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Academic experiences of international students at Eastern Michigan University

Denice Gravenstijn

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Academic Experiences of International Students at Eastern Michigan University

by

Denice Gravenstijn

Thesis

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Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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in

Sociology

Thesis Committee:

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Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to all international students at Eastern Michigan University who have participated in making this research project a reality. Giving their time to share their stories, experiences, challenges, goals, and accomplishments helped in adding needed value to this thesis.

This thesis is also dedicated to my husband, Kasey Vliet, who has spent endless nights and days listening to my ideas and reading all of my proposal and thesis drafts. Your encouragement, love, patience, and support have helped me through this challenging but amazing journey.

I also thank my family for cheering me on all the way in Suriname, South America, and also here in Michigan. I am grateful for their encouragement and support through this whole process.

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Abstract

International students who move to the United States to study can experience both positive and negative challenges during the process of achieving their educational goals at the higher educational institutions they are enrolled in. This study explored how academic experiences of international students from different racial/or ethnic groups may or may not differ from each other. For this qualitative study, fourteen international graduate students of diverse backgrounds enrolled in the Winter and/or Summer 2018 semesters at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) were interviewed. The results of this study show that there are differences as well as similarities in the academic experiences of international graduate students that can be found in first arrival experiences, cultural challenges, social networks, communication challenges, academic challenges, behaviors, and attitudes. The results of this research provide an overview of the academic experiences of international graduate students of diverse backgrounds and can be used for future research and for greater awareness at institutions and organizations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The international student population faces a variety of challenges when they move from their home country to a different host society such as the United States of America (U.S.) to live and study. The challenges these international students might face when starting their academic or educational trajectory in U.S. higher educational institutions can be both positive and negative. The positive challenges can be any challenges that might help the students understand and enhance the academic environment that they are exposed to, resulting in encouragement to learn and achieve more. However, the negative challenges may put a lot of stress on different aspects of the student's life. These negative challenges may be cultural (cultural discrimination, lack and loss of identity), health related (stress), or social (lack of support groups).

International students moving to the U.S. can experience negative challenges, such as cultural shock, lack of language proficiency, and various forms of cultural discrimination (Zhang and Goodson 2011; Aydinol 2013; Akthar and Kröner-Herwig 2015; Baier 2015). International students can also be confronted with social and psychological obstacles, such as differences in cultural values, traditions, and customs; loss of shared identity and support groups; and beliefs that are different from those prevalent in their home country (Leong 2015; Zhang and Goodson 2011; Aydinol 2013; Akthar and Kröner-Herwig 2015; Baier 2015; Rajapaksa and Dundes 2002).

These challenges international students experience can occur in their day-to-day adjustment within the academic environment and can be both negative and positive. Research shows that the greater the student's cultural differences are with the host country, the higher the likelihood of challenges and vice versa (Akthar & Kröner-Herwig 2015; Leong 2015; Poyrazali and Kavanaugh 2006). For example, European students might have fewer difficulties adjusting to

U.S. culture because of their shared ethnic and/or cultural similarities to Americans in comparison to Asian students (Leong 2015; Akthar & Kröner-Herwig 2015; Baier 2015).

The academic experiences within their academic or educational trajectory can be in the form of positive and negative challenges as well as achievements. For international students, academic achievements, academic satisfaction, and successfully finishing their academic program are a high priority within the academic environment (Aydinol 2013; Wongtrirat 2010). International students' experiences in the academic environment, also called academic experiences, can be defined as "educational experiences [...] that can occur both inside and outside the classroom" (Jeffers 2017:223). For example, academic experiences may occur between students, between students and faculty, with campus departments, and during campus events (Jeffers 2017; Leong 2015).

Aside from the different challenges international students may face, they are also able to accomplish a variety of academic achievements or successes at the universities where they are enrolled, which can be categorized as more positive challenges and/or experiences. For example, successfully attaining a degree within higher education in the U.S. makes it possible for international students to have greater economic security and improved social status if they decide to go back to their country of origin. Because of these factors, academic achievements for international students are a high priority (Wongtrirat 2010; Aydinol 2013).

Another challenge that international students can face when moving to the U.S. to pursue their academic achievements is the language barrier. This is the case for international students who have English as a second language in comparison to international students who have English as their native language (Aydinol 2013; Akthar and Kröner-Herwig 2015; Misra et al. 2003). International students have to take different language qualifying tests such as the TOEFL

(Test of English as a Foreign Language) to measure their English language skills as a requirement to be admitted to any higher educational institution. Although different language tests are required to determine if students are able to actively communicate, participate, and understand the courses in the English language, these requirements can serve as a challenge, as well as an accomplishment, for students as they try to successfully accomplish their academic goals (Wongtrirat 2010; Misra et al. 2003).

Apart from cultural and language barriers, international students may also experience direct and indirect cultural and racial discrimination. According to Lee and Rice (2007), students may encounter “discrimination based on their culture and national order also called neo-racism/new racism” (Lee and Rice 2007:389). Cultural discrimination on campus is for the majority experienced by international students of color especially in comparison to native born students who are not students of color (Lee and Rice 2007; Akthar and Kröner-Herwig 2015; Rankin and Reason 2005). Do some students of color experience more cultural discrimination than others—particularly in comparison between host country students of color and international students of color? Despite the many studies that have been done on international students’ experiences, there still is a gap in understanding the differences in academic experiences of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The current study focuses on exploring and understanding within-group differences, and the reasoning behind them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to explore and compare differences in academic experiences of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

These academic experiences contain successes and challenges that can be experienced during campus events, within campus departments, with faculty and staff, and with other students.

Research Question

What are the differences in the academic experiences of international students from different racial and/or ethnic groups on campus?

Supporting Questions

1. Are there differences in how international students from different racial groups, ethnic groups, and countries of origin are treated in the classroom by other students and faculty?
2. Are there differences in how international students from different racial groups, ethnic groups, and countries of origin are treated by staff at campus organization/institutions?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature on international students shows various perspectives and results that present an overview in understanding the international students' academic experiences in the U.S. This section will review the literature that focuses on the academic experiences of international students and thereby examine different factors that help outline the experiences of such students. These factors include assimilation, adjustments to U.S. academic institutions, race and ethnicity, and campus climate.

Assimilation

In understanding the academic experiences of international students within educational institutions in the U.S., it is helpful to know that students go through the same adjustment process in the U.S. as immigrants. Healey (1998) explains two main stages of assimilation that can occur when students (immigrants) come to the U.S. The first stage is cultural assimilation or acculturation, in which immigrants are introduced to and/or learn the cultural components of the dominant culture, such as learning the English language, food culture, norms and values, and educational system. The second stage is structural assimilation, which is focused towards the rest of the host society, mainly its social structure. This component includes the institutions and public sector of the society.

Assimilation is a complicated process in which integration into the higher educational institutions or within the host society as a whole does not automatically mean a success of acceptance or equal treatment from the host society. This is primarily the challenge for international students (immigrants) from different racial/ethnic minorities (Healey 1998).

Assimilation into American culture is a process that brings with it a lot of change for international students from different racial/ethnic groups. Barth (2010) argues that there is a difference between the process in mobility between international students (immigrants) of color and whites. This upward and downward mobility is influenced by their racial and/or ethnic background.

When international students of color immigrate to the U.S. (e.g., higher educational institutions) and decide to assimilate, they generally assimilate into a downward mobility. This means that, for example, an international student who is black and immigrates to the U.S from Haiti is automatically categorized under the Black or African American minority by U.S society. In this example, the skin color and/or the physical appearance of the student helps determine and classify the stereotypical person from the black community by majority members in the host society. In comparison, an international student (immigrant) from Ireland is automatically introduced into white society, which means the introduction into the upward mobility of the majority (Barth 2010).

In addition, upward and downward mobility can also be influenced by socioeconomic background. Joppke and Mowarska (2003) argue that the socioeconomic background of international students (immigrants) from different racial/ethnic groups can greatly influence how they assimilate into the host society (Barth 2010; Joppke and Mowarska 2003; Healey 1998). Depending on socioeconomic background, international students (immigrants) may enter either the upward or downward assimilation within the educational, economic, political and sociocultural domain of the host society.

The upward mobility, or upwards assimilation, as Morawska (2003) describes, can be seen as the “mainstream middle and rising lower class” and the downward mobility or downward

assimilation can be seen as “struggling lower and underclass” (Joppke and Morawska 2003:134). For example, compare a middle class Asian student (immigrant) from India with a college degree and family and/or social networks versus a lower class Latino student (immigrant) from Dominica with a middle school diploma and neither family nor social networks. In this case, the Asian student (immigrant) is able to rise into the upward mobility because of his education and the family and/or social networks that he has to help him adjust to America. However, the Latino immigrant can have a more difficult time without the necessary social resources and is easily pushed into the downward mobility. Thus, mobility trajectory is determined in part by race and/or ethnicity, education, family networks, and other social networks.

The upward and downward mobility is accompanied by “capitals.” The more capital one has, the easier it can be to be pushed into the upward mobility and vice versa. The three types of capital include social capital, cultural capital, and economic capital. Social capital can be understood in terms of resources and networks that one has. Cultural capital includes educational attainment, habits, and specific cultural values. Lastly, economic capital relates to power and assets/material goods (Anheier 1995; Swartz and Zelberg 2005).

Given this inequity between the mobility tracks and capitals of international students (immigrants) of color and white immigrants, how can both groups become successful? International students, specifically students of color, can have better success if they maintain their racial/ethnic identity in combination with their culture instead of fully assimilating into U.S. culture (Joppke and Morawska 2003). This approach helps international students (immigrants) of color gain better mobility within U.S. society. Although education is important, it does not mean that international students (immigrants) automatically are guaranteed success on educational, economic, and political levels. This is also the argument for learning the English language;

although it may help with communication skills and survival, it is not a guarantee for success or even a solution to the growing racial problems or tensions between immigrants and host majority societies (Barth 2010). The next section focuses on students' adjustments to the U.S. society. Adjustment to the U.S., in general, involves cultural and structural factors, but adjustment to U.S. institutions of higher education has unique challenges.

Adjustments to U.S. Academic Institutions

International students' adjustments to educational institutions in the U.S. is a complex process to understand. Therefore, it is helpful to review this process through the lens of the academic experiences within the institutional environments that the international students are in. These experiences are explained through the theoretical lens of Goffman and Bourdieu. Academic institutions structure experiences across a broad array of contexts beyond the classroom.

Academic experiences can be defined as “educational experiences [...] that can occur both inside and outside the classroom” (Jeffers 2017:223). These experiences can be interactions or social encounters between students, faculty and staff, with campus departments, and during campus events (Jeffers 2017; Leong 2015; Glass et al. 2015). Every interaction within one of these contexts shapes the academic experiences of the international students.

In understanding the academic experiences of international students through their social interactions and encounters (verbal and non-verbal), it is important to understand the meaning of the interactions in the setting or environment they occur. A theoretical framework that might explain these social interactions and encounters is dramaturgy, or impression management. This is a concept from Erving Goffman in which he uses the analogy of a stage to explore the social

interactions and encounters of performers in their natural setting or social situation they are in (Solomon 2013; Goffman 1959; Ho et al. 2013; Whiteside and Kelly 2016). International students in this context are seen as the performers or actors, the academic environment on campus as the natural setting or stage, and the human subjects (e.g., faculty) as the audience. All three components have a specific role when interactions occur.

The impression management reveals the “front stage” and the “offstage/backstage” of the performer. This means that performers present themselves to their audience as the best “self” they can be. Every time an academic experience is created, international students present themselves in a very conscious way to prevent embarrassment from occurring. For example, international students may engage in brief conversations with native-English speakers in class when they are asked a question in order to avoid struggling with the English language and to prevent miscommunication. The offstage or backstage presents an audience of other performers. The other performers can be seen as the other international students that have to go through the same adjustments to U.S. culture (Ho et al. 2013; Whiteside and Kelly 2016; Pettit 2011; Solomon 2013).

Social encounters between international students (performers) and faculty (e.g., professors/audience) help with understanding the reasoning behind the students’ impression management (personal self) and also that of the faculty (e.g., professors). Goffman’s impression management is important because it shapes understanding of the students’ experiences not only in that single encounter but also at the higher educational institution (setting) that the student is enrolled in (Whiteside and Kelly 2016). In addition, social encounters create the path to building social networks and therefore their social capital. However, the type of experiences (positive or negative) explored by international students as well as the level of inclusion and treatment

perceived during these experiences, may help students either form and gain capital or lose and not develop capital at all (Anheier et al. 1995).

Glass and colleagues (2015) state that the interaction and the relationship between international students and faculty is an important measure to determine students' "sense of belonging", especially in the academic setting they are in (Glass et al. 2015). They argue that "professors are likely among the most influential persons shaping an international student's academic trajectory, and student-faculty relationships have been found to significantly affect students' learning and motivation" (Glass et al. 2015:353). The study also showed that participation and inclusion, personal ways of knowing, and possible selves were three key factors that decided if the international student felt included in the academic trajectory. The first factor—participation and inclusion—relates to the professor's empathy, support, understanding, and appreciation for the international student. For example, professors can encourage international students by having before and after class conversation to make sure the student understands the course and to check for any questions that the student is afraid to ask in class.

The second factor—personal ways of knowing—relates to the having international students share their firsthand international and cultural experiences on certain topics in class. The last factor—possible selves—is the factor in which the professor and the student interact regarding the student's future goals and career ambitions (Glass et al. 2015). The sense of belonging can be linked back to Goffman's theoretical framework, impression management, in which the face-to-face interaction of the international student and faculty/professor takes place in class (natural setting). Both students and faculty can be seen as performers and audience.

When students interact with professors, the students try to present themselves in the role of the student. In return, professors present themselves in the role of faculty (authority). For

example, if students receive feedback regarding how to improve their engagement in class and work on self-improvement, they are receiving feedback from the professor (audience) to improve the self-presentation (self). Even though the roles are different by interacting one-on-one, the in-class settings accentuate the social behavior and treatment perspectives for international students to experience the sense of belonging through interaction as a form of inclusion within the class setting (Whiteside and Kelly 2016; Ho et al. 2013). Goffman's theoretical framework of impression management is used in the current study to understand the depth of international students' academic experiences in terms of the challenges and accomplishments they encountered. This includes their reaction and/ or attitude towards those challenges as well as their behavior in social situations, both inside and outside the classroom. The theory and concepts used will help to outline and make sense of the results generated in this study.

A second theoretical approach is through Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital. Through this framework of capitals, we can explore and try to understand the differences in academic experiences that international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds encounter. The first concept is social capital, which refers to social networks and social resources that a person can be a part of, engaged in, or exposed to in the social environment that they are in (e.g., friends' group, community, family, cultural organization, health institutions) (Anheier et al. 1995; Stephens 2007). Social capital can also be defined as "the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network" (Stephens 2008:1175). When international students move to the U.S., they have to build that social capital up again by making new friends and by getting to know the available resources at the college and social environment they are in (Glass et al. 2015; Rajapaksa and Dundes 2002; Misra et al. 2003).

Bourdieu's social capital may be used as a sociability measure. It can reveal, test the level and the amount of social capital international students have, and test their effort in sociability when adjusting to their new social environment. Building social capital is a process and takes time to be developed; therefore, it is seen as a form a social investment, not only on the personal level or in the space but also on the institutional and cultural level (Julien 2015; Ihlen 2005). This means that international students should not only develop this social capital on a personal level with students and professors but also with other social organizations and institutions that are present in their social space and broader academic environment (cultural capital). This process of engaging at the individual and environmental level, also known as the habitus, can help international students become connected to the academic community by participating in social encounters (Inghilleri 2005; Ihlen 2005).

Cultural capital, on the other hand, refers to social and cultural values, habits, and educational attainments and accomplishments; it can be seen as “embodied, institutionalized and objectified” (Erel 2010:643; Anheier et al. 1995; Swartz and Zelberg 2005). International students' cultural capital has to be explored and rebuilt within their new social setting. They have to adjust to the new U.S. culture, educational system, language, and other elements within the academic and social environment (Erel 2010; Aydinol 2013: 82; Baier 2015; Zhang and Goodson 2011).

Building social and cultural capital are key factors in helping international students adjust to their new social environment; it also is a support system for achieving their academic and other life goals. Making new friends, either through co-ethnic ties or through Americans; exploring the institutions on campus; interacting with students; staff, and faculty can help international students build needed capital for survival (Leong 2015; Anheier et al. 1995;

Stephens 2008; Glass et al 2015; Ihlen 2005; Inghilleri 2005). A lack of social and cultural capital can influence the type of experiences, both positive and negative, that international students encounter.

An important aspect in the adjustment phase of international students that is linked to building social capital is their personality. Does the student have a strong self-esteem level? Does the student have self-efficacy? Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) explored different components that play a role in the personal adjustments of international students. The results of their study showed that the development of personal ties of international students with co-ethnics has significant influences on the self-esteem of international students. Secondly, when international students build ties with Americans and much stronger ties with co-ethnics, it helps them improve their self-esteem (Al-Sharideh and Goe 1998; Lee and Charles 2007). In this adjustment process, the international students use impression management (Goffman 1959) to present themselves to the American students, who are the audience they are performing for in the academic environment (front stage). The backstage, however, is for the co-performers, who are in this case the co-ethnics with whom they build stronger ties due to shared culture, language and other values in comparison to the American students (Whitesite and Kelly 2016; Ho et al. 2013; Pettit 2011).

The length of a student's residence in the U.S. can likewise impact the way in which they adjust to U.S. culture and therefore also their academic experience (Zhang and Goodson 2011). Ramsay et al. (2007) also studied the self-perceptions of students in their first year of college by looking at their age and origin and by focusing on their support groups and levels of satisfaction in the first year. Similar to Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998), Ramsay et al. (2007) conclude that high levels of social support lead to effective emotional, social, and practical support during the

adjustment phase of international students in comparison to those who have a weak support system (Ramsay et al. 2007; Al-Sharideh and Goe 1998; Rajapaksa and Dundes 2003). In order to guide and support these adjustment issues, studies by Ramsay et al. (2007) and by Galloway and Jenkins (2009) argue that universities should focus on both the evaluation as well as the improvement of the provided services and needed support for the first-year international students within the university context (Ramsay et al. 2007; Galloway and Jenkins 2009).

Another key factor in helping international students adjust to their new social environment is through cultural capital, which refers to social and cultural values, habits, and educational attainments and accomplishments (Anheier et al. 1995). Constantine et al. (2004) show that proficiency in the English language is also another factor that can shape the academic experiences of international students. The study showed that international students who were less proficient in the English language were more depressed than students with higher proficiency in the language (Constantine et al. 2004; Akhtar and Kröner-Herwig 2015).

How international students experience their academic trajectory in the U.S. depends also on components such as their ethnic/ racial group, cultural background, native language, and the level of acceptance in U.S. society (Leong 2015; Aydinol 2013). Aydinol (2013) states that international students experienced obstacles and culture shock when adjusting to the U.S. culture differently because of their cultural background. Elements that emerged from the cultural shock that international students encounter are language and communication problems, life style and cultural differences, pedagogical differences, lack of social capital, and lack of positive experiences (Aydinol 2013; Poyrazli et al. 2001). Cultural shock (Baier 2015:22) is “the consequence of strain and anxiety resulting from contact with a new culture and the feelings of loss, confusion, and impotence, which are due to loss of accustomed cultural cues and social

rules” (Baier 2015:22). Cultural shock is also influenced by “different learning cultures, challenges and perseverance, social interactions and their impact, and lastly personal growth” (Aydinol 2013:82).

In addition, international students who come from non-Western countries and speak a foreign language have a higher likelihood of struggling with cultural shock in comparison to students from Western countries who speak English (Aydinol 2013; Baier 2015). This is also true for international students who come from non-Western countries and speak English in comparison to students from Western countries who do not speak English. Furthermore, international students from Europe whose proficiency in English is higher are able to adjust to U.S. culture more easily and to build better social networks during their academic trajectory in comparison to students from both European and non-European countries who lack English proficiency (Leong 2015; Aydinol 2013; Baier 2015).

Apart from the different challenges that international students encounter when adjusting to U.S. institutions of higher education, such as building social networks, pedagogy adjustments, cultural adjustments and language adjustments, international students’ identity is also another factor that these students are challenged with (Rienties et al. 2012). With the aim of better understanding international students’ identity within their academic experiences, the next section explores identity in terms of the concepts of race and ethnicity.

Race and Ethnicity

Through the concepts of race and ethnicity, we can explore if international students encountered different academic experiences based on their identity. In order to understand the

differences in the concepts, as well as the results generated out of this research, it is important to know what they mean and how to execute them.

The concepts of race and ethnicity are two different concepts; however, they are often used interchangeably. The construction and categorization of race and ethnicity has therefore caused several debates and conflicts. Race and ethnicity are not just a categorization of social groups, but they are also a form of self-identity and social identity in the social realm (Murji and Solomos 2015). The concept of race has been defined through a variety of viewpoints by classifying race based on a person's skin color or physical appearance to distinguish one person/group from another (e.g., a person is categorized as black, red, white, yellow) (Loue 2006). Omni and Winant (2015:2), however, argue that "race and racial meanings are neither stable nor consistent...". The authors also believe that "race is a social construction and not a fixed, static category rooted in some notion of innate biological differences" (Omni and Winant 2015: 13). This means that, race is continually changing and is not static, but dynamic. Race can be seen as a social construct carrying with it a large history based on unequal racial categorization that roots in politics, economics and the social life of communities and should not only been seen through physical differences (Omni and Winant 2015).

Classifications that have been commonly used in recent censuses are based on and defined by geographical and social group characteristics, such as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and White (Loue 2006). The definition used by the U.S. Census Bureau (2016) for race is defined as follows: "Race is a person's self-identification with one or more social groups. An individual can report as White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, or some other race. Survey

respondents may report multiple races” (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). Regarding the classifications used by the U.S. Census Bureau, Omni and Winant (2015:2) note that “the U.S. Census employs a system of racial classification, but many individuals and groups cannot locate themselves within it. They cannot conveniently fit into any of the designated racial categories. A person’s own sense of racial identity may differ significantly from how other people see and categorize her/him”. In the current study, this note was very evident, as racial categorization used in the U.S does not exist in international students’ home countries.

Furthermore, Ajrouch and Kusow (2007:75) note that “while classifying individuals strictly on the basis of physical appearance can become complicated, in most cases whether one belongs to the majority group or that of the minority, s/he has no need to assert her/himself, rather it becomes readily apparent”. International students (immigrants) that come to the U.S. are automatically classified under one of the racial categories of the host society mentioned above. Whether they are aware of the categorization system or not, their identities and their status are pre-selected.

Depending on international students’ racial category, international students are categorized into a majority or minority group. However, their “identities not only emerge from the social and racial boundaries that define a majority/minority status in the host country, but they also reflect those in the homeland environment” (Ajrouch and Kusow 2007:76). For example, students from Africa (dark skin) are categorized under racially Black, which means they are automatically grouped with Black/African Americans who are seen as a minority population in the U.S. In comparison, students from Europe (light/white skinned) are automatically grouped to the majority. For the majority group, there are more privileges in terms of status and respect in comparison to the minority group. Although international students

(immigrants) might be a majority in their home country, they may become a minority in the host country.

In comparison to race, ethnicity is related—but not limited to—a social group or community that shares a common culture and has the same norms and values. Race and ethnicity are concepts that are both used to describe social groups in the community. The different definitions of ethnicity that have been used in the past have been based on nationality, biological traits, psychological identities of people, and a persons' cultural history (Loue 2006; Murji and Solomos 2015). Ethnicity has also been described as “self-identification and the identification by others of membership in a distinct socio-cultural group based on specific national and/or biological characteristics” (Loue 2006:35).

In addition, ethnicity theories used show that the concept of ethnicity does not only include the biological components that were identified in race but also the religious elements that helped make sense of this concept. Omni and Winant (2015), however, note that the concept of ethnicity, as has been used in the U.S., was more related and focused on the ethnic white varieties and not as much focused on the immigration ethnic identity that is used in the present day. The categorization or the distinction of white ethnic groups, therefore, is being used as guidelines or measures to categorize immigrant ethnic groups. Therefore, similar to race, ethnicity in the U.S is also related to inequality on different fronts. This is noticeable in the so called hyphenated ethnic groups (e.g., Italian American, Jewish American, Mexican American and African American) (Omni and Winant 2015).

According to the U.S. Census (2016:1), ethnicity “determines whether a person is of Hispanic origin or not. For this reason, ethnicity is broken out in two categories, Hispanic or

Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Hispanics may report as any race”. The census definition of ethnicity is very limited, as it only focuses on Hispanics and no other ethnic groups.

Racial and ethnic classifications can serve as constraints for international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. How the racial and ethnic categorizations have been made by scholars or by the census in the U.S. can be different than how international students identify themselves. For example, a student from Suriname, according to these categorizations, will be placed in the skin color category “black” and in the racial group “Black/African American” in the U.S. However, in Suriname, the group category would be Creole or Afro-Surinamese and not Black or African American. While this student will share a skin color identity with the categorized race, the student’s cultural background (ethnicity) will be different from the Black/African American racial group; therefore, this international student may have difficulties identifying with native born Black/African American students. When international students come to the U.S. they are set in a racial or ethnic category that applies to the U.S. and may not apply in the country of origin. Murji and Solomos (2015:12) therefore agree that because race and ethnicity are an important part of one’s identity, “identity cannot simply be imposed. It is also chosen, and actively used, albeit within particular social contexts and constraints”.

In this study, the concepts of identity in terms of racial and ethnic group are used to identify if there are differences in the experiences of international student based on their racial and ethnic background. Considering that the concepts of race as used by the census bureau can be foreign and irrelevant to international students, this study enabled international students to state their identity. Although in the demographics section the census racial and limited ethnic categorization was used as a guideline, in this study, international students were given the

opportunity to share what their racial and/or ethnic identity is in order to understand how they identify themselves and not how the host society classifies them.

Campus Climate

In order to understand the academic experiences of international students within educational institutions in the U.S., it is also important to understand how international students from different racial and ethnic groups interact in the campus climate of the educational institution where they are studying. The campus climate is used as a platform to understand the racial and ethnic settings that the students' experiences take place in (in and out of the classroom). António and Monteiro (2015) argue that differences in ethnic, racial, and cultural background play an important role in the academic experiences of international students in the host society. In addition, acculturation attitudes of minority groups are partly influenced by the social adjustment context and how they are treated by the majority group in the host society (António and Monteiro 2015; Rajapaksa and Dundes 2003).

Rankin and Reason (2005) researched how students on campus from a diverse racial background perceive the racial climate that they were in. Comparing students of color/minorities' experiences to White students/majority, the study revealed that minority students had different perceptions of their racial climate in comparison to white students. For example, the unequal treatment reported by Whites was more in terms of gender (female) compared to the students of color, who were treated unequally based on their race. In comparison to White students, students of color experienced a non-welcoming campus environment (Rankin and Reason 2005; Lee and Rice 2007).

How students perceive the racial climate is important in understanding what the impact of cultural discrimination can have on the international students' academic trajectory. International students face challenges within the campus environment (in and out of class) through their peers, staff and faculty, and other people within the campus environment (Lee and Rice 2005; António and Monteiro 2015). Rankin and Reason (2005) also noticed that educational interventions regarding improvement of the racial climate on campus were more effective and better received by students of color than by white students. Minority students were more open to diversity compared to non-minority students.

The strong willingness for diversity shown by minority students is because of their concern with discrimination; therefore, campus diversity could influence perceptions of discrimination and even help decrease the amount, which can be very beneficial for equal treatments of minorities on campus (Ward and Zarate 2015). In addition, Ward and Zarate (2015) and Yoso et al. (2009) argue that campus racial climate should be taken into consideration when addressing attitudes and perceptions of students and staff towards diversity because it gives a better overview in understanding the values of diversity for each group (Ward and Zarate 2015; Yoso et al. 2009).

Apart from having a diverse racial climate, Okoye-Johnson (2011) proposes that multicultural education could also be of influence on student's racial attitudes. Although his research did not focus on graduate students, it gives an overview of the advantages of multicultural education on student's attitudes from both minority and majority groups (Okoye-Johnson 2011).

Interventions by academic institutions can help improve the racial climate on campus in order to better the experiences, perceptions and educational outcomes on campus (Rankin and

Reason 2005; Peterson et al. 1999; Yoso et al. 2009). Henry et al. (2011) agree that educational interventions such as increased diversity programs in colleges can help improve racial and ethnic climates on campuses. Their research showed that students increasing the awareness of racial and ethnic identities between both white students and students of color helped improve positive attitudes and perceptions as well as behavioral dimensions on campus (Henry et al. 2011; Rankin and Reason 2005; Lee and Rice 2007; Yoso et al. 2009).

In other words, racial diversity and different interventions within an academic campus climate can give us a general understanding of the environment that international students are exposed to and can help explain the challenges that they encounter within the environment that they are in. In the current study, the campus climate was used as a tool to understand what and how international students experience and view the campus environment they are in. This in terms of their own interactions and perceptions that may or may not influence their attitudes and behaviors towards other domestic students, faculty, and staff.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter, the methods and execution of the research will be described by explaining the type of research conducted and presenting the research design through a discussion of the sample size, participants, semi-structured interview guide, procedure, and analysis.

Type of Research

This research project used a qualitative approach in conducting the study and focused on exploring the academic experiences shared by international graduate students from different racial and ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds. This was executed through fourteen interviews, of which twelve were face-to-face and two were by phone. A qualitative approach was used to provide students in this study with a platform in a natural setting (on campus) to share their experiences in terms of their opinions, feelings, and emotions in order to help describe and understand their academic trajectory at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) as a whole. This approach also helped to elaborate and understand the environment and the culture at EMU from the perspective of international students from a diverse background. Dixon et al. (2015:282) confirm that qualitative research is considered more ‘naturalistic’...whereas experiments (qualitative design) involve observing people in a lab...[F]ield research involves observing people in their natural settings—in their homes, their places at work...” (Dixon et. al. 2015: 282). Apart from Dixon et. al. (2015), Creswell (2014:4) also argues that a qualitative approach “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem”.

Furthermore, the qualitative method approach in this study made way in “understanding issues through broad and open-ended inquiry, understanding behaviors of values, beliefs and

assumptions” and therefore was a useful approach for exploring the academic experiences of international graduate students as newcomers to the U.S. academic realm (Choy 2014:101).

The in-depth interviews that were conducted in this study began with semi-structured questions along with a topic list to guide the interview. The topic list contained the following topics: campus experiences (on campus, in class with students, faculty, staff, departments), racial discrimination, perception of diversity on campus, and U.S. cultural adjustment experiences.

Although face-to-face interviews were the main method used, two phone interviews were used to accommodate two of the participants who were not able to meet in person. Face-to-face interviews are a great tool for exploring and understanding the experiences of international students as research subjects, or as “persons who construct the meaning and significance of their own realities” (Seale 2004:257; Creswell 2014). Although two phone interviews were included, the face-to-face interviews proved to be a better way to build trust with the participants, giving them the opportunity, freedom, and assurance of confidentiality to express their opinion (Seal 2004). In addition, this approach was a great way to recruit more respondents. The in-person contact facilitated trust. Further, it gave the flexibility to use probes in terms of understanding and knowing more details behind respondents’ answers, perceptions, and experiences (Dixon 2016; Creswell 2014). The use of face-to-face interviews as a data collection approach also helped informally to strengthen the verbal and non-verbal interactions between the researcher and the participants compared to the two phone interviews that were conducted (Choy 2014).

Sample

The Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), specifically its Office of International Admissions, was contacted via phone and in person regarding posting of the

recruitment material and recruitment of participants for the study. This approach was taken to have students voluntarily participate in this research. After full approval from the UHSRC/IRB (see Appendix F), the given recruitment information was posted on the OISS website for students to see. In addition, international students were approached at OISS and asked to participate in the study. This led to word of mouth and the start of a snowball sample being executed. The snowball sample helped with the recruitment of the majority of international students for this research project.

The sample size for this study was set at twenty interviews; however a total of fourteen respondents were interviewed as saturation was reached at twelve. To assure that the assumption was correct after interview number twelve, two additional interviews were conducted, confirming that saturation was met. The two interviews showed the same themes that were observed and found in the prior interviews and did not add new information to the set of interviews that had already been conducted. Saturation is “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” (Guest et al. 2006:59; Constantinou et al. 2017). This means that the likelihood of collecting more new information or data is saturated (Creswell 2014). Saturation is a key component when doing qualitative research since it gives an idea of how many interviews to conduct from the sample population (Guest et al. 2006; Creswell 2014).

A sample size of twenty interviews was used as a starting point in order to ensure a large enough sample size to be able to identify the range of meanings attributed to the subject under study by the target population. In prior research from Creswell (2014), it is argued that a good sample size for qualitative research (e.g., grounded theory studies) would be between twenty and thirty interviews (Creswell 2014; Guest et al. 2006). Although the recommended number for interviews is between twenty and thirty, this study reached saturation at twelve. The number of

twenty interviews as the target sample size was needed to make sure that there were enough possible interviews in order to meet the saturation point in the study (Guest et al. 2006; Constantinou et al. 2017).

The participants of this study consisted only of master's level or higher international students at Eastern Michigan University who were enrolled in either the winter and/or summer semester of 2018 and who had been studying and living in the United States for more than one semester.

Procedure

Once students replied via email and or phone, students were included on the participant list. The participants were contacted via email and phone and asked to participate in a face-to-face interview. In two situations, students were not able to participate in a face-to-face interview and participated via a phone interview instead. All fourteen participants in the study signed the informed consent to participate in the research project. The informed consent (see Appendix C) was constructed by the researcher and approved and stamped by the UHSRC/IRB. The informed consent was given in person to thirteen out of the fourteen respondents to sign, and one informed consent was emailed and signed electronically by the participant.

The face-to-face interviews that were conducted in this study contained semi-structured questions and a topic list that was used to guide the interview. The topic list contained the following topics: campus experiences (on campus, in class with students, faculty, staff, and campus departments), racial discrimination, perception of diversity on campus, and U.S. cultural adjustment experiences. In addition, at the end of each interview, demographic information was gathered (see Appendix A). The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix G. A few of the semi-structured questions asked were:

- How has your experience in the U.S. been so far?
- Do you remember your first day on EMU campus? If so, please describe it.
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your classmates versus how you are treated by your friends?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your professors in and outside of class?
- How would you describe your experiences with campus departments starting with when you first applied to EMU (e.g., Records and Registration, Student Center, OISS)?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way international students are treated by students, professors, and staff based on their race, ethnicity, and/or nationality?
- Are there international organizations or social groups on campus that you interact with? If yes, how has your experience been so far?

During the face-to-face interviews, the interview was recorded using two audio recorders. In addition, notes were taken manually. The recorded notes and audio were transcribed into a word document and color and thematic coded for analysis. Additionally, the notes and audio materials were kept in a safe place and were only accessible by the researcher for protection of participants' confidentiality.

Qualitative Analysis

The data analysis in this study used grounded theory to analyze the face-to-face and phone interviews and focused on an inductive approach to analyze the collected data. This

approach helped to identify the concepts used to understand the academic experiences of international students. The concepts used in the theoretical framework of this project were impression management (dramaturgy) and social and cultural capital. These theoretical concepts were used because they helped with better understanding students' experiences through their emotions and shared concerns and accomplishments during the interviews. Impression management was a guide in understanding students' attitude and behavior and how they reflected on the treatment they received in the social context that they were in (in class, around other peers, with faculty, staff, and or campus departments/institutions). The theoretical concepts of social and cultural capital, on the other hand, were used as a guide in understanding how and if students build and/or gained any social and cultural capital (e.g., social networks, new values, habits) during their academic trajectory at EMU.

Furthermore, a grounded theory approach was used as a guideline to collect the interviews or research data; literature regarding international students experiences also aided in understanding and making sense of the topic. This process helped to create ideas and form approaches through the lens of theories and through the theoretical concepts (Charmaz 2006). Creswell (2014) notes that the inductive part of the analysis helps to detect emerging themes or codes and concepts that were used to organize the data collected (Creswell 2014; Dixon et al. 2016). As Dixon (2016: 280) notes, "[...] codes are not usually predefined as in survey research, but rather emerge through an inductive process." In this research, the emerging themes or codes and concepts from the theoretical framework were used to understand and develop arguments regarding the topic of international student academic experiences and to interpret the relation with the theoretical concepts used by Goffman and Bourdieu (Dixon 2016). By reading through the interviews or collected data and exploring the emerging themes, the researcher determined

key themes to further guide the analysis and detect where concepts emerge in the data.

Therefore, in accordance with grounded theory, qualitative coding was one of the key parts when doing qualitative research for this study because it helped to organize, interpret, compare, and give better understanding of the information that was collected through the fourteen interviews (Charmaz 2006).

The analysis in this project required different phases of transcribing, coding, and categorizing. First, a list of all participants was made in Microsoft Excel with the specific characteristics ranging from the date and time of the interview, the country of origin, the gender, age, race and ethnicity, and the location where the interview was conducted. The recorded interviews were transcribed by hand using Microsoft Word. Each transcribed interview consisted of a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio.

After the process mentioned above, the emerging themes, or codes, and concepts were identified and labeled. Some of the emerging themes were language barriers, cultural challenges, academic challenges, educational system, social interactions, social support system, positive and negative experiences, and stereotypes. This process is also called coding, which is described as “attach[ing] labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about.” (Charmaz 2006:3). The above themes that emerged were used to help organize, manage and understand the data that were collected through the fourteen interviews with the international students. Because the interviews in this research were collected at different times in the process, memo writing and analyzing started with the first interview, which served as a narrative guideline (Creswell 2017; Charmaz 2006).

Additionally, the themes were used to categorize and interpret the collected data. The relevant data detected were color coded/labeled. This step is important to take unneeded data out (also called “winnow”: “a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it.”) (Creswell 2017:195). In order to understand the emerging themes, interpretation was explored by searching for any emerging relationships. By using these steps to help maximize the output and in order to understand the topic Charmaz (2006:3) argues, “Through studying data, comparing, and writing memos, we define ideas that best fit and interpret the data as tentative analytic categories.” Finally, the themes that were used will be presented in Chapter 4: Results. The themes are as follows: first arrival experiences, cultural challenges, social networks, communication challenges, academic challenges, and differences in behaviors and attitudes.

Potential Benefits

The respondents in this research project did not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, by participating in this study, an opportunity was created for them to share their academic experiences as international students, which can help provide awareness and improve academic services to international students during their academic journey at Eastern Michigan University. The knowledge provided can be used as a stepping stone to accomplish equal treatment for all students. Furthermore, each participant received a thank you card and a compensation of \$10 for participating in this research project.

Researcher's Reflection

The researcher, who is an international student from Suriname, South America, has a personal connection and familiarity to the topic international students' academic experiences. One of the reasons for the researcher's interest in the topic was based on her own reflections and questions in understanding how other international students experienced their academic trajectory in higher education, specifically at Eastern Michigan University, where the researcher conducted her study and is currently finalizing her master's education. The personal aspect helped with reflecting on experiences and questions such as what challenges and positive experiences other international students encounter; were they treated differently because of their race, ethnicity, or cultural background; and how did they deal with the challenges.

Because of the personal link to the topic, the researcher is aware of her personal bias towards this topic. Therefore, literature was reviewed in understanding the different viewpoints and identifying key theoretical concepts to execute the topic in an academic and professional manner. Through a personal connection, the researcher was able to understand and sympathize with the challenges, as well as accomplishments, that the participating international students encountered. Having a personal connection and being an international student were great tools to interest students in participating in the current study, which made participating students more comfortable sharing their stories. When students got emotional and uncomfortable, the researcher asked if they wanted to continue and gave them time to reflect as well as used a brief self-disclosure as an international student herself to make them feel respected, heard, and comfortable.

One of the key components in the study was the racial and ethnic aspects of the participants. Although in the demographics section (see Appendix A) U.S. census categories

were used, these were not forced onto the student but used as a guide for the study. Participants were therefore given the freedom to share and express their own racial and ethnic identity. The reason behind this approach was that, similar to the researcher, the racial and ethnic categorization system used in the U.S. is not a known attribute in the international students' home country. This was validated as students expressed how frustrating it was to be put into a box that does not even represent their own and group identity. Listening to other student's experiences was a great opportunity in identifying challenges, as well as similarities, through key themes that were identified during the interviewing process of the research.

Risks

The current study had minimal risk. All fourteen students participated on a voluntarily basis and presented their opinion to the researcher (investigator). The students were allowed at any time, when feeling uncomfortable with the subject, to withdraw from the research. Fortunately, this did not occur during the study.

The primary risk of participation in this study was the potential loss of confidentiality. This risk was addressed by assigning a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio. Therefore, no names of the participants were used during the interview.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, the results and analysis of the research data will be presented. In the first section, the demographics (see Table 1) of all fourteen respondents will be presented. Each respondent was given a pseudonym for confidentiality. The main objective of this chapter is to present the experiences of all fourteen international students by using the themes that emerged during the analyses. The themes will be presented below.

Gender	N	%
Female	9	64%
Males	5	36%
	14	100%
Age	N	%
20-24	4	29%
25-29	6	43%
30-34	3	21%
35-39	1	7%
	14	100%

National Origin	N	%
Middle East	4	29
Africa	1	7
Asia	9	64
	14	100%
College	N	%
College of Arts and Sciences	5	36%
College of Education	4	29%
College of Technology	1	7%
College of Business	4	29%
	14	100%

The international student sample consisted of nine (9) females and five (5) males. Furthermore, the respondents were of different multi-racial, multi-ethnic groups and national origins, such as Middle East (4), Asia (9), and Africa (1). Of the fourteen participants, two students were in their PhD program. The study targeted only master's level or higher students; therefore, no undergraduate students were interviewed. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the participants were non-native English speakers in the age range between 23 and 35. In addition, the majority of participants were from the College of Arts and Sciences, followed by both Education and Business, and a small number from the College of Technology.

All of the international students that participated and interviewed for this study each had a unique story to share that will be presented under the themes.

Emerging Themes:

In this section, the themes that emerged are presented. The interview questions (see Appendix G) helped to generate the answers given; the emerging themes were all included under subthemes, starting with general questions, languages, experiences on EMU campus, identity, treatment in social networks, attitudes and behaviors, and social support. The questions can be found in Appendix G. All the questions that are listed on the questionnaire have been used as guidelines during the interviews. This means that not all questions were asked exactly as written or during the interviews. All fourteen respondents were given the opportunity to share their own stories and also give examples of their experiences during their time in the U.S. and as an international student at EMU. After analyzing all the data, several themes emerged, which have been divided into subthemes. Although several themes emerged from the analysis, the following are the most frequent. Each theme that is presented will be defined accordingly. The themes that emerged are as follows:

- first arrival experiences,
- cultural challenges,
- social networks,
- communicating challenges,
- academic challenges,
- differences in behaviors and attitudes.

In addition, out of these themes, two subthemes emerged. These subthemes are based on the type of experiences the international students were confronted with. These subthemes are as follows:

- *Positive Experiences*: These can be defined as any experiences that have had a positive short- or long-term effect and that influence the interviewees' overall experiences as international students at EMU.
- *Negative Experiences*: These can be defined as any experiences faced by participants that have had a negative short- or long-term effect and/or influence the interviewees' overall experiences as international students at EMU.

First Arrival Experiences

When international students move to the United States, they come with a certain perception in mind, a perception that is colored by what they see or might have seen on television, read out of books, learned in school, or heard about the U.S. and potential colleges through family, friends, or other social networks. The theme: first arrival experiences illustrates the ways in which participants described their first encounters in the U.S. generally and at EMU specifically. The first encounters are in terms of positive experiences where the participants share their excited reaction. Negative experiences, on the other hand, can be linked to any form of disappointment. The majority of experiences shared by international students were related to the city of Ypsilanti, Michigan, where all of the international students attend EMU and where most of them reside.

Devlin, who identifies as an Asian student and who has been living in the U.S for eight and a half months, illustrates this first arrival experience. Devlin was disappointed with the demographics of Ypsilanti. On the question “What was your first impression of the U.S.?” he responds as follows:

Devlin: *“The buildings were low...my expectation [of the surrounding city] was that it could be more prosperous: we can have easy access to shopping centers and would be more people around us that we can talk to, but actually there were not that many people: scarcely populated.”*

In comparison to Devlin, Sha was intrigued by the politeness of people and the scale of the buildings when she first arrived.

Sha: *“Everything is so big, and people are pretty nice here....”*

Sha is an international student and identifies as Asian; she has lived in the U.S. for nineteen months. On the other hand, one of her disappointments of her experience was the lack of good public transportation to go where she wanted to go.

Sha: *“I felt like if you need to go somewhere you need to have a car.”*

These illustrations indicate that these international students encountered disappointments but also positive experiences when they arrived in their social academic environment. This encounter within their natural setting or social setting helped influence their experience. The Goffman’s impression management theory explains that social encounters in a social setting help to influence the experiences of international students who are the performers, and the natural or social setting is the stage (Solomon 2013; Goffman 1959; Ho et al. 2013; Whitesite and Kelly 2016). The experiences of the international students (performers) in this illustration were also influenced because of the perception they had envisioned of the social setting (stage) they were

going to receive their academic education in. Devlin's perceptions were based on movies and visuals he encountered via the media. This validates the disappointment that he encountered when he finally arrived from his home country into the new natural setting (stage). We also add that the positive experience was validated by the performance of the audience, which are the people Sha encountered when she presented herself (front stage/self) as an international student in the natural setting. In comparing the two illustrations, we can conclude that Devlin had higher expectations of the natural setting (stage) and also had a set perception of the audience and natural setting he was planning to stay in this in comparison to Sha. Therefore, their first experiences in the natural social setting or new environment was very different, one more negative and the other more positive.

For the majority of the respondents, the perception of the U.S. is equivalent to freedom, independence, good education, more job opportunities, differences in climate/weather, good public transportation, and educational opportunities to become more marketable by having a U.S. educational background. Out of the fourteen respondents, thirteen came to the U.S. to pursue a graduate level education with the possibility of staying and working in the U.S. if provided with a decent job. Only one student came for personal reasons.

Cultural Challenges

The theme of cultural challenges can be linked to the concept of cultural capital that refers to social and cultural values, habits, educational attainments, and accomplishments and can be seen as "embodied, institutionalized and objectified" (Erel 2010:643; Anheier et al. 1995; Swartz and Zelberg 2005). For most of the respondents, the hardest part of moving to the U.S. was learning a new culture. The reason for this is because they had to adjust to a new country,

culture, educational system, language, and other elements within the academic and social environment (Erel 2010; Aydinol 2013:82; Baier 2015; Zhang and Goodson 2011). In learning a new culture, students are confronted with cultural differences (differences in culture between a student's country of origin and U.S. culture) as well as challenges that are caused by these differences. These cultural differences and challenges that international students encounter contributed to shaping the experiences of each student. Some of the cultural differences and challenges that the fourteen respondents brought forward were in terms of differences in cultural values and norms, adjusting to a new culture, differences in ways of communicating to each other, food, expressing one's sexuality, style of clothing, and language differences.

Travis, who identifies as Asian, illustrates cultural challenges that he encountered. His experience has been a combination of negative and positive. On the question "What has been the hardest part of moving to the U.S.?" he responded:

Travis: *"The hardest part of moving to the U.S. was 'leaving the culture' the culture from India to adjust to a new culture, English speaking culture. Back home [India] was nice...but now I am used to the culture here [U.S.]; everything has its good and bad. ...in my country we are jolly, make fun of each other, but at the same time here [U.S.] if you smile people think: what is wrong with you etc. Another example is politeness: I didn't open the door for someone on EMU campus [courteous to others]."*

For Elizabeth, there is a cultural difference in personal appearance, for example, the way one dresses. Elizabeth shared the following experiences:

Elizabeth: for Elizabeth there is a cultural difference in personal appearance for example, the way one dresses. *“The difference [with U.S. culture] would be in appearance in our country [India] it is a more traditional way. We use jeans only sometimes; so dressing style. On our face or forehead we wear a sticker and in behavior it expresses that you are responsible for everything with no parents to stop you from being with or without changes.”*

Jacob explained that one of his hardest challenges was adjusting to the U.S. culture at EMU. For Jacob, the differences in cultural values and norms were challenging. He explained as follows:

Jacob: *“the hardest part of moving to the U.S. was the culture...because the Arabic world or Arabic countries have a collective culture like groups—all live with all and we share our lives with others and here everyone lives alone...it is different from the Arabic culture. Arabic culture is a collective culture versus U.S. everyone lives alone, individualism—collectivism vs individualism—and...yes. The American people are so nice, but they are not familiar with the Arabic culture. We [Arabic] are talkative and we want to communicate all the time but they don’t.”*

In summary, these illustrations indicate that cultural differences and challenges are influenced by the cultural capital of international students. The differences and challenges that the students encountered were on the basis of the cultural differences that they encountered in the U.S in general and at EMU specifically. This in comparison to the culture from their home

country. The differences and challenges that emerged were in terms of cultural norms and values, such as cultural politeness, personal appearance (dress culture), and collectivism. These norms and values were either not used or changed and adjusted to the new social environment. The illustrations show that students came with a certain cultural capital from their home country and had to explore, adjust, and learn by attaining cultural capital from the U.S. in order to build capital in the new social environment in the U.S. in general and at EMU specifically. It is evident that through observation and engagement in social activities, students are able to build needed capital in order to survive within the social environment that has become their new home.

Another cultural challenge that students encounter is more based on their racial and ethnic identity. Diana was frustrated by the fact that people keep asking her what racial and ethnic group she identifies herself with. People often think she is Indian or Asian.

Diana: *“People here put me in a box [racial category]. It is fun for me to see that. I don’t think they have found people from different countries. They think I am from India, Japan etc....I keep listening...I don’t feel offended...cultural and racial misunderstanding... you get tired of this misunderstanding...also the country I am from, they say it is a developing country...they are biased to how bad or underdeveloped other countries are.”*

In addition, there were more cases in which international students from Africa and one from Asia descent were racially categorized as a specific racial group—namely African American/Black—and treated differently because of their physical appearance. Mathilda shared the following negative experience:

Mathilda: *“A lot of micro aggression of discrimination came to my attention of being called the ‘N’ word. Being called the ‘N’ word, there is no difference between this...it scared me, because I have a child here. How do you explain that to her?”*

Travis shared his negative experience:

Travis: *“Maybe, but not always people considered me as African-American and they even used the ‘N’ word.”*

All three illustrations show how the international students were all racially categorized and stereotyped based on their physical appearance (skin color). As Omni and Winant (2015) note, race can be seen as a social construct carrying with it a large history based on unequal racial categorization that roots in politics, economics, and the social life of communities and should not only been seen through physical differences (Omni and Winant 2015).

This is evident not in terms of unequal racial categorization but also in terms of the downward mobility through the minority status that these students were categorized in.

Through these illustrations, it is also evident that racial or ethnic categories that apply in the U.S. do not apply to international students. Murji and Solomos (2015:12) note that “identity cannot simple be imposed. It is also chosen, and actively used, albeit within particular social contexts and constraints.” Aligned with that, Ajrouch and Kusow (2007:74) argue that “race is both a structuring and cultural force in society, shaping interactions as well as being shaped by individual/group agency.” This in summary shows that the racial and ethnic categorization system used by the host society to categorize international students is irrelevant and forced because this categorization and even the concepts of race and ethnicity are not known categorizations used in the home country of international students. The racial and ethnic categorization made students in this case, such as Diana, feel as if they are boxed into a racial category that did not make sense in explaining and reflecting her identity.

Social Networks

The theme social networks illustrates the differences in treatment within social networks and social support groups that international students are a part of or planning to become a part of or encounter. Social networks and support groups are part of what Bourdieu calls social capital, which refers to social networks and social resources that a person can be a part of, engaged in, or exposed to in the social environment that they are in (e.g., friends' group, community, family, cultural organization, health institutions) (Anheier et al. 1995; Stephens 2007). Because attainment and development of social capital is a process in itself, international students have to invest socially by engaging in a variety of networks and/ or support groups within their new social environment (Julien 2015; Ihlen 2005).

The majority of international students in this study felt more comfortable in their friend groups that mainly consisted of international students (non-native English speakers) than with their classmates and or their friends that were native English speakers. This is evident for impression management, as international students feel more at home with other international students that share the same cultural norms and values. They present their real selves (backstage performer) to the offstage/ backstage audience, which are other international students. Treatment in social networks and social support means the way in which international students are treated on campus, in class, social events on campus, in their peer groups, and friend groups. Experiences varied for all respondents. Some had more negative experiences, some a balance of both positive and negative, and others more positive experiences.

Mathilda, an international student from who identifies as African or Black, illustrates this theme. She encountered a negative experience within in the classroom. She noted:

Mathilda: *“As a success coach, people underestimate me and they thought I was not knowledgeable...the students complained to my boss...because my whole being [their judgment] was just on the way I look...”*

Apart from Mathilda, Vivian also experienced a form of negative treatment. Vivian identifies herself as White/ Middle Eastern. She states stated:

Vivian: *“American people [students] don’t communicate with international students...I had a problem with classmates...we were in class with undergraduate and graduate students and they teased us because of our accent...They use slang and I asked them to explain...the group maybe gets bored from me asking too much...”*

The two above illustrations indicate a negative social encounter within the social context of the classroom that they were in. As Anheier et al. (1995) note, the type of experiences (positive or negative) explored by international students, level of inclusion, and treatment may either help a student form or gain capital or lose and not develop capital at all (Anheier et al. 1995). In this case, the development of social networking with students within the classroom was a negative experience and led to a loss of capital within that group and social setting.

In addition, the illustrations also show how the international students presented themselves (self) and how their classmates (audience) preserved them or treated them in the social setting they were in (classroom). Impression management is very evident in these encounters. This means that both Vivian and Mathilda (performers) tried to present and engage themselves with the social group in class (audience of students) and present themselves in a very conscious way in order to receive support and positive treatment to build capital as well as engage in the new academic environment. Their audience of students, however, did not present a positive self as a collective group. This shaped and affected Vivian and Mathilda’s “sense of

belonging” in a negative way, where both students felt more like outsiders that were not welcome within the social network and support group that was present.

Apart from negative encounters within the classroom, students also experienced negative challenges when dealing with different institutions on campus. Diana shared some of the negative challenges she encountered when interacting with campus departments:

Diana: *“I had issues with Records and Registration; in the beginning it was better [when I first started] but now financial part is going back. They roll me like a ball and nothing is solved. I came across that they charged me too much. I was able to get my money back. I trusted them. Even at OISS international students need help, it is not easy. They don’t give needed support. Here EMU is cutting the funding and it scares me. What is happening?”*

Apart from Diana, Sara, an international student who identifies as Asian, also experienced a negative encounter with the campus department when asking for help. She argued that the staff from the departments she talked with were very impatient in providing needed support. For an international student already dealing with navigating in a new cultural and academic environment, these negative challenges with staff of departments can be even more stressful and discouraging. Sara stated:

Sara: *“One time I was at the financial office and asked questions about financial aid, and they really were rude to me and said, ‘Read your email. In the Summer, there are no scholarships.’ The lady said to email and didn’t want to help me in person. This was a bad experience. Another experience evolved in my organization and I was searching or trying to reserve a room [for an event] and they were rude, too. She did not help*

me...when they hear that you are international student and they treat you different...they are not patient when you ask how to apply for scholarships.”

The illustrations of Diana and Sara indicate that both experienced challenges when dealing with institutions on campus. These institutions can be seen as social resources that these students need to help them through different stages in the academic process. In this case, the challenges were in terms of interactions regarding financial errors and clarity and regarding room accommodation on campus. Both students were in the process of building their social capital with the institutions they were engaging with. Although the students were able to build social capital with the on-campus institutions and learn how the system works, this interaction was very negative. This makes it hard for international students, especially when they are new to the social and cultural environment due to being a new student from a different cultural background and socio-cultural setting. Another aspect to consider is the language barrier, which makes the process of getting a problem resolved within an English-speaking institution more of a challenge and burden in comparison to other native students.

The majority of the fourteen respondents received their support from OISS, from people within the cultural designated organizations, and from other international students who shared the same racial, ethnic and or cultural background (country of origin). The organizations that students mentioned include the Turkish Cultural Student Association (TCSA), the Indian Student Association (INDSA), the Persian Student Association (PSA), and the Traditional Korean Association (Hansori).

Communication Challenges

Communication challenges illustrate struggles that international students encounter when communicating in English as their second language. These social encounters shape the type of experience the students have. The impression management from Goffman helps to explain that because students have to shape their communication (self and performance) based on the audience that they are up against, they can face different obstacles. In this case, it is in terms of communicating in clear, understandable English to native speakers. Students are therefore conscious in what they say and how they represent (perform) themselves in front of the native speakers (audience). This process puts a lot of stress on non-native students, as they either take on the challenge of communicating in order to build their social skills in communicating as little as possible to avoid appearing unintelligent to native speakers and prevent language miscommunication by pronouncing words incorrectly or using the wrong words.

All respondents experienced trouble communicating and learning the English language. Not being able to communicate to express themselves clearly made speaking English a challenge for international students. Several respondents had to take ESL (English as a Second Language) classes to more effectively communicate in the English language. Because the university is an English-based institution, all international students had to also take an English proficiency test (Test for English as a Foreign Language: TOEFL) to prove that they could communicate in the English language. Some respondents have to go through several ESL classes at the university or at other language institutions prior to beginning their regular coursework.

Jacob, a Middle Eastern international student, mentioned that learning and communicating in English was very challenging for him. Although Jacob had a few negative setbacks with the English language, gaining proficiency in the language turned out to be a great

accomplishment for him. He came to the U.S. with both his wife and his two-year-old son. He mentioned that learning English was the second hardest challenge for him since he had minimum exposure to English prior to coming to the United States. Although he felt that he improved, he was still concerned with how he would be perceived by native speakers. On the question “What has been the hardest part of moving to the U.S.?” He answered as follows:

Jacob: *“Second hardest part [when moving to the U.S.] was the language. Because my first exposure to English was when I came to the United States, so I was suffering, learning and practicing English...I was suffering here during my first semester because of the language [English]... [self-conscious in speaking the language]. I had that problem with myself about how I don’t want to make mistakes when I speak English and I didn’t know if others would accept me [that is why] I don’t want to look stupid. ...I do worry a lot about the accent, I just like to talk; I know the word and that’s it.”*

Like Jacob, William, who identifies as Asian, also struggled with the English language:

William: *“When I first came here [U.S]) the hardest challenge for me was the language barrier. Not being able to properly speak the language... I was not able to understand the [native speaker] they speak too fast. I thought they were so unkind—not considerate of me being a non-native speaker.”*

In comparison to Jacob and William, Mathilda is a Fulbright scholar from an English-speaking country in Africa. Although she speaks English, she still encountered challenges during her social interactions with people. Her hardest challenge occurred when students could not understand what she was saying because of her accent. Mathilda had been teaching English as a second language to older adults in Cameroon prior to studying in the U.S.

Mathilda: *“I have an accent that is part of my identity. My concern is when my accent becomes a hurdle for students to understand me. This young student didn’t know the studying-abroad-experiences. My accent has been a concern...”*

The above illustrations show that all the respondents aimed to present themselves or perform in a different manner when they had to communicate with native speakers (peer students, faculty, and staff). International students presented themselves (self) in a very conscious way to prevent embarrassment from occurring during conversations in order to prevent miscommunication with native speakers. Although, Mathilda was a native speaker of the English language, she still encountered similar challenges when communicating with other native speakers, in terms of her foreign accent. In addition, impression management works two ways because it not only influences the way international students represent themselves to native speakers in social settings, but also how the receiving audience, which are the native speakers, receive the communication presented. If native speakers are very impatient and less understanding of international students struggling to communicate in their second language to make their opinions and ideas known, this encounter can result in a negative experience for both parties.

Academic Challenges

The international students in this study all experienced several differences in adjusting to the U.S. educational system. The theme academic challenges illustrates the differences in the educational system at EMU and in their home country as well as the challenges and achievements they encounter within the academic realm at EMU. The academic challenges, in terms of receiving educational attainments and accomplishment, can be understood through the

lens of cultural capital. Cultural capital is an aspect that has to be rebuilt as students enter a new social environment at EMU. The students have to adjust to the new U.S. culture, educational system, language, and other elements within the academic and social environment (Erel 2010; Aydinol 2013:82; Baier 2015; Zhang and Goodson 2011).

The educational system comparison is understood to be the way in which international students perceive the pedagogical way of teaching in their home country in comparison to the educational system at EMU. With the differences in educational system come the challenges that the students experienced as graduate students in an academic environment. The students explain the differences in the educational system and the challenges they encountered in terms of the pedagogical way of teaching, the exposure to academic resources, the workload (homework and assignments), unequal treatment, grading, difficulty level, registration challenges, sharing their opinions in class, and professor-student time within their current programs.

Mathilda had a very positive experience with the educational system at EMU in comparison to her home country. On the question “What do you think of the educational system at EMU?” She responded as follows:

Mathilda: *“It is definitely a different school system, because most impressive of all you can reach teachers beyond the classroom. The fact that they have a system where you can email them and some teachers are so on top of their email, they get back to you as soon as possible. And you can work with them both within and outside the classroom that was really impressive to me. And then they try to reach their students from all angles; teachers use PowerPoint they use handouts, they use lectures, they have online canvas course shells, some don’t some do and some use both and this different approach just make it so easy to be able to learn...I love the fact that we have readings prior to class*

[e.g. textbooks, articles] and have this rich discussion in class that accompanies the lecture. In my home country it is different because from the very first day when the teacher gives out the syllabus she tells you that they are going to give 75% of the information you need and you will have to find 25%. Student has to get the rest of the information and the teacher only does 75% or gives you highlights. Here [U.S. EMU] access is good [internet]) etc. but in my country, it is different [e.g., airtime] students struggle to get the information they need. It is exhausting students; you wonder what the purpose is. You get burned at all corners. In the U.S. it is easier. For example, at EMU you have a well-documented library. Back home the library looks depleted [no good system] ... It makes it hard for students to thrive.”

Similar to Mathilda, Diana and Jacob both shared their experiences. However, for both Diana and Jacob, adjusting to a new educational system was a struggle and not as positively received as it was by Mathilda. Diana and Jacob both shared their experiences. Diana’s response was as follows:

Diana: *“The system here is different, the credit hours system. Back home the program is created for you. In the U.S. at EMU you create one yourself [your own] I felt lost. I talked to my professor and I felt lost. I had huge difficulties and I had a hard time switching”*

Jacob, who shared his negative challenges applying and enrolling to study at EMU, illustrated his experiences:

Jacob: *“My first day on campus was an unforgettable day, it was so stressful. I was so stressed at that day. I got my score, I had the conditional admission from here [EMU] so I just need to get the score from the MELAB [Michigan English Language Assessment*

Battery] or TOEFL and I go the score at the last day, two days before EMU closed. So, I had to submit all the paper and it went to the wrong department. The 9th of January I did not know if I would study here or not, because there is some problem the government cut my scholarship and they did not want to give me financial guarantee because I need to do some procedures first, so I asked my father for the guarantee to do it here and he sent it by email and they [EMU] refused to take it because they want hard copy, so my father sent that hard copy from Saudi Arabia and it takes like a week so I just start last day of registration week here [EMU]. I missed the first week of classes because I was stalled. That was so stressful the first week, the first days were so stressful. I showed them the hard copy, I have the financial guarantee is ok, they say no we need the hard copy from Saudi Arabia it takes a few days to come. And some workers at international admission were like so tough, they didn't accept the letter, they didn't...they make it difficult for me... I had a high blood pressure and ended up in the hospital first month was stressful..."

Elizabeth also shared her experiences. She is an international student and identifies as Indian-Asian. Her experiences are more in terms of the grading—when and how a student is graded when taking a course. She noted that that she was happier with the educational system from her home country than the one at EMU. Her response was as follows:

Elizabeth: *"Of course it is different, it is easier [U.S.-EMU] For example, in my country when you go to the school you don't have any sheets of paper for you, you have to know everything of the book, index, appendix, it doesn't matter you don't know what part of the book they ask the questions from, [this] so, that all of the students will study very well and they will think careful about their scores. Here your scores start at the beginning of*

the semester, but for us we just have two exams midterm exam and final exam, that is your scores, it doesn't matter for the grade of your scores...and the other thing here (EMU) professor told you go and read first and then they, sometimes they didn't explain it and then they ask us what is your problem that is listening. But back home the professors come and explain the chapters literally. You get questions and start practicing and then you go home and read the chapter I think this is better because I grew up with it and that's why I like it. I think I learned more and deeper than here [U.S.-EMU]."

The illustrations above show that differences in educational system from the home country and host society can influence the experiences that students have, be they negative or positive. The educational system is an important part of cultural capital that the international students have to rebuild. The negative experiences that the students encountered had more to do with the differences between the two systems that they were exposed to— home and host. The rebuilding of this type of capital required from the students to adjust to a new system (grading, pedagogy, new language) in order for them complete and accomplish their educational trajectory at EMU.

Furthermore, students also illustrated the challenge of registration for classes and getting used to creating their own program of study, something that was very different from their home country. Diana made known that making her own program of study was something new to her, as in her home country the courses were already pre-selected for the program the student was enrolled in. In addition, the material resources that were available at EMU helped to shape Mathilda's experiences. Mathilda had fewer resources in the education system in her home country, so having that here shaped her experience into a positive one. However, Elizabeth's

experiences were more negative, as she did not like pedagogical way of teaching and grading system at EMU.

In summary, the results show that the majority of the international students were challenged by the educational system they encountered at EMU. The reason for that was mainly that it was different from their home country, and their lack of knowledge in how to adjust to the new system therefore created more challenges. It is clear that in order for the students to succeed in their academic trajectory, they have to rebuild their cultural capital.

Differences in Behaviors and Attitudes.

The theme differences in behavior and attitudes illustrates the differences in behaviors and attitudes of international students in and outside the classroom. All fourteen respondents indicated that they behaved differently in the U.S. than in their home country. Several reasons were brought forward by each respondent as they explained their reason for their behavior and attitude in social interactions.

Sha, who identifies as Chinese/ Asian, illustrates this theme:

Sha: *“I think...whenever I speak English I am like a different person, and I am more like outgoing, and [I am] more optimistic and I know that if I try, every chance I get, and if I go for every chance I can probably get what I want here. But the culture is different in my country; we can't do anything we want, we can't say anything we want, so I feel like it is pretty good here [in the U.S. more freedom].”*

Goffman's impression management helps to make sense of the three illustrations above. The illustration of Sha is focused on her behavior and attitude when she speaks English as a second language. Impression management reveals the “front stage” and the “offstage/backstage”

of the performer. This means that performers present themselves to their audience as the best “self” they can be (Ho et al. 2013; Whitesite and Kelly 2016; Pettit 2011; Solomon 2013). In this illustration, the performer is Sha, who presents herself (front stage) as a different person in her new social environment. This can be in any context or social environment where she uses English (such as the classroom, with students, professors, staff). The people in the social settings (stage) that she engages with present her with an audience to explore her new self. This process was evident for all the participants in the study.

Jacob also shared his experiences. For him the differences in behavior are more in terms of behavior around a different gender than his own. He explained:

Jacob: *“I do behave differently, because it is a different culture here [U.S.]. So, like here [U.S.] I can talk to different sex [gender] and in my home country I cannot, because of gender separation. Like mainly because for the big part is a different, because of our culture...I behave differently...I try to make myself different, because I don’t want to belong to this culture, I always say I am Middle Eastern. It makes me happy to embrace my culture. My culture as Arabic Muslim is different than Western Culture [Culture from U.S.]. I don’t try for them to understand me differently. I try for people to accept me: a Middle Eastern Muslim.”*

In the Jacob’s illustration, we can also notice how he represents himself differently than he would if he were in his home country. In comparison to Sha, Jacob’s social adjustment is in terms of gender as well as religion. Jacob made clear that he does not want to be treated similarly to an American. He wants freedom to embrace himself through his culture and religious beliefs within the new environment that he is adjusting to. Although he wants to represent himself as self, he changes his front stage to perform or behave differently in terms of the different gender

culture he encounters in the U.S in general and at EMU specifically. It can be said that this social and cultural adjustment is needed for Jacob not only to gain social capital but mainly to progress through the educational system that he is enrolled in.

Mathilda stated:

Mathilda: *“I began to see myself like: as stranger in his own land when I became part of the western land. I read this book again and I looked at it from a different lens, everything had changed. It was interesting to see how I was perceived, people were on guard [on how to treat me now]. People back home saw me as a different person. People were cautious around me and said I had a “self-confident air” [after visiting home from the U.S.]. I had changed in my knowing. In my home country I had a different reality and I had another expression in the U.S. this was an opportunity to add an experience that made two perspectives. In the classroom I only tend to be more professional. As a Black woman I don’t want to be as loud. I tried to maintain that respect and I don’t want anything to be prejudice.”*

In comparison to Sha and Jacob, for Mathilda, impression management was reversed in the sense that she presented herself to her people in her country (backstage audience) and was perceived differently by her own family and friends. It is evident that she did not realize that because of her engagement in a new social environment, through culture, habits, and a new educational system, she developed an adjusted self that was now influenced by a combination of social and cultural capital from both home country and host society.

Although the experiences of Sha, Jacob, and Mathilda were each unique, they all went through a phase of having to represent and perform as a different self in their new social environment.

In summary, the theme of differences in attitude and behaviors showed different reasons why international students' behaviors and attitude change depending on the social settings that they are in. All participants shared that their behaviors and attitude reflected the setting they were in, and the people they encountered from students to faculty, family, and friends. The differences in attitude or behavior were sometimes used to state their identity as an international student or to present themselves in a way that would help them adjust to the new environment.

Summary

Although there are differences between the experiences of the international students, the results show that all fourteen international students have been treated differently from domestic students because of their status as an international student. Out of the fourteen students interviewed, two students did experience different treatment based on their racial appearance.

All of the fourteen students made known that they were treated differently by domestic students based on their country of origin and their limited language proficiency and/ or communication skills. Students reported that the different treatments were from classmates, and other peers, including staff members at different institutions on campus. The results show all the respondents aimed to present themselves or perform in a different manner when they had to communicate with native speakers (peer students, faculty, and staff). International students presented themselves (self) in a very conscious way to prevent embarrassment from occurring during conversations in order to prevent miscommunication with native speakers.

Out of the results, one can conclude that differences in how international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds are treated can be related to the fact that they are international students. International students articulated their racial/ and ethnic identity by

individually defining and explaining their own racial, and ethnic identity instead of using the census categories, which are based on the U.S. racial categorizations that international students do not have in their home country and which also do not represent the identity they claim. The reason for this was that international students of diverse backgrounds are better able to express and maintain their racial/ ethnic identity in combination with their culture instead of fully adjusting to U.S culture or to the racial and ethnic categories that are given (Joppke and Morawska 2003). This approach helps students and their surrounding community to be aware of their identity, as they preserve it and do not succumb to how the host society perceives them.

The research confirms that differences in the ethnic, racial and cultural background play an important role in the academic experiences of international students in the host society (António and Monteiro, 2015). For example, students that were used to a pre-scheduled class program within their school system back home were faced with a few challenges when they had to account for their own class schedule, namely, what classes to take and when.

The impression management concept from Erving Goffman was very noticeable in this research. International students presented themselves differently in their natural setting (for example, with students from the same cultural background) (Solomon 2013; Goffman 1959; Ho et al. 2013; Whitesite and Kelly 2016). This occurred from the experiences that students shared in settings such as in class, with professors, and encounters with campus institutions when asking for help or support.

The results also indicate that although some of the students identified as White, they received the same treatment as if they had been categorized as a person of color and were also still treated differently by domestic students because they were international students from a different country in general and because of their limited proficiency in the English language.

The results also confirm that through Goffman's impression management concept, it was made clear that the way international student presented themselves and how they were treated helped to shape their experiences in every encounter on EMU campus (Whiteside and Kelly 2016). This also gave a better understanding behind the reasoning of their attitude.

The results also indicate that the majority of the students were able to build their social and cultural capital through the different international organizations on campus. This process of engaging at the individual and environmental level, also known as the habitus, helped international students become connected to the EMU community by participating in the social activities and engaging in social encounters (Inghilleri 2005; Ihlen 2005).

Through the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), students were able to connect with international students that shared the same racial, ethnic, and cultural background. Although international students valued these networks, they made known that their networks lack the diversity and mix of other domestic students as well as communicating feeling a lack of inclusion.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, the conclusions and recommendations for this research will be presented. With support of a qualitative study, this research was able to explore the academic experiences of international students of different racial and ethnic groups at Eastern Michigan University. The research question serving as the guideline of the study was this: “What are the differences in the academic experiences of international students from different racial ethnic groups on campus?”

Conclusions

The current study aimed to explore and compare if there are differences in academic experiences of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The results of the study show that there are indeed differences in the academic experiences of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds on campus. These differences that were found were in relationship to all of the six themes that emerged in the study. These themes are as follows: first arrival experiences, cultural challenges, social networks, communicating challenges, academic challenges, and differences in behaviors and attitudes.

To understand the differences of the academic experiences presented in the results, the study used three main concepts from Goffman and Bourdieu. The first concept is impression management (Goffman), followed by social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu).

The study concludes that although there are differences between the experiences of the international students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, these students have in general been treated differently in social encounters because of their status as an international student and because of their limited proficiency in English. The racial and ethnic aspects of the

differences were only evident in three cases in which students were treated differently because of their physical appearance.

Goffman's concept of impression management formed a basis in understanding and identifying why and how student behaviors and attitudes are shaped when they entered the new academic environment at EMU (Whiteside and Kelly 2016). It was evident that all the participants presented themselves differently depending on the social environment, or the context they were in, either when communicating to native speakers in and outside of the classroom and/or when interacting with social institutions on campus. Managing the "presentation of the self" establishes for the international student a new identity, a new self or front stage. This new identity is then influenced by their adjustments to the new social and cultural capitals that they have to rebuild in order to attain a spot within the academic social networks and support groups that they will regularly engage in. As the social settings they are in change, so do the performers and audiences they encounter.

It is also evident that all international students present another identity (self) that is their own self to other international students who share the same values and go through similar challenges as themselves. The offstage or backstage presents an audience of other performers—in this case, international students that go through the same adjustments to U.S. culture as they do (Ho et al. 2013; Whiteside & Kelly 2016; Pettit 2011; Solomon 2013).

Impression management gives a new lens of looking at the academic experiences of international students. We can conclude that the differences should be put in relation to the presentation of the self and the own identity international students assign to themselves through their cultural background. The research revealed that the differences sought only through the racial, and ethnic categorization are those not entirely validate the understanding of the

challenge's international students face. As Omni and Winant (2015) and Ajrouch and Kusow (2007) make known, racial and ethnic categorizations are social constructs that are not used in the home country of international students. In other words, these categorizations, specifically race, do not represent the identity of international students.

Through the framework of social and cultural capitals, the study was also able to explore and understand the differences in academic experiences of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The respondents were able to build up their cultural capital by adjusting to the new U.S. culture, the educational system (this was different from their home country), the English language (taking courses to get proficient in the language), and other elements within the academic and social environment (Erel 2010; Aydinol 2013; Baier 2015; Zhang and Goodson). The study can also conclude that the type of experiences (positive or negative) that international students encounter, level of inclusion, and treatment that they receive influence their academic experiences (positively or negatively) at EMU.

Different studies have shown that when institutions engage with and are aware of the needs and struggles of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural background, it is possible for domestic students, staff, faculty, and on-campus institutions to better accommodate these students. Being aware of the cultural differences and students' identities leads to improved services, events, and other interventions (Ward and Zarate 2015; Yoso et al. 2009; Ramsay et al. 2007; Galloway and Jenkins 2009).

Recommendations

In order to improve the academic experiences of international students at Eastern Michigan University, there are a few recommendations that this research brought forward. The recommendations are based on the suggestions of the international students interviewed as well as the researcher's own observation. The recommendations are related to the improvement of the current research as well as future research, accommodation, and social support of both current and prospective international students. Lastly, recommendations that discuss the preferred and needed treatment and attitude towards international students are also provided.

Current and Future Research

The current study has a few limitations, starting first with the methods that were used and the period of time that the research was executed. The current study only used qualitative data, supported by twelve in-depth, face-to-face interviews and two phone interviews. The sample size of fourteen interviews is too small to make any generalizations. Secondly, the goal was to interview a diverse group of students from different racial, ethnic, and or cultural backgrounds; however, the current study was not able to provide a wide range of diversity with the international students interviewed, as the majority of the respondents identified as Asian or Middle Eastern international students. However, this study was able to provide a diverse group of international students from different countries and different fields of study at EMU. Thirdly, the study was executed in the summer semester; however, the majority of the students had graduated in the prior winter semester and returned to their country of origin or were otherwise unavailable due to summer vacation. This resulted in the lack of diversity students available to be interviewed for this study.

Future research can use the current study as a starting point and expand by addressing the limitations in the current study. The first expansion of this study could be accomplished by using not only qualitative but also quantitative research to strengthen the method used. Another approach would be to use a survey to start the study and identify recurring themes and questions that can be used to do a thorough quantitative and qualitative research by using either face-to-face interviews and focus groups to explore the research topic further.

Secondly, using a probability sample can help make generalization possible and provide more reliable data as well as giving a wider sample of international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, the time frame in which the research is done is a crucial factor for the study to succeed. Future research will benefit from using the fall and winter semester to execute the research, which may provide a better representation of the sample needed instead of the summer semester, which gives a limited diversification of the sample needed for the study.

Social Support Services

Apart from the recommendation for future studies, the current research also included suggestions from the international students interviewed for this study, starting with the social support services. In order to help international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, the international students interviewed recommended that all institutions on campus except for the OISS need to be trained and made aware of different cultural challenges that international students go through and how these institutions can help. Secondly, seminars to consult and guide students regarding the requirements and expectations of the process after students have been admitted to EMU programs (such as admission, visa renewal, taxes, class

registration, and insurance/medical expenses) would ease the transition for international students. In addition, ensuring that all departments are in sync when it comes to providing the correct and needed information to students regarding admission, visa renewal, taxes, signing up for classes, and insurance/medical expenses.

Furthermore, the interviewed students recommend the improvement of campus housing for international students. Students also suggested an earlier check-in period to housing for international students. The reason for this is to provide international students more time to adjust to the EMU campus prior to starting the semester. Another suggestion that has been brought forward is the improvement of diversity at OISS in term of the languages spoken. This would benefit the students who are not proficient in the English language.

Social Support Networks

In order to help international students from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, the international students interviewed also gave several recommendations regarding social support networks. The students interviewed mentioned that it would be beneficial for them if faculty and staff were better trained in understanding the needs of international students. Students could identify the differences in treatment between TESOL professors and regular professors in their academic journey at EMU. The TESOL professors were more understanding and supportive in comparison to the regular professors.

The second recommendation is to have a joint orientation of domestic and international students. International students mentioned that they would benefit from interacting more with domestic students, leading to higher levels of accepting, understanding, and treating international

students with respect. A combined orientation will help international and domestic students also adjust better to the campus environment as well as enrich their academic experiences at EMU.

Apart from orientation, it would also be beneficial to have other joint events, specifically cultural events such as an American Culture course or seminar. This course or seminar would be a platform where domestic students teach and bring awareness of American culture to international students and also help with strategies on how to adjust to life at EMU and in the U.S. in general. For example, training students in the new culture, school system, and language; where to shop for clothing and food; how to use the campus bus system (transportation); attitudes about sexual orientation; and other cultural issues would make international students more comfortable at EMU.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographics

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender?

Male	
Female	

3. What is your nationality/ country of origin?
4. To which racial or ethnic group do you identify yourself with?

Black or African American	
White	
American Indian or Alaska Native	
Asian Indian	
Chinese	
Filipino	
Japanese	
Korean	
Other Asian	
Vietnamese	
Native Hawaiian	
Guamanian or Chamorro	
Samoan	
Other Pacific Islander	
Some other race	

5. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	
Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano	
Yes, Puerto Rican	
Yes, Cuban	
Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.	

6. What is the highest-level degree or level of education you have completed?

No Schooling completed	
some high school	
high school graduate	
College or some college	
trade/technical/vocational training	
Bachelor's degree	
Master's Degree	
Doctorate degree	

7. What is your religious background?

Roman Catholic	
an Orthodox church such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Church	
Seventh-Day Adventist	
Christian Scientist	
Jewish	
Mormon	
Protestant	
Muslim	
Other/ Non-Religious	

8. What is your occupation?

9. What is your marital status?

	Yes	No
Single?		
Married?		
Widowed?		
Divorced?		
Separated?		
Cohabiting?		

10. Do you have children? If yes, how many?

Yes	
No	

Appendix B: Grant Funding Proposal

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate & Undergraduate Programs in Sociology
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
RESEARCH & TRAVEL SUPPORT FUND
with support from Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) sociology honor society

Application

Please print/type your responses.

Name: Denice Gravenstijn EID Number: E01564671

Mailing address: 800 West Huron Street Apt. #5 Ann ArborMI 48103
Street address City State Zip

Email address: dgravens@emich.edu _____

Program of study/Major: Sociology, Applied Research Specialty Degree sought Master _____

Anticipated date of graduation: Winter 2018 _____

Number of credits for which you are currently enrolled: 3 _____

This request is for (circle one): RESEARCH CONFERENCE TRAVEL

For which deadline are you submitting your request (circle one)?

November 30th / January 30th / May 15th

Applicant: (Denice Gravenstijn) _____ Date: 03/27/18
Signature

Faculty sponsor/Advisor: (Grigoris Argeros) _____ Date: _____
Signature

Dept. head: _____ Date: _____

Signature

*Submit undergraduate application and attachments to Dr. Tricia McTague, EMU SAC
Department 712S Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or tmctague@emich.edu
Submit graduate application and attachments to Dr. Solange Simões, EMU SAC
Department 713C Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or ssimoes@emich.edu

RESEARCH SUPPORT REQUEST

Name: Denice Gravenstijn _____

Title of project: Assessing the Academic Experiences of International Students at Eastern Michigan University

Type of research (i.e., Thesis, Independent study) Thesis _____

Provide the following information on a separate page attached to this application form.

- ❖ What are the estimated costs for which funds are being requested? Provide an itemized budget and brief rationale for each item. For this research project an amount of \$200 has been estimated for compensation of the respondents. Each respondent will be offered \$10 for their participation in the research project. The amount will be given to each participating respondent (students) after completion of the face to face interview. The sample goal of the research project is to interview twenty students. This equals a total of \$200 (20*\$10) that will be used to compensate the students for their participation in this research project.
- ❖ Total funding requested: \$200 ____
- ❖ Provide a timeline for study completion. The estimated completion time for the interviews is May 18, 2018
- ❖ Attach a copy of the prospectus/proposal or other documentation explaining the research.
- ❖ Submit documentation of Human Subjects Approval for the project

CONFERENCE TRAVEL REQUEST

Name: __N/A_____

Conference title: N/A_____

Location N/A_____ Dates: N/A_____

Presentation title: N/A

Provide the following information on a separate page attached to this application form.

- ❖ What are the estimated expenses for which funds are being requested to attend the conference? Provide an itemized budget and brief rationale for each item.
- ❖ Total funding requested: \$_____
- ❖ What will be your role during the conference (i.e. presenter, attendee)?
- ❖ What is the value of the meeting for your own professional development?
- ❖ If presenting, attach documentation that your paper/poster has been accepted, and submit documentation of Human Subjects Approval for the research.

*Submit undergraduate application and attachments to Dr. Tricia McTague, EMU SAC
Department 712S Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or tmctague@emich.edu
Submit graduate application and attachments to Dr. Solange Simões, EMU SAC
Department 713C Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or ssimoes@emich.edu

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Graduate & Undergraduate Programs in Sociology
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology

GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT
RESEARCH & TRAVEL SUPPORT FUND
with support from Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) sociology honor society

Application

Please print/type your responses.

Name: *Denice Gravenstijn* _____ EID Number: *E01564671*

Mailing address: *800 West Huron Street Apt. #5 Ann Arbor MI 48103*
Street address City State Zip

Email address: *dgravens@emich.edu* _____

Program of study/Major: *Sociology, Applied Research Specialty* Degree sought *Master*

Anticipated date of graduation: *Summer 2018* _____

Number of credits for which you are currently enrolled: *3* _____

This request is for (circle one): **RESEARCH** CONFERENCE TRAVEL

For which deadline are you submitting your request (circle one)?

November 30th / January 30th / **May 15th**

Applicant: *Denice Gravenstijn* _____ *D Gravenstijn* _____ Date: *03/27/18* _____
Signature

Faculty sponsor/Advisor: *Professor Grigoris Argeros* _____ Date: _____
Signature

Dept. head: _____ *J. M. J. B.* _____ Date: *3/29/18* _____
Signature

*Submit undergraduate application and attachments to Dr. Tricia McTague, EMU SAC
Department 712S Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or tmctague@emich.edu
Submit graduate application and attachments to Dr. Solange Simões, EMU SAC
Department 713C Pray-Harrold, Ypsilanti, MI 48197 or ssimoes@emich.edu

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

The person in charge of this study is **Denice Gravenstijn**. Denice Gravenstijn is a graduate sociology student in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Criminology at Eastern Michigan University (EMU). Her faculty adviser is *Grigoris Argeros*. Throughout this form, Denice Gravenstijn will be referred to as the “investigator.”

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research project is to explore and compare graduate international students’ academic experiences from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. These academic experiences through successes and challenges, can be experienced during campus events, with campus department, with faculty and staff, and with students. We want to know about the successes and challenges you face during your time here at the university.

Funding

The research project will be funded through the Graduate/ Undergraduate Student Research & Travel Support Fund with support from Alpha Kappa Delta (AKD) sociology honor society.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves:

- Describing academic experiences as an international student on Eastern Michigan Campus (achievements, challenges, advice, support...).
- Participating in an interview between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. The interview will be taken on the day scheduled with the participant. The interview will take place on EMU

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350
Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

campus in Faculty Development Center in the Hall library (first floor, room 109 of the faculty adviser Grigoris Argeros).

We would like to AUDIO record you for this study by using an audio voice recording device. If you are AUDIO recorded, it may be possible to identify you through your VOICE. If you agree to be AUDIO recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form. These audio recordings will be locked securely in and at a safe location and will not be made public. The recordings and notes will be locked in the office of the faculty adviser Grigoris Argeros, in the Pray Harold building, Office # 712M. In addition, a copy will be stored in a safe in the home of the researcher Denice Gravenstijn. Both locations will be locked and only accessed by the researcher and or advisor when needed.

What are the anticipated risks for participation?

The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. This risk is addressed by assigning a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio. Therefore, the names of the participant will not be used during the interview.

Are there any benefits to participating?

You will not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, this will be an opportunity to share your academic experiences as an international student which can help improve academic services to international students during their academic journey at Eastern Michigan University. In addition, each participant will receive a compensation of \$10 for participating in this research project.

<p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350 Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19</p>
--

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate. The participant has the freedom to decline to participate in the study as well as withdraw from the study at any time.

How will my information be kept confidential?

We will keep your information confidential by assigning each interview with a numerical code and a pseudonym. The participants name will not be collected whether on audio or note. Your information will be stored in a safe and will be locked. The recordings and notes will be locked in the office of the faculty adviser Grigoris Argeros, in the Pray Harold building, Office # 712M. In addition, a copy will be stored in a safe in the home of the researcher Denice Gravenstijn. Both locations will be locked and only accessed by the researcher and or advisor when needed. Furthermore, the backup data saved on the computer will be password protected and encrypted. We will make every effort to keep your information confidential.

If, during your participation in this study, we have reason to believe that elder abuse or child abuse is occurring, or if we have reason to believe that you are at risk for being suicidal or otherwise harming yourself, we must report this to authorities as required by law. We will make every effort to keep your research information confidential. However, it may be possible that we have to release your research information. If this were to occur, we would not be able to protect your confidentiality.

The investigator will ask you to use only the pseudonym given during the interview session. The investigator will also ask you not to tell anyone about anything that was said during the interview.

Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

We may share your information with other researchers outside of Eastern Michigan University through scholarly presentation and publication. If we share your information, we will remove any and all identifiable information so that you cannot reasonably be identified.

The results of this research may be published or used for teaching. Identifiable information will not be used for these purposes.

Storing study information for future use

We would like to store your information from this study for future use related to International Student Academic Experiences. Your information will be labeled with a code and not your name. Your information will be stored in a password-protected or locked file. Your de-identified information may also be shared with researchers outside of Eastern Michigan University. Please initial below whether or not you allow us to store your information:

_____ Yes

_____ No

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation in this research project will not cost you anything.

<p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350 Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19</p>
--

Will I be paid for participation?

You will be paid \$10 for completing the interview of this research project.

Study contact information

If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Denice Gravenstijn, at dgravens@emich.edu or by phone (734)-545-5025. You can also contact Denice's adviser, Professor Grigoris Argeros, at gargeros@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-0456.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may choose to leave the study at any time with no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

**Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review
Committee**

UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350

Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

Signatures

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I agree to be audio recorded for this study.

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350
Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

Appendix D: Interview Script (In Person)

Hello my name is Denice Gravenstijn. I hereby want to thank you for being part of this research project.

This interview should take between 45 to 60 minutes and your response will remain anonymous.

The purpose of this interview is to hear about your experiences as an international student at Eastern Michigan University. I want to know about your accomplishments and challenges (positive and negative) if any during your time here at the university. The results of this study will be used for my master thesis. In addition, the results might be used to inform the university of what and how they can better accommodate international students in their academic journey at the university.

You might find this research contribution interesting based on your background as an international student who has accumulated experience and knowledge that can help future international students.

**Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review
Committee**
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350
Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

Appendix E: Interview Script (Phone Call – in case Students Cannot Meet in Person)

Hello, my name is Denice Gravenstijn. I am a graduate student at Eastern Michigan University in the Sociology Applied Research Program and I am working on my thesis project. The reason for my phone call is to follow up to see if I can interview you for my research project since you were not able to meet in person. Are you still willing and able to participate in my research project? If yes, the phone-interview will take between 45 and 60 minutes and your responses will remain anonymous.

If you would like to reschedule this interview, what time and date would work best for you? If you need or want more details regarding the research study I am more than happy to explain. I am also happy to send you the interview questions prior to our phone interview. You can also call me if you have any questions or concerns at (734)-545-5025 or email me at dgravens@emich.edu.

Looking forward to our interview. Thank you for your participation.

Best,

Denice Gravenstijn

<p>Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350 Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19</p>
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Appendix F: IRB Approval Form

Date: 1-23-2019

IRB #: UHSRC-FY17-18-350

Title: Assessing the Academic Experiences of International Students at Eastern Michigan University

Creation Date: 3-29-2018

End Date: 4-16-2019

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Denice Gravenstijn

Review Board: University Human Subjects Review Committee

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Denice Gravenstijn	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	dgravens@emich.edu
Member	Grigoris Argeros	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	gargeros@emich.edu
Member	Grigoris Argeros	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	gargeros@emich.edu

General Information

Complete this form for a new human subjects project submission. For multi-site studies, contact the Office of Research Compliance at research_compliance@emich.edu or 734-487-3090 prior to completing this application.

All items with red stars are required and must be completed in order to submit. Save changes frequently.

Questions? Contact human.subjects@emich.edu or 734-487-3090.

Is your study any of the following:

- Exclusively a program evaluation (data collected for program improvement purposes)?
-

Note: Mark Yes if your data will only be used for the purposes above.

Yes

No

Affiliation:

Check one

Faculty/Staff

Graduate Student

Undergraduate Student

Student Type

Doctoral Student

Masters Student

Project Type

Thesis/Dissertation

Graduate Project

Faculty Advisor

Students are required to have a faculty member as a Co-Principal Investigator. Choose your faculty advisor from the list below.

Name: Grigoris Argeros

Organization: Sociology Anthropol and Crimin

Address: Sociology Anthropology Criminology 712, Ypsilanti, MI 481970000

Phone: 7344870012

Email: gargeros@emich.edu

Attach your faculty advisor's human subject training (CITI) certificate.

[CITI certificate Grigoris Argeros.pdf](#)

Principal Investigator

Name: Denice Gravenstijn
Organization: Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.
Address: , Ypsilanti, MI 481972212

Phone: 734-545-5025
Email: dgravens@emich.edu

Human Subject Training

Attach your human subject training (CITI) certificate.
[CITI Certificate Denice Gravenstijn .pdf](#)

Primary Contact

Select someone who can be contacted about the study in the absence of the principal investigator. If you do not have a primary contact, please list yourself.

Name: Grigoris Argeros
Organization: Sociology Anthrop and Crimin
Address: Sociology Anthropology Criminology 712, Ypsilanti, MI 481970000
Phone: 7344870012
Email: gargeros@emich.edu

Research Personnel

Add all other investigators who will either have contact (in-person or virtual) contact with human subjects or who will have access to identifiable data.

If your research personnel are not affiliated with Eastern Michigan University, list their names, titles, and affiliations below.

Attach human subject training (CITI) certificates for each member of the study staff.

Does this study involve research sites or locations other than EMU?

Note: This does not apply for survey studies in which surveys are completed on the subjects' personal computers.

Yes

No

Conflict of Interest

Do you or any study staff members have a potential conflict of interest for this project?

Yes

No

Is this project funded?

Choose No if you have department or internal funds to conduct your study (including a Faculty Research Fellowship or a Summer Research Award).

Yes

Funding is pending

No

Abstract

Provide a brief abstract of your study procedures in non-technical terms. Limit this abstract to no more than 300 words.

Abstract

International students who move to the United States to study can experience both positive and negative challenges during the process of achieving their academic or educational goal in the higher educational institutions they are enrolled in. International students' experiences can differ depending upon their racial/ ethnic group, and cultural backgrounds. This research study aims to explore the academic experiences of international students from different racial/ ethnic groups and analyze how their experiences may or may not differ from each other. Face to face in-depth interviews, and if applicable phone interviews, will be conducted with twenty international students from different racial/ ethnic, and cultural backgrounds attending Eastern Michigan University (EMU). In addition, snowball sampling may be included to get as many participants as possible. The results of this study can provide an overview of the academic experiences and challenges students from different racial and ethnic groups encounter while adjusting to higher educational institutions in the U.S. The results of this research project can be used for further study and as an awareness for institutions and organizations in the EMU Community.

Purpose

In one or two sentences, what is the purpose of your study?

The purpose of this research is to explore and compare if there is a contradiction between international students' academic experiences from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and how these experiences are different. These academic experiences contain successes and challenges, that can be experienced during campus events, with campus departments, with faculty and staff, and with students.

Study Procedures

Describe step-by-step what will occur during your project

Procedure

In order to retrieve interviews with international graduate students, the Office for International Students & Scholars (OISS), specifically the Office of International Admissions, will be contacted regarding posting of recruitment material for the current research. This approach will be taken to have students voluntarily participate in this research. The given recruitment information will be posted on the OISS website for students to see. Once students reply to the post by email or phone students will be included on the participant list. In addition, international student events posted on the OISS website will be attended to recruit more international students for the study.

The participants will be contacted via email and phone and will be asked to participate in a face to face interview. In situations where a face-to-face interview is not possible the student will be asked to participate in a phone interview instead. All participants in the research will sign an informed consent or verbally give their consent to participate in the research project. The informed consent will be emailed or given in person for the participant to sign. Participants (volunteers) will then be contacted through phone and email. Furthermore, a snowball sampling will be included to recruit more international students through the students interviewed for the research.

The in-depth interviews that will be conducted in this study will contain semi-structured questions and a topic list that will be used to guide the interview. The topic list will contain the following topics such as campus experiences (on campus, in class with students, faculty, staff, campus departments), racial discrimination, perception of diversity on campus, U.S. cultural adjustments experiences.

During the face to face interviews, notes will be taken and the interview will be recorded. The recorded notes and audio will then be transcribed, color and thematic coded in order to be analyzed. Additionally, the notes and audio materials will be locked in a save location outside off public access for protection of participants' confidentiality. In addition, a proposal for the recommended study will be submitted to the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC)/ Institutional Review Board (IRB). Awaiting the approval from IRB, IOSS will be contacted in order to ask for permission and requirements to post recruitment information of the current research on their website.

Qualitative Analysis

The data analysis in this study will use grounded theory to analyze the face to face interviews and will focus on a inductive approach to analyze the collected data. This approach will help explore the concepts used to understand the academic experiences of international students. The concepts used in the theoretical framework of this project are impression management (dramaturgy) and social and cultural capital. Grounded theorists use collected data, for example, the collected literature about international student experiences to understand and make sense of the topic. This process helps to create ideas and form approaches through the lens of theories or theoretical concepts (Charmaz 2006). Creswell (2014) notes that the inductive part of the analysis helps to detect emerging themes or codes and concepts that are used

to organize the data collected (Creswell 2014; Dixon et al. 2016). As Dixon notes, “[...] codes are not usually predefined as in survey research, but rather emerge through an inductive process.” (Dixon 2016: 280). These codes and concepts can also be used to clarify and develop arguments regarding the topic of international student academic experiences as well as interpret the relation with the theoretical framework used (Dixon 2016). By reading through the collected data and exploring the emerging themes, key themes or codes will be determined and further help guide the analysis and detect where concepts emerge in the data. Therefore, in grounded theory qualitative coding is one of the key parts when doing qualitative research because it helps to organize, interpret, compare and form the data collected (Charmaz 2006).

The analysis in this project will go through the different phases of transcribing, coding, and categorizing. First, the recorded interviews will be transcribed by hand using Microsoft Word. If applicable the Nvivo software might be used to help with the coding process of the interviews. Each transcribed interview consists of a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio. After this process the emerging themes or codes and concepts will be identified and labeled. This process is also called coding, which is described as “[...] attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about.” (Charmaz 2006:3). This is simply organizing the data into specific categories (Creswell 2014; Charmaz 2006). Because interviews might be collected at different times in the process memo writing and analyzing might start with the first interview and serve as a narrative guideline (Creswell 2017; Charmaz 2006). Additionally, the themes or codes and concepts, will be used to categorize and interpret the collected data. The relevant data detected will be color coded/ labeled. This step is important to take unneeded data out also called “winnow”: “a process of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts of it.” (Creswell 2017: 195). To understand the codes and concepts found, interpretation will be further explored by searching for any emerging relationships. Furthermore, the additional notes taken during the interview will be typed out in Microsoft Word and will be included when exploring the codes and key concepts.

Following these steps will help to maximize the output and understanding of the topic as Charmaz (2006) argues: “Through studying data, comparing, and writing memos, we define ideas that best fit and interpret the data as tentative analytic categories.” (Charmaz 2006: 3). Finally, the data analyses will be reflected on by linking it to the literature review, theoretical framework, to the data collected to understand - what was gained from this study? How can the results be interpreted? Do the results answer the research question stated for this project?

Study Measures

Provide a brief description of each measure/assessment/survey you plan to use.

Population

The population consists of international graduate students from Eastern Michigan University (EMU) that are enrolled in classes during Winter 2018 and have been studying and living in the United States of America (U.S.) for more than one semester. The goal is to include a wide variety of students from different racial and ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds, students from different departments, and

students
who have experienced at least one semester on campus.

Sample

For the current research a total of twenty students will be interviewed for this study. The total number of international students on a graduate level is listed at 327 students (Emich.edu, 2017). The sample size of twenty interviews has been chosen as a numeric measure to reach saturation. Saturation is “the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data” (Guest et al. 2006: 59; Constantinou et al. 2017). This means that the likelihood of collecting more new information or data is saturated (Creswell 2014). Saturation is a key component when doing qualitative research, basically having an idea of how many interviews to conduct from the sample population (Guest et al. 2006, Creswell 2014). Creswell (2014), argues that a good sample size for qualitative research (e.g. grounded theory studies) would be between twenty and thirty interviews (Creswell 2014; Guest et al. 2006). Although the number for interviews is between twenty and thirty, in some cases saturation can be researched before, for example fifteen. This is all dependent on the research project itself, but it is important to have enough interviews in order to meet the saturation point in the research (Guest et al. 2006; Constantinou et al. 2017).

Type of Research

This research project is a qualitative study and is focused on exploring academic experiences shared by international graduate students from different racial and ethnic groups, and cultural backgrounds. Qualitative research for this study “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell 2014: 4). Furthermore, a qualitative method approach makes way, in “understanding issues through broad and open-ended inquiry, understanding behaviors of values, beliefs and assumptions” and therefore is a great approach to explore academic experiences of international graduate students as newcomers in the U.S. academic realm (Choy 2014: 101).

In order to assess the EMU international student experience, face to face in-depth interviews will be conducted to gather the qualitative data. This method is a great tool to explore and understand the experiences of international students as research subjects; “persons who construct the meaning and significance of their own realities” (Seale 2004: chap. 37/p.257; Creswell 2014). In-depth interviews are a good way to build peoples trust, explain their experiences in their own words, and to give people the opportunity, freedom and assurance of confidentiality to express their opinion (Seal 2004). In addition, face to face in depth-interviews are a great data collection tool to get more respondents, because of the in-person contact, and it gives the flexibility to use probes in terms of understanding and knowing more details behind respondents’ answers, perceptions and experiences (Dixon 2016; Creswell 2014). Face to face interviews, as a measurement also helps informally strengthen the verbal and non-verbal interactions between researcher and respondent (Choy, 2014).

Attach all measures, assessments, and surveys.

Students must also attach the completed and signed Survey [Development Checklist](#).

Does your study use drugs or biological products?

Yes

No

Does your study use medical devices?

Yes

No

Exemption

Exempt studies are not subject to the Common Rule (45 CFR 46), federal regulations regarding the protection of human subjects in research.

They are, however, subject to [Eastern Michigan University policies and procedures](#). As such, the UHSRC requires that Exempt research be submitted for review.

According to UHSRC policy, investigators may not make their own Exempt determination. Exempt determinations may only be made by the UHSRC or their designees.

All of your research activities must fall into at least one of the following categories.

Check all that apply.

If your research activities do not fall exactly into the categories below, click "None of the above" and complete the sections appearing in the left menu.

1. Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely affect students' opportunity to learn or the assessment of educators who provide instruction.

This includes research on regular and especial education instructional strategies and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

2. Research that involves interactions involving educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior if at least one of the following criteria is met:

a. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the subjects cannot readily be identified, either directly or through study IDs that are linked to identifiers; or

b. Any disclosure of the subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing,

employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Note: This category is only applicable to adults age 18+. Educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior involving minors cannot be Exempt except for educational tests and observation of public behavior if the investigator's presence will not in any way affect the behavior of the research subjects in conditions a and b above only.

3. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under option 2 above, if:

a. The human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or

b. Federal statute(s) require(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable information will be maintained throughout the research and thereafter.

4. Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens if:

a. The sources are publicly available; or

b. The information is recorded by the investigator in such a way that subjects cannot be identified directly or indirectly, through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Note: All data must exist at the time of application.

5. Research and demonstration projects which are conducted by or subject to the approval of Federal department or agency heads, and which are designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine:

a. Public benefit or service programs;

b. Procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs;

c. Possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or

d. Possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs.

Note: All projects under this Exempt category must be published on public

list maintained by the Federal department or agency before any human subject research begins.

6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies, if:

a. Wholesome foods without additives are consumed; or

b. A food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

None of the above.

Your research does not qualify for Exempt review. Complete all of the application sections in the left menu.

Pre-Existing Data

Are you using a pre-existing data set?

Yes

No

What are the potential risks to participation in your study?

Check all that apply.

- Potential loss of confidentiality
- Potential emotional distress or upset.
 - Deception of the subject.
 - Punishment of the subject.
 - Potential damage to reputation or employability. Use of drugs or medications
 - Use of biological products.
 - Use of non FDA-approved chemicals.
 - Administration of food or other FDA-approved substances.
- Use of devices.
 - Use of ionizing radiation (e.g., x-rays).
 - Drawing blood.
 - Obtaining samples of bodily fluids or products (including DNA samples).
- Materials, survey questions, interview questions, or research stimuli that may be regarded as sensitive or socially unacceptable.
 - Sexually-explicit materials or questions.
 - Questions about drug and/or alcohol use.
 - Questions about illegal behaviors not including drug and/or alcohol use.
 - Questions about sexual orientation, sexual experience, sexual identity, or sexual abuse. Systematic selection or exclusion of a particular group (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, etc.) Purposeful invasion of privacy.

Disclosure of participants' names.

Deliberate induction of emotional anxiety or stress.

Physical activity, stress, or strain.

Electric shock.

Other

For each risk checked above, list the risk minimization or mitigation procedures.

Risks

The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. This risk is addressed by assigning a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio. Therefore, the names of the participant will not be used during the interview.

The current study has minimal risk. The student will participate voluntarily and present his or her opinion to the researcher (investigator). The students are allowed at any time, when feeling uncomfortable with the subject, to withdraw oneself from the research. If the student completes an interview, the recorded document in notes and on a tape recording device will be kept confidential, meaning no names will be attached to the interview. These audio recordings will be locked securely in a safe location and will not be made public.

The recordings and notes will be locked in the office of the faculty adviser Dr. Grigoris Argeros, Assistant Professor of Sociology, in the Pray Harold building, Office # 712M. In addition, a copy will be stored in a safe in the home of the researcher Denice Gravenstijn. Both locations will be locked and only accessed by the researcher and or advisor when needed.

The primary risk of participation in this study is a potential loss of confidentiality. This risk is addressed by assigning a numerical code and pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and to link to the audio. Therefore, the names of the participant will not be used during the interview.

Do you believe that your study involves more than "minimal risk" to subjects?

Yes

✓ No

What are the potential benefits to subjects?

Potential Benefits The respondents in this research project will not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, this will be an opportunity for them to share their academic experiences as an international student which can help provide awareness and improve academic services to international students during their academic journey at Eastern Michigan University. The knowledge provided can be used as a stepping stone to accomplish equal treatment for all students. Furthermore, each participant will receive a compensation of \$10 for participating in this research project.

What are the potential benefits to science or society?

The current research can provide awareness of the success and also possible challenges that international student may encounter. The knowledge gained through this research can be used to improve academic services to international students during their academic journey at Eastern Michigan University. The knowledge provided can also be used as a stepping stone to accomplish equal treatment for all students.

Sample Size

What is the maximum number of subjects you plan to enroll? Please account for subject withdrawals and attrition in your enrollment total.

25

Will you purposely enroll or divide subject by group affiliation (e.g., faculty and students, randomized to blue or red group, etc.)?

Yes

No

What are your eligibility criteria for participation?

Describe how you will determine whether or not an individual qualifies for participation.
Participant must be:

- enrolled at EMU during the Winter 2018 semester
- must be part-time and / or full time graduate student
- must have at least 1 semester of experience at EMU
- in addition, all genders are included

Will you screen subjects for eligibility prior to enrollment?

Yes

No

Subject Recruitment

How will you recruit or inform potential subjects about your study?
Please be as specific with your language as possible.

Recruitment advertisement:

The advertisement will be in the form of a flier that will be posted on Office for International Students & Scholars (OISS) website and on their bulletin boards.

When participants give their consent to participate they will be contacted by email.

International Students Academic Experiences

Share your academic experiences as an International Student at Eastern Michigan!

1. Are you an international graduate student?
2. Do you want to share your academic experiences and accomplishments (e.g. on campus, with the campus departments, in class, with students) at Eastern Michigan?
3. Do you have ideas on how to help other international students make the best of their academic journey at Eastern Michigan?

- 4. Do you want to help a fellow graduate international student with her master thesis research project?

If your answer is YES you qualify to participate in this research project and can contribute your academic experiences to my research project on international students.

The purpose of this research is to explore and compare international students' experiences from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The results for this research project will be used in my master thesis and help me to complete my final degree requirement in the Sociology Applied Research Program.

Students will be compensated \$10 each for their participation in this research project.

The research project will be conducted in the Faculty Development Center in the Hall library (first floor, room 109) on Eastern Michigan Campus, 900 Oakwood St, Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

Students will commit to a 45 to 60-minute face to face interview in participating in this research project. For more information please call Denice Gravenstijn at (734) 545-5025 or send an email to dgravens@emich.edu.

Do you plan to include any of the following populations in your study?

Minors (under 18 years of age)

Pregnant women with the purpose of studying the fetus or neonates (infants under 6 weeks of age)

Prisoners or detainees

Persons with a physical disability, physical weakness, or physical health concerns

Persons with a decisional, cognitive, or mental impairment (this includes individuals who are unable to provide their own consent)

Economically or educationally disadvantaged persons (this includes individuals who are illiterate or have limited literacy skills)

Victims of crime or other traumatic experiences

Individuals in non-prison institutions (e.g., nursing homes, halfway houses, etc.)

✓ Students

None of the above

Describe the procedures that are in place to provide additional protections to the group(s) checked above.

All participants will be given an informed consent with the purpose of the study, the risks, benefits, and alternatives to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary.

Recruitment Materials

Upload all recruitment fliers, email texts, phone scripts, in-person scripts, posters, social media posts, etc.
[Recruitment Material Denice Gravenstijn.doc](#)

Privacy and Confidentiality

Explain how you plan to protect subject privacy.

Privacy refers to the individual person and not the data. .

The interview will be taken on the day scheduled with the participant. The interview will take place on EMU campus in Faculty Development Center in the Hall library (first floor, room 109 of the faculty adviser Professor Grigoris Argeros).

We will keep the information confidential by assigning each interview with a numerical code and a pseudonym. The participants name will not be collected either on audio or note. Your information will be stored in a safe and will be locked. The recordings and notes will be locked in the office of the faculty adviser Professor Grigoris Argeros, in the Pray Harold buidling, Office # 712M. In addition, a copy will be stored in a safe in the home of the researcher Denice Gravenstijn. Both locations will be locked and only accessed by the researcher and or advisor when needed. Furthermore the backup date saved on the computer will be password protected and encrypted. We will make every effort to keep your information confidential. The investigator will ask you to use only the pseudonym given during the interview session. The investigator will also ask you not to tell anyone about anything that was said during the interview.

The results for this research project will be used in my master's thesis and help me to complete my final degree requirement in the Sociology, Applied Research Program. Results may also possibly be presented at scholarly meetings and/or published in peer-reviewed outlets. A copy of the results and conclusion will be shared with partipants who are interested in the overall results of the study. The data with be numerically coded and every participant will be given a pseudonym their identity and confidentiality.

Data collected will be:

Check only one.

Anonymous

Subjects cannot be identified directly, indirectly through a study ID code and key, or through combination of elements in the data set (e.g., job title and employer).

Coded

Data file does not contain subjects' identifiable information, but there is a separate key that links



study ID codes with subjects' identifiable information.

Identifiable

Data file contains direct identifiers, such as name, phone number, social security number, EID number, or elements that, when combined, allow for identification (e.g., job title and employer).

How do you plan to keep data confidential?

Include special precautions for identifiable or coded data, and address how data in multiple media (e.g., paper data, electronic data, audio recordings, etc.) will be stored.

We will keep your information confidential by assigning each interview with a numerical code and a pseudonym. The participants name will not be collected either on audio or note. Your information will be stored in a safe and will be locked. The recordings and notes will be locked in the office of the faculty adviser Dr. Grigoris Argeros, Assistant Professor of Sociology, in the Pray Harold buidling, Office # 712M. In addition, a copy will be stored in a safe in the home of the researcher Denice Gravenstijn. Both locations will be locked and only accessed by the researcher and or advisor when needed. Furthermore the backup date saved on the computer will be password protected and encrypted. We will make every effort to keep your information confidential. The investigator will ask you to use only the pseudonym given during the interview session. The investigator will also ask you not to tell anyone about anything that was said during the interview.

How will research results be disseminated?

Include plans for protection of privacy/confidentiality in publications, presentations, and other methods of dissemination.

The results for this research project will be used in my master's thesis and help me to complete my final degree requirement in the Sociology, Applied Research Program. Results may also possibly be presented at scholarly meetings and/or published in peer-reviewed outlets. A copy of the results and conclusion will be shared with participants who are interested in the overall results of the study. The data will be numerically coded and every participant will be given a pseudonym their identity and confidentiality.

Data Monitoring Plan

Does participation in your study have the potential to cause physical injury, psychological injury, trauma, severe emotional upset or distress, or does it have the potential to trigger such an event?

Yes

No

Note: There are strict regulatory requirements for the format and content of consent forms. Please use the consent template available on the [UHSRC website](#) as a basis for your consent form. You may also modify one of the sample consent forms on the [UHSRC website](#).

Will all subjects be able to legally consent for themselves?

Note: Minors (under age 18) cannot legally consent for themselves.

Yes

No

Will informed consent be obtained from all subjects?

Note: check No if you plan to use deception.

Yes

No

Describe your consent process.

Explain how, when, where, and by whom consent will be obtained. You must provide the prospective subject sufficient opportunity to discuss and consider whether or not to participate. The consent process must minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence.

1. The informed consent will be emailed to the participant
2. The participant will read through the informed consent and is able to email and call the investigator with questions to explain anything that is unclear
3. Participants will be asked to either bring a signed copy to the interview or sign a hard copy of the informed consent on the day of the interview (hard copy provided by researcher), and or give a verbal consent if the interview is done over phone. The participant may sign the document and sent a scanned copy to the investigator. This applies if the participant is not able to meet in person and agrees to a phone interview instead.

Will subjects physically sign a consent form?

Check No if you plan to obtain online or verbal consent.

Yes

No

Attach your consent form(s).

[Informed Consent Denice Gravenstijn.doc](#)

Will there be any personal costs to subjects that must be paid for research procedures?

Yes

No

Will subjects be paid or otherwise compensated for their time/participation in the research study?

Note: refreshments or food and drink offered during participation are not compensation. Compensation includes money, gift cards, lotteries/raffles/drawings, course credit, small gifts, etc.

Yes

No

Describe any compensation or payment that will be made to subjects.

Compensation and Incentives

Each student will be offered \$10 for their participation in the research project. The amount will be given to each participating student after completion of the face to face interview. The goal is to interview twenty (20) students. This equals a total amount of \$200 that will be used to compensate the students for their participation in the research project.

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires additional protections for Protected Health Information (PHI) collected from HIPAA-covered entities. HIPAA-covered entities are typically health insurance plans, health clearinghouses, or entities that bill insurance for health care.

Are you collecting identifiable Protected Health Information (PHI) under a HIPAA-covered entity?

Yes

No

Are you obtaining Protected Health Information (PHI) from a HIPAA-covered entity?

Note: HIPAA-covered entities include health plans, health care clearinghouses, or health care providers who bill insurers.

Yes

No

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law protecting the rights of students regarding the privacy of their educational record. Collection of data from an official educational record must be FERPA-compliant.

Are you requesting access to EMU educational records?

Yes

No

Are you requesting access to K-12 educational records?

Yes

No

Attachments

Faculty Advisor CITI certificate

[CITI certificate Grigoris Argeros.pdf](#)

PI CITI certificate

[CITI Certificate Denice Gravenstijn .pdf](#)

Research Staff CITI certificates

Recruitment materials

[Recruitment Material Denice Gravenstijn.doc](#)

Informed Consent form

[Informed Consent Denice Gravenstijn.doc](#)

Study Measures

[Interview Questions Denice Gravenstijn.docx](#)

[Survey_Development_Checklist_Denice Gravenstijn.pdf](#)

Appendix G: Interview Questions

Duration of each interview: 45-60 minutes

General Questions

- How long have you lived in the United States of America (U.S.)?
- What was your reason for moving to the U.S.?
- What has been the hardest part of moving to the U.S.?
- What was your first impression of the U.S.?
- How long do you plan to stay in the U.S.?
- How has your experience in the U.S. been so far?
- Do you behave differently in the U.S. than in your home country? How so?

Language

- What is your native language?
- What other languages do you speak?
- How comfortable are you in speaking English? (Applies if native language is not English)
- What is your nationality? (what country do you originate from?)

Experiences on EMU Campus

- How did you end up at Eastern Michigan University (EMU)?
- Do you remember your first day on EMU campus? If so, please describe it.
- Which program are you currently enrolled in?
- What year are you in?

- Has anything happened during your time at Eastern Michigan that has or still bothers you?
- What do you think of the educational system at EMU? Is it different than your home country? If, yes can you describe.

Identity

- To which racial and/or ethnic group do you identify yourself with?
- Have you ever treated someone from a different racial and ethnic group differently because of their race or ethnicity?
- Have you ever been treated differently because of your racial or ethnic background or nationality? How did that make you feel and how did you react?

Treatment in Social Networks (Friends, , Students, Faculty, Staff, Campus Departments)

Friends

- Do you have American friends at EMU? If yes, how did you meet them?
- Do you have American friends from a different racial and ethnic group at EMU?
- Do you have friends that are non-American? If yes, how did you meet them?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your friends who are American?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your friends who are non-American?

Students

- How would you describe your relationship with your classmates?
- How do you feel when you interact with your classmates?

- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your classmates versus how you are treated by your friends?

- How comfortable are you when you are asked questions in class by students?

Faculty

- How would you describe your relationship with your professors?
- How do you feel when you interact with your professors?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your professors in and outside of class?
- How comfortable are you when you are asked questions in class (by students/professors)?

Outside the classroom

- How would you describe your experiences with campus departments starting with when you first applied to EMU (e.g. Records and Registration, Student Center, OISS)?
- Do you participate in campus events? If, yes, can you name and describe them.
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by staff at campus departments when you seek information or help?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way you are treated by your friends, professors and staff on campus versus how non-international students are treated?
- Have you noticed a difference in the way international students are treated by students, professors and staff based on their race, ethnicity and/ or nationality?
- Have you experienced any form of discrimination on campus since you moved here?
- Have you ever felt uncomfortable with students from different racial or ethnic backgrounds?

Attitudes and Behaviors

- Do you socialize with other students on campus?
- How do staff members treat you when you ask for help at offices?
- How do you feel when you have to present in class?
- Have students ever mistaken you to be from a different racial or ethnic group than the group you identify with? How did you react?
- Have you experienced judgment or bias in American students' attitude towards you?

Social Support

- Are there international organizations or social groups on campus that you interact with?
If yes, how has your experience been so far?
- Do you feel supported by the international student accommodations at EMU (e.g. OISS, student center)? How could they be improved?
- Do you have faculty/ staff that you can go to for help or ask for information?

Appendix H: Recruitment Advertisement

International Students Academic Experiences

Share your academic experiences as an International Student at Eastern Michigan!

1. Are you an international graduate student?
2. Do you want to share your academic experiences and accomplishments (e.g. on campus, with the campus departments, in class, with students) at Eastern Michigan?
3. Do you have ideas on how to help other international students make the best of their academic journey at Eastern Michigan?
4. Do you want to help a fellow graduate international student with her master thesis research project?

If you answer is YES you qualify to participate in this research project and can contribute your academic experiences to my research project on international students.

The purpose of this research is to explore and compare international students' experiences from different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. The results for this research project will be used in my master thesis and help me to complete my final degree requirement in the Sociology Applied Research Program.

Students will be compensated \$10 each for their participation in this research project.

The research project will be conducted in the Faculty Development Center in the Hall library (first floor, room 109) on Eastern Michigan Campus, 900 Oakwood St, Ypsilanti, MI 48197.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350

Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

Students will commit to a 45 to 60-minute face to face interview in participating in this research project. For more information please call Denice Gravenstijn at (734) 545-5025 or send an email to dgravens@emich.edu.

**Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review
Committee**
UHSRC Protocol Number: UHSRC-FY17-18-350
Study Approval Dates: 4/17/18 – 4/16/19

Appendix I: Thesis Timeline

Term	Progress	Recommended Deadline. (Defense date)
Fall 2016	Select Thesis Topic	September 2016
Fall 2016	Select Chair and Thesis Committee	November 2016
Fall 2016	Write first draft of introduction/ Topic proposal	October 2016
Winter 2017	Submit draft introduction to Chair	January 2017
Summer 2017	Revise introduction and include Chair's comments	January-February 2017
Summer 2017	Write first draft literature review	February-March 2017
Summer 2017	Write first draft methods	March-April 2017
Summer 2017	Write First draft thesis proposal	June-July 2017
Summer 2017	Submit first draft thesis proposal to Chair	July 2017
Summer 2017	Revise draft thesis proposal and include chair's comments	August 2017

Fall 2017	Submit final draft to thesis committee	August-September 2017
Fall 2017	Revise final draft thesis proposal and include comments from committee	August-September 2017
Fall 2017	Submit final thesis proposal to Chair	September 2017
Fall 2017	Submit final draft thesis proposal for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval	September-October 2017
Fall 2017-Winter 2018	Data collection/ field research	October-December 2017
Fall 2017-Winter 2018	Organize and analyze research findings	October 2017-January 2018
Winter 2018	Write first draft of thesis	January-February 2018
Winter 2018	Submit first draft to Chair	February 2018
Winter 2018	Correct draft thesis to include Chair's comments	January-February 2018
Fall 2018	Submit draft thesis to committee	November 2018

Fall 2018	Correct draft thesis and include committee's comments	November 2018- December 2018
Winter 2019	Submit final draft to committee and include Chair's comments	January 2019
Winter 2019	Revise final thesis draft to include committee's feedback	January 2019
Winter 2019	Submit final thesis draft to committee	January, 2019
Winter 2019	Approval for thesis defend	January, 2019
Winter 2019	Coordinate thesis defend date and time	January, 2019
Winter 2019	Revise additional feedback from committee	January 2019
Winter 2019	Submit final thesis to committee (including Chair)	January 2019
Winter 2019	Thesis defend	January 2019