashyap, 2011; Lin, 2012; Ross & Chen, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Urban & Palmer, 2014; Whitehead, 2015).

**Internationalization Activities**

In response to the rapid advancement of global engagement in U.S. higher education over the last 20 years, post-secondary schools’ mission statements and strategic plans have increasingly included terms such as “internationalization,” “global citizenship,” “global engagement,” and “global learning” (ACE, 2011). Likewise, student participation in education abroad programs and efforts to internationalize the post-secondary level curriculum in the U.S. are anticipated to grow and gain prominence in strategic planning (ACE, 2011; IIE, 2016). Both outgoing exchange and international student enrollment are increasingly expanding on U.S. campuses to advance internationalization goals (ACE, 2011; IIE, 2016; McGill-Peterson & Helms, 2013). Despite the overwhelming emphasis many institutions place on study abroad, less than 15% of students enrolled in U.S. higher education will participate in study abroad or a similar immersive intercultural experience (ACE, 2011). Additionally, many institutions are not adequately assessing the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive skills and competencies U.S. and international students are purported to develop as a result of internationalization efforts, despite the considerable resources invested and the availability of tools to measure intercultural competence (ACE, 2011; Deardoff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011).
International Student Enrollment

The Institute for International Education (2016) projected that current trends in the growth of international students in the U.S. will continue, and is associated with the increased capacity for higher education globally. While the 2016 election in the U.S. has shown the potential to negatively impact growth of international student enrollment in the U.S., the U.S. has been the top destination for international students pursuing language study and tertiary education at the bachelors, masters, and doctorate level, especially since the middle of the twentieth century (IIE, 2016; IIE, 2015; OECD, 2016). International student enrollment exceeded 1 million students in academic year 2015-16 (IIE, 2016). The total enrollment has nearly doubled over a 10-year period (IIE, 2016) and reflects the highest rate of international student growth in 35 years, according to the 2015 IIE Open Doors Report. This increase in international student enrollment further shapes a demographic shift at the post-secondary education level in the U.S. in relation to the cultural, gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity that now exists at many institutions (IIE, 2016; OECD, 2016).

An analysis of Organisation of Economic Development (OECD) data from 2016 provides a more comprehensive picture of global mobility. The data shows the U.S. is the leader, among all OECD countries, hosting 26% of the international students enrolled outside of their home country at the graduate level. Yet international students only represent approximately 5% of the total number of students enrolled in a tertiary level in the U.S. In the U.K. and Australia, international students make up 18 to 20% of total enrolled students in tertiary education. Although the total number of international students coming to the U.S. continues to rise (IIE, 2016), according to the ACE blue ribbon panel report (2011), the proportion of globally mobile students choosing to study in the U.S. has been experiencing a decline attributed to higher levels
of capacity for pursuing higher education outside of the U.S. For the first time in ten years, the U.S. experienced a decline in new international student enrollment during academic year 2016-2017 while other competitor nations have not experienced a similar decline and some, like Canada have seen near 20% increases in new international student enrollment (IIE, 2017). Competitor countries which also include Australia, China, Germany, and France have also made aggressive efforts to market their higher education systems as destinations for globally mobile students (IIE, 2016). Ultimately, OECD predicts a continued increase in global demand for tertiary education associated with reduced costs in transportation around the globe and ease of communication. Additionally, the globalized workforce provides incentives for highly skilled people to study abroad as part of their tertiary education, particularly in English-speaking countries (Organisation of Economic Development [OECD], 2016). These variables point to the importance of U.S. higher education remaining competitive as a location for globally mobile students. However, to remain competitive, institutions must take notice of missed opportunities to recruit, welcome, and retain international students. Most importantly, institutions must begin to leverage their presence on campus to support global learning for all students.

While the total number of international students has grown nationwide from approximately 550,000 in academic year 2000-2001 to more than 1 million in 2015 (IIE, 2016), considerable variation exists among institutions’ motivations for recruiting and enrolling international students (McGill-Peterson & Helms, 2013; OECD, 2016). Institutions may enroll international students to generate tuition revenue, grow graduate level research capacity, increase enrollment in STEM programs, or support a comprehensive internationalization or diversity strategy (ACE, 2011; Arthur, 2017; Glass & Westmount, 2014; Glass, et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). Additionally, while 44 states and the District of Columbia hosted
increased numbers of international students in academic year 2015-16, the distribution of the nearly 1 million international students varies considerably across institutional types and U.S. geographic locations (IIE, 2016). International student enrollment patterns differ among various types of institutions and fields of study, and international students’ experiences vary as well, with many students expressing positive experiences and achievement of their academic and personal goals, while a considerable number of others report the opposite (Glass, et al., 2013; Glass et al., 2015). While considerable efforts are made on many campuses to promote student success, most schools pay too little attention on understanding international students’ unique experiences. Thus, many institutions are unable to provide adequate support or create an environment that promotes positive experience for international students which impacts their personal and academic success.

**Global Learning and Intercultural Skills Development**

Although campus leaders recognize that intercultural maturity does not automatically develop among students simply through more study abroad participation or more international students on campus (Bok, 2006), institutions continue to rely on participation data from outbound study and research and service programs, as well as international student enrollment as measures to demonstrate commitment to global learning and intercultural skills development (Bennett, & Salonen, 2007; Glass & Westmount, 2014; Glass et al., 2015 & Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; McGill-Peterson & Helms, 2013). Advanced intercultural skills are a part of desired learning outcomes and are increasingly necessary for graduates in the global workplace (AAC&U, 2014; ACE, 2011; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) and the task of preparing students for a globalized world rests heavily with on campus educators (ACE, 2011).
Study abroad was established as a high impact practice promoting intercultural learning in the original Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) program and continues to receive considerable resources and attention on many college campuses (AAC&U, 2007; AAC&U, 2014). The broad term “global learning” now dominates in higher education circles establishes opportunities to enhance awareness and engagement in global learning both on and off campus. There is a potential for intercultural learning to be enlarged through experiential learning on campus and within the student community in addition to study abroad. (AAC&U, 2014; Hovland, 2014; Whitehead, 2015). Soria and Troisi (2013), using data from large research universities, showed studying abroad is a less effective method for developing global learning and global citizenship competencies than sustained engagement in internationalization efforts implemented on the U.S. campus. Bennett & Salonen (2007) call for institutions to leverage their “culturally complicated campuses,” which abound with individuals who are participating in intercultural events, but who are often having an ethnocentric experience. According to King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse (2011) being exposed to diversity isn’t sufficient for promoting intercultural maturity. Instead scaffolding of experiences must be used with "structural diversity, classroom diversity, and interactional diversity" (p.482) which supports a level of dissonance to support learning but not paralyze an individual’s ability to understand difference.

Global and Intercultural Learning on Campus

Many point to the fact that opportunities for self-reflection and learning associated with diversity or intercultural experiences exist, sometimes in abundance, on many college campuses, yet on-campus programs and events continue to be undervalued and under-promoted to students as opportunities for intercultural learning (Aba, 2016; ACE, 2011; Deardorff, 2011; Kashyap, 2011; Lin, 2012; Ross & Chen, 2015; Urban & Palmer, 2014). Others question this assumption,
based on a lack evidence demonstrating colleges and universities have actually implemented the practices and policies necessary to make diversity work (Goodman & Bowman, 2014; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011). Many agree that internationalization at home needs to be further explored, and structural changes in U.S. higher education must be implemented to develop institutional standards for intercultural skills development using agreed upon methods (Aba, 2016; ACE, 2011; Deardorff, 2011; Kashyap, 2011; Lin, 2012; Ross & Chen, 2015; Urban & Palmer, 2014).

Most campuses with strategic internationalization goals attempt to define global citizenship or global learning, but there are no widely accepted definitions or standard measurement used across U.S. higher education (ACE, 2011; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff 2011; Whitehead, 2015). Intercultural knowledge, intercultural skills, and global perspective, taking are emphasized as critical skills for global citizenship (AAC&U, 2014; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Braskamp, 2011; Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Deardorff, 2006; Deardorff, 2011; Hovland, 2014; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005; Whitehead, 2015). Additionally, there is an increasingly prevalent call to acknowledge and leverage the relationships between domestic cultural diversity and global cultural diversity (Chun & Evans, 2016; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Deardorff, 2011; Sorrells, 2016; Whitehead, 2015).

The increasing diversity of the U.S. population and of all students enrolled in higher education has prompted several studies exploring how diverse educational environments impact learning. Campus environments support student learning by incorporating three types of diversity experiences: structural diversity, in the form of the presence of diverse students; inclusive learning in classroom environments, where diverse perspectives and interactions are promoted and used to support learning for all students; and opportunities for sustained interpersonal
interactions, combined with support to learn from interactional diversity (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002). Additionally, Gurin et al., (2002, p. 539) found that learning for all students "is enhanced by extensive and meaningful informal interaction" across all forms of diversity but the educational benefit is dependent "on the presence of significantly diverse student bodies."

Institutions have a responsibility to challenge students' worldviews, encourage application of knowledge to current problems, and support students in integrating their co-curricular and curricular learning. Interaction with diverse peers is a necessary component driving positive cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal learning (Gurin et al., 2002; Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012). Hurtado and Deangelo (2012) stress that positive experiences with cross-cultural interaction and socializing with others across differences have demonstrated increases in pluralistic orientation. Further, scaffolding of diversity experiences is necessary to promote intercultural maturity, due to an understanding that the dissonance that must occur should not paralyze an individual's ability to move to a place of understanding difference (Gurin et al., 2002; King, Baxter-Magolda, & Mass, 2011). In this way, there are clear parallels between domestic diversity efforts and internationalization efforts with regard to promoting learning through diversity experiences and environments. King et al. (2011) further posit that institutions must establish contexts for thoughtful and substantive interactions with diverse peers on college campuses. A significant requirement of intercultural effectiveness is the developmental capacity of individuals to make meaning that can be diminished by intergroup anxiety. Their research found that many students encounter diversity on their campus, but lack institutional support to make sense of their cross-cultural interactions in ways that help them form more the complex meaning associated with intercultural maturity. A study of friendships between white and African Americans at a predominantly white institution by Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, and Woods
reinforced the claim that institutions are critical to aiding students and supporting their capacity to learn through intergroup contact. Their research finds linkages between intergroup friendships and decreased prejudice, increased empathy for out-groups, and lower intergroup anxiety (Schofield et al., 2010). These studies highlight the need for close and prolonged contact with institutional support in order to navigate the dissonance to support interpersonal, intrapersonal, and cognitive complexity. They also point to the opportunity that exists for colleges to put forth more effort to promote global learning on campus.

**Intercultural Skills Development Models**

King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) Developmental Model of Intercultural Maturity and Deardorff’s (2006; 2011) Intercultural Competence Model provide similar frameworks for developing intercultural skills grounded in cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions, identifying conditions to promote learning, and methods to assess intercultural learning. They also align in their conclusion that attaining intercultural maturity, sensitivity, or competence is a journey that takes place over a lifetime and is not achieved by all people (Deardorff, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Curiosity, as well as the ability to see the world from others’ perspectives, is critical to developing intercultural skills (Deardorff, 2006; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). Deardorff emphasizes the responsibility of an institution to promote a culture that appreciates and values multiple perspectives and worldviews on a variety of local and global issues and that includes “programs to bring domestic and international students together in meaningful interactions through relationship building opportunities" (2011, p. 72).
Intercultural Maturity

The idea of intercultural maturity, as developed by King & Baxter Magolda (2005), is a holistic model framed on Kegan’s (1994) model of lifespan development. Parallel to Kegan’s (1994) model their model includes multiple dimensions to describe how individuals gain the capacity to understand and act in ways that demonstrate intercultural awareness and competence. Specifically, people who possess intercultural maturity demonstrate intercultural skills associated with the cognitive dimension reflected in the individual’s cultural knowledge and complex understanding of cultural differences; the intrapersonal dimension as displayed through a strong sense of self-identity that supports a person to be able to embrace and not feel threatened by cultural differences; and the interpersonal competence required to see multiple perspectives, demonstrate flexibility, and function independently with others across differences (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) framework for intercultural maturity includes three levels of maturity: initial, intermediate, and mature for each dimension (cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal). Colleges and universities develop learning outcomes with the desire to produce students who achieve the advanced level of intercultural maturity, yet the benefits of growing diversity and efforts to promote engagement across diversity have not been consistently or fully realized (Chun & Evans, 2016; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011). Through listening to international students’ experiences making friends I remained cognizant of intercultural maturity and openness for intercultural learning as it is demonstrated through the students’ narratives.

Intergroup Contact Theory

Contact hypothesis theory (Allport, 1954) provides a framework for considering the importance of intercultural friendships. The concept of intergroup contact was introduced early
in the twentieth century at a time when racial and ethnic conflict was high and demographic shifts were influenced by mobility. Despite the considerable passage of time, Allport’s (1954) book on the nature of prejudice remains fundamental to thinking about human behaviors associated with how people connect to their own families, ethnic groups, or national identities, and particularly in the way in-groups (we) and out-groups (they) are formed. Research continues to use Allport’s theory although additional work by Pettigrew (1998) has extended the theory to include friendships as a fifth form of contact with the potential to reduce prejudice.

**In-group and Out-group Status**

The formation of an in-group can result from an achieved status, such as membership in a club or organization, or ascribed status, including those conferred at birth (Allport, 1954). Importantly, Allport (1954) reminds us that in-group status is also not permanent, as there is the capacity for individuals to use agency and seek out memberships that fulfill a personal need. Related is the idea that belonging is highly personal and a construct unique to each individual based on their own requirements for security and connection to others (Allport, 1954). An in-group always implies the existence of a corresponding out-group, grounded in pursuit of security but not always opposition, according to Allport (1954). This results in a continuum where the familiar is preferred and the other thought of as less good, or possibly there is a desire for the out-group associated with respect or interest in the diversity they represent (Allport, 1954). Allport (1954) considered in-group memberships to be of critical importance for our survival and introduced the idea that our memberships are tied to our habits, concluding that individuals can develop loyalty to out-groups without hostility when a reduction of prejudice exists.
Reference Group

Also introduced in this formative body of work is the concept of a reference group, meaning a welcomed in-group or a group in which an individual wishes to be included (Allport, 1954). The concept of a reference group is critical to exploring the development of intercultural friendships. Allport (1954) posited that those in the dominant in-group are often seen as a reference group for the marginalized with regard to language, manners, morals, and law, and that learning stemming from intercultural contact is optimal when there are common goals, intergroup cooperation, equal status, and mutual support and respect for rules, laws, customs, and authorities. Belongingness exists in two levels stemming from ascribed or achieved status in an in-group reference group based on an individual’s desire to be a part of the in-group or being forced to ascribe to the customs of the dominant group (Allport, 1954). While these concepts are not central for this study, understanding ascribed and achieved status in relation to developing sense of belonging will be fundamental when considering the patterns that may develop in the nine international students’ experiences.

The concluding chapter of Allport’s (1954) book emphasizes the imperative of intercultural education and the ability of educators to promote changes to both the prevailing social system, which is linked to discriminatory practices, and the attitudinal characteristics of people and their prejudices. While Allport’s (1954) book does not describe the multi-faceted activities needed to reduce the discrimination and prejudice which he posits are achievable through intercultural education, he closes the book emphasizing the two value laden paths to reducing intercultural tension: assimilation and cultural pluralism (Allport, 1954). Interestingly, literature on the experiences of international students, who represent a marginalized group on college campuses, tends to display a preference for assimilation, although Allport proposes a
“reasonable democratic guideline” that urges eliminating obstacles for those who wish to assimilate showing welcome, respect, and appreciation to those who wish to maintain their cultural integrity (1954, p. 517). Chickering & Braskamp (2009, p. 4) stated the “commonalities between domestic issues of multicultural education and global issues of internationalization are greater than their differences in today’s world.” Greater attention is being placed on the relationships and synergies between intercultural and multicultural education efforts (Chun & Evans, 2016; Sorrells, 2016) buoyed by the focus on the intersectionality of identity development and the institutional structures which reinforce oppression.

**Intercultural Friendships**

Pettigrew (1998) extended Allport's (1954) contact theory and further explores and highlights intergroup contact to reduce prejudice, including through learning about the other group, changing behavior, generating effective ties, and re-appraising the intergroup. His more recent research also added friendship as a fundamental condition for supporting positive intergroup contact and suggests that meaningful and positive contact between members of different groups leads to reduced prejudice and negative feelings (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). His early work identified friendship as a potential fifth condition for positive intergroup interactions and points to the potential for learning within friendships, including those occurring in a college environment (Pettigrew, 1998). Later research suggests that indirect contact effects may occur, but are not as strong as direct contact for reducing prejudice and increasing empathy (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011; Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, & Woods, 2010). Importantly, his studies emphasize how the primary benefit of intergroup friendships is the potential to reduce anxiety and increase empathy (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) two conditions critical to
intercultural learning (Deardorff, 2006; King, Baxter Magolda, 2005). Geeraert, Demoulin, and Demes (2014) noted in their longitudinal study that positive, quality, intergroup contact is especially important. Therefore intercultural friendships developed early in college which are sustained through graduation and beyond have the potential to enrich intercultural learning and maturity.

While identifying friendship as a condition for positive intergroup interaction is significant, it is also problematic that Pettigrew’s original research is framed in a way that puts the burden on the international student to develop close contact with host nationals. His research concludes that the efforts of international students to build friendships with host nationals will encourage a more positive effect toward host nationals (Pettigrew, 1998). Further, his research limits a focus on reciprocity in a friendship and lacks consideration of the negative experiences international students may have seeking to form relationships with U.S. students, who often serve as a reference group. More common is an awareness of the need or a call to action for institutions to develop a campus culture that promotes intragroup interactions with attention to reciprocity, creates opportunities for meaningful engagement between culturally diverse groups, and provides the support necessary to result in positive intercultural engagement between culturally diverse groups (Aba, 2016; Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014; Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Baba & Hosada, 2014; Braskamp, Braskamp, & Glass, 2015; Deardorff, 2011; Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Kashyap, 2011; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011; Leong, 2015; Lin, 2012; Montgomery, 2010; Ross & Chen, 2015; Roy, Lu, & Loo, 2016; Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, & Woods, 2010; Soria & Troisi, 2013; Spiro, 2014; Suspitsyna, 2013; Taha & Cox, 2016; Trice, 2004; Urban & Palmer, 2014; Williams & Johnson, 2011). I
later introduce research around the composition of international student friendship networks and refrain making judgments about international student friendship patterns. Instead I focus on highlighting the experiences the international students have making friends, as well as how the friendships potentially promote intercultural learning students when they are not co-national friendships.

**International Student Adjustment**

International students’ experiences adjusting to their U.S. campus is complex, dynamic, and multidimensional, and on-campus socialization opportunities that support building strong social networks are critical predictors of social adjustment (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015, Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Leong, 2015; Lin, 2012). Several studies point to the responsibilities universities to develop meaningful pathways to engage this vital and vibrant component of the student body, to understand their intricacies, support their unique needs while also creating environments for engagement and integration (ACE, 2011; Arthur, 2017; Arthur, 2016; Glass, Buus, & Braskamp, 2013; Kashyap, 2011).

**International Student Engagement and Diversity Experiences**

Fully exploring international student engagement in U.S. postsecondary institutions requires considering literature spanning across several disciplines. Among student affairs administrators, the works of Astin (1977, 1993b, 1999) and Kuh (1993, 1995, 2001) serve as guides to understanding the many facets of student engagement at colleges and universities. Astin (1993b) found that individual student diversity experiences have positive effects on two value outcomes: commitment to promoting racial understanding and cultural awareness, where cultural awareness reflects students' understanding and appreciation of other races and cultures. The definition of student engagement used in student affairs has developed alongside
assessments like the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which seek to better understand and measure college student engagement in learning – including curricular and co-curricular experiences. Work by Astin (1999) and Kuh (1995, 2001) suggest that student engagement involves both individual investment and institutional influences. The input-environment-outcomes (I-E-O) model posits colleges and universities have the potential to create effective curricular and co-curricular learning environments that promote and value diversity of perspectives, cultural understanding, and skills to effectively engage across cultures (Astin, 1999). Literature centered on international student engagement demonstrates patterns in curricular engagement including with faculty relationships, in co-curricular participation, and on international students’ development of social networks which support both academic achievement and social integration.

**International Student Curricular Engagement**

Extant in the literature is the finding that student-faculty relationships impact student learning (Astin 1993; Astin 1999; Kuh 1995; Kuh, 2001) and are just as important for international students as for their U.S. peers (Arthur, 2016; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Glass & Westmount, 2014; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). Studies that compared international students’ engagement with their U.S. peers have identified an inconsistency in Astin’s (1984) Student Involvement Theory (Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Zhao, et al., 2005) in that international students with lower campus involvement earned a higher GPA. Several studies conclude that international students channel efforts toward academics at the expense of social integration and leisure as measured by the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) respectively (Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Korobova & Starobin, 2015;
Although international students have been found to engage differently – with a greater focus on classroom engagement over co-curricular engagement than their U.S. students – their overall academic performance is on par or ahead of their U.S. peers (Korobova & Starobin; Suspitsyna, 2013; Zhao et al., 2005).

**International Student Engagement with Faculty**

Some researchers indicate that faculty are a source of both academic and personal support for students (Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, Buus, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013). Others contend that faculty and courses can promote the feeling of belonging and community and prepare all students to develop more complex and global perspectives (Baba & Hosada, 2014; Bai, 2016; Bennett & Salonen, 2007; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016) while also resulting in a higher perceived value of higher education for international students (Urban & Palmer, 2016). This outcome occurs when international students are positioned as equal partners, and where professors show concern and care, value international students’ experiences and ways of knowing, and are inclusive in their teaching through the ways they engage international students in dialogue and interaction with their peers (Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Trice, 2007). Faculty have a distinct opportunity to provide a platform for international students to equally contribute to the dialogue and demonstrate their unique strengths in classroom discussions and activities (Urban & Palmer, 2016). Trice (2007) conducted research on faculty perspectives regarding international students’ isolation from their host national peers and found faculty can positively exert influence through increasing research group diversity, including group projects in courses, assigning individuals to groups deliberately to support cross-cultural interactions, and providing study rooms outside of class time for informal interaction between students.
Several studies examining both undergraduate and graduate level students found interaction with bilingual faculty resulted in a positive correlation with academic achievement for international students (Glass et al., 2015; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013). Some research implies that a critical mass of bilingual faculty may contribute to bringing comfort or familiarity to the classroom and enhance international students’ perception of belonging, impacting satisfaction and success (Glass et al., 2015; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013). Not surprisingly, faculty who are not sensitive to cultural differences can negatively impact the participation of international students in classroom activities due to their assumptions or inability to communicate effectively across cultural differences (Glass et al., 2015, Valdez, 2015).

Additional literature stresses that classrooms can serve to promote curiosity around cultural differences and foster inclusion (Arthur, 2017; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Suspitsyna (2013) found that international students’ attitudes toward diversity can be ambivalent, not unlike that of some of their U.S. counterparts, and argue that support and mentoring by faculty are key to international graduate students’ developing a sense of belonging and learning the norms of the scientific community. The literature points to the clear role faculty play in mentoring international students, developing their sense of belonging in their academic community, and supporting their understanding of the academic norms and expectations. Faculty can also be inclusive in their teaching and practices in a way that helps international students feel included as equal learners (Glass et al., 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Urban & Palmer, 2016). Due to the emphasis international students place on their academic success, supporting a positive classroom experience may lead international students to more readily pursue engagement in co-curricular activities which also naturally creates more opportunities for peer interaction, and the
potential for sustained contact with diverse peers. (Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Zhao et al., 2005).

**International Student Co-curricular Engagement**

Studies utilizing the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) and Global Perspectives Inventory (GPI) have found that international students engage in and experience a U.S. higher education setting differently than their U.S. peers (Glass, Buus, & Braskamp, 2013; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Mamiseishvili, 2011; Trice, 2004; Zhao et al., 2005). National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data were used in two studies comparing engagement and student satisfaction across five benchmarks between international students and their U.S. peers in their freshman and senior years (Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Zhao et al., 2005). In these studies, first year international students engaged at a higher rate in educationally purposeful activities and technology, and less in leisure activities. These students were less satisfied than their U.S. peers, while showing lower levels of engagement in academic challenges, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and technology. However, by their senior year – when international students were adapted and integrated into the cultural framework – their patterns of student engagement no longer displayed significant differences from their U.S. peers, especially when control variables were introduced (Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Zhao et al, 2005).

International and U.S. students enrolled in institutions with a supportive campus environment related their quality of relationship and engagement had higher satisfaction with the entire experience, compared to students enrolled in institutions without such support (Korobova & Starobin, 2015). Both studies conclude that international students experience greater gains
compared to their U.S. peers across the board in personal and social development and general education, which may be associated with their experiences working across cultures (Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Zhao et al., 2005). One finding indicated the density of international students lowered the perception international students and U.S. peers had of their institution being a supportive campus environment (Zhao et al., 2005). However, that finding is in contrast to findings described by Hurtado and Guillermo-Wann (2013), where lower incidences of discrimination and an overall better campus climate exists on campuses with greater student demographic diversity. Other results show that international students who are rarely or moderately engaged in co-curricular activities report a neutral sense of belonging or connection to their campus community (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). Additionally those who reported feeling adjusted perceived less constraints to co-curricular engagement, more often engaged in co-curricular activities that reinforced a positive sense of belonging, and participated in activities that include cross-cultural engagement and leisurely activity (Gomez et al, 2014). Positive impact on international student sense of belonging was connected to international student adjustment activities and general co-curricular engagement and on-campus socialization programming (Abe et al., 1998; Glass & Westmount, 2014; Glass, et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015). Congruently, these activities have the potential to promote cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development (Abe et al., 1998; Zhao, et al., 2005).

**Developing Social Connection and Networks**

Studies across several disciplines have further explored the relationship between social interaction and adjustment of international students in consideration of the benefits and challenges international students have integrating to their new environments and developing social relationships (Abe et al., 1998; Baba & Hosada, 2014; Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977;
The literature commonly points to evidence showing the benefits of developing personal relationships with individuals across cultures with regard to fostering greater awareness of one’s own culture, increasing capacity for cultural understanding, (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Braskamp, 2011; Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Hanassab, 2006; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Soria & Troisi, 2013), diminishing reliance on stereotypes, (Hurtado & Deangelo, 2012; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011) and creating increased engagement in social activities with diverse peers (Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014). The challenges international students face developing relationships with their U.S. peers are associated with both personal and contextual factors (Lin, 2012; Sias et al., 2008) including language differences, engagement patterns, temporal barriers to building and sustaining relationships, and receptiveness of the international students or their U.S. peers to cross-cultural relationships (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011; Trice, 2007). Additionally, international students’ perceptions about Americans influenced the ways they saw and built their social networks (Lin, 2012), which may account for why international students tend to be more likely to socialize with co-national and multi-national peers who have shared experiences and hardships (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Lin, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Spiro, 2014; Trice, 2007). In the findings I identify if, in this study, participants’ friends are members of the same or different cultural groups and whether the composition has significance for them.
Graduate Students

In one qualitative study of female international graduate students, the participants’ narratives revealed a complex and intentional method of social network building grounded in an understanding of the benefits of being exposed to different ideas and people (Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016). Kashyap’s (2011) qualitative study documented graduate students’ experiences in which U.S. students displayed no interest in engaging in social contact with them. The researcher further noted that students who were unsuccessful in making host-country friendships lost confidence or interest in engaging with their U.S. peers, and were more likely to isolate themselves, focus on their studies, or engage with home country peers or other international students who demonstrated more receptiveness to friendship. Others focused on the influence of the host society as a major environmental factor shaping international students’ experiences and social connections (Arthur, 2017; Le, et al., 2016; Lee, et al., 2004; Leong, 2015; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), on identifying and understanding the personal and contextual factors supporting the development of intercultural relationships (Hotta& Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kovtun, 2011; Lee, 2006; Leong, 2015; Lin, 2012; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Sias et al.), and on exploring the influence of age to identify that older students expressed more difficulty in developing new social networks (Chavajay, 2013; Lin, 2012).

Undergraduate Students

Studies involving international undergraduate students highlight how social support from peers and the institution serve to mediate stress which originates from adjusting to their new environment (Baba & Hosada, 2014; Bai, 2016; Bochner et al., 1977; Cheung & Xiao, 2013), the need for institutional support to provide adequate opportunities for students to interact at a deep enough level to foster intellectual and social engagement (Arthur, 2017; Chavajay, 2013), the
intentional scaffolding and consideration of intercultural maturity that is needed and often lacking in campus opportunities (Goodman & Bowman, 2014; King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011; Lee et al., 2004), and the support all students require to seek out and develop positive cross-cultural relationships (Arthur, 2017; Lin, 2012). In one study, international students reported the largest barrier to meaningful relationships with U.S. peers was the lack of opportunity to interact socially (Abe, et al., 1998). Findings from several studies acknowledge the potential benefits, while also pointing out the difficulties international students experience developing quality relationships with U.S. peers (Lin, 2012; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Rienties & Nolan, 2014; Ross & Chen, 2015; Suspitsyna, 2013; Trice, 2004; Urban & Palmer, 2016; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Overwhelmingly, there is agreement that colleges and universities that foster intentional environments for students to engage across multiple, and sometimes competing, perspectives contribute to promoting intercultural skills grounded in intellectual and personal development (Aba, 2016; Abe et al., 1998; Arthur, 2016; Bennett, & Salonen, 2007; Bok, 2006; Braskamp, 2011; Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Deardorff, 2011; Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Zhao et al., 2005).

**Developing Friendships**

As with all students, international students have a strong desire to make social connections. Schreiner (2010) discusses concepts of social connectedness in her article about students thriving on campus. She suggests that the social support that friends provide can sustain a student through the difficult challenges which are likely to exist in college. Social connectedness is an individual feeling of being understood by and having an intimacy with the social environment, and includes an awareness and connection to social resources (Schreiner, 2010). Friendship is an outcome of an interpersonal exchange, is a critical form of interpersonal
relationship, and can be shared by people from different cultures (Bochner et al., 1977; Gareis et al., 2011). Intercultural friendships may include additional complexity or barriers which are less commonly experienced with two people with similar cultural norms (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Sias et al., 2008).

**Cultural Variations in Defining Friendship**

Cultural groups often have varying concepts of friendship, which may result in misunderstandings (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011). This issue was explored in Chen’s (2015) research comparing Chinese and U.S. concepts of friendship. According to the research, the contextual meaning of friend in Chinese culture is not far from the U.S. meaning, yet there are also enough differences that confusion can be created in cross-cultural encounters (Chen, 2015). Other studies assert that having friendships grounded in trust and reciprocal concern, as well as a common understanding of the ebb and flow of interpersonal relationships, can bolster engagement in the college experience (Henderickson et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Kashyap, 2011; Lee, 2006; Schofield et al., 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Soria & Troisi, 2013; Urban & Palmer, 2016; Williams & Johnson, 2011). Because trust and reciprocity are values which individuals may seek in friendship but are interpreted differently in terms of how they are expressed, cross cultural friendships require finding common understanding and meaning making across cultural norms. Chun and Evans (2016) point to the differences in the manner in which individualistic and communalistic countries engage in relationships as an example to demonstrate the importance that institutions promote a culture of understanding and respect across cultures and educate regarding the dominance of norms based on existing power structures.
Benefits of Friendship

Henderickson et al.’s (2011) study of students in the U.K., Kashima & Loh’s (2006) study in Australia, and others conducted in the U.S. found that through social relationships individuals are able to garner social resources from others that can aid in adjustment and social integration (Abe et al., 1998; Baba & Hosada, 2014; Geeraert et al., 2014; Kovtun, 2011; Le et al., 2016; Poyrazli, et al., 2004; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Henderickson et al.’s (2011) study found that even friendships that were not strong were useful for providing practical information and expanded access to social groups, which contributed to international students’ sense of belonging and social connectedness. This contrasts findings that quality contact is necessary for promoting cultural adjustment and managing stress, especially during the early stages arrival to a new environment (Rienties & Nolan, 2014; Geeraert et al., 2014). Students’ interest in cross-cultural friendships reflects their ability to consider different cultural perspectives, desire to learn about other cultures, open-mindedness towards people with different religious and spiritual traditions, and respect for people whose lives are different from their own (King et al., 2011; Montgomery, 2010; Spiro, 2014; Valdez, 2015; Williams & Johnson, 2011). International students’ interest and success in developing intercultural friendships may enhance their sense of community and result in greater engagement in campus life (Arthur, 2017; Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Glass et. al, 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buss, 2015; Gomez, et al., 2014; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013).

Friendship Patterns

Literature rooted in intercultural and communication studies focus on social network theory and friendship development. Important to this research are ideas about how friendships form. While all new students undergo transition, most international students experience
additional conflict and incongruence associated with the cultural and academic adjustment unique to each student (Kim, 2012). Discourse surrounding the social and academic experiences of international students has been measured using comparison to U.S. peers or by comparing international students as a whole or specific regional or cultural groups with their U.S. peers (Hanassab, 2006; Korobova & Starobin, 2015; Zhao, et al., 2005). This approach has been criticized by some as displaying a deficit perspective (Jones, 2017; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009) and relying on over-generalizations about the needs and experiences of international students as if they are a homogeneous group (Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buss, 2015; Jones, 2017). Studies examining international students’ development of social networks from a social network theory framework are few but essential to this study (Gareis, 2012; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; McFaul, 2016; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Spiro, 2014). How students develop social networks has often been categorized into three groups grounded in work by Bochner et al. (1977). The term “co-national” is used to explain when the student’s relationships are with a student from the same national background, “multi-national” when the relationships are not from the student’s own country or nationality, and “host-national” when the student has formed relationships with a national from the host country. A recent study conducted by Taha & Cox (2016) in the U.K. resisted categorization by nationalities. In their findings, international student networks could be grouped into work, friendship, advice, and support networks. They also identified that language, culture, and co-national clusters were significant factors in shaping international student friendship networks (Taha & Cox, 2016).

**International Student Development of Co-National Friendships**

International students’ strongest friendships are often co-national friendships, especially after their initial entry and transition to the U.S. (Bochner, et al., 1977). Some literature
encourages co-national bonds as their studies have identified that co-national friends help support international students’ focus on academic classroom learning (Glass et al., 2015; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009) manage their anxiety, and open up confidence about engaging across cultures and languages (Bochner et al., 1977; McFaul, 2016). International students anxious about academic success and their ability to interact with U.S. peers often initially seek opportunities to work in groups with co-nationals, seeking out individuals with whom they have commonalities, and begin to develop supportive relationships with classmates who have a greater understanding of their personal experience (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Spiro, 2014; Trice, 2004). Montgomery and McDowell (2009) further note in their qualitative study of students in the U.K. that emotional and academic support comes from “communities of practice,” (p. 70) which are developed when learners acquire knowledge and skills through their participation in co-national communities. Co-national networks have been found to build the confidence needed to explore the host culture and begin to develop self-authorship (Bochner et al., 1977; Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2013; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Le, et al., 2016; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Spiro, 2014; Trice, 2004). A contrasting finding in two studies is that co-national social networks offer short-term support, but hinder long-term adaptation process. These studies found that co-national social networks may inhibit the forming of relationships with host-nationals, and have the potential to adversely impact language acquisition and increase overall dissatisfaction with their educational experience (Geeraert, et al., 2014; Hendrickson, et al., 2011). The social diagram activity I used in this study serves as a tool which allowed me to look at the cultural groups of the students’ friends and elicit information about the challenges and benefits making friendships.
Other findings related to co-national friendships indicate they support reconstructing social capital in the new environment (Bochner, et al., 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014) and suggest that host-national and multi-national friendships further support learning by bridging social capital, positively effecting cultural adjustment, and increasing identification with host institutions (Arthur, 2017; Cheung & Xiao, 2013; Geeraert et al., 2014; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006). These oppositional findings highlight the potential for further research across cultural groups with greater attention to the environments influencing students’ social network patterns.

**International Student Development of Multi-National Friendships**

The premise that a learning community requires students to be together as equal learning partners grounded in shared goals, common experiences, and mutual respect is prevalent (Goodman & Bowman, 2014; Lin, 2012; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Soria & Troisi, 2013; Spiro, 2014; Suspitsyna, 2013; Trice, 2004). These conditions foster successful and sustainable learning across cultures and bond international students to their community (Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Spiro, 2014). Further, reciprocity and the experience of providing and receiving practical support (associated with information or useful insight) and social support (related to personal or emotional connection) influences students’ learning from one another (Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, Buus, 2015; Henderickson et al., 2011; Spiro, 2014). As mentioned previously, international students tend to develop strong relationships and a greater sense of belonging through their relationships with other international students who share a common experience in navigating their new campus and being away from their strong network ties abroad (Glass & Westmont, 2014; Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015; McFaul, 2016). The literature also addresses how making friendships
across a number of cultural groups is complex and embedded in intercultural maturity (King et al., 2011), has shown to be related to home and host country region (Gareis, 2012) and communication and relational processes (Sias et al., 2008). Research findings also highlight the benefits of strong multicultural friendships in supporting interpersonal and intrapersonal development, due to the deepening of individual identity as well as awareness and appreciation of other cultures (Braskamp & Engberg, 2011; Glass et al., 2015; Glass, Wongtrirat, & Buus, 2015; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Spiro, 2014; Ying, 2002).

International Student Development of Host-Country Friendships

Developing friendships with peers in the host country is generally expected to be a desired part of an international students’ college experience (Aba, 2016; Arthur, 2017; Arthur, 2016; Bok, 2006). Also documented are the benefits on international students’ psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Baba & Hosada, 2014; Cheung & Xiao, 2013; Zhang & Goodson, 2011), and their holistic cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development (Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Braskamp, 2011; Deardorff, 2011), as well as the positive influence friendship has on perceptions of host nationals (Pettigrew, 1998). Despite these benefits, in many cases studies find that international students are more likely to be acquaintances with U.S. peers and less likely to be good friends (Gareis, 2012, Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; King et al., 2011; Le et al., 2016; Suspitsyna, 2013). Many studies have found that U.S. students are less likely, without campus intervention, to intentionally involve people from other cultural backgrounds in their lives (Abe et al., 1998; Fischer, 2012; Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015; Kashyap, 2011; Korobova & Starobin, 2010; Spiro, 2014; Suspitsyna, 2013; Williams & Johnson, 2011) and that institutions must create environments that foster positive engagement across cultural groups (Abe et al., 1998; Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Glass et al., 2015;
Hendrickson et al., 2011; Suspitsyna, 2013; Zhao, et al., 2005), which include social and intellectual interaction to promote academic success (Glass et al., 2015).

A study by Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman (2011) found domestic and international students often live in parallel social networks with minimal support to engage in meaningful interaction with one another. A later study by Gareis (2012) which sought to identify if there were different levels of satisfaction displayed by international students based on their home country or the host region they studied. Gareis (2012) found that international students, on average, were not satisfied in the quality or quantity of their friendships and that more than one third did not have any close American friends. In Gareis (2012) study most students who were not satisfied with their friendships indicated the problem was associated with their U.S. peers lack of interest or unwillingness to pursue close and intimate relationships with international students. Other studies found a positive relationship between international students’ sense of belonging and increased cross-cultural interaction between international and host country students, in addition to enhanced academic performance (Arthur, 2017; Glass et al., 2015; Montgomery, 2010). These relationships were found to open up the potential for developing healthy relationships with host national peers (Glass et al., 2015). Others found that international students who have multi-national relationships and who are involved with campus cultural events tend to engage socially with U.S. students as well (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Williams & Johnson, 2011). A study by Hendrickson et al. (2011) indicated that participants who reported more friendship variability with host country nationals described themselves as more satisfied, content, and socially connected, and that the qualitative aspects of the relationships have a greater impact on their well-being and academic performance than the size or makeup of their social network (Hendrickson et al., 2011). Most literature posits that intercultural interactions and friendships
aid students’ transition and adjustment to a culturally diverse university environment (Abe et al., 1998; Gomez et al., 2014; McFaul, 2016; Trice, 2004; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Yet, these relationships are unlikely to occur if students lack desire or capacity to make meaningful intercultural connections, and when curricular and co-curricular interventions and internationalization of the curriculum are not a priority (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014). Many conclude that institutions need to create environments that encourage students to engage with peers and develop strong social support systems, understanding that their friendships may include a mix of co-national, host-national, and multi-national peers (Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004). The literature demonstrates a lot of variability in student’s experiences. It also reinforces there is a real opportunity to conduct further research to explore international students’ experiences developing friendships. In this study, I explore international students’ experiences making friends. I also seek to reinforce the role an institution has to support all students and the potential for intercultural friendships to be promoted as another means to further global engagement and global learning.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Narrative became a way of understanding experience. In this view, experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others…” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi).

This chapter focuses on the methodology used to explore undergraduate international students’ experiences developing friendships in a U.S. higher education setting. I introduce the methodology, the site of the study, the student participants involved, the data collection procedures, and the instruments used in the study. Additionally, I reflect on my worldview as a researcher out of a desire to promote goodness, rigor, and trustworthiness as well as to identify means to protect the participants involved (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). I conclude with a brief summary of the chapter.

Through this study, I used narrative inquiry to explore undergraduate international students’ experiences forming friendships in their first year on a U.S. university campus. My research questions include:

R1: “What are international students’ experiences making friends?”

R1a: “What do international students stories tell us about the benefits, challenges, and environmental influences of making friends?”

I focused on international students pursuing undergraduate study. This decision was based on literature that points to considerable differences between graduate and undergraduate
international students’ experiences adjusting to their new environment, curricular and co-curricular engagement, and social network development. I sought student narratives about experiences developing friendships because of my desire to amplify their voices. I sought to counter less than positive narratives amplified in higher education media and add to limited literature and research about the experiences international students have related to the phenomenon of making friends in college. The narratives include their perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and influences of their friendships out of my desire to deepen student affairs professionals’ understanding of the occurrence of international students forming friendships in U.S. higher education. I chose a qualitative design for this study because answering my research questions relies on a qualitative data collection process. Additionally, a majority of studies about international students studying in the U.S. rely on quantitative design, which allows for generalizations but also can lead to reporting findings about international students as if they are a homogeneous group (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2014).

**Qualitative Design**

The purpose of this study is to illuminate the human experience of making friends, which aligns with using a qualitative design (Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While the findings may be transferable outside of this specific study, I focused on understanding the experience of the individuals in the study. In line with qualitative design, this study involves mutual construction of knowledge and understanding allowing a focus on exploring, gaining understanding, and highlighting individual experiences and perspectives (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Jones, et al, 2014). I explored international students’ experiences making friends using a constructivist research paradigm, where it is understood there is no universal knowledge or truth (Jones, et al., 2014). I talked to international students who are central to the
experience, and, therefore, I was the primary data collection instrument (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Jones, et al., 2014). Additional depth about the instrumentation that was used to gather multiple types of information from participants in this study will be discussed later in this chapter.

I developed an overall plan for conducting the research understanding that qualitative research is emergent. As a result, I made decisions throughout the study to shift and maintain alignment of my goals for the study, and I used inductive data analysis to make meaning of the shared experiences (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Jones, et al., 2014). It was essential to bring to the forefront my personal worldview through the use of researcher reflexivity and to make clear decisions throughout the study to maintain alignment in the execution of the plan (Jones, et al., 2014). Later in the chapter, I address my research paradigm and the approach I took in data analysis to maintain rigor and trustworthiness.

**Research Paradigm**

This study is rooted in a constructivist paradigm. The central focus of constructivism is to make sense of human experience and to understand and derive shared meaning within a particular context (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Knowledge within a constructivist paradigm is emergent, contextual, personal, and socially constructed (Guido, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Constructivists do not believe in a universal truth (Guido, et al., 2010) and also acknowledge that having an experience does not equate to learning (Lou, Paige, & Vande Berg, 2012). Constructivism guides this study to help provide understanding of the international students’ experiences within the context of their lives and to explore the meaning of the phenomenon of making friendships within the context of the site of this study, which involved multiple students’ voices and experiences (Guido, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2014;
Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overall purpose of constructivist research, or constructivism, is to enhance understanding through gathering multiple perspectives, with an understanding that identity and reality are socially constructed (Guido, Chávez, & Lincoln, 2010). Using a constructivist paradigm, I develop an understanding of the participants in the context of their lives, recognizing that my world view as the researcher, and primary instrument used in the study, is a part of the analysis or interpretation of the participants’ stories (Guido, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Throughout this study, and especially in sharing the findings, I acknowledge the paradigm I bring to this study and accept that the meaning I make from the students’ experiences is mutually constructed. With a constructivist paradigm comes a commitment to engage with the participants to develop the depth of relationship needed to support an analysis of their stories and to keep their values at the forefront (Guido, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This requires ensuring my values are obvious at each stage through researcher reflexivity. The analysis of the narratives presented in Chapter 4 and the discussion of findings in Chapter 5 are tied to the specific context of the stories shared with me in the interviews and both the participants’ and researcher’s context influence the findings. In this study, I strived to understand multiple social constructions of meaning as they played out in the students’ stories about making friends, preserve the students’ experiences, and minimize the meaning I made of their experiences.

**Research Methodology**

In this study, I gained valuable insight into international students’ lived experiences developing friendships through hearing their stories. I asked the students to share stories and reflect on the influences, challenges, and benefits of their friendships and the experiences they had making friends. Narrative inquiry focuses on the lived experiences as told through stories
and serves as a "view of experience" (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 577). Because narrative inquiry is "a relational research methodology" (Caine, et al., 2013, p. 578) which originates in education research with John Dewey's theory of experience in 1938 (Caine, et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Burke Johnson, 2014) my relationship with the students’ influences the stories they chose to share with me and my own meaning making of their experience.

I am dissatisfied with the abundance of literature which focuses on comparing international students to their U.S. peers. My decision to use a narrative methodology aligns with my desire to explore the uniqueness of each individual’s experience as well as to identify and bring attention to common aspects conveyed by international students in their stories about making friends in the U.S. Using narrative inquiry, similar to other qualitative methods, stimulates reflection and aided the participants to make meaning of their experiences developing friendships (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013).

Narrative inquirers are, by their nature, interested in lived experiences (Caine, Estefan & Clandinin, 2013). This study stimulates an appreciation for the heterogeneity among international students and their experiences, supports greater understanding of the breadth of their experiences developing friendships, and highlights patterns or themes to illuminate opportunities for practitioners to better support international student friendship development. I analyzed the narratives in an effort to magnify international students’ experiences, retained the integrity and cultural values expressed by each individual student, and called for socially just action on college campuses.

Using a narrative methodology to explore students’ lived experiences balances more widespread quantitative data and studies about international students, which provide less depth
or insight to their individual human experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized how, in narrative research, the researcher must appreciate and develop an ability to capture the temporal and relational nature of storytelling and acknowledge that people are always in the process of making themselves. As students told me their stories, I maintained an acute awareness of the specific place and time their friendship development experience was taking place. I also acknowledged the influence I had as a researcher through the questions I asked, my non-verbal responses, or the probing questions I asked. After each interview, I reflected on their stories and took field notes to connect my thoughts with what the students had conveyed. I sought to develop an understanding of their experiences, acknowledging that their experiences occurred in a different time, and the participant was retelling their experience to me while also making meaning of their experience. I remained conscious of the three-dimensional characteristics of time, environment, and relationship, especially the relationship I had with the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The three-dimensional characteristics remained a focus when gathering data as well as in the writing of the findings.

Narrative inquiry is a collaborative experience where the researcher may choose to engage with as few as one participant or as many as they believe is necessary to understand the experience of the individuals in the phenomenon (Caine, et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Burke Johnson, 2014). I talked with nine undergraduate international students about their experiences making friends and prompted them to share stories about their experiences to produce the findings which Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 41) referred to as a “research puzzle.” The findings gave prominence to direct statements from the students’ stories with my words grounding the setting, when needed, to understand the full context of the experience. A narrative study is often intensive and may take place over an extended period of
time. It may include a variety of activities that support developing a relationship with the participants beyond listening to participant’s stories. However, due to time and resource restrictions, I gathered the maximum amount of stories and personal experiences about making friends as possible through a single in-person meeting with the students.

Obtaining the desired depth and personal reflection through student’s narrative requires building sufficient rapport with the students. I had a previous relationship with only two of the students. As a result, upon meeting each student, I attempted to create a connection that would promote openness and comfort. I found that my experience supporting this population of students guided my ability to develop a rapport and build trust with the students. I also found that my personal experiences and knowledge developed from working with international students created some tension. In particular, I experienced the most tension when the students’ stories commanded an empathetic response. I wanted to remain neutral in order to minimize any influence I had over their emotions or what they chose to share about their experiences. I also felt tension when their stories reinforced the most negative and challenging experiences described in the literature. I strived to keep this tension in the forefront in the presentation and analysis of the students’ stories by using what Chase (2005) refers to as a supportive voice. Using a supportive voice, requires making the students’ personal reflections about their experiences developing friendships prominent in retelling them in the findings. Candinin and Connelly (2000) reminded narrative researchers that this tension exists when the researcher is committed to promoting the stories at the forefront and minimizing interpretations of their stories.

Conducting research requires making thoughtful decisions about the setting, recruitment and selection of participants, and procedures before beginning the study. There also requires an understanding that these will serve merely as a guide for the study and that additional decisions
are likely throughout the study to maintain alignment, including those around negotiating issues of power that may not have been anticipated (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). The data collection period was approximately two months. During that time, I collected data; used researcher memos to record my thoughts, emotions, and unanticipated outcomes after each interview; and used the notes to inform decisions about changes in data collection in order to stay in alignment with my research plan (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Setting

I considered two primary factors regarding an appropriate site for the research study: my capacity to access and build the necessary rapport with the targeted student population; and the feasibility of recruiting international students enrolled in degree-seeking undergraduate academic programs. The institution where the research was conducted was a four-year, public, doctoral university where undergraduate students take classes on the campus located in a large city in the southeastern U.S. The institution engages in considerable research activity; the campus is highly residential and has high selectivity admissions (Carnegie Classification System, 2016). The academic programs offered at the site include business and liberal arts, yet the largest enrollments are in academic programs focused in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). A majority of the more than 21,000 enrolled students on the main campus originate from the state the main campus is located.

The institution has a longstanding reputation locally and globally for their focus on global engagement. The vision of the institution includes statements related to leading and influencing decisions to address critical global challenges (Institutional Research and Planning, 2016). The campus’ reputation for global learning stems from a campus-wide vision and mission statement that places prominence on campus internationalization efforts. International students make up
10% of the undergraduate student population, 40% of the graduate student population, and represent more than 100 countries of origin. In academic year 2015/2016, 54% of all undergraduate students had participated in an international activity outside of the U.S. before graduation (OIE Annual Report, 2015). The Office of Student Engagement at the site indicated that the campus has 47 registered and active student-led organizations categorized as “cultural or diversity focused organizations.” These organizations provide opportunities for students from cultural groups or who are interested in cultures to be members or to participate in events and programs and develop relationships around common interests. While undergraduate international students enroll at all types of institutions, institutions like this one, typically host a large number of international students, which influenced the decision to choose this site to study international students’ experiences developing friendships.

**Student Recruitment and Selection**

I conducted a purposeful selection of participants to support the goal of interviewing diverse students to obtain a breadth of experiences from the interviews (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2014). After obtaining IRB approval from the University of Georgia and the site of the study, I contacted the Institutional Research Office to request the email addresses of participants eligible for the study. They provided a report that included the email addresses for 236 enrolled undergraduate international students. The report included only students holding any type of temporary visa and who were enrolled as first-time freshmen in academic year 2016.

All of the students in the report were sent a targeted email invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A). In an effort to attract international students across academic disciplines, gender orientations, and cultural groups, the invitation email included a link to complete a demographic survey (Appendix B). Additionally, I obtained support from the Office of
International Education (OIE) to include information in their electronic newsletter and on their display monitors outside of their highly trafficked office for almost two months (Appendix C). When these recruitment efforts did not result in an adequate response, I made post-card size recruitment flyers and distributed them at a monthly OIE coffee hour and at the campus advising and tutoring office because a large number of tutors are international students. Additionally, I promoted the study with the OIE advising staff and sent a similar recruitment email to the student leaders of several large campus cultural organizations. Existing relationships with gatekeepers and key informants eased my ability to access methods to promote the study to the international student community. The existing relationships ultimately helped me to receive an adequate participant response (Jones, Torres, & Armino, 2014). Participants were offered an inventive, beyond the potential benefits from the research, in the form of a $20 Amazon voucher after completing the interview with me. The incentive was used both to promote a larger response rate and to acknowledge the considerable time that students committed to participate. The students who responded to the initial invitation all held a student visa.

In my current professional role, I lead a team that supports and advocates for international students at the proposed site. I am responsible for overseeing services to international students and scholars and have a reputation of being an advocate for international students. I minimized potential influence or feelings of coercion that may come with my title, responsibilities, and reputation by eliminating any reference to my role on recruitment materials and underscoring the purpose, planned use for the data, and benefits of the study in the recruitment materials. While my history of working with international students helped me to build rapport with the individual students, I remained aware that my role at the institution could negatively impact participants’ comfort talking with me about their lived experiences. In an
effort to mitigate any anxiousness about sharing personal stories with me, I was prepared to share my personal experiences studying abroad as a college student and find other ways to convey how my experiences making friends, adjusting, and being successful living in a new environment were challenging and rewarding. I see myself as an empathetic and passionate advocate for international students and believe this comes through when talking with them. This influenced my ability to build a rapport and promote sharing personal details related to their experiences developing friendships. Overall, the rapport I built supported the relational aspects that are critical in narrative inquiry (Caine, et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participants

The term non-resident alien is the official term used by the U.S. government for students who hold temporary visas in the U.S. For purposes of this study, the term international students will be used to refer to the undergraduate student participants. In addition to the criteria used to recruit students from the site, all students were asked to complete a short initial demographic survey online to allow for purposeful selection of the student participants. I minimized the variability in the participants to include undergraduate degree-seeking students, those new to the U.S. higher education environment, and variability in nationality, gender orientation, native language(s), and majors as much as possible. I excluded non-degree exchange students because they are only enrolled for one to two semesters, often have different preparation for their U.S. study, and are more likely to have different motivations for study at the site than degree-seeking students. I excluded students who reported studying in the U.S. prior to fall 2016 because I wanted to focus on students who experienced the transition to a U.S. higher education environment in the same time period. In the next section, I will introduce the procedures, including detail about the eligibility criteria.
While fourteen students responded to the initial email invitation to participate in the study, only nine students completed the full study. Each student identified a binary gender, with four students identifying as female and five as male. All of the student participants majored in either Mechanical Engineering or Computer Science. Although this does not reflect the diversity of majors I anticipated, at this specific site, a majority of international students pursue these two majors. The country of citizenship and last residence are not the same in one-third of the students. This is a common characteristic for a significant number of students and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. The variety of languages the students use is related to the variety in their country of origin and residence. As expected, English is the only common language listed by all students. I was slightly surprised that only one student listed more than two languages. Additionally, I did not expect that Spanish-speaking students would complete the initial survey at the highest rate causing me to limit the interviews to two participants. If this study was fully representative of the selected site’s demographic make-up, the study would include more than one Chinese student and students originating from Korea and Turkey.

Procedures and Data Collection

This research study explores international students’ experiences making friends during the first year of enrollment on a U.S. college campus to gain insight about the influences, benefits, and challenges of forming co-national, host national, and multinational friendships. Participants completed three different procedures or steps in order to inform participant selection, promote reflection, and share their experiences regarding the phenomenon of making friends. The procedures included completing a web-based survey (Appendix C), a reflective friendship diagram activity (Appendix D), and an interview using a semi-structured protocol (Appendix E).
**Initial Web Survey**

The initial web survey link was included in the invitation email and in all recruitment efforts (flyer, display monitor, and post-cards). I estimated it took participants 10-15 minutes to complete. The survey outlined the purpose, the risks, and the benefits of participating in the study that aligned with the IRB consent form. The survey collected demographic information to identify that the respondent met the study criteria, which included: (a) being an undergraduate degree seeking international student, (b) living in the U.S. for the first time, and (c) enrolling at the site of the study starting fall 2016 or later. The other demographic questions included nationality, gender orientation, native language(s), and major to facilitate diversifying the demographic characteristics of participants whenever possible.

The survey also included an open-ended question that asked the students to provide their definition of friendship. The survey gathered information needed to assist in selecting students to participate in the study and to minimize variability in their degree purpose, previous experience in the U.S., and timeframe for enrolling at the site for the first time. The survey also provided a mechanism to select students who represented a variety of nationalities, gender orientations, native languages, and majors. The definition of friendship question was used to select students to interview based on the depth of their responses. The open-ended question demonstrated the student’s willingness to share their experiences, which was critical during the later social network diagram activity and interview (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). The open-ended question also provided a way to identify students who presented a definition of friendship that stood out. The definitions of friendship the students provided were used to open the discussion in the subsequent interviews.
A total of fourteen students responded to the survey. I invited ten students to schedule time to meet with me. One student failed to confirm their availability. The non-selected students were not contacted in an effort to ensure the students who were interviewed represented a variety of characteristics with regard to nationalities, gender orientation, native languages, and majors (Burke Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

Scheduled Meeting and Friendship Diagram Activity

I had planned to meet with participants in my office as I identify it as a comfortable space with artifacts from around the world adorning the walls and shelves. It also provides a high degree of privacy and would allow me to minimize interruptions. Unfortunately, the construction in my building continued throughout the fall, which forced me to identify an alternate location. After getting settled, I asked the students to read and sign the Institutional Research Board (IRB) consent form (Appendix D), gave them a copy, and kept one for my records. I pointed out to each of the participants the place on the consent form that stated they would be assigned a pseudonym and asked them if they would like to choose their name or have one assigned to them. Most students selected their own pseudonym, although two allowed me to determine it for them. After the consent form was signed, I introduced an activity that I included in the study procedures in order to promote reflection and develop a rapport with the student. I asked each student to take 5-10 minutes to complete the friendship network diagram activity (Appendix E). This activity was modified from a tool used by McFaul (2015) in her research exploring international student social networks. McFaul (2015) explored international student friend networks from a social network theoretical framework and developed a social network diagram to display the relationships with co-national, host national, and multinational students. She later created an activity to provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their social network. I have
successfully used the activity for two years with international students enrolled in the first-year seminar class I teach. For the purpose of this study and with permission of the original creator, McFaul (2015), I modified the reflective social network diagram activity to stimulate information pertinent to this study and to provoke reflection from the student participants about their friendships before beginning the recorded interview. The activity allowed students to display their friendships visually. The activity helped promote reflection, created a rapport, and also supported their ability to talk in the interview about the friends listed and their experiences making these friends. Building a rapport with the participants before, during, and after the interview was critical for the constructivist qualitative research and especially narrative inquiry (Guido, et al., 2010; Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Having the friendship diagram displayed throughout the interview allowed me to prompt the student regarding specific friendships.

In the friendship diagram activity (Appendix E), I asked students to list their salient friendships in the U.S. by name, by cultural group, and association in a visual format. Although some literature categorized friends into home country, multinational, or host country, I decided that I wanted to minimize the influence I had on how they categorized their friends. I modified the activity to ask for cultural group and not nationality. This allowed the participants to define what cultural group meant to them using their own language instead of listing their friends’ national origins, as was done in the original research study conducted by McFaul (2015). This difference is something that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5. I also added a question that would provide insight about how the students met each of their friends by asking for their associations.
The reflective activity also supported participants who were often not native English speakers in that it provided them time to reflect before being asked specific and personal questions. While talking about experiences related to making friends and engaging in activities outside of the classroom does not generally cause discomfort, the interview questions could be perceived by some as personal questions and therefore cause discomfort. I found that the students appreciated completing the friendship activity because of the visual display that helped them to reflect. Completing this activity before being asked questions served to buffer any initial anxiety around the meeting. I let the students know that the point of the diagram activity was not to evaluate their friendships but instead to support their reflections. I advised the participants that the information from the diagrams would be included in the findings only to display the characteristics of students’ friendships and not to highlight specific friendships.

**Semi-Structured Interview**

I met with each student once over the course of approximately five weeks. The semi-structured individual interviews allowed me to gather stories about international students’ experiences making friends. Interviews were conducted over a five-week period, with most occurring on the weekend and no more than two interviews scheduled a week. This allowed me to schedule sufficient time before and after the interviews for preparation, reflection, and initial analysis of interview data. I planned thirty minutes before an interview to mentally prepare, to clear my mind of distractions, and thirty minutes after each interview record notes in the margins of the protocol document that guided the semi-structured interview. I audio-recorded the interview portion of the meeting to support later transcription and analysis. The recorded interviews lasted from as few as 56 minutes to as long as 88 minutes, although in some instances, the student remained after I turned off the audio recorder to ask questions about the study or to
engage in conversation with me about how they felt after talking with me. This interaction was an unexpected but enjoyable outcome of the interviews because it reinforced how much students need a supportive and empathetic person with which to talk.

While I developed an interview protocol with sample open-ended questions and prompts (Appendix F), the interview was only semi-structured, allowing me to make decisions during interviews; this aligns with the iterative nature of the narrative method of data collection (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). The student’s friendship definition was essential to the selection of participants, and the diagram activity enhanced the interview with the participant. While the demographic survey was developed initially to support purposeful sampling, I started the recorded interview by reading the student’s friendship definition from their initial survey and asked them if they had anything they wanted to add or otherwise discuss about the definition they provided. This served to be a valuable way to be consistent with how I started each interview, to incorporate this critical information, and to ensure that the interview started with information the student provided previously while allowing each student an opportunity to expand or further explain their definitions.

The interview’s open-ended questions were created after reading literature about friendship development. The literature highlighted patterns in personal characteristics, environmental influences, and barriers that are a part of developing friendships, which I hoped to explore through the open ended questions I asked. I sought to understand the environmental influence on friendship development, the challenges students faced making friends, and the benefits of friendship due to the prominence of these aspects in the literature. The questions promoted reflection, and I used probing questions to seek more depth in instances when students
were sharing a thought and not a story. I also used prompts when I needed the student to describe their experiences or help me better understand their friendship experiences.

At the end of the interviews, I advised students they would have an opportunity to review my initial findings related to what they had shared. Although none of the participants came to review and discuss the initial findings with me, I sought and willingly received insight during the interviews about what practices and institutional assistance they felt supported their development of friendships. I expected and was pleased that overall the students were unrestrained when sharing their experiences. Through their reflection, they made meaning, and in several instances, developed a greater self-awareness about their feelings and their friendships.

Data Analysis

Critical to the success of this study was the depth of the connection I made with the participants to stimulate them to share thick narrative with me. Also, my aptitude to analyze and properly illuminate in a meaningful way their experiences forming friendships on a U.S. campus have been vital to this research. Because I have supported international students for several years, I worked to keep my presumptions or implicit theories in check throughout the data analysis and in writing up the findings (Jones, et. al 2014).

Positionality

Long before choosing a career in international education, I had a transformative study abroad experience as an undergraduate student. My personal experience living and studying abroad included a strong desire to make sense of my new environment and pursue friendships with Venezuelans as a means to strengthen my Spanish language skills and make a connection to the people and places in my new environment. In the 15 years I have worked supporting international students and scholars, I have listened to numerous personal stories in the context of
advising or otherwise interacting with students and scholars on campus. The compelling stories that students have shared with me, the tendency for literature to compare international students’ experiences to their U.S. peers, and the common practice of viewing international students from a deficit perspective motivate me to pursue this study. My goal was to gain depth of understanding about international students’ experiences through their stories about the phenomenon of making friends.

**Analyzing Individual Stories**

Recorded interviews were the primary form of data I collected and analyzed. The demographic surveys and friendship diagrams provided additional insights about each of the participants. I created two tables to display information that was gathered in the initial web surveys and the friendship diagrams. I used the tables to help me think about each individual participant and to look across the participants as a group. These tables serve as visual aids to show the individual participant demographics, their friendship definitions, and an overview of their friendship networks.

I took a few field notes during interviews, and I relied heavily on notes and researcher memos written after the interviews in the analysis of the transcribed interviews. The notes and researcher memos describe and illuminate inductive decisions I made about the prompts I used and include personal thoughts and insights occurring during the interview. The most important data analyzed are the audio recordings and transcribed interviews. This was a considerable amount of data to review and required effort to manage effectively. Analyzing the narratives involved looking at each individual experience as well as across all participants’ experiences.
Table 1

*Participant Demographic Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Last Residence</th>
<th>Languages Spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Spanish; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Sinhala; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Hindi; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>Panama</td>
<td>Spanish; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuma</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Japanese; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>Portuguese; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Chinese; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Russian; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Mandarin; Bahasa Malaysia; English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Friendship Diagram Summary*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Friendship Definition</th>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Friendship Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Samantha | Friendship comes from common interest and common world view. Friends provide company and advice. I trust them and we look out for each other and better each other. | Residence hall; crew/rowing club; class | -No co-national  
-Majority host national  
-A few multi-national  
-Friendship diagram a single page |
| Dev | The perfect definition for the friendship is a group of people willing to wait eight hours in an emergency room waiting area with me at a moment’s notice. | Orientation; residence hall; campus recreation programs | -Two co-national  
-Several multi-national  
-Majority host national  
-Friendship diagram multiple pages |
| James | Current friendships are grounded in work connections, class projects, research, etc. A mutual bond is formed based on the quality of work and shared academic incentive. | Professor; research; class; hackathon; former boss | -No co-national  
-One multi-national  
-Majority host-national  
-Friendship diagram single page |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Friendship Definition</th>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Friendship Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Friends give you a sense of family when home is miles away. They support you and are by your side in good and bad times. In times of conflict or problems, they are who you reach out to and talk to. They are there for you no matter what.</td>
<td>Residence hall; lab partner; cultural organization; prior to starting college; friend of a friend</td>
<td>-Two co-national -Majority multi-national (all Spanish speakers) -One host national -Friendship diagram multiple pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuma</td>
<td>Friends know personal things/personal information Are also mental support in difficult times when you have to make big decisions. I'm really comfortable with my friends and hang out with them often or room with them.</td>
<td>Residence hall; class; research project; cultural organization</td>
<td>-A few co-national -A few multi-national -A few host national -Friendship diagram multiple pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>The definition of friendship is related to culture. Culture defines attitudes and personalities of your friendships.</td>
<td>Residence hall; class; prior high school</td>
<td>-Several co-national. -No multi-national. -Two host-national. -Friendship diagram a single page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Friendship Definition</td>
<td>Association</td>
<td>Friendship Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Nick  | With friends I initiate both recreational and professional activities instead of just waiting until it is necessary to see them. Friends help me and I help them in times of need. | Residence hall; WeChat/Chinese social media group; lab partner; student org. | -Majority host-national.  
- Two multi-national.  
- Several co-national (all listed in one circle).  
- Friendship diagram multiple pages. |
| Alex  | Friendship is built on affection, enjoying each other's company, and genuine concern for one another's well-being. It's an investment in a person that you care about. You go out of the way to help them knowing they will go out of their way to help you. | Classes; student organization; hackathon; internship; fraternity; OIE; residence hall | - Most friends not labeled by cultural group.  
- Those labeled are host-national.  
- Friendship diagram a single page. |
| Xuan  | People that I hang out with a lot. People that I can go to study with and feel comfortable around them. People that I can be comfortable laughing and hanging out with. | Student organization/campus ministry | - Majority host-national.  
- One multi-national.  
- No co-national.  
- Friendship diagram a single page. |

**Analysis across Experiences**

When analyzing the initial web survey open-ended question, I used values coding to identify the values, attitudes, and beliefs the participants conveyed through the definition of
friendship they provided. Saldaña (2016) described value as a norm, moral code, or principle that delineates the importance we place on the item or person in question; attitude as “an affective reaction” describing the way we perceive or feel about the item or person in question; and belief as the full system that includes values and attitudes as well as experiences, personal knowledge, and all other aspects of our perceptions of the world (p. 131). Conducting this form of analysis on the open-ended questions helped me to identify some of the students’ core values associated with friendship. Most of the students’ definitions included a similar focus on the common interests, reciprocity, trust, support and vulnerability with the other person.

**Researcher Field Notes**

I expected to write “preliminary jottings” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 21) during the interviews as well as after completing the interview. Unfortunately, writing notes during the interview became too much of a distraction. Instead, I spent more time after the interviews writing down reflections from the interviews. The analytic memo included initial thoughts and reactions to the international students’ stories sharing their experiences, as well as reflections or themes that stood out and that I referred to after transcription and as themes developed (Saldaña, 2016). My extensive notes after interviews, or analytical memos, are more reflective and even conversational in nature (Saldaña, 2016). They helped me to introduce each participant in Chapter 4. I added notes to the margins of the printed transcriptions when aspects of their story were reflected in previous research or when their experiences stood out as unique. Analytical memos I took after the interviews and during the analysis supported researcher reflexivity serving to keep my personal epistemology at the forefront. When I put my notes on paper, I could see where I was making assumptions about a person based on my personal lens instead of
reserving judgment and focusing on their personal narrative. While my notes are additional data to be considered, the students’ narratives remain the focus of the findings.

I used a service to transcribe the recordings. Analyzing the transcribed interviews involved multiple rounds of listening to the audio and reading and highlighting the written transcriptions. After listening to each audio recording and editing the transcriptions, I printed each transcript labeled with the participant’s pseudonym and placed them with the interview protocol notes, reflections after the interview, and the student’s friendship diagram (again labeled with their pseudonym) in a binder. I highlighted and added notes to the transcriptions.

**Coding**

The narrative methodology was selected to align with my desire to display the lived experiences and voices of the participants in the analysis and findings. As a result, I used an In Vivo coding method in the initial cycle of coding because this coding technique uses the participant’s language, not the researcher’s language, thereby “prioritizing and honoring the participants’ voices” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 107) and is suited for action and practitioner research. I created a database in MS Excel with tabs for each participant. I took significant quotes from the stories and pasted them into an Excel file, where I labeled each quote with headings using the participant’s words. After I had completed a spreadsheet for each participant, I returned to review each set of data to think across the students’ experiences. At this time the common characteristics were illuminated.

Because of the volume of transcribed data collected and because using In Vivo coding is quite painstaking work, I often grouped together multiple lines of narrative. I used this coding technique only in the initial series in order to preserve the students’ meanings of their experiences, actions, and viewpoints, but not in later rounds of coding. This process allowed me
to look at each individual story by itself and identify themes across the students’ stories. After this step, I developed a table using my own words and that was for my use to visually display how the characteristics and themes were experienced across the students.

Data Management

The system of labeling, organizing and storing the data ensured individual student data is grouped as a set and separate from another student’s data. I engaged in dialogue with a doctoral student group on campus, with a colleague in my office who is interested in my research, and with my dissertation chair in order to stimulate processing and reflection throughout the analysis phases (Saldaña, 2016). I invited participants to hear a summary of the analysis using a “drop-in” style scheduled meeting time in order to incorporate member checking. I anticipated sharing the overall themes and characteristics as well as allowing them to provide feedback on the findings, including my interpretations. Unfortunately, none of the students responded to my email or showed up during the times I scheduled.

Writing the Findings

Transitioning from conducting narrative inquiry to considering how to write up the research text required me to conduct several rounds of asking questions to identify “meaning, social significance, and purpose” and return to the personal, social, and theoretical contexts that ground this study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 120). Moving to writing the research text required me to reflect on my experiences making friends as a student while studying outside of my home country and my perspectives as a professional working with international students. I then focused on the narratives that reflected the lived experiences of students. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in this transition, narrative inquirers may discover some aspects of their work reflect ethnographic and phenomenological features. I found this to be accurate as I
tried to distill meaning from the students’ stories and minimize my desire to group together similar or unique experiences. I felt constant tension related to my desire to make meaning from their experiences making friends individually and a desire to look more globally at the group’s experiences in order to inform recommendations for practice and future research. Reviewing the field notes and reflections was necessary to find the patterns and unique characteristics in the students’ stories and make decisions about which of the stories to include in the findings (Clandinin, 2013). In the field notes, I noted relationships to existing literature outlined in Chapter 2 that supported the discussion of the findings and implications outlined in Chapter 5.

Protecting Participants

The study followed IRB protocols to minimize the risk of harm to the participants. Attention to the confidentiality of the participants’ identities and their personal well-being after the interview was paramount. The initial Qualtrics survey included the participant’s personally identifiable information and is accessible only through a site protected by a password only known by me, the researcher. Outside of the web survey, which is password protected, no data collected included the participant’s name or other personally identifiable information, and any data analysis uses a pseudonym, not the participant’s name. The survey results were saved in a password protected Excel file, which is the only record that associates the actual name with the participant’s selected or given pseudonym. All paper and electronic files will be retained for one year after the analysis was written. The first electronic file folder contains the audio recordings. The second electronic file folder includes all transcriptions. The transcriptions are labeled with the pseudonym in order to keep participants’ information confidential.

After the interview, I observed the participant and asked each of them how they were feeling. If they were not immediately able to convey or describe how they felt, I asked if they felt
any distress. None of the students communicated they felt any distress, and more often this question caused the student to share the benefits or emotions they felt after reflecting about their friendships and the experiences they have had from forming friendships. While one of the interviews involved the student communicating attempts to cause herself harm and others provoked considerable emotion, none of the students displayed any immediate response to the interview that was concerning or not positive.

**Trustworthiness**

Deep reflection and exploration of my relationship to the research topic was critical to retain goodness and rigor in the research process (Jones, et al., 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, I acknowledge my responsibility to the participants and understand the relational ethics to ensure the participants’ lived experiences remain at the forefront (Clandinin & Burke Johnson, 2014). Using a narrative methodology means that my interpretations of the students’ narratives throughout the coding process are explicit, and, whenever possible, the participants’ experiences and words are at the forefront. I took detailed notes regarding the decisions I made to group and narrow the data across the interviews where there were common experiences. This ensured my reflections supported me to maintain alignment and ensure my own positionality with the narrative data was explicit. Sharing my interpretations with colleagues or researchers close to the topic is critical to support trustworthiness and is a form of triangulation in the data analysis process (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014).

My ability to clearly describe the decisions I made throughout the analysis, including using language that aligns with the cultural values and lives of the students, supports rigor and goodness (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). While the findings of this study are not intended to be generalizable to all students, I expect the students’ stories include
aspects that can be transferred and translated into practices to impact international students’
experiences making friends. The findings and recommendations shared in Chapter 5 are intended
to encourage others to consider environmental and programmatic efforts to promote a conducive
environment for international students to make friends. Aligned with narrative inquiry, my
analysis avoids broad conclusions about the narrative experiences of these student participants
outside of the space and time the students described. The common themes are presented as
authentic experiences of these students, and while they cannot be applied to all international
students, anyone reading my analysis and findings should find them meaningful and plausible
(Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). In the findings, I honor the cultural values of the students in
the way I present the data. I consider how I have presented the findings in ways that are
congruent with their values, which reinforces goodness and fairness as a researcher and supports
trustworthiness in the analysis. Ensuring I am up front with my own values and perspectives and
aware of how my worldview influences the analysis is critical (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014;
Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It was a challenge during analysis to be mindful and build in time and
space for memos, member checking, and sharing my initial findings with colleagues who support
international students. Each activity reinforced the rigor of the study and helped to ensure voices
of the international students remained at the forefront during data analysis.

Summary

Although this study was not longitudinal, which is common in narrative studies, using
narrative methodology allowed me to sufficiently illuminate the lived experiences of
international students developing friendships during college in the U.S. The study involved
participants from an institution with a well-established reputation as a leader in
internationalization and global education. The study amplifies the voices and experiences of
international students in an effort to understand the influences, benefits, and challenges of developing friendships. Through greater awareness and understanding of aspects international student experiences, I hope to influence dialogue and reflection in international education and student affairs about the opportunities to promote intercultural friendships, acknowledge the potential of intercultural friendships, and support global learning for all students.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

“Stories as they are lived, retold, and relived circulate in and fill spaces between people. They offer us insights into experiences and resonate in ways that help us to learn and form connections with others. Life as it is lived is not neat, tidy, or formulaic. Nor does it easily fit within the confines and conventions of the good story.” (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013, p. 583)

Introduction

This chapter centers on retelling nine international students’ stories about their experiences developing friendships in their first year of undergraduate study. The voiced stories, feelings, and reflections as well as the non-verbal messages conveyed during the story telling are a window into each student’s lived experiences. The narrative methodology, participant selection, data collection process, and process of transcribing each participant’s interview were discussed in detail in chapter three. I first present and then weave together nine individual stories in an effort to deepen existing literature and knowledge about international students’ experiences studying on a U.S. college campus, with a focus on their experiences making friends.

I introduce a metaphor to help explain my consciousness and commitment embedded in my role as a researcher and the ways they influenced my decisions throughout the study. Imagine each students’ experiences making friends in college a single wall tapestry that was formed using a multitude of thread colors, textures, and lengths and that includes three dimensional objects that are woven into an ever evolving display. The individual stories that students shared with me
are first presented as separate parcels or sections and then later woven together through the themes across experiences in order to create a larger tapestry. The students’ stories convey their unique experiences reflected in the patterns, colors, sizes, and textures visible in the tapestry. Each parcel stands on its own but is also connected seamlessly to the other sections through the aspects, the thread or objects, which connect them. In the same way each individual story (parcel) can be viewed on its own, each story is connected to an overall experience conveyed about the phenomenon of international students’ experiences making friends (tapestry). No student experiences making friends at this college in the same way that no two tapestries are exactly the same yet there are common aspects which can be identified in the complete tapestry.

In this chapter, I present nine individual stories about making friends in an effort to raise awareness of international students’ experiences making friends. I introduce the individual stories and then connect the individual stories through notable similarities in each student’s tapestry to present their overall experiences. In the first section of this chapter, I hope readers visualize each student’s tapestry. After presenting each tapestry, I will close by focusing on what I have identified as dominant characteristics, unique characteristics, and themes or relationships in what the students conveyed about their experiences making friends.

The visual tapestry I construct in this chapter is my own version of each student’s tapestry (overall experiences). While I desire to keep the students’ experiences at the forefront, it is critical to acknowledge that these findings are not an exact replica of the students’ tapestry because I made the decisions about which sections to piece together and where to connect them together based on my own worldview. I laid out the individual sections of the tapestry for each student participant to review in an effort to promote goodness and authenticity of the findings.
presented here. The decisions I made about which stories to share were made after several rounds of listening to the audio recordings, often while simultaneously reviewing the transcription.

**Data Collection, Organization and Presentation of the Findings**

I collected several types of data in this study. In this section, I remind the reader of the data collected (initial participant survey, friendship diagram, and semi-structured interview) and introduce the organization of the data before presenting the findings. Throughout the study I remained conscious of the variability of worldviews embedded in the students’ stories, conscious of how my worldview is fundamental to my own meaning making, and committed to illuminating each student’s experience situated in their worldview (Clandinin, 2000).

**Initial Survey**

I committed to interviewing students enrolled at the site who embody the diversity within the international student community. I interviewed students who presented depth in their definition of friendship on their response to the open-ended question. Their response providing a definition of friendship also provided insight about the student’s worldview. I highlight the diversity of experiences within the international students I interviewed to counter existing literature that presents international students as a heterogeneous group. The friendship diagram activity I used supported building rapport, prompted the student to reflect on their friendships, and served as a tool to probe students to tell stories associated with the friends listed on the diagram. I developed greater insight into the lived experiences of these nine students as a result of the diagram activity. There were several instances during the interview where students realized they had left someone from their story off the diagram. I encouraged students to return to the diagram to amend it whenever it felt appropriate to them. Several students commented that
it felt awkward to list out their friendships in the activity. Many also indicated it helped them to reflect which reinforced it achieved its original purpose.

**Semi-structured Interview**

The semi-structured interview was used to elicit stories about the central experience of developing friendships as an international student studying in the U.S. and resulted in learning the most about the students’ experiences. The conversation with each student was guided by interview questions which encouraged students to reflect on their experience and promoted authorship for the students to voice their experiences making friends in college. In each interview, the questions were focused on eliciting stories which illuminated the student’s perspective about the benefits and challenges of making friends as well as the influences of their friends in their lives.

**Organization of the Findings**

I retell their stories in chronological order of when I conducted the interview to ensure the field notes and researcher reflections that are infused in this chapter align with my state of knowing and meaning making at the time the interview was conducted. I conclude this chapter connecting the individual experiences into themes or highlighting experiences unique to a student. Keeping the stories separated, while also highlighting students’ common and unique experiences allows for the most pertinent components of their stories to be pieced together to create their personal tapestry to answer the primary research question as well as gain insight about the secondary research question.

R1: “What are international students’ experiences making friends?”

R1a: “What do international students’ stories say about the benefits, challenges, and environmental influences of making friends?”
I introduce each student based on our initial meeting, using my observations informed by researcher notes and reflections, their friendship definition, and a handful of stories they shared which are. After all of the students’ have been introduced, I close with a summary of what emerged from the stories about their experiences making friends at this college. I focus on the participants constructed meaning that developed as a result of answering the reflective interview questions. Throughout the interviews I sought clarity from the students by rephrasing what I heard and asking for validation or correction to be sure I understood the meaning the student was attempting to share. I include, when necessary, examples of this interchange to highlight my desire to be authentic with the findings. Authenticity in the presentation of the findings is important, so as much as possible, the student’s words will remain more prominent than my own.

**Samantha**

One of the first students to respond to the call for participants was a student I taught in a first year seminar class the previous fall. The seminar class was a section targeted to individuals who received their education outside of the U.S., and enrollment is mostly international students. In the demographic survey Samantha identified as a female, mechanical engineering student. As in all of the interviews, I started by reading the definition of friendship that the student listed in their on-line survey. She provided a definition of friendship which highlighted the characteristics she valued in her friends. She wrote:

“The characteristic that defines my friendships is common interest. It’s easier to relate to others who have the same world view and participate in similar recreational activities. I look to my friends for company and advice and for cues about what is right and wrong. Friends help guide or support my decisions.”
In Samantha’s case, the definition of friendship she provided included depth of detail and characteristics which aligned with the stories she recalled. Samantha was born in Mexico and lived there with her family until leaving for college. She discussed with me her close relationship with her family, which she said is typical for “Hispanic” culture.

I had not seen Samantha in almost a year when we met to conduct the interview. Samantha spoke in the rhythmic way I remembered which accentuates her raspy, reverberating voice. When I asked her about her interest in participating in the study, she responded that she was interested in knowing what I would find out by talking to international students. She said she felt compelled to share her experiences because she had easily developed friendships and indicated her experience might be unique.

**Samantha’s Experience: Connections Result from a Common Worldview, not Nationality**

Again, at the start of each interview, I read the student’s definition of friendship provided in the survey. Then I asked if their definition of friendship had changed since being a college student. Without pause, Samantha affirmed what I read and added “It's just a relationship of constantly bettering each other, and the fact that bettering each other looks similar for both of us, what defines the friends. Both of us want to get to that similar place, I would say.” This statement is further strengthened in the reflection below. She, like other students, refer to common worldview as a driver for whom she develops friendships with. Yet, based on her experience, she is the only student who is unequivocal that common worldview is not tied to national culture. She reflected:

… before I wouldn't think that these concepts (common world view) apply as much to people who are much more different than me culturally. . . . I come from a region where there's a very homogenous population, so I wasn't constantly being presented to people
who have different upbringing than myself. . . . It wasn't that surprising that we (people from the same homogeneous culture in Mexico) ended up with similar worldviews, as I said. But what really, not changed my mind, but really surprised me at [this university], is finding that . . . even when I encounter people who had very different experiences growing up, and had very different things shape the way they are, we still ended up being shaped the same way.

When I prompted her, she shared a story about a unexpected kinship who others joked was “the same person” as her. She said:

She was brought up in the north of the United States, and I was brought up in Mexico. But a lot of our friends joke around, and we joke with each other that we are the same person, because we will find each other during class and stuff making the same comments. Like, if we asked one for advice, the other one will just give us the same advice. But then, when we started becoming closer friends, we started opening up about more personal things, like, perhaps fears we have of life, like growing up, or insecurities that we have, or personal thoughts and stuff. And we started finding that the other one supported that feeling we each had that. I remember she told me, "You're trying to be sarcastic, right? You're being passive aggressive? You're just saying that because you know I feel that way?" And I'm like, "No. I sincerely also feel this way about this, and I know how it feels. I feel like you and I have that same connection." And she's like, "No, for sure." We stopped to think and analyze, how did we end up being the same person having such different experiences growing up?

Samantha was one of a few students who displayed a strong awareness of their own worldview. She told me that she actively pursues friendships without regard to national culture tied to the
story above and her initial pursuit of friendships narrowly based on common cultural group through a student organization which resulted in unfulfilling personal connections. Samantha also conveyed the emotions she experienced arriving to the U.S. and moving into her residence hall, saying “I remember it was very daunting to, especially as an international student, come here and not know anyone. I feel like everybody else already knew each other from high school and stuff.” This sentiment was shared by several other students. In Samantha’s case the initial expectation that Americans in her residence hall already had friends pushed her to first seek connections within the Hispanic community through a cultural student organization (SHEP) and later develop deep friendships with both host-national and multi-national peers. With some prompting, Samantha shared the story about when she became aware that common interests and worldview are necessary components for developing friendship but, in her experience, these are not tied to cultural or national norms. She said:

I expected to make most of my friends, or simply to have most of my common worldviews be shared with people from the same cultural group, . . . (in particular) the Hispanic association. I realized that I had more connections to people in my (residence) hall. People in my hall were from the U.S. or other places. . . . some friends are from the U.S., but their families are not, so they belong in that group of people that identify as not only American (but as Indian American, Italian American, etc. . . ). . . I found myself having more connections with them regarding worldview than I had with people who had a similar upbringing to myself, and that was something that surprised me. . . . I started getting closer to people in my residence hall and hanging out with them. They (Hispanic friends) would be like, "They are Americans. They don't really understand you like we do." And that's where I found a clash. The fact that we both were brought up in a
Hispanic country. . . doesn't mean you and I have a stronger connection than me and another person. I found myself having more connections with (residence hall friends) regarding worldview than I had with people who had a similar upbringing to myself, and that was something that surprised me.

In this story, Samantha expressed her desire to make friends with Americans but also expected that she would have an easier time building friendships with her Hispanic friends because she assumed they would have a similar world view. Her words and her facial expressions conveyed the disappointment she felt when others that she assumed would understand her and support her, didn’t. Samantha’s friendship diagram reflects this critical awareness as a freshman and how it influenced her pursuit of friendships with both host-national and multi-national friends more than with co-national friends.

The majority of the nine students I interviewed expressed their desire to make friends with Americans. Samantha highlights how common interests serve as a critical aspect of making connections and shares several stories about developing friendships through her participation on the rowing team. Samantha seemed to be the most successful in developing deep relationships which included a sense of security and potential for longevity. Samantha’s desire to seek out friendships based on common worldview, not experiences or cultures, bolstered her openness to make friends with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. She came to the conclusion that values can be shared across cultural groups. Openness and adaptability are attitudes that are critical in both Deardorff’s (2006) and King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) intercultural models. Her readiness to build relationships separate from common cultural or national connections, her self-awareness, and willingness to adapt behaviors without losing her own sense of self demonstrate intercultural maturity and skills necessary for intercultural relationships.
“Friends Not Only as Friendship, But as Family”

Samantha’s conversations with friends illuminate how her friends fill a void created because international students’ families are so far away and also a lack of awareness or empathy from U.S. peers for the experience international students have being away from their families. In Samantha’s case she conveys this by sharing:

Some (students with family close by) don't feel the need to make that many connections. . . .one of my friends said, "I always know I can go to my mom with my problems.” . . . I feel this true for my mom as well, but since I do not have that connection as readily available as it used to be, I now feel the need to fulfill that position with a friend. . . . I'm just really grateful that I got to make these connections here. I was thinking that if any of them were to break away, that would be very emotionally tolling for me, because I consider them ... not only as friends, but as family.

In Samantha’s experience she felt motivation to pursue friendships to replace the close family bonds and describes this when she says “You need to make an extra effort in order to connect yourself with someone since I had a strong family sense back home”.

Stay True to Themselves and Engage in What Interests Them

When I sought to change the course of the interview I prompted Samantha to discuss how she might guide a new student seeking assistance making friends. This allowed me to explore her perceptions about the environment including identifying that she needed to adapt some cultural behaviors to influence her experience developing friendships. Samantha shared that she is a Peer Leader in a residence hall which means she receives training from professional staff in order to support her to be successful in this mentorship role. I believe, and Samantha agreed, that the training she participated in to be a Peer Leader has a positive impact on her ability to navigate
challenging social interactions. Specifically the support and expectations around being reflective, the expectations to engage with and mentor her peers, and the support and feedback she is provided which help her to be more aware of herself in relation to others. In her role as a Peer Leader she said she often has conversations with new students to help them consider how to build themselves in their new environment. She advises them to:

Always just stay true to themselves, and push themselves to engage in what they already like and what they feel interested in. Try to do more things for yourself, and know that friends could line up there, because you're all staying true to yourselves, and not trying to force yourself to be something you're not, because if you do that, then you're going to connect with people who don't have the same worldview as you, and that will end up being a clashing thing.

Samantha is the only student I talked with who shared with me an active leadership role which involves regular training and contact with professional staff. Her experiences reflect what others convey with respect to becoming more aware of cultural behaviors and how they impact relationships with peers. The difference is conveyed in the stories she shared about her role and the tools that she had developed that some of her international student peers likely haven’t had access to. In her Peer Leader role she “learns from them by providing (peer residents) support.” She talks about the realization that she needed to adapt some of her behaviors to align with her American friends and to meet expectations in her Peer Leader role. She shares a story with me about one of her friends without any sense of regret or displeasure and instead a sense that she expected that modifying some aspects of herself would be necessary in her new environment. She shared an interaction with one of the friends listed on her friendship diagram about the cultural norms and how her friend responded. She recalled:
She (a friend) doesn't even have to use physical interaction in order to feel close to someone. . . . She's not the kind of person who would come up and hug you. She doesn't really like being touched in general. Because she's like, "Why would you do that?" I tried to explain to her, because I am the opposite way, and I feel like that was part of my upbringing, because back in Mexico . . . it's so common. . . . I remember that was a big adjustment that I had to do when I came here, because nobody ever says hi by giving me a kiss on the cheek. (My friend) never told me anything against it, but knowing that she doesn't like physical touch in that sense, I feel like it was a different opposing view. . . . That’s something that I've [pause] I don't do the very obvious things anymore, like kissing someone on the cheek every time you meet them. . . but I realized that I still do some of the smaller things, like just patting someone on the back, or coming up to someone and grabbing them by the shoulders.

Samantha further discusses how the Peer Leader training she received was another influence on her natural tendency to use physical contact with others in that she had to practice scenarios she may face as a Peer Leader and received feedback from staff specifically about the miscommunications that can occur from physical contact or the dangers she would put herself in instances where mental health or intense emotions were at play. Again, this story reinforced my impression that her role as a Peer Leader was a highly impactful experience that extends her ability to engage with culturally diverse peers successfully.

While my time with Samantha was short in relation to some of the other student interviews, I heard several compelling stories which I have shared here to illuminate her experience making friends. My field notes taken after meeting with Samantha exude an excitement that she had developed a sense of security of self and awareness of other that,
combined with her openness and curiosity to learn, reinforced her ability to connect on a very deep level with peers across cultures and to learn from these relationships that common experiences and nationality doesn’t guarantee common worldview.

Dev

Dev was my second interview. Upon seeing Dev outside of the academic building, I immediately felt his positive energy resulting from his enthusiastic greeting, warm smile, and pleasing accent. Despite the mild fall day outside, Dev kept on his camel colored leather coat even after we settled into our seats. I initiated some initial small talk to check in and use his verbal and non-verbal responses to gauge his readiness to start.

I read the definition of friendship that Dev shared in the initial survey. He said “the perfect definition for the friendships I have made here at Tech, is the group of people willing to wait eight hours sitting in an emergency room waiting area with me at a moment’s notice.” He identified as a male, mechanical engineering major who has Sri Lankan Citizenship and raised in the United Arab Emirates. On the friendship diagram activity, he listed his cultural group as South Asian/Middle Eastern which aligns with how he positions himself as multicultural in his stories.

He didn’t labor over the friendship diagram activity and stopped once he filled the first page. He was one of several students who added friends to their diagram during the interview as a result of the stories they shared. His ear to ear smile continued throughout the interview and was combined with straightforwardness conveyed in the tone of his voice and enthusiasm sharing his experiences making friends. I begin the interview with Dev asking about the definition of friendship he provided in the initial survey which referenced an emergency room
visit. Understandably, I was curious to understand how his hospital visit was connected to his experiences making friends.

**Dev’s Experience: “I have friends that I’ve known since kindergarten that wouldn’t show up to the ER”**

It struck me how quickly Dev opened up about his experience going to the emergency room. He recalled that he had only been a student for about a month when he knocked on his roommates’ door as he pointed at the two friends listed on his diagram. He said:

> They were checking on me and just making sure everything was okay. . . . Okay, to be specific, this was an anxiety-based thing, and I've been dealing with this for a long time, so it wasn't anything new. I know exactly how bad it gets, and I know that I can always deal with it, so I hate bringing other people and making them worry about it, because they don't understand that it's not that bad . . . We were sitting there for a long time . . . like eight or nine hours, and more people kept showing up. . . . I was feeling mostly okay. . . . It just felt like I was wasting their time a little bit, but I only realized like later on, maybe a day later that, "Hey, you know what, I probably have never had people that would do that for me before." That's exactly why I wrote that specific experience in the survey. . . .

So rewind a bit. I'm from the Middle East, I'm from Dubai, and things are very, I guess, conservative there, and it's very like everyone keeps to themselves a little bit. . . . You're really, I guess, reluctant to really put yourself out there sometimes back home. Like I said, I didn't expect to form friendships this strong in pretty much like, it's been a year, but it's been the same since I want to say freshman semester, like it (the amount of time to make these friends) was a couple weeks really.
His story shows he was being vulnerable early on with friends and their immediate response of empathy deepened their reciprocal commitment to their relationship.

“Expand My Horizons”

Dev, like several other students, is open about the worry he had about making friends prior to arriving to college, in addition to sharing his strong desire to be friends with students unlike those he grew up with. “I was worried that I wasn’t going to expand my horizons at all, I’m just going to have a similar group of friends all over again, or worst case, I’m just going to have trouble making friends at all.” Several students reference the new student orientation program as an important program to support making friends but only two, including Dev, shared a story about meeting friends at orientation. Dev connected with two male Indian students at orientation. “I mean, we hit it off pretty quick, just because I’m used to talking to the same demographic of people, but still, I didn’t feel like I was really broadening my friend circle.” Later, at a residence hall social event, they reconnected but this time their interaction included a very diverse group of residents from several nearby halls who had gathered to play a German card game. Recalling this experience, he said “It's just a fun game, and we have to all work together to figure out what happened. It was written in German, so (my German friend) was the only one that could read it.” He goes on to say that “We were all just doing that until the entire quad cleared of people, and it was just us in a circle. We decided that if we don't pass along information, we're never going to see each other again”. While they exchanged phone numbers after finishing up the card game, it was chance that he re-connected with this circle of friends a few days later in the dining hall. This group of friends all lived in residence halls in close proximity to each other his first year but have remained friends despite dispersing on and off campus during their second year. When he talks about his friends, he focuses on their diversity
with regard to national culture and how each shares something unique with their personality or characteristics. He talks about the adventures and exploration as an important part of the experiences that he and his friends seek out when spending time together. He emphasized that their differences were more prevalent than their commonalities. He said:

I feel like defining the social group as similarities doesn't do it justice as much as defining it as differences would do, in that it's more interesting to talk to someone about something new than, "Oh, have you heard that song?", "Yeah, it was pretty good," end of conversation. Yeah, we'd mostly talk about things that you wouldn't be able to speak to anyone else about, not in a privacy point of view, but in an information point of view. . . . It's always nice to have argument-based conversation about things, because there's so many points of view to things, and it's just nice to have a grown up debate sometimes.

Dev references that differences were more prevalent and also conveys enthusiasm for adventure and exploration through his friendships. The mention of the conservative culture he came from and his openness about “broadening” his friend circle reinforce his expectations that being in the U.S. as an international student would be very different than the environment he was used to in the U.A.E.

When I noticed that the friends listed on his diagram all have moved from another city and/or country when starting college, I asked him about this commonality of being forced to adjust to a new environment away from family and friends. This probing pushed him to reflect on two friends who lived in his residence hall freshman year and were from the state or nearby the campus. He shared a story about one who has a car and is considered the “eco-warrior” within the circle of friends. He recalls that she is the only friend he believes understands him enough to talk about his past. He said,
“I have anxiety issues, and I've had them since I was a kid for several reasons. She's been through similar in her past, so aside from the whole Green Peace thing, she's always the person I come to talk to about that. She's one of like two people that I confide in talking about my past and stuff.”

The smile on his face and other nonverbal cues show the pleasure he has talking about her. When I ask him how he’s feeling he said:

I guess I feel a little, well not dumb, but a little like I worried for no reason, when I mentioned that I was worried when I got on the plane to America that I'm not going to have as comfortable a social life as I did back home, when this is way more comfort, I would argue, than I had back home. Yeah, I feel rather proud that I can even list so many people. . . and well more if you need me to, that I actually consider definitely a tight group of friends, and people that I've had the most experiences with for sure. . . . So that's barely two months into the first semester and all these people already very solidly in my life.

He goes on to share how this group of friends celebrated his birthday with him in October 2016 and how the waitress commented about the large group celebrating with him. While he says he “got lucky and found a circle of friends that somehow lined up perfectly,” he also acknowledges that there are “some people you are going to get along with and some people you're not. . . . If you do somehow find more people that you don't get along with when you first get to (campus), . . . know you will find more people that you're going to like, even though you just happened to get a lot of unsavory people at first.” Dev considers his experience finding a core group of friends a positive one while recalling both the anxiety and the excitement induced by the new college environment. He recalled:
I wouldn't say I started out that way, I wouldn't say I started out looking for things that were different, because well, for the most part I was nervous. If there was advice I would give to people, I would say yeah, just talk to people that you wouldn't otherwise talk to.

“Put yourself out there”

Although Dev’s anxiety plays a role in his life, he does not hesitate to emphasize the importance of venturing out and challenging himself to be around people with diverse interests, who promote adventure, and who help him to grow. “That's just how you just grow as people. . . I made a target for myself earlier, to expand my horizons, and that's how you do that, I guess.”

He shares a story with me about a particular friend that he met through the motor sports club who influences him to try new things. He also recalls how a person whom he met prior to coming to college who is also from Dubai didn’t make the friendship diagram. When sharing a story about this person, he said, “She'd always complain about everything. . . . I understand complaints if they're warranted, but they were never warranted,” and closes the story saying her lack of positivity was annoying. Although he may see her briefly when he is back home in Dubai, he made it clear he does not consider her a friend like the others. In my time with Dev, he expressed some rejection of aspects of his home culture. This sense of rejecting or dismissing his previous place and cultural norms in order to seek out new was present in other things he shared during the interview and can be a common characteristic during a period of cultural adjustment.

Dev shared that he didn’t intend to get involved in any student organizations. He said:

That culture of joining a student organization and working towards a common goal and stuff, it's interesting but like I said, I wasn't really getting out there, and I didn't really want to be around that many people that I didn't know. You can understand how nervous that would make somebody.
But then a friend who he considers an adventurer knew he liked cars and asked him to go to a club meeting with her in fall 2016. He said:

    We ended up just staying in that club for the whole semester. . . It was an enjoyable experience and we met a lot of people that shared a lot of things with us, and definitely we grew closer together as friends there as well... (She) definitely pushes me to try new stuff.

The story he shared highlights the influence of this particular friend and his openness to try new things in particular when the recommendation comes from a trusted friend.

“A Nice Experience to Immerse Ourselves in the Culture Here”

It’s clear from talking with Dev that his friends are a significant part of his happiness. The stories he shared highlight how his multicultural friendships support him to pursue learning and growth. He is comfortable sharing experiences about what he is learning through his culturally diverse friends while also acknowledging their commonalities. He said “It's just that, I'd say we're all similar, even though we come from different places. Well, as similar as just conversation goes, but in regards to the cultural group thing on the diagram, that comes down to the information that person has about values related to their culture.” He is comfortable talking about his friends, in some aspects maybe more than reflecting about his own experiences.

Talking with Dev left me with immense hope about the experiences international students have making friends. While he openly shares his personal challenges, he is overwhelmingly positive with regard to talking about the environment for making friends and the stories he shares with me reflect his willingness to try new things, seek adventure, and grow from having a variety of experiences with friends who demonstrate similar desire. His openness toward values differences, time, and depth of experiences supported him to deepen his intercultural friendships.
I nervously emailed James twenty minutes after our scheduled time to see if he was still available to meet. When James arrived outside of the entrance to the building about thirty minutes later, he immediately started with an apology for missing our scheduled time. I was quick to respond casually that it wasn’t a big deal and focused on thanking him for making the effort meet. James spoke rapidly with a fervor that caught me off guard. He said he had been up most of the night at a hackathon that he shared with me he had won. He seemed a bit flustered, but his non-verbal cues told me he was eager to talk.

After getting settled into the high-top table in the lounge, he quickly reviewed and signed the consent form, only asking if he would have an opportunity to see what I wrote. I reminded him about what was written in the consent form about a later meeting I would schedule to invite participants to review my initial findings. He responded that he wasn’t too worried about the anonymity and appreciated the opportunity to hear about my initial findings. The rapid rate of his speech had not slowed and pushed me to slow my speech in an effort to influence his pace. I decided, as a result of the difficulty I had in previous interviews to maintain focus, that I would minimize taking notes during the recorded interview. This served to be a good decision because my interview with James was challenging because of the bleakness of James’ stories.

I started the interview reading the definition of friendship he shared in the initial survey. He wrote “friends here are the ones I have a work connection in class, research, or projects. The mutual bond in almost all cases is quality of work and shared academic incentive”. In the survey he identified as a male, computer science major from India. After a couple of initial questions about the friendship diagram activity, he rapidly filled in the circles using pseudonyms which for each of the male friends he listed.
“Dramatically Different”

When I asked James to talk with me about the individuals he listed on his diagram he rapidly introduced each of the six people listed. He used descriptive statements such as “smartest guys I have ever met in my life,” “mentor,” “strong work ethic,” “brilliant guy,” “honest,” “passionate,” “really great work connection because he's among the most elite people in the United States,” and “I can have honest, academic conversations with him, we discuss research papers.” He expressed that “a lot of these relationships are self-serving”. His initial introduction using the diagram offered limited context about how he met each of the six friends, focused on what each individual represented to him, and provided little depth about his experience forming the relationships. After the initial part of our conversation, it became obvious that his relationships and his experiences were different than the previous students I interviewed. In line with his definition of friendship provided in his initial survey, his friends are people he has close connections with in class, research, or other academic or professional activities.

I pushed James beyond descriptions to tell me stories which illuminated his experiences making friends. Sadly, his stories of making friends in college were laden with bitterness and disappointment. He was emphatic that his college friendships were “dramatically different” than his friendships before coming to college. I pushed him to help me understand this and he explained:

I was a studious student. I haven't changed. . . . But I think a lot of the dynamic has changed. . . . I haven't really met anybody who was outright racist. . . . but definitely race plays a factor, you know? You don't have a friend. You have an Indian friend. I'm just amazed.
He said his environment (moving from India to the U.S.) has changed and he places responsibility on others around him for the change in dynamic. In our time, he shares that colleagues he met during a summer internship were having seemingly different experiences at their Northern Ivy league colleges. His perception of other’s experiences and disenfranchisement with his own campus are important components influencing his experiences making friends. He conveys disappointment that his expectations were not met and, sadly, he expresses that he has given up hope on having a more positive social experience in college.

“They were so American”

He tells me that making friends before college “was automatic” and further says:

My friendships back at home weren't this un-casual. There was no incentive structure in place. . . . (my friends were) the kind of guys who I could basically talk to unfiltered... I could just really let my guard down. . . . In my first semester, I couldn't really get along with my roommates. I deliberately chose a four person room...so that I could make more friends. . . because that would create more opportunities for friendships. And I really wanted to get the most out of college. . . . but, those guys were really the kind of people who were on the opposite spectrum… Those guys just slept for 12 hours a day... I didn't really hope my roommate would be the future President of the United States, but I really wanted a person who'd have a constructive view of life and would have good discussions or something. But those guys just watched football and slept. So, I changed rooms in my second semester.

James went on to discuss his friend experiences during the second semester in a similar manner. He explained,
… those guys were …average kids. None of them were driven. . . . I made friends with them really quickly. They respected me and all, but the conversations that we had were football, which I don't watch. Just random stuff like, I don't even remember their names. . . . They were so American. . . . There were Indian Americans, there was an Asian. . . . but there were not really any international students (around me in the residence hall). When I start talking about, big stuff like, goals and objectives, I come off as a little elitist or narcissist, and maybe a show-off. I don't do that anymore. I just stopped doing that because I understand that's not working.

James’s story conveys that he set expectations that he would make friends with his roommates. He quickly made decisions about who they were based on their behaviors which he interpreted as mediocre and as a result was disappointed in his residence hall and with the people he had planned to be friends with. James stated that he was not surprised that the majority of the friends on his diagram were not students and were instead older white, Jewish men which he associated with his “strong respect for Jewish culture”. He met some through an internship he had last summer and others through his professor. James references perceived racism and communicates his own stereotypes in several stories. For example, he tells me “I have met Jewish people who are just stupid, but if you introduce me to a person I don't know, and you say he's Jewish, I have a really preconceived, positive notion about him.” He continues, “I have developed over the years, genuinely and unfortunately, a really negative view of the South.” He goes on to say “I'm not racist, but I don't really like the whole black culture. I don't have anything against the black people.”

“I was just so absolutely alone, not one conversation throughout the entire day.”

James shared a story which illuminates how quickly he began to feel isolated. He said:
I came to (this campus) in August. I filed for transfer application in October. It was that fast. In two months. I was the student filing transfer applications right after he starts college. . . . So, every three or four days I used to have one conversation, like literally one conversation, because the lecture halls are 300 people. It's not like really small lecture halls, so there's no conversation in lecture halls. One conversation in three or four days that was literally the statistic.

He tells me he hasn’t transferred because of an internship he had between his first and second year that gave him hope. He is also on track to graduate in a year and has confidence that the relationships he has made will safeguard his professional success. This doesn’t change the difficult and disappointing experience he has had with respect to building friendships. When I asked him how he feels when looking at his diagram, he says:

It makes me feel bad. I have been in therapy regarding this. It took me a while to acknowledge, you know, that I don't have friends. . . .So, now that I have acknowledged that, ironically, I feel better…I was really worried that at some point I might have lost my ability to make friends. But that internship experience (last summer) and going to New York City and finding those small group of people was reassuring. . . . I think the average environment (at this campus) is actually not that bad for making friends, if you are just an average kid. But definitely somebody like me, who has this niche interests and doesn't really align with the average population ... I'm in no way saying I'm better or worse, but I do think I don't really fit in.

James conveyed confidence that his attempts to meet friends in his residence hall programs and going to student clubs or academic activities to seek relationships grounded in common interests had no chance of ever working at the institution. He went on to talk about how his current
relationships won’t ever be the type of intimate friendships he desires and that he used to have before college. He said:

I really value and cherish relationships that are deep. Deep in the sense they're not superficial…They have this sort of . . . innate trust, and you know, honesty and genuineness in them. . . . (and my current) relationships are very different because the incentive structure. . . . I have become so defensive, have become afraid to get rejected ...

People have the same fear of jeopardizing this structure because I have gotten so defensive over the year.

While James is unclear about who “people” are in the statement above, I wasn’t able to prompt him further because he rapidly moved on to another story and I wasn’t able to circle back.

He told a story later about a female friend he missed an opportunity to make friends with. He said, “There was this one girl who did try to do it (hang out). I was really defensive, and when I tried to reach back, the structure was gone. . . .By that time the ship had sailed because nobody likes to be shut down.” From this story, I expect he initially may have been afraid of being vulnerable with her when rejected her request to hang out. He may have assumed she was like previous peers who were only looking for an “incentive” to spend time with him. James uses the term “incentive structure” a few times in our interview and when talking about most of the individuals he listed on his social diagram activity. I ascertain the meaning to be that he believes the majority of his relationships in college are grounded in the other person’s desire for personal gain through their relationship with James. Ultimately, his stories convey that he is also seeking relationships with others for personal gain. He shares that his relationships previous to college were “multi-modal” meaning more casual and without a dominant expectation of an incentive from the relationship.
Victoria

Victoria was my second interview with a female, mechanical engineer, Spanish speaker from a Latin American country. While I was eager to meet Victoria, I had contemplated not inviting her to interview due to my desire to ensure a broad demographic mix of students. In the end, I saw a considerable difference in the friendship definitions between the two women and was interested to hear their distinct experiences. Victoria was raised in one Latin American country but due to the challenging political and economic climate in her home country, her family moved to a neighboring country in her last year of high school. In the survey she defined friendship as:

A person who gives you a sense of family when you're not home or miles away from it.

When moving away from your country, your house, and leaving your family, it's always important to have someone that supports you and is by your side through the good and bad times. Having friendships helps you know that in the times when you have conflict or problems, that you have a person to reach out to and talk to. I’ve learned, during my time here, that there are different types of friends. Friends that can help you with simple things like doing homework or helping you get a pen, all the way to friends that help you with much deeper things like a death of a family member or wanting to change your major. Friends are maybe not as unconditional as a family member, but they are close.

True friendship is a person that will always be there for you no matter what.

Before starting the interview, I attempted to stay mindful about the focus of the interview. I attempted to remain mindful with my emotions because they are stronger because of my personal experiences, family, and deep friendships with people in both her home country and her last country of residence.
“Friendships were critical to my life and development”

Victoria’s definition of friendship was the most descriptive of all of the surveys. She, like Samantha, talked about how friends filled a void due to being so far from family. This similarity is not surprising when factoring in the common cultural base which places high importance on family relationships. My first question asked if her definition of friendship had changed since starting college in the U.S., she said:

At the beginning, friends, they were just people that were in school, and we used to share classes, and maybe go out some day, or come to my house. But now, it's basically living with a person. . . . There's no family, mom to tell, or dad to help. You just need to ask a friend for you. . . . It changed in a way that it's depending more on someone, more on friendships, so it became stronger, and I believe more important, the relationship of having friends or someone to count on. . . . I consider that friends are not just only the people that you rely on when difficult situations. It's just like small things are people that are there for you…in the good and bad times.

She goes on to share how her friendship diagram, which covers two pages, is dominated by friends whom she considers to be like family and also friends who aren’t as close but whom she views as just as important.

Through her stories, she conveys comfort with the different levels of trust and different types of support they provide. She also talks about going out of her way to see some people while with others she simply crosses paths daily as a result of similar schedules. It is clear in the interview that Victoria is pleased with the variety of friends she has developed and tells me “It is nice to see my friends all written down. It looks good, exciting. It makes me feel like I'm not alone. . . . that I have someone to trust and be there for me.” She adds without any prompting:
As I was writing them, I saw the majority, not the majority, but all of them their first language is Spanish. I don't know if it's just because we have the same background, or we share the fact that we're very far away from home, but also since English is not my first language, I can explain myself better in Spanish and develop better relationship in Spanish. It’s just quick.

Victoria is the only student I interviewed with friends from only one language base and similar cultural groups. The stories she shared display the importance she places on cultural norms as a necessary bridge to developing friendships. She assigns shared national culture as a foundation for trust, understanding, ability to be vulnerable, and ability to offer appropriate and reciprocal support to each other. She shares a story about her relationship with one of her closest friends started because she saw him crying (being vulnerable) and she helped him through his problem. She said:

He really appreciated that I did that for him. I really helped him with his situation. After that he became on the executive board for (a cultural organization). He basically helped me to get my current position as social chair. I am under him, so basically he's my boss. .

. . I feel he's my mentor and my friend. Really though, all three of them.

Her statements highlight how this friendship, and many others, are multifaceted. This is a theme common in the stories I heard from most of the students and will be discussed further in the findings in Chapter 5.

“A lot of my friends are Latin”

Cultural similarities and mentorship are common features in most of the students’ experiences making friends. Victoria discusses the critical role that SHPE (the Society of
Hispanic Professionals) played in aiding her to meet most of her friends and the mentorship this cultural student organization provides. She said:

To start, when I first got here to [college], I had a Latin roommate. I think most of the relationships grew from SHPE. . . . SHPE is a big part of the friendships. I think that the language is very important to be able to feel free to talk in Spanish. Basically we did a lot in freshman year Latin events and stuff. Just meet up, get together. . . . get more involved with other types of nationalities.

Victoria shares stories which reinforce that her comfort in speaking Spanish with her friends is a significant aspect which helps her to build connectivity and depth in her relationships. She shares a story about a classmate that she is friendly with, where they support each other with small favors but that hasn’t developed into an intimate friendship. She said:

For example, I have a lab partner. She's from here from Georgia (U.S.). She's super nice. . . . We have the same classes, literally, the same schedule. . . . I see her in every class.

She's super nice, and I always talk to her. Yesterday she needed a favor. She needed me to give the homework to the class. She was not going for whatever reason. I got her homework and took it to the class. I can do her a favor. Basically we have a relationship, and I can be there for her if she needs something. She can be there for me if I need something, or if I need an answer in the lab, she can give it to me. But there's not. . . . I think that in the case that (if) I did develop a relationship with her, it would be amazing. We've just not had that click. I don't know that connection. It would be amazing to develop to a deeper friendship, but it's also fine with me with just having her if I need something in the class. . . . There are different kinds of friends. There's someone you can
trust and there's other that you just in good times say, "I need a small favor. Can you do this for me?"

Victoria demonstrates in the story above a comfort with being friendly with individuals but not necessarily having a similar type of depth of friendship as the friends she listed on her diagram. Ultimately, there has to be an interest on both sides to deepen the relationship and in this case, she conveys satisfaction with their level of interaction and reciprocity.

“Unidos”

Her contentment with her existing friendships and lack of desire to push beyond cultural barriers to deepen a friendship with her classmate is backed up in the literature which points to the need for both parties to come into a relationship with a similar opportunity to benefit and display reciprocity (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Victoria states that cultural understanding deepens the connection between friends because of their personal understanding of her family’s experience being forced to leave their home and seek to build their life in a neighboring country. She said:

I feel more identified with (my home country nationals), to be honest, because I feel understanding with them about our rough path, because there has been a lot of things happening in (my home country) and the economic situation. For some of them, their parents are still in (my home country). They're living the crises and with being through all of the disaster in our country with the government.

In later stories about a friend whom she met freshman year and now lives with, she refers to how their interactions are “effortless”, involved “negotiation”, and are dependent on awareness and understanding each other’s “costumbres” meaning customs and routines. She talks about the steps she and her roommate took early on this year to develop common agreements. “We
arranged the rules. Then a month after we sat again and said ‘So, after a month of living together, what do we like, what do we dislike.’ We have gained that sense of what (we each need) to live together”.

She also shared that “proximity” early on influenced how her friendships evolved and goes on to share stories of how she has remained friends with people she saw every day as a freshman because they “look for the time to be together”. She tells me “We had a strong relationship, and then now that we don't live in the same place, we have grown a little bit apart . . . Then last week he got a problem again and he came to talk to me. The friendship is still there.”

“I've gained a lot of sense of home here”

Of all the students I interviewed, Victoria expressed the strongest sense of ease with her experience making friends as she discussed how moving from (her home country to the neighboring country) was not a positive experience with regard to making new friends and caused her to be anxious about a move to the U.S. for college. She told me:

Since my experience in (my last residence country) wasn't the best one with making friends, before coming (here) I was really worried (about) making friends. . . . Moving from (home to there) was terrible. . . . my new beginning in (my last residence country) wasn't the best, . . . it was tough thinking about making friends or starting again. At first I was really anxious, but as I got here it has been amazing. I love (it here). I love my friends, and I love everything. . . . (Although some of) my friends, other people haven’t had the same experience. Honestly, my friendship experience here has been really good. I think I have a person that can help me for anything that happens to me here). . . . I love, all the things (this place) does to help you make friends. Or just make you feel this is a good place not just to study, but to live.
She talks about how the residence halls, the clubs and organizations, and the overall freshman experience all supported her ability to make friends. Victoria’s experience pushes me to remember that while some may perceive the dominance of Spanish speaking friendships as negative, it can be overwhelmingly positive for the wellbeing of the individual student and positively impact their satisfaction in college.

**Takuma**

Takuma arrived exactly five minutes before our scheduled time. It was a cool and cloudy fall day and I was eager to get back into the warm building. His non-verbal cues showed his nervousness about meeting me so we engaged in a little small talk as we walked to the lobby. We agreed that instead of sitting by the window, which today offered little natural light, we would move closer to the main hallway to take advantage of the ceiling lights. He read through the consent form carefully and nervously laughed throughout parts of the interview. Throughout our initial exchange he seldom made eye contact with me which I had expected due to cultural norms in Japan. I was prepared for a very different type of exchange in this interview as compared to the previous interviews, specifically reminding myself to be comfortable with silence and to minimize my natural tendency to make direct eye contact. I pushed myself to count the seconds in between the time I last spoke to leave him time to both think and respond without me prompting him. I knew from my professional experience that sharing personal information, reflection, or talking to an older person who is a stranger were all factors that may cause anxiety for a Japanese student. Takuma had did not provide a definition of friendship in the survey, therefore I started the interview by asking him to share his definition of friendship and talk about if the definition had changed at all after coming to study in the U.S.
“I feel like knowing a person is not a friend”

Takuma was quick to state that friendship requires more than just sustained regular contact. He said “Friends would of course know the personal things, personal information, but also they tend to be my mental support, I guess, when I have some difficulties, or when I have to make big decisions. Like my major changing.” This is reinforced when he adds, “I feel like just knowing a person personally, is not a friend. I'm really comfortable with my friends, so I would tend to be hanging out with them or even rooming with them. I wouldn't room with a classmate that I casually talk.” He goes on to say that his definition of friendship hasn’t changed but he references the challenges caused by the change in scale from his high school. This is also where he shared with me that before starting college he was enrolled in a small international school located in Russia where he had only 80 students in his graduating class. He said:

Here, each grade is several thousand students and there's so many classes, so many sections for each class and we have the freedom to choose a class. So it's not always that we're going to have the same class and while it's nice that I can meet new people through this big population, it's kind of hard to really get to know each other. That's how I feel it's kind of difficult.

When I ask him to share how he was able to meet one of the friends on his diagram, he tells me a story about a male, Japanese friend who he met through the Japanese Student Association. He indicated he was looking for Japanese students and believes most international students pursue friendships “with their same ethnicity”. He further shared that he initially only saw this friend through the cultural student organization activities but over time they gained comfort with each other and started to meet up for other types of recreational activities which deepened their
friendship. When I pushed him to help me understand his perception about international students seeking friends within their own cultural and linguistic group he said:

I feel if you're living in a country that's outside of your country, it's pretty much a lot of stuff is different from how you think or how you talk or even how to perceive things. And in that way, if I am having the same nationality or background with a person, it's really easy to understand each other. How we think about things, how we perceive things. . . .

We have I guess, the same taste of for food and stuff. So we can go to the same restaurant. . . also, I feel the language also helps us, because we could speak in our own language. . . . For me, English is supposed to be also my primary language, because I've been living outside all the time, but still speaking in my language, Japanese, is much more comfortable.

Takuma shared a story with me about another friend who is Japanese American and who he refers to both on his diagram and in his storytelling as “partially international”. The concept of “partially international” was common in many of the students’ interviews. The term refers to Americans who also have a strong national heritage from another country. It reinforces the significance of the multicultural demographics of this campus. His story highlights another important facet of this study.

For Takuma, his relationship with this Japanese American friend became an important opportunity to challenge his preconceptions about what was “normal” behavior, allowed him to learn about his own identity, and challenged him in a way to consider other ways of living. In particular, he references not understanding her decision or rationale in choosing to be a vegetarian and her commitment to religion. He said:
I talk about diet with her, like why are you doing vegetarian and why not just a normal person, but I've never really been convinced by the reasons, but I also respect the reasons. . . . some of them are interesting to understand, but I just can't accept it. . . . not just because of the vegetarian, but also the religious stuff, because I'm not personally religious, but she's very religious. Sometimes she says, “Why don't you just try some religion?” because I have a lot of difficulties managing my feelings. At the same time, I feel it might be helpful. . . . but it's hard for me to actually get into religion.

When I ask him about which friends he would want to meet his family, he shares with me that he is most comfortable thinking about introducing his Japanese friends to his parents because of the common language and culture but says he probably would introduce all of his friends. This leads him into telling me a story about a friend from Singapore who he met through class but deepened the friendship by spending time outside of class with him because of a mutual friend. He said:

He was in the same dorm with me last year and we had the same class in the first semester, I think. A math class. And at first, I didn't really know him, even though I was in the same dorm because we were pretty far away, in terms of the room and I didn't really sit together with him, during the class. . . . One of my friends asked me to go to shopping with him and (this friend) also came, and I first introduced myself as being from Japan and he told me he’s from Singapore. At that point, I was, oh, he's an international student and I guess we might have something in common. And we started talking about how different U.S. and other countries are, in terms of many things and how we might have trouble getting jobs here or something. But I think while I was talking with him, during that shopping, I felt like I might become friends with him and after that
shopping, we started sitting together during the class and when we meet each other
during the hallway we just talk all the time.

This story again conveys the importance for Takuma to seek something or someone to bridge
cultural differences. The fact that they have a common friend who connected them and he could
immediately identify with him because they are both international students, provided an impetus
for Takuma to spend time with him. After spending time, he realizes that he enjoyed being
around him and has deepened the relationship.

“I’m trying to get some inspiration”

I asked Takuma about challenges he experienced making friends. He shared “I feel if I’m
really completely different from another person, it will be inspiring for me to know that person.
But it is very hard to start a conversation because if I have something in common, then I could
start with that and then try to diverge to more areas. That's why I look for commonalities.” I then
asked Takuma how his friends have influenced him. Interestingly he shares a story about a
Japanese friend who pushed him to see outside of what he refers to as a normal “Japanese
narrow-minded way”. He talks about how this friend was a leader in the cultural organization
and has shown him how to take a different path in life and has been inspirational to help him
think outside of his cultural norms. He tells me that before getting involved in the Japanese
Student Association he was struggling to make friends. He didn’t find the activities in the
residence hall helpful to make friends but he begins to tell me about his roommate who he says
was born in Korea but has been living in the U.S. for almost all of his life. Like a couple of the
other friends on the diagram, he identifies this friend as “partially international”. He talks about
how freshman year his roommate found him on Facebook and was interested in rooming with
him because he had a strong interest in Japanese culture. This roommate from freshman year is
in a fraternity now, and although they don’t spend as much time together as when they lived together, they are still good friends and “sometimes I just meet him at his frat house or he is also in a cultural club and we have events together.” He adds:

It was also very good for me in a way, because he understood how Japanese people think since Koreans and Japanese have some kind of commonality in thinking. Some of the customs. He was the one who actually told me about a lot about U.S. colleges. I didn’t even know about the fraternity culture. . . . He was my go-to person for the American culture too.

Takuma’s experience with his Korean American friend demonstrates the importance of individuals who serve to bridge across cultures. He says this friend understands how Japanese people think but also serves as his “go-to person” for understanding American culture.

Later Takuma is very up front that lack of accommodation is something that turns him off immediately from deepening a relationship with a person. He is up front that “cultural connection or an international background” are big factors for him. Although his parents have pushed him to make friends from the U.S., he expresses that he “is biased toward international students” because it is just easier to make friends with someone who already understands you.

He shared a story about meeting a close Japanese friend listed on his diagram, he said:

I feel international students have to have a feeling that they want to be friends with their same ethnicity, so I was looking for some Japanese students. And I met him at the club and it was ... initially, we were just club members, just doing activities together, but the more time I spent, we had some commonalities and interests.

He shared relief when he learned that the campus was very diverse and that there was a Japanese student organization where he knew he could meet people. He says that despite the diversity it is
necessary for the school to “introduce students to these options that are available . . . and really try to drive students to those activities, because students are really reluctant”. He confesses that “I just need some kind of push to actually get into that activity or event.” His awareness of himself and the hesitancy he has to engage across cultures was present throughout the interview.

Blue

Blue is a female Mechanical Engineering major from Brazil. I met with Blue on a weekday evening after a long day at work. She completed the friendship diagram activity very quickly and before starting the interview, pointed out that she wasn’t able to fill out each of the six available circles. She did not include any cultural group for any of the friends who were not listed as Brazilian. While she didn’t tell me what pseudonym she wanted me to use until after we finished the interview, I believe her name choice Blue was directly related to the emotions she conveyed in the one hour interview. We also spent more than 20 minutes talking after the audio recorder was turned off. She, like other students I interviewed, was forthcoming about her experience navigating mental health challenges.

“I don’t have many friends and I have very few friends from the U.S.”

Blue assured me that before starting college in the U.S. she was very interested in meeting people from other places and getting to know their culture. Friendship in her definition was tied to the culture, the attitudes and personalities of her friends. Before talking about herself, she tells me that her brother, who is enrolled at another U.S. college, has no Brazilian friends which is in contrast to her experience. As a result she points out, “He (my brother) got to know the culture. He dresses differently, he speaks differently. Different food. A lot of his friends are American.” She points to her diagram to tell me she lives with her best friend who she attended high school with in Brazil but was not friends with before starting college in the U.S. Later she
provides more depth about how she and her roommate are quite different in personality but their common national culture grounds their relationships during challenging times. She follows up reinforcing what others before her have pointed out by saying “I noticed with my other international friends, since we’re alone in the country, we tend to, not use other people as family but be closer to them, count on them to help with everything”.

She talks about her first year living in the dorm and how lonely she was but, now that she’s in an apartment, she and her friend study together in the living room, watch television together like a family does, and cook meals together. She recalls how she missed the comfort of home her freshman year because her living situation was so bad. She shared how the horrible roommate situation from her freshman year led her to meet and deepen relationships with most of the friends listed on the diagram. She shared:

I had a really, really bad roommate, which made me stay out of the room most of the time. There was a study space in the building I used to live, and that's how I met him [points to diagram]. I used to sleep on his couch most of the nights when (my roommate) came back drunk. He and his roommate would let me stay with them, which is kind of nice. It's funny that the friendships continue today, even though I don't use their couch anymore. . . . That made me closer to my other friends like (them) [points to the diagram]. They are both from Brazil. Since they knew how bad the situation was I would sometimes sleep in (her) dorm, or they would stay with me for most of the time so I wouldn't feel alone with my roommate. When I came here I was expecting, not to have a bestie roommate, but to learn from her and get to know her. But that didn’t happen. . . . I couldn’t complete one single paper (referring to the friendship diagram). I have (these three). . . they are my closest friends.
She tells me that the Brazilian Student Association was her link to meeting Brazilians and is lucky that one of her friends has also been with her in all of her mechanical engineering classes. She emphasizes that she never considered rooming with her current Brazilian roommate her freshman year because their personalities are so different but they both had a really bad first year roommate experience and that helped them to bond. When I point out another friend she hasn’t talked about on the diagram, she tells me:

She is from Georgia (U.S.). She's quite different. . . . I didn't notice that we were as close as we are until a month ago when she was talking to me about the friend that she likes. . . . It's something that I didn't expect to happen; when we started talking we had a calculus class together. She sat next to me. She had difficulty with questions so I helped her. Then we continued talking along the semester and I thought it would end last semester. But it didn't. We have Physics class together. She tries to make the friendship work even though we're not in as many classes as we used to be. . . . We sometimes get lunch. But, she has a really busy schedule. She works a lot so it's hard to get together. And, she goes to my apartment sometimes because she lives alone, and she feels very lonely.

When she talks about her relationship with this friend, it is clear that she values the time they spend together. Yet she seems to be surprised that they are still friends. This sentiment becomes easier to understand when she talks about her lunch friends and the self-imposed barriers she seems to put up around herself related to putting in the effort required to build relationships with others.

“**I’m not very good at keeping friends**”

Blue tells me about other students, mainly graduate students, that she meets for lunch sometimes in the dining hall but says they are not listed on her diagram because “They are my
lunch friends. We don’t talk as much about personal stuff... We talk about school... but it’s not a personal conversation as I have with my other friends”. She goes on to say that she is often asked to go out to spend time with people but she prefers to focus on other things. She said:

I like studying, and watching TV, and reading most of the time. I just rather do that instead of talking to people. It's hard to keep close friends like that. People usually just go away. (This is) something that happened in high school also. I had really close friends but then I kind of forgot them and they just went away. Something that hasn't happened yet with any of them, but I feel like it might happen if maybe if I change classes and we don't have that kind of (sustained time together) anymore.

Blue is aware that making friends requires effort and her friends have to take a more active role to maintain a friendship with her. She tells me the people she has listed on her diagram are like her and okay with not being together all of the time. She acknowledges that her freshman year roommate experience and an intense illness she experienced last spring are experiences that solidified the depth of connection she has with the friends listed on her diagram. She emphasizes that it is more important to her to have “quality over quantity” of friends. She talked about a time she considered leaving college and recalls thinking about the loss of her friends as something that kept her in school. Common experience has been an important connection. She shared:

I have, not depression, but I tried to kill myself a few months ago. My mother doesn't know that. My parents don't know that. It's been happening every two years for about 10 years now. It's okay I can deal with (it) by myself, but (my roommate) walked in and she was really scared, and I feel really sorry for her. They sat with me and those two [points to diagram] trying to convince me to go to talk to a psychologist. But, it's not going to happen. I feel that they are not going to judge me as much as my parents will. They are in
the same thing. (My roommate) went through (her own struggles) last semester and we helped her. I think they understand me more.

In this story, she also communicates that her freshman year challenges, the common experiences, are absolutely what pushed her to maintain her existing close friendships. Her story also reinforces her prominent concerns about losing her friends and leaving school.

After the interview with Blue, I spent time talking with her to ask how she was feeling specifically related to the stories she shared about suicide attempts. We talked broadly about her father and his mental health experiences. I talked to her about campus resources including the variety of counseling based services that are offered in addition to psychological assessments. She focused on the efforts she had been making to read books recommended by her father and how they were helping her significantly. She countered, asking me to consider ways that the institution’s counseling services were not what she wanted or needed. I made the decision not to push Blue about her assumptions of what counseling services provided. While talking with her was heartbreaking, I also felt strongly that she wasn’t a threat to herself or others and felt a need to respect the agency she displayed in her decisions not to seek help from campus resources and pursue other options.

**Nick**

Nick’s interview was scheduled on a weekday evening. I had to make a more conscious transition from my day time mode to slow down and focus on being mindful. I met Nick in the hallway of the academic building and we walked up the stairs to enter my office building and arrive to my office. Making small talk with Nick was much easier than I had anticipated as he displayed his comfort with this type of communication. We settled into my office quickly and I
proceeded to introduce Nick to the consent form. He didn't spend much time reviewing the form and quickly moved to the last page to sign it.

Nick identified as a male, mechanical engineering student from China. Chinese students are the largest group of international students in the U.S. and on the site of this study with regard to national origin. I responded to a few clarifying questions about the diagram activity including questions about what “cultural group” meant and if he had to fill the whole. I reminded him that the activity was intended to help him reflect on his friendships and that he determined what cultural group meant. He feverishly wrote out the names of six friends, reviewed what he wrote, and stated he had finished the activity unless I wanted him to complete another page.

Nick’s rapid pace of speech and strong accent caused me to again minimize note taking during the recorded interview. I started by restating the definition of friendship he shared in the survey. He wrote “Friends are someone that I regularly engage in activities with, recreational or professional. They are of personal help to me in time of need, and I am willing to help him/her when she requests.” Because of previous experiences engaging in class with Chinese undergraduate students, I was prepared to use prompts in the interview to push Nick to share stories or reflections about his experiences. Using prompts proved to be unnecessary since Nick was eager to share his perspective about the experience making friends in the U.S. in addition to his own stories. Nick’s interview was almost an hour and a half, the longest out of the nine students.

Throughout the interview Nick was reflective and conveyed a very strong sense of self-awareness. It conveyed that he had decided, before arriving to the U.S., he would need to be flexible and accommodate different cultural values in order to make friends with his U.S. and international peers. Nick was quick to state that his definition of friendship has not changed since
starting college but described how the environment for making friends has changed dramatically. He described how his activities as a high school student in China were “more restricted” and the time “committed to school” meant he didn’t meet people outside of a small circle in his classes. Throughout the interview he conveys a message that college in the U.S. “it’s more open” giving him choice over who he wants to meet, how he spends his time, and what values he uses to make decisions. This led him to share the story about how he met his first year and current roommate.

**Match.com for Roommates: “I just let fate decide”**

Nick told me how he and his roommate were matched together based on the matching process used by campus housing. He strongly desired to have a “typical” American roommate and added that he “saw this guy (in the housing matching system) and I automatically assumed he is white”. They started chatting about motor sports and about firearms and identified they had common interests. He recalled a story about the first days on campus where his parents met his roommate’s parents over dinner and emphasized, “It’s a very special thing when you meet your roommate for the first time”. He said he was very aware that the cultural norm in China which include body contact with close friends wasn’t going to be appropriate in this new environment. He told me another example about how in China he is accustomed to talking with friends using jokes and banter, sharing that “here in America I’m cautious”. He shared that he and his roommate have similar desire to sleep early, which he noted is unusual for a college student but a common behavior that supported their ability to successfully room together. During the first seven months of living with his roommate, Nick told him each time he went somewhere alone with the understanding that if Nick didn’t come back, it was an indication he was probably in trouble. He added that his roommate’s mom once told him, “If (my son) gets arrested, make sure you call me to bail him out” [laughing]. These statements, made early in the interview,
demonstrated a strong willingness on Nick’s part to be accommodating and display respect for differences in order to be friends with his roommate. He was invited to Texas to spend Thanksgiving with his roommate’s family his first year in college; his friendship deepened throughout the year, and he is living again this year with the same roommate. He shared with me that “he knows many Chinese people on WeChat” and that most of them used WeChat to find a roommate. He said, “If a Chinese is going to live with a Chinese it would be easier and can help each other out. Most of us have really never known a foreigner, a non-Chinese. It can be a challenging experience.” He follows up immediately with “We’re in America, it is part of the reason you study abroad, to meet new people. . . . You’ve made a conscious decision here to do things to behave a little differently and to respond a bit differently”. Nick’s statements and experiences throughout the interview display an understanding of his fellow Chinese peers alongside a conscious decision to chart a different course through being intentional about challenging himself to connect with U.S. peers and to be flexible when in situations which contrast with his customary way of being.

“That movie ‘Cars’”

I pushed Nick to help me better understand his willingness to be flexible and adapt in his new environment in an effort to make friends and his experiences making those decisions. He told me about his strong desire to use insults, jokes, or engage in banter with his American friends but that he recognizes it would be perceived as inappropriate. He said “I know when we are close friends when this (using his jokes) is okay and that makes me feel closer to this person. I’m just more cautious about this (here) because I don’t want to offend people”. He tells me that this level of trust an authenticity exists with a few of his “real Chinese friends”. When I notice on his diagram that he didn’t list any of these friends, I ask him why. He corrected me and shows
me he listed them as a group on the diagram stating “They are all sort of the same”. I ask him to talk to me about this statement and he deflects and starts a story which illuminates the previous point about not being as comfortable being vulnerable with his U.S. friends, in this case his roommate. He told me a story about returning to his apartment recently saying he was “very careful” entering the apartment to avoid disturbing his roommate who, like Nick, normally goes to bed by 10:30. In the morning he proactively apologized to his roommate because “that’s good communication”. When his roommate tells Nick that he didn’t wake him up, Nick instinctively, because he has a close relationship with his roommate, said “Yeah, I see you slept really sound, I was trying to choke you and you didn’t even realize.” Nick describes the shock on his roommate’s face which made him conclude that his joke was “over the line”. He talked about how he tried to recover from his statement and his roommate regained his composure but told me it was clear he caught his roommate “off-guard” all the same. He recalled thinking “This is bad . . . to the relationship because he’s going to think I’m a freaky guy. . . . I could definitely do this with people I identify as friends in China”. He shared a metaphor using the Pixar movie ‘Cars’.

We’re a bunch of cars. I'm manufactured in China, with my friends, all of the cars, I see the chains they use, the tires they use, what kind of suspensions they use, so we're going to have the same performance, pretty much the same performance. I can just drive the way I want. . . . I know them. . . . I know what kind of jokes they have told, what kind of insults they have taken from other people, and I know they're okay with this. Now, I go to America as a Hyundai and I see this bulky V8 muscle car. I don't know what they (the V8) does so I start real slow and be careful. . . . I just assumed. . . . In China I just joke
and in America it's not what the T.V. says. People here are very cautious. . . . I'm a little bit disappointed in all of that, but it's okay.

“Who counts their friends?”

Nick then tells me he feels “happy” when he thinks about the friends he listed on the diagram, yet follows with a statement which conveys a sense of worry about whether he has enough friends. He asks himself out loud if he should “lower the threshold” or not. He further described the types of interactions he has with some of the friends listed, saying he would never ask his roommate to go to dinner like he would his girlfriend. He told me time with his roommate and other U.S. friends is often spent track shooting at the shooting range, go cart racing, or doing other types of campus activities which he seems to assume are appropriate for a male American friend. He shared with me a story about how a friendship developed with another friend listed due to their student club which involved designing, building and flying rockets for competition. In particular he focuses on a friend who he labels international because he is from Canada and how he just realized that he speaks “really good” Chinese. He told me he was “stuck in a generalization that he didn’t speak Chinese” and this new awareness has influenced him to get closer by offering let this friend borrow his car for a driving exam and offer him guidance about how to guy a car in the U.S. He goes on to say that “just because he's Chinese, I kind of feel like he can take more jokes”. After I push him to help me understand his assumptions he shared another car metaphor. He said:

It's easier for me to recognize other Chinese who can take banter, but it's more difficult to recognize if they're American to do that. . . . I probably can push other people too, and they would have a good time, but I'm cautious. It's like you're driving a Mustang. You don't know how it will shift around corners, you don't want to push those cars.
When prompted, Nick identifies that he categorizes the friendships with students who aren’t Chinese like him a little bit differently, in terms of the ways that the friendship develops and what he does as a friend. He said, when I asked him what surprises him about his diagram, “It’s not a lot of people, but I guess it’s good.” This message communicates the conflict I hear in some of his stories. He has had success achieving his goal to make friends with his U.S. peers. At the same time, he conveys concern about the quality or depth of his relationships with his U.S. peers. Specifically, his stories highlight a difference in the degree of vulnerability and depth with his U.S. friends and how that is different from his Chinese friends because he doesn’t have to worry about their motives or modify his behaviors.

“Friendship is part of the package”

Up to this point Nick has introduced a lot of imagery to help me better understand his experiences and the decisions he has made to pursue friendship in college. I ask him to imagine giving advice to a new international student about making friends. First, he shared how unsettling it was at first to talk to strangers, pointing out that this is something that isn’t done in China unless you are trying to peddle goods to someone. He followed up with this advice:

I guess don't be afraid of being awkward or something because awkward is a very interesting feeling for yourself. Talk to people, and when people talk to you don't assume you're a stranger, and talk to them. Don't spend all of the time, this is what a lot of Chinese people do, they do their homework and want to get A's on everything.

While reflecting about what he just said to me, he stated that while making friends is great, “it’s not all about making friends”. Instead, the process of making friends requires “engaging in new experiences” and while college is about learning, it isn’t just about studying. He shared this experience with me:
For example, archery club, I didn't really know archery, but it's pretty cool. . . . I joined this club. . . . I'm learning stuff, it’s really interesting. And I'm like hey I wish I would have taken this as a credit and put more time with this. It's interesting to learn and it's very rewarding. I didn't know that before I came to (campus).

He recalled how this experience reinforced how he had to make decisions to do things outside of his cultural norms in order to support his curiosity and motivation to learn. He told me that before coming to college he and his friend’s worshipped achievement. His experiences so far in college have taught him to “look at it differently”. He said, “If somebody says hey this guy is American he graduated in two years, I’d say oh, he probably didn't have any life or something. I would joke about it. . . . After I came to the US, I realize there is more than just clubs.” Through trying many things, he has realized “benefits” to his “personal development”.

Nick shared several stories about friends listed on the diagram which conveyed that common interests, common culture, or common experiences in addition to regular contact are fundamental to all of his friendships. What is interesting is that, again, he is adamant that his Chinese friendships are “automatic” because of the similar upbringing and culture and that his U.S. and international friends are a result of common interests. It is clear that as I ask Nick to talk about his friendships it causes considerable reflection. He shared how important the effortless relationships with his Chinese friends are and said, “Sometimes I need to get in the comfort zone a little bit”. He also conveyed a conflicting message that he values being curious about others and learning through contact with others he perceives as different from himself. Nick conveyed his strong value in balancing different types of relationships. Interestingly the interview concludes with a recommendation, situated in recent campus events, that it is more essential that this institution encourage students to pursue a diverse friendships than put
“millions of dollars into the counseling center to address students’ mental health.” In Nick’s mind, making friends has a direct impact on mental health. When I asked about this he said “Yes, you have to have people to talk to if you don’t have them, then that's bad. You've got to let the water flow out.” His feeling that the institution has a responsibility to support students to develop friendships stands out from other interviews and reflects his cultural values.

Alex

Alex was the only student whose participation in the interview was a result of being recruited by a colleague in my office who identified that he met the sample criteria. Alex was hired by a staff member in the office I work to serve as a welcome ambassador to newly arriving international students for the fall 2017 semester. I remembered Alex from the teambuilding activity just a few months prior and perceived him as amiable, having a great sense of humor, displaying adaptability throughout the teambuilding activity and debrief. My colleague suggested Alex for my study because he had demonstrated he was a student who could easily make connections during time he worked in our office. My colleague knew I had interviewed several students from Latin America and Asia and told me Alex was Russian. Alex was familiar with the location of my office and met me in the hallway a few minutes before our scheduled time.

I gave Alex the consent form and he carefully read through each section of the form. I reminded him I would ask him to select a pseudonym if he wanted to. He responded quickly and told me to choose one for him. His only question was about what type of stories I was expecting from him. I could tell he was worried about what he might be asked and how to best respond. I told him that I wanted to learn about his experience through stories he was comfortable sharing.
instead of short answers to specific questions. He still seemed hesitant, but I moved on to begin
the friendship diagram activity in an effort to get started and not impact the interview.

He had questions about how I wanted him to label cultural groups. I advised him that this
was a part of the diagram because the literature on cross cultural friendships highlights the
importance of culture in developing relationships, but for the purposes of this activity, he could
decide what was important to list or how to identify. Alex struggled more than most students to
complete the friendship diagram as a result of not being given specific direction. I followed up
by telling him he didn’t have to write anything if he wasn’t sure how to respond. I also reassured
him that there were no right or wrong responses in the activity or in our interview because the
focus of the study was to hear stories about his experiences making friends, and this was unique
to him. He seemed to appreciate hearing this as I sensed his facial expression and posture relax.
He completed the friendship diagram on one page, although like several other students, he
mentioned friends not listed during the interview and when offered the option, added them to a
new sheet of paper. Alex had identified as a male, computer science major in the survey where
he also indicated his definition of friendship was:

A relationship that is built on affection. Friendship is shared between individuals who
enjoy each other's company, but also have genuine concern for one another's well-being.
It's an investment in a person that you care about, as you often have to go out of the way
to help them. In return, however, you know that they will go out of their way to help you.

“Friendship is an investment”

Alex’s definition of friendship emphasized the relational aspects. He stated that the
definition hasn’t changed in college but that he needs more time to develop the same types of
friends he had prior to college because they were developed over many years. He told me that his
diagram reflects the friendships he has had the most contact with at college and had invested the most time and effort.

When I ask him how he felt completing the activity, the focus shifted back on the challenge he had with assigning a cultural group. He said that he only wrote something down if he “was pretty sure they would identify themselves” in that way and he tried “not to guess for them” indicating that he didn’t want to “make too many assumptions” if he didn’t know exactly what they would answer.

Alex said he feels happiness when thinking about the friendships displayed on the diagram. He said, “I have so many friends in so many different groups and such a variety of people who are all really awesome, and at the same time, have really specific and unique interests.” Alex began to talk about a friend listed on his diagram he met through his involvement in a student club and focused on how they both have common interests in particular with developing a “smart watch”. He conveyed excitement because he and this friend can relate to each other and are enthusiastic about similar things.

He then told me about his membership in a fraternity and how this provides him a lot of opportunities to interact with peers who are in different majors but have a common goal and experiences. He followed up quickly by pointing to a friend he met through an internship last summer and another who he met during his time as a student ambassador welcoming international students last fall and how the training they both participated in gave them an opportunity to get to know each other. I push him to recall a story. He shared the story about “his first friend here”, his first year roommate. He told me how a group of guys went to play basketball including him and his roommate which is when he identified they were “both equally
terrible at basketball”. They also happened to be in the same major which helped them both
during registration for classes. He further conveys the importance of similarities when he said:

I feel like with each one of my close friends, I went through at least one really good
bonding experience, I feel like that was really good for me having a situation where we
both are trying to do the same thing or have an experience together ... essentially both
feeling the same thing. . . . Once I already had one really close experience, afterwards the
rest of the process to becoming friends didn't have to have a specific bonding experience.
Once you have an experience like that I feel where you kind of get to understand each
other and kind of see that they think similarly or maybe they find the same things funny.

Afterwards it's a lot easier to slowly make that a stronger friendship.

The message conveyed in this story is fundamental to Alex’s experience making friends. He
recognizes that in his experience, making friends requires commonality as an opportunity to
deepen a friendship over time.

“Finding time or putting effort into branching out, trying different things”

Later in the interview Alex mentions how he used to have a harder time with the initial
interaction with a new person. He said “something I used to be not good with is meeting people
for the first time” and something he has “been getting better at” is meeting new people. He
acknowledged that after his first semester, he began to push himself to try to make the first
contact and find things to do with new people, for example studying, joining a club, or pursuing
an opportunity that allowed him to branch out. He speaks to how being a welcome ambassador
was an opportunity that wasn’t something he ever thought about but because there were so many
different students hired he was able to learn about their hobbies, interests, and realize how
people’s lives were really different. It was “cool”. He finished by stating that he knows he needs
to “make the initial contact” and “if you really want to be friends with them, and then you can
figure out if that friendship will work or not”. He further stated, after you “rely on someone” and
feel like you give or receive something out of your relationship, it is easier to deepen the
relationship over time. Importantly with Alex, a common cultural group isn’t a condition in any
of his stories. He said:

Maybe for me I don't have a great amount of cultural identification with my friends, or
that's not, at least for me, the reason I'm friends with them, just because they're not that
many people. . . . I was born in Russia and I lived in Canada for a while, there were no
Russian people and also not that many Canadian people here, so at least for me that
wasn't a thing. I know for some of my other friends I think it was. . . . For them that was
the way they hit it off and the reason they're friends.

In this story he conveys how his experience making friends isn’t rooted in national identity
because there are few, if any, who can related to being both Russian and Canadian.

He spoke about his friendships as being “on the same level and balanced” with regard to
the give and take support for each other. While Alex ended up adding three additional friends
during the interview, he also shared with me his decision not to list a friend. He said “I want to
be friends with him, but also if that club, for example, stopped existing today, I don't know if
we'd continue talking or being friends.” He told me that the other friends listed on his diagram
are people he is more confident will continue to be friends regardless of time and place, but he is
not alone in conveying concern about the potential for friendships to endure changes. After
further reflection he said:

A lot of the closest friends I have right now are same (class) year as me. . . . We were all
just trying to make friendships and getting to know each other (last year), which maybe
helped us make a stronger friendship. . . . A lot of the friendships I made later were with people outside my specific major or in different years.

Alex communicated to me that thinking about his experiences making friends allowed him time to reflect on what he did soon after arriving to campus and how his strategies changed in his second semester, which has resulted in positive outcomes with regard to the diversity of his friends.

Joining the fraternity is a specific example he shared with me as an example because he strongly feels that the decision to join a fraternity has been a positive one with regard to making friends. He said, “(the fraternity) had a lot of unique people, I feel like some fraternities on campus are just all really similar people. . . . it was just a lot of unique people from different backgrounds, international students too”. He closed the interview stating “Everyone's so unique, everyone has completely different backgrounds. Some people do have cultural groups they base their friendships on but, in my case, I don't.” This reinforces the importance Alex sees in having a sense of belonging with a recognition that “students’ experiences will be very different because there's not a cultural group for every student to necessarily build those connections” and the ways people develop friendships is unique.

Xuan (Shoo-en)

I was excited for my last scheduled interview with Xuan. Being a little hyped up from a busy workday, I immediately appreciated her calming demeanor. Once we arrived to my office, we spent several minutes talking about some of the things displayed on my walls. I was grateful for this time to shift my mental state and focus on the interview with her. I shared the consent form with Xuan who read it carefully, asked me about the pseudonym, and let me know right then the name she wanted me to use. After she signed the consent form, she asked why I was
looking at the experiences international students had making friends. I let her know that I
selected this topic because I felt it was important to increase the awareness and understanding of
international students’ experiences, knowing how friendship is important to all humans. I told
her that the interviews I had conducted up to that point reassured this was a valuable study.

Xuan identified in her survey as a female, mechanical engineering major, and the only
student who listed three languages. Xuan’s spoken English was by far the easiest to understand
out of all of the students I interviewed. Interestingly, she brought a story about language into the
interview when reflecting on what she expected it would be like to be an international student. I
would soon hear stories with an undertone of worry, with a sense of being alone, and which
showed that most of Xuan’s social life was tied to her involvement in campus ministries because
of her strong Christian values. Xuan’s emotionally charged stories caused me, at times, to be
overwhelmed with sadness and empathy.

During the friendship diagram activity, Xuan completed a single page and looked over
her diagram with a pensive facial expression. I let her know that it would be okay if she decided
she wanted to add additional friends later on a new sheet, indicating that this had occurred with
other students. She let me know that wouldn’t be necessary, that these were the only people she
considered friends. I took quick look at her diagram as I was preparing the audio and noticed that
almost all of the friends were connected to a campus Christian student organization or activity.
This was the first student I interviewed who had demonstrated any affiliation with organized
religion in their diagram.

“You know them on a different level”

Xuan did not complete the survey question to provide a definition of friendship. In the
interview when I asked, she said “People that I hang out with a lot and people that I can go to
study with and feel comfortable around. . . hang out with them outside of classes. . . that I can laugh around with”. When I asked if this definition has changed since arriving to campus, she said, “The general concept is the same, but I feel like the friendships here and friendships back home is very different. . . I don't really know these people for that long, but back home, a lot of the friends that I have, I grew up with. . . It's just you know them on a different level.”

Throughout the interview with Xuan the concept of time and depth of friendships is present in many of her experiences. She tells me that her diagram lists “the closest person that I have in each community that I have here”. She described two primary campus student ministries she is involved with and comments on one friend who is also involved in both.

I later learn from Xuan that this friend is her boyfriend and is the first person she met in the U.S. before arriving to campus. She recalled the way that a former graduate of the campus visited her community church in Malaysia just prior to leaving for college and ensured that Xuan was connected to a current student and his family upon her arrival. She said, “He (her boyfriend) helped me adjust to college. Because through his connections, I stayed with his family the first day I was in the U.S.” He was involved in several campus Christian student organizations which he encouraged her to be a part of although she already knew she “wanted to be a part of a Christian campus ministry”. She recalled that “he was the only person I knew in the U.S. at that time” and she “felt more comfortable going to events and those places.” She remembered thinking that she wasn’t even sure if she’d keep in touch with him but said:

The fact that I started going to CCF and RUF, and he goes there, and I go to church with him too. Through that, we just got to know each other a lot better. Then, he knew at certain points when I was homesick or whatever, and he would just be there even though
he wasn't my super close friend at that time. He was just there because he empathized with how I was feeling my first year.

Many of her stories included her first friend, now boyfriend. In her stories about him, there is a stronger connection and depth than is conveyed in other friendships.

When I asked her about his displays of empathy she said, “I've gotten to know him a lot better than all my other friends here, so I think, he just could read me better. I'm actually dating him right now, but it's a work in progress.” She conveyed confidence in her relationship with him and how she has been more vulnerable with him than her other U.S. friends. She described a general ability to “tell him if there's something on my mind, something going on back home that I feel like I'm missing out on and stuff. Then he would just be there to listen basically. He was just there for support.” When I ask if there is a specific story she can tell me about the trust she has with her friends, she said:

I'm still working on the whole trust thing. I do feel I'm a lot closer to a number of these people [points to diagram], but it is definitely tough to trust them on a very deep level if you've only known them for one year. I do think that I trust him [pointing to her boyfriend on the diagram] quite a bit if you're talking about him specifically. I wouldn't say it’s like 110% trust at the moment, because it hasn't really been that long.

When I ask her tell me how looking at the diagram makes her feel, she says many of the “connections” are in a “budding stage” and a “transitioning stage”. With all of the stories she tells me about friendships she has made in college, there is an undertone of concern about permanency. She followed up with, “I don't know if it's going to be the same way next semester or next year because college is like ... Everyone is busy and on their own, and if you're not taking the same course or classes, you can drift apart. . . It feels like an initial stage, even though it's
been one year.” She then pointed out that there are two friends, her boyfriend and another male friend who is from Singapore whom she has the most sense of permanency with. She also told me a story about a friend from freshman year that she decided to room with this year but they barely even talk now that they are living together. She reflected:

It felt like she didn't want to make an effort anymore to bridge certain cultural differences. It feels like she'd rather be friends with people that she can make an instant connection with. She already has high school friends here. . . . It's just a lot easier for her to just keep those friends, and not have to make any other new friends. I guess building on our friendship was extra work.

Again, throughout the interview, she reflects on the depth of her friendships and said she has “been feeling pretty worried about my relationships here at college actually”. Looking at the diagram reminds her that she has friends to hang out with, talk to, and share things with but she stated “it's not always going to be there. It doesn't feel like I have a grasp on these friendships.” She says she’s excited to meet new friends if some friendships listed on her diagram change in the coming year, which she expects they will, but she circles back to her “wish that there could be more permanencies” for more friends than just the two.

“We connected because he is from Singapore. My mom is from Singapore”

I ask her to tell me a story about someone else on the diagram and without hesitation she tells me about the other “closest friend”. She said, “We hit it off in the first week of school. . . the fact that I had met him at (orientation) and the fact that we had shared a common thing. I mean, it's a neighboring country. We started studying together.” While they haven’t had any classes together, she says they quickly became “accountability” study buddies. She also points out that her other friends don’t understand her the same way because they are American and “he also
understands feeling homesick” making it “a lot easier to connect with him, because he's also not from here”. She said “He could understand coming from Southeast Asia, the differences in culture and things like that, things that we struggle with like language.” She recalled that “it was just an instant connection because we had similar backgrounds”. When I ask her about advice she would offer a student new to campus, she said, “I could change one thing, it would be to pick one (organization/thing) that I really liked at the beginning, and just invest my time in that” to help deepen the friendships I made.

She said students should pursue activities based on their passions and uses rock climbing as an example, which learn more about in another story. She talked about being prepared to be in a room where others knew each other and not getting too frustrated by the challenges of making friends in this type of space. When talking about setting herself up for the challenge, she said “I think that made it tough, but it's just mentally prepping yourself. It's tough, but it has to start somewhere, right?” She told me that she realized early on that her roommate wasn’t interested in the campus ministry which caused her to decide that she “didn't want to let that stop (her), because otherwise, she’d have no friends here. I had to psych myself up for doing it (going out alone).” She continued saying she was prepared to go four or five times to meetings knowing she “wouldn't immediately have deep connections or deep friendships” before giving up. She expressed that she was glad that wasn’t necessary.

She spoke about the “interns” that the campus ministry hires to “reach out to people who show up who are new just to make them feel welcome”. She said, “Even though I didn't feel really close to these people. . . the fact that they are making an effort to remember my name, that definitely kept me going.” She said:
“There aren't a lot of Malaysians over here, but I have an instant connection with the Malaysians that I do find over here. They (Malaysians) tend to group together. One thing I realized is that it's just so much easier... like with (my Singaporean friend), we have an instant connection. We have similar understandings of certain world views. . . . It's just a lot easier. I think the fact that the majority here is American, it's just a lot easier to make friends with other Americans, and not have to. . . because you don't have a shortage of Americans over here, so you don't really have to bring that effort to make friends with people who aren't similar to you.”

Xuan’s interview is the most direct with stating her perception about American’s lack of interest in engaging across cultures, but she wasn’t the only one to express similar feelings.

“**Americans say banana. I say bonona**”

As I explore this relationship with her international friend, she brings up a common experience of her American friends “making fun of” the way she pronounces things. She indicates how it’s a very simple example of differences that manifest into frustration because “nobody understands what I'm saying”. She then switched to how he also can relate to missing certain foods and shared how they lead groups of “other Asian and non-Asians, Americans” to local “Asian restaurants” when they are “interested in trying” their cuisine. She beams as telling me that it was “pretty fun because we could get excited over the same things”. She displayed a similar enthusiasm when she told me a story about a graduate student friend who is a member of the campus ministry but also someone she recently identified has a common passion for rock climbing. She told me her enthusiasm is because “if I didn't have her, I probably would totally give up rock climbing, because it's tough, time consuming, to keep up with something like that.” If she didn’t have a friend to go with her, she would likely spend her time doing other things with
friends. When I asked her to talk about challenges to making friends, she shared a story about being unprepared for the English language to create a barrier. She said:

I thought I'd be fine. I'd fit in just fine. It started out that way, where people didn't assume I was from anywhere else. Language wise, they all thought I was American until I said bananas and banana, but I think, what really made the difference though in making friendships and stuff that I realized recently is that culturally, even though I speak very much like an American, culturally, we're still very different. I just feel like sometimes, they wouldn't understand my perspective in things. It is definitely challenging.

She continued telling me that she often gets into conversations at the campus ministry or when they have their trivia programs that everything is “American pop culture or American things” and she just stays quiet because she doesn’t know anything. She highlighted that “there are a few people who are interested in where I come from, and want to know more about a different country, but for the most part, I think, a lot of people are just like, ‘America, that's all I need to know’.”

She said she has certain perspectives that don’t align with the “popular view” in that her Christian values are more conservative than her American peers, specifically with regard to expressions of intimacy with a partner. She told me, “This is a weird topic, but kissing or making out, things like that. . . . I come from a more conservative society, but over here, even if you're not dating someone, you kiss them. In frat parties, you make out with people you don't know.”

This story conveyed the conflict that resonates throughout Xuan’s interview in relation to her desire to deepen relationships with American peers while also recognizing that many of them are unaware or uninterested in understanding her worldview.
When I push her, it helps me see it’s even deeper than lack of understanding; some of the community she values are unable to demonstrate respect for her viewpoints, which in the example she shared are more conservative than theirs. She recalled, “I felt like my viewpoint, I was being shot down because of that. They were like ‘Oh, it's not that big of a deal. You're making a big deal out of it. That’s not the way we do things here’.” When I convey to Xuan what I understood from her story, she agreed that she felt her individual viewpoint or stance on the particular topic was rejected but also that because the individuals had the majority opinion they weren't even open to hearing a different viewpoint. She told me she felt they were telling her to “change your viewpoint.”

“An exception. . . . an exotic factor”

As we near the middle of the interview, Xuan states in no uncertain terms that her relationship with her boyfriend is “definitely an exception”. She said:

If did not have that mutual friend in Malaysia who connected me with his family, I would not be friends with him just because there's so much difference, and he doesn't have to go out of his way to make friends with me, because he's in a fraternity and stuff. He has his other friends, American friends that he can be friends with. That (the mutual friend) allowed us to connect in some way.

She goes on to day that in her first year she had more “non-Asian friends” and now she is “gravitating” toward Asian American friends because “maybe it’s easier to connect with them” since “they have a heritage that is similar somewhat to mine”. These statements are examples of the conflict that I hear throughout her interview. She told me, “if I were stuck with just Malaysians, I wouldn’t really be exposed to other viewpoints” yet, outside of her two closest friends, she can only share one additional story about a friend who displays a genuine curiosity
and desire to learn more about her culture. She told me the story of an American friend from the campus ministry who “is genuinely interested in me as a person” and made her feel very welcomed. She stated that this friend she was just very genuinely interested in how she “was different and how she could learn from my experiences, my view of the world”. Overall though, she said many of the students in the campus ministry she is so heavily involved with are “not similar enough” and “they don't want to make that effort to bridge any differences that might be there” which results in feeling “like I'm an outsider here in the U.S.”.

Another important message conveyed by Xuan is tied to financial matters. She told me how often she isn’t able to participate in activities which might allow her to deepen her relationships with friends because the campus ministry groups tend “to bond over fancy outings”. Xuan provides context about the volatile currency rate, reminds me that as an out of state resident her tuition is much higher than many of the friends in her community, and notes that many are close to family which gives them easier access to financial support. She said, “I'm still trying to find a proper community that doesn't cost me any money”.

After really opening up to me about her feelings of not entirely fitting in with her current friends or being welcomed to the extent she expected, she tells me a heart wrenching story about walking back from a grocery store near campus with her Singaporean friend. A car full of girls drove by them and yelled out the windows to tell them to “Get out of our [expletive] country!” She said this event was both unexpected and also heightened her feelings of being unwelcomed here. She further described feelings which caused her to question if her boyfriend or other friends she had made were really interested in knowing her or if it is “temporary maybe just because I'm temporarily exotic or something. I'm different”. She told me that these feelings may be tied to soon after her arrival when she let people know she liked to draw henna. She noticed many
people gravitated to her initially but after they no longer had interest beyond getting their henna, they didn’t try to deepen their understanding of who she is.

She said she also questions the depth that exists in her relationships because her local friends can offer each other things and reciprocate things in a way she can’t. She told me that she feels excluded from the “you show me your world. I'll show you mine” type of friendship because she doesn’t “have a home to invite people to, so it's tough to get invited over”. She sees invitations being offered, but without the ability to reciprocate or travel or do other things that cost money, she is left out of these offers here. She also indicated that she feels making new friends in her second year is tougher because classes are even harder, everyone is busier, and more people already have established their social networks.

By the time the interview with Xuan ends, she has described several other examples of ways that American’s have conveyed a “my country is better than your country” message in conversations with her. She tells me that she doesn’t focus on these experiences because she knows that not all Americans are this way, but that these experiences “sting” and also bolster her relationship with her Singaporean friend because he can understand her hurt and frustration and also keep her spirits up in a way that she finds comforting. She told me that she has perceived different treatment from peers who don’t know she is from abroad. She said she felt others convey a message that she is “inferior,” that she is in the U.S. because her life at home “sucked”.

While she is grateful for the friendships she listed on the diagram, overall her hesitancy with deepening relationships due to lack of trust becomes more evident as we talk. Hearing how unwelcomed she has felt as a result of several types of direct statements displaying xenophobia or indirect micro aggressions is something that makes Xuan’s interview painful and also so important to capture in this study.
A Complete Tapestry: Experiences Making Friends

The intent of this study is not to generalize about all international students’ experiences making friends. In this chapter I amplified international students’ experiences to promote greater awareness, emphasize their similarities as well as their unique experiences. In the first part of this chapter, I introduced each student participant through stories about their experiences making friends in their first year of college. Each set of stories formed a unique tapestry. In this section, I focus on the interrelated aspects in the students’ stories as well as notable or unique individual experiences. I weave together each tapestry using the common aspects conveyed by participants in their stories. I also highlight when literature reinforces a theme or the theme is missing from existing literature. It is important to note that many of the themes and experiences making friends are not unique to international students. I urge colleagues to consider these students’ experiences to be more intentional about our work to support learning for all students although I reserve my recommendations for practice and research for Chapter 5.

I organized the students’ friendship definitions and demographic information into several tables, two were introduced in Chapter 3. Table 1 displays the core demographic characteristics of the participants. Table 2 shows the friendship definition which highlights the common values such as mutual bond, concern, reciprocity, and trust; how friends know personal information, assist with problems or conflict, are there through good and bad times; and how they have a common worldview or a similar culture. Table 2 also displays the initial association with the friends listed on their diagram and show these relationships originated from the first year orientation program, living in a residence hall, participation in academic, recreational, or cultural clubs, as well as through a class or a research activity. While the demographic variables and the
The student’s definition of friendship are important aspects which bring dimension to who they are, their stories are the more significant to gain understanding of their experiences.

The students’ stories showed commonalities with regard to being worried about the experience of making friends in the new college environment and their pre-college expectations about making friends peers different from themselves. Additionally, I identified themes in the experiences, feelings, and views conveyed in their stories. Finally, King and Baxter-Magolda’s (2005) Intercultural Maturity level of development frames this study as it relates to an individual student’s readiness for intercultural friendships. The remainder of this chapter will center on discussing the themes across experiences displayed in Table 3 (below) and the influences, benefits and challenges of friendship identified in the students narratives displayed in Table 4 (later in the chapter).
Table 3
Themes Across Students’ Stories (Tapestries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Samantha</th>
<th>Dev</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Takuma</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Xuan</th>
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<td>Pre-college Expectations and Emotions about Making Friends</td>
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<td>Worried about Making Friends in College</td>
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<td>Develop Friendships with Diverse Peers</td>
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<td>First Year Experiences, Feelings, and Views about Making Friends</td>
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<td>Commonalities Support Friendships</td>
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<td>Effort/Investment is Different in College</td>
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<td>Reflecting was Beneficial</td>
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<td>Values Alignment Impacted Friendships</td>
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<td>Cultural Group Significance Varies</td>
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<td>Environment Supports Friendships</td>
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<td>Importance of Time/Proximity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort with a Variety Friendship Types</td>
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<td>Priorities Influence Experiences (financial, academic, social, incentives)</td>
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<td>Friends Play Parental/Mentor Role</td>
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<td>Anxiety, Stress, and Mental Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Varied Effort- In/Out Group Friendships</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolation/Dissatisfaction/Insecurity</td>
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<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racism/Unwelcoming Experiences</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Display of Cognitive, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Maturity</td>
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<td>Intermediate Intercultural Maturity</td>
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Shaded means the student conveyed this expectation, experience, or view.  
NO means the student conveyed they did not have this expectation, experience, or view.  
N/A= did not communicate this expectation, experience, or view or they displayed an initial level of Intercultural Maturity.
Pre-College Expectations and Emotions about Making Friends

Each student’s narrative conveyed a sense of worry or anxiety, before arriving to the U.S., about making friends in college. Although I didn’t ask a specific question about students’ expectations, everyone but Victoria and Takuma indicated that they expected they would develop friendships with their U.S. peers in addition to other peers not from their home country or cultural group. The other seven students conveyed excitement to “study abroad” knowing they would have opportunities to make friends with peers from around the world, and most specifically referenced a desire to make friends with Americans. Most students also conveyed openness and awareness that studying in the U.S. afforded them a unique opportunity to be exposed to people representing diverse cultures. The students’ stories included both heartwarming and disheartening experiences related to the varying degrees of success they experienced fulfilling their expectation to make friends with peers who were different than themselves.

Nick’s stories reflected the strongest expectation to make the most of being in the U.S. to make friends with Americans. Nick put forth considerable effort to make friends with U.S. peers. In his interview he said he made “a conscious decision here to do things, to behave a little bit differently and to respond a bit differently”. Nick’s desire to adapt to U.S. customs was conveyed throughout his interview. Xuan, Blue, and James had high expectations for developing cross cultural friendships, in particular with U.S. peers. Their expectations for relationships with Americans were thwarted. As a result of unmet expectations, their friendship experiences were negatively impacted and resulted in overall lower numbers of friends or less depth and connectivity with friends outside of their cultural group. Dev, Samantha, Takuma, and Alex
conveyed a sense of anxiety about their ability to develop cross cultural friendships and they expressed greater overall satisfaction with their friendship experiences.

Takuma referenced his parents’ encouragement to make friends with “Americans and non-Japanese students”. Although he didn’t express pre-college expectations to make friends with students from different backgrounds than his own, he did end up making friends with U.S. peers. He also references that the attended an international school in a European country prior to coming to the U.S. and this experience may have influenced his outlook on being around peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Victoria, on the other hand, placed little value on making friends outside of a similar cultural group and was content that her few American or non-Spanish speaking friends served a more transactional role than a support role.

**Student Experiences, Feelings and Views about Making Friends**

There were many unique experiences shared in the students’ narratives yet as shown in Table 3, there are a number of experiences, feelings, or views that are conveyed which are common to all or a majority of the students. In this section I address the most common themes across each student’s experiences and when applicable where they are discussed in literature. Then I’ll share several examples which are less common across the student’s experiences or not discussed in existing literature.

**Perceived Commonalities Support Friendships**

In this study, each student shared how they pursued friendships based on perceived commonalities which ranged from cultural/national origin; recreational, academic, or professional interests. How students self-identify or label others results in perceptions that may support or impede building connection across commonalities, which each conveyed was a necessary aspect for developing friendship. Yet, most of the students I interviewed had not
previously reflected on the most salient aspects of their identity or discussed identity with their friends. While listening to Victoria's positive experiences making friends within her cultural group was pleasing, her experience is portrayed negatively in literature and higher education media reports as failing to integrate into the larger campus community and move outside of their cultural group (Arthur, 2017; Fischer, 2012; Fischer, 2014; Hendrickson et al, 2011; Mamiseishvili, 2011; Ross & Chen, 2015; Urban & Palmer, 2016;).

**Benefit of Reflecting about Friend Making Experiences**

The students, for the most part, had not talked with anyone to reflect on their friendships prior to our time together. They shared with me that they valued the opportunity to reflect on and talk about their experiences making friends. I am grateful to my colleague for allowing me to incorporate a modified version of her original activity to conduct this study. It was clear to me after each interview that the act of reflecting on their experiences and their friendships was valuable and informative for each student. This was not surprising as Clandinin (2000) states that through storytelling we develop understanding, meaning, and can relate to our experience. Overall, the experience of writing down their friendships and talking in depth about the experiences they had developing friendships brought to the forefront positive feelings and the reflection served to be therapeutic, reassuring, or rewarding. In a few instances, the activity rehashed painful or difficult feelings related to feeling isolated or unwelcomed, or caused the student to question the security in their existing friendships.

Examples of each of those feelings were highlighted in the students’ narratives. Early on when talking with Takuma, he expressed reservation talking about friends:
“It's just very weird because I feel people never think about friendship or the definition of friendship when they interact. I don't say, let's be friends with a person. We just, I guess, naturally become or we just realize at a certain point that, we're actually a friend.”

By the end of the interview after reflecting and sharing stories about his experiences making friends, he conveyed several specific examples of what he has done to develop friends. The act of sharing his experiences made him aware of his overall satisfaction with his friendships, consider decisions about who not to include on his diagram, what environmental influences have supported him to make friends including pressure from his parents to seek out friendships with Americans.

In talking with Xuan, a very different interaction occurs. While our conversation started with positivity about her friendships developed through the Christian student clubs with which she is involved, after some reflection, the tone of the stories begins to change. Reflecting on her friendships resulted in her sharing some significant and challenging experiences with overt or subconscious xenophobia, which impacted the depth and feeling of security in her friendships. She said:

To some extent, that (these experiences) influences other relationships that I have. . . . I think, that has a detrimental effect because it makes me more distant even with people who actually genuinely care about making friendships. . . . I think maybe this is temporary maybe just because I'm exotic or something. I'm different.

Hearing Xuan question the authenticity of her friendships was very difficult. She had taken risks to meet friends through the campus ministry and toward the end of our conversation openly considered if she should change her strategy to connect with new peers through student
ministries she said were more targeted to Asian Americans, expecting she might feel less isolated.

**Values Alignment Impacted Friendships**

Each student expressed that the depth of a friendship was influenced by the degree of values alignment which was reflected in the degree of trust, the feeling of reciprocity, the ability to be vulnerable, or the empathy displayed by their friend. These characteristics are common in human friendships and not unique to international students. The students’ stories represent a wide array of experiences of actually being able to make deep friendships in the first year of college. Samantha, was the only student who openly conveyed that common cultural identity had no influence on her friendships and referred instead to the importance of common worldview, which isn’t the same as cultural identity. Reciprocity was a value commonly present in most of the friendship stories, except for James who identified it as a desired but lacking feature in his friendships. The students who had developed deep friendships (Samantha, Dev, Victoria, Takuma, Blue, Nick, and Alex) conveyed values alignment in their stories and also conveyed more happiness when reflecting and sharing stories with me about their friendships.

**Individual Priorities Influence Experiences**

Individual priorities which included academic, social, financial, or incentive structures also influenced students’ experiences making friends. Students conveyed several different priorities in their stories. Most students shared stories with me to reinforce how their priorities helped them to develop friends while James and Xuan share stories which convey how their priorities have negatively influenced their experiences making friends. James describes how his friendships all include “incentive structures” and his contact with them is related to academic activities. His relationships all stem from his overwhelming drive and motivation for academic
and professional success. His stories reinforce how his prioritization of achievement and academics hasn’t aligned with most of his peers. His experience highlights a perceived mismatch between himself and this college environment, leaving him feeling isolated and without any hope of making friends with anyone like him at this college. He says, “I think I’m sort of one that couldn't really fit in with the available options”. Unique to this study, were concerns Xuan expresses about the influence of financial constraints on her ability to connect and participate in social activities with friends. The volatility in the global economy has a considerable impact on international student enrollment and likely the currency fluctuation has impacted international student experiences in college. She shares how her financial constraints and the priority to focus on not spending money has had a negative impact on her ability to make friends because there are so many instances where money is needed to participate in social activities.

In Victoria’s case, her desire to balance both social and academic pursuits resulted in her decision to take on a leadership position as social chair in a cultural student organization and influenced her decisions about which friends she selects for study groups. Most students share stories similar to Victoria’s where their individual priorities influence who they engage with and what type of friendships they develop. Existing literature reinforces the influence of individual values, cultural norms, and campus environments on students’ experiences (Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Kashyap, 2011; Lee, 2006; Ross & Chen, 2015; Sias et. al, 2008).

**Campus Environment Supports Friendships**

Takuma reinforces that any efforts an institution makes to promote cross cultural engagement to students like him, American or international, are a critical means of achieving institutional goals related to graduating global citizens. He references the emails and orientation messages from the Office of International Education urging him to take part in social programs.
Most of the agreed with this assertion and conveyed the campus offered many opportunities which facilitated their ability to explore new things to meet interesting people. The students spoke about the cultural and co-curricular organizations, residence halls, and academic activities including study groups as ways to meet others on campus. Nick says “(College) in the U.S. is more open. You are able to meet more people so many different ways.” Another example of the supportive campus environment is the experience shared by Xuan. She recalled the CCF interns “whose jobs are actually to reach out to people who show up who are new just to make them feel welcome and stuff. Even though I didn't feel really close to these people, the fact that they are making an effort to remember my name. That definitely kept me going.” Dev and Blue both talk about the friends they cultivated through meeting for meals in campus dining halls.

**Importance of Time and Proximity**

Most students expressed an awareness that the depth of their college friendships was related to their proximity and the length of time they knew their friends, which for most students was only about one year. Victoria shared a story about rooming with her two closest friends her second year of college. She told me about the changes she was already observing with their relationships with each other now that one roommate had decided to return home for health reasons. She spoke at length about how going from a group of three friends living together to two resulted in her existing roommate relying on her more and how it has diminished their friendship with the roommate who was now living at home with her family. She ended the story stating that the impact of her friend’s departure from college had left her with an awareness “that relationships can be unstable”. Victoria conveys an awareness that being close to your friends and able to regularly spend time with them matters in friendship development as described in previous literature (Sias, et al.,2008; Taha & Cox, 2016; Trice, 2004; Trice, 2007).
Samantha shares a story about staying with one of her friend’s family for ten days. When she told me about the impact of this experience on their friendship she said, "I feel like I started feeling more as if she was my sister than she was my friend, because we were all living together within the same family. We would talk before going to bed and we would spend all day together." Samantha later talks about a male friend she made her first year through SHEP and while she said they are still good friends, she indicated the dynamic has changed now that he isn’t “immediately available to me physically”.

Takuma shared two prominent stories which reflect the importance of time and proximity on his experience developing a friendship. He stated “Initially, we were just club members, just doing activities together, but the more time I spent, (I realized) we had some commonalities and interests. . . and eventually, gradually, we became friends”. In another example, Takuma indicated he would not otherwise be friends with a U.S. peer but they are on a research project team together. He recalled “it was a little bit challenging” because they “didn’t have much commonality” outside of the research project. He told me that after they decided to sit together in the café one day they developed a stronger connection. When talking about this friendship he said:

When I talk with her, I try to get some inspiration from her, something different that I just don't know or just don't have. . . . She's one of my few really Americans friends. Sometimes she just provides me how American people think about things. . . . I try to think about things globally, but sometimes you have to know how. I'm living in the U.S., so I should know how American people think.

Takuma’s story reinforces both that sustained contact, time, and proximity are critical components to support friendship development and reinforces literature with regard to the
importance of both the quantity and quality of contact for intercultural friendship development (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Le, et al, 2016; Lin, 2012; Sias et. al, 2008).

**Comfort with a Variety of Friendship Types**

Not every student talked specifically about different types of friendships in their time with me even when they displayed an openness for casual friendships, close friends, or more transactional friends. While Victoria was the only student who indicated she expected to develop friendships with other Spanish speakers from Latin America, she shared a story about a U.S. classmate which reinforced that she was open to having different types of friends, including U.S. peers. Her story illuminated that while she didn’t expect to have deep, trusting relationships with students outside her cultural group, she was happy to have transactional friendships with American classmates. When talking about a specific U.S. classmate she said, “We've not had that click. . . that connection. It would be amazing to develop to a deeper friendship, but it's also fine with me with just having her (to go to) if I need something in the class.” Literature indicates cross-cultural friendships may be more transactional in nature because it isn’t as easy to develop a depth of trust that you might have in a relationship with someone you identify as being similar to you (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Lee, 2006; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Dev shared a story about his emergency room visit to convey an awareness of the depth of the relationship he had with those friends resulting from their willingness to be at his side for many hours when he was in need. He said “I probably have never had people that would do that for me before”. Dev expresses comfort with having friends like those described above as well as more casual friends he is more likely to have fun exploring the city with. Samantha, Dev, Victoria, Blue, Takuma, Alex, and Nick also convey satisfaction with close friends who they depend on greatly as well as regular contact with friends who they do not have the same depth of
connection with. While many of the experiences are touched upon in existing literature, Nick expressed something unique in that he categorized all of his home country friends as a single group on his friendship diagram because they were “all the same” because, in his perspective, they had homogeneous experiences in China.

**Friends Play a Parental/Mentor Role**

These students also shared how their friends often played a parental or mentor role in college which was different than in high school. Many students were explicit that their friends played a parental or familial role because they were so far from their own parents. Others described how their friends served to broaden their perspectives and mentor them, which reinforced their decision to change a major, pursue an internship, better themselves, or take risks they wouldn’t have normally considered.

**Influence of Anxiety, Stress, and Mental Health Experiences**

It was painful to hear stories from five of the students which stressed the influence of anxiety or more severe mental health experiences which connected them to other students and many ways aided them to make or deepen friendships. In this study, one third of the students disclosed their decision to either seek or actively avoid therapy for a mental health condition. James conveyed the most extreme isolation and pointed to the source being a lack of genuine friendships. He told me he was able to talk with me because he was already in therapy about his isolation and challenges with his current environment. Blue described attempting suicide before and during college and how her friends were the only people who were aware of her attempts and motivated her to stay in school. Dev talked about how his severe anxiety served as a bridge to form friendships because of an early experience going to the emergency room. Additionally,
Alex, Victoria, and Xuan students refer to stories which convey that their own or other’s stress and mental health conditions positively influenced their experience developing friendships.

**Varied Effort to Make In/Out Group Friendships**

This study reinforces what relationship studies literature starting with Allport (1954) describe in relation to in group, out group, and reference group status and the highly personal construct of belonging. In this study, students who emphasized their friends’ cultural group also conveyed that they have different types of relationships with their friends. For example, Samantha and Alex focus the least on cultural group identity when talking about their friends and also convey minimal variation in their experiences making friends across cultural groups. In contrast, Nick, Xuan, and Victoria are very explicit about their friend’s cultural group, and their stories about making friends and how they categorize their friendships convey how they interact differently with them.

Making friends with peers from their own cultural group is described as effortless by Nick, Victoria, and Blue. Victoria talks about living with her roommate who “has the same background” and said that although one of them may get mad, they are like sisters. “It's not forced. . . . I can explain myself better in Spanish and develop better relationship in Spanish. It's just quick.” James talked about his previous friendships in high school in India as being effortless. He said: “It was automatic. My friendships back at home were casual. There was no incentive structure in place. The incentive structure was just spending time together. Casual, emotional, those are the kind of guys who I could basically talk to unfiltered.” Nick uses the cars analogy to describe how he doesn’t have to think when he is with his Chinese friends but he’s more cautious and aware of his actions and words when he’s with his roommate and other American friends.
Nick, Xuan, Blue, Takuma, and Alex directly convey the challenges they have experienced making friends with peers from a different culture. Takuma openly states that he looks for safe and obvious commonalities including common language, cultural group, or interests to make friends. He shares a story about an American friend who is on an academic research project team and his experience making friends to her, understanding that she does not have obvious similarities to him. He said:

I didn't really have much commonality with her and we could talk about the group project, but that's it. That's not what friends are supposed to be doing, you should be talking about more stuff. So it was very challenging for me to actually start a good conversation with her, but there was one time, I was getting Dunkin' Donuts for my little lunch and she was at the food court as well. . . . We decided to just sit down and I was having the feeling that I want to be more friends with her, beyond team members. We ended up figuring out that we had a common friend, I guess. And we just talked about her, how she's interesting for both of us and that was I guess, the icebreaker. Beyond that, we started talking about where we're from or what background we had. And yeah, now we're friends.

He again points to a common friend as a bridge to form the relationship with this American friend. When I ask Takuma if his relationship with her feels reciprocal in that she’s also learning from him, he says “We're trying to give and take cultural differences. I don't really think she's really very trying hard, but occasionally she just wants to know. . . so I just provide her insights.” While it may be a challenge initially to engage in conversation or find commonalities with a person who isn’t from your same culture there are also instances where
misunderstandings can occur. Xuan’s experiences feeling undervalued or exotic with some American friends is an example of this.

**Experienced Isolation, Dissatisfaction, or Insecurity with Friendships**

The notion of instability in friendships in relation to time and proximity was also present in Xuan’s stories. She conveyed that the friendships in the U.S. didn’t have the same depth as her other friends from home. She said, “I don't really know these people for that long. . . . I feel like, it's just you know them on a different level.” Xuan conveys a sense of worry about the potential loss of friendships due to changes and natural “transitions that occur in college”. She also shared that she wished she had the depth and trust with more than just two of the friends she listed on her diagram. When talking about the difference with the others, she said “It's not really that much time spent with them. Whenever I'm at those (campus ministry) events, I feel like I have a friend there, but beyond that I don't have that deep of a connection with them.”

**Experienced Racism or Unwelcoming Experiences**

I should not have been surprised by students describing feeling unwelcomed or being targets of outright racism. Xuan’s experiences included an overt verbal display of hatred and ignorance toward her and a friend while walking home as well as more subtle unwelcoming or intolerant messages which occur regularly with American peers. Through sharing her stories she also expressed how these experiences impact her perception of the stability of all of her friendships but especially those with Americans. James discusses his overall perception that his first year roommates were racist and that most interactions he has had in the U.S. involve some degree of racism. He emphatically states he is not racist, while at the same time expressing negative stereotypes about Southern culture and Black people and positive stereotypes views about Northern culture and Jewish people. While other interviews don’t provide context about
the way a student experiences race in the U.S., most of the students I interviewed have likely not been exposed to quality information about racial and cultural identity in the U.S. and have developed their own, potentially misguided, conclusions about American cultural norms and expectations.

The same students who had unwelcoming experiences or experienced overt racism in their first year also conveyed less satisfaction or security with their friendships. In the case of Xuan, she expressed that the general attitude she perceives from Americans has influenced her openness to pursue friendships with some people. She said:

There's a lot of Americans here that I've come across who think that America is the greatest. And sure America is a super power and all, and America is strong in education, but it doesn't make it the one sole country in the world that's perfect. . . .So, one thing that's definitely affected, I guess, my perception of Americans as well, like my American friends. They think they're joking around, and they think it's something to laugh about, but they're like, "Oh, if you didn't think America was the best, why did you come here?" Like a very snide comment in that sense. So, I think that definitely affects bridging that gap, because they view it as, "Oh, you're coming here because we're better," you know? So, yeah, that's definitely one experience that's just ... it bugs me sometimes.

Xuan’s stories provide both subtle and overt examples of being put down based on her nationality. James describes his experience when he said, “You don't have a friend. You have an Indian friend.” In both instances, the unwelcoming messages or racism they experienced directly influenced their perceptions of Americans and limit their willingness to be vulnerable or otherwise pursue friendships.
Several stories convey the importance of feeling welcomed and how a welcoming experience can be a bridge to building relationships across cultural groups or an unwelcoming experience a barrier to cross cultural engagement. While only three students I interviewed described negative or neutral experiences making friends as a result of experiencing racism or feeling unwelcomed. Their experiences are disheartening and are occurring on a campus with a strong international reputation like this one that is located in a major U.S. city. If this campus isn’t cultivating a welcoming and safe environment for all international students, the outlook nationwide is concerning.

**Display of Intercultural Maturity**

Literature concludes that intercultural maturity, also termed intercultural competence, promotes meaningful and mutually beneficial intercultural interactions (Bennett, 2004; Deardorff, 2009; King & Baxter Magolda, 2005). While this study was not intended to evaluate intercultural maturity of the students interviewed, the stories of the seven students who desired friendships outside of their cultural group provide examples of the ways these students were aware of their behaviors and at times adapted behaviors or demonstrated flexibility toward their friends, which influenced their experiences developing friendships. The students who displayed cognitive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal characteristics identified in King and Baxter-Magolda’s (2005) intercultural maturity framework had distinct experiences from those who didn’t recognize the importance of self-awareness, adaptability, perspective taking, curiosity, and flexibility in friendship development, particularly when engaging with someone functioning with different cultural norms. The positive experiences Samantha and Nick had making friends across cultural groups were in contrast to James’s isolation to one cultural group based on his own personal stereotypes. It is worth noting that Nick made accommodations which meant he wasn’t
always able to behave normally with his American friends, at times this impacted the depth of connection they had. He said, “I’m very cautious” when he engaged with “Caucasian” peers because he hasn’t been able to comfortably express himself using his normal banter like he does with his friends from China.

James and Victoria didn’t convey intercultural maturity in their stories, and also have less diversity of friends based on cultural group as displayed on their friendship diagrams. James displayed minimal intercultural maturity characteristics, had few friends among campus peers, and his mentors were limited to professional role models. Victoria didn’t express expectations to have deep intercultural friendships. James’s and Victoria’s experiences are logical in that a desire for intercultural friendships along with intercultural maturity support greater success developing intercultural friendships. Samantha shared several examples of deep, trusting intercultural relationships while James was the most isolated of all of the students I interviewed. Sadly, he shared with me he has experienced several weeks at a time without having conversations with peers.

Samantha and Nick both expressed openness to consider other’s perspectives and adapt behaviors. In Samantha’s case, she understood that she would need to consider when physical contact was appropriate in this new environment. Nick identified early on a need to be cautious with his communication, as displayed in the story below and in an earlier experience shared about his roommate’s response to a joke he made about choking him. He said:

I watch a lot of American T.V. shows, and I just assumed. . . everybody likes those jokes.

In China, I just do this, but in America it's not what the T.V says. People here are very cautious. I watch South Park, you know South Park? I thought American people like that,
but no, they can't really take those jokes. They like watching the show, but they don't like hearing it from a real person.

Nick identified that the American television shows he watched created an inaccurate expectation that Americans appreciated crass humor or banter in day to day conversation.

Takuma, displays reserving judgement and demonstrating an openness needed to understand and accept a “Japanese American” friend who he describes as both very religious and a vegetarian, things which are uncommon in Japan. Alex too displays intercultural maturity, although it is less embedded in his stories and more obvious in his decision to share his discomfort labeling any of his friends by their “cultural group” on the friendship diagram unless he has had an explicit conversation with them and they self-identified. Samantha was the only student who was well supported as a result of her role as a residence hall peer leader and friendships with peers who provided mentorship.

While the students’ experiences are the most important aspect of this study, the sub question explores the benefits or influences of friends on students as well as the campus environmental influences on making friends. I created a final display in Table 4 which outlines the themes across the students’ stories.
Table 4

**Benefit or Influence of Friends on Students and Environmental Influences on Making Friends**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Samantha</th>
<th>Dev</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Takuma</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Xuan</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit or Influence of College Friends on Students</strong></td>
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<td>Aid Decision Making</td>
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<td>Promote Improving Ourselves/Taking Risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide a Variety of Support</td>
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<td>Support Identity Development/Salience</td>
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<td>Promote Mental Well-being</td>
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<td>Increase Satisfaction with College Experience</td>
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<td><strong>Campus Environment Influences on Making Friends</strong></td>
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<td>Residence Hall (roommates &amp; activities)</td>
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<td>Recreational or Cultural Organizations</td>
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<td>Sustained Contact Deepens Friendships</td>
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<td>Common First Year Experience Programs</td>
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<td>Academics (class, study groups, research)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Received Messages to get Engaged/Involved (Peers, OIE, Student Life, Res. Life, etc. . . )</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Social Media/Technology</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Projects/Campus Work/Internship</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</table>

Shaded means the student communicated this benefit or influence of their college friends or that this was an environmental influence on their experience making friends.

**NO means the student communicated their college friends did not influence them in this way or the college environment did not have this influence on their experience making friends.**

**n/a means the student did not directly communicate nor did their stories convey this influence.**

**Benefit or Influence of Friends on Students**

All students expressed directly or indirectly in their stories or their friendship definition that their friends helped them to make decisions. In Takuma’s case it was related to a change of
major. In Victoria’s case it was to take on a leadership position. Students like Samantha and Alex also mentioned how friends pushed them to improve themselves. Nick mentions his friend modeled taking reasonable risks outside of ingrained cultural or familial norms. Dev expressed how his friends pushed him to explore and be open to adventures. In many ways students also described how their friendships helped them to explore or solidify their own identities. In Xuan’s case, this mean holding to her more conservative values despite not being understood or respected for them. Dev, Takuma, and Nick share unique stories about strict cultural norms and expectations they have reconsidered due to relationships with friends which have influenced them to consider alternatives. Several students share experiences which reinforce the ways which friendships benefit them. Specifically students’ stories demonstrate ways in which friendships support identity development and development of intercultural maturity in college. Takuma shared a story about an American friend and said:

> I think when I talk with her, I feel I'm trying to get some inspiration from her. A different thing that I just don't know or just don't have. Different ideas or ways of thinking, and also, she's one of my few really American friends. Sometimes she just provides me how American people think about things. I'm really international and I try to think about things globally, but sometimes you have to know how. I'm living in the U.S., so I should know how American people think.

He also talked about how his Japanese friend who was a cultural organization leader really influenced him to reconsider the traditional path most Japanese students take after college. He said

> (My friend) was thinking about starting up a company. That idea was very interesting, because I never thought about starting up a company before I came here. I was just
thinking, I'm just going to work in a company and just work there for my entire life or something. But he provided me (the idea) that making your own company might be also interesting . . . that I could choose what I want to do. That was also inspirational.

Takuma’s stories, along with others, reinforces how different friendships influence students.

**Campus Environmental Influences on Experiences Making Friends**

Samantha, Takuma, Dev, Alex, Blue, Victoria, Xuan, and Nick all state in a variety of ways that regular contact with peers in a residence hall, class, or dining hall, as well as their involvement in clubs or organizations, influenced their experiences making friends. Many students talked about the residence hall experience and their first year roommate in their interview. Several students referenced the overall positive environment in the residence halls because the first year halls created a space where many people were seeking friendships. One third of the students (Blue, Xuan, and James) had negative experiences with their first year roommates. Several students, including James and Nick, shared they had sought a roommate outside of their cultural group. While Blue, James, and Xuan each shared stories about varying degrees of challenging residence hall experiences with roommates who were not culturally similar, these negative experiences were countered with positive roommate experiences described by Nick, Samantha, and Takuma. Importantly, except in the case of James, any student who described a challenge with their roommate in their first year also reflected how this challenge helped them. Blue commented about benefits she sees now as a result of her challenging experience. She said:

> I see how it benefited me. It was actually my best semester. I think that even though it wasn't a very good emotionally for me. It helped my academic year. . . . I set some boundaries how I can study and how to succeed here. According to my parents, it
lowered my expectations for roommates and that’s how I'm able to live with [my current roommate] because now I'm okay with something that is not as bad.

Everyone except James shared their perspective that the environment at their college supported friendship development. Their experiences convey opportunities to improve the residential experience for students who don’t get along with their roommate. Yet both Xuan and Blue also reflected how their challenging experience helped them to grow and they still felt the residence hall overall was a positive experience which positively impacted their experience making friends. The size of the college in contrast to the students’ high school was something another third of the participants raised as a challenge in the environment. Takuma, Alex, and James all stressed that it was hard for them to adjust to the scale of the campus and that finding friends was difficult in their lecture classes which dominate in the first year. Takuma and Alex talked openly about how their first semester was really difficult and they hadn’t met many friends because they focused only on academics. By their second semester they began getting involved in research projects, academic, or social clubs to connect with people who had similar interests. James too talked about his less successful attempts to meet students through attending student clubs. While the students shared a variety of experiences outside of these examples, the students agreed that the new student orientation, residence hall, study groups, student organizations, co-curricular activities, and overall first year experience promoted friendship development. A few, including Xuan, Takuma, and Nick commented that they were experiencing more difficulty in their second year now that many students are settled into their friendships.

**Conclusion**

The students’ stories include information about aspects of their lived experiences that I did not anticipate as well as aspects highlighted in previous research. Although the experience of
being an international student extends well beyond the experience of making friends, meaningful relationships have been shown to aid international students with overall adjustment (Baba & Hosada, 2014; Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004) and friendship has the potential to reduce prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998, Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). In retelling their stories, I focused on the common threads and textures in their stories (tapestries) relating to their pre-college expectations and emotions; their experiences, feelings, and views about making friends; their level of intercultural maturity; the benefits and influences of making friends; and the campus environmental influences on making friends.

The students’ stories focus on their experiences making friends that more often required them to develop entirely new social networks. It isn’t possible to separate some of their general experiences adjusting their new life in the U.S. I wove nine single tapestries and through the common experiences created a larger tapestry which displays their experiences together with a compelling message about their experiences making friends and the opportunities we have to learn from them. The importance of international students’ friend making experiences cannot be ignored, especially considering they must rebuild social networks to aid them to thrive in their new environment and often with minimal support or acknowledgement from their peers or their institution about their unique efforts and experiences.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends” - Dr. Maya Angelou

Researcher Reflection

My specific interest in friendship development and intercultural friendships resulted from a review of the literature about international students and intercultural friendship as a means to reduce prejudice. My personal experience and years of working in international education motivated me to explore experiences international students have while making friends during their first year enrolled at a U.S. college. Hearing international students share their stories about their experiences making friends strengthened my resolve to narrate aptly their experiences and heighten the awareness, empathy, and resolve my fellow educators have for their role supporting students in college. My desire to advocate for additional support for all students who are interested in developing intercultural friendships is bolstered by the value of promoting opportunities for all students to pursue global learning.

In retelling the stories the students shared with me, I implore fellow educators to connect with international students’ experiences pursuing friendships as first-year college students and reflect on their own memories of making friends in college. Getting to know these students, through their stories, reinforces my certainty in the potential of intercultural friendships to stimulate global learning for all students. These students’ experiences highlight the need to pursue an understanding of their pre-college expectations, provide adequate support to both
international students and U.S. students to engage in intercultural relationships, and ensure there are intentional opportunities for reflection about friendship making in order to support learning and intercultural development. The stories I heard from the nine participants reinforced the impact friendships can have on both personal and educational outcomes. I anticipated learning beyond the boundaries of understanding international students’ experiences making friends; however, I was surprised by how much the students shared with me. The importance their reflection and storytelling was for their own meaning and how much students’ pain and their joy impacted me emotionally and psychologically shocked me. I had not anticipated that they would have such an impact on me. I believe these students’ experiences will influence the willingness of international educators and student affairs professionals to work together to implement practices that promote a positive campus culture for intercultural friendships to develop.

Critiques of the Study

This study was conducted with nine undergraduate international students enrolled at a research-intensive university that graduates a majority of its students in STEM degrees. This institution also conveys a strong value for global learning in their mission and through engagement in internationalization activities. Although the staff and financial resources targeted to intercultural learning are extremely limited in relation to the resources spent on study abroad and international student services, international students’ experiences will likely be quite different on campuses that have much less demographic diversity, invest less on internationalization efforts, and target resources beyond study abroad and recruiting international students.

A significant goal of this study was to amplify each individual voice and convey the heterogeneity within this widely diverse demographic group. Each of the nine students
volunteered to participate in the study. This indicates they were open to talking with a stranger about their experiences making friends. Each student conveyed their interest in the topic and curiosity about what their experience was like in comparison to their peers. I did not ask students to describe their experiences in the demographic survey and instead selected the students based on other demographic criteria. I amplified the unique aspects of their experiences as well as highlighted where there were similarities across students’ experiences in order to promote possible interventions around common themes.

While the study included a fairly even representation of males and females, several language bases, and national origins, the study only included undergraduate students from two STEM majors. Although the study is not intended to be generalizable, I believe that many of their experiences may be transferable to other international students at similar types of institutions. More than a third of the students were living in a country other than their citizenship country, which reinforces the global mobility that exists within the community of students who are choosing to enroll in a U.S. college like the one where this study was conducted.

Their experiences may be immensely different from students at small, liberal arts institutions where there tends to be a vastly different campus culture and more individualized resources invested on campus relationships among the students and between the administrators. This study took place on a single campus; it is not possible to know the degree that campus environment influences international students’ experiences in making friends. Additionally, due to time and financial resources, I only met with each student for one interview. Although each interview provided a snapshot of the participants, I believe the study could have included greater depth about their experiences if I had observed and met with each student multiple times over a long period of time.
Discussion

The stories I heard about students’ experiences making friends in college, combined with previous research, reinforces opportunities institutions have missed to impact positively international students’ friend-making experiences (Arthur, 2016; Arthur, 2017; Bai, 2016) and to promote intercultural friendships based on the benefits for all students (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Because most of the students had friendships across cultural groups, the experiences they shared affirmed intercultural-friendship development should be a recognizable part of strategic global-learning objectives. Literature shows every student stands to benefit when there are strategic activities in place to promote global learning for all students (Braskamp, Braskamp, & Engberg, 2014; Chickering & Braskamp, 2009; Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Glass, Kociolek, Wongtrirat, Lynch, & Cong, 2015; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Jones, 2017). My hope is that these stories will help convey the opportunities to engage all students in global learning, regardless of their desire to study abroad, and that institutions will take notice of these opportunities to target and leverage international students to implement more on-campus global learning opportunities that involve sustained contact across cultures.

Making Meaning of their Experiences through Reflection

The process of reflecting about friendships made in college was perceived as a healthy activity for all participants, including the most isolated student and those who communicated concern about the stability of their friendships. Clandinin (2000) stated that, through storytelling, we develop understanding, meaning, and can relate to our experience. Although making the space for reflection may be challenging to incorporate into a busy student schedule, this study reinforces my confidence in the value of making space for students just to talk or process about their experiences or, when necessary, gain assurance they matter and are heard. Talking with
these students reinforced that discussions and reflection around identity salience are important with college students who are in the process of developing their senses of self and deciding how and when to break from previous expectations or restrictions placed on them by their family, environment, and cultural norms. Practical interventions can be implemented on campuses and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The students who were content with their friendships and experiences making friends in college also conveyed happiness about their overall college experience. This finding reinforces a previous study conducted in Australia by Kashima and Loh (2006) that found that international students’ ties with co-national, host national, and multinational peers positively affected their cultural adjustment and increased their identification with their host institution. Students who expressed insecurity in their friendships or displeasure with their experiences making friends also displayed a less positive outlook about their overall college experiences. Although this finding may not be surprising, it is critical when considering the importance of friendship on the overall wellbeing and retention of international students.

**Expectations and Worries**

In my interactions with the nine participants in this study, most expressed they were both worried about making friends in college and eager to have an opportunity to make friends with peers who are from the U.S. and around the world. While their intercultural maturity displayed through their stories was varied, the students’ friendship definitions did not vary greatly, especially around the foundation that friendships involve trust, reciprocity, vulnerability, empathy, and mentorship. The Intercultural Maturity Development Model (King & Baxter-Magolda, 2005) displayed in Figure 1 provides a framework to consider the different degrees of comfort students have when engaging with culturally diverse others or looking beyond common
national culture to connect based on common worldview or openness for differences. Through their stories, I heard examples where most went outside of their comfort zones to make attempts to engage with culturally diverse others. Two minimized their discomfort and focused on making friends who are culturally similar to themselves; although in both cases, they developed either casual or deeper friendship with peers representing a range of cultural groups. Unfortunately, one student found the barriers to making friends insurmountable. While institutions cannot control an individual student’s experience making friends, the stories I heard from students highlighted that all of the students I interviewed were worried about being able to establish a new friend network in college. Although this finding may seem obvious, previous literature did not discuss the anxiousness or expectations international students have about making friends in college.

Their stories reinforced my own anecdotal beliefs and previous literature that states that international students who decide to pursue education abroad generally desire to develop multicultural friendships in the new environment, especially with U.S. students (Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Chavajay, 2013; Gareis, 2012; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kovtun, 2011; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Montgomery, 2010). However, the capacity to build strong friendships is impacted by the receptivity and intercultural maturity of either or both of the students, in addition to the international students’ perception of being welcomed, respected, and valued members of their new community (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kashyap, 2011; Leong, 2015; Lin, 2012). In this study, most of the students indicated the institutional support and programs during their first year aided them in developing friendships.

Throughout the stories international students shared with me, they conveyed a desire for deep friendships that require reciprocity, trust, vulnerability, and empathy. For the six students who displayed satisfaction with their friendships, they indicated their friends influence their lives
in a similar way to a parent, family member, or role model. More specifically, participants talked about these roles in terms of the type of assistance that was freely available to support them to make decisions, solve problems, consider taking risks, see alternative options, or improve themselves. The students who did not express satisfaction in their friendships made no mention of the same type of reliance on their friends as a parent or mentor.

**Pursuit of Friendships Based on Perceived Commonalities**

Research posits friendships can be pursued or inhibited based on a wide variety of perceived commonalities or interests (Lee, 2006; Sias et al., 2008). These students’ experiences reinforced the pursuit of friendships based on perceived commonalities. Students told stories that conveyed how cultural group identity saliency is often not a part of pursuing friendships for those with a higher level of intercultural maturity or more prominent those with a lower level of maturity, which manifests as being less comfortable with cultural differences in friendships. Except for James, all of the students expressed that the campus environment is supportive for making friendships in their first year of college, while also acknowledging that the second year has not been easy. Additionally, several students shared examples of U.S. peers who were unwelcoming or experiences that impacted their confidence engaging with U.S. peers.

Measuring intercultural maturity was not a desired outcome of this study, but it was used to frame the experiences or statements students shared that offer insights about their level of maturity. I used the model to consider how intercultural maturity influenced their friendship development experiences in the ways they or others conveyed readiness for intercultural friendships. The students who displayed the lowest intercultural maturity had either very limited friendships or all of their friendships were with students from the same or similar culture. Lack of self-awareness, flexibility, and perspective taking resulted in isolation for one (James). A lack
of desire to engage across cultures informed the more limited cultural group friendship network of the other (Victoria).

**Inadequately Prepared for Intercultural Friendships**

A few students either communicated examples where they or their U.S. peer were inadequately prepared to engage in a cross-cultural friendship because of perceived differences and a lack of support to navigate the intercultural challenges. In our time together, James demonstrated minimal intercultural maturity as reflected in King and Baxter Magolda’s (2005) Intercultural Maturity model (Figure 1). He did not convey a desire to understand his peers, consider alternative perspectives, or recalibrate his own expectations or behaviors. Instead, he was explicit that his expectations were not met with regard to the type of learning community provided by the institution. James’ stories conveyed his perceptions, stereotypes, prejudice, minimal degree of self-awareness, and desire for deep relationships that coincided with a lack of openness or flexibility, two characteristics of which are critical for developing intercultural relationships. All of these things are directly connected to the disappointment he conveyed about his college experience overall, which included his belief that the campus lacked academic rigor and his peers lacked motivation resulting in a mismatch between him and his environment.

The commonalities sought may include cultural groups, but, more often, these students conveyed that common interests, values, and priorities are more critical than a national identity. Additionally, the students in this study mentioned commonalities in the ways their friends prioritized academics, social relationships, finances, or incentive structures. These were factors that were greater influences to their friend-making experiences. The concept of friendships grounded in incentive structures was introduced by James, who had friendships in college that were not like his pre-college friendships. His stories of dejection and isolation were associated
with the dissonance in expectations and actual campus environment. His lack of person
environment fit was unique in the students I interviewed, but his experiences were in alignment
with studies focusing on student adjustment, sense of belonging, and retention (Mamiseishvili,
2011; Gareis, 2012; Glass & Westmont-Campbell, 2014; Gomez, Urza, & Glass, 2014; Kashyap,
2011). James expressed a desire to have “multi-modal” and “reciprocal” friendships that each of
the other students I interviewed had developed. James shared positive experiences he had had
making friends during his summer internship, which highlights that although he had difficulty
making friends on this campus, he was able to have positive friend interactions when he changed
his environment to participate in the summer internship program in a private college in the
Northeast. While James’s experience demonstrates the least encouraging example about the
challenges of making friendships, it also provides a clear opportunity to consider how personal
characteristics and environmental characteristics come into play in friendship development.
Xuan expressed the barriers that limited finances and stress about the fluctuating currency
exchange placed on her ability to socialize and interact with peers doing activities that required
money. Especially insightful was her perception that she often was not being invited to engage
with her U.S. peers in the same ways that other domestic friends were because she “didn’t have
anything to offer” in return. While these barriers to friendship were not expressed by other
students in this study, I am confident that their experiences are likely similar to other students not
involved in this study.

Friendship Networks are Nuanced

While I did not focus this study on the categorization of the friendship networks, I used
the friendship diagram to allow students to display their friendships prior to the interview. The
students were asked to list their friendships by cultural group associated with the original
research that focused on categorizing friendship networks by nationality (McFaul, 2016). I expected students would gravitate toward categorizing their friends based on national identity or cultural group similarities. Instead, the students’ friendship diagrams and their stories reinforced that their perspectives on the significance of cultural group in their friendships varies, and their experiences of making friends was different in college than it may have been in their home country, which many students indicated were more homogeneous. Four students rejected categorizing their friends in the diagram or in the stories they told about their experiences for a variety of reasons addressed in Chapter 4. This study highlights that students may perceive cultural identity as more nuanced than the host country, multinational, and co-national labels that dominate literature. A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Taha and Cox (2016) found that students categorized their friendships into four categories: work, friendship, advice, and support networks. This study used cultural group to identify intercultural friendship variability, which is something further discussed in the recommendations due to the implications it has on how we engage with international students and minimize assumptions about their salient identities. In this study, the students’ demonstrated a potential for cultural groups or cultural identities to be less important than other commonalities around recreational activities, academics, or worldview. Only two students, Victoria and Takuma, pursued friendships primarily based on cultural similarities, which is counter to what is described in previous studies and more recent media reports (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006).

The students all reflected on the distinct differences involved in the effort and investment required of them to make friends in college. Participants shared that the friend-making experience in college was different than in high school with many references to having more
options to meet friends, more heterogeneity in their friends, and less time to spend with friends, in addition to other variations. They also conveyed comfort with having a variety of friend types or friendship variability. Most demonstrated this with the friendship variability displayed on their friendship diagrams. Samantha and Alex had significant friendship variability with regard to cultural groups and also displayed considerable cultural maturity. Samantha was explicit that a shared worldview was more important than common cultural norms, which resulted in her having more U.S. and multicultural peer friends. Alex’s diagrams also communicated considerable culture group diversity; he was least interested in labeling his friends by their cultural group and had the most diverse examples of curricular and co-curricular activities, which supported friendship connections. Dev too had considerable variability in his friends and expressed that this was more related to his nature to seek differences and explore new things with friendships.

While students expected to make friends with host-nationals, students also often find host-country friends the most challenging. The majority of existing literature indicated that international students are more likely to socialize with co-national and multi-national peers who have shared experiences and hardships (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Lin, 2012; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Spiro, 2014; Trice, 2007). Four of the nine students I interviewed directly communicated that they had an easier time developing friendships with those from a similar or same cultural group. These students perceived common experiences and understanding because of perceived cultural similarities and identified that more effort is involved to develop friends who they do not perceive as culturally similar.
Benefits or Influences of Friendships on International Students

This study reaffirms the importance of friendships in the lives of international students for their wellbeing and their overall satisfaction with their college experience. The students’ experiences conveyed a wide variety of benefits that stem from their friendships and a variety of campus-environmental influences on their experiences making friends. Their experiences demonstrated that institutional assistance can be critical for students to experience positive outcomes with friendship development, particularly when the root of the inability to make or deepen friendships is tied to the readiness of individual students or their peers to engage in intercultural relationships.

While the effort students must make to sustain friendships is not unique, their stories conveyed the magnitude of the stressors and inhibitors that influenced their experiences making friends in college. Research has established that developing friendships heavily depends on both personal characteristics and environmental influences (Abe, Talbot, & Gellhoed, 1998; Bai, 2016; Chen, 2015; Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Sias et al., 2008). Many students also spoke about the limitations presented because of the high-pressure environment and the time needed to develop deep friendships. This institutional site is known for its demanding academic environment, so I was not surprised to hear concerns about the time limitations.

Influence of the Campus Environment

Although this study did not set out to evaluate the type of contact between friends, both time and proximity were obvious factors that influenced friendship development experiences among participants. I was not surprised as these characteristics have been heavily discussed in the literature as aspects that influence friendship development, particularly among international students who desire to make deep friendships like those they had prior to their sojourn to the
U.S., but who have experienced difficulty navigating individualistic cultural norms in the U.S. (Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Sias, et al., 2008; Trice, 2004; Trice, 2007). Intercultural communications and relationship studies literature grounding this study are laden with studies that reinforce how sustained, quality, and quantity of contact promotes relationships to develop and are particularly important for intercultural friendships (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011; Gareis, 2012; Geeraert, Demoulin, & Demes, 2014; Hotta & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Renties & Nolan, 2014; Sias et al., 2008; Taha & Cox, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 2005). The scale of the campus was communicated as a barrier to developing friendships by one-third of the students, who indicated they had come from much smaller and more intimate high school environments. Scale is a commonly known environmental aspect of a college campus that can result in person-environment mismatch and can be addressed in multiple ways. Practical interventions may mitigate some of the negative impact caused by an imbalance between the campus scale and a student’s expectations.

Samantha is the only student I talked with who shared with me an active leadership role that involved regular training and contact with professional staff. It is likely her student role has provided her tools that some of her international student peers have not had access to. Her experiences reflected what I heard in many interviews with respect to becoming aware of individual cultural behaviors and how they impact relationships with peers. Different from most students, as a Peer Leader, she receives direct training that allowed her to explore her cultural values as well as how to engage with others who may have different values. Her leadership role afforded her unique opportunities to “learn from them by providing them [peer residents] support.” She has had opportunities to apply and obtain feedback from professional staff in relation to her role as a peer leader, which I expect have influenced her interpersonal and
intrapersonal growth. Although not all students will have paid roles like Samantha’s, institutions must integrate opportunities and experiences that focus on interpersonal and intrapersonal growth. This can occur in many types of campus engagements including campus certificate programs that are tied to career development, wellness initiatives, and campus leadership positions.

**Implications for Practice**

These students’ experiences bolster the rationale for institutions to implement focused institutional efforts to promote intercultural friendships between U.S. and international students. Ideas that would encourage such relationships include intensive and intentional intergroup dialogues, better leveraging international students’ experiences and cultural assets in curricular and co-curricular spaces, and ensuring that there is adequate support for the complex and difficult to measure cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills which can be honed through sustained engagement across cultures.

The majority of students conveyed that their campus was a supportive place for developing friendships. Overall, their stories and friendship diagrams pointed to vibrant relationships with a variety of peers. The students’ responses to questions about their satisfaction with the campus environment with regard to making friends highlighted their expectations that the institution shared a responsibility to aid students in the process of re-creating their social networks in the U.S. The students indicated that the first-year experience program (orientation), residence halls, and student organizations were important for their experiences developing friendships. They spoke of forming study groups, finding peers who had common experiences with mental health challenges, and recognizing the rewards and excitement that are a part of developing new social networks where cultural norms are not always aligned. However, none of
the students pointed to specific examples of institutional support related to developing intercultural relationships; instead they focused on the impact of campus roommate matching, availability and promotion of cultural organizations, and reinforcement and reminders they have received to engage in co-curricular activities.

The institution that served as the site of this study offers few opportunities to assist students to prepare for what might be different about making friendships on a U.S. college campus. These should include relevant cultural context to aid students to make meaning of the types of contact they can anticipate, opportunities to learn intercultural skills integral to successful cross-cultural relationships, and spaces to obtain support for the challenges of developing intercultural relationships. Takuma specifically communicated that despite the demographic diversity, it is necessary to “introduce students to these options that are available…and really try to drive students to those activities, because students are really reluctant”. He confessed that “I just need some kind of push to actually get into that activity or event.” While he is the only student to be this explicit, he is likely one of many students that would benefit from additional contact from mentors, administrators, and peers to participate in the co-curricular opportunities that promote and support students to build relationships and consider the benefits of cross-cultural contact. He and others mentioned how mutual friendships served to bridge friendship development with peers who were perceived to have less commonalities. Overall, the students’ experiences supported existing literature (Astin, 1999), which stresses the importance peers play in the promotion of co-curricular engagement and learning.

One-third of the international students interviewed told stories about considerable displeasure with how they were received by their U.S. peers. Although it was disheartening to
hear their stories, the current national climate is not welcoming. The students’ stories reassured me that each could have had a different experience if there was more support, beginning with the marketing of the value of the diverse campus and extending to the opportunities to reflect and promote learning through cross-cultural experiences that include uncomfortable dissonance and potential for rewarding growth. The students’ stories also reinforced that although this institution enrolls large numbers of international students and a majority of undergraduates participate in a study abroad, the campus does not have a culture that reinforces the benefits of on-campus cross-cultural experiences. Institutions that "integrate internationalization into their ethos" (Ross & Chen, 2015, p. 32) and bring international and U.S. students together to provide them with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to apply what they are learning will promote global competence. The wide array of opportunities all students have to learn through engaging across the vibrant and diverse students enrolled on campus are under-promoted or underappreciated.

Each student I interviewed explicitly conveyed the importance of friendship in their lives, even when their stories conveyed less than positive friendship development experiences in college. The students who communicated positively about their friendships conveyed more reliance and emotional support in their definition of friendship. These students stated that friends “are mental support in difficult times when you have to make big decisions” (Takuma); “help me and I help them in times of need” (Nick); “give you a sense of family when home is miles away” (Victoria); and “provide company and advice…look out for each other and better each other” (Samantha). The students who communicated less positively about their friendship experiences displayed less reliance on their friends in their definition and stated “friendships are grounded in work connections, class projects, and research” (James); “culture defines attitudes and personalities of friendships” (Blue); and “people that I can study with and feel comfortable
laughing and hanging out with” (Xuan). This study was focused on international students’ experiences making friends, yet through their stories, I was given insight about their overall experiences and fulfillment with their college experience.

Finding students to participate in the study was something I expected to be easier due to the small number of participants I expected to interview relative to the large number of eligible participants I had contacted with various forms of recruitment. However, I was unprepared for many of the students who agreed to participate to be so openly grateful for the space to reflect and share stories about their experiences in college developing friendships. While these students volunteered to participate in this study, the benefits of regular reflective practice during college related to both personal and academic engagement should not be overlooked. At some point during or after each interview, each student conveyed the value in completing the friendship diagram and interview with me because of the opportunity they had to reflect on their experiences making friends and recalling stories about their experiences making friendships. Caine, Estefan, and Clandinin (2013) reinforced the value of narrative inquiry to stimulate participants to make meaning of their experiences.

**Recommendations for Practice**

While the majority of the nine participants described positive friendship experiences, there were heartbreaking examples shared that highlighted where students have been under supported in navigating the challenges face developing intercultural relationships or where students were not encouraged to include intercultural relationships in their friendship networks. Campus housing provides a critical opportunity for programs to encourage U.S. and international students to choose a roommate with different life experiences or cultural frame. A model example is Rutgers University Global Roommate program, which is highly sought-after on the
campus. This program includes educational opportunities to enhance awareness and respect for cultural differences, support with roommate issues grounded in cross-cultural conflict theory, and multiple types of opportunities to engage in local, national, and global current topic dialogs that leverage the different experiences students bring to the discussions. Examples of programs to consider including are as follows: living learning communities, peer mentor programs, weaving smaller team activities or projects into large classes and co-curricular activities, and ensuring first-year seminar courses exist to aid students with developing networks and cultural capital about campus resources.

While no student should be forced to develop intercultural friendships, in this study, most participants’ desired diversity in their friendships. When they had diverse friendships, participants conveyed that these relationships were rewarding because of the opportunity to learn from others different from themselves. Institutions benefit from developing operational definitions for the global learning values they promote. The operational definition must be used to cultivate a welcoming and inclusive campus culture that includes opportunities for learning through structured, informal, and sustained intercultural interactions. Expectations related to the value and opportunity to grow and learn about yourself and others through intercultural exchange must be communicated to students at the point of recruiting new students. Students, as well as the institution, must be held accountable and supported to create opportunities for meaningful engagement between culturally diverse groups. In order to promote cultural curiosity, reciprocity, inclusiveness, and provide the support necessary to yield positive intercultural engagement between culturally diverse groups. U.S. students need to be informed about intercultural maturity development and the potential to enhance intercultural maturity through sustained intercultural friendships. The stories I heard in this study as well as research conducted
by Schofield, Hausmann, Ye, and Woods (2010) showed that the positive impact of diverse peer relationships reinforce the need to engage U.S. students in on-campus intercultural experiences. Soria and Troisi (2013) advocated that these types of experiences are more financially feasible and otherwise accessible to more students than study abroad.

A college in Australia published a paper about a program they conducted over a five-year period that promoted healthy interpersonal relationships and sexual education (Borrett & Zysk, 2007). This program was a partnership between the counseling services and international services offices and involved international students and U.S. students narrating their relationship stories about roommates, romances, friends, and professors/staff in order to convey norms around intimate relationships in a format that promoted peer-to-peer learning. The impact of this program on healthy relationships and sexual health was demonstrated and showed how engaging international students in the planning of services and activities delivery is critical. Involving students in developing interventions, peer mentor programs, leading intergroup dialogues, or similar types of programs promotes agency from the students who stand to experience considerable gain. The campus administrators play a role to ensure there are a variety of opportunities available, to support students in their learning, and to model values that reinforce the value of diversity. All learners can benefit from learning how to engage in cross-cultural relationships, foster positive interpersonal interactions, and promote understanding through bridging cultural norms. The unwelcoming experiences conveyed by the interviewed students in this study, showed that domestic students need to be introduced to a campus culture that promotes the benefits of diversity on learning. The U.S. students need to understand how they would benefit from increased cultural awareness and knowledge and mentoring to support their ability to apply skills and create a welcoming campus environment for international students.
This study also reinforces that institutions would benefit from taking the time to identify what international students expect from their U.S. study-abroad experience before they arrive to campus. It is especially important to consider the expectations students have about what their experience developing friendships will be like and who they expect to be friends with during college. When an institution gathers information about expectations for making friends, a program can be developed to provide more context about campus culture and expectations within U.S. culture in regards to social norms and relationships. Xuan’s story about being prepared to take the risk and show up to an unfamiliar environment is a clear example. She said “It's definitely scary to show up. …I went there not really expecting anything. I wasn't expecting any rejection or immediate acceptance or anything.” Her self-awareness about not setting specific expectations is important because other students, like James and Nick, did not convey an awareness of their initial expectations, and they expressed a greater sense of disappointment in their stories.

A wide variety of models exist to orient new international students to campus. The orientation model in place contributes to the climate for international students and the culture of integration or segregation on campus. Institutions need to provide additional supplemental orientation programs for new international students, in addition to campus-wide orientation programs. There are ample opportunities to recruit diverse orientation leaders who can be supported to facilitate student-led sessions that can provide information and experiential learning around U.S. cultural norms, including those around developing friendships in this context. Kovtun (2011) called for programs that promote increased understanding of U.S. social diversity that aid their comfort in engaging with people of diverse backgrounds. I suggest taking this a step further by establishing clear expectations to all students around the cultural respect and
value in cross-cultural engagement. Administrators must promote opportunities for students to understand how cultural norms influence friendship expectations. International and domestic students can be incorporated into a program through a panel where students can share their personal experiences, reassure students that they are not alone when worrying about making friends in college, and offer support around specific concerns or questions. A program currently exists to address general wellness and safety at the research site. Including additional content to be more explicit with students about the value of friendships and the support available to them around developing new social networks would likely be well-received based on the experiences conveyed by the nine students interviewed in this study.

An environment where international students feel that they matter is critical. Xuan’s stories talked about a position in campus ministry for a person to focus on engaging and reaching out to new students attending the organization’s meetings. She directly stated that the welcoming feeling that this person conveyed through getting to know her name helped her to return to the ministry and deepen relationships with others. This experience reinforces the small but noticeable efforts that can be made to be more intentional and caring about checking-in with new international students to identify if the student is receiving the support they need to find the spaces to connect and build relationships with peers. Places to check-in on students would be in the residence halls, student organizations, student life, and campus services offices. To be clear, all students could benefit from this intentional focus on caring for our students and support for community building. Based on this study, students from recently immigrated families can serve as a bridge to build relationships outside of co-national groups. The stories shared conveyed that these “partially international” students, a term specifically used by Takuma, more easily understand international students and also serve as cultural mentors sharing knowledge of the
U.S. culture with international students. Recent immigrant students, based on stories shared in this study, have the potential to increase the likelihood for the international student or U.S. student to remain open to the cross-cultural relationships that the students in this study expressed were more challenging, as well as rewarding.

Most students in this study indicated the experiences and learning opportunities that are a part of first-year co-curricular and on-campus residential experiences supported their experience making friendships. This study did not focus on which aspects were most valuable or supportive to students, but it became clear through the students’ stories that U.S. students must be given the framework early on to understand their role in welcoming diverse students to campus as well as the importance of intercultural friendship development for their own learning. All students can gain cultural awareness and greater respect for human differences and similarities through intergroup dialogues led by trained peers or campus administrators. The capability to form cross-cultural relationships is influenced by intercultural maturity (King, Baxter Magolda, & Masse, 2011), but measuring intercultural maturity is not a dominant activity on college campuses – even those with global reputations like this site. As a result there are wide variations in the capacity for our students to develop intercultural friendships and little awareness by administrators about the degree of support a student requires to promote learning. It is imperative to identify what perception U.S. students have of their international peers as potential friends, in particular with students who are planning to study abroad as a means of developing intercultural skills.

Ensuring college students have regular opportunities for reflective practice similar to what was afforded to the participants of this study is also important. Additional opportunities for reflection on co-curricular and curricular activities and learning must be available by prioritizing
tools, time, and space for processing that helps students help themselves make sense of their experiences. Higher education professionals must help students come into awareness of their own processes of making meaning and help them recognize and appreciate how others may make meaning differently. E-portfolios and co-curricular transcripts are being introduced and used by institutions to provide students a place to catalogue, reflect, and apply the learning that occurs across campus and throughout their studies. Students who participate in study abroad programs are often encouraged to narrate their experiences digitally or in other visual or written formats. Similar expectations ought to be in place with international students who will have much longer and sustained immersive experiences with more opportunity to lose sight of the individual learning and growth that are occurring throughout their sojourn. Institutions who model inclusive campus internationalization practices avoid creating a culture of international students vs. U.S. students in their view of internationalization (Taha & Cox, 2016).

**Recommendations for Research**

This study was focused on the experiences international students had while making friends and not on the composition of the students’ friendships. Participants were asked to complete a friendship diagram as a pre-interview reflective activity. During this activity, I identified that many of the students I interviewed do not seek out friendships based on their cultural group identity. A larger scale study to obtain information about international students’ social networks across a number of demographic variables, academic programs, and campus types would be useful. Online survey technology would allow the social diagram activity to be used to conduct a large-scale study to include both U.S. and international students. This type of research would augment the anecdotal media reports that center on the failures of colleges to support international students to integrate into the campus community.
When completing the social network diagram activity, several students’ stories highlighted the multicultural nature of this campus as positive influences on their experiences making friends. In one case, Takuma introduced several examples where his “partially international” friends, referring to friends who are American and also have a strong heritage tied to immigration to the U.S., served as a bridge to aid him to connect with other U.S. peers. Additional research looking at the ways multicultural students on U.S. campuses serve to bridge relationships between students would be useful and support theoretical and practical connections between intercultural and multicultural work in higher education.

This study only included international students, but I believe additional research is needed to understand U.S. students’ experiences making friends, in particular their interest, the benefits, and challenges of intercultural friendships. The experiences international students have making friends with U.S. students will not improve without greater understanding of both groups of students’ experiences. While language, cultural norms, and perceptions may serve to be a barrier for international students to engage with U.S. students, future research should look to the Intercultural Maturity Development model (King & Baxter Magolda, 2005) or other similar models to evaluate intercultural maturity and identify the extent that fear of others, perception of overwhelming differences, disinterest in cultural norms outside of their own dominant experiences, and xenophobia are involved in the decision U.S. students make not to pursue developing intercultural friendships.

Several institutions nationwide are assessing intercultural growth for students before and after participating in study abroad. There is an opportunity to expand on research done by Williams and Johnson (2011) that analyzed U.S. students with and without international student friendships to see if there were differences in their multicultural personality characteristics. As
anticipated, their study identified that there was significant cultural learning occurring through interpersonal relationships. Study abroad is still promoted as the ideal method to gain intercultural skills, although this is gradually changing. Research should explore intercultural maturity in students who study abroad and have limited intercultural friendships as well as those who have a variety of intercultural friendships and study abroad.

There is a critical need for efforts that promote global learning on campus to be inventoried and further explored because few campuses have historically focused efforts on sustained intercultural activities on campus. Research is beginning to be published about the benefits of on-campus efforts, but it has compared study abroad to sustained on-campus experiences (Ross & Chen, 2015; Soria & Troisi, 2013). Research could explore different types of high-impact on-campus practices to consider which aspects best stimulate intercultural learning. Living learning communities (LLC) that include a global learning component are flourishing on campuses. These environments provide a ripe opportunity to explore the intercultural maturity and friendship networks of students living in a culturally diverse LLC, where there is adequate support for intercultural learning to occur as compared to students living in a more culturally homogeneous LLC without a global learning focus.

The incidences of mental health conditions represented in the international students is not unusual based on my experience working on this campus. It was interesting to hear students talk about their conditions as a connector or a factor that enhances the bond with friends who either experience their own conditions or convey empathy in their friendships. International students are one of the least likely groups to seek treatment from the site’s campus counseling services. Additional research is needed to explore further the role of friendships on students with mental health conditions. This information would be useful in that it could help counseling centers with
their work trying to reach international students and aid identifying avenues to support international students’ mental wellbeing with alternative, potentially more culturally normed methods.

**Conclusion**

All students benefit from opportunities to develop friendships, and all students benefit from opportunities to develop and apply critical intercultural skills. Institutions likely already support students to make friends but must put in place additional support to aid students in the lifelong journey of developing intercultural skills. Institutions who convey a strong value for global learning and developing students into global leaders have a myriad of opportunities. While I have always believed that global learning is more than the bare minimum of recruiting international students and sending students abroad, talking with these students about their experiences making friends in their first year of college has solidified that global learning must be an effort that begins on campus and, when a student desires, deepened beyond the borders of the U.S. Creating spaces for identity exploration, practical application of skills needed to work in diverse teams, and support to reflect on cross-cultural negotiations are essential. More attention is needed to create well thought-out and inclusive international programs and services that promote global learning for all students and that directly involve international students leveraging their knowledge and experiences to create a culture of global learning on-campus and abroad.

I focused several months exploring existing research on international students’ experiences in order to prepare to conduct this narrative exploration. This exploration of literature reinforced anecdotal knowledge I have gained through years of working with international students and introduced me to aspects I had not yet considered. I have greater depth
of knowledge about global learning in U.S. higher education, the curricular and co-curricular experiences international students have while studying in the U.S., and what is needed to create inclusive learning environments. It is imperative that institutions begin to ensure U.S. students are active participants seeking intercultural learning on campus while also responding to the unique needs of international students studying in the U.S. Institutions gain from developing, promoting, and assessing the diversity of intercultural experiences available on campus and highlighting how they complement the high impact, but often exclusive, intercultural experience of studying abroad. Study abroad must be one of several options afforded to students to develop global citizenship skills. Students gain from understanding that positive, sustained intercultural engagement on campus with peers from around the world promotes intercultural growth and enhances the campus climate for all students. Prioritizing on-campus global learning opportunities also has the potential to promote increased engagement in study abroad programs by students who might otherwise not have participated. Most importantly, ensuring every student has access to information about the benefits, tools, and support to engage across cultures enhances the overall educational experience and learning outcomes for all students.
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Dear student,

I am a graduate student enrolled in a Doctoral program in Student Affairs Leadership at the University of Georgia. As a graduate student, I am conducting qualitative research to explore undergraduate international student experiences making friends in college. I received your email address from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. This study will explore the experiences international students have making friends including the influences, the benefits, and challenges in developing friendships. I am seeking depth in understanding the experiences international student have developing friends out of a desire to promote understanding and to advocate on behalf of international students.

Undergraduate international students who have enrolled as a first time freshman at Georgia Institute of Technology within the last year are sought to participate in the research study. In order to be eligible, you should meet the following criteria:

1. You are 18 or above and hold a temporary visa.
2. You have not enrolled at a U.S. high school, college or university prior to Georgia Tech.
3. You did not enroll at Georgia Tech before fall 2016.
4. You are pursuing a bachelor’s degree at Georgia Tech.

Participation is voluntary. Strict confidentiality of participants will be maintained throughout the study.

Participants may spend up to 2.5 hours to complete the research activities. Participants selected to participate in an in person interview with the researcher will receive a $20 Amazon voucher for their participation.

If you are an international student and want to participate in the study, complete an initial survey at International Students’ Experiences Making Friends to confirm your eligibility and provide demographic information. If you have any questions about this study, please call me, Marisa Atencio, at 404-894-9167 or email me at mlf51247@uga.edu. Thank you in advance.
Best,
Marisa Atencio
University of Georgia
Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student

Draft thank you email

Dear %Name%,

Thank you for completing the survey for the research study to explore international student experiences making friendships in college. I will reach out to you again by email if a follow up interview is requested.

Thank you again,
Marisa Atencio
University of Georgia
Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student

Draft email to inform participant they have been selected to participate in the study

Subject: Interview- study to explore international student experiences making friendships in college; please respond

Hello %Name%

Thank you for completing the survey to participate in a research study to explore international student experiences making friendships in college. I am requesting to meet with you in person to conduct an interview to hear more about your experiences making friends at Georgia Tech. The interview will take place in my office in the Savant Building where the Office of International Education is located.

I hope to schedule interviews during the times below:

Saturdays starting Oct. 27 between the hours of 9am-5pm
Sundays, starting Oct. 28th between the hours of 9am-5pm
Please confirm specific times you are available on a Saturday or Sunday in the coming weekends. I will send a confirmation email and calendar request once I have scheduled the interview date.

When you arrive for your scheduled time, I will briefly introduce a social network diagram activity which should take no more than 15 minutes to complete. After completing the activity, I will ask you a few open-ended questions so you can share your experiences making friendships in college. The activity and interview are expected to take no more than 1.5 hours of your time.

Best,

Marisa Atencio

University of Georgia

Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student

Draft participant thank you email

Dear %Name%,

Once again, thank you for taking the time to participate in the research study I am conducting to complete my doctoral dissertation. Your time is valuable as are the experiences and stories you shared with me. In the coming months I will analyze participant data in order to write up an analysis which will illuminate the experiences you and other participants have had in their first year on a U.S. college campus making friends. You will receive an email to invite you to participate in a focus group to review the initial data. As a reminder, personally identifiable information about you will not be shared with anyone. The feedback from the focus group will be used to support the rigor of the study. The analysis and narratives will support administrators, faculty and others who work with international students on U.S. college campuses have a greater awareness of the experiences international students have making friends in college. I intend to make recommendations to those who serve international students enrolled at U.S. colleges.
As promised, there is a $20 Amazon voucher can be redeemed by following this link. Should you have any problems with the link or have any questions, please call me, Marisa Atencio, at 404-894-9167 or email me at mlf51247@uga.edu.

Best,

Marisa Atencio

University of Georgia

Student Affairs Leadership Doctoral Student
APPENDIX B

Web Survey

3) Last/Family Name:

4) First/Given Name:

5) Gender Identity: (drop down menu which includes an option for prefer not to answer)

6) Country of Permanent Residence outside of the U.S: (drop down menu)

7) Country of Citizenship: (drop down menu with multi-select for dual citizens)

8) Language(s): (drop down menu with multi-select option)

9) Other languages: (drop down menu with multi-select option)

10) Academic Major: (drop down menu with muti-select for dual majors)

11) Please think about your friendships at Tech. What are the characteristics, traits, or behaviors of your friends? Consider what ways you rely on your friends or do they rely on you?

Considering all of this, please share a description or your definition of friendship below: (open-ended)
APPENDIX C
Recruitment Flyer

1. Have you enrolled at Tech for **LESS THAN 1 YEAR?**
2. Are you open to **TALKING ABOUT FRIENDSHIPS?**
3. Do you have a **STUDENT VISA?**
   ✓ Participate in an IRB approved research study to explore international students’ experiences making friends at Tech.
   ✓ Take a 15 min demographic survey and complete a 1hr interview.
   ✓ Enhance understanding of international students’ experiences.
   ✓ **Research participant confidentiality will be maintained.**
   ✓ Complete Survey @
     [https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LFPQ6GI9e3iMC1](https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6LFPQ6GI9e3iMC1) or email [mlf51247@uga.edu](mailto:mlf51247@uga.edu) for more detail***

$20 Amazon.com voucher given to participants after interview with the researcher
APPENDIX D

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT FORM
International Students’ Experiences Making Friends

Researcher’s Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you if you are selected to participate in an in person interview with the researcher.

Principal Investigator: Marisa Atencio
Office of International Education, Georgia Institute of Technology
404-894-7475 or marisa.atencio@oie.gatech.edu

Purpose of the Study
I am conducting qualitative research from a single university to explore the ways international students develop friendships during their first year enrolled on a U.S. college campus. Conducting this research will illuminate the experiences of international students offering an opportunity to better understand the experiences of the international students who participated in the study in regards to forming friendships. I also seek to explore influence, the benefits, and the challenges of developing friends.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are an international student who can share information about your experiences forming friendships on a U.S. college campus.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked …
• To provide data to the researcher in the form of a brief on-line survey and a longer in person interview.
• If selected for an in person interview, you will be asked to complete a friendship diagram activity where you will list friendships you have made since coming to college using the diagram activity. This activity should take no more than 10 minutes.
• During the interview with the researcher, you will be asked a several open-ended questions which allow you to share your experiences and stories about making friends in college including their influence, the benefits and the challenges of developing friends. The researcher may use the friendship diagram activity to ask you questions in the interview. Participants will
be advised not to share information unless they are fully comfortable talking about it with the researcher.

- The total in person interview with the researcher should last no more than 1.5 hours.
- The researcher, will offer you an opportunity to provide feedback on the analysis and notes in scheduled 2 hour period. This group meeting (member checking) is optional is expected to last less than 30 minutes.
- While the researcher will keep the focus group comments confidential, we can’t promise that other focus group participants will keep the information confidential. The researcher will ask all participants to respect the confidentiality of others by not revealing who participated in the focus group and by not discussing what was said in the group.
- The time commitment expected of participants will range based on the individual’s degree of engagement. The maximum duration to participate in this research study is expected to be no more than 2.5 hours.
- All of the interview materials will have a pseudonym as an identity in order to protect the participant’s confidentiality.

Risks and discomforts

- It is possible that participants may feel mild emotional discomfort (e.g., feelings of stress/discomfort, sadness guilt or anxiety, loss of self-esteem, etc.) when sharing experiences about making friends in college and engaging in activities outside of the classroom. The researcher will minimize emotional discomfort by ensuring each participant understands they have full authority to decide what to share and what not to share. In addition, the researcher will provide information to each participant about Student Counseling Services at the end of the interview portion of the study.
- The researcher takes responsibility to prevent any social risks for participants by ensuring full confidentiality for participants (e.g., breach of confidentiality that may result in embarrassment or stigmatization within one’s social group). The researcher protocol will minimize the risk of loss of confidentiality for participants.

Benefits

- Participating in the study is not expected to provide direct benefits to the participant, although participants may find some personal benefit from taking photos, seeing their social networks in a diagram or talking about their experiences making friends and being engaged outside of the classroom.
- The researcher will analyze the data provided by participants and publish the findings in an effort to inform anyone who supports international students on U.S. college campuses about experiences international students have making social relationships and their experiences being engaged in activities outside of the classroom. These experiences will enhance the awareness and understanding college administrators and faculty have about international student experiences and offer important insight which can be useful for anyone supporting international students enrolled in U.S. universities.

Incentives for participation

Participants selected to conduct an interview with the researcher are eligible for a $20 Amazon gift card. Prior to leaving the interview, the researcher will email the participant a link to the $20 Amazon gift card. The researcher will record receipt of the incentive using the participant’s pseudonym on the UGA payment log. The payment log will be retained for audit and not shared unless required by law.
Audio Recording
Audio recording devices will be used during the interview to allow the researcher to transcribe the interview for later analysis. The audio recording will not include any personally identifiable information.

Privacy/Confidentiality
This research involves the transmission of a limited amount of data over the Internet. Every reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the effective use of available technology; however, confidentiality during online communication cannot be guaranteed. Only data collected in the initial survey will include participant’s name or other personally identifiable information. Research participants selected to complete an in person interview will be asked to provide or if preferred assigned a pseudonym upon agreeing to participate in an interview. The researcher will use the pseudonym throughout the interview including on printed materials used in the interview, throughout data analysis, and in the findings in an effort to maintain confidentiality of the participants.

The initial demographic survey data will be saved in Qualtrics with a unique password that only the researcher knows. The survey, interview audio file, and transcription data will be saved as an electronic file folder which is password protected. Each audio file and transcription will be labeled with the pseudonym to maintain participant’s confidentiality. The interview files will be kept in a separate password protected folder in an electronic document which includes a list of the participant names and their pseudonym. Any friendship activity diagrams with notes from the interview will only have the individual’s name redacted and include the participant’s pseudonym. All electronic files will be retained for one year after the analysis is written and reported. The project’s research records, except the actual names of participants and the assigned pseudonym, may be reviewed by the Office for Human Research Protections and by departments at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight only when required by law.

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Marisa Atencio a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Georgianna Martin at glmartin@uga.edu or at 706.542.0791. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_________________________    _______________________  ____________
Name of Researcher    Signature    Date

_________________________    _______________________  ____________
Name of Participant    Signature    Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
APPENDIX E

Friendship Diagram Activity
APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

- The research participant was sent an email reminder 24 hours prior to the scheduled interview date with the date, time and location of the meeting.
- I engaged in small talk as needed to build rapport and lessen anxiety.
- When the participant arrived the researcher greeted them and ensured had an opportunity to read and sign a hardcopy of the IRB consent form. I asked if they had questions about the IRB consent form & gave them a signed copy.
- I reminded them that their participation is voluntary and that if at any time they are uncomfortable and want to stop the interview they can let me know this.
- I let the participant know that they will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym that will be used when writing up the findings. If they were not interested in selecting their own pseudonym then I identified one for them. The IRB consent form and the web survey were the only data with their actual name attached, all other data including the social diagram and transcription of the audio will be saved under their pseudonym.
- I gave the participant a printed social network diagram activity with the instructions below.

Instructions for the Social Diagram Activity

1. The activity I am going to ask you to complete is one that allows you to write out and visually display the social relationships you have made during your first year enrolled in college here.
2. Before getting started, I want you to think about listing the peers on this activity who you consider to be a close friend.

3. In addition to listing the name of the friend, write the friend’s cultural group—however you define this, and the location where or how you came to associate with this friend. For example: lunches in North Ave dining hall, FASET orientation, OIE check-in, Indian Student Association meeting, etc…

4. You have about 10 minutes to fill out the diagram with the information requested. I have additional pages so please feel free to ask for one if you fill the one I’ve given you.

5. I let them know about 5 minutes before the end of the time to give them time to finish up writing thoughts.

6. After completing the social network diagram activity, I place the activity on the table between us.

7. I prepare the audio recorder and proceed to record the interview no longer using the student’s first name in the recording in an effort to support confidentiality.

Sample Interview Questions: In Priority Order

I am going to ask you a few questions in an effort to hear more about your experiences making friends a college student and the association with the friends you’ve listed on the activity. The questions are intended to be broad and there is no right or wrong response. Only share what you are comfortable talking about but also know that I am seeking to truly understand your lived experiences in relation to making friends.

When you completed the survey on-line survey you completed a question asking about your definition of friendship. You shared a definition of friendship including indicated the
characteristics, traits, or behaviors of your friends include. I read their description or definition of friendship before asking the questions below:

1) Has this definition changed since you’ve been here at Georgia Tech or since being a college student? If yes in what way and for what reason?

2) What were you thinking about as you considered which people to include on the diagram?

3) How does looking at your diagram and thinking about your friendships make you feel? Do you know why you feel this way?

4) Please tell me a story about the friendship you made with (select a person) listed on the diagram?

5) Imagine I am a new GA Tech student asking you for support making friends, how would you describe your experiences at Tech making friends?

6) Tell me a story involving one of your friends that helps me to understand the influence they have on your life.

7) Tell me a story that helps me to see the benefits of one of the friendships you’ve listed.

8) Is there a story you can tell me that highlights the challenges you’ve experienced making friends as a student here?

9) Is there a friend you were not sure you should list on the diagram or that you hesitated to list?

9a) If you did list them, tell me about this friendship. What caused the struggle in listing them as a friend?

9b) If you did not list them, what was different about this friendship that prevented you from listing them?
10) Is there anything about the diagram that stands out to you/surprises you?

11) Can you think of a story about developing a friendship with someone here that shows how this is a supportive place to make friends?

12) Can you think of a story about developing a friendship with someone here that shows how this is a challenging place to make friends?

**Probing Questions**

Can you give me an example or tell me a story that demonstrates what you’ve just said?

How does that make you feel?

What do you wish I could understand about your friendship with this person?

Describe what that was like:

**Interview Wrap up**

8. After the discussion end, turn off the audio and check in with the participant to ask how they are feeling.

9. I remind them that they can advise me at any time if they do not want their data used in the study and that if they continue to participate, I will follow up with them in the coming months to share analysis notes and initial findings.
**TABLES**

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Citizen</th>
<th>Last Residence</th>
<th>Languages Spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Spanish; English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dev</td>
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<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>United Arab Emirates</td>
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<tr>
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<td>India</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Hindi; English</td>
</tr>
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<td>Panama</td>
<td>Spanish; English</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
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<tr>
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<td>China</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>Russia</td>
<td>Canada</td>
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<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2

**Friendship Diagram Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Friendship Definition</th>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Friendship Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Samantha | Friendship comes from common interest and common world view. Friends provide company and advice. I trust them and we look out for each other and better each other. | Residence hall; crew/rowing club; class | -No co-national  
-Majority host national  
-A few multi-national  
-Friendship diagram a single page |
| Dev | The perfect definition for the friendship is a group of people willing to wait eight hours in an emergency room waiting area with me at a moment’s notice. | Orientation; residence hall; campus recreation programs | -Two co-national  
-Several multi-national  
-Majority host national  
-Friendship diagram multiple pages |
| James | Current friendships are grounded in work connections, class projects, research, etc. A mutual bond is formed based on the quality of work and shared academic incentive. | Professor; research; class; hackathon; former boss | -No co-national  
-One multi-national  
-Majority host-national  
-Friendship diagram single page |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Friendship Definition</th>
<th>Association</th>
<th>Friendship Composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Friends give you a sense of family when home is miles away. They support you and are by your side in good and bad times. In times of conflict or problems, they are who you reach out to and talk to. They are there for you no matter what.</td>
<td>Residence hall; lab partner; cultural organization; prior to starting college; friend of a friend</td>
<td>- Two co-national - Majority multi-national (all Spanish speakers) - One host national - Friendship diagram multiple pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takuma</td>
<td>Friends know personal things/personal information. Are also mental support in difficult times when you have to make big decisions. I'm really comfortable with my friends and hang out with them often or room with them.</td>
<td>Residence hall; class; research project; cultural organization</td>
<td>- A few co-national - A few multi-national - A few host national - Friendship diagram multiple pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>The definition of friendship is related to culture. Culture defines attitudes and personalities of your friendships.</td>
<td>Residence hall; class; prior high school</td>
<td>- Several co-national. - No multi-national. - Two host-national. - Friendship diagram a single page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Friendship Definition</td>
<td>Association</td>
<td>Friendship Composition</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>With friends I initiate both recreational and professional activities instead of just waiting until it is necessary to see them. Friends help me and I help them in times of need.</td>
<td>Residence hall; WeChat/Chinese social media group; lab partner; student org.</td>
<td>-Majority host-national. -Two multi-national. -Several co-national (all listed in one circle). -Friendship diagram multiple pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>Friendship is built on affection, enjoying each other's company, and genuine concern for one another's well-being. It's an investment in a person that you care about. You go out of the way to help them knowing they will go out of their way to help you.</td>
<td>Classes; student organization; hackathon; internship; fraternity; OIE; residence hall</td>
<td>-Most friends not labeled by cultural group. -Those labeled are host-national. -Friendship diagram a single page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuan</td>
<td>People that I hang out with a lot. People that I can go to study with and feel comfortable around them. People that I can be comfortable laughing and hanging out with.</td>
<td>Student organization/ campus ministry</td>
<td>-Majority host-national. -One multi-national. -No co-national. -Friendship diagram a single page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Themes Across Students’ Stories (Tapestries)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Samantha</th>
<th>Dev</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Takuma</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Xuan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-college Expectations and Emotions about Making Friends</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Worried about Making Friends in College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop Friendships with Diverse Peers</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>First Year Experiences, Feelings, and Views about Making Friends</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commonalities Support Friendships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effort/Investment is Different in College</td>
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<td>Reflecting was Beneficial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Values Alignment Impacted Friendships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment Supports Friendships</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of Time/Proximity</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comfort with a Variety Friendship Types</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Priorities Influence Experiences (financial, academic, social, incentives)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends Play Parental/Mentor Role</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety, Stress, and Mental Health</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Varied Effort- In/Out Group Friendships</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isolation/Dissatisfaction/Insecurity</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Racism/Unwelcoming Experiences</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Display of Cognitive, Interpersonal, and Intrapersonal Maturity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intermediate Intercultural Maturity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Shaded means the student conveyed this expectation, experience, or view.

NO means the student conveyed they did not have this expectation, experience, or view.

n/a means the student did not communicate this expectation, experience, or view or they displayed an initial level of Intercultural Maturity.
Table 4

*Benefit or Influence of Friends on Students and Environmental Influences on Making Friends*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Samantha</th>
<th>Dev</th>
<th>James</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>Takuma</th>
<th>Blue</th>
<th>Nick</th>
<th>Alex</th>
<th>Xuan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefit or Influence of College Friends on Students</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Aid Decision Making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote Improving Ourselves/Taking Risks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide a Variety of Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support Identity Development/Salience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote Mental Well-being</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increase Satisfaction with College Experience</td>
<td>NO</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Campus Environment Influences on Making Friends</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Residence Hall (roommates &amp; activities)</td>
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<td>Recreational or Cultural Organizations</td>
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<td>Sustained Contact Deepens Friendships</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common First Year Experience Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academics (class, study groups, research)</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Received Messages to get Engaged/Involved (Peers, OIE, Student Life, Res. Life, etc. . . )</td>
<td></td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Social Media/Technology</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Projects/Campus Work/Internship</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shaded means the student communicated this benefit or influence of their college friends or that this was an environmental influence on their experience making friends.

NO means the student communicated their college friends did not influence them in this way or the college environment did not have this influence on their experience making friends.

n/a means the student did not directly communicate nor did their stories convey this influence.
**FIGURES**

Figure 1

King and Baxter Magolda's (2005) Developmental Model of Intercultural Maturity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain of Development and Related Theories</th>
<th>Initial Level of Development</th>
<th>Intermediate Level of Development</th>
<th>Mature Level of Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Assumes knowledge is certain and categorizes knowledge claims as right or wrong; is naive about different cultural practices and values; resists challenges to one's own beliefs and views differing cultural perspectives as wrong</td>
<td>Evolving awareness and acceptance of uncertainty and multiple perspectives; ability to shift from accepting authority’s knowledge claims to personal processes for adopting knowledge claims</td>
<td>Ability to consciously shift perspectives and behaviors into an alternative cultural worldview and to use multiple cultural frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
<td>Lack of awareness of one's own values and intersection of social (racial, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation) identity; lack of understanding of other cultures; externally defined identity yields externally defined beliefs that regulate interpretation of experiences and guide choices; difference is viewed as a threat to identity</td>
<td>Evolving sense of identity as distinct from external others’ perceptions; tension between external and internal definitions prompts self-exploration of values, racial identity, beliefs; immersion in own culture; recognizes legitimacy of other cultures</td>
<td>Capacity to create an internal self that openly engages challenges to one's views and beliefs and that considers social identities (race, class, gender, etc.) in a global and national context; integrates aspects of self into one's identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Dependent relations with similar others is a primary source of identity and social affiliation; perspectives of different others are viewed as wrong; awareness of how social systems affect group norms and intergroup differences is lacking; view social problems egocentrically, no recognition of society as an organized entity</td>
<td>Willingness to interact with diverse others and refrain from judgment; relies on independent relations in which multiple perspectives exist (but are not coordinated); self is often overshadowed by need for others' approval. Begins to explore how social systems affect group norms and intergroup relations</td>
<td>Capacity to engage in meaningful, interdependent relationships with diverse others that are grounded in an understanding and appreciation for human differences, understanding of ways individual and community practices affect social systems; willing to work for the rights of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Baxter Magolda, 1992, 2001; Belenky et al., 1986; M. Bennett, 1993; Fischer, 1980; Kegan, 1994; King & Kitchener, 1994, 2004; Perry, 1968)