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Title: ***Challenges Faced by Saudi Arabian Students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and Their Effect on Academic, Social, and Cultural Experiences***

The accompanying research report is submitted to the **University of Wisconsin-Stout**, **Graduate School** in partial completion of the requirements for the

Graduate Degree/ Major: **MS Career and Technical Education**

Research Advisor: **Deanna Schultz, Ph.D.**

Submission Term/Year: **Fall, 2014**

Number of Pages: **75**

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 6th edition

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Khan, A. Y. ***Challenges Faced by Saudi Arabian Students at the University of Wisconsin-Stout and Their Effect on Academic, Social, and Cultural Experiences***

Abstract

This study investigates the significant challenges facing students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the United States. The study uses in-depth interviews of male and female Saudi students and employs a combination of interpretive analysis and thematic analysis to reveal several significant points of common experience across the sample. Noteworthy observations are the lack of any experience of cultural bias or stereotyping from the American side, important differences in some dimensions of experience due to gender, and significant evidence of a common desire among Saudi students to embrace the challenges of the cross-cultural academic experience to become more self-reliant, confident, and competent in their respective professional careers. While the level of workload challenge is considerable for this group, the consensus among the participants is essentially that they would rather undergo the difficulties and become better for having succeeded than finish the experience having gained little more than better knowledge of English language. Nevertheless, some points of improvement were discernible in the analysis, and the study accordingly provides a series of recommendations for practice and future research at the end.

Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have come to fruition without my believing in Allah. Thanks to God for everything. This thesis would also have been impossible without the inspiration, advice and support of my advisor, Dr. Deanna Schultz. Thank you for your patience and guidance, from the first draft to the final submission. I would also like to thank the international student advisor, Michael Lee, for his notable aid during this study.

I am grateful for the time and assistance of my friend, Nicole Bobo. She has provided me with considerable assistance during my graduate journey at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Her help was very much a source of inspiration and a reason for appreciation.

Special acknowledgements go to my father, even though he is no longer alive. I want to say that I really miss you, and I know that you are so proud of me. Special acknowledgements also go to my dear mother for all of her support and prayers. To all my family, brothers, and sisters who believe in my capabilities, I say thank you. Finally, thank you to all of my friends who have supported and encouraged me in completing this thesis.

Most importantly, thank you, Abdullah, my beloved husband, and thank you Mariana, my lovely little daughter, for your patience, love, and support while I have pursued my Master's Degree.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The flow of international students into the United States started in the 1950's, when the number of foreign students seeking to pursue their education in the country began to rise, and has since grown at roughly 10% per year (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011). Institutions of higher education in the United States thus became popular destinations for students from foreign countries, considering the opportunity to learn advanced business, medicine, technology, and engineering in particular. The United States has remained the premier destination for higher education, despite the great competition that the country has faced from many nations, which have tried to promote local choices in higher education to combat the loss of intellectual capital that seems to result from this process (Getahun, 2006; Simsek, 2011; Xu, Cui, Sun, & Zhang, 2005). This has remained the case, even as private multinational universities and colleges move their educational services to the target markets by establishing higher education institutions in other countries (Stone, 2003; Lindsey, 2011; Lindsey, 2013). However, international students face many academic, social, and cultural difficulties during their studies in the United States, factors that make their adjustment processes in the region increasingly challenging (Silver, 2009).

Saudi Arabia is among the leading countries of origin for U.S. international students, although China shows comparable statistics (Larson, 2013). According to Hazen and Alberts (2006), most international students seek education in the U.S. to pursue superior professional credentials. The students also seek U.S. education with the intention of learning more about the U.S., while also capitalizing on the scholarship opportunities made available by their home countries. Some Saudi students also consider educational qualifications or degrees from the U.S. more prestigious in comparison to those offered in their home countries. Others often seek U.S.

higher education in pursuit of more experiences that can have a positive impact on their later job opportunities and career choices in Saudi Arabia (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

As Hazen and Alberts (2006) observed, these motivations come from a perception that the U.S. system of higher education offers world-class skills and training, which foreign students believe surpass what they will find within their own countries. Consequently, this kind of education allows the individuals to secure better employment opportunities in their home country (in this case, Saudi Arabia). According to Hazen and Alberts (2006), skill development improves the capacity of people to work, while also revealing opportunities at work to facilitate a greater scope of creativity, as well as increasing job satisfaction. Moreover, the future prosperity of any economy ultimately comes from its employed population, along with their productivity level, because economic growth is a function of a greater increase in individual productivity, rather than individual consumption (Getty, 2004). Saudi students from U.S. universities who return to their home country for employment prefer jobs within the oil industry or other fields that demand specific professional qualifications, skills, and experience. These may include healthcare, information technology, telecommunications, construction, and teaching (Alfaris et al., 1997).

Nonetheless, the process of studying in the U.S. typically invites a range of difficulties, as experienced by the students. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) observed that Saudi English as a Second Language (ESL) international students encounter significant language challenges while transitioning to the host country's university life. International students must learn a new language, along with new rules concerning interpersonal behaviors, to excel in the foreign country. Aside from English-language proficiency, difficulties faced by foreign students include the availability of social support, the incidence of racial prejudice or discrimination, issues with

low self-esteem or other psychological effects, unexpected bouts of homesickness, and questions relating to how and whether to develop relationships with Americans (Andrade, 2006; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011).

Considering the increased flow of Saudi international students into U.S. universities, it is essential to understand the experiences students undergo during the transition process from the home country to the foreign country. Students face complicated cultural factors, in terms of new academic styles, attitudes, behaviors, and values. Understanding such experiences will be helpful to the people serving them, such as instructors, while also helping to prepare Saudi students in their efforts to travel to the U.S. for educational purposes (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Overall, the published literature associated with the experiences of ESL Saudi Arabian students in the U.S. is scarce. For this reason, it is necessary to consult unpublished sources, such as the theses of Hanson (2012) and Almotery (2009). Both of these studies sought to assess some aspect of the Saudi experience at the University of Wisconsin (at Stout and La Crosse, respectively). In doing so, each addressed the experiential question broadly, looking for whatever combination of positive or negative experiences might emerge as being important to Saudi students. Significantly, Hanson (2012) found a complex pattern of responses to her question about challenge (referring to interacting with instructors), while Almotery (2009) produced lengthy, multifaceted results in response to his question about challenges. Thus, together, these studies point in the direction of addressing the question of challenge directly, hence the purpose of the present study.

This study thus primarily assessed the experiences of both male and female ESL students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) in a U.S. institution of higher education, particularly focusing on the challenges they faced while studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-

Stout). The points of concern addressed in this study include academic, social, and cultural challenges.

Indeed, as a Saudi student at UW-Stout, the present author has faced precisely the kinds of challenges outlined herein. These have included understanding new words, mastering grammatical structures, citing multiple sources when writing a research paper, participating with spontaneity in class discussions despite a distinctly Arab accent, and teaming up with other students to discuss topics in an interactive setting or to deliver PowerPoint presentations in class. All of these challenges have proved fruitful as a source of motivation for undertaking the research topic addressed in this study, which generally aims to see if other Saudi students have had similar experiences.

Statement of the Problem

In spite of the benefits associated with studying in the United States, international students from the KSA face a completely different cultural world upon their arrival in the country and at the university. Thus, cultural diversity also makes it difficult for KSA students to study at U.S. institutions of higher education, such as the University of Wisconsin-Stout. There is limited empirical research available in the literature regarding the needs, experiences, and challenges of ESL international college students from KSA during their studies in the U.S. As previously noted, the exceptions have included Hanson's (2012) quantitative study, which provided some of the core ideas behind the elaboration of interview items in the present one, and Almotery's (2009) study, which produced evidence of the complexity of challenges faced by Saudi students. While Hanson's (2012) study was valuable in terms of setting a precedent for the systematic study of Saudi students at UW-Stout and elsewhere, it would have benefited from further development of its interview questions to address different kinds of challenges, consistent

with the insights provided in Almotery's (2009) study. This study therefore aims to fill a need implied by both of these studies, namely, to address the question of challenges directly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine different challenges faced by ESL students from the KSA, using the case of UW-Stout, to generate qualitative data representing the most important dynamics. Future researchers may thus be able to use the results to study the issues methodically, such as by making comparisons across universities. Through one-on-one interviews with a convenience sample of six Saudi students currently enrolled in the ESL course at Stout, this study focused on challenges involving the students' social interactions, cultural relations, and academic performance.

Research Questions

The research study has pursued answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges that female and male ESL students from the KSA face while studying at UW-Stout?
2. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA at UW-Stout affect their academic achievement?
3. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA to UW-Stout affect their social interactions?
4. What are the cultural experiences of female and male ESL students from the KSA, during their studies at UW-Stout?
5. What benefits do the female and male ESL international students from the KSA believe that their UW-Stout degree will bring, when they pursue employment in their home country?

Significance of the Study

The diverse cultural and linguistic challenges that Saudi international students face after their arrival, as they pursue their education in the United States, are important to understand in order to conceptualize solutions. Therefore, this study endeavors to provide a good platform for discovering more about these students' educational experiences during their study and stay in the United States, from the perspective of a single institution, namely, UW-Stout. Considering the increasing number of Saudi international students seeking higher education at this institution as well as in the United States as a whole, it is important to understand to what degree adjustment problems undermine academic achievement among these students. With this understanding, university administrators may more effectively adopt proactive solutions. The result is helpful for the academic institution's own reputation, as well as for confirming the validity of the KSA national policy to promote foreign studies for Saudi citizens. This topic is therefore relevant in providing an insight that offers a greater understanding of the various experiences that these students have in their transition processes from home to host country.

The number of Saudi students enrolled at UW-Stout has been increasing each year. This fact implies that the experience at UW-Stout may be generally positive. The rising concentration of Saudi students at one institution also has positive implication, because it means that a community is forming. There is a difference between attending to the needs of individual students with no substantial social network to use as a resource, and of those with such a network. Such a network may serve as an asset, which the institution can leverage to facilitate what it is otherwise able to do with individual students.

Assumptions

In addition to the foregoing limitations, the research study has also relied on the following assumptions:

1. That the study participants would be willing and cooperative in participating in the study, responding to the research questions openly and honestly, without apprehensions.
2. That the respondents would provide an authentic representation of the Saudi experience at U.S. institutions of higher education in general, to ensure the credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness of the conclusions.

Definition of Terms

Certain terms require definition for clarity. These include the following:

Culture shock. This involves the anxiety people face due to the loss of familiar symbols and signs of social contacts in a society that is different from their own (Sherry et al., 2010).

Cultural adjustment. This involves learning to adapt and align one's priorities and interpretations of cultural cues with a new cultural environment, in which one has lost familiar sources of information, such as language (Andrade, 2006).

Foreign student. This is a synonym for *international student* (see below). The reference to a student as foreign rather than international is appropriate in a country-specific context, such as when referring to the United States in particular, as opposed to academic institutions in general (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Halāl. Description of culinary ingredients permitted under Islamic dietary principles, analogous to the Jewish concept of *kosher*, and similarly subject to some degree of variance of what one deems acceptable, depending on the person in question (Howell, 2010).

International student. An individual who has traveled temporarily to another country, such as the United States, in pursuit of education in a vocational or academic institution (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Internationalization. This refers to a policy, along with its associated process, of proactively introducing the sociocultural elements of various foreign countries and interests into the university environment (Gürüz, 2011).

Methodology

The participants of this study were ESL Saudi Arabian students who were studying at UW-Stout, in the United States. A sample size of six students served as the source material for qualitative data in this study (four male and two female students). The researcher conducted an in-depth, one-on-one interview with each participant, to collect ideas from the participant's own point of view regarding challenges faced while studying at the university. The emphasis in the interview process was on the effects of these experiences on cultural relations, social understanding, and academic performance.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine significant challenges faced by ESL students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), using the case of UW-Stout, with a goal of generating qualitative data and determining what the most important dynamics are. The literature review process undertaken in this study involved searching library databases for keywords, focusing on academic journal articles. The keyword search began with a narrowly construed topic (e.g., Saudi, "United States," "higher education," "adjustment"), with variations on the last term (e.g., "stress"), followed by progressively broader phraseology by eliminating one key phrase at a time. The process stopped when it was apparent that virtually all newly appearing articles were irrelevant to this paper's topic.

This chapter covers three sections. These include international education in U.S. higher education to help explain the topic, the challenges that foreign students have faced in the countries in which they have pursued higher education, and a discussion about the experiences of Saudi students at institutions of higher education in the United States.

Internationalization in U.S. Higher Education

Students started traveling overseas for educational purposes long ago. International students started seeking education in the United States after World War One (WWI). At the completion of World War Two (WWII) in the mid-1940s, the U.S. experienced a massive flow of international students into their schools and institutions (Dreher & Poutvaara, 2011). The country enacted the 1946 Fulbright Act, which simplified the ability of foreign students to study in the country. Following this law, greater numbers of Saudi students began to gain admission into U.S. colleges and universities (Gürüz, 2011). Besides benefiting the foreign students, this overture has resulted in great contributions to U.S. educational programs, such as by enabling

U.S. students to gain an international perspective and helping the development of cross-cultural skills essential for leadership positions in the future (Deardoff, 2009; Gürüz, 2011).

Thus, the numbers of international students into the United States have risen from about 30,000 in the 1950s to over 800,000 as of Academic Year 2012-2013 (Haynie, 2013; Hazen & Alberts, 2006). The United States has become the leading country for hosting foreign students worldwide. Most of these students hail from non-Western nations, with the majority being from Asian countries, primarily Taiwan, Vietnam, China, South Korea, Japan, and India (Haynie, 2013). For this reason, the United States has become a global hub for foreign students from all over the world. Since 1999, the U.S. has hosted approximately 500,000 foreign students, and current data show that this trend has been increasing (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Taken together, these statistics indicate a need for U.S. institutions of higher education to internationalize their program. In this sense, internationalization refers to a series of steps taken by an institution to introduce elements of various foreign cultures and interests coherently into the institutional mission (Gürüz, 2011). The concept implies a progression from one state of being to another, envisioning change across disciplines, which engages many stakeholders. These stakeholders include both domestic and foreign students, both domestic and foreign faculty, and an injection of both traditional and modern ideas into the curriculum (Wang et al., 2012).

In response to these rising numbers, the U.S. system of higher education has experienced significant institutional changes due to globalization (Gürüz, 2011). These changes have put pressure on institutions to adapt or align their functions and character to suit complex societal expectations and demands. Many universities are therefore adopting a more business-minded approach in constructing their academic programs. For example, they are improving their

services by offering subsidies in fees, scholarship awards, and better study facilities that utilize modern technology. Indeed, international students play an important role in this process, as revenue from them helps support domestic programs. As a case in point, Silver (2012) has reported that U.S. law schools, which have historically attracted self-funding students, must now support increasing numbers of domestic students with funding (p. 230). Their ability to reach out to international students thus directly affects the viability of domestic programs.

However, as the number of foreign students rises, there is also an increasing need to understand and manage the psychological and cultural adaptation of such students to the hosting country's culture and norms (Gürüz, 2011). Thus, internationalization must involve more than merely introducing ways to make U.S. students and faculty aware of foreign cultures and practices. It must also attend to the needs of the students, as people displaced from their nations of origin and therefore unique in terms of their psychological and cultural needs.

Specifically, foreign students require some degree of institutional attention to help meet the unique needs and concerns that emerge upon newly setting foot in the host country (Evans, Carlin, & Potts, 2009). Such students experience challenges during their studies in the country, yet there are usually very few means available through which to solve these issues. Instead, there is a presumption in most U.S. institutions of higher education that students will eventually figure out how to navigate the college environment, because all new students face adjustment issues of some kind (Andrade, 2009). Nevertheless, there is both a financial and an ethical need for American colleges and universities to offer a favorable environment that integrates students from all national origins. Meanwhile, as Niyozov and Pluim (2009) have shown, the importance of acknowledging the religious and cultural sensitivities of Muslim students in particular extends to students at all levels of both secondary and higher education.

International students are a representation of a culturally heterogeneous or diverse group, which plays a significant role in the growing diversity within the universities and colleges in the U.S. (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). International students bring along a broad range of ethnic heritages, cultural worldviews, and linguistic backgrounds. For this reason, the diversity of international students within U.S. institutions of higher education is staggering, with students coming from many different nations. Some foreign students are more familiar with the Western cultural norms because they come from major cosmopolitan cities in their own countries, which often provide strong exposure to Western ways (Stone, 2003). However, others come from rural areas, where strong family ties and high levels of interdependence hold communities together (Razek & Coyner, 2013). International students from conservative cultural backgrounds often carry their practices intact into the United States. Despite adding to the range of the cultural spectrum in the United States, cultural adjustment is necessary for interactions to occur.

As foreign students continue matriculating in large numbers into U.S. institutions of higher education, it is essential that these institutions put more effort into understanding the difficulties faced by foreign students, as well as providing relevant support (Roy, 2013). Some of this support may emulate current efforts to accommodate immigrant students' success at preparation for college in American high schools (cf. Ruiz de Velasco, Fix, & Clewell, 2000). By incorporating a conception of these needs into internationalization efforts, notably, how they run their campus services, U.S. institutions may stand to benefit even more than they already do from including these students. In fact, international programs already generate economic gains for U.S. institutions (Bourgeois, 2002). Tuition fees from foreign students enable U.S. institutions to hire additional instructors, while also acquiring additional facilities to aid in enhancing education.

Driven by these forces, the United States has developed its institutions in a manner that has proved beneficial to both international and American students. The ability to relate with students from diverse cultures serves as an exceptional advantage, since both groups of students benefit from such relationships. An internationally diverse group, or student body, generates valuable cultural, economic, and educational benefits to the U.S. universities and colleges (Gaulé & Piacentini, 2013). American students also interact with foreign students, thereby learning the norms that the latter follow in their native countries. In this way, they mingle better, with minimal fear of violating the cultural restrictions of their foreign counterparts (Chang, 2014).

Challenges Faced by International Students

Attending to the needs of international students requires first identifying what those needs are. International students in the U.S. comprise a diverse population that has unique needs and concerns. International students' needs are primarily social and academic, under the influence of cultural differences, language ability, and the preconceived expectations held by such students in relation to U.S. campus life (Gürüz, 2011). The literature indicates that there is an inadequate degree of interaction between international and American students, in part due to a degree of American ethnocentrism, which exists among many students and often ignites personal judgment about other cultures (Gürüz, 2011; Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006).

International students often feel overwhelmed by cultural variances in the U.S. They often feel threatened by the dominance of the American culture over their own cultural practices (Wilson, 2011). Once international students travel to the U.S., they normally feel the deficiency of their own usual social support sources. For this reason, social support is critical in promoting their self-confidence and self-esteem, while also assisting in minimizing stress, which is increasingly vital for academic achievement (Wilson, 2011).

Several factors affect the process of adjustment, among which the dominant factors may include finances, housing, and homesickness (Rigas, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). Most foreign students also experience social problems associated with social integration, role conflict, and daily life chores (Rigas, 2009). Psychological stressors, such as academic demands, support system changes, the lack of local connections, and the lack of familiarity with U.S. culture and customs, can result in social isolation among foreign students (Nesic, Choi, & Anderson, 2009). In relation to academic adjustment, international students consider education as very crucial, which augments their concerns about study skills, grades, time management, and independent-thinking ability (Sundstrom, 2009).

Academic credits, student-teacher relationships, the frequency of exams, the nature of class discussions, the assumptions underlying common assignments, and the norms of class attendance have all proved to be significant stressors for international students (Schulte, 2009). The process of adapting to these factors is therefore a greater challenge to them than seems apparent at first. The experiences in the new country differ dramatically from those of their mother countries in some crucial ways, yet they typically lack any kind of preparatory program to help them adjust to the new country prior to departure from their country of origin (Andrade & Evans, 2009). The cultural backgrounds of students act as an important factor to a foreign student's adjustment process.

International students often have trouble adapting to issues such as language, diet, socialization, cultural diversification, and racial restrictions (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009; Rabab'ah, 2005). Many students have encountered cultural isolation, lack of support from their U.S. peers, and homesickness (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2000). Moreover, only a limited number of such international students seek personal counseling, in spite of the substantial acculturation stressors

that they face during their study period in a foreign country (Nesic et al., 2009). International students often face psychological trauma, which may be most treatable through counseling from specialists in their mother countries, who are more likely to understand their situation, than from those in the United States (Friedenberg, 2009). There are restrictions in place, however, which make access to these services difficult for these students. The restrictions relate to constraints in visa extension and securing funds to travel back home. The difference in the zonal times from their home geographical positions further makes it difficult to access the counseling services (Abu-Melhim, 2014). Consequently, separation from one's home culture brings greater complexity to the issue of how to manage student life than is likely to be the case among domestic students.

Students commonly face language difficulties, especially when their mother tongue is fundamentally different from English, as in the case of students from Arabic-speaking countries (Sherry et al., 2010). Foreign students face academic difficulties and issues related to English language proficiency, failure to meet the expectations of instructors, class performance, understanding the American system of education, and lack of support services. Poor English language proficiency has a high probability of affecting the foreign students' social and academic performances (Rabab'ah, 2005). Indeed, the linguistic benefits that students from former colonial possessions (e.g., Egypt or the United Arab Emirates) are absent in the case of Saudi students (Harb & El-Shaarawi, 2007). Consequently, language barriers result in challenges navigating through the U.S. educational system, in addition to the daily living experiences, and these influences interfere with students' ability to adjust to a foreign environment and culture (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Nevertheless, language issues are only a highly visible subset of the range of forces that intensify the challenge for international students, which include personal concerns, academic difficulties, and health matters (Gürüz, 2011). More recently, researchers have discovered another dominant challenge, namely, culture shock. Culture shock describes the agitation and anxiety foreign students feel as they experience peculiar cultural norms in the countries that they study in (Sherry et al., 2010). This anxiety may be unapparent on the surface, but chronic anxiety of any kind, if left unattended, can have serious long-term effects (Sherry et al., 2010). Thus, culture shock may have physiological consequences, such as headaches, physical wellbeing, ulcers, depression, psychological distress, lack of appetite, and insomnia (Gürüz, 2011). Culture shock also manifests itself in the apprehension that people feel after losing touch with their familiar cultural signs and symbols.

Challenges Faced by Saudi Students

This last section focuses specifically on Saudi students in the context of adjusting to a foreign environment for purposes of higher education. This insight is important, because several characteristics make the Saudi case unique. Toward this end, two unpublished studies are of most direct importance to the present study, namely, Hanson (2012) and Almotery (2009). This section will accordingly review Hanson's (2012) findings, followed by those of Almotery (2009), citing implications for the present study. It will then review the more general literature that has a bearing on the Saudi experience.

Hanson (2012) applied acculturation theory to analyzing the experiences of first-year Saudi students enrolled at UW-Stout (cf. Berry, 1997, 2003). Her method involved first interviewing three female and three male Saudi students enrolled in a summer ESL course at the institution to identify prominent themes. Her interview questions stemmed from acculturation

theory, so they identified themes focused theoretically on issues related to acculturation, rather than other kinds of issues (e.g., level of academic preparation), which might just as well explain some of the experiences reported by the interview sample (cf. Balls Organista, Marín, & Chun, 2010). Hanson (2012) then created a survey based on the themes that emerged in the interview process and administered it to a sample of 52 Saudi students enrolled in various courses at the institution.

Hanson (2012) reported her findings in the form of percentages, thereby creating a profile of normal behavior in the context of these students' study-abroad experience. For example, Saudi students at UW-Stout typically engaged in activities with one another about two to three times a week (p. 33). Most reported never feeling "unwanted" during team projects, but having "a good relationship" with their instructors, whom they felt were "approachable" (pp. 34, 38, 39). Most also reported "occasionally" visiting the Office of International Students (OIE), as well as finding the office very helpful (pp. 40, 41). Given a choice of types of student organizations, most reported belonging to religious ones (p. 35). A plurality also reported being comfortable in mixed-gender classes, associating with U.S. students about two or three times a week, finding the OIE "useful" or "somewhat useful," and sometimes attending OIE events (pp. 36, 37, 41, 42).

Nevertheless, one question in Hanson's (2012) study produced very mixed results, notably whether the respondents felt challenged to communicate with their instructors in English (p. 40). Similar percentages of responses to this question ranged from "never" (27%), to "always" (29%), with somewhat lower percentages associated with intermediate responses (viz., "rarely," 18%, and "sometimes," 20%) (p. 40). This singular finding may have deeper implications than Hanson's (2012) study was capable of investigating within its design. While it

is possible that the responses reflected confusion over the meaning of the question, it is also possible that they reflected complexity in that part of the student experience that involved interacting with instructors and speaking English with Americans at the same time. Hanson's (2012) study therefore has highlighted the importance of analyzing the motivations of Saudi students at UW-Stout more deeply than was possible in that research design.

This question of deeper motivations was the subject of Almotery's (2009) study of Saudi students at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. In that study, the author explored interview responses of several graduate and undergraduate students to identify common themes surrounding the experiences of these students in their study-abroad setting. Among the salient themes identified by Almotery (2009), motivations for studying in the United States included professional advancement, personal growth, the influence of family and friends, and the attractiveness of the combination of a reputable institution in the setting of a small city. Related to Hanson's (2012) mixed result from the question about challenges, Almotery (2009) found academic rigor, linguistic difficulties, and culture shock to be important challenges, while that of studying in a coeducational environment simply required some adjustment. However, the challenge of being subject to negative stereotypes on and off campus was significant. Based on Almotery's (2009) findings, the question of challenge is indeed quite complex and merits further investigation.

Aside from Hanson (2012) and Almotery (2009), the remaining literature addresses the Saudi experience in more general or peripheral ways, providing insights from several angles. It is especially important to observe that Saudi Arabia is different from most other Arab countries, and this fact may play a role in Saudi students' self-perceptions. These differences include the country's central position of religious authority in the Muslim World, the importance of

traditional cultural authority in urban life, and rapid but carefully planned economic expansion (Kamrava, 2011). In addition, most industrial jobs rely primarily on guest workers, which the country's official policy of "Saudization" aims to decrease proportionally over time, with certain expected effects on Saudi job expectations (Ramady, 2010). These changing expectations include decreasing government support for unemployed Saudi citizens, decreasing reliance on foreign workers to assume skill-intensive jobs in Saudi Arabia, and an increasing emphasis on the acquisition of marketable skills among Saudi citizens (Ramady, 2010).

Accordingly, the U.S. experience serves as a critical means of workforce development in Saudi Arabia (Alhazemi, Rees, & Hossain, 2013). Specifically, after completing their education in the United States, many individuals also serve as important sources of human-resource capital in their mother countries. The result is a substantial contribution to the home country's workforce, which becomes possible through successful policies of internationalization (Chang, 2014; Razek & Coyner, 2013). In turn, this development helps build the economies of those same countries. Thus, internationalization at U.S. institutions of higher education actually allows for economic and political connections with the students' home countries, which is essential to U.S. interests (Razek & Coyner, 2013).

Statistics indicate that the number of Saudi Arabian students seeking education in the U.S. has fluctuated from time to time. Several factors have contributed to this phenomenon. In 1999, for example, the U.S. experienced a significant flow of students from the KSA into their schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2000). However, there was a drastic decline in enrollments in 2001, following the terrorist attack of September 11. That year represents the height of the modern period of intensity along religious lines, given the new political culture that has arisen

since then (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). Consequently, the level of student flow into the country fell precipitously, even though it has since recovered in recent years (Abu-Melhim, 2014).

In addition to these factors, longer-term forces may also be at work behind such changes in Saudi readiness to send students to the United States. For example, as Saudi Arabia becomes more capable of training its own skilled workforce, the demand for U.S. education may fall over time. However, Saudi students also require more attention than do international students from most other countries, because they hail from a very different environment, which is often at odds with key aspects of Western culture. It is therefore possible that ongoing patterns of difficulty in the international experience will influence Saudi preferences for educational venue.

Indeed, as Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchins, and Pursley (2007) demonstrated, spiritual health is very important to academic success among students accustomed to a spiritual culture prior to attending college. Thus, international students from the KSA tend to experience exceptional challenges during their studies in the United States, especially from this perspective, given the conservative nature of their background. Considering the religious, academic, cultural, and gender diversities at home, KSA students must be very conscious of impractical or unreasonable expectations regarding foreign student participation and possible drawbacks to academic excellence (Haddad et al., 2006).

Along these lines, researchers have identified the cultural challenge to be most important, as it presents the greatest source of psychological stress or culture shock for Saudi students (Tas, 2013). The three most pronounced aspects of cultural adjustment for Saudi students in U.S. higher education appear to be those associated with the transition itself, followed by academic life, and then social life. Research addressing the transition mainly has to do with culture shock (Almotery, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010). Research addressing the challenges inherent in academic

life has focused mainly on differences in academic expectations or rigor (Almotery, 2009; Hanson, 2012; Rabab'ah, 2005). Research on adjustment to social life indicates tight-knit Saudi communities at U.S. institutions may impede Saudi students from socializing with American students (Razek & Coyner, 2013). The uncertainty regarding what to expect in American social settings, such as the content of meals or the prospect of being around people who are all drinking alcohol, is also a significant impediment.

An important aspect of cultural heritage is diet. For Saudi students in particular, questions pertaining to the *halāl* content of food are more complex than they usually seem to Americans, to whom it is often sufficient to separate the ham from the sandwich, for example, to meet their own dietary requirements (Howell, 2010). For this reason, international students must develop strategies of adapting to the foreign culture in order to study effectively. Indeed, most success among foreign students in facing the challenges of cultural adjustment comes from their ability to preserve their home country values, rather than sacrifice them for those of the host country (Chang, 2014).

In addition, different kinds of social structures exist between the two countries (Fluck, 2009). Implicit behavioral norms in the educational setting are often hard to decipher for Saudi students in the United States (Razek & Coyner, 2013). For example, there is often a significant difference between male and female impressions among Saudi students (Razek & Coyner, 2013). For example, Almotery (2009) found female students to have more deeply negative expectations about forming relationships with Americans than did male students, and accordingly, they rarely socialized outside Saudi circles. There is also a difference in terms of the presence of a broad range of behavioral cliques on a typical U.S. campus, which are less prevalent on a Saudi campus (Ashaalan, Alsukah, & Algadheeb, 2013). Among Saudi students, an individual

generally develops relations with Saudi students based on gender and personality. Among Americans, gender is hardly important, but subgroup is. Some subgroups are serious, while others can be very childlike and even countercultural. In Saudi Arabia, this range of differences is virtually absent. One interesting similarity between the two cultures, however, is that there are both entrepreneurial and conventional types of students (Al-Habib, 2012).

Despite the prominence of cultural challenges in considerations of the difficulties faced by Saudi students enrolled at U.S. institutions of higher education, language is also a factor, which merits mention. Indeed, the only way that Saudi and American students can benefit from one another is if they have an effective form of communication available and are actually able to exploit it (Abu-Melhim, 2010). Saudi students therefore naturally need to learn the English language, but Arabic is structurally and phonologically quite different from English, and there is limited opportunity in Saudi Arabia to practice speaking on a daily basis with English-speaking people. Certainly, learning a second language is a daunting task for most people, especially if their resources for doing so consist of little more than entertainment (e.g., movies) or other displays of culturally standard communication, which may violate some of their cultural norms (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Summary

In summary, this chapter provides an overview of the prior literature related to the topic of Saudi students' challenges in U.S. higher education. To do so, it presented three sections, to start with the broadest view and subsequently to narrow the focus. The first section examined the matter of internationalization in U.S. higher education. This section showed the growth in demand for U.S. higher education through the 20th century and the U.S. response to this increasing demand by enacting the Fulbright Act to facilitate international students' ability to

gain access to U.S. institutions of higher education, followed by the progressive internationalization of university programs independently. The second section focused more squarely on the challenges faced by international students in transitioning abroad for educational purposes, while highlighting culture as the primary source of difficulty in these experiences. The third section narrowed the topic even further, to discuss the Saudi experience in particular. This section accordingly emphasized the differences between Saudi students and other Arab students as being a significant consideration in understanding the uniqueness of the Saudi experience.

Across the literature, the main sources of inspiration for how the present researcher opted to construct this study include the recognition of the importance of dividing the noted challenges into academic, social, and cultural varieties (Andrade & Evans, 2009; Gürüz, 2011; Haddad, Smith, & Moore, 2006; Nesic et al., 2009; Schulte, 2009; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2000; Wilson, 2011). In addition, as explained in the first chapter, the implications regarding the complexity of the adjustment challenge raised in Hanson's (2012) study warrant paying specific attention to the nature of this challenge. Meanwhile, the prominence of the theme of challenge among Saudi students at a sister university of UW-Stout, as raised in Almotery's (2009) study, further emphasizes the need to explore this question in the present study. Accordingly, the next chapter lays out the methodology that this study will use to investigate this key question directly.

Chapter III: Methodology

As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to examine significant challenges faced by ESL students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), using the case of UW-Stout, with a goal of generating qualitative data and determining what the most important dynamics are. This chapter covers six sections. The research design describes the framework that guided data collection and analytical options. The sample selection explains the identification of subjects for the interviews. The instrumentation section details the construction of the structured interview. Data collection procedures describe the process of setting up and conducting the actual interviews. The section on data analysis explains the manner of organizing and interpreting the data, as laid out in Chapter IV. Finally, a short section on limitations sets boundaries on the extent to which it is possible to generalize the results from this study, given the selected research design.

Research Design

The research design used in this study was case analysis, utilizing an interview technique. Interviews are an appropriate data collection tool to use when the goal is to gather a person's insights in-depth, rather than superficially (Lee & Nelson, 2006). The method was therefore qualitative in nature. Specifically, it involved a deep level of qualitative research, requiring effort on the part of the researcher to understand the subject's point of view and faithfully present it as raw material for data analysis (Yin, 2011). As a case study, its design aimed to generate unique qualitative data from a limited range of subjects (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Because the purpose of this study was to examine the different challenges that ESL students from the KSA face at UW-Stout, it was reasonable to take an open-ended approach to asking questions, to permit students to raise issues that a preconceived, quantitative method

might fail to anticipate. This study therefore adopted a qualitative approach, featuring open-ended questions addressing the experience of transitioning specifically between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Questions focused on issues involving the following: (a) the challenges faced by KSA students at UW-Stout; (b) the effects of those challenges on academic, social, and cultural experiences; and (c) the effects of those challenges on future careers after returning to Saudi Arabia.

The objective of the interview-based research was to generate information that a survey approach may overlook (Lee & Nelson, 2006). Thus, it may reveal new questions to ask in future research, which current theoretical models may fail to anticipate. As a data collection tool, interviews have the disadvantage of requiring considerable time on the part of the researcher to schedule sessions, ask questions while paying attention to the developing answers to warrant follow-up questions, and prepare the resulting narratives in the form of readable records (Lee & Nelson, 2006). Data analysis is also usually time-consuming, especially using a case approach, because the researcher must patiently review the narratives for patterns, using a combination of logic and intuition (Wertz et al., 2011). For this reason, it is necessary to limit the range of subjects to a small number.

Sample Selection

The criteria for selection included student availability for participation, Saudi nationality, and the choice of a combination of female and male students. Accordingly, the sample studied here focused on an available group of Saudi ESL students at UW-Stout. To select participants, the researcher contacted the university's International Students Office. The intent was to identify six Saudi students enrolled in ESL who might be available to participate in the interview process, ideally three female and three male students, with enough experience in taking courses at UW-

Stout to be able to provide informed responses. In fact, there were considerably more male students than there were female students enrolled at Stout during the noted term, so it was infeasible to be very selective on the question of longevity at the institution, but the criterion of being from Saudi Arabia was easy to manage by comparison. The study took place in the summer, when there was limited availability due to the temporary departure of several students to visit family in their home country. The plan was to ask for six student volunteers and obtain their consent for interviews, evenly divided between female and male students. However, by the time of the interviews, only two female students were willing to participate, so the interviews proceeded with two female and four male students instead.

Instrumentation

The researcher interviewed each of the six participants individually (in a one-on-one format), in consideration of the Saudi cultural influence that would likely have an effect on group-level interaction. Specifically, among Saudi nationals, the presence of male students in the group may inhibit how freely the female students express their thoughts and feelings. For this reason, a focus group format would have been impractical. A survey with numerical responses would also have been impractical, because the goal of this study was to generate original insights. Finally, an open-ended questionnaire would have suffered from limited writing space or a tendency of participants to rush to complete the task. Thus, the best procedure was indeed the face-to-face interview. Each interview took less than one hour. The interview featured 13 open-ended questions, as presented in Appendix A.

The present researcher served as the interviewer. The interviews took place in English, with Arabic translation interjected only as necessary for clarification of meaning. The open-ended nature of each question was to encourage subjects to elaborate in any way that they

deemed appropriate. The interviewer occasionally added a follow-up question, when she felt that the subject had failed to address an important aspect of a question.

Data Collection Procedures

Following are the steps that the present researcher followed in gathering the data:

1. The researcher selected participants through UW-Stout's International Students Office and provided an informed-consent statement for students to review before they agreed to volunteer.
2. The researcher solicited six students to volunteer for participation in the study, based on the criteria stated above. She sent volunteers an email message to confirm their understanding of the nature of the study and willingness to participate, and to secure their signature to indicate informed consent.
3. The researcher scheduled appointments with each participant and conducted the interviews in the Memorial Student Center (MSC) at UW-Stout, limiting each case to one hour. She took notes to record the conversation, while using a digital voice recorder as backup, and reassured each participant that voice recordings would be subject to erasure upon confirming the correctness of the written narrative.
4. The researcher rewrote each narrative based on the notes and voice recording after the interview, and erased the voice recording. (Erasure of the voice recording was important for assuring the participant of strict confidentiality.)
5. After rewriting each narrative, the researcher contacted each participant individually with a copy of his or her narrative notes, asking for corrections as necessary. The researcher designated fictitious initials to distinguish among

narratives in permanent record. The researcher concluded the process by sending thank-you notes and reaffirming confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the narrative data from the interviews was thematic in nature (Wertz et al., 2011). This means that the researcher carefully analyzed each interview and annotated a code beside each word or phrase judged to represent a repeated idea. A tabular display of the data showing the number of times each salient theme occurred provided a basis for judging the reasons (in each participant's experience) for positive or negative aspects of experience. The researcher next sent each participant a copy of his or her own narrative, with the annotated themes visible, and requested correction of any noticeable errors. The researcher then updated the tables and proceeded to interpret the results.

Limitations

As explained earlier in this study, the main limitation due to the selected methodology had to do with the use of subjective inferences from interview material. Because qualitative studies often come with an implicit threat that the researcher will inject her own assumptions into the interpretation of the material, accuracy in this process depends greatly on the researcher's mental discipline and psychological separation from the object of analysis (Merriam, 2009). In the present study, benchmarking helped to maintain this rigor. Specifically, Appendix A links each interview question with one or more of the previously listed research questions. With this linkage in place, the present researcher looked for themes in the interview content that touched on the associated research questions, rather than looking for themes in an open-ended way. While the adopted method therefore sought to minimize the influence of subjectivity in the analysis, other limitations were due to the case-based nature of this study. These are as follows:

1. Case-based approaches may fail to generalize to other contexts (Smith et al., 2009). Indeed, differences between these findings regarding negative stereotyping and those previously uncovered by Almotery (2009) at UW-La Crosse attest to this fact.
2. The narrow pool of interview subjects available UW-Stout at the time of the study, and in the course that served as the source of participants, has increased the possibility that idiosyncrasies among the interviewees, such as personality-based differences, may have influenced some of the inferences drawn from the material. If such an influence was present in the analysis, it will have affected the conclusions, upon which future studies might base their own assumptions.

Chapter IV: Results and Analysis

The purpose of this study was to look into the various challenges faced by ESL students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), using the case of UW-Stout, to generate qualitative data and thereby draw inferences about the most important dynamics. The sample of one-on-one interview participants was from a summer course in English as a Second Language (ESL). Participants had to be Saudi nationals. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the challenges that female and male ESL students from the KSA face while studying at UW-Stout?
2. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA at UW-Stout affect their academic achievement?
3. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA to UW-Stout affect their social interactions?
4. What are the cultural experiences of female and male ESL students from the KSA, during their studies at UW-Stout?
5. What benefits do the female and male ESL international students from the KSA believe that their UW-Stout degree will bring, when they pursue employment in their home country?

The method used in this study for data collection was a structured-interview technique, addressing one participant at a time in a confidential setting. The structured interview consisted of 13 questions, listed at Appendix A. Each question supported one or more of the five research questions of this study. The first interview question asked what challenges the participant had faced, without specifying the type of challenge. The next three questions asked how those challenges had affected the participant's academic achievement, social interaction, and personal

development, respectively. Questions 5-8 addressed whether cultural differences had impeded social interaction. Question 9 asked about cultural learning in general, while Question 10 asked about opportunities for growth. Questions 11-13 focused again on challenges, in terms of how the participants' success in meeting them might have helped in their professional development.

This chapter first reveals the results of the interviews by research question, followed by an interpretation of those results with a focus on unstated assumptions that appeared to govern participants' observations. The interpretation section again follows the order of the research questions, followed by a section devoted to observable differences between male and female students, to conclude the chapter.

To aid in the analysis, the researcher recorded each interview in digital form and then converted it into a written transcript, with the help of selective notes taken during the interview. The researcher then carefully deconstructed the interview data by coding key words and phrases to mark salient or repeating themes emerging in the answers. An analysis of these themes produced the results presented below.

Participant Data

The participants consisted of Saudi students enrolled in a summer course in English as a Second Language (ESL), at UW-Stout. All participants were between 20 and 30 years of age. Two participants were female, while four were male. The imbalance in the ratio of male and female participants was due to a smaller than expected class size in the summer term due to temporary departures among many Saudi students to their home country. This change affected the number of female students more strongly than it did the number of male students, because there were already fewer female students than male students from the KSA prior to the summer term. The participants had been at UW-Stout between 4 and 19 months. Specifically, the female

participants had been at the institution between 4 and 7 months, while the male participants had been there between 12 and 19 months. The imbalance in terms of longevity at the institution was also a function of the small class size in the summer term, because there was little choice on the matter of selecting female participants. Among all participants, the effort was to identify people who had been at the institution for enough time to have experience in the classroom and in local life. However, this level of selection was only possible among the male participants, for the noted reason.

To preface this section, it may be worthwhile to note that participants appeared to understand the phrase "while studying" to mean essentially "with reference to studying." The intent of the phrase was to specify time spent at the institution, regardless of the activity. Otherwise, Interview Question (IQ) 1 sought to anchor the participant in thinking about challenges in general, as connected to the whole experience, while subsequent questions focused on specific aspects of the experience (see Appendix A). Nevertheless, the participant usually started an answer with reference to challenges in trying to study, learn, do homework, participate in class, or take tests. The participant then typically followed with some commentary relating to other (non-academic) aspects of the experience.

Research Question 1: What are the challenges that female and male ESL students from the KSA face while studying at UW-Stout? This question used answers mainly from Interview Question 1, with supplemental material from Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, and 13. The most salient themes were personal freedom, English-language fluency, personal growth, and social exchange (Table 1). In this context, personal freedom refers to the time or opportunity to attend to personal matters, whether religious or simply a matter of having personal time for hobbies or communication with family. English-language fluency refers to participants' beliefs

regarding their proficiency to engage in conversations, especially about academic topics. Personal growth refers to participants' feelings about their own self-improvement, typically as a function of the challenges that they face in this university setting. Social exchange has to do with all kinds of interaction with other people, including classroom discussions or casual conversations. Most of the observations about social exchange refer to trying to talk freely and openly with others.

Table 1

Challenges Faced during Study at UW-Stout

RQ1	**Mean References per Person**			**Highlights**
	T	**F**	**M**	
	n=6	**n=2**	**n=4**	
Personal Freedom	4.00	4.00	4.00	No family contact, personal time, social time.
English Fluency	3.83	4.50	3.50	Specialized vocabulary, spontaneity, syntax.
Personal Growth	3.67	3.00	4.00	Challenging self, purpose, self-reliance, willpower.
Social Exchange	2.33	2.00	2.50	Class participation, local customs, fear of misspeaking.

Top Categories (T = all; F = female; M = male)

Although the first challenges mentioned by most of the participants seemed to emphasize the heavy workload (Interview Question 1), the references varied more as the interview progressed. In the end, the predominant theme was that of personal freedom, even though the heavy workload was clearly a part of these references. For example, as one male participant explained, "The pressure placed on academic assignment and lack of time prevent me from practicing one of my hobbies, which is reading books that are not related to the University life."

In general, the references to workload emphasized a lack of time to attend to personal matters, including contacting family members.

The challenge of managing in English was a frequent theme throughout the interview. However, an important revelation in this sense was the presence of a substantial amount of specialized vocabulary in each course, rather than the simpler matter of insufficient fluency in English. For example, as one male participant explained, "One of the biggest-challenges that I have faced during my studies at UW-Stout has been the difficulty to understand some vocabularies, especially the ones specific to each course."

Meanwhile, however, these references often occurred near others that showed that the participants understood this aspect of their experience as a challenge from which they could grow. For example, one male participant observed that challenges of this kind "have helped me to improve myself, become a better person, and succeed in any area of study and life." Next, it is easy to see how language barriers affect social exchange, meaning that the participants experience less interaction with other people than they would if they could just speak Arabic. Thus, as a male participant explained, "When I want to say or explain something to American people, I can't say it correctly, so I prefer not to speak at all." This hesitation to speak also affected students in the classroom. As some participants revealed, they often believed themselves capable of answering an instructor's questions in class in terms of their intellectual ability, but regularly let the opportunity pass due to their linguistic self-consciousness. Other issues included difficulties in cultural interaction, adjustment, and complexity in the laws or norms of society.

Research Question 2: How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA at UW-Stout affect their academic achievement? This question mainly relied on the answers to Interview Question 2, but some material from Interview Questions 4, 7, 11, and 13 is also relevant to this question. The most salient themes included personal growth, English-language fluency, social exchange, and cultural awareness (Table 2). Of these, the previous section defines the first three. For its part, cultural awareness refers to observations about culture, such as Saudi students' observations about American culture and American observations about Saudi culture. Included in this category is the theme of respect for other cultures, which arose in the interview material, usually in a favorable way. That is, the participants observed that their ability to respect other cultures had benefited from the experience. They also observed that the local Americans tended to respect them, so there was no perceived bias or stereotyping.

Table 2

Challenges Affecting Academic Achievement

RQ2	**Mean References per Person**			**Highlights**
	T	**F**	**M**	
	n=6	**n=2**	**n=4**	
Personal Growth	3.67	3.00	4.00	Challenging self, purpose, self-reliance, willpower.
English Fluency	3.50	5.00	2.75	Specialized vocabulary, spontaneity, syntax.
Social Exchange	2.17	2.50	2.00	Customs affect understanding, fear of misspeaking.
Cultural Awareness	1.67	2.50	1.25	Gender relations, cultural learning, respecting differences.

Top Categories (T = all; F = female; M = male)

References to personal growth were most prominent in response to the interview questions attached to this research question. No other research question produced a result with personal growth in the strongest position. An example of this motive is in the comment by one of the male participants, namely, "I always try to learn something from the difficulties I face." However, English-language fluency seems closely related to this effort toward mastery. As in previous cases, several of the comments about English fluency overlapped with those relating to social exchange. For example, as one female participant noted, "[I] struggle to participate during classes, even if I have the answer, because of the language barrier." Thus, the lack of confidence in one's own abilities in the language was a stifling influence on interaction in the classroom.

Regarding English fluency, the female students seemed more sensitive to this question than did the male students. This outcome seemed to be a product of respondents' understanding fluency to include social interaction in conversation, rather than just linguistic ability *per se*. Thus, the implications of fluency overlap with those of uncertainties about social customs. As

one female participant commented, “I was afraid to speak, because I didn’t know Americans’ customs.” This issue has a close relationship with that of cultural awareness, notably the matter of gender relations. Thus, as one female participant observed, “When I had any questions regarding my class, I felt too shy to ask, because all my classmates and instructors were male.” Part of the reason for overlap may be that the lack of opportunity for social interaction impedes linguistic fluency.

The effect of limited language abilities in English on comprehension in class was an overarching issue. According to one participant, an instructor would often make a statement that the student found incomprehensible, but there seemed to be no real opportunity to stop the instructor to gain clarity about it. Even the novel nature of assignments might strike a Saudi student as a cultural issue, rather than just a pragmatic one. The use of PowerPoint presentations and working in teams was new, for example. Even in a course in mathematics, the manner of presentation was different from what had occurred in Saudi Arabia, where the instructor provided a straight explanation before having students try to complete a series of exercises. In the United States, the instructor was more likely to present the challenge before the student had learned the procedure to follow.

Research Question 3: How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA to UW-Stout affect their social interactions? For this question, the key interview material is in Interview Questions 3 and 8, with supplemental details from Interview Questions 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11. The most salient themes were personal freedom, social exchange, English-language fluency, and personal growth (Table 3). The previous sections define all of these. The results in this case were the same as those in response to Research Question 1, except for the order. Personal freedom again rose to the top, but social

exchange rose to second place in this case. This is reasonable, given the substance of the question, but it is interesting that personal freedom is still the main concern for the participants, even in the context of social interactions.

Table 3

Challenges Affecting Social Interaction

RQ3	**Mean References per Person**			**Highlights**
	T	**F**	**M**	
	n=6	**n=2**	**n=4**	
Personal Freedom	4.33	3.50	4.75	Private conversations, personal time.
Social Exchange	4.17	3.00	4.75	Perceptions of impatience or laughing at mistakes.
English Fluency	2.83	4.50	2.00	Social learning, spontaneity, syntax in head.
Personal Growth	1.50	1.50	1.50	Challenging self, purpose, self-reliance, willpower.

Top Categories (T = all; F = female; M = male)

In this case, the theme of personal freedom emphasized the issue of having too little time to socialize, including the time needed to interact with family back in Saudi Arabia. Thus, one female participant listed "homesickness and the difficulty to adapt with the new environment" among her most important issues. Meanwhile, there was also some discussion about the effect of speaking Arabic in social encounters, given the substance of Interview Question 7. This affected social exchange partly by discouraging language learning and partly through the phenomenon of language switching to maintain privacy. Thus, as one male participant observed, "When Saudis gather near American citizens, the conversations must be in Arabic (between Saudi people), which makes the American citizens feel annoyed." Meanwhile, in partial explanation of why students hesitate to speak English, one male student observed the process of mentally organizing

a sentence, which might prevent a person from keeping up with the flow of a discussion: "I think I need more time to organize my sentences when I have a conversation." Nevertheless, the theme of learning from one's challenges continued to emerge in this part of the discussion. As one male participant observed, "With all of those challenges, I became a person who relies on himself." Another male participant explained, American students had often "motivate[d] me by saying things like, 'Yes, you can do it by trying; everything is possible; just work hard on it.'"

Overall, four participants cited language barriers as impeding social interaction. Moreover, as in Research Question 2, the female participants emphasized linguistic impediments more than did the male participants (cf. the associated discussion, above). For the others, deadlines limited the opportunity to socialize. Longevity in country had no apparent effect on whether the participant cited English-language ability as an issue. Between the two female participants, as previously noted, one expressed hesitation with regard to talking to men, even among her instructors. Whether this hesitation also affected interaction with male Saudi students was unclear from the interview results. In Saudi Arabia, men normally teach men, while women normally teach women. The other female participant cited academic work pressures as crowding out her available time to interact with others. Thus, while language barriers limited interaction with Americans and other international students, time pressure barriers limited interaction with everyone, including the other Saudi students.

Research Question 4: What are the cultural experiences of female and male ESL students from the KSA, during their studies at UW-Stout? The fourth research question asks the students to highlight their significant cultural experiences in the United States while enrolled at the institution. The main interview item to answer this research question comes from Interview Question 9. Supplemental material comes from Interview Questions 5, 6, and 13. The

most salient themes were cultural awareness, personal freedom, personal growth, and professional growth (Table 4). Of these, professional growth is the new one in this discussion. This refers to participants' observations about their personal growth from the experience, but with professional implications, such as relating to the value of having certain attributes (e.g., solving problems effectively or easily interacting with people from other cultures) to one's professional career back in Saudi Arabia.

Table 4

Challenges Affecting Cultural Experiences

RQ4	**Mean References per Person**			**Highlights**
	T	**F**	**M**	
	n=6	**n=2**	**n=4**	
Cultural Awareness	4.00	4.50	3.75	Notice differences in family size, taboos, wine/pork.
Personal Freedom	3.67	4.00	3.50	Prayer space/opportunity, ingredients, Ramadan.
Personal Growth	2.17	1.50	2.50	Good challenges, purpose, self-reliance, willpower.
Professional Growth	0.50	0.50	0.50	Managing time/demands, new teaching techniques.

Top Categories (T = all; F = female; M = male)

The implication of family size in cultural awareness stands out as an interesting observation. This referred to the Saudi students' astonishment at how small American families were. They inferred this difference to be a simple product of culture, so they may have wondered on some level whether such small families might create feelings of isolation within one's own country. Saudi students appear to see large families, including closeness with extended families, to be essential to quality of life and perhaps mental health as well.

Otherwise, the focus of Research Question 4 on cultural matters naturally pushed the theme of cultural awareness to the top of the list of references made by the participants. Much of this discussion was factual, such as observations about eating pork or drinking wine, rather than examining feelings in intercultural encounters. The idea of respect for other cultures dominated this part of the discussion. For example, as one male participant commented, with regard to the Americans that he had met, "Many people respect all religions and beliefs, and they don't care what your religion is." Most of the participants also reported experiencing few impediments to their cultural or religious freedom, but two of them noted the difficulty that often arises due to the lack of available prayer spaces. As one male participant explained, "There is no place for performing prayers, and I don't have enough time for prayer." This seemed to refer to the necessity to return to his quarters to wash and pray, since there was no dedicated area opportunity nearer to the classroom. Nevertheless, once again, the theme of personal growth emerged in this conversation. For example, as one male participant commented, "I came here for a purpose, which is to earn my Master's degree, so I will overcome those challenges to learn and benefit from them." Lastly, the participants seemed to find cultural respect to be important to their professional growth as well. One male participant praised the effect of "understanding and respecting American perspectives regarding . . . issues, . . . beliefs, [and] opinions."

Observable differences between American and Saudi culture were especially prominent in the answers to Interview Question 9, including aspects of life that one would expect to be familiar even before the cross-cultural encounter, such as differences in dietary habits (notably the Islamic prohibition to consuming pork products). Nevertheless, at least in some cases, it seemed to be a significant cultural encounter to see these differences played out in real life, as though one were witnessing direct evidence of what was previously a myth about how certain

foreign peoples live. Two participants also mentioned the consumption of alcohol, but no one else included that issue, perhaps because it is only visible in social settings, which are rare.

The remaining themes among the top four listed in Table 4 included personal growth and professional growth, although the former was clearly more important than the latter. Overall, the most reasonable inference from this observation is that some participants saw a connection between their cultural experience in the United States and the benefits that they expected from it in terms of their broadening awareness of different societies. This benefit includes practical skills, in fact. As one female participant noted, the innovative teaching techniques that she saw made a genuine impression on her. Two participants also noted the benefit of having had to practice time management, which they understood to be relevant to their future responsibilities in professional positions. Thus, the participants cited challenges, their sense of purpose, and their greater ability to manage difficult time demands as having something to do with their cultural immersion.

Research Question 5: What benefits do the female and male ESL international students from the KSA believe that their UW-Stout degree will bring, when they pursue employment in their home country? For this final research question, Interview Question 12 provided the primary answer, while Interview Question 10 supplemented it with insights about those aspects of the campus experience that most strongly resulted in the noted benefits. The most salient themes were professional growth, English-language fluency, academic support, and cultural awareness (Table 5). Of these, the new one in this discussion is academic support. This refers to a feeling that other people at the institution have helped, motivated, or encouraged the participants through their challenges. Some participants observed, for example, that the ESL class was very helpful, especially in terms of how the faculty helped with matters other than just

learning English. However, support from fellow students, such as while working in student teams, was also important.

Table 5

Benefits Gained during Study at UW-Stout

RQ5	**Mean References per Person**			**Highlights**
	T n=6	**F n=2**	**M n=4**	
Professional Growth	2.33	1.50	2.75	Confidence, teamwork, managing time, English.
English Fluency	1.83	1.50	2.00	English valuable, learning skills, social learning.
Academic Support	0.33	1.00	0.00	ESL tutoring was valuable, well-written textbooks.
Cultural Awareness	0.33	0.00	0.50	Intercultural learning.

Top Categories (T = all; F = female; M = male)

Note: The low means are because this research question used only two interview questions.

In answer to Research Question 5, which focused most strongly on career aspirations, the most prominent theme was professional growth. As previously explained, this theme usually consisted of positive comments about the self-improvement expected from the noted challenges. As one male participant observed, "I have to work hard to achieve my goal." Nevertheless, when these participants discussed the benefits of personal challenges, the theme of English-language fluency was always nearby. Thus, some of the answers were quite pragmatic, such as one male participant, who explained, "I will have a certificate from the U.S. that proves proficiency in the English language, which is a significant asset to most companies there." It was interesting to see the theme of academic support show some degree of importance in this question, although the sheer number of references was modest.

Last in position in this case is the theme of cultural awareness, which produced an even smaller number of references, even though it was still more evident than all remaining themes, hence its inclusion in the table. There seemed to be a sense that cultural respect was part of what the students would need later in life, after their return to Saudi Arabia. Thus, as one male participant observed, "When we have any conversation with American people, we must not ask about their personal life, including age, relationship, and salary, while we do that in my country." This observation seemed to fall into the category of valuable cultural facts to know about Americans when dealing with them professionally. Aside from the benefit of the cultural experience or in terms of self-improvement by having taken on great challenges, a common practical benefit noted by the participants was, of course, the ability to speak English. One of the female participants, whose interest was evidently to earn credentials with which to teach English in the KSA, also noted the value of the teaching techniques that she learned, which she will be able to apply back home.

Interpretation

Starting with Interview Question 1, the first comments made by the students mostly had to do with academic rigor and such difficulties as meeting deadlines. However, as the interview progressed, other themes became dominant, so that none of the highlights under any research question referenced academic rigor as a theme. Instead, the most frequent themes among the top categories reported under each research question were English-language fluency and personal growth. To be sure, concerns with English-language fluency overlapped with those involving the difficulty of academic life, notably whenever the source of the academic challenge was the student's struggle with the English language. Thus, it is probably more interesting that concerns with personal growth occurred among the top-reported themes as often as did concerns with

fluency in English. This outcome suggests that the students were usually making sense out of their academic challenges by considering the benefits in personal growth that they would derive from meeting them.

The next most frequent themes were personal freedom, social exchange, and cultural awareness. The concern underlying the first of these mainly had to do with time constraints, such as when students have trouble attending to either personal or worship-related matters due to the strictness of the schedule that they must follow. There was also an overlap between the references to personal freedom and social exchange, in terms of one's capacity to interact with others without fear of embarrassment or frustration in the effort to communicate. Otherwise, the theme of social exchange tended to emphasize a lack of awareness of some of the cultural norms of interaction. Thus, there was a modest overlap between the themes of social exchange and cultural awareness as well, insofar as the latter may refer to knowledge of cultural rules. Finally, there was also some overlap between personal freedom and cultural awareness, specifically given the challenge of having to figure out whether food or drink at a gathering among students contained any prohibited ingredients in Islām. The students seemed to suggest that it was harder than they had expected to determine the *halāl* content of food, especially with regard to residual pork products in common food items (e.g., lard). (Lard appears to be present in certain crackers, which may accompany a dish like chili in restaurants.)

By comparison to these themes, professional growth appeared next in frequency, although only Research Question 5 directly addressed the benefits of the educational experience, in answer to which this was the strongest theme. Interestingly, professional growth outpaced English-language fluency in overall importance only in Research Question 5. The literature provided little basis for anticipating how strongly the students would feel about building such

competencies as self-reliance, self-confidence, and facility in interacting with Americans. Moreover, in the same context, the students cited academic support in a positive light, noting the helpfulness of the ESL staff, the model for emulation provided by the textbooks, and the opportunity to use some of the methods displayed at UW-Stout when teaching later in Saudi Arabia. Thus, academic support only appeared among the top-reported themes with a positive connotation in the study.

Aside from these observations, the foregoing results were easiest to interpret by scrutinizing the assumptions behind them. That is, when Saudi students' conceptions of what life will entail in the United States prior to their departure conflict with the reality that they encounter, there is an emotional effect, rather than just a cognitive one. This exacerbates any confusion that might ordinarily occur as the students learn the norms and rules of their host country and institution (Voss & Krumwiede, 2012). Difficulties in cultural interaction seemed mainly to involve the effort to learn unwritten rules of behavior, such as in gender relations. Participants would have predicted this, but the actual encounter with American practices seemed more confusing than one would have imagined, as implied by one female participant's statement in the context of her hesitation to talk to people, namely, "I did not know Americans' customs." This appears to be ordinary culture shock, which everyone experiences when first immersed in a foreign culture (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Despite some emotional difficulty, such as homesickness, however, the fact that most participants felt this to be a welcome challenge suggests that they have prepared well for the experience. For example, as one male participant noted, "Facing those different challenges taught me how I can rely on myself in this host country, as well as how I can balance between my academic and personal lives." Thus, the most common response pattern to Interview

Question 4 is the attitude that the challenges are an important source of learning and self-betterment. Still, with limited time to spend outside of coursework, there may be only limited opportunity to learn from these challenges. As one male participant commented, "Due to the pressure placed on academic assignments and lack of time, I don't have time to interact with my Saudi or American friends."

In Research Question 2, short deadlines were a common issue. Importantly, one participant explained the Saudi way of setting assignment deadlines, which involves negotiating with the students to see how much time will be necessary to complete an assignment. In the United States, the instructor sets deadlines very strictly and penalizes students for missing them, even though it may be difficult to meet them in every class. The assumption here may be that the instructor must want perfect work, rather than whatever level of quality is possible under the deadline. As one male participant observed, "They gave us many assignments with a short deadline, and we didn't have enough time to complete them." By this statement, the student evidently meant that Saudi students have to do assignments for more than one class at the same time, but each assignment demands considerable attention by itself, due to the language barrier.

In Research Question 3, lack of knowledge about the norms of interaction was an issue, exacerbated by limited English-language abilities. Norms of interaction involve much more than translating thoughts from Arabic to English. There is a rhythm to a conversation, body language, and other considerations (Egolf & Chester, 2013). Confusing nonverbal responses may result from one's use of an Arabic cultural pattern of nonverbal communication when Americans in the conversation are expecting an American cultural pattern instead. For example, the use of one's hands during speech is different between the cultures. Americans seem to move their hands to

reflect the emotion that they feel while speaking, while Arabs may point directly at a person merely to emphasize an idea, rather than to be demeaning.

These differences in meaning can be subtle, so they may cause confusion in face-to-face communication. Thus, to an Arab, an American may often appear impatient, intolerant, or annoyed, as noted in the interview material, in response to perceptions that the Arab's verbal and nonverbal communication are out of alignment according to his own cultural upbringing. Simple mispronunciation also contributes to this effect, and the result can be frustration, or perhaps humorous, at least when the only issue is pronunciation. As noted by a male participant, "Some American students laugh at me when I say or read something during class. . . . I have a different accent than them." For example, as pronounced using Arabic phonology, *parking the car* may become *barking the car*. (Arabs arguably experience an even greater source of levity when Americans try to pronounce the elegant phrase *min kulli qalbī* [with all my heart] before mastering the difficult Arabic letter *qāf*. The result is *min kulli kalbī* [with my entire dog].)

In Research Question 4, the focus among the participants was on cultural knowledge or awareness, far more than cultural adjustment. The latter might imply culture shock, while the former is more trivial. The participants emphasized the importance of cultural respect in general, meaning the need to learn about the culture of another people as a basis for interacting with them respectfully. They observed interesting American customs, such as leaving the family early to be independent. Cultural bias was also part of this question. Interview Question 5 asked how comfortable participants felt practicing their customs. Interview Question 6 asked about cultural stereotyping. No one reported any stereotyping or pressure by Americans in response to Islamic practice. One female participant noted that she felt free to wear the hijāb (the complete covering for women in Islamic tradition) and to withdraw for daily prayers. However, the other reported

that class attendance and the absence of a dedicated prayer area deprived her of the opportunity to pray. She noted how hard it was during Ramadān, the Islamic month of fasting, which was in July this year. The Muslim style of fasting requires abstaining from both food and drink all day. As she explained, "I think [an 8-4 schedule] is too much time for a student who doesn't eat or drink anything to spend in classes."

Finally, in Research Question 5, it is important to highlight the fact that the low numbers simply reflect the low number of interview questions assigned to this research question. That is, most repetition of themes occurred between interview questions, rather than within the same one. Since only two interview questions produced quantities of thematic references for Research Question 5, there was little opportunity for students to repeat themes.

Otherwise, there was little evidence of any difference between assumptions and reality in Research Question 5. In this case, the participants evidently had a clear idea of why they were studying in the United States. They emphasized the practical objective of earning a strong professional degree to their career back home. Interestingly, however, they placed strong emphasis on self-reliance and becoming a better person through difficult challenges. Thus, the experience was more than a means to an end. Rather than reveal any wish for an easier path, they instead voiced appreciation for the rare opportunity for transformation in the experience. Those classroom experiences that the participants found most rewarding were tutoring, interacting with American and other international students, working on class presentations in teams, and doing interesting exercises in American textbooks. They saw social interaction as mainly a way to build fluency in English, although one participant also mentioned the value of interaction as a way to learn to work with different personalities.

An implied question in this project was whether there might be differences between male and female participants. Figure 6 therefore examines the most important issues overall and provides the mean results for female and male students, respectively. Indeed, fluency in English was most important to both groups, but then some differences emerged. The female participants saw cultural awareness (i.e., knowledge of cultures, as opposed to experience) as next in importance, while the male participants instead saw social exchange (i.e., interpersonal interaction) as filling that position. This makes sense in terms of the different social norms regarding gender relations, as female students must be very careful and circumspect in their social interaction, unlike male students. However, both groups found personal freedom to be third in importance. In this case, the reference includes freedom of personal time, family time, and time for worship.

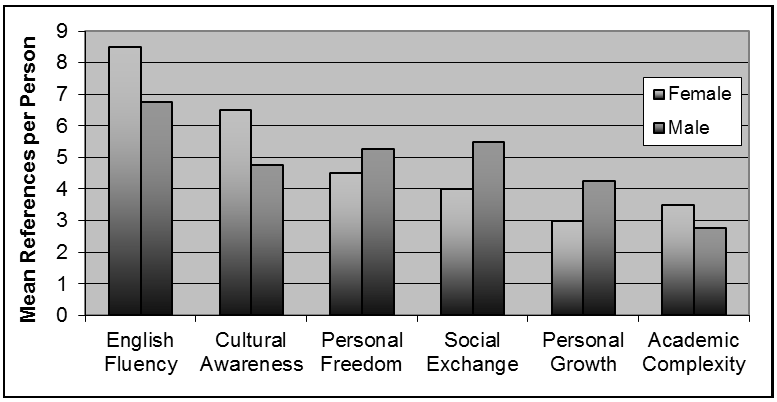

Figure 1. Main issues for students by gender.

Note: In descending order of most-referenced theme to least-referenced theme overall.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine different challenges faced by ESL students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), using the case of UW-Stout, to generate qualitative data that might enable inferences about the most important dynamics. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the challenges that female and male ESL students from the KSA face while studying at UW-Stout?
2. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA at UW-Stout affect their academic achievement?
3. How do the challenges faced by female and male ESL international students from the KSA to UW-Stout affect their social interactions?
4. What are the cultural experiences of female and male ESL students from the KSA, during their studies at UW-Stout?
5. What benefits do the female and male ESL international students from the KSA believe that their UW-Stout degree will bring, when they pursue employment in their home country?

The researcher interviewed each of the six participants in a one-on-one format, using a structured interview tool (Appendix A). The researcher looked for recurrent themes in the interview data, and quantified their relative frequencies for display in the tables in the preceding chapter. The previous chapter thus showed the results from the interview data in answer to each of the five research questions that asked participants what challenges they faced as international students, illustrating the response patterns in data tables. This chapter concludes this study with recommendations for practice and closing thoughts.

Conclusions

Overall, the participants revealed their perceptions from being in a challenging and often trying environment, but generally found the challenges to be a welcome and necessary aspect of their life at UW-Stout. They seemed to reveal a kind of faith that the difficulties inherent in the full experience will make them better and stronger as people. Moreover, they fully expected that the qualities of self-reliance, ability to manage multiple tasks under heavy pressure, and ability to deal with people from many backgrounds as being distinct sources of professional advantage from which they will benefit upon their return to the KSA. Drawing from Research Question 1, the significant challenges faced by ESL students from the KSA include both linguistic and cultural components. Linguistically, the issue is the sudden need to do all of one's work in English. This issue is common to all cross-cultural experiences where one must speak a foreign language. Culture shock is evident in the sample in the form of the unexpected degree of difficulty that the students experienced in negotiating their academic demands, as predicted in the literature (Andrade, 2009). The theme of isolation also emerged in the interview material, which confirms the observations of Nesic et al. (2009), Rigas (2009), and Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2000), regarding the effects of cross-cultural experiences.

Research Question 2 reinforces the observations made from Research Question 1 about the central role played by purely academic needs in adjustment, while agreeing with the literature on this role (Gürüz, 2011). It is clear that there are differences related to academics that present challenges to Saudi students, such as professors' setting strict assignment deadlines and students' use of someone else's work as their own. Thus, many assumptions are at work in the minds of the students, which create expectations that often conflict with reality. This dynamic plays a role in hampering adjustment (Schulte, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010).

As an important ancillary observation, which may have implications for how faculty may be able to address the issue, the American position on plagiarism has roots in Islamic legal practice, in which a jurist's reputation lay in the ability to write original scholarship (Makdisi, 1999). Yet the students from the KSA seemed to find this academic expectation perplexing. For example, as one female participant observed, a significant challenge consists of "learning rules . . . such as plagiarism," adding that "in my country, they don't care about this aspect."

Research Question 3 then turns to social interaction. Once again, English-language abilities are the main impediment, but here one can see the role of nonverbal behavior in this effect. Learning English in a Saudi classroom is the same as learning a foreign language in any classroom setting, in that it emphasizes verbal behavior, while usually ignoring the nonverbal cues associated with culture (Abu-Melhim, 2010). This kind of training seriously hampers a person's ability to enter into a conversation in English (Andrade & Evans, 2009). Meanwhile, constraints on time due to heavy workloads keep students from practicing their conversational English (Schulte, 2009).

Research Question 4 focuses on the cultural experience directly. The students experienced no bias or stereotyping, contrary to predictions raised in the literature (Haddad et al., 2006; Wilson, 2011). There is little critical substance in the interview material regarding culture, except some difficulties associated with the practical concerns of worship, which some of the literature addressed (Niyozov & Pluim, 2009; Rabab'ah, 2005). How to pray during the day without a facility for a masallā (place of worship) was an issue, as was the effort to fast during Ramadān. These are indeed important spiritual issues (Nelms et al., 2007). However, there was no apparent rift between Saudi students and others out of discomfort due to cultural differences,

contrary to expectations (Lee & Rice, 2007). Instead, lack of time and difficulty speaking English were the main impediments.

Finally, Research Question 5 examines the benefits expected from the students upon their return to Saudi Arabia. Results confirm the importance of career relevance to their choices (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Understanding the students' professional motives can provide important insights that instructors may be able to use in helping smooth the way. For example, the pronounced weight that the students placed on self-improvement, self-reliance, and determination should resonate strongly with Americans, because these are also part of the ideal American character. These observations go beyond some of the literature's emphasis on practical benefits (Chang, 2014). However, they agree with other literature, which emphasizes developing talent specifically to meet academic challenges (Sundstrom, 2009).

Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations come from the findings of this research.

1. Set up daily networking during ESL non-meeting days with American volunteers, who ask questions about culture and interests, to prompt informal practice.

Through ESL, the institution already promotes mastery of English, but it would help to create greater constancy of practice. Extended exposure to native speakers can be exhausting to the student, but controlled opportunities for practice may work.

2. Train daily in nonverbal communication, such as by having students interpret body language.

American volunteers act out various feelings and attitudes; students interpret. If culture shock exacerbates the anxiety associated with language practice, then training in cultural flexibility

may help. The foregoing recommendation, to supplement ESL, would require assistance from professors of speech, psychology, diversity, and culture.

3. Enumerate specific differences in assumptions about student expectations from this study, and prepare an end-of-ESL seminar to facilitate discussion.
4. Review Islamic norms of scholarship from history, and interpret American norms from the Islamic perspective in a similar seminar format.

Both of the foregoing recommendations have to do with strengthening the confidence of Saudi students by revealing differences in assumptions, while also showing them that some of the assumptions underlying American academic practice actually have a link to their own history. Thus, it might help to connect assumptions to cultural principles and compare them. Perhaps Arab students could study extracts from Makdisi (1999), as their final study task in ESL. Meanwhile, professors in philosophy and history should assist here.

5. Provide separate networking events and nonverbal-interpretation classes for female students of all nationalities.
6. Create an *international women's quiet room* on campus, with a clean, unfurnished carpeted area that disallows footwear, for prayer or private meditation.
7. Wherever possible, shift some schedules to hours after sundown (e.g., hold ESL at night) during the month of Ramadān. (Ramadān lasts a full month and starts about 11 days earlier each year, so it rotates across the calendar over time. It is understandably impossible to adjust most schedules, but some effort would go a long way to show understanding.)

To address issues relating to social interaction, in fact, Recommendation 1 and Recommendation 2 already offer solutions. However, an important area is gender relations. To address this,

Recommendations 5 and 6 are ideas that try to accommodate an important area of cultural sensitivity among female students in particular. In the area of cultural experience, one issue is accommodating prayer, specifically for the female students, as the men have greater flexibility in this regard. The institution may hesitate to accommodate religion, as it strives to be neutral, but these solutions may be feasible. Recommendation 7 simply addresses the holy month of Ramadān in particular.

8. Permit the use of foreign-language dictionaries in the classroom for students on F-series visas, as this will greatly enhance the learning process.
9. Invite instructors to attend an end-of-ESL event in which international students team-present their goals and aspirations in a PowerPoint format.

These final recommendations have to do with aligning the student experience more directly with student career goals. Here, the most important consideration is instructors' understanding of student needs. It is unnecessary to treat all students identically as a way to promote fairness; rather, the issue is accommodation. Meanwhile, the final recommendation above actually has an ulterior motive, in that those students without familiarity with PowerPoint or team-based study arrangements will have a chance to apply these concepts in the safety of the ESL environment, rather than suddenly having to adjust to them in a full-immersion classroom. Meanwhile, the instructors in attendance will be able to witness first-hand both the sincerity of the international students and their perceptions of the unique opportunity that they have, to study in this country.

Recommendations for Research

Institutions that have only recently begun to invite international students to their campus life may see very different answers come forth from the same questions. It would therefore be helpful in the future to replicate this study in other institutional contexts. Each replication might

produce new thoughts, which the researchers could compile with prior efforts to produce a broader view. In addition, replicating this study with other nationalities would add needed dimensionality to the picture. This broadening of the research on two key dimensions might produce a comprehensive view of the underlying challenges of the cross-cultural learning experience in at UW-Stout.

The results of research of this kind may thus serve to clarify or refine theories of cross-cultural adjustment to apply to the specific circumstances of the experience of international education. The dynamics at work in this context are more specific in nature than are those in the general population of people in cross-cultural situations. That is, the larger population includes people who seek employment, refuge, or political freedom overseas, as well as those ranging in ages from the very youngest to the very oldest. Among students, the motivations are mostly similar, as are the ages. The performance orientation among the Saudi students evidenced in this study, which includes self-reliance, determination, willpower, and a sense of purpose, makes sense among students who have embarked on a significant challenge in the promotion of their career objectives. If most international students share this trait, then it would be helpful to measure it directly, using the appropriate surveys. Future research should therefore focus on those aspects of these findings that other groups of international students are likely to hold in common, especially in the realm of motivation.

Concluding Thoughts

It is reasonable to interpret the observations drawn from the interviews featured in this study as contextual in nature. That is, the response patterns presented in the preceding chapter have to do with a student experience that is largely a product of the success of the institution at accommodating them, in addition to student's periodic interactions with the local community.

For many people on both sides of the international experience, there seems to be some level of mystery. Saudi students can sympathize with other international groups to some extent, given their common circumstance, yet there is some mystery there as well. International students can try to understand their American hosts, but again, there is some mystery there. American students and instructors can try to empathize with international students, but the evidence of the mystery there seems to emerge every time one sees Americans treating international students in the same manner as other Americans. Americans may see this as fair or respectful, because they see equal treatment as essential to their concept of justice. Yet the international students are at a distinct disadvantage, because it is virtually impossible to meet the standards of cultural fluency that govern successful social interaction. As a remedy, they withdraw, preserving the mystery.

Given all of the cultural questions, the key to unlocking the mystery of cross-cultural relations on an international campus of an institution of higher education is probably different from simply having answers to consult, from some expert source. The problems that different international students encounter are more likely to result from an inability to determine what the right questions are, on all sides. People who have little idea of what questions to ask, in any context, just tend to withdraw from the situation. This may be why international students so often find a need to withdraw from social interaction with other nationalities, as well as why American students so often find it hard to interact with international students in general. After a degree of effort, such as during a cross-cultural event, the uncertainty that one must endure in any cross-cultural interaction simply becomes exhausting. Yet the participants seldom know what ideals they share with one another. The effort to connect based on superficial criteria gets in the way. It is the hope of the present researcher that this study has revealed some of the

deeper questions, which everyone may ask, that may substitute for all of those superficial ones that otherwise just get in the way.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research by volunteering to be interviewed. Your knowledge and experience is critical to my research and may help futures students from Saudi Arabia. This interview will last no more than one hour. During the interview, I will ask 13 questions. The interview will be recorded and will be transcribed later into written form.

Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what challenges did you face as an ESL student from KSA while studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the U.S.? [RQ1] (The "RQ" reference in brackets refers to the numbered research question that aligns with the interview question.)
2. How do these challenges affect your academic achievements while studying here? [RQ2]
3. How do these challenges you faced while studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout affect your social interactions? [RQ3]
4. Do you think that these challenges have hindered your personal development? If yes, how have they hindered your development? [RQ1/2/3]
5. Do you feel comfortable practicing your customs and religious values at the University? If yes, can you explain? [RQ1/3/4]
6. Have you encountered any type of stereotyping during your educational life at the University? If yes, what types of stereotypes have you encountered? [RQ1/3/4]
7. Do you feel that the Arabic language has created a barrier for effective communication between yourself and American citizens? Explain [RQ1/2/3]
8. Do you receive social support and acceptance from the local US students while studying at your university? Explain [RQ3]
9. What have your cultural experiences been during your time at the University of Wisconsin-Stout in the U.S.? [RQ4]
10. What opportunities for growth do you feel have been provided you by studying at this University? [RQ5]
11. What is the most challenging thing you have faced so far while studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout? [RQ1/2/3]
12. Do you think that facing these challenges will help you professionally when you return to KSA? Explain [RQ5]
13. Describe your overall experience of studying at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. [RQ1/2/4]

Thank you, again, for your participation. I appreciate your time and consideration. If you would like a copy of this study when it is completed, I would be glad to offer it to you per your request.