A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL NEEDS BEING ATTENDED TO BY PROFESSIONALS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

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HERLEVI, C.M. A qualitative study of international students' perceptions of academic and social needs being attended to by professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Master of Science in Education, College Student Development and Administration, May 2000, 106 pp. (M.Vahala)

This case study was designed using interviews and a positioned subjects approach to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L). The study explored the following research questions: (1) What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs? (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? and (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students? Utilizing a purposeful sampling procedure, ten male international students and six female international students who were enrolled in an advanced speaking English as a Second Language (ESL) course were interviewed in the Spring of 1999. The data were analyzed by identifying themes, which emerged from the transcribed interviews and supplemental sources of evidence based on the research questions of the study and specific coding categories. The coding categories used in this study were: perspectives held by participants, participants’ way of thinking about people and objects, and participants’ relationships and social structures.
This case study suggested that international students at the UW-L perceived their academic and social experiences and needs to be important in their adjustment to the university. Findings supported that initial adjustment and expectations/goals were related to cultural and developmental factors and language and academic concerns. Participants' academic experiences were positive with professionals and in classroom experiences. Social support from other international students, from professionals and students who provided information about social activities on campus, and from the residence hall environment were positive. Recommendations were made for additional, narrowed and longitudinal comparison studies centered on these issues. Continual assessment of the academic and social needs of international students, and further research on the adaptation and development of international students, with particular emphasis on psychosocial and stage development is also recommended.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The international student population has been growing. These students have
unique academic and social needs that universities struggle to meet. The purpose of this
study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic
and social experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse (UW-L). An analysis of
how professionals at the University attend to the academic and social needs of
international students was included.

This chapter includes a description of the problem, the statement of the problem,
the purpose and research questions of the study, the significance of the study, the
assumptions and limitations of the study, and a description of the terms used in the study.

Description of the Problem

International education has a rich and diverse history that has often surrounded
higher education. Individuals have been studying abroad for hundreds of years in an
effort to understand and adapt to new cultures. In early history, as well as today, students
and scholars traveled to “foreign” countries in order to bring different perspectives and
ideas back to their home country regarding other cultures and different ways to educate
others (Cowley & Williams, 1991).

The history of international students on U.S college and university campuses can
be traced since the time of the colonial colleges when these students were studying at
places like Yale and Harvard. Although the number of international students were
included in statistics before the twentieth century, these students did not begin to appear in significant numbers until the 1950s (Barber, 1985). This increase in international student numbers was due in large part to the federal government.

The federal government began to play an important role in educating America about internationalism in the first half of the twentieth century, as the U.S. became more involved in global events. Prior to this, public support was not widespread for international education, but when an understanding of other nations became essential to the U.S. defense, attitudes changed and Americans began to understand the need to know more about the international dimensions of their lives (Vestal, 1994). The Institute of International Education (IIE) was founded in 1919 and the first IIE bulletin indicated that the purpose of the Institute was to provide an avenue of international education for the benefit of the U.S. (Klasek, Garavalia, & Kellerman, 1992). Further, the Institute reflected:

The IIE should represent American education vis-à-vis the rest of the world, administering fellowships and visiting professorships, welcoming foreign scholars, arranging itineraries of foreign educational missions, holding conferences on problems of international education, and conducting activities of a similar nature (Klasek et al., 1992, p.198).

The IIE also led the way for other international educators to show support for international education through the funding of international related events (Garavalia, 1997). One of the most widely recognized events was the passage of the Fulbright Act of 1946, which provided for the exchange of scholars and students between the U.S. and foreign countries (Hanson & Meyerson, 1995). With the passing of this legislation, new views of how to educate individuals about the world they were encountering emerged.
The National Defense Education Act of 1958, which emphasized foreign languages and area studies, and Title XI of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1975, which encouraged U.S. universities to work collaboratively with less developed countries to solve problems such as hunger, were particularly significant to the expansion of international study (Garavalia, 1997). In the early 1990s one-third of all students worldwide who were studying abroad enrolled in higher education in the U.S. (Vestal, 1994). In 1997-1998, the largest one-year gain in a decade set a record with total enrollment of international students in higher education just over 480,000 (Desruisseaux, 1998). This increase was reflected at the local as well as the national level.

With the U.S. government’s commitment to internationalization and globalization (Ojano-Sheehan & Pearson, 1995) there has been a massive influx of international students in the U.S. over the past 50 years. These students have represented a wide cross section of society. They had diverse needs and encountered certain problems in their academic, financial, personal, and social adjustment to the U.S. (Pyle, 1986). To address these adjustment problems, offices of student affairs in American colleges and universities created support services to meet the needs of international students. These services have increased over the years (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1991). Understanding what these needs are and investigating how professionals attend to specific needs of international students was the focus of this study. Thus, this study sought to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L. An analysis of how professionals at the University attend to these academic and social needs was also conducted, with a focus on providing professionals with
information to utilize in the implementation of new support strategies for working with international students.

**Statement of the Problem**

The study developed because of my past and current experiences with advising and teaching international students, my passion for understanding and advocating for the unique needs of international students, my interest in creating more connections between international students and American students and professionals, and the interest by the UW-L English as a Second Language (ESL) Institute in better understanding what professionals can do to provide support for international students.

Since 1990 international student enrollment at the UW-L has increased 150%. According to the Office of International Education at the UW-L, in 1990 there were 87 international students at the University and in November of 1999 there were 178 international students at the University. An emphasis on international education noted in the University’s 1992 Strategic Plan resulted in an increased number of international students attending the UW-L. In keeping with the University’s Strategic Plan, UW-L earmarked funds to recruit international students and substantially increase the international student enrollment over the next five years. The UW-L's Office of International Education expects international student enrollment to reach 250 students by the year 2003. With the increasing number of international students, and society’s continued focus on internationalization and globalization, institutions of higher education need to culturally assess the unique adjustment and development needs of international students.
International students tend to experience a variety of adjustment and development concerns while attending colleges and universities. These students struggle to find ways to manage successfully as total strangers in a foreign land and often experience what is known as “culture shock.” Culture shock can be viewed as an “occupational disease” experienced by people who are introduced suddenly to a culture very different from their own (Church, 1982). According to Church (1982), symptoms of this “occupational disease” can be anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and a longing for a more predictable and gratifying environment. International students also experience a variety of other adjustment and developmental concerns such as: learning a new language, dealing with homesickness, understanding new laws, adjusting to academic work, and getting to know and understand a variety of new people. Recent studies suggest that academic (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992) and social (Hayes & Lin, 1994) concerns have been identified as two of the biggest problem areas for international students. When these needs are not met, a significant number of students are unable to adjust socially (Cheng & Leong, 1993). What these academic and social needs are and how professionals at the UW-L attend to the needs of international students was the focus of the study.

**Purpose of the Study**

Transitions for international students entering foreign colleges can be difficult, as international students are faced with increased responsibility and academic concerns. They need to adjust to a variety of cultural and social changes in a short amount of time (Luzzo, 1996). Many of these students are only at the university on short-term exchange
programs. In order to assist these students, support services in the form of English as a second language institutes and international education offices have been developed.

The UW-L ESL Institute offers international students individualized programs, experienced professors, and modern facilities. Three levels of instruction from beginning to advanced English are offered with courses in speaking, listening, reading, writing, and U.S. culture. International students also have the opportunity to be involved in classroom activities with American students, and are provided with the use of a language laboratory, private tutors, and individual academic advising. In conjunction with the ESL Institute, the UW-L Office of International Education has created a number of international student support services. The Foreign Student Advisor at the UW-L works most closely with international students. The Foreign Student Advisor provides assistance on immigration matters, coordinates all campus and community services available to international students, and promotes interaction between international students and the university as well as the local community. The Foreign Student Advisor also discusses with the students, academic, financial, health, personal, and social concerns or problems with the strictest confidentiality. In addition, the UW-L Office of International Education supports an International Student Organization, a community social interaction program entitled La Crosse International Friends Exchange, a Global Link program which provides an avenue through which international students can share knowledge of their country with people of the community, and several brochures, handbooks, and newsletters where international students can obtain valuable information about life in the U.S.
Although concerns of international students are often addressed by the UW-L ESL Institute and Office of International Education, they may not be by other faculty, staff, and student affairs administrators. Leong and Sedlacek (1986) found that international students were likely to approach faculty members and counselors as help sources. In addition, research by Cheng and Leong (1993) found that international students ranked academic needs first as an area of concern, suggesting international students could benefit from increased contact with faculty and academic advisors. Creating more awareness about international students' academic and social needs could positively impact their academic and social adjustment and development.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and to analyze how professionals at the University attend to these academic and social needs. A secondary purpose of the study was to provide professionals with additional information to utilize in the implementation of new support strategies for working with these students at the University.

The study explored the following research questions:

1. What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L?

2. What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs?

3. How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students?
4. What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students?

**Significance of the Study**

International education has posed many challenges for both the individual students and for the educational institutions involved (Surdam & Collins, 1984). Many of these challenges are reflected in the research on international student adaptation and academic and social adjustment (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). This study investigated the concerns of international students at the UW-L in order to determine what these students’ needs were and what professionals could do to meet those needs. Of particular concern was the successful achievement of the academic goals of international students. For international students, achieving academic goals is often mandatory and academic experiences tend to become stressful. Without the positive social experiences that can help foster academic achievement, “the resulting stress can have a strong, negative impact on the international student’s experiences in the U.S. educational environment and on their ability to transfer the knowledge and skills they learn in U.S. classrooms to their home countries” (Wan et al., 1992, p. 608). By exploring specific academic and social adjustment experiences of international students at the UW-L, this study will provide professionals with information to utilize in the implementation of additional support strategies for working with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of these students.
Assumptions and Limitations

This qualitative study was designed to explore what international students at the UW-L perceived as their academic and social needs and how professionals at the University met those needs. As is true with most case studies, this study is not generalizable to other international students, professionals, or universities.

The researcher assumed professionals were interested in additional support strategies that could be implemented when working with international students. In addition, the researcher assumed international students would be willing to talk about their academic and social experiences. The participants were willing to talk about these experiences, but the depth of conversation differed between participants. In part, this appeared to be due to English proficiency and personality.

Sixteen participants were interviewed in this study. They were international students from nine different countries who were enrolled in ESL courses. These participants reported their perceptions of academic and social needs as they had experienced them. The proficiency and understanding of the English language varied with each student interviewed and may have limited the consistency of perceptions between participants. In addition, because the participants were all part of the ESL Institute, their perceptions may not be consistent with that of other international students not enrolled in the ESL Institute. Although the participants were all part of the ESL Institute, no attempt was made to limit the participants to one specific group of international students with similar adjustment needs and experiences.
The time allotted for the study was adequate to investigate initial information about the participants’ academic and social experiences without inconveniencing the participants. However, it did limit the amount of time the researcher had to further investigate how the data could be used and shared with others in creating additional support strategies to attend to the academic and social needs and the adjustment and development of international students.

Explanation of Terms

**Academic Needs** - Concerns that involve study skills, writing skills, reading, speaking in class, using the library, adjusting to courses and professors, and learning about university and community services (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986).

**Academic Support** - Instructional and advisement systems to assist in handling academic course load (Wan et al., 1992).

**Adjustment** - Successful integration into campus life and the local community (Pyle, 1986).

**English as a Second Language** - Courses taught in English to assist international students with learning English through reading, writing, speaking, and U.S. culture.

**International Student** - The Institute of International Education defines an international student as a student from another country who is attending an American university or college (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

**Professionals** - Faculty, staff, and student personnel administrators who work with international students in the university environment.
Social Activities - Activities that involve interaction with others that include student government, publications, music, fine arts, sports, social services, religious organizations, and international student organizations (Office of International Education-UW-L, 1997). These activities can be both on campus and off campus.

Social Needs - Concerns about friendships, extended family, cultural differences, and interactions with individuals at school and in the community (Parr, Bradley, & Bingi, 1992).

Social Support - Friendship, social ties, and social integration plus the availability of emotional and tangible resources (Creamer, 1990).

Chapter Summary

As a result of more international students in institutions of higher education, understanding the academic and social needs and adjustment experiences of these students has become very important. The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and to analyze how professionals at the University attend to these academic and social needs.
CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

This is an exciting time in the world of international education. With the millennium upon us and a progressive society interested in global issues and understanding, there is no time like the present to delve into the many unique facets of this field. Of key importance, more now than ever, is the international student. In view of the fact that the number of these students is dramatically increasing both nationally and locally, it is imperative that professionals are aware of their role in making this experience valuable for these students. Professionals must research, learn, and understand international students and their unique needs and concerns.

This chapter examines the international student and the adjustment issues they face concerning academic and social needs and support systems, provides an overview of various developmental theories based on cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors that play a role in the adjustment experience, and analyzes what professionals in higher education settings can do to foster the adjustment and development experiences of international students.

The International Student and Adjustment Needs

International students have a variety of different expectations, needs, attitudes, and experiences. International students are often categorized by their reason for coming to the U.S. Spaulding and Flack (1976) reported that international students come to the U.S. for several reasons: to obtain an advanced education or training not available at
scholarship funds or other financial aid, to escape unsettled political or economic conditions, or to learn about the U.S. These students also differ in country of origin, age, sponsorship, field of study, personal goals in studying abroad, and job opportunities at home (Pyle, 1986). While having different motives for studying in the U.S., international students often experience many adjustment and developmental needs similar to those of American students.

Common issues experienced by international students and students from the U.S. include homesickness, the need to develop new peer relationships, and the need to become independent (Cheng & Leong, 1993). Similarities have also been discovered between Asian international students and American students in academic autonomy, which may reflect either “their motivation to work hard and persevere, even in an alien culture, or a reluctance to seek help when language is a barrier” (Ojano-Sheehan & Pearson, 1995, p. 526). The specific area in which international students have been found to differ from American students is the magnitude of their needs, the importance of their needs, and their preferences for seeking help (Cheng & Leong, 1993). Thus, international students are faced with a challenge in adjusting and developing to their new environment as they encounter new situations, people, or beliefs to which they are not familiar.

A new environment poses challenges for any student’s adjustment to college. For international students this experience seems to be more difficult because of the additional stress of encountering an entirely new culture (Altbach, Kelly, & Kulat, 1985). Culture shock sets in and this is most commonly viewed as a normal adaptation
process to cultural stress involving symptoms of anxiety, helplessness, irritability, and a longing for a more predictable environment (Oberg, 1960). Within the concept of culture shock lies anxiousness and concern about extended family, cultural differences, finances, school, racial discrimination, and social interaction (Ojano-Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). In addition to learning a new language in a relatively short time in order to communicate in the new environment, international students are faced with a number of unique adjustment needs.

Heikkinheimo and Shute (1986) conducted a study of the adaptation of international students to a new environment and asked the question: Why should adjustment of international students be of concern? A number of reasons emerged from the study. International students were more likely to have positive academic and nonacademic experiences if they enjoyed satisfying contact with the host community. In addition, host students often benefited from the presence of international students by the enrichment of learning and social interaction. If these factors were not present, international students suffered from alienation (Schram & Lauver, 1988), and unhealthy, nonenriching interaction between the international student and the U.S. academic community was experienced (Fasheh, 1984).

Alienation was defined by Burbach (1972) to include three elements: feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social estrangement. Powerlessness described the feeling that it is impossible to achieve outcomes; meaninglessness was the inability to make sense of what is happening; and social estrangement described loneliness. Fasheh (1984) described these feelings as surfacing when there was lack of interaction by
international students and the academic community. He commented that the resulting situation leads most international students to follow one of two paths: “either to assimilate completely the American cultural values and accept them unquestioningly or to become rigid, closed, and hostile in their outlook, attitudes, and behavior” (p. 317).

This behavior results in adjustment problems. Fasheh (1984) described adjustment as learning how to deal with differences and new perspectives, how to confront them, reflect on them, and develop new awareness and synthesis of them (p. 317).

Howard Smith emphasized four adjustment stages that most students pass through while studying abroad: the spectator stage, the adaptive stage, the coming-to-terms stage, and the predeparture stage (Pyle, 1986). In the spectator stage, international students studying in the U.S. may experience nervousness and fatigue, which usually ends when students participate in activities that are defined by American culture. The adaptive stage relates to culture shock and “anxiety may manifest itself in such behavior as excessive preoccupation with the drinking water, the food, minor pains, excessive fears of being cheated or robbed, fits of anger toward or avoidance of local people, and a longing to be with fellow nationals” (Church, 1982, p. 540). The coming to terms with the new environment marks the third stage, where the students reassess their own beliefs. In the predeparture stage students have put American culture into a new perspective and begin to think about going back to their home country.

In Church’s (1982) study of international student adjustment in the U.S., adjustment was described as a transitional experience reflecting “a movement from a state of low self and cultural awareness to a state of high self and cultural awareness”
Oberg (1960) described four similar stages: a “honeymoon” stage characterized by fascination; a second stage characterized by hostility; a recovery stage influenced by increased language knowledge; and a fourth adjustment stage where new customs were accepted and enjoyed.

Stage models of international student adjustment make it difficult to predict the same adjustment problems and concerns for all students. Because of the diversity of the population, investigators have attempted to describe typical sets of characteristics or patterns of adjustment in international students studied.

Typologies were created by Church (1982) to represent two continuums. At one end of the continuum was the “sojourner who was more traditional, conservative, and conforming in social behavior, interaction, and outlook, and who identified strongly with the home culture—for example ‘detached observers,’ ‘constrictors,’ and ‘old style’ types” (p. 543). At the other end of the continuum was the “sojourner who was characterized by reduced identification with the home culture, a less conservative social outlook, and more involved social interaction with host nationals—for example, ‘enthusiastic participants,’ ‘idealists,’ and ‘new style’ types” (p. 541). In the middle was the “adjustor,” who was open to the new culture.

Researchers have found support for what has been described as the U curve of adjustment for international students (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). The U curve described the initial adjustment of international students as easy and successful, which then follows a “crisis” in which one feels less well adjusted, somewhat lonely and unhappy, and then
one finally begins to feel better adjusted again, becoming integrated into a foreign community (Altbach et al., 1985).

Church (1982) concluded that international students have a variety of unique adjustment categories that they may fall into because of diversity in culture, but this does not mean all students begin with a particular phase or stage. International students experience the aggravations of the cultural experience. Bochner and Furnham (1986) sees these students as needing to attain adjustment as foreigners with special cultural learning problems; as students adjusting to the stress common to all beginning students; as a maturing and developing person concerned about purposes, meaning, and goals; and as a national representative for his or her ethnic background and national status.

Church (1982) also found that the problems reported by international students in a variety of cultures have remained essentially the same over the last 30 years. The difference between students was the degree they experienced adjustment problems. Consistently, language difficulties, financial problems, adjusting to a new educational system, homesickness, and adjusting to social customs and norms have been the most difficult problems (Altbach et al., 1985).

In a study at North Carolina State University (Stafford, Marion, & Salter, 1980) all international students who had preregistered for the spring semester were asked to complete a questionnaire about their adjustment in a variety of areas. The results showed homesickness as the most pressing area, and housing, social relationships, English language, and finances as secondary difficulty areas. Further, this study reported that undergraduate students reported greater levels of difficulty than graduate students with
English language, academic coursework, finances, food, unfriendliness of the community, and maintaining cultural customs.

Surdam and Collins (1984) investigated the adaptation of international students by looking at the specific variables mentioned previously. All 143 participants were interviewed and completed a questionnaire that sought data in the areas of finances, career plans, academic experiences, time spent with fellow citizens and Americans, and use of student personnel services. Although the results of the study supported the U curve hypothesis, the concerns of international students with host and peer interaction, English language facility, parental education, religious participation, student discrimination, and participation in student services activities were emphasized (Surdam & Collins, 1984).

Klineberg and Hull (1979) suggested that although the actual degree of difficulty and problems experienced for international students was concentrated and greater than expected in a few areas, the nature or kinds of difficulties were fairly easily anticipated and should be addressed in the adaptation and adjustment of international students. The principal areas students have identified as requiring adaptation and adjustment were language skills, academic issues (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986), and social interaction (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

Academic achievement has been cited as one of the main goals for international students (Wan et al., 1992). Heavy academic pressure is commonly experienced by many international students because of family expectations and pressures to perform well (Harvey & Stewart, 1991). In Leong and Sedlacek's (1986) study of the academic and
career needs of international students and U.S. college students, international students expressed greater overall academic and vocational needs. Academic needs included the need to develop more effective study skills, receive help in selecting scheduling courses, improve writing skills, and become more comfortable speaking up in class (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). These students also expressed concern about needing more help from academic advisors and establishing an academic agenda. Included in these needs was the issue of language difficulties. International students reported having serious problems in understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions, and writing essays because of interpretation problems and vocabulary difficulties (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). A number of these students felt that if they could speak more with faculty, staff, and students at the university, their academic difficulties would lessen. In addition, these problems improved when international students experienced a supportive campus environment (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

In a growing number of studies on bicultural adjustments, social needs have been identified as a major concern in both academic and social adjustment (Hayes & Lin, 1994). The extent of social encounters with individuals in the host country may be the most important, yet complex issue, related to international student adjustment (Church, 1982). Empirical studies have tested the hypothesis that increased interaction with individuals from the U.S. leads to positive adjustment for international students (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Often an international student's main objective has been the successful achievement of academic goals, and this achievement was enhanced if the emotional and social atmosphere was pleasant (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).
Status differences, fear of rejection, anxiety, academic, and personal concerns have been shown to affect international student's social adjustment (Schram & Lauver, 1988). Anxieties associated with immersing oneself in the social environment of the host culture may cause international students to form enclaves of fellow nationals that largely determine the living arrangements, friendship patterns, and organizational affiliations of the students involved (Church, 1982). Research has shown the benefit of establishing relationships with host nationals. Though this contact is often limited (Hayes & Lin, 1994), international students were found to desire more contacts with students from the host country.

Hayes and Lin (1994) and Parr et al. (1992) emphasized specific areas in which international students expressed other areas of social concern. These areas included: extended family; cultural and individual differences, such as competitiveness, individualism, and assertiveness; campus activities; substantial friendships; and finances. The areas of little concern were housing, food, a place to worship, and transportation. Interestingly, in both of these studies, international students were found to be most positive about their social experiences in their first year in the U.S. rather than in additional years.

**Developmental Theory and International Students**

The college experience is a complex, exciting, and stressful experience for many students. International students are faced with a number of academic and social adjustment struggles that can adversely affect their development. Although unique in their adjustment to a new environment, international students can be similar to American
students in development. These similarities involve a range of developmental tasks that all students experience. Developmental tasks comprise the way a student grows, increasing his or her developmental capacities as a result of experiences in an institution of higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Of importance is that these developmental tasks often occur early in the college experience, thus supporting research that adjustment of international students can be initially fostered. For purposes of this study, specific, significant human and student development theorists who have based their research on cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors were identified.

Cognitive Theories

Cognitive development theories described the increasing degree of complexity with which individuals make meaning of their experiences with moral questions (Gilligan, 1993; Kohlberg, 1969) and questions of knowing and valuing (Kitchener & King, 1981; Perry, 1968). These theories examined the process of intellectual development as it relates to individual students. Rooted in the work of Jean Piaget (1972), cognitive development and the ability to adapt to the environment depend on the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation and accommodation combined define the process of incorporating and modifying existing schemes for new ideas and information (Gardiner, Mutter, & Kosmitzki, 1998). Students file information into their schema either positively or negatively depending on how the individual reacts and processes the information (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). When expectations are not confirmed by experiences, cognitive dissonance often occurs. For example, Gardiner et al. (1998) explain:
Anyone who has traveled abroad and attempted to make sense of new surroundings or tried to explain new objects or words to a foreign visitor has engaged in assimilation and accommodation—sometimes with success, sometimes with failure, and sometimes with humor (p. 82).

Piaget (1972) stressed the importance of finding a balance in order to reconcile the roles of maturation, experience, and social interaction. He specifically noted that social interaction with peers, parents, and other adults were especially influential in cognitive development. This is critical for international students, whose magnitude of needs span these cognitive and social boundaries (Church, 1982).

In the tradition of Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg (1969) referred to moral reasoning as the cognitive process by which individuals make decisions about culturally defined values and moral issues. Kohlberg (1969) proposed six stages of moral reasoning based on justice and guided by: reward, punishment, and obedience; own and other’s immediate needs and interests; expectations from people close to oneself; obligation to fulfill duties and follow consensual laws and rules; values and morals relative to one’s group and awareness of diversity; and self-chosen ethical principles that are considered universally valid, or social laws that are based on universal principles. Although the rate of development and the stage to which individual student's progress vary, the universality of Kohlberg’s stage models have been demonstrated in women and various cultures (Evans et al., 1998). The question that remains has been whether justice is the primary consideration in non-Western cultures.

Carol Gilligan’s (1993) research was guided by the concept of women’s moral thoughts being defined by caring for and maintaining the welfare of others. In a study by Stimpson, Jensen, and Neff (1992), a questionnaire was used to measure feminine and
masculine attributes that were considered culturally appropriate by gender in the U.S.

The questionnaire was administered by professors during class to female and male college students in Korea, Thailand, China, and the U.S. In all four countries, women shared a preference for an ethic of care versus justice. The question remains regarding the reason more women than men from various cultures previously adhere to the ethic of care (Evans et al., 1998). Gilligan (1993) concluded that women develop a different kind of cognitive morality due to their different socialization. This socialization may explain development in different cultures and poses a challenge for professionals when working with international students who are diverse in cultural and social experiences and gender.

Similar to Kohlberg, William Perry (1968) described schemes as shaping the way people view their experiences. These schemes included four key words representing differences in the process of making meaning. Perry (1968) described these as duality, multiplicity, relativism, and commitment. Dualism represented viewing the world as right or wrong according to an expert. Multiplicity honored diverse views and thinking as beginning to become more independent. Relativism recognized the diversity of opinions. Commitment involved decisions that were associated with social experiences and relationships.

Many international students come to U.S. universities viewing the world from their country’s perspective. They have established a right and wrong belief system based on some authority in their life (Perry, 1968). Although many of these students are open to multiple perspectives, they are not likely to initially be committed to multiple perspectives until longer into their stay in the U.S. Understanding international students’
perspectives about their country and the new environment is an important consideration to be taken when working with these students.

Since cognitive theories focus on how people think about their life, rather than on the content of those experiences and issues, theorists and researchers have hypothesized that cultural conditions can have less influence on cognitive development than on psychosocial development (Creamer, 1990).

Psychosocial Theories

Observations of college students confirm that students change as a direct result of the higher education experience (Astin, 1977). Chickering and Reisser (1993) and other psychosocial theorists sought to support and gain official recognition of that change when they proposed that human development be used as the unifying, overarching educational purpose of colleges and universities. Chickering and Reisser suggested that universities should try to encourage and enable intentional developmental change in students throughout the life cycle, which can be reflected in holistic, personal, and academic development. A major developmental report in the late 1960s, the Hazen Foundation Report, pointed out that colleges promote personal development beyond what is learned in the classroom:

Students interaction with teachers; encounters with college leaders’; involvement in friendship groups; acquisition of values from the student culture; and exposure to the climates of flexibility or rigidity that permeate the college environments as well as the college’s operative educational goals all have an immense impact on the evolution of student’s self and world views, on their confidence and altruism, and on their achievement of personal identity and mature intimacy (Creamer, 1990, p.100).
Rodgers (1980) described psychosocial development theory as being concerned with social interactions and assumed that specific developmental tasks or issues occupy individuals at different stages of life and that development is affected by biological changes, psychological changes, and societal norms for a given age range.

In many ways an individual’s culture defines what is appropriate behavior and when and under what conditions it is appropriate to exhibit certain behaviors. For instance, cultural impingements, sometimes gender related, are present in all of us, even though they are often unrecognized in daily life activities (Creamer, 1990). “Because psychosocial development incorporates social and cultural impingements within its process, international students face conflicts and crises as they strive to maneuver through the maze that is higher education and try to learn to function in an alien culture as well” (Creamer, 1990, p. 110).

According to many psychosocial theorists, the major task facing students is formation of identity. Erik Erikson was one of the first psychologists to discuss this concept. From Erikson’s (1968) perspective, psychosocial development was viewed as a process where ego growth involved a progressive differentiation of interrelated characteristics, each of which has a time of special ascendancy crucial to further development. Identity is part of this development, occurs at different stages for students, and is ever changing. Erikson (1968) recognized identity as the internal relationship we have with ourselves as well as the external relationship we have with others. He believed identity described a persistent sameness within oneself and a sharing of some kind of essential character with others.
International students must maneuver their way positively in the new environment to form their identity. Chickering and Reisser (1993) focused on maneuvering of identity by describing the following “vectors” that students move through: developing competence, managing emotions, developing autonomy, establishing identity, freeing interpersonal relationships, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Chickering and Reisser (1993) further identified seven key influences on student’s development: institutional objectives, institutional size, student/faculty relations, curriculum, teaching, friendships and student communities, and student development programs and services.

All influences must work together to assist in movement along the vectors and identity formation. When students are encouraged to form friendships and to participate in communities that become meaningful subcultures, and when diversity of backgrounds and attitudes, as well as significant interchanges and shared interests exist, development along all seven vectors is fostered (Reisser, 1995). When these tasks are accomplished, individuals have a firmer sense of self, become capable of identifying a purpose in life, and can develop a personal and consistent set of values (Ojano-Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). Although this process has been argued as similar for both American and international students, it is complicated by the diversity in academic, cultural, and social backgrounds of international students, as well as the challenge of a new environment.

Environmental Theories

In both cognitive and psychosocial theories, environmental factors play a role in the developmental concerns of international students. The most important principle in this theoretical realm is a system of interacting parts (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991):
The complex interaction of cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental processes
B=f(PxE), states that behavior is a function of the interaction of person and environment
(Evans et al., 1998). If development occurs within the person and in interaction with the
environment as Lewin suggested, international students personal development must be
viewed from unique multicultural perspectives (Creamer, 1990).

These environmental factors were an integral part of the international students'
initial experiences at universities in the U.S. In addition, Kurt Lewin’s famous equation
B=f(PxE), states that behavior is a function of the interaction of person and environment
(Evans et al., 1998). If development occurs within the person and in interaction with the
environment as Lewin suggested, international students personal development must be
viewed from unique multicultural perspectives (Creamer, 1990).

The complex interaction of cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental processes
has been recognized by a number of researchers. Mines (1985) suggested a kind of
"push-pull" relationship between these processes. For example, in the development of
interdependence, an aspect of Chickering’s vectors, an increase in cognitive complexity
is implied by being able to process interrelationship issues and benefits necessary to
relate interdependently without becoming dependent or counterdependent. Although all
human beings have much in common when it comes to cognitive and psychosocial
development, a number of additional factors must be recognized if accurate and valid
assessment is to occur for international students in a new environment. With the vague
attention being paid to the developmental processes of international students, these
factors need to be addressed in meeting the diverse experiences and developmental needs
of international students. To understand why international students behave as they do
and to facilitate their development, such factors as their characteristics, background, and environmental surroundings must be examined.

**Professionals’ Roles and Adjustment/Development of International Students**

Although most international students manage to cope successfully in the U.S., it has been estimated that 15-25% of them have significant adjustment and development problems (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Professionals have given the needs of international students increased attention over the years (Parr et al., 1992). Faculty, staff, and student personnel professionals have facilitated learning and development academically and socially (Creamer, 1990). When this occurs there is a created awareness of cultural differences that have distinct implications for student adaptation in educational, social, and cultural events (Eisen, 1986). This theme of helping people to "build bridges" across cultures and facilitating adjustment and development is crucial (Verthelyi, 1996).

Some studies have found that international students expressed overall satisfaction regarding the way universities have met their academic needs (Luzzo, 1996). In many other studies, international students have expressed concern about what professionals can do to assist them with academic coursework (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Stafford et al., 1980; & Wan et al., 1992).

Leong and Sedlacek’s (1986) study of academic and career needs of international students identified several methods for meeting the needs of these students. In terms of academic needs, the educational counseling and advising of international students should focus on the development of basic study skills and even more so on the development of the individual student’s academic plan. Often international students have a greater need
Harvey and Stewart (1991) stated that the “two most fundamental objectives in advising international students was to help them adjust to the demands of their respective academic programs and achieve academic success” (p. 173). An academic advisor can serve as a resource in helping international students set and meet goals. Given the seriousness with which these students view academic achievement, the advisor, whether faculty, staff, or student personnel professional, may be a predominant influence in the lives of these students. Professionals in these roles can take into consideration the identified academic and social adjustment and development problems and contribute substantially to the creation of a positive environment for students (Harvey & Stewart, 1991).

In a study of academic stress of international students attending U.S. universities, results revealed that international students needed more professional intervention in English language skills and social support networks (Wan et al., 1992). Often language training is done in the student’s home country and then continued in the U.S. The English training received in the U.S. is often designed to help them pass the standardized Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Although this training assisted the student in gaining more language skills, it often failed to adequately meet the academic demands of a specific program or goal of the student. Professionals helped international student’s academic adjustment by going beyond basic language training to emphasize functional language skills—such as note taking, conversing with faculty, and
participating in class discussion (Wan et al., 1992). In addition to language skills, those students who had stronger social support networks in their new academic environment tended to rate academic situations as less stressful. This supported findings that “the effectiveness of instructional support and advisement systems can ease international students’ academic adjustment” (Wan et al., 1992, p. 620).

International students, both undergraduate and graduate, are often overwhelmed by their new educational environment, and their stress levels may rise. Wan et al. (1992) said this could be compounded by isolation from the campus community as they may overlook the support available to them. Thus, professionals in higher educational institutions must also be persistent in reaching out to these students socially.

Support by professionals in the campus community can come in a variety of different social networks. In a comparison study of international and U.S. students’ preferences for help sources, international students showed greater preferences for formal sources of help until they developed more personal, informal networks with student friends (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). Preferred formal sources were faculty members and counselors. This suggested two issues for professionals working with international students: First, efforts should be made to foster informal networks, such as organizing social and cultural events that would help international students develop friendships with other students (Leong & Sedlacek, 1986). These networks were important because international students have felt isolated and the quality of interaction and relationships with students and professionals has been important in their adjustment. Second, because faculty members and counselors will be approached, they need to be aware of adjustment
International students have been an interesting and challenging population with which to work and professionals can have a positive impact on their adjustment and development during their period of study in the U.S. by understanding the unique adjustment experiences of international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994).

Chapter Summary

In summary, international students are a unique population of students on today’s college and university campuses in the U.S. Research on international students suggests that these students have a variety of adjustment problems, concerns, and needs that must
be addressed by the campus community, especially in regards to academic achievement and social interaction. It is important to address these specific areas because they are often found to inhibit adjustment and development and cause international students to feel alienated in their new environment. The development of international students takes into consideration unique cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors that are directly related to and interconnected with the academic and social adjustment experiences of the international student. In addition, in the development of international students, the individuality and diversity of each student, with regard to expectations and goals of studying abroad, English language proficiency, and other factors, must be taken into consideration by professionals who work or have contact with these students. When professionals assess and become aware of the unique adjustment and development needs of international students, they can foster positive adaptation to American culture.

The main purpose of this literature review was to focus on research in the areas of international students' academic and social adjustment needs, development, and professional awareness, in order to provide an initial basis for looking closer at what the UW-L can do to assist international students. This proved important in assessing the perceptions of international students' academic and social experiences at the UW-L and analyzing how professionals at the University attend to those academic and social needs.
CHAPTER III

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L. An analysis of how professionals at the University attend to the academic and social needs of international students was included. This chapter describes the research design and methods used in this study. It includes a description of the researcher's perspective and approach, a description of the sample and how the sample was selected and accessed, and descriptions of the data collection procedures and data analysis methods used.

Research Design

This study was designed as a case study utilizing interviews to investigate participants' perspectives. A positioned subjects approach was used. Through methods of observation, focused and relatively open-ended interviews, and analysis of historical and current research, data were collected that focused on the adjustment and development experiences of international students, on primary concerns about academic and social needs and support, and on additional support strategies that professionals could implement when working with international students. Case studies are empirical inquiries that investigate current situations in context. This method of inquiry, as Yin (1994) states, "...copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result, relies on multiple
sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulation fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 13). A single case study approach allowed the researcher to study a specific group of participants at one site. The positioned subject approach was used in order to focus on what the perceptions of academic and social needs and experiences of international students were, viewed from each participant’s perspective. Conrad, Haworth, and Millar (1993) referred to this approach as “one that assumes that people, as positioned subjects (where subjects refers to people with particular needs, perceptions, and capabilities for action, and position refers to the environment in which they are located), actively interpret and make sense of their everyday worlds” (p. 29). The positioned subjects approach provided data from the participant’s perspective, as well as from the researcher’s perspective, by making meaning out of these perceptions based on both the participants’ and researchers’ experiences. This approach created a less intimidating environment for the participants because the researcher participated in the interview conversations and a comfortable relationship was established between the participants and the researcher. In addition, this approach provided the researcher with the opportunity to encourage the participants to expand on the interview questions.

Qualitative methods provided the researcher with the opportunity to understand and interpret international students’ behaviors, needs, and experiences that would not have been easily handled by statistical procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) or questionnaires and surveys (Kuh & Andreas, 1991). The researcher learned how the
participants viewed their academic and social needs and experiences at the UW-L and how they felt about professionals at the University in attending to those academic and social needs. Kuh and Andreas (1991) suggested that monitoring the experiences of international students through the use of interviews could help professionals determine how they might smooth the transition for newcomers and embrace them as full members of the institution. Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) reported that qualitative methods proved useful in their study of the adaptation of foreign students at Canadian universities because “qualitative research methods allowed mutual involvement in the research process and the resulting report could be written in the language of the research participants” (p. 400).

Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure validity and reliability, interviews were focused and relatively open-ended which allowed the participants to talk freely. Connections were created between the researcher and the participants to ensure rapport and comfort, before, during, and after the interviews. In addition, the researcher created a conceptual map (see Appendix A) of what the study was intended to investigate in order to have a basic framework to follow in the investigation.

Although considered a beginning qualitative researcher, prior instruction in qualitative research methods and experience in the “field,” experience teaching and advising international students, and a passion for advocating for the needs of international students provided the researcher with the skill, competence, and rigor needed for this study. Kirk and Miller (1986) supported Junker (1960) in replying:
Caple (1991) suggested, “there is no reason to believe that with some tasks a human being cannot obtain a level equal to or better than ordinary standardized instruments to say nothing of the richness of the data produced from this source” (p. 387). The researcher increased the trustworthiness of the data through triangulation.

Triangulation was achieved by corroborating the interview data with other sources and using multiple sources of evidence to assure the accuracy of the data (Yin, 1994). The study used observation as well as analysis of historical and current research to ensure this accuracy. In addition, a questionnaire was given to the participants by the researcher, and the English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty member gave the participants a related assignment. This provided triangulation of the data to assure accuracy. Finally, the collected data were placed into a research portfolio to enable other researchers to follow this research process.

Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness concerns were addressed throughout the data collection procedures and analysis of methods sections in this chapter.

Sample

The ESL Institute at the UW-L was contacted in January of 1999 to assist in obtaining the target population—international students at the UW-L. The researcher was aware of the concern by the ESL Institute to produce general information about what international students’ academic and social experiences were like at the UW-L. In
addition, the ESL Institute was curious about international student’s adjustment to ESL courses, as well as to the university and community. After a careful review of the literature and discussion with ESL faculty about the purpose of the study, the researcher arranged to cooperate with one of the ESL faculty members to identify the sample. The sample was selected using a purposeful sampling procedure. “This is a strategy in which particular settings, persons, or events are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that can’t be gotten as well as from other choices” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). The ESL faculty member was asked to identify various international students who could participate in the study. Sixteen students who were currently enrolled in an advanced speaking English course were suggested. The ESL students in the advanced speaking English course were here both short and long-term, had encountered a variety of unique academic and social experiences, and had differing English language skill levels. Although ESL international students may be considered a relatively homogenous group of international students within the ESL Institute, the goal was not to investigate the homogeneity between ESL students. Instead, the goal was to capture the heterogeneity within the sample in order to better understand what international students in general have encountered as academic and social experiences at the UW-L and what professionals at the University can do to better attend to these academic and social needs.

In March of 1999 the researcher obtained the 16 names of the participants who would be interviewed for the sample. A sign-up sheet was prepared with dates and times in the months of March, April, and May of 1999 for the participants to arrange interviews. The researcher went to the ESL advanced speaking English course and
provided a brief overview of the study. Maxwell (1996) suggested that it was important to think about the relationship you want from the participants. The visit to the class was intended to develop basic rapport with the participants and to familiarize them with the researcher. It was the researcher’s intention to create a relationship that fostered comfort, confidence, and understanding of the study, without creating personal bias based on too much rapport. The participants were asked to place their names and phone numbers on a sign-up sheet in the appropriate day and time when they could meet with the researcher. The researcher picked up the sign-up sheet two days after the visit to the class. The researcher called each participant the day before the interview to confirm the date, time, and place of the interview. Besides the initial help from the ESL faculty member, the researcher was the sole person who scheduled, conducted, recorded, and transcribed the interviews in order to eliminate bias based on outside factors or interpretations.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collected in the study were grounded in observation, focused and relatively open-ended interviews, and analysis of historical and current research. The research questions that guided the study were: (1) What factors play a role in international students’ initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs? (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? and (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist
with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international
students?

Each interview took place in an on-campus area. Rooms were reserved in
Cartwright Center and Wilder Hall on the UW-L campus. The researcher met the
participants at a designated place and proceeded to the interview room. After a brief
getting acquainted session, the researcher explained how the interview would proceed for
the 45-minute period and provided background information as to how the study evolved.
The main purpose of the study was communicated to the participants by reading the
purpose statement and informed consent form (see Appendix B). To ensure protection of
the participants, the researcher described the details of research with human subjects in
the U.S., encouraged the students to keep the interview confidential, and explained that
the audiotapes used to record the interviews would be destroyed after transcription of the
results. The researcher explained the informed consent form and encouraged the
participants to ask questions about any vocabulary or concepts they did not understand as
they were reading the form. Before the participants signed the informed consent form,
the researcher once again asked them if they needed anything clarified. At this time the
researcher informed the participants that once the study was completed they could obtain
information about the results by contacting the researcher or the ESL Institute.

When the participants were comfortable with the purpose, procedures, and
confidentiality of the study, they signed the informed consent form and both the
participants and the researcher kept a copy as a resource. All 16 participants completed
the interviews for the study.
The researcher began the interviews by collecting demographic information from the participants that included gender, student status, native continent/country, and length of time at the UW-L. The researcher proceeded to ask the participants 15 focused interview questions. The questions were designed to obtain descriptive data about the academic and social experiences of the participants. The interviews were considered relatively open-ended focusing on two topic areas. These topic areas were: (1) goals and expectations for studying at the UW-L, as examined in the first five interview questions; and (2) adjustment and experiences, with particular focus on academic and social needs and support of those needs by professionals, as examined in the remainder of the questions. Consistency was insured by conducting the interviews in the same manner each time and by asking the same focused interview questions, but the open-endedness of the questions created variance in how each participant answered. The researcher emphasized asking the interview questions in a manner that encouraged descriptive answers, listening attentively to the participants, and flexibility. The interview questions can be reviewed in Appendix C.

During the interviews, if the participants did not understand a question or vocabulary word, the researcher explained the term by reading the definition of the word or giving a personal example of the concept, being careful not to prompt the participants to answer in a specific way. At the end of the interview the researcher asked the participants if they had any questions and provided them with a follow-up questionnaire (see Appendix C) to be completed only if there were additional insights or questions about the interview. The researcher received two follow-up questionnaires that were
used in the results and conclusions section of the study. In addition, the participants were asked to complete a written assignment given by the ESL instructor (see Appendix C), similar to the questionnaire given by the researcher. The assignments were used as additional supplements to the interviews as needed. Once the researcher was completely finished with each interview, brief observations (field notes) were made by the researcher regarding the interviews, the environment, and the length of the interview.

**Data Analysis Methods**

The researcher personally transcribed verbatim the interviews within a month of the interview to insure accuracy of the content. The researcher organized the interview transcripts and the supplemental questionnaires and assignments according to specific coding categories. The coding categories used in this study were: perspectives held by participants, participants' way of thinking about people and objects, and participants' relationships and social structures (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

After identification of the specific major categories, the researcher identified themes that emerged from the interviews. The researcher placed them within each major category based on the three main research questions that guided the study: (1) What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs? and (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? The last research question, (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social
adjustment and development needs of international students? was used as a culminating question in Chapter V.

The Cut-Up-and-Put-in-Folders Approach was used to handle the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Themes were identified by analyzing words and meanings from the interviews. The words and meanings from each interview that fit within each major coding category were cut and placed into their specific major category folder. Themes based on expectations and initial adjustment of international students were placed into the perspectives held by participants' category. Themes based on international students' experiences and needs were placed into the participants' way of thinking about people and objects category, and those based on interactions and support were placed into the participants' relationships and social structures category. The researcher then proceeded to analyze each of the major code folders. After the researcher looked over the specific words and themes, they were placed into piles supporting each specific research question. The researcher then proceeded to make statements that related to the research question and used quotes from the interviews to support these statements. In doing this, the researcher was sensitive to the discrepancies that could be found between meanings presumed and those understood by the participants.

Chapter Summary

This study was designed to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and to analyze how professionals at the University attend to these academic and social needs. The study followed a case study design and used observations, focused and relatively open-ended
interviews, historical and current research, and the positioned subjects approach to collect data. Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study were discussed. The sample for the study consisted of 16 international students chosen from an advanced speaking ESL course at the UW-L. Data were analyzed using major coding categories: perspectives held by participants, participants' ways of thinking about people and objects, and participants' relationships and social structures. Themes from the interviews were established based on the four research questions in the study: (1) What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs? (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? and (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students?
CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

This chapter includes the results of the case study investigation concerning perceptions of international students’ academic and social experiences at the UW-L and analysis of how professionals at the University attend to their academic and social needs. The data collected from the 16 participants in the study describes demographic information, followed by information based on themes related to the research questions of the study: (1) What factors play a role in international students’ initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive to be most important to their academic and social needs? (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? and (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students? The first three research questions were separated according to the respective major coding categories that guided the results of the study: perspectives held by participants, participants’ ways of thinking about people and objects, and participants’ relationships and social structures. The final research question was a culminating question based on all results reported and will be discussed in the recommendations section in Chapter V.
Demographic Data

Demographic data from the participants were summarized based on four categories: gender, student status, native country, and length of time at the UW-L (see Appendix D). Sixteen international students participated in the study. Ten of the participants were male and six were female. Nine participants were exchange students, five were degree-seeking students, and two were enrolled as special students utilizing the English as a Second Language Institute (ESL). The participants were from a variety of different geographical areas. Six participants were from North America-Mexico, six were from Asia, three were from Europe, and one was from South America. The participants varied in length of time at the UW-L: Four participants were at the University for 0 to 3 months, seven participants were at the University for 3 to 7 months, and five participants were at the University for 7 months or longer. Although demographic factors were analyzed and may have played a role in the participants' perceptions of academic and social experiences at the UW-L, these specific factors were not the focus of this case study. Instead this data supported the heterogeneity and individuality between participants, in order to better understand what international students in general have encountered as academic and social experiences at the University. For this reason and to ensure confidentiality, when the participants were quoted they were not always described by demographic data, unless the researcher felt it relevant and then the participants were described by their native country or student status.
Perspectives Held By Participants

The perspectives held by participants’ category includes themes based on the research question: What factors play a role in international students’ initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? The participants’ ways of thinking indicated orientations toward particular expectations/goals and adjustment experiences each participant encountered. Through specific examples and general points of view, the researcher intended to capture the shared understandings by the participants and conceptually frame those understandings into specific theme areas. Data based on participants’ expectations/goals prior to coming to the UW-L revolved around three main themes: (1) understanding American academics and learning English, (2) understanding American culture, and (3) creating friendships. Data based on initial adjustment focused on themes of (1) nervousness in a new environment and with the English language, and (2) openness to a new experience.

Expectations/Goals of Understanding American Academics and Learning English

A majority of the participants stated that a major reason for choosing the UW-L was because family, friends, and professors from their native countries had recommended the University as one that had strong exchange and degree programs for learning English and understanding American academics. When asked by the researcher what each participants' expectations/goals of the UW-L were before coming to the University, the predominant theme centered on the goal of learning English. Nine participants replied with the following certainty: “First learn English,” “My main goal was to learn English.” “I thought to enter the university was good because you take regular classes and then it is
good for our English skills.” “Only to learn English in order to improve my speaking,” “I wanted to learn better English.” “I wanted some real good English classes not just with Mexicans.” “I knew I wanted to improve my English and I knew it would be a challenge.” “Not good English ability and want to learn more.” “There is not so many Chinese speakers and that is good for my English.” In addition to expectations/goals of learning English at the UW-L in an environment that provided interaction with different native speakers, five participants were concerned with better understanding American academics and improving their international test scores in order to pursue study in the U.S. A degree-seeking participant from Asia replied, “I want to maybe go to graduate school here. My goal, I want, when I graduate, I want my academic score to be at a high level and the main point I want to learn from here is to freely study because in my country you only obey the instructor.” A second participant from Asia also replied, “I wanted to learn better English for my test scores.” Beyond academic test scores, participants showed concern about understanding American academics. Participants from Europe and Mexico responded, respectively, “I wanted to learn the Business English here,” and “It is important for me to know about the image and how Archaeologists from here work and share ideas about Archaeology.” These themes related to Heikinheimo and Shute's (1986) main objective that stated international students are concerned with the successful achievement of academic goals, which can be enhanced if the emotional and social atmosphere is pleasant.

In general, the participants were very direct and certain that learning English and understanding American academics was very important. This paralleled Leong and
Sedlacek's (1986) study that expressed the importance and concern by international students to develop more efficient language skills and establish an academic agenda. In addition, when the researcher asked the participants if these expectations had been met, the participants who quoted English learning as most important, reported the following similar responses: “Yes, I think I am very satisfied.” “Yeah because I think that you learn English when you talk with Americans.” “Yes, I am in Baird Hall and am able to talk with many people.” “Yes, better than I thought because I met a lot of nice people here.”

Although the majority of participants felt their initial experiences/goals were being met, a participant from Japan commented that although her expectations/goals were being met, she was still struggling because, “I’ve never taken regular classes before and this is the first time to take regular classes and the professor and ESL teacher are totally different.”

This theme will be addressed later in this chapter.

Expectations/Goals of Understanding American Culture

Another theme that centered on the participants’ expectations/goals of the UW-L before coming to the University was understanding American culture. Four participants responded to this theme by saying their expectations/goals were: “To get a cultural experience in a different culture;” “To know more people and learn about another culture;” “To gain some knowledge to bring to my country;” and “To see how life is in America and to see the difference.” The four participants that responded this way also emphasized that learning English was of primary concern in order to achieve their goal of understanding American culture.
Expectations/Goals of Creating Friendships

A final theme based on expectation/goals of participants before coming to the UW-L was creating friendships. Four different participants answered this question by replying: “First learn English and make friends.” “I wanted to know more people.” “My main goal was to learn English and then to make friends.” “Make many friends.”

Although the themes of understanding American culture and creating friendships were not as predominant as learning English when addressing the questions of expectations/goals of the participants before coming to the UW-L, these themes prominently emerged in the relationships and social structures category. The themes were part of an understanding of how successful academic achievement and language learning could be enhanced by a positive social environment (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

In addition to addressing the expectations/goals of the participants, the researcher examined the initial adjustment experiences the participants had when first enrolling at the UW-L. The participants' responses were reviewed and categorized into two main themes: (1) nervousness in a new environment and with the English language, and (2) openness to a new experience.

Initial Adjustment and Nervousness in a New Environment and with the English Language

The predominant theme that emerged from the researcher's question about initial adjustment experiences was being nervous about adjusting to a new environment and
learning the English language. Nine of the sixteen participants described these feelings in a similar manner:

“When you don’t speak very well the language and you really don’t have any people you know there it is hard. Now, I am making a play and have the opportunity to gain more language skills. The language is very important to get contact with people and at the very beginning you relate to other international students because you know they are in the same position that you are. You have no friends and the international students have the patience to try and understand you. At the very beginning you feel like lonely, homesick, and you have to get through that.” (Europe)

“In the beginning it was hard because - not in the ESL classes for sure - but the Business class vocabulary was difficult in beginning. In the beginning because you don’t know words and how they fit together and it can be depressing.” (Europe)

“After classes I have to do my homework. I like to read and study a lot because I can not communicate too good. Every day I studied for hours. Now I can communicate better, especially in my job. Everything is different. Environment in class is good because the teachers are well prepared. For instance, in my Finance and Marketing classes things are very different than in English classes. I am the only foreign student and I try to catch all I can from the teachers but sometimes it is difficult and I feel like a fool in class. I ask can I borrow your notes for a couple of seconds and they lend me their notes, but I feel like they think I can’t understand. Here is different. For instance, in Mexico, students are different. All students help. Here there is a lot of competition.” (Mexico)

“I felt a little nervous because of the language. In Mexico I think my English is a little well. When I came here my English is low. When I arrived to the airport I was alone and the lady said something and I kept saying repeat please. When I came to the university I did not know if I would be able to answer all the questions. I was worried about it. I was living in Mexico and I was far away from my family. I was learning about how to keep myself relaxed and I kept thinking about that when I came here.” (Mexico)

“At first I couldn’t understand at all so I was nervous but I am getting used to it. At first I didn’t like here because it is kind of a countryside if I compared with Madison so I feel lonely.” (Asia)

“At the beginning it was very different for me to live with people of so many cultures. I was nervous because of language and the grammar and vocabulary.” (Mexico)

“Well first everything is new so you want—at least at the beginning, I wanted to talk to everyone. In the middle of the semester I was confused because culture shock. Sometimes you are like tired. Everything is new and you are changing everything like
These nine participants reported initial nervousness in a new environment and with the English language at the UW-L. According to Altbach et al. (1985), a new environment poses challenges for international student's adjustment to college. The difficulties stem from the stress of a new culture, which leads to culture shock and feelings of nervousness, loneliness, and anxiety (Oberg, 1960), which is what the majority of the participants reported. Although the proficiency and understanding of the English language varied with each participant, a consistent theme emerged that after a few weeks of getting to know more people and practicing English, feelings such as nervousness and loneliness lessened and the participants began to more comfortably adjust to the University.
Initial Adjustment and Openness to New Experiences

Although a majority of participants responded with initial adjustment symptoms of culture shock, six other participants responded in a manner that exhibited openness to a new experience and positive initial adjustment:

“It has not been that hard because I have met international students.” (Asia)

“Very quiet and good place to study English. Very comfortable because I have to live here a long time it is interesting.” (Asia)

“It is good like when I lived here with my friend for two weeks and it was good to know La Crosse. It is different—everything is different for me. The Mexican school and here is the same so there are a lot of American people and people from France and Germany because there are international programs. Not all kind of people are different. Many things were the same. I feel real comfortable because I have friends here so I say no problem.” (Mexico)

“First time when I came to La Crosse I drove my car with my friend and he told me about La Crosse—before I get to La Crosse I think La Crosse really small town but actually it is kind of big. I was surprised. Sometimes I went to drive around here and it was different. My friends were here and I was not nervous because I knew people.” (Asia)

“I feel good. I think the classes are very good and interesting. Being here is very different than in my country but it is not so difficult. I think in my mind I think when we are in other place we have to live like the other people and we have to adjust our behavior to live the way the other people do and it is easier.” (South America)

“I like it. I am one with open mind. Everyone I know is different country, different culture and you should respect other cultures. There is a lot of nice people here.” (Europe)

The six participants who responded to initial adjustment experiences at the UW-L as easy and successful felt that way because of three sub-theme areas. Two participants felt respecting other cultures and adjusting to living the way other people do was important to their initial adjustment. Three participant's initial adjustment experiences were fostered positively through having friends at the University, and a final participant,
who had been at the University for over 7 months, simply stated that it was more comfortable the longer time in a new environment. All three of these sub-themes relate to what other researchers have described as stage models of international student adjustment. A model that would support these results is the U curve of adjustment, which describes initial adjustment of international students (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). The U curve described initial adjustment of international students as easy and successful, then follows a "crisis" in which one feels less well adjusted, and finally supports the integration into the foreign community. This model supports these particular sub-theme findings because participants described initial adjustment as successful, and yet at times felt lonely and unhappy. This does not mean these participants always adjust beginning with a particular phase or stage because the diversity of the participant's culture and the new environment is often unique (Church, 1982).

Participants’ Ways of Thinking about People and Objects

The participants’ ways of thinking about people and objects category includes themes that evolved from the research based on the research question: What do international students perceive to be most important to their academic and social needs and how has this affected their experiences? The researcher captured the shared understandings of the participants about what academic and social experiences made up their world at the UW-L. Data based on the participants’ classroom experiences, experiences meeting new students, and experiences in social activities were analyzed and divided into theme areas. Classroom experiences were divided into themes based on (1) experiences in ESL courses and (2) experiences in non-ESL academic courses.
Experiences meeting new students were divided into themes based on (1) difficulty developing relationships with American students and (2) the ability to make connections with other international students and American students, especially in the residence hall environment. Experiences with social activities were based on themes of (1) involvement because of information from professionals and students at the UW-L, and themes of (2) noninvolvement because of time and academic commitments, and interest in more individual or family activities.

In order to better understand what the participants perceived as their most important academic and social needs, the researcher addressed the interview question:

What academic and social needs do you feel have not been met while at the UW-L?

Perceptions of academic needs that were most important to the participants were divided into two theme areas that addressed (1) making more connections with other American students and professionals in the classroom, and (2) being able to devote more time to academics. Perceptions of social needs that were most important to the participants were placed into one overall theme area, also titled making more connections with other Americans.

**Classroom Experiences in ESL Courses**

The researcher asked the participants to describe their classroom experiences at the UW-L in order to learn more about what academic needs the participants perceived to be most important. When describing their ESL courses, two solid themes emerged. The predominant theme was that ESL courses were very positive. Ten participants responded about the positive aspects of the ESL courses:
“My ESL teacher is really nice and accessible. I have this good impression of American ideas of education.” (Europe)

“In the ESL courses, like every Friday, there is laboratory and the teachers are very helpful for me, trying to make me to understand.” (Asia)

“It is so free. ESL classes are more free.” (Asia)

“ESL for me is a fun class. It is not hard and you don’t have to do a lot of things for the class, it is pretty easy.” (Europe)

“ESL classes are very useful because I have to improve my speaking and my listening skills and the teacher give me many opportunities to speak.” (Asia)

“There is an opportunity to speak and participate and sometimes you are in groups. It is different than in Mexico, here it seems more dynamic.” (Mexico)

“It seems I was only Asian in La Crosse. At the English school there were many Asians in class. I think ESL is much better than in Madison because I can relax in class because I can’t speak English if there are any other Asians, but there are few Asians.” (Asia)

“The class is very interesting—very dynamic. All ESL professor are very attentive to students. The class is very good to give all the students a good level of English.” (South America)

“Well the English ones is like easier because there are smaller groups and it is easier to talk with whoever.” (Mexico)

“My ESL classes are fine—they help.” (Europe)

Although the ESL courses were well received by the participants in the study, three participants had similar experiences that were more negative than positive:

“In ESL classes I feel it is very hard for me. There is a lot of homework in writing, grammar, and reading.” (Mexico)

“I think writing class and grammar class together is a bad idea. They focus on writing and forget the grammar. For example, a lot of people from Asia are very good at grammar but for example my grammar is bad. For example, TOEFL lab class was so bad. I think this is very important. My teacher is Chinese and I want to learn American pronunciation so it is difficult.” (Mexico)
"In my English class I would like to know why there is a Chinese person teaching English. I respect this person a lot, but I think there should be an American teaching the class. Sometimes the class is boring and I can not understand her. This class is very important because it is for my TOEFL test, so it is frustrating at times." (Mexico)

All three of the above participants were from Mexico, which may represent a common geographical theme. In addition, all six participants from Mexico mentioned being concerned with their academics and feeling a variety of family and home university pressures to do well, which was consistent with Harvey and Stewart's (1991) findings that heavy academic pressures were often experienced by international students.

**Classroom Experiences in Non-ESL Academic Courses**

Eight participants commented on both ESL courses and one or more non-ESL academic courses they were taking. Comments centered upon the theme of non-ESL courses being more difficult than ESL courses:

"The professors very fast for me. The classroom is big – 200 students and it is kind of hard to follow. In my other courses my professors very fast, much faster than ESL teachers." (Asia)

"The Computer Science professor has only taught a little bit about topic. We read more in book." (Asia)

"The Accounting classes are much more difficult. I have to do more, but it is not so fun. More discussion and accounting exercises." (Europe)

"In my Finance class we have quizzes. Usually we have groups of five people. Yesterday I felt like no one paid attention to me. I felt ignored and at first was offended. Then I thought maybe it was just the culture." (Mexico)

"For example, I am so happy for taking Archaeology because it is new for me. Some topics I have learned in Mexico and some topics are new for me. One thing is when I put myself in front of the class and I do not know how I did it but I could speak in English. It is different and difficult." (Mexico)
"Geography and math are difficult. I am not relaxed because students in classroom are American students only and I don’t have friends in class and the professor speak English very fast and I can’t understand." (Asia)

"In the other classes you are in huge rooms and it is really difficult to talk more. You have to pay attention and lecture classes like computers is different than practicing English. Computer lab is good but the lectures you have to listen." (Mexico)

"I think I am impressed about the way of their teaching. What they are teaching is different from the book. The class book—if the professor point a book you need for this class—they don’t absolutely say according to this book. This book is just a preference. In Economics and History class we just follow the teacher and there are more tests.” (Asia)

Although the eight participants responded that non-ESL academic courses were more difficult than ESL courses, the participants felt that the non-ESL courses were interesting and they were intrigued by the different styles of teaching in the U.S. compared to their native country.

**Difficult Experiences Meeting New Students**

In attempting to learn what the participants perceived as most important to their social needs and experiences, the researcher asked the question: What have your experiences been like in trying to meet new students at the UW-L? The first theme that emerged was that it was difficult meeting American students. Ten participants responded by saying:

“I met them in class and when I first came here at the orientation. In dormitory, Baird Hall, introduced to American students. I wanted to meet many American people but I couldn’t. Only the ones in Baird Hall.” (Asia)

“How to explain—it is like, for American students in Archaeology class we are friends but everyone has homework. In Mexico, at the end of class we talk to each other and get to know each other and have coffee. There is more relations with new people than here.” (Mexico)
"It is difficult. In Baird Hall the Americans say hi but we spend more time with international students." (Mexico)

"American students kind of difficult. Some Americans are like oh hello, you are from Mexico, oh cool and begin conversation and some are just oh hello and I touch their shoulder and they will look at me like don’t touch me—it is my culture and it is kind of weird for the Mexicans. Hard to have relations with American people.” (Mexico)

"It is difficult. In Baird Hall the Americans say hi but we spend more time with international students.” (Mexico)

"I think lots of times I was very shy. I think I am getting to become outgoing.” (Asia)

"I don’t know it is kind of hard for me. I am kind of quiet. Because when you are learning English you are afraid to speak something and sometimes Americans don’t understand you.” (Mexico)

"I want more talking I think with other students. It is difficult meeting new people mainly because of language. In my classes sometimes I talk with people but not many.” (Asia)

"The language does cause a distance. We don’t understand the slang and it may be boring for the American students to tell us a joke because we don’t understand.” (Europe)

"Conversation with Americans are just hi, how was your classes doing, bye.” (Mexico)

A predominant theme that will be addressed later in this chapter was the difficulty participants communicated in making connections and developing relationships with American students because of cultural differences. These themes may evolve from status differences, fear of rejection, anxiety, academic, and personal concerns (Schram & Lauver, 1998), as well as from cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors that were addressed in Chapter II.

Making Connections with American and International Students

Ten participants reported that because of their residence hall, classroom, and friendship experiences it was not difficult to meet other students. The predominant theme
was that it was easier for the participants to meet other international students because of similar experiences and living in the residence hall. This did not suggest that all participants felt this way and several participants did express that because of the residence hall experience it was easier to make more connections with American students. This is how the participants responded when asked by the researcher to describe their experiences meeting new students:

“Experience at the dormitory is good. There were lots of people to meet and we shared and talked. I like having lots of friends and it was easy for me.” (Europe)

“It is easy in classroom to make friends because everyone is together. Also, dormitory is good for knowing other people. Mostly met international students. I have met one American student and he is my friend from Korea’s roommate. Also, a front desk worker talked with me and we had fun with each other.” (Asia)

“At the beginning to make friends with international students it is easier. After a month it is more difficult because at beginning everyone meet each other and after a month they are thinking about other things. After a month, we know some of the international students and don’t need to meet others. It is easy to meet American students because of the outdoor club.” (Asia)

“That is pretty easy. I think the thing is it is a small university so you see them again. It is much easier here. You see everyone twice here – maybe in Chicago you see them only once.” (Europe)

“I have met a lot of new people. I consider me friendly person. Friends are very important in your life because you can help people and they can help you. When I lived in Baird Hall I met almost everyone there. They called me the Baird Hall married man and told me I was old. I always met people when we went to eat, both international and American students.” (Mexico)

“Like at international student meetings someone introduced to me or I talk to them. Living in dormitory I have more opportunity to meet people than if I lived in apartment.” (Asia)

“It is easy to meet other international students because they have open minds and want to know and meet people. A friend of my friend introduce me to many people—it is really nice.” (Mexico)
“In ESL I met many students. In Baird Hall last year there were American students who were very helpful and my roommate was helpful.” (Asia)

“I have met both international and American students in Baird Hall by going to watch movies or if something is organized I try to go.” (Mexico)

“After I learned English more, I met students in Baird Hall. For example I have a friend close to here and she has neighbors and friends from Germany and France.” (Mexico)

The majority of the participants reported being able to make more connections with other international students than with American students. According to Church (1982), it is the anxieties that stem from culture shock that may cause international students to form enclaves of fellow nationals that largely determine the living arrangements, friendship patterns, and organizational affiliations of the students involved.

Involvement in Social Activities

In order to continue to understand the most important social needs and experiences of the participants the researcher asked the participants if they were involved in social activities. The first theme that emerged was that because of professionals and students from the International Education Office and from the residence hall environment, participants knew about social activities and were involved. Eight students reported the following after being asked by the researcher about being involved in social activities:

“Yeah, I have been doing some of the International Office activities. We went cross country skiing and we also organized a food tasting activity. This was at the very beginning. Now, I am doing a play and am involved there. I am also going to be in the Outdoor Club as well. It is a really good opportunity to go to Arizona and meet people that have your same interests. They are really open to everybody there and so this is a really good opportunity for international students and they enjoy hiking and backpacking and other outdoor activities.” (Europe)
“Yeah, I went with my roommate to a Chinese restaurant and Chinese New Year party. I went cross country skiing with International Education. In my English class we go to other classes and talk with American students.” (Asia)

“Yes, outdoor club. Party with international students and lots of friends. Joined the gymnastic club, fitness club, went to winter camping and skiing. Going to New Mexico at Spring Break with Outdoor Club. Saw posters and joined. Some events are organized by Baird Hall also.”(Asia)

“International office go to skiing or go to eat Lisbeth’s house. ISO meetings sometimes.” (Mexico)

“The business club because I saw a poster and I thought it would be good for my major and talk with some people. ISO does skiing.” (Mexico)

“International student’s activity. Skiing, swim, or just to talk.” (Asia)

“I am going to the ISO meetings. They are interesting. Latin Club also. I meet a girl who works in bookstore and she is American but her background is Mexican and she speak very well English.” (Mexico)

“In Baird Hall we do a lot of things. We go to programs and talk about a lot of things.” (Europe)

**Noninvolvement in Social Activities**

A conflicting theme emerged from the researcher’s question about experiences in social activities. This theme focused on little or no involvement in social activities because of time and academic commitments, or interest in pursuing more individual activities with friends or family. This was not surprising considering the research showed that many international student’s main objectives were academic goals (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986) and that they must deal with added academic pressures from home (Harvey & Stewart, 1991). Six participants responded according to these themes:

“The only thing I do is go to parties or with friends. My snowboarding classes. I am not a club person. I am more individual.” (Europe)

“I used to work in Pizza Hut. But it is interesting because I want to go to church but
I was afraid because I do not know very well English. I would like to be in a group but I have no time. One of the reasons I left Pizza Hut is because I have so much work. Just no time.” (Mexico)

“No, I play tennis at tennis court. I like swimming. I wanted to participate in activities but I have no time because of studying.” (Asia)

“No, I have just a few friends and I live in an apartment alone so I just continue to go to school and go home to study.” (Asia)

“No, because I choose not to be. When class ends I go to my home.” (South America)

“No, I am so busy. Like last semester I was working lots of hours and this semester I am working like 7 hours and with this computer class I have no time. Last semester I was in the Spanish club, but now I have no time because of work. I like basketball and soccer and I have done the intramurals.” (Mexico)

Perceptions of Participants' Most Important Academic Needs

After analyzing the participants’ ways of thinking about people and objects category based on the research question and interview questions that revolved around academic and social needs and experiences, the researcher examined the data in order to understand what the participants perceived to be most important with regards to academics. Primarily, participants did not specify any major concerns they had with their academic experiences. Participants relayed earlier in this section that making more connections with Americans and professionals in the classroom, and being able to devote more time to academics was of first concern. In addition, tutoring was also mentioned when asking the participants about their academic needs. These themes were consistently seen in the interviews and will again be looked at when exploring the participants' relationships and social structures category. Five participants responded to these themes, the other eleven participants either felt they had no specific academic needs or were adjusting well to academics at the UW-L:
“In the future, I would like smaller classes. For me, the most important is to talk with American students and get more tutoring.” (Asia)

“I think the lectures that I have received are excellent but I think there needs to be more relations between students and professors and share in the work. Maybe you can find someone who is working the same topic you are and then you can share ideas.” (Mexico)

“More talking with students and teachers in classes.” (Mexico)

“Probably Physics is the one I have problems with. There is a tutor but he is busy and you have to make an appointment and that is sometimes difficult.” (Mexico)

“I feel very good about everything but Lab class. Our teachers are very good and have a very interest in us. I want Grammar and Writing separate—I think focusing on Grammar is more important.” (Mexico)

Perceptions of Participants' Most Important Social Needs

The researcher followed the same approach in addressing the most important social needs of the participants. Based on the research question and the interview questions about experiences in social activities, the participants did not see any major concerns or needs they had with regards to social activities. In fact, the majority of participants felt there was plenty of information available about social activities both on and off-campus. In contrast, the predominant concerns of the participants focused on the need to be more involved, especially in order to develop relationships with other students.

Not having the available social time since academics were of first concern was the response of seven of the participants:

“Just more practice speaking.” (Asia)

“I would like to be in more activities with people together but the problem is the time.” (Mexico)

“No I think things are the best for me because of my time.” (Asia)

“For my first semester I think it is okay. I am busy with classes but I will work in the
The participants' relationships and social structures category included themes based on the following research question: How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? The researcher captured the relationships of the participants regarding interaction with instructors or other academic professionals and other students. Themes that emerged from the interview questions about interaction with instructors or other academic faculty communicated positive experiences and in turn suggested favorable responses in regard to being academically supported. Themes that emerged from the interview questions about interaction with other students communicated (1) challenges in creating relationships with other students because of differences in culture and language, and (2) positive interaction with other students based on friendships and involvement in social activities. In addition, based on involvement in social activities and friendships, social support was viewed positively.

Academic Interaction and Support from Professionals

This study was designed to investigate how the participants perceived academic interaction and support by professionals. In order to address this relationship, the
researcher asked the participants to describe their interaction with instructors or other academic faculty and to describe their experiences in regard to academic support. All sixteen participants replied in a positive manner about their academic interaction and support from professionals:

“I think I may have a little advantage because of the fact I am working in the foreign language department as well. I am taking as well Acting I and my teacher he is really always there. It is also really the same with the German class I am taking now. I have a closer relationship as a student because of the fact I work in the foreign language department and I knew him before classes. For example, in this case as well, he took all of the students to breakfast to get the students to be very close and accessible to the teacher and feel comfortable.” (Europe)

“I would say that my teachers are willing to do whatever they can. I remember I went to my ESL teacher when I had to write a paper for my acting class and I had to do a performance and she reviewed all my stuff and was willing to do it no problem.” (Europe)

“The professors are very willing to help teach students. They are very happy to answer my questions, so I guess that is good. I ask one Chinese teacher about another program and she was very helpful and in her English class also she is helpful. They are all very good.” (Asia)

“When you ask any questions they will help you. Very friendly, much more friendlier than I expected and that is really good. In ESL we discuss a lot. In the Accounting we just listen. Professors always tell us we can ask a questions if we have to.” (Europe)

“In general it has been good. With my English teachers I always talk. We make jokes about English and culture. They are very nice. My Marketing teacher is a nice teacher and good friend. Sometimes after class we talk because he went to Mexico and wants to go again. We talk about Mexican food, the culture, and this class. He always asks me do you understand what I said? I ask him if he understands me. If I have a question I always ask because it is the only way I will learn. The ESL teachers very nice and helpful. The instructors always say if you have questions you can call me. They support
me with extra information and materials. They talk about class and other things. It seems like complete support. I always ask questions.” (Mexico)

“In class, very kindly.” (Asia)

“For example, they are very nice. In Archeology the professors are very nice. They have given me many supports. My one teacher, she always put an invitation to me. They are very nice. The professors are a little hard. If I am a little late it is hard. In ESL classes they are very nice.” (Mexico)

“I try to talk to them if I have a time as much as I can. Usually I go to my professor after the class or before the class. If I have a question in my Anthropology class I wrote down during class, and then after the class I go to my professor and ask him. The ESL instructors are like my friends. I talk with them about English, weekend, and spring break.” (Asia)

“It is good. Every time I will ask the teacher explain me this and they always do. The teachers are real different here. A little thing-- you can call them by their first names. In Mexico, you should call them professor. All my teachers have trust in me and seem to like me a lot. For example giving me their phone number if I need something-- call whatever time and you can come to my office to check my homework.” (Mexico)

“There is a very good relation. They are very kind and they always try to help me. One of my teachers helped me when I was having trouble understanding something. I think the contact with the instructors and other international students and my roommate is helpful.” (Mexico)

“They always help me. In mathematics I talk to my professor after class. In ESL very helpful.” (Asia)

“I think it is good. I am the oldest student in the class. I think that my kind of age is more similar to my professors than the other students and for me it is easy to talk with them and ask questions. It is good but I ask for one professor to suggest for me some places to go and she told me and it was nice.” (South America)

“They are good. They try to go easy going in classes and not to be stressed out. They make us speak every time English—they don’t want us to speak our native language. Just sometimes in the class you can ask how do you pronounce this or say this. In Physics I think it is harder. Sometimes I just don’t get it—like the vocabulary is so hard so I just don’t understand and I ask for help.” (Mexico)

“Right now I don’t know my advisor but my History teacher help me a lot about my History paper cause my English writing is not very good. My ESL teachers mainly help me about speaking English. They are very helpful.” (Asia)
According to Parr et al. (1992), professionals have given the needs of international students increased attention over the years. At the UW-L this attention is primarily given in support service offices such as the ESL Institute and the Office of International Education. Although overall satisfaction by the participants with faculty at the University was found, there were concerns from the participants about more professional involvement in developing English language skills and social support networks. Wan et al. (1992) discussed this in detail in their study of social support and adjustment.

Social Interaction Challenges

When investigating the interaction between the participants and other students at the UW-L, the predominant theme that emerged was that building relationships with other students was a challenge because of language and cultural barriers. Similar to experiences in meeting new students, eleven participants responded that interaction was difficult between them and American students. In fact, interaction was more likely with other international students based on similar experiences in a new culture. The participants described their interactions and relationships with other students at the University in the following words:

“It is good, they are willing to help. Very good interaction.” (Mexico)

“I think they are okay—most of them want to help us—even when I miss class a lot.” (Europe)

“For example, at the very beginning I was taking American Legal Systems, and this was kind of my own fault. I was attending this class but really did not meet anyone there. There was not much interaction between the students in the class and this was the only time I saw these people, as well in the very beginning you are adjusting yourself and you
don’t feel so comfortable and easy going. For example, right now, these are very
different kind of classes – this Acting - I am really having a chance to meet American
students, as well because you have to interact with everyone and is the kind of class
where you can have relationships. As I said before though, most of my relationships are
with international students.” (Europe)

“Students are very friendly, even American student. In the class we can have fun, but
out of class I don’t think American student will invite you to go somewhere. It is kind
of hard for students to join their life. And for other student the same as international
student they will invite you to go to parties and there is not as much of a barrier. I think
it is the differences between race and language and culture.” (Asia)

“Other international students it is very easy to get into contact because we are sitting in
the same boat. We have the same problems. We want to do the same things so it is
pretty easy to get into contact with them. With American it is much more difficult.
Maybe the reason is because the Accounting classes are more quiet and not so much
contact. I did meet students at the snowboard course or at a party – not easy in
classroom.” (Europe)

“Well, with my English classes we are always making jokes and kidding. We are very
good friends. I meet a lot of students from different countries and it is very interesting
because now I know more about the cultures like Korean, Japanese, Arabic. Of course
we teach them Spanish because a lot of other people want to speak Spanish. In my other
classes, except Finance - Finance is very different. The class is good but my classmates
are different. They are not cold but they are quiet. In general, I have a good relationship
with classmates.” (Mexico)

“I think I need to meet more people from La Crosse. I have no relation to many people.
I have no relation with Japanese or Chinese people; mostly Mexicans. Only a few
persons I know.” (Asia)

“I think in my other classes that are not ESL they are much different. The professor is
not as much conversation and there is not much conversation with the American
students. There are group activities but we don’t participate as much. With international
students we have more in common.” (Mexico)

“I think most American students have stereotyping to international students—like when
I was in Madison. Madison has lots of students and they used to talk to me. I don’t
know if in La Crosse they don’t like me or they are shy. Once I asked American student
to borrow me a pencil and he borrowed me a pencil. Sometimes it is difficult to speak
American student and international because of English.” (Asia)

“I think to deal with the foreign from other countries is good. Americans seem to just
think of themselves. I know it is competitive and I am like come on. In English we
have to work on groups and it is different. With Americans it is really difficult to make a group. We were supposed to do a group in Computer Science but everyone just worked by themselves and no one asked each other.” (Mexico)

“I think it’s difficult to construct a close relationship with other students. I don’t know why maybe because different culture or way of life. We are very friendly but I just don’t satisfy this situation. We are polite but it is difficult.” (Asia)

“With Americans I have only said hi—sometimes in the kitchen or bathroom but I have contact with the other international students—we watch movies, go to restaurants, play something, cards or something. In the beginning, the Asian accent is so difficult but actually I can understand it. I had a roommate this semester but she left early in the semester. She was very quiet. I had another roommate before and she didn’t talk to me—nothing. It was very difficult to begin to start a conversation because of my English.” (Mexico)

Social Interaction through Friendships and Involvement

A secondary theme found in regard to the participants’ social interactions with other students was that relationships and social interaction were positive for participants who were able to meet and establish new friendships with either American or other international students. In addition, participation in social activities that emphasized involvement with other students fostered positive interaction. Although this theme was not as predominant as the challenges and difficulties expressed in interacting with other students, it was relevant since establishing new friendships with other students was clearly important to the participants throughout the interview. Six participants responded positively in describing their interaction with other students:

“I joined outdoor club and met many American friends. They are really nice and taught me much. I read poster in Baird Hall about club and joined. International students in Baird Hall very nice.” (Asia)

“With international students I have met a lot of Mexican friends and talk about the other countries and cultures.” (Asia)
"I'm living in Baird Hall and I'm living with Americans so they talk to me a lot. I talk to my roommate a lot. They are so friendly. They try to understand my English—I can speak a lot with them. I don't have many opportunities to talk with American students in my Anthropology class. I think I have class before that class and another right after so I can't talk. I talk to international students because they are living in Baird Hall too." (Mexico)

“There are a lot of students besides Mexicans. There are students from Asia, Saudi Arabia, a lot of different countries—that is good. All my friends here are from other countries, always talk in English. If I got problems I will say help me with my homework, my reading and writing. I know a lot of Americans from my friend. I know some Americans in Baird Hall but they say hello, how are you and then go. I do many things with international and American students and Mexicans too.” (Mexico)

“It is good too. I don’t have a big interaction because I live off-campus but I see the students in class. One class I work with American students and they are helpful and kind.” (South America)

“Everyone likes me. I am always smiling and I like the way people treat me and I treat them nice. I am easy going and that helps.” (Europe)

This overall theme of the importance of establishing social interaction and relationships with other students will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Social Support

Although participants responded that interactions with other students, especially American students, were challenging and difficult based on positive social interaction through friendships and involvement at the University, the participants felt they were socially supported and aware of opportunities for social interaction through professionals and other students. Twelve participants communicated this support:

“There are lots of things to do. ISO tells us about social activities. ESL teachers sometimes ask us to go to activities or their house.” (Asia)

“Easy for international students to get involved from International Office. In the beginning the Business classes said you could do some activities. So things are offered.” (Europe)
"I notice this school has a lot of programs and activities. In just a few months it is hard to be involved in everything. I hope to get more involved. International office has many activities, like a dinner we are planning. I missed the first week when they were having introductions but there seems like a lot of social activities available." (Mexico)

"In Baird Hall there are many things to do. I have seen signs but I do not know what they mean exactly. The teacher in class have told us. I will play basketball with friends and I will go to my uncle’s house." (Asia)

"I think there is a lot of social things on campus and am very interested." (Mexico)

"Many papers on the walls so I can see there is information. ESL teachers and my friends tell me when something is going on." (Asia)

"There are a lot of activities, especially in Baird Hall. In Cartwright Center I also see many signs." (Mexico)

"My friends tell me about different activities." (Asia)

"I see folders on the walls and in Cartwright Center about workshops. The international organization talks about activities like skiing and others." (South America)

"If there is some trip in Baird Hall I will sign up and go. In ESL classroom sometimes there are sheets on the door and I know about things to do." (Mexico)

"I learned about the ISO from International Education. There is information about social clubs. There are dinners in basement or meeting in my floor. Our ESL instructors tell us about the cultural events or meetings." (Mexico)

"Actually there are a lot of meetings and things to do." (Europe)

Although the participants felt there were a variety of social activities to get involved in, concern was still reported that these experiences would have been more positive with increased interaction between the participants and American students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the results of the case study investigation concerning perceptions of international students’ academic and social experiences at the UW-L and analysis of how professionals at the University attend to their academic and social needs.
Demographic information was presented based on the participants' gender, student status, native country, and length of time at the UW-L. The themes that emerged from the interview data were placed into three main coding categories: perspectives held by participants, participants' way of thinking about people and objects, and participants' relationships and social structures.

Results from the perspectives held by participants' category included themes based on the research question: What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? Data based on participants' expectation/goals prior to coming to the University surrounded three main themes: (1) understanding American academics and learning English, (2) understanding American culture, and (3) creating friendships. Data based on initial adjustment focused on themes of (1) nervousness in a new environment and with the English language and (2) openness to a new experience. Results from the participants' ways of thinking about people and objects category included themes based on the research question: What do international students perceive to be most important to their academic and social needs and how has this affected their experiences? The participants reported themes based on classroom experiences, meeting new students, and experiences in social activities. Perceptions of academic and social needs that were most important to the participants were making more connections with other American students and professionals in and out of the classroom and being able to devote more time to academics. Results from the participants' relationships and social structures category included themes based on the research question: How have international students perceived academic and social
interaction and support by professionals and other students? A significant theme that emerged was that the participants felt both academically and socially supported, especially in the classroom and in social activities. Concerns did emerge in the repeated theme of difficulties in creating relationships with other students because of differences in culture and language. The fourth research question, What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students?, was addressed in Chapter V, as a culminating question that provided additional support strategies to be implemented by professionals based on the three prior supporting research questions.
CHAPTER V

Conclusions, Discussion, and Recommendations

This chapter includes the conclusions, discussion, and recommendations for further research based on the results and research questions of this case study: (1) What factors play a role in international students' initial adjustment and expectations/goals at the UW-L? (2) What have international students experienced academically and socially and what do they perceive as their most important academic and social needs? (3) How have international students perceived academic and social interaction and support by professionals and other students? and (4) What additional support strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students?

Conclusions

Based on the results and findings of the study, the researcher concluded:

- International student's initial adjustment at the UW-L is affected by culture shock, cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors which are unique to each student, yet focus primarily on feelings of initial nervousness. In addition, expectations/goals of international students focus on the importance of academics and language. This was concluded based on the majority of participants' responses. When addressing initial adjustment to the University, participants communicated a variety of different factors that affected their adjustment. This study addressed the primary factor of nervousness. This nervousness is communicated throughout the literature based on...
and Oberg (1960) found, culture shock from a new environment causes nervousness and anxiousness for a more predictable environment. In addition, because international students are unique cognitively, psychosocially, and environmentally, the literature emphasizes a need for more research focusing on these developmental areas. When addressing international students' expectations/goals related to academics and language, this was a predominant theme communicated by all of the participants. The participants felt the primary goal of studying in the U.S. was to learn English and be successful academically. Many of the participants' families demanded academic success, which was communicated by the participants. In addition, this conclusion parallels the literature, which identifies academic achievement as one of the main goals for international students (Wan et al., 1992).

- International students' academic experiences and support from professionals in ESL and non-ESL courses was positive. All participants in the study communicated some type of academic and social support from professionals during their classroom experiences. Although their experiences were different in the ESL and non-ESL courses, the participants responded enthusiastically about their interaction with faculty. This contributes to the literature, which states that international students are concerned with what professionals can do to assist them with academic coursework (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986; Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Stafford et al., 1980; & Wan et al., 1992). Considering international students often look to faculty and counselors for assistance (Harvey & Stewart, 1991), this help can influence both academic and social adjustment. This conclusion not only contributes to the literature based on who international students
seek out as help sources, but supports the emphasis by researchers that professionals can contribute substantially to the creation of a positive environment for international students.

- International students need assistance and additional support strategies in creating relationships and fostering interaction with American students. This conclusion was based on predominant themes and language that emerged throughout this study about concerns international students have with making connections and developing relationships with American students. Although the participants were very concerned with academics, it was communicated that there was a need for development of outside relationships in order to improve language skills and learn about American culture. This contributes to the literature, which identifies social needs and relationships as a major concern for international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994). This also supports the literature that emphasizes that with increased social interaction, international students are often more academically successful (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986). In conclusion, both professionals and students at the UW-L must begin to address these issues in order to assist international students in successful adjustment to the American university environment.

- International students viewed social support from other international students, from professionals, and students who provided information about social activities on campus, and the residence hall environment as positive. The participants in this study respondent enthusiastically when asked about social support and information about social involvement. Both participants on and off campus felt professionals and students.
provided them with a variety of information about how to get involved in social activities and kept them notified about new activities that were offered. This conclusion was positive as this social interaction helped the participants become more comfortable with their English speaking and with the new environment. According to the literature, international students were found to be positive about their social experiences and activities in their first year in the U.S., rather than in subsequent years (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Parr et al., 1992). This study supports this conclusion because the participants were here for less than a year and communicated their positive social experiences with regard to social activities. In contrast, although the participants viewed social support with regard to social activities as positive, social interaction with American students was still a primary concern as found in this study and emphasized in the literature.

**Discussion**

The international student population has been growing. These students have unique academic and social needs that universities struggle to meet. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and to analyze how professionals at the University attend to these academic and social needs. A secondary purpose of the study was to provide professionals with additional information to utilize in the implementation of new support strategies for working with these students at the UW-L.

A case study approach was utilized with interviews to investigate participants’ perspectives. Data were collected through observation, focused and relatively open-ended interviews, and analysis of historical and current research. The collection focused
on the academic and social adjustment and development experiences of international students. In addition, data were collected regarding international students primary concerns about academic and social needs and support. Analysis revealed additional support strategies for professionals to utilize when working with these students. The researcher participated in the interview conversations and this established a comfortable relationship between the participants and the researcher. This rapport allowed the participants to expand on the interview questions. Through positive nonverbal communication, expression of answers, and feedback from the supplemental related assignment the participants completed, the researcher found that the interviews were valuable in investigating the unique academic and social experiences of international students at the UW-L. In addition, the interviews were valuable in analyzing what additional support strategies professionals could implement in attending to the academic and social needs of international students.

Although concerns of international students are often addressed by the UW-L ESL Institute and by the Office of International Education, implications and discussion about international students' perceptions of academic and social needs and how professionals at the University address these concerns, were based on the research questions that guided the study.

On the basis of information communicated by the participants at the UW-L, it was found that five main factors play a role in international students' initial expectation/goals and adjustment. These factors are (1) understanding American academics and learning English, (2) understanding American culture, (3) creating friendships, (4) adjusting to the
nervousness of a new environment and new language, and (5) adopting an open view concerning the life-style and culture of the host country. Most of the participants in the study were concerned with and had expectations/goals of learning English and understanding American culture and education. The participants who communicated their initial adjustment to the University as very nervous because of the new environment and language felt that their expectations/goals were enhanced after a few weeks of being at the University, practicing the English language, and forming friendships. In addition, those students who responded positively about their initial adjustment experiences felt adopting an open view concerning the new culture was fostered through a longer length of time in the U.S. or establishing friendships before coming to the University or early in their stay.

In order to better understand and meet the initial adjustment and expectations/goals of international students, additional programs, workshops, and handbooks should be provided that offer assistance in meeting these academic and social expectations/goals. International students should be provided with orientation sessions in their own country about culture shock and adjustment and adaptation to a new environment before coming to the University. In addition, by creating an understanding and awareness of the unique expectations, needs, attitudes, and experiences of international students, this will assist all individuals involved in achieving their goals and adapting to initial adjustment experiences. Training American students, faculty, staff, and other student personnel administrators in these issues could foster international student adjustment to the University.
International students experience positive academic classroom experiences as well as challenging social experiences in meeting new students at the UW-L. Although experiences are different for international students in the ESL classroom and regular university classroom, most of the participants felt very positive about their academic experiences.

Considering the ESL classroom and regular classroom have different goals and objectives, participants felt the ESL courses were more interactive and interesting. In contrast, the regular university courses were viewed as more challenging, suggesting that participants were adjusting to different approaches of learning content than in their home country. Although the regular courses were viewed as more challenging or difficult, they were not viewed negatively. Participants communicated interest in the courses and interest in learning more about the American style of education.

In order to address these concerns, international students should be provided with basic information about ESL and non-ESL courses not only from the ESL Institute and the Office of International Education, but also from their faculty advisors and instructors. Faculty advisors and instructors should make an effort to explain their classroom philosophy and expectations to the students. In conjunction, international students should be aware of the importance of reaching out to the faculty advisor or instructor to better understand the classroom environment and differences between American education and their home educational styles.

Social experiences were found to be more challenging than positive because of the difficulty in meeting new students at the University based on the themes addressed
earlier: nervousness in a new environment and with a new language, concern for understanding the American culture, and wanting to create friendships with other students. The researcher found that the participants, whether or not they experienced difficulty or ease in meeting new students, were able to make more connections with other students, both American and international, if they were an active part of the residence hall and classroom environment and were involved in social activities. It was further found that if the participants were not involved in social activities, it was because time and academic commitments forced them to prioritize between academics and involvement at the University.

International students need support strategies that address the social challenges in meeting other students at the UW-L. The problem seems to be more complicated because many international students' first priority is academics and there is no time to take part in the social support strategies offered by the University. These students communicated wanting to meet and talk with individuals from the host culture in order to practice English and become more familiar with American culture. With time limitations, language barriers, cultural differences, and living in an environment that does not provide many connections with individuals from the host culture, making these connections was difficult. These concerns could be addressed by creating additional programs that involve opportunities in which international students and students from the host country get together at a common place on campus to share cultural experiences and develop relationships. This could be implemented as part of the international student orientation week and then continued throughout the semester. In addition, international students
need to understand the lifestyle of other students and American students need to understand the academic and social needs of international students. This could be briefly discussed in the classroom, during orientation sessions, and by professionals who interact with students in the residence hall or in social organizations. These programs could create more convenient opportunities for both international students and American students in developing short-term or long-term relationships.

International students perceive academic interaction and support by professionals as generally positive, and by other students as more challenging. Most of the participants communicated that both ESL and non-ESL professionals were willing to assist the participants in learning English and better understanding American academics. The participants felt it was more challenging to interact with American students because of cultural differences and language barriers. For most of the participants interaction with other international students was positive and was based on similar experiences in a new culture and regular interaction in ESL courses.

International students perceived social interaction and support with other students as challenging because of cultural, language, and environmental differences. This was related to what international students were experiencing in trying to meet new students at the university. For those participants not involved in social activities, the residence hall, or with other international students, a much more conscious effort to build relationships with other students had to be implemented.

Based on the participant's communication and themes that emerged from the interviews, the researcher used the fourth research question, What additional support
strategies can professionals implement to assist with the academic and social adjustment and development needs of international students?, as a culminating summary and discussion of what additional support strategies faculty and staff professionals could implement in attending to the academic and social needs of international students. For example, participants communicated concerns with creating friendships and connections with other American students and professionals. Strategies mentioned previously, as well as additional support strategies in the form of peer and faculty mentor tutoring could be implemented. Considering academics and learning English are top priorities for international students, combining tutoring and mentoring seminars, conducted and attended by both international and American students and faculty, could enhance academic and social interaction between international students and individuals from the host country. In addition, the tutoring/mentoring program could provide valuable information to international students, American students, and professionals about the unique cultural experiences and academic and social needs of international students and individuals from the host country, while at the same time fostering relationships.

**Recommendations For Further Research**

This study investigated the perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and analyzed how professionals attend to these academic and social needs. Conducting additional studies that focus on these issues and comparing the results with those from other national and local studies could provide a better understanding of what the "general" international student population is experiencing academically and socially. A related recommendation would be to narrow
this study to specific academic and social experiences international students have encountered, suggesting more detail with regards to the interview questions and less of a “general picture” approach.

Continual assessment of the academic and social needs of international students and further research on the adaptation and development of international students could provide professionals with more strategies with which to help these students. Particular emphasis could be placed on researching psychosocial and stage development of international students, which could provide professionals with specific intervention strategies in assisting these students with adaptation to a new culture. In addition, since international students at the UW-L seemed satisfied with the support they received from professionals, it is recommended that additional qualitative or quantitative studies be conducted to compare the significance of international student's satisfaction with professionals at the UW-L.

Another recommendation for future research would be to compare American student and international student attitudes with regards to academic and social interaction. This could improve and foster relationships between American and international students and assist in educating both groups about the perceptions each group have of each other. This could improve academic, social, and environmental experiences.

Finally, longitudinal studies could explore both demographic factors and international students' academic and social experiences. Research could be conducted over several years that provides additional adaptation and adjustment factors that might
affect international students, such as length of time in the United States, cultural differences, finances, racial discrimination, and social and academic skills.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of international students concerning their academic and social experiences at the UW-L and to analyze how professionals attend to these needs. Based on the results of the study the researcher concluded the following: (1) International student's initial adjustment at the UW-L is affected by culture shock, cognitive, psychosocial, and environmental factors which are unique to each student, yet focus predominantly on feelings of initial nervousness. In addition, expectations/goals of international students focus on the importance of academics and language; (2) International students' academic experiences and support from professionals in ESL and non-ESL courses was positive; (3) International students need assistance and additional support strategies in creating relationships and fostering interaction with American students; and (4) International students viewed social support from other international students, from professionals and students who provided information about social activities on campus, and the residence hall environment as positive.

In order to better understand and meet the initial adjustment and expectations/goals of the participants, additional programs, workshops, and handbooks, for international students, American students, and faculty and staff professionals should be provided that offer assistance in meeting these academic and social expectations/goals. International students should be provided with orientation sessions in their own country
about culture shock and adjustment and adaptation to a new environment before coming to the University. In addition, creating an understanding and awareness of the unique expectations, needs, attitudes, and experiences of international students, and American students and professionals, will assist all individuals involved in achieving their goals and adapting to initial adjustment experiences. International students should also be provided with basic information about ESL and non-ESL courses not only from the ESL Institute and Office of International Education, but also from their faculty advisors and instructors. Faculty advisors and instructors should make an effort to explain their classroom philosophy and expectations to the students. In conjunction, international students should be aware of the importance of reaching out to the faculty advisor or instructor to better understand the classroom environment and differences between American education and their home educational system. Certain support strategies do currently exist at the University that address the social challenges international students face in meeting other students. The problem may be more complicated because many international students' first priority is academics and there is no time to take part in the social support strategies offered by the University. These concerns could be addressed by creating additional programs that involve opportunities in which international students and students from the host country get together at a common place on campus to share cultural experiences and develop relationships. These meetings could be implemented as part of the international student orientation week and then continued throughout the semester. In addition, international students need to understand the lifestyle of American students and American students need to understand the academic and social needs of international
students. This could be briefly discussed in the classroom, during orientation sessions, and by professionals who interact with students in the residence hall or in social organizations. These programs could create more convenient opportunities for both international students and American students to develop short-term or long-term relationships. Finally, peer and faculty mentor tutoring could be implemented.

Considering academics and learning English are top priorities for international students, combining tutoring and mentoring seminars, conducted and attended by both students and faculty, could enhance academic and social interaction between international students and individuals from the host country. In addition, the tutoring/mentoring program could provide valuable information to international students, American students, and professionals about the unique cultural experiences and academic and social needs of international students and individuals from the host country, while fostering relationships.

Recommendations for further research with international students included conducting additional studies that focus on these issues and comparing the results with those from other national and local studies to provide a better understanding of what the "general" international student population is experiencing academically and socially.

Continual assessment of the academic and social needs of international students and particular emphasis on researching psychosocial and stage development of international students could be researched to provide professionals with additional support strategies for helping international students adjust and adapt to a new culture. In addition, since international students at the UW-L seemed satisfied with the support they received from professionals, it is recommended that additional qualitative or quantitative
studies be conducted to compare the significance of international student's satisfaction with professionals at the UW-L.

Another recommendation for future research would be to compare American student and international student attitudes with regard to academic and social interaction. Finally, longitudinal studies could explore both demographic factors and international students' academic and social experiences.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Concept Map
Concept Map

Academic Support

Most important academic needs

Initial adjustment and expectations/goals

Academic Experiences

Social Support

Most important social needs

Initial adjustment and expectations/goals

Social Experiences

International students perceptions of academic and social needs being attended to by professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Academic and Social Support by Professionals

Academic and Social support strategies to assist in adjustment and development
APPENDIX B

Purpose Statement and Informed Consent Form
The purpose of this study is to obtain and investigate perceptions that international students have about their academic and social needs being attended to by professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. It is the researcher’s intent to interview participants for approximately 45 minutes. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants are free to discontinue participation at any time without discrimination by the researcher. To ensure confidentiality the Informed Consent form will be signed and the audiotapes will be destroyed immediately after completion of the transcription by the researcher.
A Qualitative Study of International Students’ Perceptions of Academic and Social Needs Being Attended to by Professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions that international students have about their academic and social needs being attended to by professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. For this study, you will be asked to answer questions about your academic and social experiences and how professionals in these experiences have attended to your needs at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The interview will be conducted in a 45-minute period.

The information gathered in the interview will remain confidential. Interviews will be audiotaped for transcription by the researcher at a later time. All audiotapes will be destroyed after the transcription and final research is completed.

Anticipated risks and/or inconveniences in this study are minimal. Demographic information will be collected, but personal information about your life will not be investigated. Results of the study may be published or presented but no personal data will be revealed. There is a possibility that answering some questions in the interview may evoke strong emotions. Should you experience any feelings beyond your control, counseling and testing services are available on the first floor of Wilder Hall, 785-8073.

Anticipated benefits from participating in this study can be expected. You will be given the opportunity to reflect on your academic and social experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. In addition, the study is expected to produce findings that will provide professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse an opportunity to reflect on what they can do to better serve the international student population.

Please feel free to ask questions of the researcher before signing the Informed Consent form and at any time during the study. The study is voluntary and participants are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty by the investigator.

For one’s right as a research subject, the following person may be contacted: Dr. Garth Tymeson, Chair of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Institutional Review Board, 785-8155.

I, _______________________________ agree to participate in the research study entitled, “A Qualitative Study of International Students’ Perceptions of Academic and Social Needs Being Attended to by Professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.” The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered. I have read the description of the project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this Informed Consent form to keep for my reference and that I can contact the below people if I have any concerns about the study;
Participant’s Signature

Investigator’s Signature

Principal Investigator:
Chrystal M. Herlevi
2426 Hengel Ct. #109
La Crosse, WI 54601
Telephone: (608) 788-6237

Date

Faculty Chair:
MaryBeth Vahala
212 Cartwright Center
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
Telephone: (608) 785-8888
APPENDIX C

Interview Questions, Follow-Up Questionnaire, and Related Assignment
**Interview Questions**

1. How long have you been at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse?

2. What factors played a part in your decision to study abroad?

3. Did you consider other colleges/universities in your decision to study abroad? If yes, which others and why? If no, is there a reason?

4. What were some of the expectations/goals you had of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse before coming here?

5. Have these expectations/goals been met?

6. Describe your adjustment to college since being at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

7. Describe your classroom experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

8. Describe your interaction with instructors or other academic faculty at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

9. Describe your experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in regards to academic support.

10. Describe your interactions with other students at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

11. What have your experiences been like in trying to meet new students at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse?

12. Have you been involved in social activities on campus? If yes, which activities and how did you get involved? If no, is there a reason?

13. Describe your experiences at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in regards to social support.

14. What academic needs do you feel you have that have not been met while at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse?

15. What social needs do you feel you have that have not been met while at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse?
A Qualitative Study of International Students’ Perceptions of Academic and Social Needs Being Attended to by Professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

Follow-Up Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to clarify or discuss any additional insights that you might have had about the interview. The questionnaire is to be filled out within a week and sent to the researcher in the attached self-addressed envelope if there are additional comments. If you have any questions you may contact the investigator at the number on the Informed Consent form.

1. If you had to do another, similar interview, what would you do differently? Would you answer the questions differently?

2. The focus of the interview was your perceptions of the academic and social needs being attended to by professionals at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Please list additional thoughts on this topic that you did not express in the interview.
Interview with Chrystal Herlevi

TIME: 

DATE: 

If you need to change the time or date, please contact Chrystal 24 hours in advance.
email: herle_cm@mail.uwlax.edu
work phone: 785-8106
home phone: 788-6237

The location will be at 213 Wilder Hall, or a room will be reserved at Cartwright Center.
(Look for a notice on the location.)

After the interview, write one or two paragraphs in response to each of the following questions:

1. Describe how you felt during the interview and why. How difficult was the interview for you? Was the interviewer easy or difficult to understand? Why?

2. Which questions were most thought-provoking? What questions from the interview have you discussed previously with friends and/or family? In what ways were their views similar to or different from yours? (If you have not discussed any of the questions before the interview, discuss several questions with friends or family after the interview. Compare and contrast their response to yours.)

3. If you had to do another, similar interview, what would you do differently? Would you answer the questions differently? If so, how?

4. The focus of the interview was your perceptions of UW-L and the La Crosse community. Please list additional thoughts on this topic that you did not express in the interview.
APPENDIX D

Demographic Data Chart
### Demographic Data Chart

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### Length of Time at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

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