

HOW CULTURE INFLUENCES THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL WEST
AFRICAN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A TWO YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE
PROGRAM

by

LORETTA SAMUEL CROSSON

(Under the Direction of Talmadge C. Guy)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how culture influences the experiences of international West African students enrolled in a two years college degree program. Three research questions guided this study: What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience? What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences? In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

A qualitative case study methodology was employed for the research design, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection. Ten international students enrolled in degree seeking programs at an urban two year college located in central Georgia were interviewed about their learning experiences. All participants were international, undergraduate students pursuing their Associate degrees who had taken at least four core courses during the past year. An international student is defined as one who was born outside of the United States and for whom English is a second language. The phrases 'international students' and 'foreign students' will be used interchangeably

throughout this study. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself, and the data were analyzed using the constant comparative method to generate major themes.

Data analysis revealed that the West African students' felt more or a greater sense of compliance as a result of their respect for their authority and their parental direction/expectations for them to succeed. Their experiences were characterized by the different levels of competitiveness they encountered in terms of economics and access to education. They also exhibited a higher level of anxiety because of inadequate language proficiency, communication skills, and processing/completing course work. The second category of findings delineated the strategies African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences. African cultural values and school norms greatly influenced these African students' educational experience.

Based on the findings, three conclusions were drawn from this study: The first is that some West African students will experience conflicting messages from their African culture and the newly encountered Western, Eurocentric culture. The second conclusion is that the West African students interviewed clearly evidenced that cultural factors are important in influencing the educational experiences of West African students in American two year colleges. Last, learning for these West African students is a high-risk-taking enterprise that works better when they are made to feel more secure and centered in who they are and what they are already capable of doing before they are asked to take on new ventures.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Learning, Community College, Culture, Cultural Experiences, Cultural Values, International Students, Two Year College, West African International Students

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The American community college dates back to the early years of the 20th century. The community college evolved from at least seven sources of educational innovation. Two began in the 1880s and 1890s: (a) Community boosterism and (b) the rise of the research university. Three came from the educational reforms of the Progressive Era (1900–1916): (c) the advent of universal secondary education, (d) the professionalization of teacher education, and (e) the vocational education movement. The final two, (f) open access to higher education, and (g) the rise of adult and continuing education and community service, were primarily post–World War II phenomena. The seeds of all seven of these innovations can be found even in the earliest junior colleges (Educational Encyclopedia, 2008).

Changing Demographics of Community Colleges

The multiple forces fueling community college development contributed to confusion over the name and mission of these institutions. The terms *community college*, *junior college*, *technical college*, and *technical institute* encompass a wide array of institutions. *Two-year college* refers to all institutions where the highest degree awarded is a two-year degree (i.e., associate of arts, associate of science, associate of general studies, associate of applied arts, associate of applied science). Generally, community colleges are comprehensive institutions that provide: (a) General and liberal education, (b) career and vocational education, and (c) adult and continuing education. Yet many two-year colleges do not offer the comprehensive curriculum just outlined, and therefore are not truly community colleges in this comprehensive use of the term.

Junior college refers to an institution whose primary mission is to provide a general and liberal education leading to transfer and completion of the baccalaureate degree. Junior colleges often also provide applied science and adult and continuing education programs as well. *Technical college* and *technical institute* refer only to those institutions awarding no higher than a two-year degree or diploma in a vocational, technical, or career field. Technical colleges often offer degrees in applied sciences and in adult and continuing education.

Also, there are technical institutes with curricula that extend to the baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate (i.e., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), but these are not community colleges. There are also proprietary (for-profit) two-year colleges that refer to themselves as technical colleges, technical institutes, or community colleges. Adding to the confusion of labeling is the fact that *community college* has become used generically in higher-education literature to refer to all colleges awarding no higher than a two-year degree.

From the 1940s, they were known most commonly as junior colleges. During the 1950s and 1960s, the term “junior college” was applied more often to the lower division-branches of private universities of two year colleges supported by churches or organized independently, while “community college” came gradually to be used for the comprehensive, publicly supported institutions. By the 1970s, the term “community college” was usually applied to both types (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). For the purpose of this study, a community college is defined as “a regionally accredited institution of higher education that offers the associate degree as its highest degree; however, today, in a number of states community colleges offer the bachelor’s degree as well” (Vaughan, p.

1). Their primary purpose was helping communities by teaching subjects that pertained to industry and the economic needs of the surrounding areas. However, as time went on and the economic needs of society began to change, community colleges began to offer job-training programs also.

Among the social forces that contributed to its rise, most prominent were the need for workers trained to operate the nation's expanding industries; the lengthened period of adolescence, which mandated custodial care of the young for a longer time; and the drive for social equality, which supposedly would be enhanced if more people had access to higher education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Great challenges faced the United States in the early 20th century, including global economic competition. National and local leaders realized that a more skilled workforce was key to the country's continued economic strength, a need that called for a dramatic increase in college attendance (American Association of Community Colleges {AACC}, 2006). As the largest sector of higher education, community colleges played a unique role in ensuring access to quality postsecondary education and specialized training programs for almost half of all U.S. undergraduates.

Every community college has its own culture and serves a unique geographic area and clientele. In spite of an apparent growing national interest in global competence, relatively little attention has been paid to the growing number of international students entering the community college classrooms. However, it is apparent that broader curricular internationalization is needed because postsecondary graduates are poorly informed about other people, and events; and offerings by institutional type are uneven, with two-year institutions providing fewer international education opportunities than their

four year counterparts (American Council on Education (ACE, 2000). Attitudinal and experiential data are key to understanding campus culture related to internationalization.

Growing Trend of International Students in Two Year Colleges

One important trend that is affecting America's community colleges is the growing presence of international students. An international student is for the purpose of this study "a student who was not born in the United States, is not a legal citizen of the United States, and for whom English may or may not be a second language."

Community colleges across the country hosted more than 582,984 international students, up from 70,000 international students during the 2002-2003 academic years, according to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) (2007), "Open Doors 2007" report. There was an even higher increase in the number of new international students, those enrolled for the first time at a college or university, in the fall 2006, a figure which rose 10% from the previous year (IIE, 2007).

These numbers continue to rise as recruiting international students for two-year associate's degrees or four-year bachelor's degrees from community colleges is becoming more focused with each admissions cycle. According to former Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Karen Hughes, "the increase in enrollments seen in this year's Open Doors statistics reflects the dynamism, diversity and excellence of U.S. higher education institutions in a competitive international environment, and demonstrates the commitment of the U.S. government and U.S. higher education leaders to welcoming international students" (IIE, Open Doors, 2007, p.12).

Important data on international education exchange in the United States' colleges and universities for the 2007 academic year indicated that the 582, 984 foreign students

who studied in the United States brought more than \$14,499.1 billion into the U.S. economy. The total net contribution to the U.S. economy from international students increased negligibly (less than .1 percent) from the previous year, a result of a 2.4% decline in foreign student numbers, offset by inflation and a slight increase in the overall level of U.S. financial support. Business and management, engineering, and physical and life sciences, social sciences, and math/computer sciences were the top five fields of study for foreign students in the United States (IIE, 2007).

Community colleges are diverse institutions that serve a wide variety of needs. These include the students who come to upgrade their skills for a particular job, students who are pursuing an associate degree to transfer to a 4-year institution and students who come to pursue a hobby (such as learning a language). The educational outcomes of community college students reflect these diverse initiatives. This flexibility has resulted in what Allan E. Goodman, President and CEO of the Institute of International Education, believes has contributed to vigorous efforts at the national, state and campus levels that have combined to produce this rebounding of international student enrollment. Given increased global competition for talent, as well as expanded higher education options in many of the leading sending countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, and Asian countries, America needs to continue its proactive steps to insure that its academic doors remain wide open, and that students around the world understand that they will be warmly welcomed (Open Doors, 2007).

Issues and Concerns for International Students in Community Colleges

With increased enrollment figures, we are ever reminded of the dramatic shifts in population much of which can be attributed to the increased enrollment of international

students on college campuses. Consequently, this factor has required that colleges and universities be prepared to teach students who are racially, linguistically, and culturally different from previous generations of students. With these rapid changes in the population come a number of road blocks which prohibit some international students from succeeding at U.S. institutions. First of all, culture shock can be a great impetus to the collegiate experiences of international students, yet college administrators and faculty alike tend to underestimate how dramatic culture shock can be. A lot of international students get sick after they arrive. Some students never make the adjustment (Street, 2003). Becoming accepted into an affinity group that offers social support is much more difficult for international students if few students are from their country or global region.

Moreover, adapting to the customs and mores of American society and campus life may conflict with aspects of the personal and cultural identity of international students (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). As a result, those students are more likely to report feeling isolated and lonely, which can escalate into severe depression (Mori, 2000) and in turn may lessen their participation in activities that contribute to the important learning and personal development experiences of college life. Beyond that, many countries' educational systems value different academic and social skills than the United States' higher education system. If a student moves from an educational system that values text mastery to one that values collaboration and hands-on learning, he or she might have to maintain a demanding "cram" schedule in the host country and "burnout" becomes a significant threat.

Language barriers have proven to be one of the greatest challenges for international students while studying abroad (Ranjani, 1998). A majority of these

students arrive from countries where English is not the first language. Although most international students are able to pass a standardized proficiency examination in English, they have difficulties functioning satisfactorily in an academic setting. Deficiencies in writing, reading, and speaking the host country's language have proven to be just a few of the reasons these students are unsuccessful. International students' difficulties in understanding lectures, expressing ideas and writing reports have been attributed to their lack of proficiency in English.

Another issue where language can be problematic is when an international student brings a spouse and young children to the host institution's country, where he or she might be the only person in the household to speak the host country's language fluently. As a result, the student often bears the responsibility of taking care of household concerns which can be made more burdensome by unfamiliarity with the host country's social and governmental structures (Street, 2003). International students also may feel left out; therefore, colleges and faculty must obtain a greater understanding of culture and the role it plays both in the experiences of international students and in the classroom setting.

Finally, racial discrimination and prejudice is another concern. Racial prejudice may derail the healthy acculturation process and serve to worsen what is already felt and perceived as negative (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). Experiencing racial prejudice may lead to low self-esteem, self-confidence and intensify international students' sense of harm and threat when encountering difficulties in their academic and social lives.

African International Students in Community Colleges

The mobility of African students and the influence of western higher education is not, as some would think, a recent phenomenon. Students from newly independent

African nations first began coming to the United States in significant numbers during the 1960s. By 1985, after the OPEC oil boom, oil-rich Nigeria was the third highest country of origin for international students in the United States. Five years later, with oil prices plummeting, it had disappeared from the top 10. The trends in the 1980s were clearly related to Africa's deep economic crisis and the number of students able to come to America from Africa dwindled.

During the early 1990s African students began to once again seek international educational opportunities. Today, African students are drawn to the United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Canada, and Australia as well as emerging educational magnets in other Asian countries, but the United States is still invariably their first choice. The number of sub-Saharan African students in the United States, approximately 32,423 doubled in the decade between 1991 and 2001, later receding slightly, as much in response to international economic pressure as to post-9/11 reaction (Keteku, 2007). In 2000, more than 34,000 students from Africa traveled to the United States for study (Teferra, 2002).

Thus, the presence of international students gives higher education a richness of diversity unavailable in most United States communities. As African students continue to choose to study in the United States, institutions of higher education will need to respond to growing globalization. However, there is very little data available about these students' interaction and socialization in American colleges and universities. Because African students possess diverse cultural perspectives, colleges and universities' disciplines must be ideally suited to contribute to an expanded understanding of the cultural heritage of African students, facilitate the interplay of personal and professional dynamics within

academia, and underscore the potential impact of international perspectives on families and communities (Marcketti et al, 2006).

African international students face different challenges than typical African American students because oftentimes they are recent immigrants into the United States whose families have journeyed while enduring discrimination, war, disease, and other obstacles to create better lives for themselves and their children. Africans are often confronted with complex decisions regarding work, school, family and community. Many Africans are border-crossers building new identities in the United States while maintaining family ties in their home countries and are often faced with uncertainty about the future (Rendon, 1996).

Because Africa is a vastly diverse continent with more than 50 countries, 900 million people, and more than 2,000 languages spoken, there are varying histories of colonization, extension of political and economic control over an area by a state whose nationals have occupied the area and usually poses organization or technological superiority over the native population, which has resulted in civil strife and political instability in each country (Stebleton, 2007). There are differences in culture, ethnicity, race, traditions, economic viability and social cultural factors that have a significant impact on the educational needs of Africans from each of these countries to the United States (Fanon, 1968).

It is highly likely that these Africans' educational needs and experiences are unique compared to those of African American students and other international students and, therefore, heuristic. To honor these differences, further inquiry into the educational needs of African international students should be initiated. Although research on

international populations has appeared in education and social science literature (Alfred 2003; Lacy, 2004), there has been a dearth of inquiry into the role of culture and its influence on the experiences of African international students and, in particular, African international college students. This lack of research thus far may be somewhat explained by the fact that the most recent surge in African international students journeying to the United States has occurred within the last 5 to 15 years, since the 1990s, further highlighting the need for legitimate study focusing on these students.

Implications for Two Year Colleges

Colleges and universities must begin a focused and concerted effort to provide international students in particular, and all students in general, the skills, attitude, and knowledge they will need to be successful in the pluralistic and interdependent world in which they will live and work as adults. Among these competencies are the ability to be multilingual and the ability to be cross-culturally competent (Scott, 2001).

According to Johnson (2003) international students and scholars are part of America's investment in foreign policy. Making a case for the value of international students in America, Johnson (2003) gives reasons why America has supported international students and educational exchanges since the end of World War II. Among the reasons are international students bring important and growing educational benefits to American colleges. They add diversity to the student body and provide the first opportunity that many Americans have for close and extensive contacts with foreigners. They fill perennially under-enrolled science courses that colleges would otherwise find difficult to offer. Increasingly, foreign graduate students provide crucial support for teaching and research, particularly in the sciences (Johnson, 2003).

International students also contribute significant economic benefits. According to the Institute of International Education, more the 70 percent of undergraduate international students pay full tuition. Last year, international students and their dependents spent \$12 billion in our economy. The most important benefits that the United States has gained from educating successive generations are in the realms of foreign policy and national security. International students and scholars, who constitute an exceptional reservoir of good will for our country, are perhaps our most under-valued foreign policy asset (Johnson, 2003).

In 2000, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) conducted a survey regarding community colleges' involvement in international programs and services, following a 1995 survey of the community colleges' involvement in these areas. The survey was sent to 1,171 community colleges; one follow-up postcard was sent to non-respondents. Three hundred seven colleges responded, for a 26 percent response rate. The 2000 survey sought information about initiatives in three broad areas: internationalizing curriculum; providing campus and community activities designed to increase global awareness; and facilitating person-to-person international experiences and cooperation.

Highlights of the AACC 2000 survey reported that 82 percent of the responding colleges reported having international components in their courses, compared with 40 percent in 1995. The number of colleges with international business programs, including contract training, grew from 23 percent in 1995 to 60 percent in 2000. 83 percent of colleges reported sponsoring activities to promote global awareness on campus and in the community, compared with 43 percent in 1995. Additionally, colleges are increasingly

recruiting international students, bringing greater diversity to campuses and their surrounding communities. 44 percent of colleges reported recruiting or hiring faculty and staff who are from another country or who have international experience. Thus, as the world grows more interconnected, community colleges are increasingly beginning to understand that international students' culture, which fuels their experiences, must be made an important part of the community college mission.

Statement of the Problem

Over the last 100 years, the number of community colleges has grown, and they have transformed from small, local institutions into well-established networks for higher education. Their presence has not only impacted local communities and the world of higher education but has also highlighted the importance of preparing students to function in a globally competitive environment. As students prepare for professional careers and personal lives in an increasingly global environment, international experience becomes an important component of undergraduate education.

According to Stewart (2004) "the sound educational motives for incorporating diversity and multicultural experience on American campuses provide principles for working toward the goal of including some international experience in the curriculum of all students whether they are majority group members or students from ethnic or racial minorities" (p. 159). Even though most college campuses are already diverse, international students constitute an important source and distinct element of diversity which can facilitate the global awareness of the overall student population.

Attending a school enrolling substantial numbers of international students may advantage American students in the marketplace, to the extent that the experience of

interacting with international students increases their cultural sensitivities and skills in working with people of different backgrounds (Calleja, 2000; Carnevale, 1999). Changes in America's educational population have, without a doubt, required that colleges and universities be prepared to teach students who are culturally different from themselves.

Yet the questions still remain: How are colleges responding to these changes and challenges to help nontraditional adult African international students with different cultural backgrounds become successful learners? What is the impact of cultural factors in terms of the academic and personal challenges that ultimately drive or hinder these African students' experiences? The objective then becomes creating learning environments that promote and value cultural diversity while intentionally exposing students to multiple, and sometimes, competing perspectives that challenge previously unexamined assumptions about culture. In this study the perspectives of nontraditional, West African international students was explored to better understand their reasons for and challenges when studying in the United States.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of culture and its influence on the experiences of international West African students. The students were nontraditional adult students enrolled in degree programs in an urban, two year college in Georgia.

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience?
2. What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?

3. In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

Significance of the Study

This study can bring both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of adult education and international studies. The exploration of West African international students' culture as well as West African international students' learning experiences can enlighten the universe of adult learning theories which are based primarily on Western cultural values and ideologies. By analyzing the cultural factors that influence African international students in a traditional learning environment, this study will examine the importance of contextual influences in an effort to expand the dearth of literature on African students' educational experiences in America.

From the unique learning experience of African international students in their interactions both inside and outside of the classroom, we can better understand the influence of cultural factors on their experiences in the college setting. We know that satisfying the need to become socially accepted into an affinity group that offers social support is much more difficult for international students if few students are from their country or global region. Beyond that, we know that adapting to customs and mores of American society and campus life may conflict with aspects of the personal and cultural identity of international students. We also know that the U. S. Department of State supports Education USA advising centers in 37 African countries with over 300,000 contacts per year (Keteku, 2007). However, we do not know if these issues of cultural adaptation will dampen their participation in activities that contribute to important learning and personal development outcomes directly related to their college experiences.

The practical implications of this study are two-fold. First, by studying the learning experiences of African international students, adult educators can gain better understanding of the unique cultural values and learning styles that impact the experiences of international students. This understanding is essential as it has the potential to decrease some miscommunication and misinterpretation across cultures. Secondly, by examining African international students' learning experience, this study can serve to improve adult education theory and its application to adult learners by providing suggestions to help community colleges develop learning support services to facilitate the increasing demands of international students' needs. According to Anderson (2001), unlike outsider knowledge often experienced, practitioner research can be resourceful. It can enable educators to use their own research to provide analysis that is counter to that of academic researchers. These academic researchers tend to use research to develop and market scripted curricula that result in the "de-skilling of practitioners" (p. 23).

Most college environment studies tend to focus on the overall institutional environment or campus climate (Smith, 1997), not the classroom environment. Studies that have been conducted on the effects of diversity in the college classroom have focused primarily on either cross-cultural learning between domestic and international students or courses that center on topics of race (Marin, 2000). Teaching and learning are at the heart of the academic enterprise, so it is important for them to understand how changes in the college student population are being negotiated in individual college classroom and college campus environments (Schneider & Schoenberg, 1998).

Hofstede's Five Dimensions of Culture (1991) served as the foundational framework for this study. The primary objective was to provide data which will enable educators and administrators alike to improve their understanding of cultural dimensions and better distinguish one culture from another. The cultural dimensions model is a framework that describes five sorts (dimensions) of differences/value perspectives between national cultures (Hofstede, 2001). The nature of the adjustment that the group makes was the cultural lens through which the study was analyzed.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of cultural factors influencing the educational experiences of West African international students in degree level programs in an urban, two year college. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What cultural factors impact international students' educational experience?
2. What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?
3. In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

This chapter explores the literature on African international students' educational experiences from a cultural perspective and is organized into the following six sections: community colleges, cultural theory, funds of knowledge/student development, international students, West African international students, and a chapter summary.

The chapter begins with a brief history of the community college. This background sets the parameters for the types of students enrolled in these institutions and their mission. An examination of culture is then presented as a preface to the theoretical framework which undergirds this study. Hofstede's Five Dimensions of Culture (1991) provide the foundational basis for this study whose primary objective to provide data which will enable educators and administrators alike to improve their understanding of cultural dimensions and better distinguish one culture from another. Since culture can vary a great deal from one individual to another and operating from the paradigm that human development takes place within a social context, funds of knowledge provides the

impetus for understanding the cultural issues that affect the collegiate experiences of both international and African international students.

This distinction is followed by a discussion of characteristics particular to international students in general and African international students specifically. The factors that influence international students in general, such as identity, adjustment, social engagement, alienation and involvement, are examined in context with the principles outlined by Hofstede. Because cultural norms play a large part in the mechanics of interpersonal relationships, factors that influence West African international students, specifically identity, culture, and racial implications, are discussed in relation to Hofstede's dimensions from a cultural perspective.

The literature for this study was acquired through an in-depth search and review of the library databases. Over 200 sources were consulted and/or utilized for this document's development. Some of the literary databases searched were EBSCOhost indexes and articles, Proquest, Reference USA, Literary Reference Center, Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Points of View Reference Center, ERIC, Association Unlimited, Student Research Center, Academic Search Complete, as well as a host of Education books and articles.

Community Colleges

Community colleges are the gateway to higher education in the United States for a growing number of students. The community college mission is to provide access to postsecondary educational programs and services that lead to stronger, more vital communities (Vaughan, 2006). The number of community colleges has grown, and they have made the transformation from small, local institutions into well-established

networks for higher education. These colleges provide students with an opportunity to earn credits for the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree at high-quality, accredited institutions. Their impact has not only effected local communities and the world of higher education but also aided in training students to function in a globally diverse economy. With their lower tuition costs, community colleges give students a way to save money while learning in a supportive environment. They enable student access to training for associate-degree or non-degree careers, and they offer continuing education and personal development classes for the broad spectrum of adult learners (Boggs, 2005). Most community colleges primarily serve commuter students and do not have residential facilities.

Access has been a major theme in American higher education since the end of World War II, and community colleges have been at the center of the nation's commitment to providing universal higher education (Vaughan, 2006). During the same period, the country's rapidly growing public high schools were seeking new ways to serve their communities. Three-quarters of high school graduates were choosing not to further their education, in part, because they were reluctant to leave home for a distant college (AACC, 2006). It was common at this time for high schools to add a teacher institute, a manual learning (vocational education) division or a citizen school diploma program. The high school-based community college, as first developed at Central High School in Joliet, Illinois, was the most successful type of addition. Meanwhile, small private colleges, such as Indiana's Vincennes University, had fashioned an effective model of higher education grounded on the principles of small classes, close student-

faculty relations and programs that included both academics and extracurricular activities (AACC, 2006).

Probably the simplest, overarching reason for the growth of community colleges was that an increasing number of demands were being placed on schools at every level. Whatever the social or personal problems, schools were supposed to solve them. Over the years, the expectations for the community college drastically changed. As a society, the community college was looked at to solve many social ills. Racial integration was just one of its many assignments. The courts and legislatures insisted that schools mitigate discrimination by merging students across ethnic lines in the various programs (Vaughan, 2006). The schools were also expected to solve problems of unemployment by preparing students for jobs (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Although needs are as diverse as the communities served by community colleges and may change over time, most communities have many needs in common and expect their colleges to meet those needs (Vaughan, 2006). From the combination of these expectations emerged the earliest community colleges, roughly balanced between private and public control but united in their commitment to meet local needs. Unlike most other institutions of higher education, community colleges are directly and explicitly linked to their communities. Their student bodies come, by and large, from local sponsoring areas. At least part of their funding comes from local sources, through sponsorship, tuition, or a combination of the two (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Community colleges also provide access to education for many nontraditional students who are adults and working while enrolled. The average age of a community college student is 29 years old, and two thirds of community college students attend part-

time (AACC, 2007). At the same time, community colleges not only provide access for adult students but also serve an increasing number of traditional age and high school students who take specific courses to get ahead in their studies. In fact, half of the students who receive a baccalaureate degree have attended a community college in the course of their undergraduate studies. Most community colleges, even those with a strong orientation to programs for transfers to universities, have as part of their missions the economic and workforce development of their communities. Most have a wide range of community service programs, from adult literacy to skills upgrading to community theatre.

The community college is largely a phenomenon of twentieth-century American higher education. At the close of the twentieth century, two-year colleges enrolled 5,743,000 students, 96 percent of whom attended public community colleges. Nearly 40 percent of all undergraduate students attended community and junior colleges (Educational Encyclopedia, 2008). Between 1900 and 2000 the significance of this sector of higher education grew enormously as its predominantly public character evolved from a much wider variety of origins (Ratcliff, 2008). The United States has been able to adapt and capitalize on its diversity of peoples, regions, and economics, in part due to the pragmatic and adaptive nature of its educational system. At the post-secondary level, the comprehensive community college has made a singular contribution to this adaptation and pragmatism.

While many countries possess binary divisions of their higher-education system (universities and polytechnic colleges or institutes), these are accessible only to individuals with an acceptable performance on government-sponsored high-school

graduation examinations. In contrast, American postsecondary education has remained steadfastly committed to inventing courses of study, educational programs, or even whole institutions dedicated to the needs and expectations of its society, peoples, and cultures. The flood of immigrants coming to the United States between 1900 and 1920 also fueled the growth of community colleges. The educational needs and backgrounds of junior college students diversified as enrollments grew (Ratcliff, 2008).

A new wave of immigration began in the 1980s, a wave that continued into the twenty-first century. International students began to make a considerable contribution to the enrollment figures in American community colleges. Once again the United States expanded and extended higher education to new segments of the population. During the 2002-2003 academic years, community colleges across the country hosted more than 582,984 international students according to the Institute of International Education's (IIE) (2007), "Open Doors 2007" report. An even higher increase in the number of new international students, those enrolled for the first time at a college or university, in the fall 2006 was apparent as enrollment rose 10% from the previous year (IIE, 2007).

Some came with little or no formal education or language skills; others came with extensive education but few language skills, while a third group consisted of those with English language skills but little formal education. The community college directed recruitment efforts towards those who were not being served by traditional education: those who could not afford the tuition; who could not take the time to attend college on a full-time basis; whose ethnic background had constrained them from participating (Cohen and Brawer, 1996). Attitudinal and experiential data are key to understanding campus culture related to internationalization. Unfortunately, very few data of this nature are

available for college and university students and staff. This study seeks to help alleviate this gap in literature by providing a resource for all groups in an effort to bring to light the issues that confront international and African international students and outline how they can begin to effectively navigate through those experiences.

Cultural Theory

Successful interactions and relationships require the use of knowledge, attitudes, and skills about cultural diversity within a global context. The success of U.S. international diplomacy is becoming increasingly dependent upon knowledge and principles of cultural pluralism. Culture shapes human behavior, attitudes, and values. Human behavior results from a process of socialization, and socialization always takes place within the context of specific cultural and ethnic environments (Pai, 1984).

In some instances, the word *culture* is often incorrectly confused with *race*. Hofstede (1991) compares culture to an onion in that through peeling off outside layers of rituals, heroes, and symbols, one can reach the core of value. Value, according to Hofstede (1980), refers to “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others (p.19). As Kimball (1987) states, the basic caretaking practices of human survival are essentially the same for everyone, but their pattern, organization, and learning are specific. Most people belong to several cultures at any point in time. The contrasting value systems we encounter through these affiliations can be termed collectivist (interdependent) and individualistic (independent) orientations.

While many mainstream people assume that the independent individual is a universal prototype, approximately 70% of the world’s population upholds an alternative belief system that emphasizes social interdependence or collectivism (Triandis, 1989).

Researchers have asserted that several minority group members living in the United States and Canada, such as American Indians, African Americans, African French, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans and Asian Canadians, adhere to an interdependent, collectivist world view where group determines one's world view, behavior, and goals (Greenfield, 1994). This finding is in contrast to individualistic values exposed by members of Euro-American and Euro-Canadian groups which emphasize the significance of the self and individual rights (Greenfield, 1994).

Whatever one's belief, Robinson (1996) states that one culture must not be viewed as inferior to another but as equally valid. One does not have to agree with the practices of a particular culture to respect and understand that culture. Acknowledging the existence of other cultures does not invalidate or diminish the importance of one's own culture or a dominate culture (Robinson, 1996).

Theoretical Analysis of Culture

Culture, a popular yet ambiguous concept, has been described in a variety of ways. There are well over 160 definitions of culture. Banks and Banks (1997) defined culture as "the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one (group of) *sic* people from another in modernized societies" (p. 8). A person's humanity cannot be isolated or divorced from his or her culture or ethnicity. One cannot be human without culture and ethnicity, and one cannot have culture and diversity without being human (Gay, 1994). The influence of culture and ethnicity are established early and thoroughly in the process of human growth and development, and they prevail thereafter for the remainder of one's life.

Consequently, every person lives and stands for his or her own culture. As DuPraw and Axner (1997) maintained, culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves. Culture consists of ways of thinking, values, reactions to problems and situations, and many other things. It is easy to “see” racial and ethnic differences and to group people together into racial and ethnic cultures. It is not so easy to do so when one must go into the psyche of a person (Robinson, 1996). Hofstede (1991) outlined culture as “the collective programming of the mind” (p.4) and explained,

This does not mean, of course that people are programmed the way computers are. A person’s behavior is only partially predetermined by his or her mental programs: (s)he has a basic ability to deviate from them and to react in ways which are new, creative, destructive, or unexpected. (p.4)

Unfortunately, many schools are microcosms of mainstream society. In their procedural norms, codes of behavior, structural arrangements, and distributions of power, privilege, and responsibility, they mirror Anglocentric cultural values (Gay, 1994). Therefore, the influence of culture can vary a great deal from one individual to another. Studying culture can improve our understanding of people’s environments and how environments may influence them but cannot help us make conclusions about people themselves. Since we live in a global age, technology has brought the world much closer together. People of different cultures find themselves working together and communicating more and more. This interaction is exciting and interesting, but it can also be frustrating and fraught with uncertainty. Building connections with people from

around the world is just one dimension of cultural diversity. There are also issues like motivating people, structuring projects, and developing strategy.

Hofstede understood this dilemma in the early 1970s. Hofstede's work was a life time pursuit of research with the primary agenda of studying culture and its impact in the workplace. What emerged after a decade of research and thousands of interviews was a model of cultural dimensions that has become an internationally recognized standard. With access to people working for the same organization in over 40 countries of the world, Hofstede collected cultural data and analyzed his findings (Hofstede, 2001). He initially identified four distinct cultural dimensions that served to distinguish one culture from another. Later he added a fifth dimension and that is how the model stands today. The cultural dimensions model is a framework that describes five sorts (dimensions) of differences/value perspectives between national cultures. He scored each country using a scale of roughly 0 to 100 for each dimension (Hofstede, 2001). The higher the score, the more that dimension is exhibited in society.

The Five Dimensions of Culture

Armed with a large database of cultural statistics, Hofstede analyzed the results and found clear patterns of similarity and difference amid the responses along these five dimensions. Interestingly, his research was done on employees of IBM only, which allowed him to attribute the patterns to national differences in culture, largely eliminating the problem of differences in company culture. In Hofstede's dimensions, power/distance refers to the degree of inequality that exists - and is accepted - among people with and without power. A high power/distance score indicates that society accepts an unequal distribution of power and people understand "their place" in the system. Low

power/distance means that power is shared and well dispersed. It also means that society members view themselves as equals. The second dimension, individualism/collectivism, refers to the strength of the ties people have to others within the community. A high individualism score indicates a loose connection with people. In countries with a high individualism score there is a lack of interpersonal connection and little sharing of responsibility, beyond family and perhaps a few close friends. A society with a low individualism score would have strong group cohesion, and there would be a large amount of loyalty and respect for members of the group. The group itself is also larger and people take more responsibility for each other's well being.

The third dimension, masculinity/femininity refers to how much a society sticks with, and values, traditional male and female roles. High masculinity scores are found in countries where men are expected to be tough, to be the provider, to be assertive and to be strong. If women work outside the home, they have separate professions from men. Low masculinity scores do not reverse the gender roles. In a low masculinity society, the roles are simply blurred. Women and men work together equally across many professions. Men are allowed to be sensitive and women can work hard for professional success. The uncertainty/avoidance index, or fourth dimension, relates to the degree of anxiety society members feel when in uncertain or unknown situations. High uncertainty/avoidance scoring nations try to avoid ambiguous situations whenever possible. They are governed by rules and order and they seek a collective "truth". Low uncertainty/avoidance scores indicate the society enjoys novel events and values differences. There are very few rules and people are encouraged to discover their own truth.

Finally, the fifth dimension, long term/short term orientation refers to how much society values long-standing - as opposed to short term - traditions and values. This is the fifth dimension that Hofstede added in the 1990s after finding that Asian countries with a strong link to Confucian philosophy acted differently from western cultures. In countries with a high long term score, delivering on social obligations and avoiding "loss of face" are considered very important (Hofstede, 2001). Because cultural norms play a large part in the mechanics and interpersonal relationships at work, most people who grow up in a culture take their norms of behavior for granted. They do not think about their reactions, preferences, and feelings. However, when they step into a foreign culture, suddenly things seem different. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can be used as a starting point to evaluate approaches, decisions, and actions based on a general sense of how the society might think and react. Of course, no society is homogenous and there will be deviations from the norms Hofstede found.

Hofstede's Model of Cultural Dimensions can be of great use when it comes to analyzing a country's culture. There are, however, a few things to keep in mind. First, the averages of a country do not relate to individuals of that country. Even though this model has proven to be quite often correct when applied to the general population, not all individuals or even regions with subcultures fit into the mold. It should be used as a guide to understanding the difference in culture between countries, not as law set in stone. As always, there are exceptions to the rule.

Secondly, the data has been collected through questionnaires, which have their own limitations. Not only that, but in some cultures the context of the question asked is as important as its content. In group-oriented cultures, individuals might tend to answer

questions as if they were addressed to the group he/she belongs to. While, on the other hand, in the United States, which is an individualistic culture, the answers will most likely be answered and perceived through the eyes of that individual. Lastly, some secondary elements of culture can be modified over time and with experience, but the core feature continues to be the mainstay of a person's sense of being and identity throughout life. Kallen (1970, pp. 184-185) makes this point cogently in the following observation:

Deeply ingrained cultural socialization becomes problematic in education when the schooling process operates on one cultural model to the exclusion of all others, or when culturally different children are expected to set aside all their cultural habits as a condition for succeeding in school. Such a demand is not only unreasonable, but is impossible to achieve. Attempts to comply with it may lead to cultural adaptation, marginality, alienation, and isolation. With the exception of adaptation, none of these responses is conducive to maximizing the human well-being and academic success of students. The incompatibilities or discontinuities between the culture of the school and those different ethnic groups need to be major issues of analysis in making decisions about educational programs and practices that reflect and promote cultural diversity (Spindler, 1987b). These incompatibilities or discontinuities are especially important to any understanding of the aspects of human behavior that most directly affect teaching and learning, such as values orientation, interpersonal relations, communication styles, time usage, performance styles, procedural rules, systems of problem solving and

cognitive processing (Boggs, Watson, Gegeo & McMillen, 1985; Kockman, 1981; Shade, 1981, 1989).

Clearly, the relationship between culture and learning has been widely studied in the fields of multicultural education and adult education, and there are many types of cultures: some are macro-cultures; others are micro-cultures. Each has a unique set of identifiable features and characteristics that all within that culture share. Cultures can be racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender-based, education-based, geographic, linguistic, or take a host of other forms (Robinson, 1996). More often than not, culture has been treated as a factor, along with others, that influences the learning behaviors of a particular group of people.

Wang (2006) developed a study of cultural values and how they shape Chinese graduate students' online learning experiences in American universities. Using Hofstede's dimensions of culture as a framework, he found that as Chinese graduate students became more aware of and frequently reflected on the different teaching-learning styles between U.S. and China; they learned new strategies for adapting to the new model of online learning, such as participating in mutual communication, engaging in informal and collaborative learning, and learning to be self-managed. Factors such as language, instructional styles, Chinese cultural values and school norms influenced their learning experiences. These factors also caused them to have different learning experiences than those of their American classmates. Wang surmised that "the impact of the cultural values and school norms are reflected in their learning behaviors, such as silent or passive learning, working hard, being formal or content-oriented, deferring to the teacher, having concern for others and worrying about losing face" (p. 174).

In adult education, even the major learning theories have traditionally been based on one culture, usually the White, male, and Western European culture (Amstutz, 1999; Pratt, 1991). Because ethnic and cultural diversity in U.S. society has not been sufficiently reflected in educational decisions and practices, schools have frequently become discontinuous or out of sync with the populations that they are supposed to serve. This discontinuity exists most often when schools are controlled by individuals from the dominant culture who use only their standards to guide actions but the population that they serve does not practice similar cultural standards. In this case, culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy (Hofstede, 2001).

Funds of Knowledge, Social Context and Student Development

Operating from the paradigm that human development takes place within a social context (Heggins & Jackson, 2003), understanding the variables that impact the collegiate experience of international students, with an emphasis on student development and the transition process, is important. The potential of international students to change both the content and the process of education has received attention in the literature where it has been argued that they bring an international perspective to classroom discussions and challenge and encourage teachers to consider new methods of instruction that are more consistent with their previous learning experiences (Ward, 2006).

The essence of international student development is the interaction between the student and the educational environment. This interaction is detrimental in order that all aspects of the student's life are attended to and the environmental resources both challenge and provide the support needed to meet these challenges. Thus, diversity on college campuses is not a gratuitous or idealistic goal; it is essential in order for college

students to learn how to live and to work effectively with others who differ from themselves (Gurin, 1999; Smith & Schonfeld, 2000). Most studies on international students focus more on international students' assimilation experiences than on the social contexts to which international students are exposed. These studies have led to the assumption that international students' identities are constructed only within the individual (Hsieh, 2006).

Moving to and studying in the United States can pose many challenges for international students: adjusting to a new university system, establishing an identity in an unfamiliar culture, communicating in a foreign language, dealing with financial worries, being uprooted from familiar social support systems, experiencing homesickness, and feeling lonely (Arthur, 1997; Brinson & Kottler, 1995); Das, Chow, & Rutherford, 1986; Pedersen, 1991). Research has indicated that moving to a new culture can have potentially detrimental effects on people's mental health (Mallinckrodt & Leong 1992; Sandhu 1994; Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). Nwadiora and McAdoo (1996) found that English speaking ability was associated with fewer acculturative stressors among a group of Amerasians age 19-23. Because English language usage is a vital indicator of acculturation level (Mouw & Xie, 1999), the relationship between communicating in English and aspects of psychological well-being is strengthened.

Constantine, Okazaki, and Utsey (2004) examined English Language proficiency in relation to self-reported depressive symptoms in African, Asian, and Latin American international college students. In their study on self-concealments, social self-efficacy, acculturative stress and depression in African, Asian, and Latin American international college students they found that limited English language skills may be of concern for

many of these students because such lack of ability may affect their cultural adjustment processes in the United States. Therefore, it is important for institutions of higher education be able to recognize these challenges and provide international students with adequate counseling (Komiya & Eells, 2001) and academic assistance to enhance their experiences on the college campus. Many educators believe “that educating *all* students for a diverse society and world is part of an emerging institutional mission – one from which all students might benefit and one for which having students from diverse backgrounds is a genuine asset” (Smith, 1997, p. 11, italics in original).

Changing demographics of the student body, the global work environment, the diverse workforce, and the need for an inclusive education and campus environment have given higher education institutions the impetus for promoting diversity and multiculturalism in college campuses (Krishnamurthi, 2003). According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU, 1998), over the years, many institutions have implemented multicultural initiatives by trial and error and have learned from such initiatives. In order to begin to address the varying needs of international students, colleges and universities are going to have to move beyond the mainstream, independent values which include but are not limited to self-directed learning, individual initiative and autonomy, and Socratic questioning as important instructional approaches.

A concept introduced by Luis Moll (2005), funds of knowledge is one impetus for addressing the cultural issues that affect the collegiate experiences of international students and their interactions with campus personnel, faculty and other students. Funds of knowledge are the cultural artifacts and bodies of knowledge that underlie household activities (Moll, 2005). They are the inherent cultural resources found in communities

surrounding schools. Funds of knowledge are grounded in the networking that communities do in order to make the best use of their resources.

Moll (2005) and other scholars have demonstrated the importance of communities of learners within large cultural and familial networks. Within these networks, the zone of proximal development is manifested in different ways “the zone of proximal development today will be the actual development level tomorrow – that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow...the only ‘good learning’ is that which is in advance of development” (Vygotsky, 1978, pp.187-89). Funds of knowledge can be situated within a household, in a Vygotskian notion of the individual or in the collective, from one household to another or to a greater community.

In a study conducted by the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology (BARA) and the College of Education of the University of Arizona (1995), researchers used the term “funds of knowledge” to describe the information, methods of thinking and learning, and practical skills related to a community’s everyday life. At the core of this concept is a notion of culture as a dynamic entity, not simply a collection of foods, clothes, and holidays. Instead, it is viewed as a way of using social, physical, spiritual, and economic resources to make one’s way in the world.

Anthropologists, teacher educators, and teachers learn about the funds of knowledge possessed by students and their families in order to gain insight about connections among ordinary curricular goals and students’ experiences in the community. Funds of knowledge, then, become the impetus for research that establishes that the students who are most involved with the college perceive that they are achieving. Others, including Marashio (1999) emphasized the importance of student engagement through

learning communities.

The theory of funds of knowledge can be used by both researchers to guide their investigation of student development and by college administrators and faculty to help them design more effective learning environments. But the theory can, more importantly, shed some light on the degree to which students control their own learning outcomes.

While some development can be achieved through coursework, out of classroom experiences and living environments can further enhance and extend students' learning and development. Many international students come to North America with a false and distorted idea about social life here. Upon arrival, they find a discrepancy between their social expectations and social reality (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Their new milieu, at times, forces some of them into the state of isolation due to problems of adjustment.

Student effort has been identified to be a key predictor of perceived gains in general education as well as in personal and social development (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Schell and Rojewski (1995) admonished through their research that a de-centered learning environment is more feasible where the focus is on a community of learners who must learn and apply difficult concepts to an ill-structured environment, while the professor adopts a perspective of facilitation and support.

International Students

One important trend that is affecting America's community colleges is the growing presence of international students. The numbers continue to rise as recruiting international students for two-year associate's degrees or four-year bachelor's degrees from community colleges is becoming more focused with each admissions cycle.

Between the 1999-2000 and 2006-07 academic years, international student enrollment in

two-year institutions increased by 22 percent. The need has also been recognized by American government officials that the United States must do a better job in its public-diplomacy outreach. The US Embassy has instituted a new State Department scholarship program to provide foreign students practical training at American community colleges. The program underscores the view that community colleges, with their expertise in work force education, may often be the best places for future leaders in developing economies to get training (Fischer, 2009).

In January of 2006, Karen P. Hughes, who was then the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, announced plans to double the number of foreign students attending community colleges in the United States. Community Colleges for International Development, a national consortium of two-year institutions also known as CCID, furthered the effort to attract international students by submitting a proposal to run the program, which covers students' tuition and fees, housing, and other study-related expenses while they complete a one-year certificate or a two-year associate degree (Fischer, 2009).

With all of these concerted efforts to attract international students to American colleges and universities, there still appears to be a lack of interest or discourse reflecting the experiences of these international students once they arrive. During the course of my research, very little recent literature relating to the content and purpose of this particular study could be found. Most of the literature encountered focused on African American, Hispanic American or Native American students. The literature that was found on the experiences of international students focused primarily on Asian international students.

Current literature highlighting the dilemmas and/or the experiences of African international students was scarce.

International Student Identity

In order to address the growing presence and experiential needs of these international students, educators should first have a foundational understanding of student identity and a working knowledge of why this theory is applicable to understanding international student identity. Erikson's renowned principles of identity development focuses on the notion that for educational experiences to be relevant they must be perceived as personally meaningful to students; that stress and anxiety can have detrimental effects on academic efforts and achievement; and that school learning should follow procedural rules and guidelines that are compatible with those that students are accustomed to in their cultural communities (Gay, 1994). Overall, student development theorists agree that student development is integrative in nature; it requires mutuality, equality, cooperation and collaboration among all parties (students, faculty, staff, and administration). However, what they fail to acknowledge is that the identity of international students in American community colleges is further compounded by the fact that these students have inadequate informal support and thus feel socially isolated (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986).

Gurin and Nagda (2006) examined a series of models, de-categorization, recategorization, and Tajfel's (1974) identity theory, while probing the diversity argument more deeply. Using social psychological theories to understand the underlying programmatic assumptions of various curricular and co-curricular diversity initiatives on college campuses, they were able to identify tensions of intergroup harmony and

intragroup solidarity among the different theories and programs and to consider particular diversity programs and intergroup dialogue that creatively addressed seemingly irreconcilable tensions. Gurin and Nagda (2006) proposed a future research agenda that focuses on intergroup relations and the role of diversity education raised in affirmative action cases and the methodological issues associated with isolating the impact and efficacy of various efforts.

Knefelkamp and David-Lang (2006) asked students about their experiences of diversity both in and outside of the classroom. They analyzed data gathered from about 200 students using various models of intellectual and identity development. They were particularly interested in students' experiences during their first two years of college since they believe that these are often the years during which students experience their first substantive "encounters" with diversity. Knefelkamp and David-Lang (2006) concluded that educators want students to integrate the acquisition of intellectual reasoning tools into their personal and academic encounters with diversity so that their intellectual and interpersonal growth are facilitated by diverse and complex experiences. In an effort to broaden student identity development, Hurtado (1999) stressed that "Colleges that strive to diversify their student body provide the first opportunity for many students to encounter students with different perspectives, expand their own parochial views, and learn from peers with different cultures, values and experiences" (p.27).

International Student Adjustment

In order for the U.S. to retain its attractiveness as a host country and to better accommodate the significant number of international students studying in the U.S., it is crucial to identify and understand the factors that affect the satisfaction and retention of

these students. Babiker et al. (1980) argued that the degree of adjustment difficulties is a function of the dissimilarities between culture of origin and culture of contact. One possible interpretation is that those who experience more significant cultural distance are likely to experience greater life changes during the cross-cultural transition and consequently, more stress and problems with adjustment. Psychosocial adjustment of international students then is considered to be important because of its positive relationship with academic performance (Pedersen, 1995; Stoyhoff, 1997).

Arthur Chickering (1969) emphasized the importance of developing interpersonal competence – the ability to work cooperatively and productively with others-and of recognizing and accepting interdependence as an essential reality of living. Wehrly (1986) asserted that the stress that students experience in the first 6 months of study in a foreign country often reaches crisis level. Most international students report some degree of culture shock when they arrive to begin their studies (Furnham, 1988; Olaniran, 1996, 1999; Selvadurai, 1992; Thomas and Althen, 1989). That shock is typically manifested as stress, anxiety and feelings of powerlessness, rejection, and isolation (Oberg, 1960).

Oberg identifies four stages of emotional reactions related to cross cultural adjustment as a) honeymoon stage – characterized by the initial excitement, curiosity and enthusiasm of the newly arrived individual; b) crisis stage – sometime after the initial contact, the individual is overwhelmed by the difficulties with and requirements of the new culture, characterized by feelings of inadequacy, frustration, anger, anxiety and depression; c) recovery stage – characterized by crisis resolution, culture learning taking place and the individual being better able to function in the new culture; and

d) adjustment stage – characterized by the individual achieving the ability to enjoy and function competently in the new environment and culture.

It is clear that significant educational benefits may derive not only from differences in perspectives between students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds but also from students' discoveries while on campus that their student peers within various racial and ethnic groups do not all think and act alike and that they and their student peers in other racial and ethnic groups do in fact have much in common. Thus, the student's level of intellectual complexity is the most significant filter through which he or she interprets and ascribes meaning to experiences of diversity of all kinds.

Meacham (2003) circulated a questionnaire to 117 undergraduate students at a public research university. The students perceived three educational outcomes as likely to be facilitated when there are more rather than fewer minority students in classes: cultural knowledge and awareness, recognizing the complexity of issues, and learning to work with people who are different. Some colleges have begun to examine the connection between student and social diversity, which has been found to be explicit. Students are now being asked to reflect on their identities and values, raise consciousness about diversity on campus, prepare for work and civic relationships with those who are different, acquire skills in negotiating difference and working towards consensus, and become secure as a member of one's own racial or ethnic group while accepting and supporting other groups (Meacham, 2003).

Lim (1999), in a study of 10 Koreans who attended a course in the United States, suggested that individual needs assessment, diverse instructional methods, and instructor sensibility to cultural differences are vital for foreign learners. Therefore, every parent,

advisor instructor and administrator of a college or university should be familiar with the most recent student development theories and their focus on how institutions, faculty members, and parents can best support individual students to promote their psychosocial and cognitive development.

Cigularova (1975) argues that college administrators need to be more aware of the factors that affect the quality of international students' psychosocial adjustment to university life in the U.S. Such awareness will help institutions identify the adjustment needs of international students. It will reduce the frustration, disappointment, and challenge for student affairs administrators when dealing with the transitional problems of international students and provide professionals with guidelines for creating culturally appropriate services and programs. A greater sensitivity towards the needs of international students will involve this group of students more completely and meaningfully in the American culture.

International Student Acculturation

Acculturation for many international students then involves the process of orientation to a new cultural environment and adjustment to different social patterns, which often present great difficulties. Understanding the American culture and adjusting to the temperate climate have also created some problems for foreign students (Wray, 1981). Often these students are unaware of the cultural differences in friendship building, dating etiquette and customs of Americans. Prejudices, impatience, religious and political attitudes on the part of both native and international students often interfere with socializing. As a result, students of some nationalities have greater and different

adaptation difficulties than others (Lee, 1981), frequently becoming dissatisfied and alienated because of attitudes exhibited which cause them to feel a lack of belonging.

Investigations have shown the difficulty of drawing any generalizations about the experiences of international students or of schools enrolling them. Some studies indicate that international students place greater emphasis on academic and professional goals than on nonacademic matters. It was found that nontraditional students, probably because of their limited time on campus, had fewer interactions with people from other cultures. Most of these students predominately interacted with those of other cultures through activities of clubs and Greek organizations (Hughes & Romeo, 1999).

International students in junior and community colleges frequently rate themselves lower than average in social and academic adjustment than do their counterparts in four-year colleges (Lee, 1981).

Kolger (1999) has suggested that student engagement can substantially contribute to students' cognitive development during the college years. Allport (1954) argued that cross-racial contact will produce more tolerant attitudes when members of different groups interact with each other under specified conditions, namely when they have equal status in the situation, get to know each other well, and cooperate with each other toward common goals, and when their contact is supported by relevant authorities. James Banks (1989) enumerated several objectives of multicultural education, among them "[t]o transform the educational experience so that male and female students, exceptional students, as well as students from diverse cultural, social-class, racial, and ethnic groups will experience an equal opportunity to learn in school..." (p. 19-20).

It is clear that interaction with diverse peers in and outside the classroom is the crucial way in which diversity produces educational benefits for students. Astin (1993), summarizing results from a longitudinal study of thousands of college and university students, remarked that “The single most powerful source of influence on the undergraduate student’s academic and personal development is the peer group” (p. 7). Expert reports and many of the amice curiae briefs that were presented to the U.S. Supreme Court stressed that institutions of higher education must offer guided opportunities for students to interact across race and ethnicity (Gurin & Nagda, 2006). However, they did not address what kinds of cross-racial interactions and educational diversity initiatives foster mutual learning and enhance the college experience among diverse students. Institutions of higher education can assume the obligation of creating and maintaining a wholesome atmosphere that will create a mutual understanding between international and native students by establishing strong services that support the interaction experiences of these two groups.

International Student Alienation

International students tend to experience more serious alienation than do American students due to difficulty in adjusting to new campus life in the United States. Klomegah (2006) conducted a study in a small minority serving institution whose international students predominately shared similarities with home students in terms of physical characteristics. The objective was to find out the applicability of the social correlates of alienation, as evidenced by previous studies, and to find out to what extent findings may deviate from studies done in larger educational institutions. He proposed a variation in the level of alienation experienced by international and American students

and that relationships exist between independent variables (geographic home region, duration of stay in the U.S. and College, and frequency of social contact with other students) and the dependent variable (alienation).

The weak association between geographic home region of students and alienation did not support earlier studies (Hull, 1978) which indicate that students from regions similar to the U.S. contextual environment such as Europe experience less alienation than those in Africa (Klomegah, 2006). Among the explanatory variables introduced in this study, social contact or time spent by respondents with other students from any geographic region, had the strongest and significant association with alienation experience even when the association was considered within the context of students' rural and urban backgrounds (Klomegah, 2006).

According to Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Alexander et al., 1981; and Owie, 1982, and contrary to the findings of the previous study, in the current context, no evidence was found to corroborate the generalization that international students experience more serious alienation than do American students. Being exposed to new values, attitudes, and behavior patterns is not necessarily debilitating; however, indeed the experience can be transformative. In fact, some research shows that international students seem able to cope relatively well when faced with other stressful life events (Leong, Mallinckrodt, & Krolj, 1990; Parr & Others, 1992). Yet, many researchers and educators are still interested in the psychosocial adjustment of international students in order to find ways to reduce their stress and increase positive aspects of their experience. With recent increased competition from other host countries (e.g., Great Britain, Australia), the unspoken assumption is that those students who are satisfied with their study abroad experience

will serve as spokespeople for the country and the institution where they obtained their education (Cigularova, 1975).

Educators want students to integrate the acquisition of intellectual reasoning tools into their personal and academic encounters with diversity so that their intellectual and interpersonal growth are facilitated by diverse and complex experiences (Knefelkamp & David-Lang, 2006). While it is plausible that international students channel their efforts toward academics to compensate for what may be a less than satisfying social life, the literature is silent on the extent to which they engage in other effective educational practices (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005). A growing body of research and our own experiences in the classroom are beginning to tell us more about the complex variables of student experience and response in classrooms and on college campuses in which multicultural materials and instructional values are implemented.

One concern is the infusion of culturally diverse texts and pedagogies which may engender resistance related to issues of privilege or threats to privilege especially for students from the dominant culture. Such infusion or transformation may elicit responses of confusion, defensiveness, guilt, or anger when cultures are treated comparatively; it may result in superficial or misdirected responses (Miller, 1992). Another concern is that general education diversity courses are often designed to deliberately foster students' encounter with diversity and complexity, but too often their design is ignorant of students' actual intellectual and psychological readiness for this learning experience (Knefelkamp & David-Lang, 2006). Such encounters can tend to overwhelm students, thereby, resulting in intellectual regression or rigidity.

If the encounter stage is extremely overwhelming, intellectual and interpersonal regression can result in the hardening of students' previously held views. Such regression is almost always accompanied by anger at the "other" and at having to listen to multiple perspectives of the other. Yet, if proper integration takes place, social contacts among students can help new students as well as foreign students experience a sense of belonging (Alexander et al., 1981). Friendship networks seem to be a critical factor in how well international students deal with stress and alienation (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985).

It appears that international students experience more serious and painful adjustment to U.S. campus life than do native-born or host students. Alienation is what happens to the socialized individual when he or she becomes removed from his or her own nature and the natural world through knowledge. Previous literature suggests that international students experience more serious alienation than do American students due to difficulty in adjusting to new campus life in the United States. Factors such as loneliness (Alexander et.al, 1981), helplessness, desire for dependence, hostility, fear and bewilderment are some of the emotional and psychological characteristics associated with the process of adjustment or alienation experience (Scram & Lauver, 1988).

According to Seeman (1959), alienation "denotes the estrangement of the individual from key aspects of his or her social existence ... alienation is a feeling on the part of the individual that he cannot influence the situations in which he interacts" (p. 783). Seeman's (1959) five-fold classification of alienation – powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement serve as a frame of reference for international study because it attempts to make traditional interest in

alienation amenable to empiricism, and it is a good standard reference for conceptualizing alienation. Schrom and Lauver (1988) also studied alienation among international students including powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement as its definition. They found that among the international students at a large Southwestern United States University, non-European undergraduates who spend little time with others are the most likely candidates for alienation. They recommended developing orientation programs, such as intradepartmental buddy systems, which encourage international students to become acquainted with Americans and provide opportunities for interaction.

Gougis (1986) admonishes that “stress adversely affects students’ daily academic performances by reducing their willingness to persist at academic tasks and interferes with the cognitive processes involved in learning” (p. 147). The stress and anxiety that accompany a lack of support and affirmation can cause these students’ mental attention, energy, and efforts to be diffused between protecting their psyches from attack and attending to academic tasks (Gay, 1994). Faculty members, academic and student life administrators, and institutional researchers (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005) need more information about what international students do in college in order to know whether and where to intervene to improve their experience and, in the process, enhance the quality of undergraduate education for all students. As Kahn (1991) noted, building up such cooperative networks is necessary “not only for college, but for the world. If it cannot be achieved on the college campus, it cannot be achieved anywhere” (p. 38).

In summary, every educational decision that is made at any level of education reflects someone’s socialized world view and cultural orientation. As a result, there is little if any program or curriculum development aimed at international students in most

colleges and universities. In order to create classrooms and schools that are truly multi-culturally sensitive, educators must first become committed to multiculturalism and then begin to examine and restructure all elements and traditions that are part of the educational process.

International Student Involvement

In order to help foreign students have a smooth transition to college and university campuses, most international student services have instituted programs, such as counseling, network of host families, picnics, etc. (Owie, 1982). Dillard and Chisolm (1983) reported on a number of studies involving counseling relationships with international students. They discovered that most international students place a higher importance on academic success and professional training as opposed to concerns about social adjustment and involvement with American culture. They also found that international students, while having a greater need for professional counseling assistance than American students, are more likely to consult with friends and family members about matters involving psychological stress than with professional counselors. They concluded that counselors of international students need to be familiar with the cultural characteristics of these students in order to have positive relationships which lead to productive outcomes.

Still, too often, students remain segregated by their cultural backgrounds and institutions miss amazing opportunities to help these students make the most of resources that will aid in the development of their cultural and global competencies. Two of the more identified theories on student involvement and adaptation are Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory (1972) and Astin's Involvement Theory (1984). Astin (1984)

defines student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” (p.518). Piaget’s Cognitive Development Theory (1972) described two processes used by the individual in its attempt to adapt: assimilation and accommodation. Both of these processes are used throughout life as the person increasingly adapts to the environment in a more complex manner (Huitt & Hummel, 2003). Piaget’s Theory proposes:

Assimilation is the process of using or transforming the environment so that it can be placed in preexisting cognitive structures. Accommodation is the process of changing cognitive structures in order to accept something from the environment. Both processes are used simultaneously and alternately to accept something from the environment. Both processes are used simultaneously and alternately throughout life. (Huitt & Hummel, 2003, p. 1)

As international students realize that American education differs significantly from the education they may be accustomed to in their countries, some research based strategies may prove useful in the American educational navigational process. Empirically, effective learning by international students proves modestly related to language proficiency, learning strategies, study strategies, and certain personal characteristics. Empirical evidence also indicates (Abel 2002) that students who actively develop their own learning strategies and then actively organize and adjust their study behaviors prove significantly more successful than “passive learners” (Corno, 1986; Thomas and Rohwer, 1986; Weinstein and Mayer, 1986; Zimmerman, 1986).

Since friendship networks seem to be a critical factor in how well international students deal with stress, those who have a strong social support system tend to adjust to

college life in their host country more quickly and effectively (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Schram & Lauver, 1988). International students indicate a stronger preference for making friends from the same country or students from other nations over students from the host country (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985). At the same time, those international students who do cultivate friendships with American students tend to adapt and adjust more easily (Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985).

Similarly, Astin's Involvement Theory (1984) is centered on five basic patterns and consist of *Involvement* which refers to the investment of physical and psychological energy in various objects. The objects may be highly generalized (the student experience) or highly specific (preparing for a chemistry examination). Regardless of its object, involvement occurs along a continuum; that is, different students manifest different degrees of involvement in a given object, and the same student manifests different degrees of involvement in different objects at different times. Involvement has both quantitative and qualitative features. The extent of a student's involvement in academic work, for instance, can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that program. The effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement.

While it is plausible that international students channel their efforts towards academics to compensate for what may be a less than satisfying social life, the literature is silent on the extent to which they engage in other effective educational practices – activities that decades of research show are associated with high levels of learning and

personal development (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Ewell & Jones, 1993, 1996). In fact, relatively little is known about the extent to which international students are satisfied with their experience, interact with peer and faculty members, and participate in a variety of other educationally purposeful activities. Even less is known about West African international students.

West African International Students

The faces of students on college campuses have changed dramatically in recent years. Many of these new students are more racially and ethnically diverse than in the past. They are recent immigrants into the United States from a variety of places around the world, including Africa. During the 1990s, African immigrants were the fastest growing immigrant group at a rate of 620.7% based on proportional growth (Stebelton, 2007). According to 1990-2000 census data, the African international student population totaled 29, 686 during the 1990s (Ronningen, 2003).

In 2000, the number of African international students admitted to the United States was approximately 40,000; approximately 80,000 documented African international students were admitted in 2005 to the United States according the Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Immigration Statistics, 2006, p. 11). According to census data (as cited in Roberts, 2005, p.A1), the proportion of Black people living in the United States who describe themselves as African-born more than doubled in the 1990s, to approximately 2 million US residents. Since the early 1990s, Africa has been experiencing profound social, political, and economic changes in what some describe as a “continental rebirth” (National Summit on Africa, 1996). Others have remarked that this is a particularly

exciting time to be involved with Africa, because the region is emerging from years of benign neglect by American business and U.S. policy makers (Coffman, 1999). In fact, Atwood (1999), administrator of the Agency for International Development, says that “Africa is starting on the superhighway to global economy” (p. 16).

On the basis of these trends, colleges will be called on to serve the diverse needs of African international students as the population continues to grow. Many African international students have needs and issues that make them unique when compared with other international students. Stebelton (2007) outlines three distinct issues that separate present African international students from various other groups of international students: a) the impact of colonialism, slavery, and identity, including racism and discrimination; b) the influence of contextual factors that promote an ongoing state of living in uncertainty; and c) the experience of negotiating the conflicting messages between the African and Eurocentric, Western worldviews. Stebelton (2007) poses that because of the endurance of a long and complex history of colonialism, international humiliation and the assumption of inferiority by people around the world, African international students have experienced a psychological and socio-psychological legacy of colonialism and slavery that cannot be ignored.

The students selected for the study will be primarily from West Africa. West Africa is the region of western Africa that includes the countries of Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. Since culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves, culture then consists of ways of thinking, values, reactions to problems and situations, and many other things

(DuPraw and Axner, 1997). It is easy to “see” racial and ethnic differences and to group people together into racial and ethnic cultures. It is not so easy to do so when one must go into the psyche of a person (Robinson, 1996). Hofstede’s five dimensions of culture can be used to examine West African international students’ perspective of their cultural experiences. The objective is to find clear patterns of similarity and difference amid the responses of these students.

These patterns will allow for the attribution of patterns to national differences in culture. Power/distance will establish the degree to which these students feel that inequality exists and is accepted on campus among people with and without power. Individualism/collectivism will examine the strength of these students’ ties others within the college setting. Masculinity/femininity will analyze how the student value traditional gender roles in their experiences. The uncertainty/avoidance index relates to the degree of comfort the students feel when in uncertain or unknown situations. Long term/short term orientation will examine how much these students value long standing as opposed to short term tradition and values when negotiating these experiences.

West African International Student Identity

Because African international students have been forced to adopt a number of roles upon entering American colleges and universities, they have been forced to find ways to negotiate the experiences associated with these roles. This balancing multiple identities is what Homi Bhabha (1994), a scholar on post-colonialism, calls *hybridity*. The hybridity perspective is described as a combination of identities that African international students need to negotiate their new situation, including their new roles in the United States, such as student, worker, family member, etc. From this perspective, it

appears that many African international students will experience an intersection of multiple identities (Mellow, van Slyck, & Eynon, 2003) which may be a source of psychosocial stress for these students.

Cummings (1996) argues that identities are “constantly being shaped through experiences and interactions” (p.11). While relying heavily on developmental models of adults to describe adults’ development as characterized by identifiable stages or phases, most researchers of adult development take the position that adults develop according to universally shared patterns. Consistent with Somers’s (1994) critiques of adult educator’s heavy emphasis on theories and frameworks that offer stages, Whitbourne (1986) argues that adults’ identity “does not undergo regular, predictable shifts in its structure and content according to a timetable set by the individual’s chronological age, nor does it remain invariant over the adult years” (p.7).

Because racial or ethnic identity can motivate people, we must ask what happens when an individual belongs to two competing ethnic groups. Depending on the situation, a person’s racial identification preference may become more prominent or new compromises with or suppressions of the other identity may occur (Newsome, 2001). Nwadiora (1996) wrote about the Nigerian immigrant college student experience,

Some African immigrant college students experience adjustment issues because they assume a triple identity in the United States. First, African immigrants want to be identified as Africans. Second, because of racism and discrimination, American Society does not clearly differentiate between the experiences of African immigrants and African Americans. Third, African immigrants must adjust to living and working in a predominately White culture as they

simultaneously attempt to maintain their own cultural traditions and heritage. Last, African immigrants may struggle with the meaning of maintaining an African national identity versus adopting a Black American racial identity. The challenge of negotiating and balancing these multiple identities, while dealing with potential issues of discrimination and racism, can be especially stressful to African immigrant college students. (p.117)

Ethnic identity is an individual's sense of self as a member of an ethnic group and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense and takes the individual from an unexamined ethnic identity and through a period of exploration (Phinney, 1990).

Identification based on ethnicity involves a sense shared substance with others based on the character and spirit of a cultural group linked through commonality of origin, beliefs, values, customs, or practices between group members (Newsome, 2001). It should be emphasized that there is a significant amount of heterogeneity among the various African populations in terms of religion, language, culture, and other factors; the African society is not monolithic. However, African international students often have similar needs based on a shared history and philosophy that includes "Fundamental values and beliefs that permeate the continent of Africa, regardless of diversity" (Young, 2003, p. 166).

West African International Students Culture

Many African international students will experience conflicting messages from their African culture and the newly encountered Western Eurocentric culture. There is a profound difference between the two worldviews and in the emphasis and value placed on the collective good versus that of the individual (Stebelton, 2007). As is emphasized in Moll's (2005) funds of knowledge, and in most African societies, finding personhood is

centered within the family and community, not in the individual, as is true in most Western cultures. It is the community that helps shape and define the person. Menkiti (1984) described this philosophical concept as the “processual nature of being” (p. 172), an ongoing process that is ideally a transformation of the individual that occurs over time and through immersion in the community.

As noted by Moll (2005), normative research often does not capture all of the diversity of life, especially how families need to strategize to deal with the concrete and changing conditions of their lives. This factor is relevant for African international students not only in their families and communities but especially in their college interactions. Funds of knowledge include all of the knowledge of families. It is the situatedness of what a family must do to live and even thrive in a particular location. The same is true in classrooms: communities of learners generate their own situated knowledge when they are allowed to.

Many African international students who immigrate to the United States initially experience a psychological push-and-pull dynamic between traditional African values that promote harmony, cooperation, and community and a Eurocentric approach that favors conflict, competition, and individualism (Young, 2003). Young expressed concern that some African international students may experience stress and subsequent dysfunctional behavior as a result of having to “pick and choose” the values that are convenient for certain situations, this leaving them without a true philosophical grounding that reflects their traditional values. According to their work with Black South African students, Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) surmised,

Black students sometimes find themselves torn between two worlds – on the one hand, they live in a world that values connections and attachments to family and community whilst, on the other hand, they have to spend their educational (and later, work) lives in a world that values independence and competition against others in order to succeed. (p.6)

The experience can be especially challenging to African international students who are recent immigrants and are assuming multiple roles and adjusting to a variety of changes in a new country (Stebelton, 2007).

West African International Student Racial Implications

Even with the number of restrictive measures recently imposed in the United States that disproportionately affect African students, such as stepped up scrutiny of incoming students, new laws and regulations to track students, additional visa-processing fees, and extended waiting periods (Teferra, 2002), African international students continue to flock to America in hopes of pursuing their educational dream of obtaining a college education. With the number of African international students in the U.S. continuing to increase, there is an even more pressing need to study the relationships between Americans and foreigners. Without a doubt, many African international college students will experience some form of injustice that is due to racism, discrimination, and/or oppression. Pope et al. (2004) argued that although discrimination is a fact of life in U.S. society, there is a moral and ethical responsibility to address this issue.

Based upon the findings from several field studies of ethnic relations (e.g., Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Brewer & Cambell, 1976; Levine & Cambell, 1972; and Struch & Schwartz, 1989) that support “a weaker and modified version of Rokeach’s (1960) Belief

Congruence Theory” (Brown, 1995, p. 180), it is hypothesized that the more similar a culture is to American dominant culture, the more favorable American students will be toward a person of that culture (Mehta et al., 1996). Mehta et al. conducted a study which investigated 207 college students’ attitudes toward foreign students. Subjects read a job summary of a student applicant and evaluated the candidate for job success potential, likability, and likelihood of personal adjustment. They were given the opportunity to volunteer or decline to offer various degrees of hospitality to the candidate. Sex and qualifications of the candidate were held constant; the only variable was national origin: Africa; East (China or Indian); or West (France or United States). The findings of the study indicated that,

American students rated students from Africa lower on likability and personal adjustment than they did candidates from the West. They made more favorable evaluations of job candidates who originated from western countries than from an African country. American students seemed to think that a migrant’s ethnic background does not bear on the likelihood of succeeding on the job, yet this background did affect how much they like the migrant and how personally adjusted they think she is. The findings matched those of another study conducted by Mehta (1996) which found that international students from Africa, East Asia, and South Asia perceived more prejudice than those from Western countries. In the case of African and Western migrants, their perception fit reality in that American students are more prejudiced toward newcomers from Africa than from Western countries. (pp.13-14)

Prejudice toward subordinate groups is linked to attempts to maintain a hierarchical social structure (Sidanius, Devereux, & Pratt, 1992) was supported by the current findings of greater prejudice toward African newcomers than toward Western ones. Since education is the midwife of cultural learning, a cultural system that influences the way students perceive the world, it knows no geographical boundaries and has its impact on educational systems and their students throughout the world. It is fixed within a certain limited cultural context, particularly that of the dominant culture and ultimately is defined by the culture which produces it (Newmark & Asante, (1976).

Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the history of the community college and then broadly reviews the literature in four areas of research in order to set up the theoretical framework for the current study. First, an overview of the major theories of culture is presented. Second, cross cultural student development theories are outlined to help undergird their relevance to international students' experiences. In the third part, research on international students is examined as it relates to adult education from an international perspective. Finally, literature is presented on West African international students and the factors that may contribute to their experiences, motivation and adjustment in college environments.

The current trend of globalization increases the need to understand the nature of international students' experiences on American college campuses. According to a survey by Development Dimensions International (Wellins & Rioux, 2000) 88% of global organizations report the local culture has a significant influence on the ways in which they conduct business and training in a particular location. Implementation and

communication problems, however, often become barriers that prevent international students from experiencing successful educational programs in foreign cultural contexts.

Biggs (1996) pointed out that some Western studies of international education include misperceptions about Confucian-heritage learning culture. He suggested that, to understand education in different cultures, researchers should not only observe teaching and learning behaviors at the surface levels, but they should focus their research lens deeper to understand the cultural roots and assumptions of the observed behaviors. Since relatively little is known about the extent to which West African international students are satisfied with their experience, interact with peers and faculty members, and participate in a variety of other educationally purposeful activities, more information about what West African international students do in college is needed in order to know whether and where to intervene to improve their experience and, in the process, enhance the quality of undergraduate education for all students (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005).

Closer investigation of the nature of West African international students' interactions will help to better understand how and why particular outcomes result from interactions among racially and ethnically diverse students. There is also a need for more qualitative research –interviews, case studies, etc, to bring into the discussion in much greater numbers many African international students who have so far been primarily talked about rather than talked to. African international students are certainly among those who have not been much heard except as objects of, rather than partners within, this construction of what seems sometimes to be prefabricated and fairly monolithic academic edifices (Miller, 1992).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of culture and its influence on the experiences of international West African students. The students were nontraditional adult students enrolled in degree programs in an urban, two year college in Georgia. The research questions which guided this study are as follows:

1. What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience?
2. What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate these educational experiences?
3. In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

This chapter describes the methodology that was employed to explore the research questions and is organized into the following seven sections: design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, reliability and validity, researcher reflexivity, limitations and chapter summary.

Design of the Study

A qualitative, case study design was used for this study. Qualitative research is an umbrella term that comprises various approaches that are based on a set of common assumptions. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is interested “in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than in confirmation” (p. 19). A fundamental assumption of qualitative research is that there is no absolute truth or objectivity, that multiple realities are constructed and perceived by people through the process of interacting with their environment and that the overall

objective is to understand the *meaning* of an experience (Merriam, 1998). Van Maanen (1988) views qualitative research as “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520).

Eisner (1991) points out that all knowledge, including that gained through quantitative research, is referenced in qualities and that there are many ways to represent our understanding of the world:

There is a kind of continuum that moves from the fictional that is “true” – the novel for example – to the highly controlled and quantitatively described scientific experiment. Work at either end of this continuum has the capacity to inform significantly. Qualitative research and evaluation are located toward the fictive end of the continuum without being fictional in the narrow sense of the term. (Eisner, 1991, p. 30)

Qualitative research assumes multiple realities and is a highly subjective phenomenon that is based more on interpreting than measuring. According to Merriam (1998), qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with process rather than outcomes or products. They are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, what they experience, how they interpret these experiences, and how they structure their social worlds. Qualitative research stresses the importance of the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, usually involves fieldwork; and is descriptive in that words or pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about the phenomenon and largely inductive in that it builds on abstractions,

concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing theory. Additionally, researchers trained in the use of quantitative designs face real challenges when called upon to use or teach qualitative research.

Johnson (1995) notes that qualitative methodologies are powerful tools for enhancing our understanding of teaching and learning and that they have “gained increasing acceptance in recent years” (p.4). Qualitative research attempts to identify why certain things happen and looks at the “natural” history of the activity or event. The importance or emphasis is placed on how people make sense of their lives and experiences, interpret their experiences, and structure their social worlds. The data is maintained through the researcher who is responsive to the context and who can adapt techniques to fit the varying circumstances. The researcher is able to physically visit the research site or “field” in order to observe the behavior in its natural setting.

Since the philosophical foundation commonly associated with qualitative research is in the interpretive research paradigm, which is grounded in understanding the process a phenomenon undergoes and meanings that are imbedded in people’s living experiences, this design best fit my study. Unlike quantitative research paradigm, which posits that one objective reality exists and that reality is quantifiable and measurable (Crotty, 1998), the qualitative paradigm allows researchers to inductively explore socially constructed meanings, not constraining them to fit within a predetermined set of categories of analysis (Patton, 2002). The qualitative design allowed me to utilize an inductive research strategy and keep enough flexibility to analyze themes, concepts and hypothesis for understanding international students’ educational experiences.

Case studies can be either single or multiple-case designs. Single cases are used to confirm or challenge a theory, or to represent a unique or extreme case (Yin, 1994). Single-case studies are also ideal for revelatory cases where an observer may have access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible. Single-case designs require careful investigation to avoid misrepresentation and to maximize the investigator's access to the evidence. These studies can be holistic or embedded, the latter occurring when the same case study involves more than one unit of analysis. Multiple-case studies follow a replication logic. This is not to be confused with sampling logic where a selection is made out of a population, for inclusion in the study. This type of sample selection is improper in a case study. Each individual case study consists of a "whole" study, in which facts are gathered from various sources and conclusions drawn on those facts (Yin, 1994).

A case study is one of several ways of doing research whether it is social science related or even socially related. It is an intensive study of a single group, incident, or community. The case study will involve the study of West African international students enrolled in a two year community college setting. Rather than using samples and following a rigid protocol to examine limited number of variables, this case study involved an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single group, instance or event: a case. It provides a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. As a result, I gained a sharpened understanding of why the instance happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research.

Case studies lend themselves to both generating and testing hypotheses. Case study can also be a research strategy, an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life context. Case study research means single and multiple case studies, can include quantitative evidence, relies on multiple sources of evidence and benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions. Yin (1994) identified five components of research design that are important for case studies which include a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 1994, p. 20).

The study's questions are most likely to be how and why questions, and their definition is the first task of the researcher. The study's propositions sometimes derive from the how and why questions, and are helpful in focusing the study's goals. Not all studies need to have propositions. An exploratory study, rather than having propositions, would have a stated purpose or criteria on which the success will be judged. The unit of analysis defines what the case is. This could be groups, organizations or countries, but it is the primary unit of analysis. Linking the data to propositions and the criteria for interpreting the findings are the least developed aspects in case studies (Yin, 1994).

The case study's site was a public, two year college located in the urban area of central Georgia. Approximately 4100+ students were enrolled in the fall of 2010. Twenty one AAS degree programs exist with 35% full-time students and 65% part-time students in attendance. The institution's mission is the commitment to meeting the economic and workforce development needs of the community it serves. Its vision is to be the preferred, most respected and responsive two year college in the State of Georgia. This college wants to be recognized for its student-centered atmosphere of educational

excellence and maintain an intellectual environment by encouraging teaching and learning, which inspire the full development of individual goals, abilities, and interests.

Sample Selection

The sampling strategy is a function of the research purpose and selected methodology; as a result, I used purposeful sampling for my research. Merriam (1988) states two types of sampling are used in research: probability and nonprobability. Because generalization from a statistical perspective is not the goal of qualitative case study research, the use of nonprobability sample, or “purposeful sampling” is very appropriate. The naturalistic inquiry aspect of purposeful sampling will allow a process orientation that documents actual operations and impacts of a process, program, or intervention over time. According to Patton (2002),

the evaluator sets out to understand and document the day-to-day reality of participants in the program, making no attempt to manipulate, control, or eliminate situational variables or program developments, but accepting the complexity of a changing program reality. The data of the evaluation include whatever emerges as important to understanding what participants experience.

(p.42)

The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding which leads to selecting information-rich cases, those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research study (Patton, 2002). Yet, in spite of the apparent flexibility in purposeful sampling, researchers must be aware of three types of sampling errors that can arise in qualitative research. The first relates to distortions caused by insufficient breadth in sampling; the second from

distortions introduced by changes over time; and the third from distortions caused by lack of depth in data collection at each site (Patton, 1990).

Purposeful sampling was selected because its importance in allowing for the selection of information rich cases relative to the research purpose. Sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population (Patton, 2002). My research population will consist primarily of West African international students who were born outside of the United States and who have lived most of their primary years in their native country. My data was collected in the United States rather than the students' countries of origin. English was a second language for the students, and they were all currently enrolled in an urban, two year community college setting in the United States.

It is important to determine criteria for selecting information – rich cases, or the best sample. When working with an international student population, the researcher has to ensure that a purposive sample, not a sample of convenience, is used in which individuals are selected on purpose based on the careful judgment of the researcher regarding what types of individuals would be especially good sources of data for a particular research topic (Galvan, 2006). Since in qualitative research there are no requirements for sample size, sampling to the point of redundancy is an ideal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Specifically, I utilized participants who satisfied the follow criteria:

1. Participants should be African students who grew up in West Africa (primarily) and are pursuing undergraduate studies in United States public, two year community colleges in an urban setting.

2. These West African students will be enrolled college level courses and will be pursuing Associate degree programs of study. Participants will be selected from the population of international undergraduate students.
3. Participants will have studied in the United States for at least one year but no more than five years.
4. Participants who have lived in the United States for nor more than five years will not be included in the study since they may have assimilated in American culture so well that their experiences may be influenced by that substantive integration.
5. Participants must have taken at least one college level course during their studies in the United States. In this study, a college level course is one that is transferrable between the community and four-year college system in the state.
6. Participants can include a range of ages, genders, majors, departments and regions in West Africa.

Using the outlined criteria, I began my search for participants at a two year college in central Georgia. Informed consent was given prior to the interview by the students as is deemed adequate protection of human subject rights utilized by the researcher. In the second phase of my sampling, if necessary, I contacted other instructors on campus and asked them to recommend students appeared to fit the aforementioned criteria.

Data Collection

Qualitative research allows the researcher to conduct a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences by collecting thick, rich data through interviews, observations, the collection of artifacts, and through other forms of data collection (Merriam, 1998). Of these various means of collecting data, semi-structured interviews,

were used in my research study. These in-depth interviews were used as the primary method of gathering data. Interviews are very effective because they afford the opportunity to obtain “direct quotations from the participants about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 1990, p. 4). An overview should communicate to the participant the general topic of inquiry and the purpose of the case study.

The field procedures mostly involve data collection issues and must be properly designed. The investigator does not control the data collection environment (Yin, 1994) as in other research strategies; hence the procedures become all the more important. During interviews, which by nature are open ended, the subject's schedule must dictate the activity (Stake, 1995). Gaining access to the subject organization, having sufficient resources while in the field, clearly scheduling data collection activities, and providing for unanticipated events, must were all planned for.

Interview questions made the process more systematic and comprehensive by limiting in advance the issues to be explored. They allowed both the participant and the researcher to stay focused on the research question(s). Because the interview process can involve a combination of conversational strategies and the interview guide approach, it allows the “flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting or from talking with one or more individuals in that setting” (Patton, 1990, p. 342).

The interviewing phase of qualitative research is dynamic and ever-changing. No two situations or circumstances are ever alike. The most seemingly calm interview can prove unpredictable when the mixture of personalities and circumstances stir, energize,

comprise or impact the setting in some manner (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). As a result, the use of narrative research has increased over the years. As with the interview, when researchers seek to obtain the information about the lives of people from other cultural backgrounds, narratives as a form of research in the data collection process is becoming more important because of their seemingly uncomplicated nature. Stories are the familiar and are easily understood as the discourse used to frame our everyday lives and are sometimes told, whether intentionally or inadvertently, by the participant during the interview process.

Thus, the story has universal appeal, has an unobtrusively, intimate format and is easily understood (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). In general, life story and oral historians acknowledge that women's and men's stories tend to be told in very different manners. Such variations frequently occur when there are societal experiences and circumstances attached to distinct live positionalities (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Therefore, the researcher has to be concerned not only with his/her representations of the subject of research but also with the contradictions resulting from her positioning and perceived identification with those in power.

Yeatman (1993) make makes the point that what is often avoided is the complexity of dialogue that arises between subjects who understand themselves to be complexly like and different from each other, but are differently positioned. When conducting cross-cultural studies, the time it takes to communicate across international boundaries, such as language, culture, custom, etc., and the problems associated with working in bureaucratic institutions like universities are very real considerations. The issue or notion of representation and "difference" in research which focuses on the ways

in which institutional structures, while having the potential to be creative and constructive, can be exploited in destructive ways (Martin & Humphries as quoted in Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996).

Spivak (1990) places responsibility on all those engaged in debates about issues of equality and domination, to enter them from a position of being informed about respective histories, and to take the risks involved in a genuine dialogue. In locating him/herself in the dialogue, the researcher must consider carefully strategies to prevent fragmentation and trivialization, and take account of the problems which arise out of cultural relativism and institutional imperialism. Early discussions in anthropology and sociology assumed that the researcher was either an insider or an outsider, yet more recent discussions have unveiled the complexity inherent in either status and have acknowledged that the boundaries between the two positions are not all that clearly delineated (Merriam & Johnson-Bailey et al, 2002).

Yin (1994) asserted that a case study investigator must be able to operate as a senior investigator during the course of data collection. There should be a period of training which begins with the examination of the definition of the problem and the development of the case study design. If there is only a single investigator, this might not be necessary. The training would cover aspects that the investigator needs to know, such as the reason for the study, the type of evidence being sought, and what variations might be expected. This information could take the form of discussion rather than formal lectures.

Therefore, the task then will be to gather comprehensive information while ensuring that the basic units of analysis remain distinct and that the overall quality and

individuality of the participant's responses are not compromised. The research is "based on the notion that knowledge for teaching is 'inside/outside', juxtaposition intended to call attention to teachers as knowers and to the complex and distinctly nonlinear relationships of knowledge and teaching as they are embedded in the contexts and relations of power" (Cochran-Smith and Lyte 1993: xi as quoted in Merriam & Johnson-Bailey et al, 2001). As a result, every researcher struggles with representing the 'truth' of his/her findings as well as allowing the voices of the participants to be heard.

Since my research questions focus on cultural factors that impact West African international students' experiences and the strategies used to negotiate these factors, the qualitative interview approach was an ideal technique for this research although the formats for interviews can vary. Patton (1990) writes about three types of qualitative interviewing: a) informal, conversational interviews; b) general interview guides; and c) standardized, open-ended interviews. The informal, conversational interview enables the questions to emerge from the immediate context, and the questions are asked in the natural course of events (Vaz, 1997).

According to Merriam (1998), the most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another typically in a conversational form. I utilized a combination of the three aforementioned types because my ultimate objective was to obtain a special kind of information. Since the objective of qualitative analysis is to transform data into findings, another challenge for me was to make sense of all the interviews conducted in relation to the proposed research questions since a researcher has the "obligation to monitor and report his/her own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible" (Patton, 1990, p. 434).

The interviews were approximately one to two hours in length for each participant. They took place at mutually convenient time and locations on campus. After asking for informed consent and having the student sign all required documentation, I advised the student that participation is strictly voluntary and then went on to explain the purpose of my research and my research questions. Since the main purpose of the interview then is to obtain a special kind of information, I wanted to access the perspective of the person being interviewed, not put things in the person's mind. I expressed to the student that his/her input will help in educational research studies focusing on the issues that African international students encounter in a contemporary two year college setting.

The interviews were audio-taped, and I developed an interview guide including 17 questions based upon three research questions. The interviews were conducted in standard English and transcribed afterwards. I also took field notes in order to assist me with the recordation of context, body language of the participants, and any thoughts that came to mind. Patton (2002) explains:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe... We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world – we have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 341)

Accordingly, Dexter (1970) said there are three variables in every interview situation that determine the nature of the interaction: “(a) the personality and skill of the interviewer, (b) the attitudes and orientation of the interviewee, and (c) the definition of both (and often by significant others) of the situation” (p. 24).

Taylor and Bogdan (as cited in Merriam (1988) lists five issues that should be addressed at the outset of every interview: the investigator’s motives and intentions and the inquiry’s purpose; the protection of respondents through the use of pseudonyms; deciding who has final say over the study’s content; payment (if any); and logistics with regard to time, place and number of interviews to be scheduled. One topic addressed in the interview was questions that underscored some of the conceptual framework literature discussed in the study that guides cultural values, followed by questions concerning students’ perspectives on multicultural education.

I attempted to elicit information which expressed their understanding of and experiences with multiculturalism and the multicultural initiatives that can be incorporated into the classroom to facilitate the learning process for international students. I referred to the interview guide during the process and used probes to explore relevant topics that emerged from the conversation. Finally, I elicited information from students about their involvement and motivation from a cultural viewpoint. I examined the concepts of culture, values, and barriers in terms understanding to what extent international students feel these factors influence their identity and experiences on the college campus.

In this particular study, the primary focus of the data collection was the participants’ experiences on campus with college administration, faculty and other

students and how their individual culture and values impact those experiences in the college setting. The key issue for the researcher in selecting and making decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis is to decide what she wants to be able to say something about at the end of the study (Patton, 1990). The research inquired into these issues in-depth with careful attention given to detail, context, and nuance. Since my research questions aimed to identify West African students' perspectives and to address their learning experiences in the community college setting as well as to determine how they negotiate their social and cultural experiences, the best way to get this information was to ask directly since these experiences cannot be observed or investigated from other records.

The data collection process was not constrained by predetermined analytical categories which contributed to the overall breadth of the qualitative inquiry. Although no one can fully understand the experience of another person, the objective of the interview and narrative data collection is to increase the understanding of these students' encounters. The researcher looked at a broader range of experiences from a small sampling of students with diverse backgrounds in order to allow the participants to describe what has happened and how they make sense of the experiences.

Data Analysis

The researcher is the primary instrument for data analysis in qualitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). After being immersed in the context of the data for a period of time, the qualitative researcher searches for a combination of themes, categories, concepts, tentative hypotheses, and even theories that can be inductively derived from the data. Qualitative research allows the researcher to employ an inductive

research strategy and keep enough flexibility to analyze the themes, concepts, topics and hypotheses as they unfold from the data. When analyzing case study evidence, there must also be an analytic strategy that will lead to conclusions. Yin (1994) presented two strategies for general use: one is to rely on theoretical propositions of the study, and then to analyze the evidence based on those propositions. The other technique is to develop a case description, which would be a framework for organizing the case study. In some situations, the original objective of the case study may help to identify some causal links that could be analyzed.

Pattern-matching is another major mode of analysis. This type of logic compares an empirical pattern with a predicted one. Internal validity is enhanced when the patterns coincide. If the case study is an explanatory one, the patterns may be related to the dependent or independent variables. If it is a descriptive study, the predicted pattern must be defined prior to data collection. Yin (1994) recommended using rival explanations as pattern-matching when there are independent variables involved. This requires the development of rival theoretical propositions, but the overall concern remains the degree to which a pattern matches the predicted one. Yin (1994) encouraged researchers to make every effort to produce an analysis of the highest quality. In order to accomplish this, he presented four principles that should attract the researcher's attention: sShow that the analysis relied on all the relevant evidence; include all major rival interpretations in the analysis; address the most significant aspect of the case study; and use the researcher's prior, expert knowledge to further the analysis.

Stake (1995) recommended categorical aggregation as another means of analysis and also suggested developing protocols for this phase of the case study to enhance the

quality of the research. He also presented ideas on pattern-matching along the lines that Yin (1994) presented. Stake (1995) favored coding the data and identifying the issues more clearly at the analysis stage, and Runkel (1990) used aggregated measures to obtain relative frequencies in a multiple-case study. However, Eisner and Peshkin (1990) placed a high priority on direct interpretation of events, and lower on interpretation of measurement data, which is another viable alternative to be considered.

In the technique of *constant comparison analysis* data are extensively collected and coded by means of induction, deduction, and verification to produce a well-constructed theory. According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the four main steps of constant comparative analysis are (a) inductive category of coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories, (b) refinement of categories, (c) exploration of relationships and patterns across categories, and (d) integration of data yielding an understanding of the people and setting being studied.

The design option employed for this data collection process allowed me to use a basic research approach which focuses on the breadth of the process as opposed to the depth. Merriam and Simpson (2000) suggest that data analysis occurs at the beginning, middle, and end of a qualitative research process. The units of analysis were individuals and various components the international students' values and cultures and consisted of transcriptions and narratives from the student interviews. An analyst has the "obligation to monitor and report his/her own analytical procedures and processes as fully and truthfully as possible" (Patton, 1990, p. 434).

All of the interviews were audio-taped, and the tapes were transcribed by the researcher herself. Each transcription was submitted to the interviewee to member check

and to ensure the accuracy of the responses. I had a peer of mine who is of African descent (Nigerian) examine the transcripts for any variations in the actual content and my interpretation. After thoroughly reviewing my field notes and the transcriptions, I analyzed the materials line by line and sentence by sentence to sort out units of meaning and code them by topic. I then wrote a summary of the interview incorporating the themes that have been elicited from the data. Through the use of thematic analysis, which involves a number of underlying abilities and/or competencies, patterns in the information were seen and a context for the emergence of themes is provided.

Many common elements of interviews included but were not limited to reoccurring words and themes through which I then was able to use direct observation (field notes) to confirm similar ideas of the subjects and then link together the observed facts and recorded information to form the theories and explanation for the general research questions being examined. I conducted brief, follow-up interviews as necessary with a few of the research participants because more data and further clarification was required.

Reliability and Validity

One consideration that a qualitative researcher may encounter when working with international students is deciding what patterns were formed, what constituted a theme, and what meanings to extract from the data. The task was to gather comprehensive information while ensuring that the basic units of analysis remained distinct and that the overall quality and individuality of the students' responses were not compromised. Reliability and validity are the indices used to determine the trustworthiness of research. Thus, Merriam (1998) suggests a series of strategies to establish validity and reliability

for qualitative research: first, it is important that the researcher divulge his or her subjectivities, biases, assumptions, and theoretical orientation; second, the researcher should describe in detail the social context from which the data will be collected and analyzed; third, the researcher should describe the selection criteria and how those criteria were derived; fourth, the researcher should employ the triangulation approach by using multiple methods and sources to collect and analyze the fifth, the researcher should member-check his or her data and interpretations. This requires the researcher to send the data and tentative interpretations back to some participants and ask if they are plausible; and finally, using an audit trail to describe in detail the researcher's data collection process, data categorization process, and the decisions that were made in each area will also help enhance the reliability and validity of a study.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree to which the results are consistent with the data collected (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Merriam (1998) indicates that reliability concerns “the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 205). However, since human behavior is not static and there are many interpretations of a particular phenomenon, it is impossible to repeat a study in order to establish reliability in the traditional sense. Marshall and Rossman (1995) argue that qualitative research is not replicable because “the real world changes” (p. 146), and so no other researcher conducting a similar study should expect to replicate previous findings.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest thinking about the dependability or consistency of the results obtained from the data rather than demanding identical outcomes from other researchers. Other theorists suggest that questions about reliability should be concerned

with the fit between the data collected and the events in the setting under investigation “rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 36). Qualitative researchers believe that a person’s perception is his or her reality. Merriam (1998) recommends using techniques such as specifying the investigator’s position, triangulating data collection and analysis, and using an audit trail to ensure the dependability of the results.

A case study protocol contains more than the survey instrument, it should also contain procedures and general rules that should be followed in using the instrument. It is to be created prior to the data collection phase. It is essential in a multiple-case study, and desirable in a single-case study. Yin (1994) presented the protocol as a major component in asserting the reliability of the case study research. A typical protocol should have a) an overview of the case study project (objectives, issues, topics being investigated); b) field procedures (credentials and access to sites, sources of information); c) case study questions (specific questions that the investigator must keep in mind during data collection); and d) a guide for case study report (outline, format for the narrative) (Yin, 1994, p. 64).

Validity

Validity is comprised of two approaches: internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to whether research findings are congruent with reality. External validity or generalizability concerns the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Firestone (1993) indicates that generalization, although not usually a goal or particular strength within qualitative tradition, indicates that three possibilities for the generalizing from data that include

sample-to-population extrapolation, analytic generalization, and case-to-case transfer.

Case-to-case transfer refers to the generalizability of findings from one setting or event to another similar setting or event.

This study was designed as a case study; therefore, the purpose of the validity check was twofold: first, it determined whether the research participants agreed that the essence of the first interview was been accurately captured; secondly, it determined if the participant agreed with the summary and themes or if he/she wanted to add further information. In any case, revisions were made as data and theme were modified as necessary. Several strategies were imposed to improve internal validity, including member checks, peer examination, triangulation and clarifying the researcher's assumptions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1999). The goal of qualitative research is to understand how participants perceive their own reality – not establish a so-called objective reality. Qualitative researchers refer to this process as *member checking*. This term has its origins in the idea that the participants in qualitative research are in fact *members* of the research team who are *checking* the results for accuracy (Galvin, 2006).

Construct validity is also especially problematic in case study research. It has been a source of criticism because of potential investigator subjectivity. Yin (1994) proposed three remedies to counteract this: using multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence, and having a draft case study report reviewed by key informants. Internal validity is a concern only in causal (explanatory) cases. This is usually a problem of "inferences" in case studies, and can be dealt with using "pattern-matching", which Campbell (1975) described as a useful technique for linking data to the propositions. Campbell (1975) asserted that pattern-matching is a situation where several

pieces of information from the same case may be related to some theoretical proposition. External validity deals with knowing whether the results are generalizable beyond the immediate case. Some of the criticism against case studies in this area relate to single-case studies. However, that criticism is directed at the statistical and not the analytical generalization that is the basis of case studies. Reliability is achieved in many ways in a case study. One of the most important methods is the development of the case study protocol.

According to Patton (2002), triangulation also strengthens a study by combining methods, or data, or including both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Denzin (1978) describes four types of basic triangulation: data, investigator, theory, and methodological. Lincoln and Guba (1985) profess that if one wants people to understand better than they otherwise might provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it. As a result, the ultimate goal of qualitative research, typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world, is to "be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p. 5). Reality, based on the assumption of qualitative research, is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing. Validity, or truth value, in research then relates to the extent that what is supposed to be measured is actually measured (Wolcott, 1990).

Researcher Reflexivity

It is obvious that all researchers will bring some underlying assumptions to the research process. In this research, I assumed that students from different cultural backgrounds have a greater level of difficulty in the college setting both academically and socially. Part of this assumption was based on the fact that I have taught

developmental and college level reading and English in the two year college environment for the past twenty years. Agee (2002) argues that researchers bring with them a set of assumptions whenever they enter a familiar setting. These assumptions could be a source of bias for the study (Merriam, 1998).

I have had international students of various ethnicities personally share with me some of the challenges they face both inside and outside of the class. This knowledge has affected my perception of and interaction with these students. Of primary struggle is their ability to master the English language and their ability to communicate effectively with their peers. Merriam (1998) advises that because the researcher is the primary instrument in the data gathering and analyzing activities, mistakes can be made, opportunities can be missed, and the researcher's own biases can interfere.

This study in no way attempts to establish that there is a "one size fits all" approach to learning from different cultural perspectives. Another potential bias of this study is the selection sample of the participants since all of the participants were, for example, fairly homogeneous. They were undergraduate students at the same two year public college, from West Africa, somewhat educated. The conclusions from this study would probably be different if other populations were applied, such as Chinese or European students, students from other traditional university backgrounds, or Africans from outside of the mainland of West Africa.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study are limited to the context of the study and the participants in the study. These students are probably similar to many other college students, yet their stories are unique to their experiences. The diversity among these

students is also a limitation because it is difficult to represent all the cultures incorporated from the perspective of just these individuals. The students who participated in this study clearly illustrated a variety of experiences and, in turn, reflected some of the diversity in various international student populations. In an effort to respect this diversity, I tried to draw out findings that reflect their stories and experiences while staying true to the research process. Despite this effort, in qualitative studies the researcher is the instrument of the research; therefore, this factor should be noted as a possible limitation.

Secondly, the selected sample is a limitation because all of the students are of West African descent, and all of the participants are undergraduate students from a public two years college in central Georgia. The conclusions derived from this sample could vary if other populations, such as undergraduate international students from traditional four years colleges, African students who have lived in the United States longer and have more in-depth assimilation into American culture, African students who are from other parts of Africa, or African students who are in certificate or diploma programs were included. If these factors were a consideration, the inter-cultural difference might be maximized.

CHAPTER IV: PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This chapter reports the profiles of the participants in the study. Because I was interested in examining African's students' experiences from a cultural perspective, a qualitative methodology was chosen for the research design consisting of semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect data. Ten West African students purposively selected to participate in this study were interviewed. The findings will be presented in the order of the research questions.

The Participants

Research participants were purposefully sampled and selected in order for data collection. The eligible participants had to meet the following criteria: Participants should be African students who primarily grew up in West Africa and are pursuing undergraduate studies at a public, two year community college located in urban central Georgia. These West African students had to be enrolled in college level courses and pursuing Associate Degree programs of study. Participants were selected from the population of international undergraduate students. They had to have lived and/or studied in the United States no more than five years. Participants who have lived or studied in the United States for more than five years were not included in the study since they may have assimilated in American culture so well that their experiences may be influenced by that substantive integration. They must have taken at least one college level course during their studies in the United States. In this study, a college level course is one that is transferrable between the community and four-year college systems in the state. The participants included a range of ages, genders, majors, departments and regions in West Africa.

As illustrated in Table 1, the sample consisted of ten participants from a public two year college in urban central Georgia. There were six females and four male participants whose ages ranged from 20 to 47. They came from various provinces or regions in West Africa. None of the participants have resided in the United States longer than five years. They are all undergraduate students, and their majors are primarily situated in the health care field. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. A profile of each participant follows.

Table 1. Participants Demographic Information

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>First Language</i>	<i>Major</i>
Kenji	27	Male	Togo	West Africa	Ewe	Nursing
Marwe	22	Female	Senegal	West Africa	Wolos	Medical Assistant
Katura	30	Female	Ghana	West Africa	GA	Nursing
Ola	35	Female	Nigeria	West Africa	Ibo	Nursing
Lulu	29	Female	Cameroon	West Africa	French	Nursing
Efra	47	Female	Ghana	West Africa	Asante	Business Management
Fanta	28	Female	Nigeria	West Africa	Yoruba	Medical Lab Technician
Hakim	20	Male	Ghana	West Africa	GA	Accounting
Mongo	24	Male	Nigeria	West Africa	Ibo	Computer Programming
Chaga	38	Male	Cameroon	West Africa	French	Nursing

Kenji

Kenji, a 25 year old male, is a first year student majoring in nursing. His home country is Togo, West Africa. Upon beginning the interview, Kenji seemed a bit agitated and restless, like he was late for work or an appointment. I inquired about his demeanor and his response was that he was somewhat nervous. When I asked him his ethnicity, he stated that his people are just considered African and that their native language is Ewe. The highest level of education Kenji received in his country was a high school degree from Ora, a sort of technical college. He chose to come to the United States because he won the lottery visa which helped him to come here. He has been in the United States for approximately four years. He chose to attend this two year college because of convenience, with it being in close proximity to his residence, and he liked the area. He also felt that its proximity saved him time because he was so busy commuting to school and work. The college was recommended to him by two of his friends who previously attended but have since moved to Minnesota.

Kenji believes that the Practical Nursing program in which he is currently enrolled is competitive, not hard. He is presently enrolled in an English 1102 literature course. He feels that his level of English proficiency is adequate to meet his academic and social needs in terms of being able to write papers and communicate with teachers and the other students. He stated that he didn't have problems writing. However, Kenji admitted that he is a shy person who didn't talk too much partly because of his accent which sometimes hinders communication with teachers and other students. He felt at times that when he is speaking to non-African students and teachers they do not understand him well and that he does not always understand them well.

When asked what, if anything, in terms of his culture may provide the greatest challenge for him experience wise at school, Kenji relayed that the teaching methodology is much different. He stated that at this college a number of pages of exercises may be assigned; however, students are not given much time to complete them; whereas in his country, students may be given five or six pages of exercises to do, but they will be given plenty of time to complete them. Also, when students are given an essay to write, they may be given a day or two to complete it; whereas in Africa, they may be given a week. In other words, he indicated that in American colleges students are given less time to complete their assignments than in Africa. He expressed that in Africa, homework is homework; it is neither graded nor recorded as a part of the student's permanent record.

Kenji indicated that his cultural values have contributed to him being shy or more introverted than American students. He felt that back home students tend to be more catered to by their parents, which makes them shy. The students are not encouraged to express their thoughts so openly. They might be thinking of something important or something might be hurting them inside, but they are taught not to openly talk about it with others. Or if they are school and they sometimes have a question, they may not ask the question. If they do ask, they want to know is it okay to ask beforehand. In America, Kenji explains, "when American people are feeling something, they just talk. Being a shy African, I think, is no good."

Kenji does not belong to any of the social or cultural organizations on campus. Although there is an international student organization on campus, Kenji stated that he had never heard of them. He admitted that even if he was familiar with or introduced to the organization, his participation would be difficult since he doesn't have time because

he is busy person. He works and has a family to take care of. He is not on campus full-time which also prohibits his ability to interact more so with students and faculty.

However, he did say that if he had more time he would be interested in joining an organization on campus. He believed the club might help with his socialization skills once he got used to the other students. He emphasized that they could talk, but if he doesn't know the person, he still will not tell them anything. This behavior did not appear to be secretive to him. He stated that they are raised to be confidential and keep to themselves.

Kenji said he does not feel isolated or alone on campus. He talks to some people on the campus. He even has a group of friends whom he talks to and studies together with when possible, but he only talks to people he already knows. The people are both American and African. He has a friend from Nigeria and two from Africa, but the other friend is a lady and he does not know where she is from. He also has three friends from America. They come in early and study in group before going to the class. He finds that studying in a group helps him a lot. They are able to ask each other questions in case they encounter something similar to that question on another assignment in class again.

He also noticed that during a test some of the same questions came up, so studying in groups with other students helps a lot. Kenji feels, "upon comparison of the classes here to the classes we have back home you know, we have a lot of students, a lot of students in a class, and we are accustomed to like about 50 students in a class; whereas, back here sometimes we sometimes only have 10 – 20." He also admits that he does not talk as much in larger classes than in smaller classes.

Marwe

Marwe is a 23 year old female student from Senegal, West Africa. She is from the Wolof tribe whose native language also called Wolos. Marwe seemed a bit guarded at the initial start of the interview. I reassured her again that the interview was confidential and would serve purely to outline some recommendations that could ultimately help instructors and administrators implement programs, services and curricula that could better the college experiences of African students. She then began to open up and inform me that the highest level of education she received in her home country was graduation from high school which consisted of thirteen grade levels.

She further stated that she did not choose to come to the United States; instead, her parents were moving here and brought her along. She has lived in the United States about four years. She chose to attend this two year college because of convenience; she tried other universities first but it took too long for her to complete the program. She wanted to obtain a degree quickly, so she could be ready for the job market. Her major is Medical Assistant.

Marwe states that she has not received ESL courses at the college but has, in fact, taken some previously at the college's adult education center, the same place where she received her GED. Marwe does not feel that her level of English proficiency is adequate to meet her academic needs at school, not one hundred percent. She also admits that as a result of her language deficiency her writing skills are not as good as they should be. She feels that her language barrier affects her social skills on campus as well. With all of the different cultures on campus, she said it is easier for her to be friends mostly with foreigners, or other Africans.

She views college as being much different than high school in terms of making friends, “Maybe because it’s not like high school. The people are like grown and stuff. They already have their friends, and they already have that friend status and everything. So it’s not easy to make new friends.” According to Marwe, her culture has a lot to do with her social skills. She views the American students as more outgoing than she. She expressed that in her home country, the people are not encouraged to be very outgoing or outspoken. Personally, she views herself as being a very quiet and shy person. She admits that she does not make friends easily and being from a different culture makes socializing much harder too.

I asked Marwe if she knew of or belonged to any clubs or organizations on campus. She stated that she did not know of any. I then asked her did she think that participation in one or more of these organizations might help her with her socialization skills and shyness. She stated that participation would probably help with her socialization skills, or lack thereof, on campus but would be very difficult for her because she has to rush out and go to work after classes. She works in the afternoon, and most the meetings and activities are in the afternoon so she cannot make them. Therefore, because of the time factor, the only time she really has to interact is in the classroom or between classes.

One of the major difficulties Marwe states that she encountered in the classroom was understanding or comprehension because English is actually her third language. Her second language is French, and her first language is Wolos. As a result, in class she said that she sometimes is slow to make the translation of what her instructors are talking about because each of her three languages has a different interpretation. When she was in

school in Africa, the courses were taught in French. She also finds communicating with the instructor complicated sometimes because it is hard to express herself when she speaks. Marwe relays that because of her accent, she sometimes does not pronounce words correctly, or she does not know how to say them properly, so most of the time she is just quiet. She does not say anything. It is hard for her to explain herself, so she would just rather not say anything. She believes she would feel more comfortable speaking out, asking questions, and talking to the instructor in smaller classroom settings.

Katura

Katura is a 30 year old student. She is originally from Ghana, West Africa. She speaks several different languages back home. The most common is “Ga”. The Ashante language is another language spoken in the region of Africa Katura is from. Katura was very outspoken. She did not appear to be confined in any way. She seemed relaxed in her chair as she leaned back and intensely contemplated each question.

The highest level of education she obtained in Ghana was high school after which she wanted to be a secretariat, so she went to secretariats school. She switched her studies to Medicine upon entering school in the United States because she could not find a similar school to that in Africa in the United States. She relocated to the United States because her husband and family were here, so she decided to follow. She chose to attend this particular college because it was close to her house and the location was convenient. She is in her second year of studies.

Her major is Practical Nursing, but she is considering changing her major now because she is finding the English language too difficult to obtain the necessary grades to get into the program. The required grade for all classes in the nursing program is B, but

she is having a difficult time obtaining Bs because of her English skills, or lack thereof. She is having problems passing her English classes with a grade of B or better which is a requirement for entrance into the program. She has not previously taken any English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. She is currently taking ENG 1101 which is Introduction to Literature. When I asked her how she was doing in the course, she stated, "I have a C which I don't like it."

Katura does not think that her level of English proficiency is adequate for to meet her academic and social needs in college. She does not feel that the level at which she is communicating in English is sufficient for her to get through her program and pass her classes. She says that back home, in Africa, if she was not doing well in a class, she could take extra classes in the same area. She states that at the current college, there are no extra classes available just the tutorials which are all on the computer "you have to know how to use and go to the computer and help yourself, but there is nothing in the classroom. Back home we have a classroom or we have extra classes that we attend to help us to improve of the work."

I then informed Katura that there were prep classes available, such as English 097 and 098 which are preparatory developmental classes and even some developmental reading classes. She stated that she had taken both of those classes and was still having problems with the English language. However, she said that she may consider taking some of the developmental reading classes. Katura feels that the language barrier, from a cultural standpoint, provides the greatest challenge for her learning. She also feels that because she is from Africa she has different customs than the American students.

She states “the way we were brought up is different from the way they (Americans) are brought up, and maybe the way and what we eat is different from what they eat.” She admonishes that there is a lack of respect both in the workplace and in school. She gives an example of how people address each other at her workplace, “I mean, you know, what it’s like at my work place. I wouldn’t call you by your first name or just call you Katura. I have some respect. I would call you Ms. Katura, but here people call you by your name without any respect.”

Katura believes that although she is not involved in any of the student organizations at school she is aware that they exist. She said that a guy called her who was an organizer of the international club and wanted her to join, but she wasn’t really interested because she was still fighting with her English. She has not had time to call him back. However, Katura share that she really wants to join, but she has a lot on her my mind and a lot going on. The organization’s members call her now and then, but she does not return their calls. It is not that she is ignoring them; it just that she does not have the time. She is tied up with work; she works a 12 hour shift. She may work four days in the week, and then the rest of the week she has her own school work to do. She says she has a house and cars to pay for. Katura does feel that her participation in one or more organization would help in terms of her interaction with the instructors and the students on campus, but she just does not have the time.

Ola

Ola is a 35 year old student who is originally from Nigeria, West Africa. The most common language that she speaks is Ibo. English is a second language for her. Ola has already been college educated in her home country. She has a four year college

degree. She also acknowledges that her parents were somewhat affluent in Nigeria which is why she was able to obtain a college degree before coming to America.

Ola appeared very confident and had a good command of the English language. She has been attending the college for two years now and anticipates graduating at the end of 2010 with an associate degree in Practical Nursing. She currently is not receiving any kind of instruction in English right now and feels that her level of English proficiency and/or ability to communicate in English is very adequate to meet her academic and social needs at the college. She states that she is from and Nigeria, a British colony. Basically the country considers English a second language, but it's actually her first language. She does not feel anyway unequal to the other students in the class because English is a second language for her.

Ola believes that American students take their education for granted. Because there is such a high poverty rate in her country, Ola believes that she tries harder because she realizes these opportunities are far and few in between. She feels American students have all the resources for students such as the hope grant and Pell grant. According to Ola, in her country of Nigeria, "there are no grants. Where I come from, you pay for education; you have to be like really highly connected to get a scholarship. But here all you have to do is work hard and study and you will get a scholarship. The competition is actually low, but where I come from we have very few colleges; you have to be the best of best to get into school." She views access to American colleges as less competitive, and when they (Africans) come here and see all of material things that people have, they want to work harder to have the same.

Ola did not think her language, customs or values detracted from her educational experience. She did not feel that the cultural values that were instilled in her took away from her having a positive educational experience. She did stress that in her country, students were not allowed to decide what academic areas to pursue. She stated that when she was going to college in Nigeria she wanted to be a newscaster; however, her parents refused to allow her to study broadcasting. Instead she had to study math even though she had never been a strong math student. She admitted that in her culture she did not have a lot of choices. Her parents pretty much dictated what she was going to do and so she just pretty much went along with their decisions. She felt that African parents have a strong will and tend to control their children and their educational direction. Ola acknowledges, however, that her strict cultural background has helped her to be more persistent in pursuing her goals.

She does not belong to any social or cultural organizations on campus. She is aware that they exist, but she is not affiliated with any of them. She stated that she had not encountered any kinds of social issues or difficulties on campus. Math continues to be a problem for her academically, and she struggles with the courses. She feels that she probably should have taken a refresher or developmental course before taking her program level math courses. She said that she has never had any social problems on campus previously, nor does she feel isolated. She does have friends who are both African and African American, but they only interact on campus.

Lulu

Lulu is a 29 year old female from Cameroon, West Africa. French is considered her first language although the dialect spoke primarily in the African village where her

mother was raised is Bayangi. The name of the tribe to which they belong is Mamse. She is a high school graduate having graduated in her native country. Lulu shares that she went to school for a total of 14 years because the students actually complete seven years of primary or elementary school and then another seven years of high school for a total of 14 years. Primary or elementary school begins at first grade. The students are not required to attend kindergarten. She has lived in the United States for approximately four years and has attended the two year college for about a year. Her major field of study is Practical Nursing with a projected graduation date of 2011.

Lulu is not currently receiving any instruction in English. She admonishes that there were some online websites that she used to access to refresh her memory on certain information concerning English as a Second Language (ESL). She would also visit places that she could go to reinforce her English. There was a Catholic mission in Fayetteville that she visited, and the staff gave instructions to do a global session. They would inform the participants about certain websites where they could find a lot of information.

Lulu does feel that her level of English proficiency is adequate to meet her academic needs. She feels she understands what people are saying when they speak English. She also states that she can write when somebody speaks English although her pronunciation might be different because of her French background. She finds it relatively easy most times to understand and interact with other students because the other students tend to be curious about her accent. Thus, they will ask her where she is from, and that initial interaction and/or inquiry will ultimately lead to conversation about her ethnicity. She expressed that she lets them know she is originally from Africa which usually begins a barrage of question.

She does feel somewhat unequal to other students because English is a second language for her. She explains “the way we (Africans) are being brought up, we don’t just talk until question has been asked. You always have to follow directions before you say something, so I don’t know how I can put it.” I encouraged her to just put it the way she felt, to say what she feels. She responded with “Well, like if I’m talking with somebody, it is okay for us to exchange ideas or information, which makes me feel okay, but sometimes when I talk I have many situations where because of the way I pronounce a word maybe the person became annoyed and I don’t know what I did. I know that they couldn’t understand me. I have had situations like that.”

Lulu stated that in her African community/culture people are taught to not speak if no one is asking them a question. In African schools, teachers have so much power over their students. If a student commits a crime, the teacher has the authorization to beat the student in class, or if the student is not present during roll call that day, the teacher will postpone the punishment. Sometimes they will send the person to mow a field. They might assign the punishment in front of the class or in front of the whole school if it is a crime that wasn’t very unacceptable or disrespectful to others. Also, African culture encourages that when Africans meet with somebody early in the morning they greet the person with “good morning,” but she has seen a lot of differences right here in school. When most people in the school see or greet each other, they just say “hi”. She feels that “hi” doesn’t really show the concern that “good morning” displays when greeting someone. She can really see the difference in the time and maybe thoughtfulness that a person has.

Fanta

Fanta is a 28 year old female from Nigeria, West Africa. She has lived in the United States for approximately eight months. She has a four year degree from the Federal College of Education in her home country of Nigeria. She has attended the college for two month, and her major is Medical Lab Technician. Her anticipated year of graduation is 2011. She believes that her language, customs and values have contributed to her educational experiences.

She states that her culture had actually given her an advantage in terms of her educational pursuits. She relays that at a very early age she started learning not in a class but right at home. Her mother taught all of the girl children the work of a woman not just in the house. She basically told them that as young women they would have to learn to be hard-working in life. She would get them up very early the morning before everyone else in the house to make sure that they cleaned the house and that everything was well arranged. Fanta believes that her mother was at that time creating work ethics in them so that today they would be prepared to face and adapt to the challenges in a different atmospheres or environments. Fanta feels she has an advantage because of the fact that she was raised in that environment where work was tedious, it was hard and she was exposed to different, and sometimes very controversial, situations.

Fanta admits that she does not belong to any of the social or cultural organizations on campus, nor does she even know of any. She does think that if someone were to talk to her about one or make her aware of the existence of a particular organization, she may be interested in participating. She stated that she would not mind joining an organization because it may help her to meet different people of different backgrounds, and it may

help her with her socialization skills. Joining an organization could also allow her talk with people who are from different backgrounds and different countries, and she will have the opportunity to see the things that they are going through, the things that they like or they don't like, the challenges they are having and/or the good experiences that they have had.

One difficulty encountered on campus that Fanta shares involves the ability to establish relationships with other students and staff. She does not know if it because maybe people are busy or they see different faces all and every time. She has noticed, however, that a person can have a fresh smile on his or her face and go to one of the administrative offices for assistance, and the person who is receiving the information doesn't really show a smile. He/she does not seem to feel good or happy about what he/she is doing or are really enthusiastic about his/her job.

She says she has noticed this lack of enthusiasm particularly in the financial aid office. She has seen so far that there are maybe two particularly friendly people at the financial aid office and offices that she has encountered. She noticed that there seems to be communication problems. When she says "good morning" to somebody in one of the offices, the first thing that the person will ask is "how may I help you?" She implies that it doesn't seem like the person is sincere or concerned about the students or what the students are saying by the way he/she greet them. I asked her if the staff seemed cooperative once she has passed the initial greeting stage, and she did think they were respectful and concerned about her needs and/or inquiries. She said in some instances they were, however, some others were not in her point of view. She felt they were just

doing their jobs, and several times she has had to go to somebody who is above them to look for more help.

Efra

Of all the West African students, Efra was the oldest. She is 47 year old and from Ghana, West Africa. Efra was by far the most talkative, articulate and educated. She received a Bachelor degree in 1986 in Social Sciences from the University of Science and Technology, a university in West Africa. Her first language is Asante. She has been in the United States for approximately two years and is pursuing Business Management as her program of study with an anticipated graduation date of June 2010.

She is not receiving any instruction in English right now at the school; she had previously been one my students in English 1101 which is a college level, introductory composition course. She shared that at the time she felt the course was a bit challenging because she didn't know what to expect. Being enrolled in the course was the first time she had been in a college setting in America, so she didn't really know what to expect or how to react in the class. Initially, she was a bit intimidated, especially because of the fact that she had an accent, but she said she became more comfortable in the class when I made the students understand that what is important is not where a person comes from but what the person can learn from and/or bring to the class.

Efra discussed her level of English proficiency as adequate to meet her academic and social needs. She shared that having been in college previously has helped her with her enunciation and pronunciation although her accent is still quite noticeable. She said she never actually felt unequal but more so uneasy the first couple of weeks because some of the words she pronounced were not pronounced the same in her home country as

in America. If she wanted to answer a question, she would sometimes sit back and rehearse what she would say in her mind before she said it. This strategy helped a whole lot. It was then that she realized the class was not too bad because people were willing to accept her just the way she was.

According to Efra, her language, customs and values have been both negative and positive. Efra iterates the positive side is that she has been taught to be respectful to her teachers, peers and people in general. She enjoys and is grateful for the opportunity to attend college in America. She has a purpose for attending and is intent on making sure that the purpose is achieved. However, she does admit that she is and has been very intimidated. When everybody is talking, eating and drinking in class, she feels she should be doing the same things to fit in, but she knows in her heart that their actions are wrong, rude and disrespectful. She said that observing this type of behavior does not make her lose respect for the educational process, but it does make her wonder.

There was a particular class she remembers that had computers, and it was like the teacher did not exist. He was there, but everybody was doing his/her own thing. She wanted to leave early, so she told herself to at least wait until break so her leaving wouldn't be so obvious. The flip she reflected is that maybe she shouldn't have waited. If she had come to America when she was younger chances are she believes that she would have thought it cool to just get up and leave. She probably would have geared away from what she had been raised to do and how she had been raised to act. She probably would have done what everybody else was doing, but because she is older and more mature, she reasoned with herself to figure out whether to stick to her values and show leadership or follow the crowd.

Efra does not belong to any social or cultural organizations on campus, primarily, she states because of her demanding work schedule. She said she saw an advertisement on one of the announcement boards for a sorority which she kind of considered because her dad went to a school outside the country to obtain his college education, and he pledged with one of the fraternities. I then told her about the international club and Student Government Association (SGA) on campus. She was not aware that either one existed. I explained to her that the international student club and SGA on campus provided quite a few vehicles for the students to get to know each other and other international students. Many of the American students partake in the activities and festivities. Efra then said that she was interested in finding out more about the organizations and possibly even joining one in the near future.

Hakim

Hakim is a 20 year old male from Ghana, West Africa. His major is Practical Nursing. Hakim was extremely shy. He seemed to have a difficult time expressing himself and finding the right words in English that were comparable to his native language of GA. He is single and does not have any children. He has only been in the United States for about a year which is probably part of the reason for his demeanor He has not fully assimilated into the American culture. His lack of assimilation was obvious by his dress, hair and behavior. He had on a festive, traditional African pant suit made of a colorful pattern. His hair was a bit disheveled and he appeared somewhat agitated.

When I asked him what has been his greatest challenge since entering college in the United States, his response was the computer. He stated that in his English class everything has to be typed out on the computer. All assignments must be typed and even

the tests have to be taken on the computer. This lack of technological skills has proven to be a hindrance for him because he does not have a computer at home to practice on. He did not have any practice prior to attending college nor is he used to working on the computer because he and his family do not have the resources to own a computer. Therefore, he has to come to school after class and hours to complete any work that he did not finish during class time. Also, he is a slow typist; therefore, typing has been one of his major setbacks because he has not been able to complete all of his assignments in a timely manner.

He stated that he is balanced when it comes to associating with other students. He has friends who are both American and African. He also stresses that he does not do too much socializing with anyone, although both groups are friendly and helpful. He speaks of a time when he had a presentation to complete for a psychology class, and the students were required to do some in depth research. There were a couple of classmates who were willing to help and directed him to resources and websites that were very helpful in guiding him. He does admit, though, when meeting students on campus and hearing somebody speak his language that familiarity does provide a level of comfort.

Beyond that, however, he really does not interact too much with the other students unless it is required. He does like confrontational situations would really rather keep to himself. He does not communicate with the other students when he goes home in terms of calling them up but will if he a study group with them. Hakim said he prefers interacting more with students when the class size is small. He feels that his interaction with the students and the instructor changes a whole lot. He recalls a time when he was in his math class. He pretty much knew everybody in the class because it was small. There were

only 12 students. He met some acquaintances and friends that he still says hello to and has a little chit chat here and there with. However, in his public speaking class which was a bigger class of about 30 students, he barely acknowledged everybody. He felt more comfortable speaking out and asking questions in his smaller math class because he didn't feel so intimidated.

He speaks of a class where he had a good experience. Something good happened in this class because he learned something he thought he could not learn. Hakim used his math class as an example. He says that everybody loved and respected this teacher because she was stern, and she did not give out the grades just like that. He worked hard, and what he was most fascinated or what gave him the most satisfaction was when he had to do his presentation. The students were required to pick a topic and talk about it in front of the class for a certain length of time. When he received his grade and no points were deducted for his accent, his confidence was lifted. At first he doubted himself, but now he knew he could do it.

He gives special thanks to his father especially. When he was growing up and he would go before his dad and say "um, um you know", his dad would say, "I don't know, or I don't know um; tell me what you want tell me." At the time Hakim thought he was being a mean man. Over the years, though, he learned to appreciate his dad's comments. Now that he is in college, He is able to communicate more effectively and to talk without gesturing or looking for words from everywhere. Hakim believes that the fact that he had a teacher who was not just any ordinary teacher, and who made him work for everything that he received resulted in him feeling really good about the grade that he received. He was very proud of himself.

Mongo

Mongo is a 24 year old male student from Nigeria, West Africa. He has been married for approximately four years and has two small children. He works full-time, attends school full-time and is currently pursuing an associate degree in Computer Programming. Of the four males interviewed, Mongo was clearly the most responsive and talkative. He seemed very confident with himself and his ability to communicate in English. There were times, however, during the interview session that he would pause as in thought when he was having difficulty making the transition from his native language to English.

The biggest obstacle that he found in college is that teachers are not very patient; they could be a little more patient. He recounted an incident in an anatomy class he took, and remembered that a student wanted to ask the teacher a question. The teacher seemed irritated and did not fully answer the student's question because the class was ending. There was not enough time allotted perhaps for her to get through her material and for the students to have the opportunity to ask questions so they can understand. Mongo said that he communicates with his instructors and the other students both inside the classroom and outside of the classroom. Sometimes he emails them and sometimes if he has a question after class he will join the students or teachers to seek clarity. He did admit, however, that he does not interact very often.

Mongo stated that most often he understands and does not have to ask about everything. He iterated "like yesterday, I was confused about the question, so after class I got the teacher to explain it more. Then, I understood better what to do than before." He does not feel that his language communication is a problem in his understanding but that

the main obstacle is the way he processes the questions of the teachers. Sometimes he thinks that he understands a question, and he goes home and studies the assignment. Then he will complete the assignment the way he understands, but when he returns back to school, he may have the answered incorrectly and will ask the teacher to explain it to him more.

One behavior that Mongo feels may have prevented or prohibited him from learning or having a positive experience on college study is his shyness. He feels his shyness at times prohibits him from asking questions and speaking to students. The most obvious or pronounced thing to him culturally that he thinks may have affected him in the college setting is that back home in Africa parents do not allow the children to talk that much. This cultural factor, he stressed, has affected not only his academic performance in terms of not asking his instructors a lot of questions in class but also his socialization skill when interacting with the other students. He said that he tends to socialize more with other African students but he also socializes with the other African American students on campus sometimes.

One reason he believes his interaction with African American students is somewhat limited is because he finds them very outspoken and aggressive. He believes that some have a very pronounced lack of respect for both their peers and their instructors. They will speak out loudly and sometimes rudely in class. The transition here has been somewhat difficult because in Africa, the students do not speak out with permission in class. They tend to have a very high regard for their teachers and respect for the other students.

Mongo feels the college, the instructors or even the other students could do to assist him and others like him to have a more positive and/or a more successful learning experience in college was to utilize more group assignments, program and activities. He also feels that the class length could be increased to accommodate more study time for study groups and group work. He mentioned a couple of times that he is very busy with family and work which limits the amount of time that he has available outside of the class time. He cited almost everyone has to work, and when some people go to home, they have a lot of stuff to do at work or at home. Therefore, they do not really have time after school or after class to get together.

Chaga

Chaga is the final student that I interviewed for this study. Chaga is a 38 year old male from Cameroon, West Africa. He has been in the United States for about four years. He has one child back in Cameroon who is 19 years old. What stood out the most about him was his demeanor. He was very laid-back. He expressed to me that he feels confident with his language skills although sometimes when he reads a question there may be one word that will throw him off entirely off because he does not know what it is or its meaning. It's difficult for him to go back to look for context clues because he doesn't really understand how the word is being used in the sentence. This situation, or lack of comprehension, has been his biggest challenge.

Chaga said he finds that he interacts more so with African students or other foreigners on campus rather than American students. He thinks that the reason he may be drawn to these students is because they have been through the same things or similar things in the classroom. They tend to have very little interaction or sit alone, and he can

relate to their discomfort which is may be why he feels more comfortable with them.

Some of them are from the same area in Africa; therefore, they are probably experiencing the same challenges. Some of them are starting over and taking classes, so it is likely they are going through the same thing.

When asked if he communicates with his instructors or classmates outside of class and, if so, how often, Chaga responded that he does call some of the students when he has a question, but after the class ends for the quarter, they just call each other every once in awhile to check on each other. He said he does not communicate with his instructors outside of class unless he has problem. If he does not have a problem, he does not feel comfortable asking the instructor questions in the classroom or arranging a meeting with the instructor during his/her office hours.

As for the strategies he has adopted to help with him with learning, Chaga states that he prefers to study alone. He has learned to practice on his own and tends to just be a loner. He says it is quicker, and he tries to be in class as much as he can in an effort not to miss anything. He prefers traditional face-to-face classes because he learns more sitting in class rather than the classes online. He likes reading the material and going to school. He feels that his introverted behavior has prohibited, distracted and taken away from his learning process in some respects. He admits that he is a loner and is not very good at working in a group. He also thinks it might help him if he would interacted more with people and worked in a group. He has never tried group work because he has always preferred to do the work by himself. He rarely interacts with his teachers outside of class, and in class he still has minimal contact with them. After class, he leaves and goes to work or to do things on his own.

Chaga acknowledges that he is very isolated, by choice, on campus. He chooses solitude because he feels Africans have different backgrounds and cultural beliefs than the typical American student. He feels that his isolation or the tendency to go it alone and to do his own thing is that part of his culture, yet American students are always trying to be in a group or be together and talk. In Africa, Chaga explains that the education process is very competitive. There are so many bright students and a limited number of spaces in the classrooms. Thus, the best way go forward is to be strong, smart and independent. The focus is not on group interaction but on individual competition.

He also feels that the need to be competitive is one of the reasons he tends to be a little quieter, shy and work alone. He stated that he was pretty much encouraged to be that way growing up. In African culture, according to Chaga, the education system advocates and greatly supports self-directed learning, isolation and competitiveness. Chaga also is not comfortable with group assignments because he does not trust everybody, and if he does not trust them personally, then he does not trust that the person will do his/her part of the assignment because he does not even know the person. He does not want to depend on them for the assignment and his grade, and then when the assignment is given to the teacher, it is not correct.

Summary of Chapter

Ten respondents participated in this study. The youngest person was 20 and the oldest was 47. Six people were in their 20's, three were in their 30's, and one was in her 40's. All were from West Africa. Six were employed either part-time or full-time. Two had already obtained bachelor degrees in their home country. Overall, the respondents were cooperative, warm and willing to participate in the interviews. Only Kenji admitted

not wanting to participate in the interview when it began because he is extremely shy, but he said it was informative and afforded him an opportunity to open up about issues that no one had ever asked him about before. These interviews were conducted at various places: in school classrooms, restaurants, conference rooms, etc. Four of the participants I had met previously. All remembered either seeing or talking with me on the college campus. All of the participants seemed equally willing to share their experiences and even appeared grateful that someone had taken the time to ask questions and to listen to their responses.

In sum, they all agreed that examining how culture influences the experiences of international African students enrolled in a two year college degree program is a worthwhile endeavor. They told their feelings of interaction with the hopes that the research will help others and be expounded on in the future. They all believed this topic is an area that has been minimally discussed openly or researched and could definitely help the assimilation process for other African and international students enrolled in two year colleges in the United States. Finally, eight of the ten stated that articulating their process of adaptation has helped them to think more deeply about their own future in the educational process.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

This chapter reports the major finding of the study. Since higher education institutions throughout the United States are facing the challenge of diversifying and colorizing their campuses, addressing the needs of all students in an effort for those students to achieve academic and social success has become an even greater challenge. As a result of the increase in international enrollment in American college and universities, it has become imperative for these institutions to understand the dynamics associated with educating these international students. The purpose of this study was to examine how culture influences the experiences of international West African students enrolled in a two years college degree program. The findings will be presented in the order of research questions. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience?
2. What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?
3. In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

The themes that emerged from the findings are presented in detail in five sections. The interviews as text were analyzed primarily using the constant comparative analysis method. The West African students' experiences in a two years college setting include feeling a need to manage their learning, exert more control over their learning experience, overcome feelings of shyness and isolation, and interact more with others from different

cultures. The overall findings are presented in Table 2, *Summary of the Findings*. The chapter concludes with a summation of the discussion in the chapter.

Table 2. Summary of the Findings

Research Questions	Themes
What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience?	<p>Culturally Grounded African Respect for Authority</p> <p>Culturally Influenced Academic Competiveness and Commitment</p> <p>Bi-lingual Dissonance that Affects Academic Pursuits</p>
What strategies do African international Students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?	Selectively Acculturated Communication Styles
In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?	Selectively Adaptive Social Networking Skills

Cultural Factors and Educational Experiences

Cultural norms play a large part in the mechanics and interpersonal relationships at work, and most people who grow up in a culture take their norms of behavior for granted. They do not think about their reactions, preferences, and feelings. However, when they step into a foreign culture, suddenly the environment is different. These environments can be intimidating for African students who are recent immigrants, are assuming multiple roles, and are adjusting to a variety of changes in a new country. The

themes of authoritarianism, competition, language, communication and social networking are presented in this discussion.

Section 1: What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experience?

Many African students who immigrate to the United States initially experience a dynamic between traditional African values that tend to promote harmony, cooperation and community and a Eurocentric approach that tends to favor conflict and individualism. In order to understand the multiple perspectives held by these students, one has to understand perspective consciousness or have an understanding of the “views that comprise the deeply held beliefs and assumptions of individuals, groups, nations and nations regardless of time, space, and causality” (Kirkwood, 2001, p. 11). These students values have been shaped and continue to be shaped by the cultural influences that escape conscious detection yet exercise profound influence on human actions.

Culturally Grounded African Respect for Authority

Culturally Grounded African Respect for Authority from a cultural perspective can encompass a respect for authority and/or showing respect for authority figures whether these individuals are encountered in an official or a communal capacity. It can also be influenced by the historical and cultural circumstances in which people find themselves when they are forced to come to terms with their environment and themselves as a social unit. The West African students interviewed clearly showed a high level of respect and an acceptable tolerance for authority. They all appeared to attempt to conform and/or promote harmony in the situations they encountered.

What was truly remarkable is that none of the students knew each other or were related to each other, yet their responses were pretty much consistent. Ola stressed that she was unable to decide what academic area to study. She recounted how in her country students were not allowed to decide what academic areas to pursue. She stated that when she was going to college in Nigeria she wanted to be a newscaster; however, her parents refused to allow her to study broadcasting. Instead, she had to study math even though she had never been a strong math student. She admitted that in her culture she did not have a lot of choices. Her parents pretty much dictated what she was going to do, and she just went along with their decisions. She felt that African parents have strong wills and tend to control their children and their educational direction. Ola acknowledges that her strict cultural background has helped her to be more persistent in pursuing her goals. She seemed to place a very high value on and respect for authority.

When I asked Efra about some of the cultural things that made African students, particularly from West Africa, stand out from typical American students, what traditions, customs, values, religions, morals, etc., were markedly different and provided the greatest challenge for her as a result of being from another country, she responded,

from my observation, we (West Africans) are a little bit more structured. It is like we have more a structured background in the sense of you do not get and speak unless you are spoken to. It is like I cannot just come into the classroom and start talking. I have to wait for the teacher to say something to me, and then I respond accordingly; that is because in our culture we are not suppose to just get up and talk, or walk into a room with a mature or older person and start talking. It does not necessary have to be an older person, but your teacher is somebody you look

up to. If you are on a job, your employer or your supervisor you look up to them. In that situation, you give them so much respect. Here in this school, you can pretty much say anything; you can eat in class. People would be eating in class; people would be texting in class; people would be talking in class as if it was no big deal. Back home, I do not care if you are in a school or university. When the lecturer comes in, it is a different ball game.

Efra's response indicates that she believes Africans are more respectful. Her references to "structure" and "structured backgrounds" correlate with her belief that African students have more deference to authority. Their culture teaches them that they should not speak to a person who is considered to hold an authoritative position unless spoken to first, and the adherence to classroom protocol is understood.

The West African students felt that most American students just speak out without permission indicating a lack of authority for teachers, other students, and education. They felt that some American students do not have good attitudes about education and take their educational opportunities for granted. Lulu stated, "in my African community/culture, people are taught not to speak if no one is asking them a question. In African schools, teachers have so much power over their students. If a student misbehaves, the teacher has the authorization to beat the student in class, or if the student is not present during roll call that day, the teacher will postpone the punishment." Mongo believes that some,

African American students on campus have a very pronounced lack of respect for both their peers and their instructors. They will speak out loudly and sometimes rudely in class. The transition here has been somewhat difficult because in Africa,

the students do not speak out with permission in class. They tend to have a very high regard for their teachers and respect for the other students.

Fanta limits her interaction with African American students because she finds them very outspoken and aggressive. She believes that some have a very pronounced lack of respect for both their peers and their instructors. They will speak out loudly and sometimes rudely in class. The transition here has been somewhat difficult because in Africa the students do not speak out with permission in class. They tend to have a very high regard for their teachers and respect for the other students. Fanta recounted an incident in an anatomy class when,

A student wanted to ask a question, but the teacher seemed irritated and did not fully answer the question of the student because the class was ending. There was not enough time maybe allotted for her to get through her material and also at the same time give students the opportunity to ask questions so they could understand. The teacher was not very patient on this particular day. One student began challenging the teacher and talking very loudly to her in front of the class. Then some of the other students began to chime in. The first student even had the audacity to tell her that she should be more organized because the class was not taught or paced effectively at all.

Katura feels that because she is from Africa she has different customs than the American students. She believes, “the way we were brought up is different from the way they (Americans) are brought up, and maybe the way and what we eat is different from what they eat.” She believes that there is a lack of respect both in the workplace and in school. She gave an example of how people address each other at her workplace,

I mean, you know, what it is like at my work place. I would not call you by your first name or just call you Katura. I have some respect. I would call you Ms.

Katura, but here people call you by your name without any respect.

Mongo said one reason he believes his interaction with African American students is somewhat limited is because he finds them very outspoken and aggressive. He believes that some have a very pronounced lack of respect for both their peers and their instructors, “they will speak out loudly and sometimes rudely in class. The transition here has been somewhat difficult for me because in Africa, the students do not speak out without permission in class. They tend to have a very high regard for their teachers and respect for the other students”.

Culturally Influenced Academic Competitiveness and Commitment

Culturally Influenced Academic Competitiveness and Commitment was another theme that emerged as a result of the analysis. Competition is a contest between individuals, groups, nations, animals, etc. for territory, a niche, or a location of resources. It arises whenever two or more parties strive for a goal which cannot be shared. Competition occurs naturally between living organisms which co-exist in the same environment. Since public classroom space is so limited in West Africa, the children who are not affluent adopt a competitive mentality in order to obtain an education.

In fact, the majority of education systems in West Africa derive from educational reforms introduced during post-independence periods. Educational reforms occurred in a context of decolonization and intended to shift from the colonial education system which was seen as a colonial heritage perpetuated by agents of imperialism and considered irrelevant to West African realities. Indeed, the colonial education system was designed

in a way to prepare the youth for white-collar jobs and to serve the political and economic interests of the country. Thus, it was irrelevant to career aspirations of the people. Chaga explained,

in Africa the education process is very competitive. There are so many bright students and a limited number of spaces in the classrooms. Thus, the best way go forward is to be strong, smart and independent. The focus is not on group interaction but on individual competition.

He also admonished that the need to be competitive is one of the reasons he tends to be a little quieter, shy and work alone. He stated that he was pretty much encouraged to be that way growing up.

Onyebuchu states that American students take their education for granted.

Because there is such a high poverty rate in her country, Ola believes that she tries harder because she realizes these opportunities are far and few in between. She feels American students have all the resources for students such as the Hope grant and Pell grant.

According to Ola, in her country of Nigeria,

there are no grants. Where I come from, you pay for education; you have to be like really highly connected to get a scholarship. But here all you have to do is work hard and study and you will get a scholarship. The competition is actually low, but where I come from we have very few colleges; you have to be the best of best to get into school.

She views access to American colleges as less competitive, and when they (Africans) come here and see all of material things that people have, they want to work harder to have the same.

Fanta feels that her culture has actually given her an advantage in terms of her educational pursuits. She relays that at a very early age she started learning, not in a class, but right at home. Her mother taught all of the girl children the work of a woman and not just in the house. She basically told them that as young women they would have to learn to be harder workers in life. She would get them up very early the morning before everyone else in the house to make sure that they cleaned the house and that everything was well arranged. Fanta believes that her mother was at that time creating competitive spirits in them so that they would be prepared compete in different atmospheres and/or environments. Fanta contends that she has an advantage because of the fact that she was raised in that environment where work was tedious, it was hard, and she was exposed to different, and sometimes very controversial, situations.

Kenji also acknowledged the need to work harder and be better in African culture, “upon comparison of the classes here (in America) to the classes we have back home, you know, we have a lot of students, a lot of students in a class. We are accustomed to like about 50 students in a class; whereas, here sometimes we only have 10 – 20.” He also expressed that because classroom space is limited in Africa students have a tendency to keep to themselves and try to be the best students they can possibly be for fear of losing the opportunity.

Hakim recounted an incident at college when he was enrolled in a class and a group project was assigned. The other students in the group lacked motivation and determination. However, because of his competitive nature and desire to succeed, he expressed that he had to take the initiative and become the group leader if they were to be successful,

I had a class last quarter, and we had to do a group presentation. I was more or less the head of the group or the leader of the group, and it appeared that the others were very confused about the whole thing. But my grade depended on this paper, so I was like ‘we got to come together as a group and make this thing work’. I called them, and I told them let us meet. Some did not want to, but they still came. I tried to throw in a bit of humor at the meeting every now and again so it would not be so tense.

Finally, Efra believes that her competitive spirit is an advantage. In fact, she stated “coming from my own academic background can be an advantage for me being an African and studying here in the US because we have a more strict background”. She feels that because she already has a degree and comes from a strict background she is actually better prepared than her American counterparts. She considers her strict cultural background an advantage in her educational quest because it has instilled in her a mission to succeed and a driving force that pushes her to do well.

Bi-lingual Dissonance that Affects Academic Pursuits

Bi-lingual dissonance is a figurative phrase used primarily to indicate the difficulties faced when people, who have no language in common, attempt to communicate with each other. Typically, little communication occurs unless one or both parties learn a new language, which requires an investment of time and effort. People who come to a new country at an adult age, when language learning is a cumbersome process, can have particular difficulty overcoming the language barrier. Marwe stated that she has not received ESL courses at the college but has taken some previously at the college’s adult education center, the same place where she received her GED. Marwe

does not feel that her level of English proficiency is adequate to meet her academic needs at school, not one hundred percent. Her native language is Wolof.

She also admits that as a result of her language deficiency her writing skills aren't as good as they should be. She feels that her language barrier affects her social skills on campus as well. With all of the different cultures on campus, she said it is easier for her to be friends mostly with foreigners or other Africans because she feels that they may be experiencing the same issues with language that she encounters. Knowing that someone else may understand her plight in terms of her language inadequacies gives her comfort that she has some allies who may understand her more.

Kenji believes that the Practical Nursing program in which he is currently enrolled is competitive, not hard. He is presently enrolled in an English 1102 literature course. He feels that his level of English proficiency is adequate to meet his academic and social needs in terms of being able to write papers. He stated that he didn't have many problems writing. However, Kenji admitted that he is a shy person who didn't talk too much partly because of his accent which sometimes hinders communication with teachers and other students. He felt at times that when he is speaking to non-African students and teachers they do not understand him well and that he does not always understand them well.

Lulu is not currently receiving any instruction in English. She admonishes that there were some online websites that she used to access to refresh her memory on certain information concerning English as a Second Language (ESL). She would also visit places that she could go to reinforce her English. There was a Catholic mission in Fayetteville

that she visited, and the staff gave instructions to do a global session. They would inform the participants about certain websites where they could find a lot of information.

In class she said that she sometimes is slow to make the translation of what her instructors are talking about because each of her languages has a different interpretation of some words. She also finds it complicated sometimes communicating with the instructor because it is hard to express herself when she speaks. Lulu relays that because of her accent, sometimes she does not pronounce words correctly or she does not know how to say them properly, so most of the time she is just quiet. It is hard for her to explain herself, so she would just rather not say anything. She believes she would feel more comfortable in smaller classroom settings because she would feel more comfortable speaking out, asking questions, and talking to the instructor.

It should be emphasized again that there is a great deal of heterogeneity among these African students in terms of religion, language, culture and other factors. Their fundamental beliefs and values are evident in the degree of anxiety they felt when confronted with uncertain or unknown situations at college. Efra stated that her English 1101 course was a bit challenging because she did not know what to expect. Being enrolled in the course was the first time she had been in a college setting in America, so she did not really know how to react in the class. Initially, she was a bit intimidated, especially because of the fact that she had an accent, but she said she became more comfortable in the class when the instructor made the students understand that what was important is not where a person comes from but what the person can learn from and/or bring to the class.

African students seem to struggle linguistically with the transition of coming from an African country where their ethnic dialects or languages are the norm. Katura feels that her language barrier, from a cultural standpoint, provides the greatest challenge for her learning. Katura does not think that her level of English and does not feel that the level at which she is communicating in English is will enable her to get through her program and pass her classes. Her major is in nursing, but she is considering changing her major now because she is finding the English language too difficult to obtain the necessary grades to get into the program. She is having problems passing her English classes which will hinder her chances of gaining entrance into the program.

She is has not previously taken any English as a Second Language courses. Katua share that back home, in Africa, if she was not doing well in a class, she could take extra classes in the same subject area. She states that at the current college, there are no extra classes available just the tutorials which are all on the computer “you have to know how to use and go to the computer and help yourself, but there is nothing in the classroom. Back home we have a classroom or we have extra classes that we attend to help us to improve of the work.”

Mongo stated that most often he understands and does not have to ask about everything. He iterated “like yesterday, I was confused about the question, so after class I got the teacher to explain it more. Then, I understood better what to do than before.” He does not feel that his language communication is a problem in his interaction but that the main obstacle is the way he processes the questions of the teachers. Sometimes he thinks that he understands a question, and he goes home and studies the assignment. Then he will complete the assignment the way he understands, but when he returns back to school,

he may have the answered incorrectly and will have to ask the teacher to explain it to him more.

Section 2: What strategies do African international Students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?

Awareness and communication require comprehension of prevailing world conditions, developments, trends, and problems confronting today's college students. They demand an understanding of the causes and events and their effects on the students and their educational experiences. Increased awareness of the dynamics of communication styles can lead to new knowledge of experiences and interactions and their long range implications.

Selectively Acculturated Communication Styles

Another theme that materialized was selectively acculturated communication style. This theme is characterized as a limited withdrawal or avoidance, by choice, of verbal and physical contact or communication. In African countries communication boundaries and avoiding 'loss of face' are considered very important. Chaga acknowledged that he was had very limited personal relationships on campus. He stressed his lack of communication with others is a mechanism native to his culture because Africans have different backgrounds and cultural beliefs than the typical American student.

He felt that his loose ties to the American students on campus and his tendency to go it alone derive in part from his culture, yet American students are always trying to be in a group or be together and talk. His African culture, according to Chaga, advocates and greatly supports self-directed learning, lack of interaction and competitiveness,

studying in Africa is an individual thing...you never even see like a group assignment that all the students have to do together. It is just the individual; you do your own thing is how it is there. That is why I am not very comfortable with group assignments. I just go and do on my own thing.

Kenji expressed that he too is shy and his culture in terms of values has contributed to me being shy or more introverted than American students. Students in Africa are not encouraged to express their thoughts so openly. They might be thinking of something important or something might be hurting them inside, but they are taught not to openly talk about it with others. He believes that in America when American people are feeling something, they just talk. Being ashy African and not interacting regularly with other students has been difficult for him.

Fanta said she has not felt isolated on campus, like she was by herself, or no one understood her, but she does not divulge personal information with the other students. She then shared that she does not have any friends on campus, but every time she takes a class, she makes sure she keeps in contact with at least two students. She feels that not everybody will welcome her, but once in a while if she has a difficult assignment or something that she did not pay attention to, she likes to have either one or two people to get the information. Most often, though, she will go to her teacher. Most of the students the she stays in contact with for informational purposes do eventually end up becoming friends with her. She has been friends with some of them since entering college.

These West African students interviewed appear to have very limited and informal communication with the American community although they do tend to have a very close connection with their family member and others from their native country.

Katura stated that she does not interact much with the other students or participate in any school or student organizations although she is aware that they exist. She said that a guy called her who was an organizer of the international club and wanted her to join, but she was not really interested because she was still fighting with her English. She has not had time to call him back. However, Katura share that she really wants to join, but she has a lot on her my mind and a lot going on.

Lulu does communicate somewhat sparingly with the other students and instructors because English is a second language for her. I then asked Lulu to tell be about a specific incident that happened which exemplified the communication differences that she mentioned, and she described an incident when she was completing a clinical for her program of study,

The manager overseeing me at the hospital asked me some questions when I was completing a clinical for the nursing portion of my program of study. I tried to answer as briefly as possible because of my accent, and I did not want to take too much time. As a result, the manager said that I spoke too low and too timidly and that in a fast paced environment like this one I needed to be more alert. He then told my supervising instructor. He thought that because I was laid back and my voice was calm that I was not really interested and very shy. She said she had to explain to him that the way she was brought up; she was taught not to talk too loud and to always keep like a distance when talking to somebody.

When I asked if she was referring to a space distance or a vocal distance, she replied “both, a vocal distance and even the space; we always respect that person. We expect that

when we talk we need to have that calm tone, because the person understand us better, and it shows respect to the person.”

Section 3: In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience?

In his definition of global education, Case (1993) differentiated between perceptual and substantive elements in conceptualizing education. His perceptual component focused on the development of worldmindedness and empathy; resistance to prejudicial thinking and stereotyping and cross-cultural knowledge. This component is effective to international students because they must be very adaptive in an environment that may not fully understand or even want to understand their culture. Anderson (1994) challenged these students to see themselves as

human being whose home is planet earth, [who are] citizens of a multicultural society living in an increasingly interdependent world, and who learn, care, think, choose, and act to celebrate life on this planet [to meet] the global challenges confronting humankind. (p.5)

Selectively Adaptive Social Networking Skills

Selectively Adaptive Social Networking Skills was another emergent theme that the students experienced. Experiencing and establishing social networks involves acquiring new knowledge, behaviors, skills, values, preferences or understanding and may include synthesizing different types of information. Anything that individuals do, including acting, thinking and feeling, when interacting with others can and should be regarded as social networking. Through practice, learning, mistakes, and review, acquiring new social networking skills can provide individuals with the behaviors and

habits necessary for actively participating within their own education. Social networking is, thus, the means by which these students' encounter, establish and experience social interactions within their environments.

Most of the African students interviewed tend to worry a great deal about 'losing face'. Since group socialization is not encouraged in their home school systems, one strategy that these students embraced in the American college setting was the small group concept. They stated that they were more comfortable deferring questions to group settings. Several of the respondents indicated that they were extremely shy, did not know many people on the campus, and had very few friends on campus. These students felt that more group and social interaction through the student organizations on campus would facilitate their learning experiences. Katura stated that she is not involved in any of the student organizations at school. She admitted,

a representative from the organization called me, but I did not return his call. It is not that I am ignoring him; I just do not have the time. I am tied up with work; I work a 12 hours shift. I may work four days in the week, and then the rest of the week I have my own school work to do.

Katura does feel that her participation in one or more organization would help in terms of her interaction with the instructors and the students on campus, but states that she just does not have the time.

Hakim cites that he is neutral when it comes to associating with other students. He has friends who are both American and African. He also stresses that he does not do too much socializing with anyone, although both groups are friendly and helpful. He speaks of a time when he had a presentation to complete for a psychology class, and the

students were required to do some in depth research. There were a couple of classmates who were willing to help and directed him to resources and websites that were very helpful in guiding him. He does admit, though, when he meets students on campus and hears somebody speak his native language, which is Ga, the familiarity does provide a level of comfort. Beyond that, however, he really does not interact too much with the other students unless it is required. He does not like confrontational situations and would really rather keep to himself. He does not communicate with the other students when he goes home in terms of calling them up but will call if he is in a study group with them.

Fanta has noticed situations on campus which involved the ability to establish relationships with other students and staff. She does not know if the lack of concern occurred because people are busy or they see different faces all the time. She has noticed, however, that a person can be having a great day with a fresh smile on his or her face and go to one of the administrative offices on campus for assistance. When the person approaches the window, the person who is receiving the information doesn't really show a smile. The person does not seem to feel good or happy about what he/she is doing and is not really enthusiastic about his/her job. She implied that it did not seem like the person is sincere or concerned about the students.

I then asked her if the staff is cooperative once she has passed the initial greeting stage, and she did think they were respectful and concerned about her needs and/or inquiries. She said in some instances they were; however, some others were not in her point of view. She felt they were just doing their jobs, and several times she has had to go to somebody who is above them to look for more help. She said that she has learned to adjust to the way American interact with each other in the sense that their actions do not

seem personal. Lulu shared that African culture encourages that when Africans meet with somebody for the first time or early in the morning they greet the person with “good morning”. This gesture of good will does not happen on campus a lot in her observation. She said she has seen a lot of differences here in the school,

When most people in the school see or greet each other, they just say “hi”. “Hi” does not really show the concern that “good morning” displays when greeting someone. I can really see the difference in the time and maybe thoughtfulness or respect that a person has.

Chaga said he finds that he interacts more so with African students or other foreigners on campus rather than American students. He thinks that the reason he may be drawn to these students is because they have the same fears that he may be feeling in the classroom. They tend to have very little interaction or sit alone, and he can relate to their discomfort which is may be why he feels more comfortable with them. Some of them may be from the same area or some other part of Africa; therefore, he believes that they are probably experiencing the same challenges. Some of them are starting over and taking classes, so it is likely they are going through the same reentry process. When asked if he communicates with his instructors or classmates outside of class and, if so, how often, Chaga responded,

I do call some of the students when I have a question, but after the class ends for the quarter, we just call each other every once in awhile to check on each other. I do not communicate with my instructors outside of class unless I have a problem. If I do not have a problem, I do not feel comfortable asking the instructor

questions in the classroom or arranging a meeting with the instructor during his/her office hours.

As for the strategies he has adopted to help with him with learning, Chaga states that he tries to be in class as much as he can in an effort not to miss anything.

He prefers traditional face-to-face classes because he learns more sitting in class rather than the classes online. He likes reading the material and going to school. He feels that his introverted behavior has prohibited, distracted and taken away from his learning process in some respects. He admits, I am a loner and not very good at working in a group. I think it might help me if I interacted more with people or worked in a group. I have never tried group work because I have always preferred to do the work by myself.” Chaga said he rarely interacts with his teachers outside of class, and in class he still has minimal contact with them. After class, he leaves and goes to work or to do things on his own.

These students often strategically seek out smaller or more intimate settings as a social network mechanism for them to deal with the behaviors they see exhibited by American students. Mongo said prefers interacting more with students when the class size is small. He feels that his interaction with the students and the instructor changes a whole lot. He recalls a time when he was in his math class. He pretty much knew everybody in the class because it was small. There were only 12 students. He met some acquaintances and friends that he still says hello to and has a little chit chat here and there with.

However, in his public speaking class which was a bigger class of about 30 students, he barely acknowledged everybody. He felt more comfortable speaking out and asking questions in his smaller math class because he didn't feel so intimidated.

Efra iterates that the positive side is that she tries to be even more respectful to her teachers, peers and people in general as a result of social experiences she encounters in the classroom. She enjoys and is grateful for the opportunity to attend college in America. She has a purpose for attending and is intent on making sure that the purpose is achieved. However, she does stress,

I am and have been very intimidated. When people (African American students) are talking, eating and drinking in class, I feel I should be doing the same things to fit in, but I know in my heart that their actions are wrong, rude and disrespectful. When I observe this type of behavior, it does not make me lose respect the educational process, but it does make me wonder.

Kenji indicated that students in Africa are not encouraged to express their thoughts so openly. They might be thinking of something important or something might be hurting them inside, but they are taught not to openly talk about it with others. He also states that does not belong to any of the social or cultural organizations on campus. Although there is an international student organization on campus, Kenji stated that he had never heard of them. He admitted that even if he was familiar with or introduced to the organization, his participation would be difficult since he doesn't have time because he is busy person. He works and has a family to take care of. He is not on campus full-time which also prohibits his ability to interact more so with students and faculty.

However, he did say that if he had more time he would be interested in joining a student organization on campus. He believes that joining a club on campus might help with his socialization skills once he got used to the other students. He felt that if he had time to actually sit down and talk with the students of other backgrounds and form a bond that the interaction might provide an opportunity to explore some commonalities that they may share.

According to Marwe, her culture has a lot to do with her social networking skills. She expressed that in her home country, the people are not encouraged to be very outgoing or outspoken. She admits that she does not make friends easily and being from a different culture makes socializing much harder too. I asked Marwe if she knew of or belonged to any clubs or organizations on campus. She stated that she did not know of any. I then asked her did she think that participation in one or more of these organizations might help her with her socialization skills and shyness. She stated that participation would probably help with her socialization skills, or lack thereof, on campus but would be very difficult for her because she has to rush out and go to work after classes. She works in the afternoon, and most the meetings and activities are in the afternoon so she cannot make them. Therefore, because of the time factor, the only time she really has to interact is in the classroom or between classes.

A good educational experience she had while in school was several friendships that she has made. She met the students in her English 191 class, and they have remained friends ever since. Marwe says the relationship with her friends developed by helping each other out on the first day of class when the instructor asked them to exchange numbers. Exchanging numbers was beneficial because they were able call each other and

ask for help from one another if they did not understand something. She found herself calling the other students to ask “about homework and stuff like that. After that, we started like changing books for different classes which helped a lot.” She stated that another reason being able to call the other students is important is because she does not have a lot of time, and she is not on campus much. Being able to interact and meet people so that she can socialize with them afterward class hours is a good thing. Marwe said she “did not have to run around try to say ‘oh I don’t know anyone; let me try to get in touch with the instructor’ you know, so that is good.”

Summary of Findings

This chapter reported the findings according to each of the three research questions. To the first question of the cultural factors impact African international students’ educational experience, three major themes characterized their educational experience. First, they felt more or a greater sense of compliance as a result of their respect for their culturally grounded African respect for authority and the parental direction received and expectations to succeed. Second, they experienced a culturally influenced academic competitiveness and commitment in terms of economics and access to education. Third, they felt a higher level of bi-lingual dissonance that affected their academic pursuits because of inadequate language proficiency, communication skills, and processing/completing course work.

The second question focused on the strategies African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences. A major theme or strategy to emerge was selectively acculturated communication styles. African cultural values and school norms influence these African students’ educational experience. In order to cope with

their educational experiences, African students have learned and practiced new strategies, such as participation in mutual communication, interacting with foreign students and learning self-managing skills or approaches for their courses and interactions. Two major phases of their negotiation consisted of reflecting on their different learning styles and gaining knowledge of new strategies to assist with their educational experiences.

The third research question dealt with the ways these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experience. The impact of the cultural values and school norms are reflected in their selectively adaptive social networking skills, such as preferring to work in small groups, deferring questions to group settings, and acquiring new knowledge, skills, and understanding. Another strategy is their search for friends of African or international descent and their acceptance or rejection what they perceive as African American student behaviors characteristics.

Through reflection, participants became aware of the differences between the two educational systems, such as student-student and student-teacher interactions, instructional styles, class participation, and educational etiquette. Being aware of their differences has facilitated their ability to stand outside of their own culture and think from another cultural perspective. These strategies or behaviors, which may be common to American students, conflict somewhat with African students' traditional cultural values and learning styles.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of culture and its influence on the educational experiences of international West African students. The students were nontraditional adult students enrolled in degree programs in an urban, two year public college in Georgia. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What cultural factors impact African international students' educational experiences?
2. What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences?
3. In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students' educational experiences?

The sample was chosen purposefully in order to locate information-rich participants and to create maximum variation based on age, gender, major and education backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants at times and locations convenient for them, each lasting from one and half to two hours. All of the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and later transcribed by the interviewer for further analysis. Follow-up interviews and email contacts elicited additional information and clarification. In this chapter, three conclusions are generated and discussed, based on the findings from this study and the relevant literature. The implications of this study for practitioners of adult education are addressed, along with suggestions for future research.

Three conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. The first is that some West African students will experience conflicting messages from their African

culture and the newly encountered Western, Eurocentric culture. The second conclusion is that The West African students interviewed clearly evidenced that cultural factors are important in influencing the educational experiences of West African students in American two year colleges. Last, learning for these West African students is a high-risk-taking enterprise that works better when they are made to feel more secure and centered in who they are and what they are already capable of doing before they are asked to take on new ventures.

Conclusion one: Some West African students will experience conflicting messages from their African culture and the newly encountered Western, Eurocentric culture.

There is a profound difference between the two worldviews in the emphasis and value placed on the collective good versus that of the individual. The meaning of personhood in African societies is centered within the family and community, not as individuals, as is true in most Western cultures. In most African societies, it is the community that helps to shape and define the person. Menkiti (1984) described this philosophical concept as the “processual nature of being” (p. 172), an ongoing process that is ideally a transformation of the individual that occurs over time and through immersion in the community. Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) found that,

Black students sometimes find themselves torn between two worlds—on the one hand, they live in the world that values connections and attachments to family and community whilst, on the other hand, they have to spend their educational (and later, work) lives in a world that values independence and competition against others in order to succeed (p. 6).

Some West African students will face the challenge of balancing multiple identities. Bhabha (1994) called this concept hybridity. The hybridity perspective can be described as a combination of identities that immigrants need to negotiate their new situation, including their new roles in the United States (e.g., student, worker, family member). From this perspective, it can be seen that many West African students will experience an intersection of multiple identities (Mello, van Slyck, & Eynon, 2003), and this identity balance may be a source of psychosocial stress for these students.

Hofstede understood this dilemma in the early 1970s. What emerged after a decade of research and thousands of interviews was a model of cultural dimensions that has become an internationally recognized standard. With access to people working for the same organization in over 40 countries of the world, Hofstede collected cultural data and analyzed his findings (Hofstede, 2001). He initially identified four distinct cultural dimensions that served to distinguish one culture from another. Later he added a fifth dimension and that is how the model stands today.

The cultural dimensions model is a framework that describes five sorts (dimensions) of differences/value perspectives between national cultures. However, because cultural norms play a large part in the mechanics and interpersonal relationships at work, most people who grow up in a culture take their norms of behavior for granted. They do not think about their reactions, preferences, and feelings. However, when they step into a foreign culture, suddenly things seem different. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions can be used as a starting point to evaluate approaches, decisions, and actions based on a general sense of how the society might think and react. Of course, no society is homogenous and there will be deviations from the norms Hofstede found.

As Piaget (1971) pointed out, from a very early age, humans reach out to grasp the world and adapt their ways of grasping to the feedback they receive. Neisser (1976) noted that this idea can be melded with the perspective of James and Efra Gibson (1982), which emphasizes that the real world is structured in terms that afford various types of action by the human agent, and that our perception of those affordances is adaptive. Moreover, the adaptation of the developing human being to the physical environment is mediated by cultural systems of representation handed down by more experienced persons (Vygotsky, 1978); Cole 1996). Therefore, each generation and each individual makes these systems of representation his or her own by adapting, expanding, and transforming them, through participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 1990;, 1993; Serpell, 1993c, 1998, Serpell *et al.*, 1991, 2005).

Nwordiora (1996) contended that some immigrants experience adjustment issues because they assume a triple identity in the United States. The challenge of negotiating and balancing these multiple identities, while dealing with potential issues of discrimination and racism, can be especially stressful to the African immigrant college students. Guy (1999) notes,

The nature of the fit between learners' cultural backgrounds and their educational experiences is of central concern because of culture's importance in establishing criteria for success or failure. Thus, a principal focus of the educational experience, from the perspective of cultural relevance, is the reconstruction of learners' group-based identity from one that is negative to one that is positive. Learners from marginalized cultural backgrounds too often resort to a rejection of dominant cultural norms and standards (Ogbu, 1992; Quigley, 1990). However,

such a stance consigns those individuals to further marginalization and exclusion (Darder, 1991). For adult educators interested in addressing the ways in which cultural domination affects learners in adult education settings, educational strategies must be developed to minimize the potential for further exclusion and marginalization of learners. (p.13)

In short, the artistic, intellectual, and spiritual expression of the full complexity and diversity of the human experience are not being transposed between ethnic communities. The ultimate tragedy here with the inconsistent experiential interaction, however, is not that archaic societies are disappearing but rather that vibrant, dynamic, living cultures and languages are not being shared with other cultures because there is a lack of interpersonal connection among cultures. At risk is a vast archive of knowledge and expertise, a catalogue of the imagination, an oral and written literature composed of the memories of countless elders and healers, warriors, farmers, fishermen, midwives, poets and saints being forced out of existence. Every view of the world that fades away, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life and reduces the human repertoire of adaptive responses to the common problems that confront us all. As a result, knowledge is lost, not only of the natural world but of realms of the spirit, intuitions about the meaning of the cosmos, and insights into the very nature of existence (Davis, 2003).

Wilson (2000) a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, Lexington, published an article where she examined how her Ghanaian students talked about an identity that included being “a member of an ethnic group and citizen of a nation, as well as being an African

and citizen of the world” (p. 197). She concluded that her Ghanaian students wear Ghanaian sunglasses and that Americans wear American sunglasses when they look at the world. As was identified in my studies, Wilson’s findings concur with the evidence that people may be conscious of their own perspective but often are not aware of how strongly their nationality, their culture, and their experiences inform that perspective.

As Said (1993) wrote in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Rarely before in human history has there been so massive an intervention of force and ideas from one culture to another as there is today from America to the rest of the world” (p. 318). Even in the most some of the remotest village in Africa, people seem to have adopted European culture and even prefer it (Wilson, 2000). These West African students interviewed clearly expressed some characterizations of assimilation into the college culture in terms of behavior either in an attempt to ‘fit in’ or ‘belong’ or as a matter of selective preference.

Conclusion two: The West African students interviewed clearly evidenced that cultural factors are important in influencing the educational experiences of West African students in American two year colleges.

The second conclusion to be drawn from this study is that cultural factors are important in influencing the educational experiences of West African students in American two year colleges, and those experiences are shaped by ingrained African cultural values such as hierarchical relationships, keeping harmony, face saving, and conservatism. The majority of the educational systems in West Africa derive from educational reforms introduced during post-independence periods. Educational reforms occurred in a context of decolonization and intended to shift from the colonial education

system which was seen as a colonial heritage perpetuated by agents of imperialism and considered irrelevant to West African realities.

West African culture has clearly defined roles for males and females. In traditional male/female roles, poor farm women not only work longer hours than men but often perform more physically demanding work. It is now commonly recognized that in poorer households, women farmers usually work longer and harder than men. A 1999 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Assessment of Rural Poverty confirms this pattern in the West and Central African countries. In the first place, poorer rural women in West Africa usually work longer hours a day than males in similar circumstances. In the Central Province of Cameroon, women's working week is longer than 64 hours, whereas for men it is only about 32 hours. About half of women's time is spent on domestic tasks, but even then women spend more time on agriculture than men do (26 hours/week compared with only 12 hours/week for men).

However, these lines are beginning to become blurred as African students find themselves forced to come to terms with their environments and themselves as a social unit (Sanday, 2000) in America. According to Serpell (1990), "in addition to its theoretical fruitfulness and its empirically predictive power, a psychological theory will always be judged by its capacity to resonate with the broader cultural preoccupations of the society of which its audience are members" (p. 125). Thus, the role of socio-cultural assumptions and values about self are rarely acknowledged in African culture.

Researches of individualism and collectivism investigate whether perceptions of the self in specific cultural groups are autonomous (independent) or social in orientation.

Members of cultural with an individualist view of self regard the self as rooted in that

realm of awareness that is intrinsic, private, and unique to the person and that gives a sense of distinctiveness or separateness from the other. Individualistic perceptions of the self have been associated with Western cultures (particularly the United States) that have tended to (mis) construe personal freedom, responsibility, and achievement as synonymous with individualism (Sampson, 1988).

Collectivist cultures foster a sense of the self that emphasizes members' public spiritedness rather than individual privacy, the common as opposed to the unique, the members' compatibility with people, objects, and circumstances (Anderson, 1987; Hui & Trandis, 1986; Markis & Kitayama, 1991; Trandis, 1989). A person's self-identity is seen in terms of his or her perceived connectedness with significant others (e.g. family, clan) who both constitute and validate the individual's sense of self-hood. Private thoughts and feelings about the self and others are not considered pertinent to an individual's view of the self. Goals, aspirations, and preferences are perceived in terms of how they make possible an individual's expression of belongingness and how they help advance the goals of the collective.

In anthropological studies of African societies, researchers (e.g. Beattie, 1980) have suggested that African societies are among the most collectivist in their view of self. For instance, extended family systems, clan loyalties, and use of teknonyms (e.g. father of X) are a part of the basis of individual social affiliation and identities among indigenous African cultures (Mpofu, 2001). This struggle with identity was evident by the responses from the West African students interviewed for this study about their experiences in the classroom and with other American students. Sampson's (1989, p. 94) observation regarding the need to connect "our theories of the person with social change,

in particular, with major historical transformations in the social world” speaks particularly to these West African students as well as to modern African communities of students that are under the strain of the competition between Western and indigenous African value systems. Such an impact, if it were widespread, could have an impact on perceptions of the self-concept in modern African communities and lead to more evidence of acculturation toward urban, Western influences.

This modernity trend, as studied by Inkeles (1983) is characterized by an individualistic, rational, and secular view of life as opposed to the traditional collectivist, metaphysical and moralistic orientation. To question who has the power to determine culture serves as a reminder of the imbalance in the distribution of power between those who identify with mainstream cultural traditions and those who, in the spirit of democratic and popular culture, like these West African students, seek to redefine their identities and social practices in terms of marginalized cultural perspectives (Guy, 1999). *Conclusion three: Learning for these West African students is a high-risk-taking enterprise that works better when they are made to feel more secure and centered in who they are and what they are already capable of doing before they are asked to take on new ventures.*

The third conclusion of this study is that learning is a high-risk-taking enterprise that works better when students are made to feel more secure and centered in who they are and what they are already capable of doing before they are asked to take on new ventures. Psychological security and a positive feeling of self-worth are prerequisites for the more abstract need to know and learn (Gay, 1994). Schlossberg (1989) ponders whether or not a community can be formed on campus “that allows all students to find a

place of involvement and importance” (p.6). Viewing the development of learners from the perspective of their participation in cultural practices, Barbara Rogoff (1990, 1993), Serpell, (1993b) and others (Packer, 1993) have advocated for the term *appropriation* in preference to *internalization*, to capture the idea that membership of a community of practice is contingent on a sense of ownership of its cultural resources.

The West African students’ mastery of the dominant culture in which they are submerged is perhaps grounded less in the intrinsic motivation that arises from a disciplined application of explicit study skills and attitudes than that which arises from membership/ownership of the community of literate practices. That explicitly studious perspective may tend to encourage compartmentalization of the knowledge and understanding that students acquire at school, and thus insulate their more intuitive understanding of the world grounded in indigenous languages and beliefs. As indicated by both theoretical studies and these West African students’ perspectives on their experiences, project work has the potential to break down such isolation by engaging students’ minds on both levels: the theoretical and the practical.

Fincher (2002) too noted that student motivation is exceptionally high in project work, often leading to students investing a level of effort in their project that is disproportionate to the amount of credit that the grade carries in the overall assessment of their degree. In the late 1980s, Jean Lave, whose formative years in academia were spent studying apprenticeship as a form of educational practice in Africa, began to advocate a new approach to the study of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and development under the rubric of legitimate peripheral participation,

Reacting against some of the artificiality of the formal arrangements for learning institutionalized in the western tradition of formal schooling, these authors have advanced an account of human learning as less about the process of receiving information and more about changing forms of participation in social practices. Their elaboration of argument is grounded in an analysis of various forms of apprenticeship, which they selected as a context in which to observe and understand human learning, that can be found in many cultural settings around the world, and that may be less systematically biased by western culture than the institution of formal schooling. (Serpell, 2007, p. 26)

Additionally, many large metropolitan two year colleges in the United States have recognized over the past three decades a new curriculum development challenge posed by the growing cultural diversity of the society that they aspire to serve, often compounded with divisions along lines of race and social class. Dumas-Hines (2001) addressed the cultural challenges on college campuses based upon a review of the literature as well as a research study conducted on 29 universities in Midwestern United States. Their findings include but were not limited to develop a university-wide philosophy statement that encourages cultural diversity; analyze the cultural diverse faculty and student composition on campus and set goals for enhancing diversity; conduct research on best practices/programs/activities that promote recruitment and retention of culturally diverse faculty and students; and develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive plan for recruitment/retention activities that focus on enhancing cultural diversity on campus among faculty and student populations.

Educators need to be keenly aware that many of the traditional school patterns accommodate some students and work consistently against others. Thus, the creation of new courses is central to the process of including multicultural issues in the curriculum. Rancho Santiago College in Santa Ana, California, serves a community which is largely Latino and Southeast Asian. A course entitled, "American Pluralism in Microcosm: The city of Santa Ana as Text" proved to be an effective means of increasing students' appreciation and respect for cultural diversity in this community (Nixon et al., 1997).

Fresno City College (FCC) has undertaken the development of a new American Studies discipline that will address issues of pluralism and identity. The first step in this process was the creation of a new course, "American Pluralism: The Search for the Common Ground." The college's American Pluralism and Identity Committee is presently working on integrating sections of American Literature, American History and Ethnic Studies into the new discipline (FCC, 1997). Additionally, Itawamba Community College (ICC) (Mississippi) has revised curricula across various disciplines according to a framework of four questions: What does it mean to be American? What divides us? What brings us together? What do we have in common? Students consider these questions on a personal level as well as through academic materials (ICC, 1997).

However, in the Maricopa Community Colleges (Arizona), when multiculturalism was made a faculty development priority in 1993-1994, opportunities for discussion were made available but not required. As a result, only one or two of the 800 faculty members reported making changes in the curriculum as a result of these efforts (Story, 1997). Faculty commitment and preparation are necessary for the success of any curricular change. Many educators have been taught to think that education is neutral and

apolitical. As Bennett (1995) reminds us, education is neither neutral nor apolitical. Effectively measuring the international content of college and university courses is difficult. For instance, while language, area study, and other such classes are widely understood to be international in nature, reaching consensus on what constitutes international content and how it should be measured has proven illusive.

Promoting leadership diversity and cultural diversity awareness and sensitivity encompassed several directions at Kirkwood Community College (Iowa). The Beacon College grant awarded to the Metropolitan Community College in Omaha gave them an opportunity to focus specifically in the issue of programming over the last two years. One of the activities that took place was weekly presentations by students and staff members of difference describing the county/culture they have experienced. These presentations were made by not only persons from other countries but also by those of other races and persons who live with disabilities (Nanke, 1993).

Despite differences in interpretation, research suggests there is much room for improvement: broad curricular internationalization is lacking; postsecondary graduates are poorly informed about other countries, people, and events; and offering by institutional type are uneven, with two-year institutions providing far fewer international education opportunities than their four-year counterparts (American Council on Education, 2000). As a result of this lack of commitment and preparation, this study aims to provide faculty with a resource that will underscore the importance of and need for programs and initiatives that facilitate and enhance the experiences of the international students that they teach.

Implications for Theory

Students who entered kindergarten in 2010 will graduate from high school in the year 2023. According to Kirkwood (2001),

They will confront a world quite different from tribal initiations and graduation rites of the twentieth century. Those young adults will face a new world order. Their daily contacts will include individuals from diverse ethnic, gender, linguistic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. They will experience some of history's most serious health problems, inequities among less-developed and more-developed nations, environmental deterioration, overpopulation, transnational migrations, ethnic nationalism, and the decline of the nation-state.

The new age will challenge their emotional, intellectual and physical well being. This prophecy has an eerie similarity to Hofstede's theoretical research almost 30 years ago. Although Hofstede's cultural dimensions used the workplace as the basis for its conclusions, yet the finds are still relevant today in reference to the cultural issues that college students, particularly international college students, face in college classrooms and college campuses on a daily basis.

In this study I have found that our humanity has entered a new epoch in the history of civilization. The collective richness, multiple talents, and combined strength emanating from increasing cross-cultural interactions has brought problems of lack of respect and tolerance for others who are culturally and racially different, uneven distribution of resources, ethnic conflict, and struggles for power (Kirkwood, 2001). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the college system to equip students with the

attitudes, knowledge, and skills necessary to become competent, responsible, and humane citizens of the community, state, nation and world.

Hofstede's theory was developed based on the investigation of cultural factors in the workplace. Drawing on Hofstede, the findings for this study demonstrate the utility of Hofstede's theory for analyzing cultural factors that influence international students experiences in two year colleges. Cross-cultural awareness will provide students and educators with an enlarged global dimension, perspective and consciousness. Hanvey's 1976 dimension of cross-cultural awareness is informed by,

the diversity of ideas and practices in human societies and how the ideas and ways of one's own culture are perceived from other vantage points. Sustained contact with another culture frequently reinforces stereotypes and cultural distance.

Although intellectual understanding may find the actions the actions of others 'believable', empathy and transpection are difficult to achieve. They constitute the highest level of global cognition and compassion. (as quoted in Kirkwood 2001)

Even though increasing attention is being paid to the cultural issues in adult education, empirical study of the impact of the culture on international students' learning experiences has been very limited. This qualitative study project several areas for further research. With this study serving as an important element of culture and international student education from the perspective of West African international students, it is important for researchers to continue the expansion of the findings and conclusions presented here and to examine further the theoretical, cultural issues in adult education.

Implications for Practice

Academic success seems to correlate modestly with attitudes toward learning and learning strategies, as measured by *the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory* (LASSI), an assessment measure of student-learning and test taking strategies. Specifically, the number of course withdrawals by international students correlates significantly with LASSI scales that measure attitudes toward studying, effective time management, and concentration. The LASSI total score also correlates significantly with the number of withdrawals (Stoyhoff, 1997). The findings in the literature commenting on them suggest some helpful steps for international students to develop an overall strategy for academic success.

The Role of Students

According to Abel (2002), international students can prepare for the American experience and the culture shock of a very different experience by auditing classes beforehand, visiting campus organizations, and speaking with American students about what to expect. The expectation in the United States is that students will demonstrate a good deal more individual initiative than is often expected in universities outside the United States. Some international students also expect more formal relationships with their professors than do most American students and so depend on professors to tell or do more for them than is expected in most American universities (Abel, 2002).

International students can determine the “Learning Time” available for each course by becoming familiar with the university calendar, the time allotted by professors for covering various topics in each class, the amount of material a course will cover and a

course's level of difficulty. A learning model developed by Carroll (1963) suggests that "learning time" and student perseverance are the most important variables in academic learning by international students. Available learning time depends on the calendar established by the college for each semester and the time allotted for the completion of course topics in each class.

To add, they should plan study time and recreation time because the more time a student spends on a course and better he/she focuses on the material, the more successful he/she will be. Perseverance refers to the student's intensity and focus on academic content during the allocated learning time. Carroll's study suggests that all else being equal, the more time a student spends on a course and the better he/she focuses on the material, the more successful he/she will be. Bolstering Carroll's model are findings by Moore (1994) of a positive association between time management practices and academic success. For most international students, studying for long, uninterrupted periods is most effective (Light, 2001).

Getting the right kind of peer tutoring referrals from offices in English, language, and math departments can be beneficial. Although McKeachie (1986) found that most peer tutoring was ineffectual, Trowbridge and others (1991) and Lidren, Meier, and Brigham (1991) found that small groups tutored by advanced undergraduates who supplemented lectures, readings, and projects were effective in improving test scores in certain subjects. Developing visual models will help to conceptualize what they are learning. Gage and Berliner (1992) argue that models provide "accurate and useful representations" (p. 314). Specifically, they found that students who study models and conceptual maps before a lecture may recall as much as 57 percent more of the

conceptual information than students who do not study and discuss such maps and models.

Students can also join a study group and discuss study material with friends. Zimmerman and Pons (1986) found higher academic achievement among students who regularly used peers to help them learn. Boyer and Sedlacek (1988) found that the strongest non-cognitive predictor of international students' academic achievement was the support given by friends. Thus, the social integration desired of internationalization is the involvement of students of diverse cultural backgrounds in mainstream campus activities. Opportunities to participate in student government organizations, involvement in the campus media, and employment as resident hall advisors or student counselors increase opportunities for greater international awareness and cross cultural appreciation of all members of the campus (Schoorman, 2000). For if students feel that the school environment is alien and hostile toward them or does not affirm and value who they are, they will not be able to concentrate as thoroughly as they might on academic tasks (Gay, 1994).

The Role of Faculty

In one important comparative survey of university faculty, U.S. scholars regarded international academic activity – work, research, and collaboration – as less important than did their foreign counterparts, although it indicated nothing about the importance they attach to introducing international content into the undergraduate curriculum (American Council on Education, 2000). However, the global economic workforce has encouraged business, engineering, and scientific disciplines to address multicultural issues in their curricula (Krishnamurthi, 1997; Hedwith et al., 1998; Volet and Ang,

1998). Students and faculty who participated in the AAUP study (2000) stated that conditions that were essential to maximizing the potential benefits and minimizing the potential drawbacks of racially and ethnically diverse classrooms include but are not limited to a) a learning-centered rather than teaching-centered philosophy, in which the faculty member is considered only one of the classroom participants; b) interactive teaching techniques, such as small group discussions, student presentations, debates, role playing, problem posing, and student paper exchanges; and c) a supportive, inclusive classroom climate (p.7).

Multicultural courses must be designed to enhance students' ability to function in an increasingly diverse society and empower them as citizens who can make a difference. In considering content, an educator's primary concern should be that of enabling students to develop an understanding of our collective history – the places in time and space where people's lives intersect but also the lives of groups of people prior to and after such intersections (Scott, 2001). When there is a significant difference in socialization between teachers and learners, it is vital that teachers question their assumptions about their learners' actions. For example, Guy (1999) indicates that

white, middle-class, female adult educators who have lived in middle-class homes and who work with African American single mothers may believe they have something in common with their students as either women or as mothers. Yet the barrier of race and class can lead to important misinterpretations and misunderstandings about how learners view the learning environment. In other words, the system of meaning shared among the students may be quite different from the beliefs, assumptions, and values of the instructor. (p.14)

Therefore, a multicultural curriculum should include experiences that allow students to explore events, concepts, issues, and themes from multiple perspectives.

Goals for student learning in multicultural courses include developing an appreciation of the “knowledge traditions within the contemporary United States”; providing an understanding of the role of racial, cultural and ethnic differences in the formation of our national identity; evaluating diverse views of the interrelationship of self and community; exploring the individual students’ own cultural heritage; and developing the ability to read and compare cultures through their cultural expressions (Olguin & Schmitz, 1997). Including racial and ethnic topics, examples, scholars, and perspectives in course content is especially important for students in multi-racial/multi-ethnic classrooms; doing so demonstrates that the voices of the dominant white culture are not the only ones worth listening to (Marin, 2000).

Merryfield (1998) concluded that American teachers’ guiding theory involves teaching “students about their own cultures and diverse cultures through multiple perspectives and comparisons of both similarities and differences so that student understand the complexity of culture and demonstrate tolerance and respect for differences” (p. 352). Marchisani and Adams (1992) present a useful model that can assist instructors in conceptualizing the classroom from a culturally relevant perspective. The model addresses four elements of the learning environment that should be examined through the lens of culture: (a) the instructor’s cultural identity, (b) the learners’ cultural identity, (c) the curriculum, and (d) instructional methods and processes.

Providing a curriculum which reflects the experiences of a diverse population will help in retaining traditionally underrepresented student populations by providing a

curriculum which is culturally relevant (Reid, 1995). This concept is nowhere more important than in community colleges which currently enroll 42% of all first time college students as well as 46% of all minority students in higher education (Foote, 1997). Two year and community colleges are finding that not only should voices of the people they represent be used as frequently as possible but also that the curriculum should be relevant to the lives of students and should reflect their images as well as their everyday living experiences. All students should be given an accurate, well-rounded view of people.

The Role of Institutions

Two year colleges throughout the United States are facing the challenge of diversifying and of colorizing their campuses. Learned societies, such as the Association of American Universities, the American Association of University Professors and the American Council on Education, publicly support greater diversification in higher education (Dumas-Hines, 2001) because all have realized that multicultural education can create a foundation for effective and successful diplomacy in the global context (Bennett, 1995). They have also realized that until colleges and universities understand the importance of culture and multiculturalism and sufficiently incorporate this understanding into the educational process the initiatives in place now will not be enough to help the multitude of international students who will be entering American classrooms over the next decades.

The goals of a public college should include not only meeting the expectations of accommodation for an American community of scholarship and science, but also recognition of the international society that they are responsible for serving. In the field of adult education, it is widely accepted that learning is situated in context (Bandura,

1977; Pratt, 1990; Pratt & Nesbit, 2000), and that program developers should adjust programs to accommodate learners' backgrounds. In other words, program developers are assumed to be responsible for examining the influence of local culture on learners and adjusting the program appropriately. According to Serpell (2007),

Many large universities in the United States and in Europe have recognized over the past three decades a new curriculum development challenge posed by the growing cultural diversity of the society that they aspire to serve, often compounded with divisions along lines of race and social class. At the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), the service learning project entitle 'Nurturing developmental partnerships' (DNP) was conceived among a group of graduate students under my guidance as an attempt to connect their own professional training with some of the salient social problems confronting human development. The core concept was a cascade of mentoring relationships across multiple levels of the public education system...(p. 30)

Pope (1995) wrote that multicultural organizational development involves a systematic, planned change effort. Colleges and universities have generally failed to be successful in responding to structural or proportional diversity (Hurtado et al., 1999), and there have been only sporadic efforts at systematic change within higher education. The claim by two year colleges to offer a uniquely valuable contribution to the development of human knowledge rests on the claim that the knowledge they generate "has been sustained through rigorous critical examination, according to the rules, procedures and methods of a community governed by critical and self corrective methods" (Anderson, 1993, p. 63). Yet, to the extent that certain socio-cultural groups have been systematically

excluded from the academy over the course of history, the legitimacy or validity of that community's practices requires some demonstration.

Diversity and multicultural initiatives have become increasingly important in higher education institutions due to the changing demographics of the student body and the recognition of the need for inclusive education and scholarship. Guy (1999) indicates that "because learning is essential to cultural reproduction, learning is also a central way of combating cultural domination and oppression. Focusing on culture as both object and subject of individual and group learning serves as a way of breaking the destructive cycle of racial, gender, and ethnic oppression" (p. 12). This understanding of culture-based adult education has implications for adult educators who work with persons from traditionally marginalized social groups. As institutions engage in initiatives to promote multiculturalism and diversity, it becomes crucial to assess and evaluate the quality and success of the initiatives. Three studies conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE) in conjunction with the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) (2000) which focused on diversity in college classrooms indicated that,

the official mission statements and supporting documents of the 28 top liberal arts colleges in the country (as ranked by U.S. News and World Report) all list a range of essential aspirations that include but go well beyond intellectual mastery. Six values were cited by more than half of the colleges analyzed: the acquisition of intellectual mastery and rigor; learning to value service to community; developing self-knowledge and growing personally; learning perspectives from diversity; developing and nurturing a liberated, creative mind; and gaining an increased capacity for tolerance, respect, and concern for others. (p.5)

The term “multicultural” has generated considerable debate in educational circles. The purpose of multicultural curricula is “to accommodate and respect the varied cultural origins of our diverse population” (Eaton, 1997). Takaki, author of *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* and professor of ethnic studies for 20 years defines the objectives of the multicultural class as the place where students can understand their larger community and figure out what it means to be an American. It is a place where we study the question: How do our paths intersect?” (Reid, 1995).

Multicultural Program Organizational Development (MPOD) has emerged as a separate area of study from traditional organizational development. MPODs are units on campuses that have as their primary responsibility to engage differing constituencies of the campus community in services and educational interventions that, broadly defined, work to overcome systems of social oppression (Jackson & Hardiman, 1994). Clark (2003) suggested three ways to assess MPODs. She suggested examining: (a) the aesthetic environment (e.g. the physical surroundings that give messages of inclusion or exclusion; Banning, 1973); (b) the structural environment (e.g. positions held, decision making styles, benefits, and development opportunities); and (c) the interpersonal environment (e.g. the presence of caring, listening, respect, and teamwork).

Beyond MPODs, there have been several approaches to assessing diversity and multicultural initiatives depending on institutional goals and needs. A number of assessment studies have focused on particular aspects of multicultural teaching and learning (Lisi, 1997), impact on students’ performance (De Vita, 2002; Watson, et al., 1993), and student preparation (Hedwith et al., 1998). Multicultural assessment has also

emerged as an important field in professional studies where multicultural competencies are crucial for serving the needs of diverse clientele (Suzuki, 2000).

Suggestions for Future Research

Two popular metaphors advanced by western theorists for the process of education as growth and education as a journey (Kleibard, 1975; Serpell, 1993a) are,

According to the metaphor of education as growth, the student is a plant, the teacher is a gardener, and the curriculum is a greenhouse. The goals of education are maturity, fruition, and health. Powerful though it is, this metaphor fails to afford adequate recognition to the agency of the student. According to the metaphor of education as a journey, the student is a traveler, the teacher is a guide or companion, and the curriculum is a map or route. Thus, the goals of education are arrival at a destination, enjoyment of the journey, and adaptation to the new world into which the journey leads. (Serpell, 2007, p. 25)

As a result of the findings in this study, we can begin to address the experiences and the journey that these West African students encounter by enlarging our American global perspective. Perhaps we can accomplish that goal by encouraging students to read online newspapers from other countries. We can also urge our students to participate in an amigo program, which matches international and American students (Wilson, 1993). We can learn from these West African students and facilitate the process of students and teachers' celebration of difference and unity in the United States. We can broaden our definition of "American" to include citizens of North, Central, and South America and work toward becoming citizens of the world.

Without a doubt, inclusion does not guarantee equity. Rather, educational norms, processes, and goals must be reevaluated for their potential to assist learners whose individual and group identities are most at risk in terms of the dominant culture's definition of success (Guy, 1999). However, American colleges must begin to attach special importance among its methods of instruction to project and socialization assignments to afford students an opportunity to test formal theories against reality; to prepare students for the practical challenges they will face at work after graduation when interacting with others with diverse ethnic backgrounds; and to invite students to compare and, if possible, integrate academic theories and perspectives with indigenous interpretations of experience.

Moll (2004) points out that African culture is both variegated and dynamic and is best understood within the context of a more general theory of culture; and it is broader in the sense that for the curriculum of a university to be responsive to the demands of its African students attention should be paid not only to cultural parameters, but also to physical-geographical, socioeconomic and political dimensions. Within the narrower conception is the argument for the inclusion of indigenous African cultural perspectives, concepts and practices among the guiding criteria for curriculum development. Darder (1991) argues that biculturalism should frame educational environments. She defines biculturalism as "a process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live" (p. 48).

The rapidly changing demographics of the United States mean that college students in this country are more culturally and ethnically diverse than ever before. Thus,

the implications of this study make it vitally important that further research be done on authoritarianism, competitiveness, language, communication and social networks towards determining the prevalence of these phenomena amongst African college students from different cultural groups. Cross cultural studies in the United States from an African context are seriously lacking. Students are embarking on a journey of higher education with a view of adaptation to a future world of which their teachers have only partial knowledge and understanding. University curricula should, therefore, afford opportunities for students to test existing theories against reality and to prepare for practical challenges in the college environment.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informational Letter

Date: _____

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Adult Education at The University of Georgia. I invite you to participate in a research study entitled “HOW CULTURE INFLUENCES THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL WEST AFRICAN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A TWO YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE PROGRAM”. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of culture and its influence on the experiences of international African students enrolled in degree programs in an urban, two year college. Three research questions guided this study: What cultural factors impact African international students’ educational experience? What strategies do African international students employ to negotiate their educational experiences? In what ways do these strategies help or hinder African international students’ educational experience?

Your participation will involve a detailed interview where you will be asked a series of questions about your experiences in the two year college setting and should only take about one hour. 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. The interview is strictly confidential. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. Your identity will not be associated with your responses in any published format.

The findings from this project may provide information on how colleges and universities can better service their international students and provide programs and services that are more conducive for their college experiences. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me Loretta Crosson at (678) 549-4399 or send an e-mail to lscross@bellsouth.net. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to The Chairperson, University of Georgia Institutional Review Board, 612 Boyd GSRC, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; telephone (706) 542-3199; email address irb@uga.edu.

By signing the consent form, you are agreeing to participate in the above described research project.

Thank you for your consideration! Please keep this letter for your records.

Sincerely,

Loretta S. Crosson

Appendix B: Interview Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled “HOW CULTURE INFLUENCES THE EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL WEST AFRICAN STUDENTS ENROLLED IN A TWO YEAR COLLEGE DEGREE PROGRAM” conducted by Loretta S. Crosson from the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Guy Talmadge, Program of Adult Education, University of Georgia (542-4018). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand the purpose of this study is to explore or understand how social and culture influences the experiences of international African students in the two year college setting. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- 1) I will participate in an interview in an interview lasting about one and a half hours;
- 2) The researcher will ask me questions about my experiences in the two year college setting and how my culture may have influenced the outcome of these experiences;
- 3) All my responses will be audio-taped. The interview data will be kept safe by the researcher and all of my personal information will be replaced by pseudonym or by using anonymous.
- 4) I may be asked to participate in a short follow-up interview or a focus group discussion.
- 5) I will be asked to provide some classroom documents if applicable.
- 6) My information will be kept if I need to be contacted for a follow-up

I will receive a small gift of appreciation for participation at the end of the study. No risk is expected during the research. No information about the participants, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others without my written permission. The audiotape will be kept in a safe place where only the researcher can access it and it will be erased when the research is finished.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. The researcher can be reached by phone (678) n549-4399 or via email (lscross@ bellsouth.net).

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Loretta S. Crosson

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Telephone: 678-549-4399 Email: lscross@bellsouth.net

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

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

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson,
Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411;
Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

Appendix C: Interview Guide

RQ1

1. Are you receiving any instruction in English now? If yes, where and when?
2. Do you feel your level of English proficiency is adequate to meet your academic and social needs at DTC?
3. Do you feel unequal to other students because English is a second language for you? How so?
4. What cultural factors, if any do you think provide the greatest challenge for your learning?
5. How do you think your language, customs, values, or norms have contributed to or detracted from your educational experiences?
6. What social or cultural organizations do you belong to on campus?

RQ2

1. What kinds of issues or difficulties have you encountered on campus?
2. Do you believe your gender has contributed in any way to your experiences in the classroom or on campus?
3. What other academic or social problems have you had on campus?
4. Have you ever felt isolated on this campus? When? Why?
5. Do you have more interaction with other students in larger or smaller classes?
6. Tell me about a good educational experience since you have enrolled in the two year college. Tell me about a bad experience.

RQ 3

1. What do you feel has been the biggest obstacle to your learning experience?
2. Did you communicate often with the instructors and your classmates? How so? How often?
3. What strategies have you adopted/employed to facilitate your learning?
4. How have your actions and/or behaviors inhibited the learning process for you?
5. What do you feel the college, instructors and even other students could do to assist in you having a more successful college and learning experience?

Appendix D: Demographics Sheet

1. What is your name?

2. What is your home country?

3. How old are you?

4. Male or Female?

5. What is your ethnicity?

Languages(s)? 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____

6. What was the highest level of education obtained by you in your home country?

7. How long have you lived in the United States?

8. What county in Georgia do you live in?

9. How long have you attended this college?

10. What is your major?

11. Projected Graduation Date?
