Study to Work, or Work to Study? An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of International Students' Internship Experiences in the United States

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STUDY TO WORK, OR WORK TO STUDY? AN INTERPRETIVE
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS’
INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES

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DISSERTATION

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Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving parents, Simeon and Tsvetana Rosev, who never wavered in their support throughout my entire doctoral journey. Their endless efforts and sacrifices have allowed me to achieve my dreams. I am forever thankful.

And,

To my soon-to-be husband, Kevin Klein, whose constant encouragement, wisdom, and unconditional love played a significant part in making this study possible.
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Не се стреми към успех, ако го искаш; просто прави това, което обичаш и в което вярваш, и той ще дойде естествено.

My Bulgarian heritage played a very important role in my research interests and enthusiasm for international education. The quote above is a Bulgarian expression that translates to, *don’t strive for success, just do what you love and believe in, then success will come naturally*. Working with international students and learning more about global education and public diplomacy is work that has come naturally for me. This doctoral journey was truly an enjoyable experience and I believe this is due to my bicultural heritage and love for international students.

Achieving the title of Doctor of Education was a five-year journey filled with hard work, new friends in academia, dedication, and a new respect for academic research. I started this journey in an eight-person cohort, where I was the youngest and with the least amount of life, professional, and academic experiences. My peers uplifted my confidence each semester and supported me through my course-work. Ultimately, my academic experience was profoundly transformational, and this would not have been possible without the collective support I received from each one of my cohort peers.

My dissertation committee played various supportive roles throughout this journey and I am very grateful for their expertise throughout all levels of this process. I first and foremost need to give praise to my dissertation chair, Dr. Allison Borden. I still remember the first day of Introduction to Data Analysis for Organizational Leaders, and how stressed everyone was to do math again. Her calm demeanor, sincerity, and belief that we would all succeed instantly drew me into her personality and teaching style. Not only is she one of the most intelligent people I
have ever grown to know and work with, but her consideration for my life outside of research and compassion for my journey through this process has made her more than just my dissertation chairperson, but a true friend.

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during the weekends pulled me away from friends and family, but when I had a little bit of time for fun, thank you for being there.

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Finally, this dissertation is in honor of my Bulgarian parents who have always valued education above anything else. While growing up, I remember their challenges while immigrating and raising a family in a foreign country. This study is a manifestation of the American Dream and a reflection of my parents’ journey. Thank you, mom and dad, for always believing in me and teaching me how to cherish family, culture, and the important things in life.
This is a phenomenological qualitative research study that explores the essence of the international student experience while studying at a Master’s or Ph.D. level in the U.S. This study examined two main concepts: work experience and cultural transformation. The work experience component explores the professional development and acculturation process for international graduate students and the cultural transformation element aims to understand the cultural differences, self-identity, and transformative aspect from the participants’ experiences abroad.

Using purposeful sampling and a transcendental research design, twelve international students (five pursuing a Master’s degree and seven pursuing a Ph.D.) were interviewed in a chronologically structured format. The semi-structured interviews focused on the participants’ experiences with acculturating and adjusting to the U.S., their internship journeys and career aspirations, and lastly, a reflection of home and self-identify. Three larger concepts were developed to explain the phenomenon: expectations, costs, and outcomes.
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Chapter One – Context for the Study

Broad Social, Political, Economic, and Educational Background for the Study

Each year U.S. universities welcome and rely on nonimmigrant students from around the world. International students bring academic expertise, global perspectives, and diverse cultural perspectives to U.S. students and faculty (Wongpaiboon, 2008). International students make a significant impact on the American economy, with $39.4 billion contributed in 2016 (Institute of International Education, 2018). International and domestic students, the university community, and local economies all benefit from the opportunities that result from international study (Wongpaiboon, 2008). International students in degree-seeking programs who study in the United States are dedicating at least two to four years to a new life abroad as they immerse themselves in American culture and the U.S. education system. Duderstadt (2000, p. 19) believes that American universities “not only reflect a strong international character among its students, faculty, and academic programs, but it also stands at the center of a world system of learning and scholarship.” Duderstadt (2000) continues to explain that even though U.S. university campuses are intellectually rich, the self-absorbed nature and ethnocentrism of the U.S. culture is an issue for developing the international competencies and global knowledge of university professionals and academic peers.

The landscape of international education is constantly shifting. For many years, the United States attracted the highest number of international students seeking education abroad. Currently, students search for higher education outside of their home country, but with less emphasis on the United States (Neghina, 2016; Redden, 2017). At the University of Toronto, for example, there has been a 20 percent increase in international student applications, an 80 percent
increase in applications from the U.S, a 59% increase from India, a 68% increase from Turkey, and a 63% increase from Mexico (Redden, 2017).

Internationalization is defined as “the policies and practices academic institutions and individuals use to cope with the global academic environment” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). When there is a focus on internationalizing U.S. higher education, the number of international students increases, but as visa issuance becomes more strict and travel bans increase the international student population in the U.S. decreases each semester (Lee, 2017). Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 290) believe that the motivations for internationalization include, “commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisition, and enhancing the curriculum with international content, and specific initiatives include cross-board collaborations and exclusive programs for international students.”

U.S. colleges and universities are implementing new marketing strategies focused on offering safe and welcoming campuses, such as #WeAreWelcoming or #YouAreWelcomeHere to sustain international student admission (Lee, 2017). The long-term trends influencing the pace of internationalization include political realities and national security; government policies; and the cost of study. The international enrollment crisis has forced university administrations to rethink internationalization in terms of rehumanizing, politicizing, and consciousness-raising international education (Lee, 2017).

U.S. universities have many different types of student populations on their campuses, which include Americans, DACA students, nonimmigrants, exchange students, permanent residents, and others. All these student populations are experiencing their own unique set of challenges. This study researched nonimmigrant students in the U.S. on an F or J visa. A nonimmigrant is any foreign national who is temporarily visiting the United States to fulfill a
specific purpose, such as education (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). There are three types of student visa categories, F-1, M-1, and J-1 student visas. Most graduate students studying in the U.S. whose primary purpose is to complete an academic course of study are F-1 students, meaning they entered the U.S. in the F visa status. Visa status is important to address because different student visas hold different benefits and restrictions. Non-immigrant international graduate-degree seeking students arrive from every continent in the world, with more than 231 countries and territories represented (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). At the University of New Mexico, there are 690 international graduate students and 1280 international students in total from 104 countries (The University of New Mexico Global Education Office, 2017).

International student enrollment is tracked nationally through the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). The most recent report for 2017 showed a strong decline in students studying from Saudi Arabia, with a 19 percent decline and the highest growth coming from Nepal with an 18 percent increase (Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). The University of New Mexico reported a large decrease in students from India, China, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea compared to years prior (The University of New Mexico Global Education Office, 2017). Canadian universities are seeing record high enrollment numbers of international students. Unlike its U.S. neighbors, Canada learned to manage growing numbers in international enrollment for the 2017-2018 academic year (ICEF, 2017).

**Statement of the Problem**

Before arriving in the United States, all international students, except Canadians who do not need a visa to enter the U.S., are required to prove “no-intent to immigrate” to receive a student visa from the United States government. Unlike typical American graduate students who
are eligible to apply for financial aid through federal loans, international students do not have access to certain financial resources, like financial aid. Before a university can provide admission to international graduate students and issue an I-20 or DS-2019 form for them, the student must prove that they have the finances to pay tuition, housing, and all living expenses for one academic year. International students pay out-of-state tuition unless they are awarded special scholarships or assistantships.

Understanding the international student population is important for university policy makers because many of these students are coming to the United States with unique challenges. Bai (2016) and Liu (2009) found one unique challenge for international students, mostly from Asian countries, is extreme pressure from their families to succeed. Much research has been conducted to better understand the process of acculturating in the United States for international students from different cultural backgrounds (Bai, 2016; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Dellinger, 2014; Park, Song, & Lee, 2014; Ra, 2016). Academic pressure is one of the main acculturation stressors for Chinese students (Bai, 2016). Chinese families and culture expect superb academic achievement from their children, causing Chinese students in the United States to experience greater fear of academic failure and more stress than other students (Lui, 2009).

Upon arrival, international students are strongly advised to acculturate within their new setting. Adaptation is critical for a successful life abroad; as international students learn the American education system, maintain social networks, and manage academic pressure (Bai, 2016). Many international students find themselves experiencing little acceptance, tolerance, and understanding of their cultural practices by people in their new surroundings, and, sadly, also may experience racial discrimination (Furukawa, 1997; Hamboyan & Bryan, 1995). The process of remaining authentic in a vastly new setting is not promoted in U.S. institutions of higher
education as much as it should be.

There are high physical and emotional costs for international graduate students who pursue and achieve their academic and career aspirations in the United States (Leong & Chou, 1996; Pedersen, 1991). International student populations face unique situations in their search for employment in the United States after completing their academic degree (Sangganjanavanich, Lenz, & Cavazos, 2011). Spencer-Rodgers (2000) conducted a culturally relevant, career-development needs assessment and found international student participants’ vocational needs are centered around obtaining work experience, overcoming interview barriers, and developing job-search skills. The unemployment rate nationally for 20-24-year-olds living in the United States in 2016 was 12 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Unemployment for all young adults can be scary and frustrating, but international students are not afforded the legal opportunity to be unemployed in the United States after graduation. There is an immigration rule, which is calculated in the aggregate, allowing only 90 days of unemployment before violating his or her immigration status (USCIS, 2020). The process to find employment is stressful for most graduates, but international students specifically need to navigate through visa requirements and restrictions, which are also subject to change.

One-third of science and engineering post-graduate students in the U.S. are foreign-born, and by 2020 international students will comprise half of the U.S. science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) Ph.D. graduates (Han & Appelbaum, 2016; Han, Stocking, Gebbie, & Appelbaum, 2015). International students can compete with U.S. citizens and permanent residents in the STEM workforce because there is a significant decline historically in the number of U.S. citizen and permanent resident STEM doctoral recipients. International students who graduate with a STEM degree are offered three years of Optional
Practical Training (OPT), while international students from other disciplines are afforded only one year. The extra two years are referred to as an OPT STEM extension.

**Purpose of the Study**

This was an empirical qualitative study designed to examine the experiences of international students who are employed through an internship, Curricular Practical Training (CPT), during their graduate degree program. I collected qualitative data through a phenomenological approach to capture the genuine experiences of international graduate students while living and studying in the United States. Through in-depth interviews, international students were able to explain the unique process of acculturating while studying and working, their post-graduation plans, and their professional experience in an American work environment. Institutions of higher education need to be more aware of international student needs to secure an internship and gain valuable U.S. work experience. It is important to understand the purpose of higher education, and the role institutions play in the development of international students. It is crucial to understand the strengths and the resources international students bring from their home countries in the forms of social, human, and economic capital. Their confidence in finding and developing resource opportunities in the United States is important to understand as well.

The process to acquire a visa to study in the United States is lengthy, expensive, and tedious. Internations, many times, must go through an interview process, potentially not in their home city. There is an unimaginable amount of documentation required through every step of the process, and making an error on one page or misplacing a certain document means the entire application can be discontinued or denied. An exponential amount of effort and energy is needed to travel to the United States as a non-immigrant. Many students find themselves leaving their home countries to start a better life, only to find misery, depression, and hopelessness in their
new lives (Davis & Garrod, 2013). Gareis (2012) estimates that almost 40% of international students do not have a single American friend. Leask and Carroll (2011) find great concern when international students live in isolation, as this leads to a lack of communication and interaction between domestic and international students, which impedes diversity and intercultural relations on university campuses. Many international students believe they are coming to the U.S. to make their lives easier, but due to work restrictions, they find themselves living in worse socioeconomic conditions than before.

**Research Questions**

Creswell (2013) addresses the central question in any qualitative study as, “the declaration of the query examined in its most general form” (p. 105). Through continuous examination and reexamination of the central question the researcher develops a single overarching question and sub-questions, dissecting the central question into several parts (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research seeks to find “meaning” questions to uncover the essence of a certain phenomenon (Morse, 1994). Using the structure outlined by Creswell (2013), the central question of this study was: What meaning do international graduate students at a higher education research institution in the southwest region of the United States who have worked in an internship ascribe to their academic and personal experiences?

To further refine the central question, Creswell (2013) recommends five to seven sub-questions, which mature and evolve through the data collection and research process. Every international student in the study has a different combination of background, major, culture, and many other variables. I used the sub-questions to structure the diverse data and to help centralize the interviews and observations during the study. The main sub-questions are:
1. How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career-decision making self-efficacy post-graduation?

2. In what way has being in the United States impacted international students’ journey towards better understanding their own culture and their outlook on life and the world?

Other sub-questions that are addressed in this study, but not heavily analyzed include:

What challenges do international graduate students face when are acculturating to the American culture and education system? How, if at all, has being in the United States influenced international graduate students’ view of home? What are the reasons for wanting or not wanting to continue working in the United States after graduating?

**Conceptual or Theoretical Framework**

In this paper, I have explored the paradox of career development by analyzing the data from the point of view of chaos and complexity theory. Careers are complex and open systems with situational factors guiding the selection of majors and ultimately, careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011). During the last 25 years, career development theories have shifted from reductionist, rational decision-making and matching modes (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1959; Parsons, 1909) to more adaptive and integrative modes (Blustein, 1997; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Patton & MacMohon, 2006). The chaos theory of careers (CTC) developed by Pryor and Bright (2011) is an integrated framework for the modern career development process. Schlesinger and Daley (2016) developed a comprehensive framework for the practical use of the CTC embodying complexity, chance, change, and construction.
**Definition of Terms**

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): F-1 student work authorized for employment related to student’s field of study, such as an internship or co-op.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): The department that has jurisdiction over immigration services as well as other functions. United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customers and Border Protection (CBP) are part of DHS.

Grace Period: The time a student is given to depart the United States after completing or withdrawing from a program of study, or finishing post-completion Optional Practical Training. F-1 students have a 60-day grace-period.

International Student: An individual who is enrolled at an accredited university or college in the U.S. on a non-immigrant visa.

Internationalization: The policies academic institutions and individuals use to cope with the global academic environment.

Nonimmigrant: Any foreign national who is temporarily visiting the United States to fulfill a specific purpose, such as education.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): Temporary employment that is directly related to the graduate student's major area of study and usually undertaken after completing a degree or program.

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS): All Service Centers and District Offices, which are responsible for most immigration adjudication.
Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations, and Significance of the Study

Assumptions. Simon and Goes (2013) believe assumptions are a necessary element to enable and conduct the study. As the basic foundation of any proposed research, assumptions can be viewed as something the researcher accepts as true without concrete proof (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Williams and Colomb (2003) believe the researcher must ask: “What do I believe that my readers must also believe (but may not) before they will think that my reasons are relevant to my claims?” (p. 200). Assumptions, which are relevant within qualitative research, include the sincere effort for the participants to answer truthfully about their lived experiences. As the interviewer, there is the assumption that the participants may share personal, emotional, and sensitive information and the data collected through the interview process will be protected. All of the participants are international students and English is their second or third language; therefore, whenever necessary, I explained the questions multiple times to make sure the context was understood by all participants. The last assumption is that each participant underwent at least one full semester of an internship within their major of study.

Limitations. Every study, no matter the thoughtfulness of the construction and the expertise in conducting it, has limitations (Simon & Goes, 2013). Ellis and Levy (2009) describe limitations as uncontrollable threats to the internal validity of a study. The population can be viewed as a limitation, since there are many variables to consider within the international student population: age, country of origin, sex, major, and employer are all varying factors.

Research limitations are vital for replication or expansion of the study (Creswell, 2005, as cited in Ellis & Levy, 2009). Purposeful sampling means that the inquirer selects individuals specifically for their understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explains purposeful sampling as planned events and decisions
about who should be sampled, what form the sampling will take, and how many people need to be sampled. These varying factors may influence the validity of a study.

**Delimitations.** Recognizing the delimitations of the study sets the boundaries of the research (Ellis & Levy, 2009). There is great importance in considering delimitations because it differentiates what the research is not going to do and centralizing the main purpose of the research being performed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Through the interview processes, international students disclosed traumatizing, interesting, personal, and dramatic events about their experiences abroad. I have carefully analyzed all information provided through the participant interviews, but I did not deviate from the premise of the study and the main research question. Inconsistency or varying data had no influence on the examination of the main research question and the final analysis of the phenomenon. I did not consider undergraduate international students for inclusion in this study, even though they are still eligible to participate in CPT internships. Using a purposeful sampling method gave this study the flexibility to explore all variables, therefore not limiting the sample to a specific gender, ethnicity, age, or major.

**Significance of the Study.** There are three related issues necessary in order to conduct the research: the problem driving the study, the body of the knowledge, and the nature of the data available to the researcher (Ellis & Levy, 2009). A research-worthy problem and the domain from which it is drawn can limit the type of methodology necessary to complete the study and collect the data (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Phenomenology is the research method most useful in capturing the lived experiences of international graduate students who are studying and working in a CPT internship. There is very limited research on international students and the internship experience. Lee (2013) brings light to the professional issues international students face,
especially when applying to the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers, although this study is specific to the field of psychology

Hvalic-Touzery, Hopia, Sihvonen, Diwan, Sen, and Skela-Savic (2017) analyzed the data from six focus groups in four different countries in Europe on international practical placement experiences in health and social care study programs. The participants in the study (Hvalic-Touzery et al., 2017) made specific recommendations on how to handle the practical placement experience of students, teachers, and mentors. Albert and Hazen (2005) and Wu and Wilkes (2017) have studied the motivating factors relating to post-graduation migration plans for international students studying in the U.S. or Canada. Hvalic-Touzery et al. (2017) and Wu and Wilkes (2017) added knowledge and awareness to international student research, but more research is needed to fill the gap between international students studying in the U.S. and work experience.
Chapter Two – Review of the Literature

Introduction

A review of current and foundational literature will clarify the significance of researching the international student internship experience and reveal any openings for needed research. The literature review is concept-centric, as concepts determine the organizing framework (Webster & Watson, 2002). Webster and Watson (2002) believe a review should be logically structured around the topic’s central ideas and the use of tables and figures to economically convey the key findings and relationships. This review is purposely organized chronologically to mirror the life of an international student moving to the U.S. The first topic is the research institution itself, followed by the transition period and common but unique challenges presented to international students. The review continues to explain the motivation and the self-determination to persevere and become successful in the U.S. The last portion of the review draws awareness to the focal-point or heart of the research questions, which is understanding the impact of internships on college students.

Literature Review

Research Institutions of Higher Education

New Mexico’s public research institution, The University of New Mexico, is in the middle of a metropolitan area with an enrollment of over 26,000 students every fall for the last five years (The University of New Mexico, 2020). NM Partnerships (2020) believe higher education is a priority in New Mexico, with three major research universities, four comprehensive four-year institutions, seven independent community colleges, and three cooperative education sites and many specialized learning facilities. With 50 different options and choices statewide, The University of New Mexico stands out with over 200 degree
programs, 169,257 active alumni worldwide, and status as the official flagship university in New Mexico (The University of New Mexico, 2020).

International students are members of the alumni communities cultivated by the institutions of higher education from which they obtain their degrees. Therefore, it is important for international students to feel welcome and comfortable maintaining a relationship with their host universities. McArthur (2011) believes that the problems in higher education are not due to recent trends towards universities having an economic role or economic greed, rather, the narrowness of how the economic role is conceptualized, and that higher education should contribute to the economic and social welfare of all members of society. Many colleges and universities have devoted considerable amounts of energy and resources to re-evaluate their civic functions (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumont, & Stephens, 2003; Ehrlich, 2000). The commercialization of higher education is encouraging a society in which people either learn to subvert their creativity and identity, rather than developing a platform for a transformative experience (McArthrur, 2011).

It is important to understand the educational system in which international students choose to participate, which is usually very different from their home education systems. The cost of higher education has grown substantially over the last 75 years and more notably after the 1980s. Archibald and Feldman (2008) believe the rise in tuition costs in the U.S. is a cause of considerable public concern and the cost of a college education has become a serious national issue. Many of the international students who come to the U.S. are from countries where health care and education are subsidized by their governments. Impersonal institutions of higher education in the U.S. that view students in terms of market value are dehumanizing the educational experience. McArthur (2011) discusses how higher education promotes privilege and
fails to enrich our humanity and wider society largely due to a high concentration on its economic purpose.

Universities are like corporations, dealing with activities like planning, creating strategies, recruiting and advertising, while also managing revenues, faculty, staff, and students (Gochhayat, Giri, & Suar, 2017). For the organization to run successfully, the leaders must have the skills, knowledge, and leadership competencies relevant to education and its true purpose, rather than a profit-driven mindset. To support international student populations, leaders in specialty departments (for example, The Global Education Office) and the higher institutional leadership must work collectively to support all vulnerable student populations.

The lives of students inside institutions of higher education are both narrow and disarticulated from the outside world (McArthur, 2011). International students acculturate into a university atmosphere and lifestyle, which differs greatly from the wider social realm. Students become comfortable in student life, which can make the transition to the outside world worrisome for some individuals. International students contribute more than $12 billion to the U.S. economy each year, and two-thirds of these students and their families personally finance their education (Altbach, 2004). International students contribute to the U.S. economy, but also contribute nonmonetary benefits to the campuses, neighborhoods, and employers by cultivating cultural awareness and diversity.

International students benefit from their academic and social lives in the U.S., but American students equally benefit from cultural exchanges and experiences with international students (Barber, 2003). The purpose of any type of learning should enhance the individual’s wellbeing and contribute to the betterment of society for all (McArthur, 2011). Rehm (1989, p. 109) studied vocational education and found that the aim of education is not to prepare obedient
and subservient workers, stripped of their humanizing creativity, but enlightened, emancipated workers. Enhancing a student’s learning to better oneself and society is termed expansive learning, and this type of learning offers opportunities for personal development and growth while developing work-related skills (Fuller & Unwin, 2003).

Class, gender, and race are complex forces within the socio-economic world. Class is a dynamic concept that is reinvented according to the contemporary requirements of power and capital (De Lissovoy, 2008). International students are drawn to the United States higher education system without knowing exactly how much academic and student life support they will receive from the host university. Higher education research institutions employ staff and admit students from different parts of the world with diverse cultures, ethnicities and value systems. Managing a diverse population needs special skills, knowledge, and attitudes on the part of the administrators/leaders (Gochhayat et al., 2017). Many international students are looking for transnational human capital through their educational journey abroad and heightened globalization skills (Gerhards & Hans, 2017). For there to be a more meaningful exchange, university staff and faculty must understand what motivates international students to come to the U.S. for higher education. There must be mutual understanding between the institution and the student to avoid regret, depression, and disappointment.

The Culture of American Universities

Graddol, McArthur, Flack, and Amey (1999) predicted the popularity of the American English accent compared to the British, as many young people are influenced by American English. Media can be particularly influential in how foreigners view life in the U.S. People are led to believe everything depicted in the movies about America and American culture is real. Hollywood creates unrealistic perceptions about college-life in the U.S. The fraternity parties,
traveling every weekend, and stress-free lifestyles are, for the most part, fictitious. Social media platforms, like Snapchat, Tic Tok, and Instagram, may also contribute to this false reality.

International students who are eager to escape from difficulties in their past and start a new life in the United States often find themselves conflicted about silencing their past or speaking about their earlier circumstances (Kobourov, 1999). It is the inner conflict of becoming a new person and starting fresh or living in rumination. It is human nature to compare one’s home country to the new host country. The things that seem better or that seem worse expand one’s preferences and creates a more diverse worldview. Kobourov (1999) described his student life in his home country of Bulgaria as, “characterized by a high student/faculty ratio, lack of tutorials and personal contact with the professors, and monologue-style lectures” (p. 10). Life in the United States is a contrast for many international students. “Professors are engaged with their material and interested in their students’ welfare,” Kobourov (1999, p. 10). Kobourov’s need to continue his education journey abroad became apparent during his first year of college in Bulgaria. The inadequacies of studying in Bulgaria caused Kobourov to write to more than two hundred universities and apply to each university that did not require any financial support. During this time, Bulgarians were waiting for hours in line to buy essential food like bread and milk, which made paying for college application fees impossible. Kobourov traveled to study in the United States after winning an international grant and accepting a financial aid package at Dartmouth University. Kobourov (1999, p. 16) explained:

The greatest virtue one can possess in Bulgaria is patience. People patiently stand in lines for hours. They patiently wait for something nice to happen. They patiently drink themselves to sleep, hoping that tomorrow will be different. In the United States, patience
is almost a character flaw. Here you are in control of your own future and you make tomorrow different.

**Modern Forms of Communication.** American culture is constantly evolving. Social media outlets like Facebook, which originated in the U.S., serve more than 2.45 billion monthly active users, 300 million U.S. visitors, and has continued to gain popularity throughout the years (Aboulhosn, 2020; Eldon, 2010). Aboulhosn (2020) surprisingly contests that 90% of Facebook’s daily active users come from outside the U.S. and Canada. The United States is home to the highest population of Facebook users, but globally, India, Brazil, and Indonesia have the next largest Facebook audiences. YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat are the most popular online platforms among teens (Aboulhosn, 2020). A study by Poushter, Bishop, and Chwe (2017) shows the large differences in social media usage between 14 different developed countries around the world. In Germany, 85% of adults are using the internet, but less than half are reporting using social media platforms. Countries that show usage of social networking sites similar to Germany include Greece (46%), Japan (43%), and France (48%). Digital media and social networks have become an increasingly integral part of daily life and have heavily influenced how individuals live their lives, both at home and abroad (Stoner, 2017).

It is common in North America to use social media platforms for event planning such as birthdays, family gatherings, weddings, new babies, university events, sporting events, and club meetings. Websites such as Facebook are not commonly known to all students, as governments in China, Iran, and North Korea have censored Facebook. Social media is a function of a country’s technology, culture, and government (Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012). Authoritarian countries have a negative attitude towards certain types of social media; Chinese locals and tourists visiting China cannot access Facebook or Twitter, and the Iranian Government
permanently suspended access to Google’s Gmail (Goolsby, 2010). International students are expected to integrate into the university culture by following, monitoring, and engaging in social media platforms provided by the university. The Global Education Office at UNM uses social media as one of their communication methods for welcome events and social activities before and during each semester.

**American Culture.** The U.S. is notoriously known as the land of desire and known for the culture of consumer capitalism (Leach, 2011). The U.S. university culture can be seen as superficial to many students who arrive from abroad. Daily, data flows uninterruptedly from all media platforms with the latest fashion trends, political updates, sports, and little contemplation about what is happening globally. Americans are notorious for having limited global competence compared to citizens from other countries. Because of their lack of international knowledge and self-assured nature, Americans can come off as superficial to international students. Gemmill (2009), a South African, describes American culture as, “loud, continuous conversation and the confident, open personalities - I have found over the years that such openness is often superficial, preventing me from reaching down into the depths of a person and his or her true feelings and emotions” (p. 95). Lastly, Americans value freedom. Gemmill (2009) continues to portray Americans as fighters against traditional English society and promoters of individual freedom and escape from colonial society. Individual freedom remains as a core value in American culture, as the U.S. is a highly individualist society. The campus culture in the U.S. includes open-dialogue, socialization, debates, and idea-sharing.

**Federal Agencies and Policy Enforcement**

Federal agencies, school officials, and nonimmigrant students work together in multiple ways and capacities. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) certifies all schools for
nonimmigrant student admission, while also monitoring universities to ensure school compliance with reporting and recordkeeping regulations (SEVP, 2018). The United States government has monitored the presence of international students since World War II. The first terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 involved a foreign student on an expired student visa, which alerted Congress and the Administration to develop an electronic tracking system that would provide better and timelier information regarding foreign students in the United States (SEVP, 2018).

On September 24, 1994, a memorandum was created subjecting all foreign students to thorough and continuing scrutiny before and during their stay in the United States (Office of the Inspector General, 2002). Immigration issues continued to arise, which led to the Immigration and Naturalization Service task force, which was comprised of members from the State Department, the United States Information Agency, and experts in the administration of international student programs (SEVP, 2018). The task force found many deficiencies in tracking and monitoring foreign students, auditing, and clarity in school approval requirements. The findings from the task force led to the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act on September 30, 1996. This new public law required universities to collect information on their international students including name, address, date of birth, visa classification, student status, course of study, academic disciplinary actions taken, and termination dates and reasons (SEVP, 2018).

**The Effects of 9/11.** The September 11, 2001 terrorist attack drew new attention to foreign students. The U.S. PATRIOT Act required schools to document foreign students’ port of entry and date of entry (SEVP, 2018). This Act grants the U.S. government greater latitude to deny entry, detain, prosecute, and remove foreign nationals suspected of being involved in
terrorist activities (Lebowitz & Podheiser, 2001). The Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act closely followed in 2002, requiring educational institutions and exchange visitor programs to report within 30 days after the nonimmigrant’s program start date any international students who entered the United States but failed to enroll in their specified programs (SEVP, 2018). In 2001, after the attack, the government tracked approximately 350 million visits to the United States each year by non-citizens. More than 2 million persons entered illegally, are criminal aliens, have overstayed their visas, or otherwise have violated the terms of their status as visitors to the United States (Lebowitz & Podheiser, 2001). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 created three separate agencies, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). International students and universities interact in different capacities with all these agencies.

USCIS grants benefits to both immigrants and nonimmigrants while in the United States. For international students, this agency authorizes employment benefits and can approve changing from one immigrant or nonimmigrant status to another. ICE monitors students and investigates universities for immigration compliance. CBP officers determine the eligibility for foreign nationals to enter the United States. Students need to provide specific immigration documents every time they leave and reenter the United States. Along with these federal agencies, the Department of State has two bureaus, the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs that monitor the J visa categories. The Bureau of Consular Affairs works with embassies and consulates abroad for the issuing of all nonimmigrant and immigrant visas for foreign nationals. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs administers the Exchange Visitor Program, which was created to increase mutual understanding
between people of the United States and people of other countries through educational and cultural exchanges.

**Challenges for International Students**

Gorski (2011) explains the phenomena of the “deficit theory,” “deficit thinking,” and “deficit ideology.” This ideology has been used since imperial times as a mechanism for socializing citizens to comply with oppression, from enslavement to educational inequities (Gorski, 2011). The core belief within these theories is that inequalities result, not from unjust social conditions (racism or economic injustice), but from intellectual, moral, cultural, and behavioral deficiencies assumed to be inherent in disenfranchised individuals and communities (Brandon, 2003; Gorski, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Gorski (2011) identified deficit theory as a structural dysfunction:

Like most repressive dispositions, the deficit perspective is a symptom of larger sociopolitical conditions and ideologies come out of complex socialization processes. We no more can quash the deficit perspective without acknowledging, examining, and quashing these processes than we can eliminate racism without comprehending and battling white supremacist ideology. Otherwise, we are dealing merely with symptoms, as we do when we attempt to redress racism with programs that celebrate diversity but ignore systemic racism or when we respond to class inequities by studying a fictitious “culture of poverty” rather than attacking, or at least understanding, the educational implications of the sociopolitical context of economic injustice. (p. 153)

A narrative study (Hsieh, 2007) investigated why a Chinese female international student kept silent in her American classes. The study found the participant internalized a deficient self-perception as a useless person during class participation. During group discussions, the Chinese
student felt disempowered by her American classmates’ ideology of cultural homogeneity (Hsieh, 2007). Yeh and Drost (2002) believe American society is characterized by American cultural homogeneity, therefore, leaving ethnic and racial minority students to acculturate before they are able to operate successfully in the dominant-white-system.

A counter reference to Gorski’s (2011) explanation of deficit ideology is Groopman’s (2005) phenomenon of true hope. Groopman (2005) finds the potential for true hope as:

The elevating feeling we experience when we see – in the mind’s eye – a path to a better future. True hope acknowledges the significant obstacles and deep pitfalls along the path. It has not room for delusion. Clear-eyed hope gives the courage to confront our circumstances and capacity to surmount them. (p. 193)

International students are assumedly experiencing a mixture of both deficit ideology and true hope while abroad.

**Acculturation.** The term acculturation refers to “the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry, 2005, p. 698). Acculturation occurs at both the group and individual levels when intercultural interactions develop within social structures and personal behaviors (Berry, 2005). International students are confronted with unique issues when transitioning between student-life to a professional career (Sangganjanavanich et al., 2011). Spencer-Rodgers (2000) understands the complexities of acclimating to the U.S. culture, society, and the unfamiliarity with available employment options. Culturally-based barriers to employment opportunities for international graduate students involves the negative perceptions of an accent (Carlson & McHenry, 2006) and acculturation stress (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008).
Preskill and Brookfield (2009) explained, “people who are part of a community give up some of their individual identity to identify with the whole” (p. 191). The rationale for biculturalism or multiculturalism is the idea that multiple cultures may coexist independently or may fuse so that a hybrid combination emerges in the form of multiple identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). The word “diversity” is the main channel for opening dialogue on issues of equity, inclusion, and difference, especially when attempting to better understand the larger social order (Oliha, 2010). As Oliha (2010) explained, having an open mind and engaging in effective dialogue is the best way to understand cultural differences and ease the acculturation process.

**Cultural Progressions.** The changes occurring over the last two generations in Saudi Arabia have been driven by education. Saudi women are now able to drive, apply for a passport without male permission, attend soccer matches, and women’s participation in business and education is increasing. Between 2012 and 2013 almost 20,000 Saudi students were overseas to acquire higher education (Ahmed, 2015). The impacts of the massive student movement abroad have been evident in Saudi Arabia with rapid changes social and culturally (Ahmed, 2015). The returning student population believes in the internationalization of higher education and entrepreneurship. New ideas in the traditional Kingdom are spoken cautiously, but with many globally educated citizens and a new modern-minded official, Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, social and cultural norms seem to be transforming in the Middle East.

The changes being witnessed in Saudi Arabia did not come without sacrifice. The 20,000 Saudi students abroad, all spent time away from their families and cultures and this is a substantial sacrifice. Gemmill (1999) expressed her daunting desire to see the unknown, as her high school friends became more rooted in South African society, while she wanted an
adventurous challenge in a completely new world. Gemmill started her new life at an Ivy League institution and did not anticipate the pain of being truly alone. Hodzic (1999), a refugee from Bosnia, found refuge in the U.S. after surviving a concentration camp. Foreign students arrive in the U.S. with unique histories, and very little understanding of acculturation and its effects on their social, cultural, and emotional well-being (Haroon, 1999).

There is a range of difficulties international students experience when studying in the United States. They encounter perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality, along with cultural intolerance and confrontation (Lee & Rice, 2007). When interviewing 24 students from 15 countries, Lee and Rice (2007) determined that many of the experiences international students found as difficult were not all due to adjustment, but more serious challenges due to inadequacies with the host society.

**World English.** Many linguistics experts believe Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explains social power among international students studying in the U.S. (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, Mulderigg, & Wodak, 2011; Huckin, 1997). CDA focuses on discourse structures and the positive and negative effects these structures create for students related to power and dominance (Dijk, 2003). Non-native speakers of English, like many international students, are less empowered and view classrooms as disempowering discourse communities (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Hsieh, 2007). Foucault (1980, p. 241) takes a linguistic approach when evaluating power and identity stating, “we add layers of discourse and their regulatory power to construct subjective positions for individuals as well as the response of the individuals to these available positions.” Figure 1 shows the World English classification based on The Inner Circle, the Outer Circle, and the Expanding Circle.
Figure 1. Kachru’s (1997) three concentric circles of English.

The inner circle is comprised of countries where English is a native language. The outer circle is comprised of countries where English is a second language. The expanding circle is comprised of countries where English is a foreign language (Kachru, 1997). A study by Koehne (2006) found that international students viewed studying in the U.S. or other countries within the inner circle as a power advantage. The students in the study specifically mentioned countries such as the U.S., UK, and Australia. This power advantage is attributed to academic discourse, gaining knowledge and experience, gaining strength amid their struggles, making their voices heard and gaining confidence (Koehne, 2006).

Transnational Migration

In past generations, the process of immigration was a distinct abandonment of one’s home country and the painful process of incorporating into a different society and culture (Handlin, 1973). In recent years, a new concept termed “transnational migration” is emerging, which is defined as “immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state” (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc, 1995, p. 355). Historically,
the United States strongly opposed immigrant loyalty towards their home countries during World War I. Schiller et al. (1995, p. 52) reviewed studies conducted in the early 19th century about the immigrant populations and stated, “These studies contributed to the public perception that such populations were in fact immigrants; meanwhile, the public campaigns to ensure that these immigrants were loyal to the U.S. also sought to diminish the continuation of home ties.” Portes, Escobar, and Radford (2007) view the frequent contact across national borders as the concept of transnationalism, where immigrants seek frequent and durable participation in the economic, political, and cultural life of their countries. With the increase in density, multiplicity, transnational interconnections, and technology, transmigration continues to grow and strengthen (Schiller et al., 1995).

Haitians, Vincentians, Grenadians, and Filipinos are nationalities whose home countries still consider them constituents of their home country while residing permanently abroad (Schiller et al., 1995). Three main reasons for transnational migration are capital accumulation with no location to secure terrain of settlement, racism in mostly U.S. and European countries, and building political loyalties among immigrants to each nation-state in which they maintain social ties. Personal ethnographies are shared by families from each ethnicity by understanding the life experiences of individuals and their families. Their stories reflect the “warp and woof” of daily activities, concerns, fears, and achievements (Schiller et al., 1995, p. 50).

A Vincentian family struggles to make ends meet in their home base of St. Vincent, where multiple families live in a house with no running water or income. The younger women and men of the family transmigrated to the United States and the Dominican Republic to earn an income, to send money back to their family in St. Vincent. Many transmigrants will work abroad while maintaining business connections in their home countries. Schiller et al. (1995, p. 56) stated,
“Filipino transmigrants have built a dense network of linkages with hundreds of organizations that stage religious, cultural, and social events in the Philippines as well as in the U.S.”

As nationalism grows in the current globalized economy, transnational migration is playing a complex, significant, yet infrequently noted role (Miles, 1993). Immigrant groups are encouraged to preserve their culture, customs, and identity while adjusting to American daily life (Glazer & Moynihan, 1970). Many countries have responded by passing laws allowing migrants to retain their nationality, as this increases their remittances, investments, and charitable contributions (Portes et al., 2007). For example, those who remain citizens of their home country can vote and run for office while living in another country, because preserving the loyalty towards the home country is important to the sending countries’ government (Portes et al., 2007).

**Perseverance through Major Life Decisions**

**Career Development Theory.** Happenstance learning theory is an extension of traditional career development theories, as it takes into consideration unplanned events as an important factor in the career development process (Kim et al., 2014). Happenstance is also the ability for individuals to seek such events and experiences that can maximize their learning (Krumboltz, Foley, & Cotter, 2013). The factors shaping cross-border mobility include an increased middle class in Asia, demographic shifts, rapid technological development, improved transportation, and the growing role of knowledge (Castells, 2011). Happenstance learning theory can also be interpreted as the process of taking action, exploring, and learning from diverse experiences to seize career opportunities (Kim et al., 2016). There are five happenstance skills suggested by Mitchell et al. (1999): curiosity (exploring new learning), persistence (exerting effort despite setbacks), flexibility (changing attitudes and circumstances), optimism
(viewing new opportunities as possible), and risk-taking (taking action in the face of uncertain outcomes).

Studies have shown happenstance skills relate closely to career decision self-efficacy and maximize learning experiences through planned or unplanned career-related events (Kim, et al., 2014). Career decision making self-efficacy is an important variable in the career choice and decision-making process (Betz & Hackett, 1986). Ayres (1980) reported a significant relationship between self-efficacy expectancies and occupational consideration, and moderate but significant correlations between self-efficacy and abilities. Lent, Brown, and Larkin (1984) researched 105 students in the sciences and engineering by assessing the student’s self-efficacy beliefs against variables such as, academic grades, persistence, and perceived career options. The study found that self-efficacy contributed significant unique variance to the prediction of grades, persistence, and perceived career options in the technical and scientific fields.

**Self-determination Theory.** Two main dimensions characterize indecision in the career decision-making process, lack of information and career anxiety (Brown et al., 2012). Self-determination theory explains human motivation, through the development of human inner resources and behavioral regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan (2002) believe that SDT assumes that the desire to meet one’s innate needs is the fundamental motive for human behavior. Research also finds that the motivation cannot be taken for granted, because environmental factors can either encourage or thwart the innate tendency to act (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are considered the cornerstones of human motivation (Sun, Weidong, & Bo, 2017). Self-determination can be complemented with self-development, and when referencing international students, this concept refers to the pursuit of a good education and better career opportunities abroad.
Motivation and Grit. Duckworth and co-authors have termed the word grit as being, “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). Duckworth et al. (2007) describe grit as including determination, perseverance, and the ability to set clear goals and patience and flexibility in handling small obstacles. Wormeli (2014) explains how judgments and labels shut down the reflective, growth mindset process. For international students to successfully complete their studies in the United States, they must have some qualities pertaining to grit.

International students experience culture shock, the most common term used to explain the initial experiences of immersion in an unfamiliar culture (Lombard, 2014). Searle and Ward (1990) and Ward and Kennedy (1993) find that acculturation for international students correlates with psychological distress, which becomes the main component of culture shock. Nearly all international students encounter an array of acculturative stressors, including the language barrier, educational environment, sociocultural situations, discrimination, loneliness, and practical or lifestyle stressors (Lin & Yi, 1997; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Among all the limiting situations and challenges international students face abroad, many are able to not only succeed but thrive in programs abroad.

Wormeli (2014) professes how important grit is towards developing a long-term commitment mentality. His suggestions to educators include: to cultivate trust, make connections, be happy, provide descriptive feedback, show growth, provide constructive responses to relearning and reassessing, provide meaningful work, clearly articulate the goals, provide multiple tools and models, and making sure student experience success (Wormeli, 2014). The last recommendation towards cultivating grit is important for the international student experience, because when a student experiences success their motivation and sense of worth
increase. Words of affirmation can help international students avoid Groski’s (2010) deficit thinking and deficit ideology.

**Essential Self Theory.** The journey towards finding one’s essential self has been described as involving feelings of wholeness, connectedness, and effort to find one’s ultimate purpose in life (Milliman, Czaplewska, & Ferguson, 2003). When an individual develops higher levels of self-insight, they are then closer towards developing an authentic self (Mathieson & Miree, 2003). Hermans (2001) explored the relationship between self and culture. Anthropologists and cultural psychologists stopped viewing culture as being *out there*, but rather the structures and processes *in* the self. When students are raised in one culture and migrate to another country, they are in a situation where two or more heterogeneous internal positions (Chinese verse American) are interacting with a multiplicity of heterogeneous external positions (culture of origin, American friends, etc.). The rationale for biculturalism or multiculturalism is the idea that multiple cultures may coexist independently or may fuse so that a hybrid combination emerges in the form of multiple identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1998).

Hermans (2001, p. 258) describes the phenomenon of “dialogical misunderstandings” for individuals with multiple identities, stating:

There is a high probability of dialogical misunderstanding because the phenomenon of multiple identities raises the challenging question how people, involved in a process of acculturation, organize and reorganize their self-system in such a way that they are able to share with other people cultural elements that may be highly divergent, partly unknown and laden with power differences.

Haroon (1999, p. 30) finds herself in the middle of maintaining a “normal” appearance while internally and externally feeling obviously different. She recognizes her dialogical
misunderstanding as her downfall, as people either resented her for her self-containedness or disliked her for her above it all composure. Some see her as having no identifiable place, other than the role of an international student. She says, “Being international is merely an accentuation of the loneliness of nationhood – it is the natural loneliness we all feel drawn out more sharply (p. 30).” Haroon (1999) continues her story about her life in the U.S. by addressing her denial of self. She believes that being an international student is not comfortable unless one is comfortable with one’s self-perception. She automatically felt distanced from the other students, and to feel more comfortable around others she remade herself to fit in.

**Internships**

Peiyu Chen, an international student studying actuarial science at the University of Minnesota, found herself traveling across the world during finals week for an internship opportunity in Beijing, China. Peiyu Chen had a four-day window between taking classes and finals, and she flew to Beijing for an interview. Unapologetically, she achieved her dream and was awarded the internship position (University of Minnesota, 2015). When an internship opportunity presents itself, some students will take the leap of faith and find the courage to step out of their comfort zone. As with most profound life events, it is never that easy and requires courage. There are immigration regulations and administrative documentation processing that makes the internship a reality. Chen was featured on her university’s website as an example that anything is possible. Of course, this is not always the case, and Chen’s story has a happy ending, but many students struggle with finding internships (Mellott, Arden, & Cho, 1997).

International students are limited to the work opportunities they can partake in while studying in the United States (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Student and Exchange Visitor Program, 2017). Curricular practical training (CPT) is a benefit provided to
students who are studying on an F-1 visa and is limited to internships integral to the student’s major or the work must be a program requirement.

Bhattacharyya, Nordin, and Salleh (2009) and Patil (2005) see the increasing mobility of engineering professionals in the 21st century as a platform for engineering graduates to possess not only technical knowledge but soft skills for effective workplace communication purposes. Professional skills commonly referred to as “soft” skills in the workplace include process skills, social skills, or generic skills (Bhattacharyya et al., 2009). There have been many communication studies concerning the value and marketability of prospective engineers who possess both technical and professional skills (Artemeva, 2008; Dunbar, Brooks & Miller, 2006; Jin Xiao, 2006; Morreale, Osborn & Pearson, 2002; Schnell 2006). Engineering firms continue to grow internationally, demanding their employees enhance their global skills-knowledge of foreign language proficiency, cultural development background, international business concepts, and international technical issues (Patil, 2005).

Bhattacharyya et al. (2005) evaluated the frequency of internal and external oral communication activities as a practice by employers and their opinion on the adequacy of university preparation for effective workplace communication. Students in the study are required to participate in the Industrial Internships Program (IIP), as an opportunity to relate theoretical knowledge with real application in the industry (Bhattacharyya et al., 2005). The findings from the quantitative study (Bhattacharyya et al., 2005) are centered on the oral practices employers facilitated during the internship process. Student feedback suggested that collaborative work and frequent discussions in the form of meetings was the most common response (40.9%), participation in team communication (35.9%), and frequent non-technical discussions (35.9%).
After Graduation

Gribble and Blackmore (2012) discussed the ease provided by many key host nations for foreign graduates to migrate after graduation. International graduate students are often considered ideal migrants for host employers, possessing local qualifications, language skills, and in most cases, relevant local work experience. In 2017, a study from World Education Services (WES) examined student plans after graduation (n=2,162). The WES Research Report (2017) found that 14% plan to return home immediately, 20% plan to pursue further education in the U.S., 23% plan to stay long-term or permanently in the U.S., and 43% plan to complete OPT/AT, then return home. International graduate students experience living in their host country with some level of acculturation, making them attractive candidates for employment after graduation (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). During an international student’s educational journey in the United States, students can apply for an internship integral to their major, CPT work authorization (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2017). The opportunity for international graduate students to earn experience in a specific program of study adds to the appeal of the overseas study experience and enhances the skills necessary to compete in the global labor market (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012).

The rise in skilled migration has been more significant than any other type of migration globally, as the refugee movement increases due to natural disasters, poverty, terrorism and war (Docquier & Rapoport, 2004; United Nations, 2009). The International Migration Report of the United Nations reviews the largest populations of migrants from a single country or area of origin living in a single country or area of destination. Migrants from Mexico report the largest number of individuals going abroad, with 12 million migrants in the United States in 2015. Migrants from India show the second largest number of individuals living abroad in the United
Arab Emirates with 3 million migrants. Lastly, 3 million migrants from Russia reside in Ukraine. The growing number of migrants in many nations with advanced economies are competing for high-skilled workers, resulting in a global “war for talent” (Brown & Hesketh, 2004, p. 17).

If the university can employ their graduates, by way of employment in the community or the university itself, this will increase the morale, graduation rate, and economy of New Mexico. Weston (2011) views long-term resolution as, “a future in which the current problems have been at least partly resolved, not by one side finally triumphing over the other side but by working out unexpected and ambitious ways to honor our basic shared values, and perhaps to deepen and develop more” (p. 77).

Finn (2010) analyzed the stay rates of foreign doctorate recipients in the United States using data from 2007. He found that foreign nationals receiving doctorates from U.S. universities are staying at the ten-year rate in the U.S. at an all-time high. There is a very powerful statistic from the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) pertaining to college students and employment, referenced by Clawson and Page (2011):

The number of college students is greater than the number of chief executives, financial officers, claims adjusters, accountants and auditors, computer programmers, architects, social workers, lawyers, paralegals and legal assistants, librarians, athletes and coaches (and umpires and related workers), photographers, chiropractors, dentists, veterinarians, Emergency Medical Technicians and paramedics, firefighters, police, cooks, bartenders, waiters and waitresses, electricians, and plumbers and pipefitters combined (p. 9).
Job Search

Mangum (1982) analyzed and reviewed extensive research on the job search process for the Office of Research and Development Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor. The study sought to understand:

1. What insights research literature could provide as to the processes of job search and the relevant effectiveness of various approaches?
2. What description of various types of job search assistance could be found?
3. What was being taught in the various public and private programs of job search assistance?
4. How consistent the forms of job search instruction and assistance provided were with research results concerning effective job search processes?
5. The degree to which job search assistance and instruction accorded with the realities of the labor market.

Much of the research is centered around the productiveness of the neoclassical assumptions about the extent of job searching (Mangum, 1982). The neoclassical analysis assumes all potential employees will have perfect knowledge of every available job, alternative jobs, and all of the characteristics of each and every job. In the early sixties, Stigler recognized the deficiency in economic theory and developed the job search theory: the application of the theory of imperfect information to the labor market (Mangum, 1982). Large amounts of information about the employee and employer are needed in order to find mutual satisfaction during the labor exchange process. Mangum (1982) believes that economic models are useful when accurately describing and predicting real-world phenomena, as the real world is consistent with uncertain and imperfect information.
Phelps (1969) compares the job search process to a group of islands. There is a cost when information flows among the islands. Potential employees cannot know the wage on other islands without spending the day traveling to the other island and sacrificing income from a day at work. The job search theory by Mangum (1982) focuses on the importance of finding quality jobs and the tradeoffs between searching for employment for short and long periods of time. These tradeoffs can yield an immediate job, high turnover, and career path jobs. Schiller (1975) studied the effectiveness of various job search medias, finding:

There is enough evidence to demonstrate that the job search medium is an important part of the job search message: how an individual seeks work, as well as the amount of time and effort spent searching, is an important determinant of search success…

Moreover, there is some evidence that alternative media are not equally effective for all groups of jobseekers. In view of this and the fact that the information on available job vacancies is scarce, information on job search media should be treated as an important commodity. As such information accumulates, there is reason to believe that labor market efficiency might be enhanced and there with major macroeconomic outcomes. (p. 211)

The job search process has significantly changed since the 1970s, as millennials use Google and internet searches to find resources and information. International students studying in the United States are legally limited to the types of employment they can apply for and accept. When searching for an internship, the outcome needs to directly correlate with their field of study and the employer must agree to limit the work hours as appropriate per immigration regulations. Currently, the university in this study uses Handshake, an online job-search site, to help students successfully find internships and employment. A Michigan Tech college student named Garrett Lord found many glitches in the college recruiting system, specifically for helping
companies find college students for internships and entry-level positions. Lord was an intern at Palantri, a startup data company. After his summer internship, his peers at Michigan Tech swamped him with questions about how to connect with companies and other Silicon Valley startups. Lord, seeing the need and gaps within the recruiting system, created a new platform, Handshake, the college career network for the future. Lord believes, “Career service centers have to switch from the Web 1.0 world to mobile and social” (Rao, 2016, p. 1).

The top universities in the United States are all using Handshake to exclusively power and manage their career services and 80% of the Fortune 100 companies, including Amazon, JP Morgan, and Google are all using Handshake to recruit fresh talent from colleges and universities (Rao, 2016). Handshake allows students to upload their coursework, resumes, and transcripts, while also allowing students to apply for jobs, send messages to recruiters, and access event listings. Handshake allows students to personalize their recommendations for jobs, content, and events. It is easy to use as it is mirrored to look like Facebook, a website well known by many college graduates (Rao, 2016). The Career Services Center at UNM strongly recommends Handshake to all student populations, including international students.

Shen and Herr (2004) investigated the career placement concerns of internal graduate students. The researchers found numerous unique factors for students returning to their home countries, heading to other countries, or remaining in the United States after their education. Students’ major, gender, and geography were not salient factors affecting career placement needs, and the students’ contacts within their academic fields were far more exhaustive than the campus career services. International students tend to say clear of career services because there is a negative perception of limited services that the center can provide (Shen & Herr, 2004).
What the Research Does Not Say – Gaps

The literature on international students and their mobility tends to focus on their initial arrival abroad, but rarely considering their migration post-graduation (King and Raghuram, 2013; Naidoo, 2007; Perkings & Neumayer, 2014). A quantitative study conducted by the WES Research Institute examined the plans of international students after graduating from college. The study found most students plan to apply for work permission and stay in the U.S. for one to three years and then return home. Many studies have confronted strategies to improve satisfaction, adjustment, and retention of international students during their undergraduate and graduate programs (Andrade, 2006; Olivas & Li, 2006; Tompson & Tompson, 1996). Souto-Otero and Enders (2017) explored the utilization of rankings in two forms, international students and institutions of higher education and employers’ desires to higher based on HE rankings. The external variables such as employers, government regulations, and graduation requirements impact international students in unique ways.

Wu and Wilkes (2017) researched international students’ post-migration plans through the concept of home in Canada, where international students are viewed very differently from the United States. International students perceive home in four ways, the host home, the ancestral home, the cosmopolitan home, and the nebulous home. International students who view their host country as home when they can form a family, make friends, or establish community networks, therefore influencing the decision to settle in the host country (Geddie, 2013; Soon, 2014). With the recent regulatory change with “unlawful presence,” the decision to settle is not a possibility for many international students regardless of comfort and the feeling of home. Many participants found home to be cosmopolitan, meaning home can be considered as multiple places occupied over the course of an individual’s life (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Typically, students who
have traveled abroad prior to studying abroad view migration differently from students who have moved for the first time (Damery, 2014). Post-graduation migration and the experiences leading up to these decisions are especially timely for Americans and international students.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

This is an empirical qualitative study examining the experiences of international students who are employed through an internship, Curricular Practical Training (CPT), during their graduate degree program. I collected qualitative data through a phenomenological approach to capture the genuine experiences of international graduate students while living and studying in the United States. Through in-depth interviews, international students were able to explain the unique process of acculturating while studying and working, their post-graduation plans, and their professional experience in an American work environment. Institutions of higher education need to be more aware of international student needs to secure an internship and gain U.S. work experience. It is important to understand the purpose of higher education, and the role institutions play in the development of international students. It is crucial to understand the strengths and the resources international students bring from their home countries in the form of social, human, and economic capital. Their confidence in finding and developing resource opportunities in the United States is important to understand as well.

The main question that guided my study was:

What meaning do international graduate students at a higher education research institution in the southwest region of the United States who have worked in an internship ascribe to their academic and personal experiences? I used the sub-questions to structure the diverse data and to help centralize the interviews and observations during the study. The main sub-questions were:
1. How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career-decision making self-efficacy post-graduation?

2. In what way has being in the United States impacted international students’ journey towards better understanding their own culture and their outlook on life and the world?

Other sub-questions that are addressed in this study, but not heavily analyzed include:

What challenges do international graduate students face when they are acculturating to the American culture and education system? How, if at all, has being in the United States influenced international graduate students’ view of home? What are the reasons for wanting or not wanting to continue working in the United States after graduating?

**Theoretical Framework**

In this research paper, I explore the paradox of career development by analyzing the data from the point of view of chaos and complexity theory. Careers are complex and open systems with situational factors guiding the selection of majors and ultimately careers (Pryor & Bright, 2011). During the last 25 years, career development theories have shifted from reductionist, rational decision-making and matching modes (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Holland, 1959; Parsons, 1909) to more adaptive and integrative modes (Blustein, 1997; Mitchell, Levin, & Krumboltz, 1999; Patton & MacMohon, 2006). The chaos theory of careers (CTC) developed by Pryor and Bright (2011) is an integrated framework for the modern career development process. Schlesinger and Daley (2016) developed a comprehensive framework for the practical use of the CTC embodying complexity, chance, change, and construction.

**Concept of Complexity.** Exploration of majors and careers continues to be relevant and essential to a modern college student’s career development process (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016).
The exploration process helps students focus on what they already know about themselves, or their complexity, and assists them in exploring the patterns and themes allowing them to see the complexity of influences in their lives (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). Kobourov (1999) reflects upon his difficult past in communist Bulgaria and the broader perspective he has developed by embracing the positives from both Bulgaria and America. The life events Kobourov experienced helps him realize that regardless of where he ends up, his past or present does not need to determine the future he will make for himself. Devneesh (1999) from India was raised in a traditional conservative background not geared toward risk-taking. Students like Davneesh who are raised in highly collective cultures express the difficulty in finding their own voice. Davneesh (1999, p. 130) mentions, “All through my adolescence, I have been struggling to find a community outside my home, struggling to find my own voice, to define my own dreams, carve my own path.”

**Concept of Chance.** Careers, majors, and student life are all complex and open systems, meaning there are multiple external and situational factors influencing each level of being a student (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The heightened complexities of these systems make them highly susceptible to chance events (Schlesinger & Daley, 2014). Students who attempt to control or limit all the outside factors affecting their lives become less successful in preparing for inevitable life changes, ultimately engaging in closed-system thinking rather than healthy open-system thinking (Schlesinger & Daley, 2014). Kim (1999) unwillingly moved to the United States from South Korea for her father’s business. Her first painful memory was no longer belonging to the typical upper-middle-class intelligentsia, but rather stepping down in economic and social status in the United States. Her high school years brought a sense of inadequacy and alienation, as her physical appearance and difficulty learning English felt like barriers. The harsh experiences
many international students face during their first time abroad become valuable, as failure
develops into a source of learning and creates tolerance for uncertainty (Pryor & Bright, 2012).

**Concept of Change.** There are two systems, cognitive and affective, that equally
influence and embrace students during the active engagement process (Flum & Blustein, 2000).
Active engagement provides specific cognitive information about individuals and work, also,
affective information concerning ones’ feelings and information (Flum & Blustein, 2000).
Krieshok, Black, and McKay (2009) correlated the same cognitive and affective concepts with
rational (planned) and intuitive (unplanned) engagement through experiential activities. The
engagement through experiential activities can produce the optimal state in which to make
college decisions based on new experiences (new cultures) and information (acculturation)
(Kreishok, Black, & McKay, 2009). Eilertsen (1999) left Norway to study in the United States
with formidable regret as his Norwegian ideals reprimanded independence. The egalitarian
society in Norway chastised unique students. In Norway, there is a novel written about a village
called Jante, centered around its foundational law and stating, “Don’t think you are worth
anything; don’t think you are anything special; don’t think you’re better than us in anything”
(Eilertsen, 1999, p. 218). The saying perplexes Eilertsen (1999), since most Norwegians ridicule
the words but ironically live by them.

In Eilertsen’s case, the move to the U.S. involved rational and intuitive decision-making.
Rational and intuitive decision-making continued throughout his college journey. After touring
Lebanon, Eilertsen (1999) became intensely aware of aspects of college life that he had ignored
as a freshman. Eilertsen (1999, p. 225) was enlightened by some memories of his original
culture:
The drinking culture; the degrading abuse of women by many fraternity guys; superficial friendships lacking the allegiance I had known in Lebanon and even in Norway; the student focus on GPA, future jobs, and the token approach to learning. How much people take for granted their incredible luck in being at Dartmouth! I was emotionally upset, even at times alarmed, and this was clearly exacerbated by my own struggles to return and settle back into the normal world.

**Concept of Construction.** Adapting is essential in a fast-paced society. The term adapt is based on a multiplicity of decisions made with limited and changing information (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). Bright and Pryor (2011) stated, “The lack of ultimate control or predictability opens up the opportunity for individuals to become active participants in the creation of their futures” (p. 164). It is during the adaptation phase where unwelcomed change can lead to positive outcomes. For example, many international students are awarded in-state tuition through the Amigo scholarship. The number of credit hours and GPA requirements are substantial, causing many students to petition to keep the scholarship. During the petition processes, students meet with an international student advisor, hands sweating, and much of the conversation is centered around if they are in the correct major. Bratcher (1982) researched the influence of family on career selection and found that family systems who provide easy movement and encourage personal autonomy allow members to become independent persons. Bratcher (1982, p. 90) expresses concern for career counseling, stating:

> Individuals may continue to be influenced by family relationship forces that are outside of their awareness or with which they have not been able to deal with very satisfactorily in the past, and these forces still may be operating when considering career decision.
All students from collectivist countries need to recognize their new life in the U.S. and intentionally adjust to their new surroundings. Hofstede (2001) performed extensive research on 53 countries while measuring individualism and collectivism, coining the measurement Individualism Index (IDV). Counselors and researchers need to be conscious of students from countries such as Pakistan, Ecuador, South Korea, and Nepal because they were raised in collectivist societies. When students grow up in collectivist societies, they learn to think of themselves as part of a “we” group or in-group, a relationship that is not voluntary by predetermined by birth (Hofstede, 2001, p. 225). Many students have had since birth a predetermined career; this can cause many problems for international students who are struggling to maintain a certain GPA and have little to no passion for their major. The adaptation stage in the educational and career process may be difficult for students who struggle with unpredictability and individual experiences.
Chapter Three – Research Design

Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are basic beliefs or metaphysics that deal with ultimate or first principles (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The inquiry paradigms are reviewed by three fundamental questions from Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 108):

The ontological question, what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it? The epistemological question, what is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? Lastly, the methodological question, how can the inquirer go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?

I used a critical lens to understand the success of international students participating in an internship, working in a foreign country, and successfully competing with host country students. Critical lens research can be described through the paradigm defining questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The ontological question defines critical theory as, “crucial theory’s historical realism, which assumes an apprehensible reality consisting of historically situated structures that are, in the absence of insight, as limiting and confining as if they were real” (p. 111). The historical structures created by the world are real and have implications for the life chances of individuals. The epistemological question defines critical theory as, “transactional/subjectivist assumption that knowledge is value mediated and hence value dependent” (p. 111). The lived experiences of the researcher influence the value and assumptions of the data. Lastly, the methodological question defines critical theory as, “dialogic/dialectical methodology aimed at the reconstruction of previously held constructions” (p. 112). Through verbal communication, the reconstruction of reality, or social change, is possible. The critical lens was necessary
because international students have very little if any experience navigating the American education system, while also pursuing a career and working in the United States.

**Theoretical Framework**

The Chaos Theory of Careers by Pryor and Bright (2011) and the comprehensive framework for the practical use of the CTC by Schlesinger and Daley (2016) both influenced the theoretical frameworks used in this study. The comprehensive framework is expressed through four constructs: complexity, chance, change, and construction. The concept of complexity is the exploration process of careers. This process helps students focus on what they already know about themselves, or their complexity. Furthermore, this process assists them in exploring different patterns and themes allowing them to see the complexity of influences in their lives (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). The concept of chance analyzes careers, majors, and student life. These variables are all complex and open systems, meaning there are multiple external and situational factors influencing each level of student life (Pryor & Bright, 2011). The heightened complexities of these systems make them highly susceptible to chance events (Schlesinger & Daley, 2014). Students who attempt to control or limit all the outside factors affecting their lives become less successful in preparing for inevitable life changes, ultimately engaging in closed-system thinking rather than healthy open-system thinking (Schlesinger & Daley, 2014).

The concept of change considers two systems, cognitive and affective, that equally influence and embrace students during the active engagement process (Flum & Blustein, 2000). Active engagement provides specific cognitive information about individuals and work as well as affective information concerning ones’ feelings and information (Flum & Blustein, 2000). Krieshok, Black, and McKay (2009) correlated the same cognitive and affective concepts with rational (planned) and intuitive (unplanned) engagement through experiential activities. The
engagement through experiential activities can produce the optimal state in which to make
college decisions based on new experiences (new cultures) and information (acculturation)
(Kreishok, Black, & McKay, 2009). Lastly, the concept of construction is the art of adaptation.
Adapting is essential in a fast-paced society. The term adapt is based on a multiplicity of a
decision made with limited and changing information (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). Bright and
Pryor (2011, p. 164) stated, “The lack of ultimate control or predictability opens up the
opportunity for individuals to become active participants in the creation of their futures.” It is
during the adaptation phase where unwelcomed change can lead to positive outcomes.

**Phenomenological Research Methods**

There are three schools of phenomenology, the Duquesne school, the Utrecht school, and
Heideggerian hermeneutics. The Duquesne school is comprised of researchers, van Kaam
(1966), Giorgi (1985), and Colaizzi (1978). The Utrecht school of phenomenology is a Dutch
approach combining characteristics of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology. Van Manen
(1990), an example of the Dutch approach, uncovered the descriptions of an experience by three
different means: holistic, selective, and detailed approach. Lastly, the Heideggerian hermeneutics
approach is explained through a cyclical metaphor, because in order to reach understanding there
is a continual movement between the parts and the whole of the text being analyzed (Profetto-
McGrath, Polit, & Beck, 2010).

**The van Kaam Method.** The van Kaam method for analyzing phenomenological
research views human experience as a dynamic, complex, continually moving entity (Anderson
& Eppard, 1998). Van Kaam (1966) selected awareness and intentionality as chief determinants
of behavior and believed that self-explication always starts with awareness. The van Kaam
method is mainly used in research with large sample sizes, such as Parse, Coyne, and Smith’s
(1985) qualitative research study regarding the lived experience of 400 adults and Futrell, Wondolowski, and Mitchell’s (1993) study of 100 Scottish men and women. The van Kaam method is not limited to large studies and has been used in smaller sample sizes with 30-48 participants as well (Anderson & Eppard, 1998). van Kaam’s psycho-phenomenological method focuses on structural elements derived from the sample, or commonly referred to as grouping. Anderson and Eppard (1998, pp. 400-402) listed the advantages of this method as:

a. Specificity for analyzing lingual descriptions  
b. Feasibility for analyzing large amounts of data  
c. Appropriateness for use with moderate to large samples  
d. Detailed directions for use that provide ease in application  
e. Openness that allows opportunity for methodological adaptation  
f. Feasibility for enabling the researcher to take a critical view of the phenomena unrestricted by theory or preconceptions.

The limitations include:

a. Restriction to interpretation of lingual statements  
b. Less interactive role for the researcher and subject than generally expected in qualitative inquiry  
c. Quantitative nature in that data are separated and counted.

**Giorgi’s Method.** Giorgi (2012) roots his experiential and behavioral phenomena methodology in studying the whole person through non-reductionist methods. Viewing the attitude of the researcher is said to be the utmost important attribute when employing descriptive phenomenological psychological research. Giorgi (2012) believes that the attitude of the researcher must involve: existing within whatever object or state of affairs is present, refraining
from bringing in non-given past knowledge to help account for whatever the researcher is present to, focusing on what is given, and having a special sensitivity toward the phenomenon being investigated. The following explains Giorgi’s (2012) data analysis process through phenomenological reduction:

a. The researcher first reads the whole description in order to get a sense of the whole. (The phenomenological approach is holistic and so no further steps can be taken until the researcher understands what the data are like.)

b. The researcher rereads the description and marks every time she experiences a transition in meaning from within the aforementioned attitude.

c. The researcher transforms the data into expressions that are more directly revelatory of the psychological import of what the subject said.

Giorgi (2012) shares the example of the learner giving the researcher a straightforward description of an experience, and the researcher can reflect on the presented meanings contained in the description. Even though the description is from another, the researcher can come up with an understanding of the world of the other. If the learner was a high anxiety type of personality and is experiencing many distortions, that would bring an interpretive assumption to help account for the data rather than merely describing it.

**Colaizzi’s Method.** There are three main stages in Colaizzi’s (1978) research methodology: acquiring a sense of each transcript, extracting significant statements, and formulation of meanings. Compared to the other Duquesne school researchers, Colaizzi’s method is the only one that calls for validation of the results by returning the study to the participants for member checking. Table 1 shows a complete comparison of the three Duquesne school researchers.
Table 1

*Comparison of Three Phenomenological Methods (Profetto-McGrath et al., 2010).*

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<td>Read all protocols</td>
<td>Read all protocols to acquire a feeling for them.</td>
<td>Read the entire set of protocols to get a sense of the whole.</td>
<td>List and group preliminarily the descriptive expressions, which must be agreed upon by expert judges. Final listing presents percentages of these categories in that particular sample.</td>
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<td>Review each protocol</td>
<td>Review each protocol and extract significant statements.</td>
<td>Discriminate units from participants’ description of the phenomenon being studied.</td>
<td>Reduce the concrete, vague, and overlapping expressions of the participants to more descriptive terms. (Intersubjective agreement among judges needed.)</td>
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<td>Spell out the</td>
<td>Spell out the meaning of each significant statement.</td>
<td>Articulate the psychological insight in each of the meaning units.</td>
<td>Eliminate elements not inherent in the phenomenon being studied or that represent blending of two related phenomena.</td>
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<td>Organize the</td>
<td>Organize the formulated meanings into clusters of themes.</td>
<td>Synthesize all of the transformed meaning units into a consistent statement regarding participants’ experiences.</td>
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<td>themes.</td>
<td>b. Note discrepancies among or between the various clusters, avoiding the temptation of ignoring data or themes that do not fit.</td>
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<td>Integrate results</td>
<td>Integrate results into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study.</td>
<td>Apply hypothetical description to randomly selected cases from the sample. If necessary, revise the hypothesized description, which must then be tested again on a new random sample.</td>
<td>Consider the hypothesized identification as a valid identification and description once preceding operations have been carried out successfully.</td>
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I was originally intrigued by van Kaam’s (1966) psychophenomenological method, because, in my role as a Designated School Official, I appreciated that his approach is the only phenomenological research method that allows the researcher to have a less interactive role with
the participants. I was also extremely eager to interview a large sample size to strengthen the reliability of the analysis. After interviewing twelve willing participants, the Colaizzi (1978) method became the most natural fit with my data analysis. I followed Colaizzi’s method meticulously. I read all protocols to acquire a feeling for them, reviewed each protocol and extracted significant statements. I then spelled out the meaning of each significant statement and organized the formulated meanings into clusters of themes. Lastly, after completing the analysis and formulating an exhaustive description of the phenomenon, I asked the participants to review the findings as a final validating step. Along with Colaizzi’s methodology, I also incorporated Heideggerian hermeneutics research, because the continual movement experienced with the sample population cannot be ignored. The Chaos Theory of Careers circles into the Heideggerian hermeneutics method, as this phenomenology is concerned with the human experience as it is lived (Laverty, 2003).

**Research and Data Analysis**

**Setting.** The study took place at The University of New Mexico’s main campus in Albuquerque, NM. The University of New Mexico attracts international students from more than 97 countries from around the world, which comprises 4.8% of the total UNM student population (Global Education Office, 2014). The entire student population as a census from the UNM enrollment report for the fall semester of 2016 shows a total enrollment of 27,060 students (Fall 2016 Official Enrollment Report, 2016). The Fall 2016 Official Enrollment Report (2016) specifies the international student population as 1,288 students.

**Sampling.** This study involved international graduate student participants, who were all invited to take part in this research. The interested participants were asked if they met the following criteria before agreeing to participate. The student participants needed to have
completed at least one semester of a CPT internship and currently be enrolled as an international graduate student. A targeted sampling method is appropriate in qualitative research because it has “the potential to lay bare the social organization of hidden group activities, uncover their meanings to group members, and reveal how interactions and actors are organized within a social context” (Watters & Biernacki, 1989, p. 419). This type of research is necessary when sampling rare and elusive populations. Not all international students are able or willing to seek internship opportunities while studying in the U.S., therefore, only a segment of the international student population is examined. Targeted sampling is a strategic form of sampling used to “obtain systematic information when true random sampling is not feasible and when convenience sampling is not rigorous enough to meet the assumptions of the research design” (Watters & Biernacki, 1989, p. 420).

Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) understand the time and commitment needed from participants in qualitative research, therefore, openly addressing the time commitment and importance of availability was addressed before the interviews. As many of the students are international and English is their second, third, and potentially forth language, the ability to communicate the experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner became extremely important (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1997). To achieve a depth of understanding, I continued to sample different participants until no new substantive information was acquired (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling (interviewing international graduate students from different world regions) is the targeted sampling technique that I followed for my sample population. Figure 2 shows graduate student world region statistics that I used to create a meaningful purposeful sample (The UNM Global Education Office, 2018). As
shown, more than half of the graduate student population is represented by students from Asian countries, 18.71% from Latin American countries, and 12.95% from Middle Eastern countries.

*Figure 2. UNM International Graduate Students by World Region Admitted and Registered for Fall 2018.*

If the sample population consisted of 40 participants then the world region of the sample population should mirror the total world population. For example, 20 students would represent Asia consisting of countries such as India, China, Pakistan, Japan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Russia, Indonesia, and South Korea. Five students would represent the Middle East consisting of countries such as Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Turkey. Seven students would represent Latin America consisting of countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Honduras, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and Venezuela. Three students would represent the world region of Africa consisting of countries such as Egypt, Nigeria, and Kenya. Three graduate students from the European countries consisting of countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy would represent the European world region. One student would represent the world region of Oceania.
consisting of Australian origin. Lastly, a Canadian student would represent the world region of North America. These numbers and countries are hypothetical.

I followed the guidance of MacDougall and Fudge (2001) and their strategic three-stage checklist for sampling and recruiting in-depth interviews. After evaluating the existing literature on the importance of sampling and recruiting for in-depth interviews, MacDougall and Fudge (2001) found common success indicators during each stage of the process: prepare, contact, and follow-up. The prepare stage involves finding information sources and key contacts. Supplementary to finding information, the prepare stage includes discovering related projects and drafting alternative samples (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001). My information source and key contact was the Director of the International Student and Scholar Services from the Global Education Office because she has access to the email addresses and contact information for all international students who have participated in an internship. Her involvement with the study was approved by UNM’s Institutional Review Board.

The contact stage involves negotiation with potential participants, confirmation, and plans for continued involvement. Krueger (1994) recommends personalization and to stress to the potential participants that they have experiences and insights that would be of value to the study. Their participation in this study has benefits for the community and for other students like them.

Once the international graduate students confirmed their participation, we agreed on the best place and time to conduct the interviews. The follow-up stage involved feedback and continued advocacy from the participants. “In qualitative or action research, it is important to consider how best to maintain relationships and contact with participants” (MacDougall & Fudge, 2001, p. 124). I assured the participants that once the interviews and general analysis of
the phenomenon were complete, I would provide them with the general themes and a review of
Chapter 4 showing the evaluation of the data. As an advocate for the international students at
UNM, I want to share the research on the behalf of the participants with the Career Services
Center, the Global Education Office, and any other applicable departments and resources centers
acknowledged in the study.

**Research Population.** Since January of 2017, there have been over 200 students who have received CPT authorization from the University of New Mexico. Time is an important element within the study because the students need to have time to adjust to their new life in the United States. I was more interested in students who were towards the end of their programs, so I could get a sense of their ambitions post-graduation. Students who first move to a different country experience culture shock through culture syndromes (Ward, Bochner, & Adrian, 2001). Ward et al. (2001) described cultural syndromes as different patterns of attitudes, believes, norms, and behaviors that can be used to contrast groups of cultures.

While studying abroad, international students start to adapt to the different beliefs, norms, and behaviors in the host country, which can be different than those of their home environment. There is a hierarchy of needs when international students first arrive in the United States. First, students start to acclimate to their new housing and academic life. Locating, securing, and maintaining an internship happens much later in the process. I, as the researcher, assume that culture shock and initial challenges do hinder the success of international students. The more severe the adjustment process the longer it takes for students to thrive in their new academic and professional environment.

Because of the multiple disadvantages and barriers that international students are forced to overcome in order to be successful in the United States, I want to understand the common
themes among successful international students. This study focused on students from different countries of origin, because UNM has a very diverse international student population. Currently UNM has international students from Mexico, China, India, Iran, Colombia, and 90 additional countries. The background and culture of the participants generated interesting situational comparisons and cultivated rich data. Hofstede (1980) performed a country score analysis classifying countries on four bipolar dimensions (Individualism-Collectivism, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Masculinity-Femininity). Hofstede (1980) found that European and North American countries emerged as high on Individualism, whereas Asian and Latin American countries lean towards the collectivist end of the continuum.

Cultures that hold high collectivist values are congruent with transformational leadership, whereas an individualistic outlook would be more congruent with a transactional approach (Hofstede, 1980). Collectivist cultures are also characterized by high power distance, which would make them more willing to accept their leader’s beliefs and vision. I am not as intrigued by each international student’s leadership style, but more invested in how they were able to achieve and successfully participate in an internship. The participants who volunteered in this study came from countries that have high collectivist cultures and others who come from highly individualist cultures. There was a mix of representation from both types of societies.

Procedures of Interview Development. I collected data through qualitative phenomenological interviewing methodology. Qualitative methodology allows “the researcher to ‘get close to the data’, thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself” (Filstead, 1970, p. 6). The technique operates from the standpoint of the researcher admitting ignorance (“I do not know much about ___, so let’s find out.”) with a goal to permit the interviewees to provide a vivid description of their experiences
(Westby, Burda, & Mehta, 2003). As the interviewer, I knew very little about each of the potential interviewees’ cultural backgrounds and experiences before arriving in the United States. Mason (2002) believes an epistemological perspective when interviewing in phenomenological research is pivotal because it recognizes that human experience is complex, is grounded in the world, experienced intersubjectively, and has meaning. The researcher is responsible for strategically recognizing that respondents are viewed as real, active, and interpreting, and should intend to find meaning in their experiences (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; von Eckarsberg, 1986). As the researcher, I maintained a natural attitude, since the phenomena were presented in different ways to each participant. Bevan (2002) explains that the experience happens in many ways from different perspectives by one person or by many people.

With little awareness of the kind of data I would receive from the interviews, I invited the interviewees to speak freely and openly about their experiences abroad. I modeled useful interview behavior as described by Westby et al. (2003):

The interviewer is attempting to gain a good understanding of the social situations in which clients and their families exist and how they perceive and understand those situations. People engage in acts, activities, and events in places using objects associated with the activities, events, and locations. The activities and events generally have a time sequence. People engage in them for a reason—that is, they have goals for doing what they do, and they have feelings for what they do, where they do it, and the people involved. (p. 2)

Table 2 shows an organized and useful table for explaining the phenomenological attitude during the interview process (Bevan, 2002). The table is organized by explaining the researcher
approach, interview structure, methods, and example questions for each type of interview: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon.

Table 2

*A Structure of Phenomenological Interviewing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological Attitude</th>
<th>Researcher Approach</th>
<th>Interview Structure</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Example Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)</td>
<td>Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self Active Listening</td>
<td>Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)</td>
<td>Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions</td>
<td>“Tell me about becoming ill,” or “Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)</td>
<td>Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing</td>
<td>“Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit,” or “Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)</td>
<td>Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions</td>
<td>“Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures for Conducting Interviews.** I first contacted the international student participants to see when they were available to meet for an interview. It was important to have each interviewee open up to me about their experiences in a safe and relaxing environment. I could not interview the participants in a coffee shop, because the noise level is too high for recording interviews, but a comfortable room in one of the university libraries sufficed for both the researcher and participants. The participants were made aware of my role as the researcher before the interview began.

I began the interviews with initial questions and friendly speech events to allow for discovering questions based on participants’ responses (Spradley, 1979). I strived to keep the rapport comfortable and friendly. To accurately account for the data provided by the participant, I audio-recorded the interviews. The interview process evolved chronologically through the different stages of life, which the interviewees endured. It was important for the participants to
understand the definition and concept of transmigration, and to observe if there are connections with their home countries from an emotional, intellectual, and professional perspective. It was also important for the interviews to understand how immigration works and the bureaucratic hurdles currently existing in the United States. During the interview process, I got into deep conversations with the participants. One of the participants asked to make sure that they could not be identified, because they spoke badly about their academic advisor. Part of me was happy that the participant was honest about their experience. I was also happy to know that my role as the researcher did not hinder their abilities to speak honestly about their personal experiences both in the U.S. and abroad. It was natural to feel vulnerable, but the interviewees did understand that they are protected by the IRB (see Appendix A). The participants were made aware that my role as the researcher was to tell their stories with minimal research bias. The questions that I used during the interview process were inspired by existing instruments created by Tally Matthews (2017) and Benedict-Augustine (2016) and are in Table 3.
### Table 3

*Interview Protocol*

**Overarching Question**

What are the shared experiences of international graduate students who were involved in an internship while living in the US?

**Sub-questions**

- **RQ 1.** How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career-decision making self-efficacy post-graduation?
- **RQ 2.** How, if any, has being in the United States impacted international students’ journey towards better understanding their own culture and their outlook on life and the world?

**Interview Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background</th>
<th>1. (Self-introduction) Please tell me a little bit about yourself.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How long have you been studying in the United States?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. How and why did you choose to study abroad in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Was there a specific person who influenced your college decision? Who is he/she? How did s/he influence your decision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>5. Tell me about your first semester as a graduate student in the U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. How do your experiences in recent semesters compare with your first semester as a graduate student?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. What are your personal/professional goals at this time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship Experience</td>
<td>8. Tell me about your life at work. Is it what you expected it to be in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. Tell me about your internship journey (applying, interviewing, the first day…))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. What did you like and dislike about your internship? How did the internship affect you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>11. Tell me about home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Where do you see yourself in a few years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. What would encourage you to stay in the U.S.?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Are you happy you decided to study at UNM? Please explain your answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. What else would you like to share about your journey?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the internship experiences of international students who are studying at the Masters or Ph.D. level in the United States. One goal of this study was to look for commonalities among groups of individuals. The common experiences and behaviors of certain individuals are to be evaluated as consciously lived experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). Phenomenological research can be explored through multiple approaches: empirical, transcendental, psychological, or hermeneutic (Creswell, 2013, p. 79). The main approach in this study is transcendental, as the research is focused on the description of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Hein and Austin (2001) believe the researcher needs to make every effort to suspend his or her presuppositions, biases, and other knowledge of the phenomenon, in order to understand a particular phenomenon. This type of research is developed and studied through lived experiences, while also being reviewed and analyzed through systematic steps, procedures, and guidelines. The common themes within this research method are shared experiences, as a phenomenology cannot be proven or analyzed without the communal experiences of the participants.

Creswell (2013) shares examples of research being conducted with a phenomenological research method such as insomnia, anger, grief, driving, or mothering. This study analyzes the shared experience among graduate international students at the University of New Mexico, a large research institution in the southwestern region of the United States, who have work experience in the U.S. The experience was open to interpretation, which means the participants were able to reflect upon different stages within the internship’s timeline; the very beginning of the process (researching and applying for an internship), during the internship (interactions with...
coworkers, supervisors, and the university), and the end of the internship (plans and repetition of
the internship).

To understand a phenomenon at a deeper level, the researcher suspends past knowledge
and experiences in an attempt to find a sense of “newness” of the lived experience (Creswell,
2013; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Husserl (1999), the primary developer of transcendental
phenomenology, believes the researcher needs to be conscious of the surrounding world. Husserl
(1999) continues to explain, “We begin our considerations as human beings who are living
naturally, objectivating, judging, feeling, willing in the natural attitude” (p. 60). I, as the
researcher, though very interested in the subject, suppressed all prior knowledge and analyzed
the phenomenon solely through experiences of the research participants.

Phenomenological research is the interplay of lived experiences and commonalities found
within those experiences shared by a group of people. Lester (1999) explains the
phenomenological approach as a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and
emphasizes the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. This research brings an
understanding for subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions,
and cuts through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom (Lester,
1999). Two interesting concepts mentioned in Creswell (2013) are epoche and transcendental. To
master the art of phenomenological research, the researcher must perceive everything as if for
the first time. The extent to which the research question touches the lived experiences, distinct
from theoretical explanations, measures the success of the study (Colaizzi, 1978).

The process of bracketing in phenomenological research involves rigorous self-reflection
as Hein and Austin (2001) explain:
By engaging in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside or bracket assumptions about the phenomenon, the researcher aims at being as open and receptive as possible to participants’ descriptions of their experience of the phenomenon. The first step in the phenomenological reduction involves bracketing the natural attitude—a process that is termed *epoche*. The natural attitude refers to our unquestioned assumptions about the world and us is “real” (i.e., exists independently) and provides others with the same reality (p. 5).

The preliminary assumptions from my personal and observant experience consisted of student and institutional knowledge. My personal student experience originated from a Master’s in Business Administration program set in the same institution as the participants. The institutional experience was centered around the career fair, hosted periodically throughout the year. The career fair was recommended when searching for internships. My professional experience working as an International Student Advisor at the same institution has shaped my thoughts on career initiatives administered by the University and the difficulties international students face throughout the process. When observing international students who are interested in finding an internship, they must make sure the employment meets immigration standards. Sometime this means working with the employer to postpone the start date until the authorization process is complete, and limiting their number of hours per week comply with immigration standards. The Global Education Office and the Career Services Center both work as gatekeepers for giving permission to international students for work authorization.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

To start the data collection process, the participants were contacted by the Director of the International Students and Scholars Services from The Global Education Office at the University
of New Mexico. The director used a database that stores information about all international students on campus to announce the opportunity to participate. My electronic announcement (Appendix B) was disseminated to all 690 international graduate students using purposeful sampling. I received twelve responses from this sampling method and I separately interviewed all twelve participants.

All the participants signed a consent form during the face-to-face interview, were made aware that their participation was strictly voluntary, and that they should not feel obligated to take part in the study. I made the participants aware of the fact that if they feel uncomfortable with any of my questions, then they did not need to answer and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All the participants answered every question on the questionnaire and none of the participants withdrew from the study. The participants’ names and the businesses that they worked for during the internships have been omitted for confidentiality reasons. I replaced identifiable information in the direct quotes located in the Chapter Four analysis to maintain participant confidentiality. For example, when a participant disclosed their home country, I would replace the word with the corresponding world region. When a participant disclosed their employer’s name, I would replace the word with internship. The demographic information, which I chose to share, includes the level of study (Masters or Ph.D.), if they are here with a family, if their degree is in a STEM discipline, their world region, and if they completed their bachelor’s degree in the U.S.

I conducted all but one of the interviews face-to-face in the same location on the UNM campus. One of the interviews was conducted over the phone and recorded. Utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol, I audio recorded all interviews. I asked all participants to sign a consent form, which I provided before the interview by email and in person. After going over the
consent form with each participant, I provided each with a five-dollar Starbucks gift card as a small gesture of appreciation for their time. Most of the interviews lasted 45 minutes to an hour.

Initially, I planned to screen each willing participant by demographic information: world region, major, and gender. Once I received interested participants, I found that each participant was completely different in multiple ways and almost every world region was accounted for, except for the Middle East.

**Interview Transcriptions.** I first listened to all the digital audio files from the twelve interview participants and then began the transcription processes. Other doctoral students and alumni recommended that I use a professional company for transcription, but the chair of my dissertation committee persuaded me to transcribe the audio files myself. When I transcribed my data, I was able to capture lots of little details and I could vividly remember the interviews, which would have been lost if I hired someone for the transcriptions. All my participants were international students and many of them have a strong accent when speaking English, therefore I had to replay the recordings many times when words were muffled or not clear. Initially, with almost 12 hours of audio to transcribe, the task sounded daunting, but the reward was incalculable. I had a deeper understanding of the data and a clearer image of the larger themes.

**Types of Analysis.** Wolcott (1994) believes that the process of using data rather than gathering the data is the essence of qualitative research. Description through personal experiences, describing the essence of the phenomenon, and developing significant statements are the best options for data analysis for phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013). It is important to stay as close to the data as originally recorded. The international students are following a linear path as they move through life from country to country. It makes sense to describe their stories in chronological order. There are distinct moments in their lives that have
brought them to where they are today. Wolcott (1994) mentions that the descriptive section of
data analysis is imperative and to make sure it includes the details necessary for subsequent
analysis or interpretation. The data should not be portrayed as supporting a preconceived
framework (Wolcott, 1994).

Moustakas (1994) approaches phenomenological research analysis practically and
simply. Moustakas (1994) believes the researcher is responsible for introducing the phenomenon
from a personal point of view. Creswell (2013) states, “A full description of his or her own
experience of the phenomenon” (p. 193). When identifying significant statements from the
interviews, Creswell (2013) believes the research should: “list these significant statements and
treat each statement as having equal work, and work to develop a list of non-repetitive, non-
overlapping statements” (p. 193). The researcher then takes the significant statements and groups
them into themes. A visual representation of the categories and emerging themes is an efficient
and effective way to display the data analysis. The purpose of analyzing the data through coding
is to find themes and pattern regularities (Creswell, 2013). Patton (1990) believes qualitative
analysis should draw on both critical and creative thinking. I used this list of helpful behaviors
(Strauss & Corbin, 1998) during the analysis process to promote creative thinking:

a. Being open to multiple possibilities

b. Generating a list of options

c. Exploring various possibilities before choosing any one

d. Making use of multiple avenues of expression such as art, music, and metaphors to
stimulate thinking

e. Using nonlinear forms of thinking such as going back and forth and circumventing
around a subject to get a fresh perspective
f. Diverging from one’s usual ways of thinking and working, again to get a fresh perspective

g. Trusting the process and not holding back

h. Not taking shortcuts and rather putting energy and effort into the work

i. Having fun while doing it.

While these recommendations are specifically developed for grounded theory, they are useful and applicable suggestions when coding and analyzing the data. In phenomenological research, when analyzing the data specifically in phenomenological studies, the researcher must understand “what” the participants experienced with the phenomenon, preferably to include verbatim examples from what happened during the experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). The analysis continues to describe the “how” of the experience happened, or formally known as the “structural description” (Creswell, 2013, p. 194). The setting and context in which the internship took place, as well as the institutional setting, was developed and analyzed through the structural description. The final analysis simultaneously combines the textural and structural descriptions, in short, combining the “what” and the “how” to explain the “essence” of the experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 194).

Standards of Quality. The standards of quality used to address trustworthiness in this qualitative study included neutrality, truth value, applicability, and consistency (Guba, 1981). Guba (1981) expresses these terms as “aspects” of trustworthiness, as there are different scientific and naturalistic terms for each of the criteria. There are certain techniques to strengthen all four of the trustworthy criteria. A technique to strengthen the neutrality or conformability of the study is research reflexivity. Researcher reflexivity is for the researcher to self-disclose their assumptions, beliefs, and biases that may shape their inquiry (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
Disclosing personal beliefs and biases to allow readers to understand the researchers’ positions is important within the critical paradigm because social, cultural, and historical topics are commonly discussed from a critical research paradigm (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In phenomenological research, errors of analysis occur as a result of insufficient systematic examination and are deemed incomplete (Bevan, 2002). Systematically interviewing all participants confirms how an experience is constituted and limits the likelihood of an incomplete analysis (Bevan, 2002). All the participants were asked the same interview questions in the same order to constitute systematic interviewing.

Another method to test the validity and credibility of the research is member checking. Member checking consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The emerging themes and categories need to make sense to the participants. Colaizzi’s method is the only one that calls for validation of the results by returning the study to the participants for member checking. All the participants were provided the Chapter 4 analysis and asked evaluate the emerging themes and categories.

To strengthen the applicability of the study, purposive sampling is necessary. Guba (1981) explains, “If transferability depends upon a match of characteristics it is incumbent on investigators to provide the information necessary to test the degree of fittingness” (p. 86). The dependability or consistency in qualitative data is difficult to measure and strengthen at times, because different realities are being tapped or because the research can go through instrumental shifts stemming from developing insights through the interview process (Guba, 1981). This study is applicable and transferable to most university campuses across the U.S.
Chapter Four - Findings

This is an empirical qualitative study examining the experiences of international students who were employed through an internship, Curricular Practical Training (CPT) during their graduate degree program. I collected and analyzed the data through Colaizzi’s (1978) phenomenological approach, as this method best captured the descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants while living and studying in the United States. Through in-depth interviews, twelve international students were able to explain the unique process of acculturating while simultaneously studying and working, their plans post-graduation, and their professional experience in an American work environment. This study should ultimately be used for institutions of higher education to become more aware of the needs and resources required for international students to secure internships. I hope that the findings from this study will constructively add to the current body of research surrounding international education. This chapter presents the findings from this research study while illustrating the data analysis process. The twelve interviews were transcribed and coded using thematic coding techniques by Saldaña (2009).

Sample

The sample of participants included both male and female international graduate students. The age, race, major, or ethnicity of the participants did not limit participation in this study. Each international student who participated in this study held a valid F-1 student visa and engaged in CPT during their graduate program. Table 4 describes the study participants by various factors.
Table 4

*Description of Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Masters/PhD</th>
<th>Here with Family</th>
<th>STEM in the U.S.</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
<th>Work Experience Back Home</th>
<th>Nearing Graduation</th>
<th>Secured a Full-time Position after Graduation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aneeb</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariel</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kushal</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (Abroad)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohit</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajib</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X (in U.S.)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic Analysis**

The demographic information reveals that half of the participants are from a country in Asia. Out of those six people from Asia, four are male and two are female. A quarter of the participants come from a country in Latin America, two participants from countries in Europe, and one participant from Africa. The demographic information is very similar to the international graduate student population that exists at the University of New Mexico. Table 5 compares the world region of the participants and the world region of the UNM Graduate student population.
Table 5

*World Region of UNM International Graduate Students Comparted to the World Region of the Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World Region</th>
<th>UNM International Graduate Student Population</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>50.36%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>18.71%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>8.63%</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>7.91%</td>
<td>16.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are a few distinct patterns that have emerged from Table 4. Only students who are studying in a STEM discipline received their Bachelor’s degree in the U.S. and all those participants are here without families. It should also be noted that most of the participants, except Nina, did not have any work experience in their home country. Nina is an interesting case, because she originally graduated with a non-STEM degree, but is pursuing a STEM discipline for the extra two-year work permission. Her original plan was to graduate and work for a non-STEM field employer, but after speaking with friends and people from her home country, she believes her employability will increase after graduating with a STEM degree. Nina will have two master’s degrees, one in STEM and one in non-STEM. She reasons that employers are more willing to hire talent that can stay for a longer period (three years versus one).

The student participants who are here with their families are all non-STEM majors and all have past work experience in their home countries. Every participant has a unique journey and experience in the U.S., but students who are responsible for the wellbeing and future of their families have expressed different reasons for their educational sacrifices.
For many, including U.S. citizens, the end goal of education is to start a career and find substantial employment (Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2019). Table 4 displays how many of the participants have secured a full-time position post-graduation. Two-thirds of the participants have secured a full-time position post-graduation. Three of those participants have secured a full-time position with their internship employers, even though they are not near graduation. A participant is considered near graduation when they have only one more semester left to finish their degree. The type of internship experience is almost equally represented among the participants across three categories: government, industry, and teaching. Three of the participants participated in an internship experience in a government entity, four in education, and five in industry. An example of working in a government-related internship would be interning with a national laboratory. An example of an industry internship would be working for a Fortune 500 company. Lastly, a teaching internship would be working in a public or private school.

It is important to address the foundational similarities among all the participants. There are stereotypes that most international students are wealthy, or part of a higher socioeconomic class, because studying in a foreign country can be expensive, especially in the United States. International students need to provide substantial financial proof to their university admission specialists before they are awarded admission and granted the correct immigration documents. This is regulated by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Though this is true and all the students provided financial documentation, they are all from lower to middle-class socioeconomic families. Each participant needs to work while studying to survive. One of the participants confessed to borrowing money from friends for her financial proof and then sent the money back once she was approved. This survival mentality was mentioned often in different contexts by all the participants. All the participants
face high stakes to earn their degrees because many have loans from their families, credit card bills, or are working paycheck to paycheck. The participants hope that a U.S. education is worth the financial sacrifices. Socioeconomics plays a major role in the personal and professional wellbeing of the participants.

**Coding and Findings**

The initial coding cycle yielded 70 different themes. These themes included experiences such as overcoming obstacles and barriers, ambitiousness and actively pursuing opportunities, one’s ties to home culture, and 67 other categories. Saldaña (2009, p. 10) affirms that rarely will anyone get coding right the first time because qualitative inquiry requires deep reflection on the emergent patterns. I was not able to capture the meaning of the lived experiences of the participants until I completed multiple cycles of coding. I used holistic coding as my first cycle coding strategy to find initial themes and patterns within the data. I was focused on the main ideas of what was being said. Dey (1993) believes holistic coding is an attempt to understand the basic themes within the data and analyzing the words, rather than a line by line approach. When analyzing the data in this phenomenological study, I, as the researcher, had to understand “what” the participants experienced with the phenomenon, preferably to include verbatim examples from what specifically happened during the experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 193).

After recoding the data multiple times, core categories started to emerge. I used Pattern Coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as my second cycle coding method. Pattern Coding is used to help develop major themes from the data and facilitates the search for rules, causes, and explanation (Saldaña, 2009). This type of coding strategy pulls together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The chronological format of the interview questions used in this study gave advantage to Pattern
Coding analysis. The participants answered the questions using phrases such as “if,” “and then,” and “because,” which infer rules, causes, and explanations in the data (Saldaña, 2009, pp. 153-154). An example is if students are studying the United States with a family then they are struggling with the assimilation process for their children because if they need to move back to their home country, then the child will need to be fluent and efficient in the home language and culture. See Appendix C for an example of a coded transcript.

This section provides summaries of the findings, categories, and major themes relating to the two research questions: How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career-decision making self-efficacy after graduation? And, how, if at all, has being in the United States impacted international students’ journey towards better understanding their own culture and their outlook on life and the world?

Each major theme and category have corresponding significant supplementary quotes to better illustrate the feelings and authentic experiences of the participants. To better establish credibility, Denzin (1989) and Creswell and Miller (2000, p. 129) believe providing rich detail to the audience will produce feelings that they have experienced, or could experience from the events being described in the study. Using direct quotations from the transcriptions helps bring the experience of the phenomenon to life.

**The Acculturation Process and Self-efficacy**

The first sub-question I used to understand the lived experiences of international students working and studying in the U.S. brings attention to career motivations and the acculturation process was: How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career-decision making self-efficacy after graduation?
International students transform professionally and personally when pursuing a Master’s or Ph.D. in another country. For each theme that was exposed through the coding process, there was this constant impression of gaining, but at a cost. Many of the participants viewed their U.S. education as access to a better life and access to a less complicated world, but at the cost of being away from their families, depression, and living outside of their comfort zone.

Common themes among the participants are organized in Figure 3 by three categories: expectations, costs, and outcomes. Expectations refer to the motives shared by the participants for studying in the U.S. Costs refer to the sacrifices shared by the participants while studying in the U.S. The outcomes refer to the professional transformation of the participants, which developed through their experiences in the U.S. Each participant in one way or another came to the U.S. to pursue some form of professional development while studying. Forms of personal development include research opportunities, work experience, or making valuable connections for future work endeavors.

![Figure 3. Categories for the themes relating to acculturation and self-efficacy.](image)
**Expectations**

The overarching theme, *expectations*, focuses on the journey towards career development and the participants’ lived experiences. The participants reflected on their pre-departure expectation. There were specific questions in the interviews that were relevant to life before the coming to the U.S., and these questions helped the participants remember the reasons why they came to the U.S. in the first place. There are also times in the data analysis where the participants refer to their expectations from experiences while physically being present in the U.S. The expectations category includes the value of a U.S. education and the benefits of gaining U.S. work experience.

**The Value of a U.S. Education.** The participants all agree that a U.S. education does not solely mean a degree, but includes non-academic and professional skills. These skills may derive from multiple factors such as the different teaching methods used in the U.S. and the ability to gain work experience simultaneously while studying. The subthemes relating to the value of a U.S. education include the prestigious world-view of a U.S. degree, enthusiasm for American culture and teaching style, lack of equal educational resources, and the cooperative experience of working while studying.

*The prestigious world-view of a U.S. degree.* Kushal reflected on the recommendation he received from a family member about the value and recognition of pursuing his degree in the U.S. He states, “He encouraged the U.S., up until Ph.D., because it counts as a more valuable degree. Even if you want to work in any other country, it will be more valuable. People will value your degree more.” Other participants dedicated all their time and energy towards pursuing higher education in the U.S. and no other country. Aneeb, for example, believed that “the U.S.
has a vast amount of researchers and projects. I thought it would be a good start” and Rajib was “focused on the U.S.; that is the only place I applied.”

*Enthusiasm for American Culture and Teaching Style.* Graddol, McArthur, Flack, and Amey (1999) predicted the popularity of the American English accent compared to the British, as many young people are influenced by American English. James admires the American teaching methods from his education back home:

> We tend to focus on British literature in Europe instead of American. I was not into the posh approach to British English. We had American teachers and professors and they influenced me. I liked the teachers and I like the American approach. I also had a rebellious side. Where they want to impose the British approach and I wanted to do the other way.

Hector wanted to improve his English for future job opportunities, while other participants, like Aneeb, developed a strong appreciation for American culture and teaching practices during his graduate program. Aneeb stated, “One thing I really liked in Americans is the way that they think. They have a very good intuitive way of processing problems. I like that and I accommodate that when I grade.”

I found that students in the STEM disciplines appreciated the extra attention devoted to learning how to do research. They learned how to communicate better in both academic and professional settings. There have been many communication studies concerning the value and marketability of prospective engineers who possess both technical and professional skills (Artemeva, 2008; Dunbar, Brooks & Miller, 2006; Jin Xiao, 2006; Morreale, Osborn & Pearson, 2002; Schnell 2006). Aneeb explained how this skill is extremely valuable to the profession, especially when explaining his research to other professionals in the field:
In the four years of Ph.D., your learning curve is so much. You need to be better at communicating, articulating a problem, writing and decimating the results. It is very underrated in a Ph.D. You can do the research, but if you don’t know who to tell them, then people don’t know what you are doing… One thing that came for me in the U.S. is the communication skills. The way I realize how important it is to convey properly what you are speaking and all. In Asia, you usually speak your mother tongue or local language.

Lack of equal educational resources and opportunities in home country. For many of the participants, there is the belief that they would not have the same access to specific educational opportunities if they were studying in their home countries. Rose talked about her U.S. journey as a cathartic moment in her life and is extremely grateful for this chance. She said, “Getting the visa was a blessing in disguise because I was thinking if it doesn’t happen then I can find something here, because I didn’t see myself working right after high school.”

Joan spoke about how her major does not even exist in her home country because rhetoric is only taught to law students:

It is not what we do in my home country. Not only is it necessary when teaching students writing, but the concepts we teach our students really make life easier. For example, we teach them the course community and the concept of genre. I am so thankful for these things, because they somehow cleared my mind for perceptions of different phenomenon. We don’t have a first-year composition, so we don’t think we need rhetoric. It was only taught to law students because it was connected to public speaking, not with writing.

The cooperative experience of working while studying. The U.S. education system is very different compared to other education systems around the world. Many of the participants from
the Asian world region expressed how their student-life culture differs immensely, because they
do not study and work simultaneously as students commonly do in the U.S. Mohit is very
satisfied with the diverse student experience provided to him in the U.S., as he described, “Skills,
that is not what I admire most. I like the diversity the most. Working with others from different
vocations and conditions. It is an amazing experience.” Nina also shared how important her
student and work-life balance is for her future, by stating, “Right now, I have a work and study
life, so that quite helps me get a real-world experience. There are no internship kind of things in
my home country.”

Rose talked about how important having access to internship opportunities during her
studies has enhanced her learning experience, as she expressed:

I like knowing me, what I am workwise, because I never had that experience just at
UNM. UNM gives you the experience to develop mentally, but working outside gives
you more experience world-wide. I don’t know how to explain it.

**The Benefits of Gaining U.S. Work Experience while Studying.** For participants,
Ariel, Mohit, Kushal, Rose, Aneeb and Luis, their first job interview and first-time working was
in the U.S. These participants all shared various factors about the positives of having work
experience while studying. For the participants who have never worked before, their U.S. work
experience increased their confidence and improved their mental health. For the other
participants, who have had work experience from home, they still found many benefits from their
internship in the U.S. Many of these folks bluntly stated that they were working for the income,
for their families, and gaining work experience for future employment. The four participants in
the U.S. with a family all have previous work experience from their home country. In this
section, I believe it is important to distinguish the different expectations of the participants based on their demographic information: here with family and work experience back home.

_Becoming familiar with U.S. employment customs._ The students who have never worked in their home countries before coming to the U.S. all worked in some type of on-campus employment before their off-campus internship experience. Many of the participants worked as a TA, GA, or RA and some worked in office positions on-campus or in Resident Life. There were good and bad reviews from the participants about their first work experiences in the U.S. Aneeb shared his very first job experience in data entry and then his second work experience as a TA for one of his professors. He learned about the human resource systems from his first job experience. Once he had the opportunity to be a TA, he has adjusted to the working environment in the U.S. and has more confidence in the TA position, as he disclosed:

He made us have data entry for when we clock in and clock out, even if you are going to the restroom. And while you are working you should not talk to anyone and you should not text other people. I never complained about him. After learning how things are in the U.S., I am not sure if he is taking international students for granted. I don’t know if he would do this to Americans. They know their rights and we don’t. We don’t know how effective HR is here. If anything happens with management in Asia, you report, you get fired, that’s it. Because people really won’t care, because people are replaceable. HR is just a placeholder somewhere. It just fills the position and does the paperwork. Here HR is a big deal. Second semester I did some TA work, it was in thermodynamics and there were 70-80 people in the class. After that, I was going out and mingling with students from different cultures, backgrounds, and countries. I was quite comfortable.
Culturally-based barriers to employment opportunities for international graduate students involves the negative perceptions of an accent (Carlson & McHenry, 2006) and acculturation stress (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008). Nina, one of the participants here without a family, but who does have work experience from her home country, talked about the difficulties she endured trying to secure a GA position:

When I first came over here, it was pretty hard to get a GA, because you need to be in contact with your professor to get a GA. So, when I first got to the U.S. I applied for a GA in the GRC and I didn’t get it over there, and I applied for the assistant coordinator at CAPS, and I was not picked over there too. I was trying to get a GA and I was emailing a lot of professors and I was not hearing a positive response from them. At the end of my second semester, one of my Chinese friends talked to me about a GA and she told me that one of her friends who is a GA is going to graduate, so I need to talk to the professor if I want it. I went to that professor’s office and it was closed and I notated his office hours. Later, I went to his office and he was there and I talked to him about the GA opportunity. He told me to send in my resume and he would look at it. He was impressed with my resume and later he sent me an email to meet me and he asked me if I was interested in his GA and I got it.

Every participant has benefited in a minor or major way from their work experience in the U.S. From a one-semester horrible data-entry position, Aneeb now understands the differences between the way an American human resources system works compared to human resources in his home country. Through his TA experience, he has become more personable and has made connections with students from around the world. Nina was able to discover how important personal connections are during the job search. Later in her interview, she mentioned
being a member of a professional group on campus where she can meet employers in her field and build more personal connections for future work.

*The transformation from student to professional.* As mentioned previously, many of the participants started with an on-campus position where they learned basic skills for working in the U.S., but were later able to find an internship opportunity off-campus in their field of study. This next section presents how the participants benefitted from working in an off-campus internship. Ariel, Kushal, and Rose represent the participants who are not here with family and have no work experience back home. Ariel explained how critical internships are for students in her profession and her future resume:

> Work is a big issue for foreign students, but it could be great for the university as well, because students become professionals. If I couldn’t audition, then the university would have never known that I have developed the skills to be a professional. It is a very good thermometer for the course and for the university to know how the students are doing. For the students, it is very important because I can tell my time at UNM that I was able to do that and it will be on my resume, along with the life experience.

Kushal reflected on his personal growth through his internship experience and how this benefited his dissertation research by explaining:

> That was my first internship/exposure to industry. My first experience in the U.S. and anywhere. It was scary, but I was excited because it was my first time. I got to experience the fast pace research that happens in industry. How fast people are and how fast they take decisions. How fast, in general, their brains work compared to what we do in school. I am not saying it is slow, but it is slow compared to industry. You have a lot of support from people who have many years of experience. I had to learn a lot of different
technologies. I learned new tools and technics. I was able to incorporate what I learned in
my research, to make it faster and more efficient. The internship happened in 2017, and I
like I said earlier, 2017 was my dead year. So, trying new things and tweaking things was
helpful, to say the least.

Rose reflected on how important her internship was for her personal development,
because she was forced to collaborate, problem-solve, and practice critical decision making.
Rose stated:

Six-month knowledge. It isn’t like a project that you can practice for, and the decision
you make can impact a lot of people. It is always good to collaborate with others, being
with an engineer, speaking about myself. I didn’t want to socialize; I just wanted to work
by myself, do well, get my degree, and start working somewhere. At my internship, it is
not like that. The best ideas come from talking to other people. They help you get all the
pieces to the puzzle to help you make the big picture.

For these students, their internship experience opened new doors and helped them
become professionals in their field. They not only learned technical and professional skills, but
they also learned a lot about themselves through the process. They became better versions of
themselves.

Creating financial stability for one’s family. This next section contains data from Joan,
Rajib, and James who represent the participants who are here with family and have work
experience back home. James needs to work to support his family, stating, “The internship will
be to make money. The experience I already have. Teaching at my internship with no grade at
stake, that is just going to be fun/relaxed.” These participants are more grounded in terms of the
person they are and what they are trying to accomplish while studying in the U.S. Joan shared her work experience in the U.S. and the sacrifices she must make for her child:

   It is very time-consuming. This is just Saturday and I am very miserable because I only have one day off. I would prefer to stay home to cook and clean, just to have a rest…. I work there for the sake of my daughter. She goes to music and reading and I do not pay anything because I am a teacher. That is a good benefit. I get my wages and she attends classes for free. That is why I am there. Otherwise, no.

Rajib finds himself working to better his dissertation research and rarely sees the personal growth and skill development that some of the other participants experienced. He stated,

   I already had a lot of job experience. I did not have any job experience in the states. The internship helped with that a little, but mostly it helped with my dissertation. I really found comfort there working in a multidisciplinary group, because I have a multidisciplinary background. It was really comfortable for me and I really found some challenging work there and that was nice for me.

Costs

   This section is based on the idea of, is this all worth it? There is a tradeoff when following one’s dreams. Many students return home because the cost is not worth it anymore. During Hector’s interview, he said that he has seen many students give up on this dream because they are not able to deal with the concept of change. Major themes that developed in this section include lifestyle changes, financial concerns, and relentlessly competing to stay in the U.S.

   **Lifestyle Changes.** Lifestyle changes is a broad theme that relates to acculturating to the U.S. education system, work environment, and personal life. Three sub-themes emerged from the data for this category, adjusting to the U.S., health concerns, and being resourceful with time.
Adjusting to the U.S. Every participant went through some degree of culture shock and period of adjustment when they arrived in the U.S. Lombard (2014) defines culture shock as the initial experiences of immersion in an unfamiliar culture. Many of the participants referred to this time as being alone and questioning the decision to return home. A few of the participants shared their trials and tribulations with understanding the U.S. education system and for four of the participants, they immediately started their teaching assistantships when they arrived in the U.S. Yeh and Drost (2002) believe American society is characterized by American cultural homogeneity, therefore, leaving ethnic and racial minority students to acculturate in order to operate successfully in the dominant-white-system. Nina shares how she felt when she first arrived in Albuquerque with tears in her eyes. She explained,

It wasn’t very hard leaving Asia at that time, but after coming to Albuquerque it was very hard for me because it was my first time to be away from home and I was already missing them. The first day when I came here to Albuquerque, I was about to cry, but I didn’t know where to cry, with whom to cry, it was really hard at that time.

James shared the initial difficulties that his family experienced with the move:

It has been difficult for my wife because she didn’t know much English and she doesn’t have any friends. The loneliness she was feeling was putting pressure on me too. If your wife and kids don’t like it here, then we will have to go back home.

Sarah and James both expressed heavy emotions during their interviews, but later shared how their life began to fall into place. James talked about his children making neighborhood friends, joining clubs, and how adjustment is possible through time.

Academic cultural adjustment and mentorship. In this section, the participants recall the initial disparities between their home countries’ education systems and the U.S. college
education system. Online classes, campus resources, and professor’s office hours are all topics mentioned in the interviews. Sarah went through a difficult first semester, especially with an online class that she did not realize was online. She says, “I took an online course and didn’t have any idea, I didn’t sign in or submit anything. I went to the professor’s office and got help.” Rose shared similar types of confusion during her first semester in the U.S., stating:

I was a little stressed because I wasn’t used to being in an area where everyone speaks fluent English and everyone dresses casual. You don’t wear uniforms like in Africa…. I didn’t understand the system still: like how to get good grades, who to reach out to for tutoring services, you should use your teacher’s office hours.

Lastly, Hector elucidated some of the challenges he faced during his first semester as a student in the U.S., by explaining:

I remember I talked to some friends here and some people from the Global Education Office and they recommended me to go to the GRC to get some help. If I cannot do my papers, then I will just have to do that.

All the participants who struggled with academic cultural adjustment were able to overcome this by actively pursuing help from others. Others is a very broad term because this refers to mentors, professors, advisors, family, and friends. The mentorship is all over the board, but it is important to note that every participant confided in someone, even if they were an absolute stranger. Joan talked to a graduate student from her same country, as she said, “It was rough, but I was lucky to have a good mentor. A girl, a senior graduate student from my country. She shared her teaching materials with me, which helped a lot.” Rose talked about the importance of establishing a support system and making connections with people on campus who can help, as she stated:
I also made some friends. They then became my studying buddies. I didn’t feel like I was alone at the time, I just started going to school again. My first semester was challenging, but it gradually got better, because I chose to see the U.S. differently. I found out that people come into your life for specific reasons.

Sometimes it is easier to relate to and confide in a fellow student, but for Sarah, she was able to find the necessary help from her professor. She mentioned:

I would go before or after class to the professor’s office for a briefing. I would spend lots of time with them and I recorded the classes. It took me one and a half semesters to finally understand and feel better.

Unhealthy Routine. Kushal was the first participant who shared his health concerns and it is unnerving to report that many of the participants shared health concerns during their interviews; especially at the Ph.D. level. The participants are constantly pushing themselves to the limit to produce results. This specific demographic group cited the most issues with depression, physical, and mental health concerns. Aneeb found himself struggling with his personal and work-life balance. He shared his experiences by saying, “I am not having a life; that is not healthy. Then I started the violin and it is very fun. Personally, I need to maintain a proper personal and work-life balance.” Luis shared the battles he has experienced with depression by stating, “That Ph.D. depression that so many of us in a Ph.D. program go through. That has been an ongoing story for me for a few years. I have had help from SHAC, but it is not easy, you know.” Kushal shared a personal story about sacrificing his health for success, as he expressed:

Personally, staying fit and healthy is the only goal for me now, because I have sacrificed many things, which I shouldn’t have done in the course of my four-year Ph.D. I think I
should get on track and focus on being healthy. Trading your health for anything is not worth it. I realized that the hard way.

*Being Resourceful with Time.* Time is not a black and white concept, because different cultures perceive time differently. A common example of the different ways that time is interpreted in different cultures is the party example. A party starts at 8 PM, so what time do the Germans, Japanese, and the Latin Americans arrive? The common response is the Germans are on time, the Japanese are early, and the Latin Americans are two hours late! I found that even though this may be true in their home countries, many of the participants have adapted their lifestyle to American time and have become extremely efficient in every aspect of their daily routine. Throughout all phases in this journey, the participants strive for a meaningful experience.

**Financial Concerns.** Financial concerns is a broad theme that relates to the stress of paying for a U.S. education, socioeconomic adjustment, and the ambiguity of future employment. These sub-themes emerged sequentially through the interviews. The participants spoke of their upbringing and the financial pressure their education has on their families. Future employment becomes a concern, but not due to lack of skill, but the barriers and bureaucracy of the U.S. immigration system.

*Financial stress accompanying a U.S. education.* Financial stress was the most common stressor recognized by the participants. Coincidentally, this could be because the study is highly concentrated on work experience in the U.S., but regardless, financial concerns were distinctly mentioned by many of the participants. James finds himself juggling working and his academic program to support his family, as he stated, “I feel that I am underperforming, because I have to do so many things.” Financial stress is a burden on many of the participant’s educational
progress. Luis explained how difficult it is to complete his degree on time while working by sharing:

I just finished an RA position and it was not with physics, it was in the computer science department. There were times for about a year/year and a half that I didn’t have an RA, so I had to have a TA plus tutoring at CAPS. In order to make enough money, I couldn’t work more than 30 hours. That is why I had to get the CPT. During that time, I didn’t manage to make any progress on my dissertation, just cause I had to work that much. For a year, I had a half RA and some grading work with another TA. That’s the thing, at the end of the day you’re tired and you haven’t gotten to do the thing you need to do to graduate. That is actually very common for a lot of people. Grants are very political. Engineers get a lot more funding because there is the perception that they will get you more results, more practical results. Maybe that is true, but that is a full neglect of basic science.

James and Aneeb reflected on the differences between the costs of education in the U.S. and their home countries. “The middle-class can easily afford an education without a lifetime of debt in his home country.” Aneeb continued to explain, “In Asia, it isn’t expensive. A middle-class person can afford an education with a loan that you can pay off in four years probably.” Lee and Rice (2007) determined that many of the experiences international students found as difficult were not all due to adjustment, but more serious challenges due to inadequacies with the host society. James shared his experiences with the European education system and the inexperience he has dealing with student loans, stating:

In Europe, school is more affordable, like 500 euros for the year, which also covers Social Security. For some people, they get it for free. I don’t want to get a student loan to
pay for my studies here, to me that is strange. The TA covers tuition and I get a stipend, but it does not cover all the bills, so I need to work on CPT. Without working here, it is impossible, because it is expensive.

Lastly, Kushal acknowledged the sacrifices his parents made to help fund his U.S. education by explaining:

My student loans are based on a mortgage that I put on my parents’ home. They were able to do it and now I need to pay that off. I know that once I have a good job and a good career, it is going to pay off. If not now, sometime down the lane. Once it is all gone, you will only see the bright side. I don’t know; it is a perspective to keep the bigger picture in mind.

*Adjustment of socioeconomic status.* Five out of the twelve participants left a full-time work position to go back to school and this comes with job restrictions. International students are limited by government regulations to only part-time work, which is a major socioeconomic status adjustment for many of the participants. Hector shared his frustrations with not being able to work full-time and his fight for survival in the U.S. by confessing:

It would be better if I can work full-time, because of all of the expenses I have to go through in another country. Because in Latin America, I would be living with my parents. Let’s just say that it would be cheaper. Here, they limit you to work 20-30 hours a week and that is it. So, how is a person supposed to survive with 20 hours a week, with a salary of let’s say 10 dollars an hour? It is impossible for the most part, it becomes exhausting after a few semesters. Joan expressed the challenges she faced with a financial crisis back home and the sacrifices she made to be successful by stating:

Because there was a financial crisis in my home country in 2014, it ate all my money. It
was even hard to collect the $2,500. I asked my friends to lend me the money. I put them into my bank account, sent the scan to UNM, and the next day I went to the bank, closed my account, and gave all my money back to them. I know this was not very honest, but I came to this country with two credit cards and nothing else. It was really rough in the beginning.

*Future Employment.* Every participant shared a concern, either small or great, about visa restrictions and experiencing self-doubt towards future employment in the U.S. Ariel reflects on the lack of control she has over her future and she knows that she needs to find a legal way to stay in the U.S., by explaining, “It all depends, because right now immigration law makes it really hard to stay here and have a legal job. I don’t want to stay here illegally, that’s not how I can live.” Nina, like many of the other participants, understands what employers are looking for when hiring international students. It is important to acknowledge how the system works in the U.S. Nina listens to her friends who have experience in this area, as she stated:

I applied for internships, but because of my visa status, I am not able to get it in the Albuquerque area…One of my friends was telling me that companies spend 40,000 to 60,000 dollars just to onboard in their organizations, so they don’t want to waste that money, because there is always a risk if you will be getting H1B, not on the first try.

The participants have learned to worry about what they can control and less about what they cannot. Aneeb finds himself worrying about visa restrictions and employment much more than he expected by sharing:

Before coming here, I thought I would do very good. I didn’t estimate the visa restrictions and such, but after coming here where ever you are you are constrained by these factors. Basically, this affects how many times you want to go out and visit your
parents, which status you are in, and if you think about getting married. Relocation is not that easy for immigrants.

**Relentlessly Competing to Stay in the U.S.** Competition is a broad theme that relates to the cost of being an international student in the U.S. For international students, every moment matters and this is a heavy burden to carry for many years. This is one of the costs that comes with pursuing a degree in the U.S., especially if the end goal is permanently working in the U.S.

The assiduous nature of the participants resulted in the sub-themes of over-achieving, diversifying one’s skill-set, non-academic skills, constantly improving, and competing with Americans. These themes can be collapsed into two main concepts, competency development and character development.

**Competency development.** During the interviews, many of the participants spoke of the extracurricular activities demanded of them in order to get ahead. Joan expressed her dissatisfaction with sitting on different committees, because adding more to her skill set is exhausting, but also extremely necessary for future employment prospects. She explained,

Besides dissertation, conferences, publications, we also have service. Sitting on different committees. And even sitting takes a lot of time. In many cases, you actually have to do something on these committees, and this bothers me a lot. On the one hand, it is possible not to do that, but we need these lines on our CV because it makes us more marketable. That’s the issue. These are the basics: dissertation, conferences, and publications. But to get outstanding for the job market, we need to add something more, that is the issue.

Sarah works towards improving her English, while she is volunteering in the community. She finds creative ways to practice her English by sharing, “I volunteered a lot, mostly to have a chance to talk and improve English…I currently volunteer with Women to Be, an organization
that provides menstrual kits to women from undeveloped countries.” Aneeb finds it critical in his field to have a diverse skill set, because one day the government is focused on energy and very quickly the focus can change to climate. Scientists need to be prepared for these situations, as Aneeb uttered, “Right now I am diversifying my skill set. Not just focusing on one area of chemical engineering, but also on missional learning and EA. I can take these skills and apply for other problems.”

*Character development.* The participants share the common qualities of courageousness and diligence. International students have to learn how to be competitive and this is not easy for some students. Mohit sees how relevant competition is, especially competition with Americans, for his future job prospects. He talked about his work ethic and diligence through his journey by stating:

I have noticed brilliant Chinese and Indian people work really hard to be here, pushing them further. If I want to stay here, I have to worry about competing with Americans who don’t have to worry about leaving this country. There is this extra motivation that works for foreign nationals in this country. Americans aren’t seeing the hard part of life that we are seeing, where every moment matters. If I do bad in class, then I can lose my assistantship then I have to leave the U.S. I can’t pick up a job at Pizza Hut for extra money.

Ariel confessed that being competitive was never something she needed to develop in her youth, but throughout her journey in the U.S., she could not ignore competition. There are not many job opportunities in her field and this becomes a problem for her, as she stated:
I didn’t do many competitions, because I am not into competitions, but later in life, I started doing competitions. It is good to get the experience with competitions, because eventually you have to complete for jobs and there are not that many jobs.

International students like Rajib and Rose do not settle for an average work ethic. They work extra hours, work without pay, and put work before their own needs. Rajib discussed his work ethic by stating, “One year he funded me some and one year he didn’t even fund me, but I still worked for him, because he is an amazing person in my field and I didn’t want to miss that opportunity.” While Rose confesses working more hours than she was supposed to during her internship. She knew she needed to do more than the other interns to be seen as successful, as she explained,

I put in a lot of work and late nights. I didn’t document some of my hours, because interns aren’t supposed to work after 4 PM. You are supposed to have free time after that, but I was just focused.

Outcomes

The expectations and cost sections explain the “why” and “how” of the study. The outcomes section is meant to address the “what”; what has happened to the participants through this journey? All the participants have benefited from their educational and employment experiences in the U.S. In this section, I examine how the participants transformed professionally through this journey. The major themes in this section include coming to terms with uncertainty and the transformation of one’s identity.

The Transformation of One’s Identity. Hsieh (2006) defines the agency of identity as a way to scrutinize and adjust self, social, and personal identities in order to convey identities more acceptable to individuals. A few of the participants referred to this phenomenon throughout their
interviews. Regardless of age, every participant has transformed through this process, although, the younger participants experienced more first-time life events in the U.S. The main subthemes which developed include discovery and access to one’s passion, grit and ambition, and understanding the evolving self.

**Discovery and access to one’s passion.** Some of the participants found their passion in life before they came to the U.S., but for some of the participants, it took getting out of their comfort zones to find their passions. Regardless, all the participants shared in one way or another how they discovered their passions and the impact this has made during their education and professional journey in the U.S. Hector now knows how impactful studying abroad can be for his development academically, professionally, and personally. He had to get out of his comfort zone to find his passion, as he explained, “So, I knew that I wanted to help people in some way. I just never found the way to do it in Latin America. So, I had to get out of my comfort zone to find it.” Hector talks about his dreams to study abroad, but lack of funding during his undergraduate degree. When the stars align and he is provided with the chase, he takes it, and because of his bravery, he self-discovers his passion for education and helping others.

Rose outshined all the other students at the conference where she experienced her first internship interview and offer. The recruiters were hypnotized by her passion and enthusiasm for engineering. Within four hours of speaking with them, she received an official offer to join their team half-way across the United States. Rajib was inspired by a professor during his undergraduate education to make his life mission helping people. Since then, Rajib has been focusing all his efforts towards working for a non-profit. While studying at UNM, he was able to develop his passion for environmental economics and gained experience working for one of the top non-profits for environmental economics in the world. Rajib explained,
That really motivated me. I decided I will not be working for a corporation I will be working for a non-profit. I didn’t find a good job at a non-profit right away, so I had to work for a multinational company for 3-4 months after the MBA, but I was still looking because that was my passion.

Mohit believes he has been following his heart through this U.S. journey. He talks about his friends who are graduating soon, but believes he is on the right path for him regardless of time, as he explained:

It has been a long journey for me, most of my friends who are still in academia are still in school, getting ready to finish their Ph.D., but I am behind because I follow my heart and there are so many obstacles in the way, which have diverted me in a different direction… There is something that I want to do and then there is reality. The bottom line is I will do something that I love.

_Grit, persistence, and ambition._ All the participants expressed the idea of having grit, persistence, or ambition before and during their time abroad. As described in Chapter Two, grit is the self-determination, perseverance, and ability to set clear goals, while also having the patience and flexibility to handle small obstacles (Duckworth et al., 2007). Most of the participants have been practicing grit and persistence their entire lives, and many of the participants faced self-expectations and family expectations for success while studying and working in the U.S. Two very impactful stories came from participants Sarah and Hector relating to grit, persistence, and ambition. Sarah’s father was a huge influence on her self-identity. She shares how girls are not expected to graduate from college and sometimes not even from high school in her home country by explaining:
Back in 1995-1996 in my country, a father and mother didn’t even think about their girl. If you had a girl, she needs to get married soon, but my father had a different thought. He always saw his daughter in a different way. ‘I see her as a doctor and I will do whatever I need to see her as a doctor.’ He would pretend to have stomach pain to see me help him, like acting, so I can have different ambitions. I am the only one of my relatives that has passed college as a girl. I have one degree here and one degree there and I wish to go even further. When I lost him, I know that I need to be seen in a different way. When I visit his grave, I know he doesn’t want to see me as a typical girl, married with children, being dependent on a husband, but as a doctor.

Sarah identifies herself as the one responsible for everyone else, the one who needs to succeed and who cannot fail. This is an immense amount of pressure and stress. Sarah talks about her first day of class where she cried, praying to God for help, because she could not understand the professor. Later, she talks about emailing 1,000 professors from five different universities with hopes of receiving funding, because without funding she would not be able to continue. Pryor and Bright (2012) find that the harsh experiences many international students face during their first time abroad becomes valuable as failure develops into a source of learning and creates tolerance for uncertainty. Sarah’s journey has never been easy, even well before coming to the United States. She disclosed:

I worked for two years after my bachelor’s degree and basically, I have been providing for my family since I was little. I lost my father when I was only nine years old, so I am one of the primary breadwinners since I was 14-15 years old. I have three sisters and one brother and I am the eldest. Back then, women weren’t as free in my country. My mother couldn’t work, so when my dad passed away we sold his business, transferred it to my
uncle. We got some money from there, put it in the bank, lived on some interests and my uncle was giving us so money to cover our expenses. It was hard, really it was hard.

Hector experienced many obstacles throughout almost every stage of his journey. He first struggled with adapting to the academic use of the English language, which led to difficulties in transitioning to the U.S. education system. To this day, Hector continues to endure obstacles relating to finances and immigration. The literature mentions that nearly all international students encounter an array of acculturative stressors, including the language barrier, educational environment, sociocultural situations, discrimination, loneliness, and practical or lifestyle stressors (Lin & Yi, 1997; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). He will not abandon the many years that he has sacrificed thus far, and continues to make the best out of any difficult situation. Here is an excerpt from Hector’s interview that illustrates his persistence and grit towards completing his education and his future:

I knew I was not at the same level as the American students in the same program. I know the process that they chose you because you have the skills somehow. You have shown that you have the skills to be in that program through a cover letter, resume, things like that. I made it through I made it to the program and I realized that I had to do it. I am not a quitter if that makes sense. I don’t want to commit to something and just quit. I like to see how far I can get into something and if it doesn’t work out, then I will just move on.

Hector reflected on this first semester, and even though it was extremely difficult to continue, he remained persistent. He stated:

My first semester in the Master’s program was really tough, because I was barely getting into the English language by speaking by hearing and the academic setting is different from my English classes. The English classes are very basic. Getting into an academic
world is just a different scenario. I remember the first class and I couldn’t understand, so I cried and made a scene. I was like I can’t do this, this is awful. So, I grabbed my things and I left. It was a nightmare, but I made it through the first semester and I just had to learn how to manage my emotions in terms of I am not the best of the class.

Hector shows qualities of grit as he works towards accomplishing one goal at a time. He comes to terms with his new identity in the U.S. and adapts to his new life. He affirms this by stating:

The Ph.D. was easier, in terms of that because I was used to it now. I was dealing with people with a higher level of education like principals and all of these things. It was understanding that I was valuable in other ways. I learned to not put yourself down, just because knowing that you have to work twice as hard as they might do because it is a different language. During the Ph.D., I understand that I am valuable in another way. Even if I didn’t finish my Masters or my Ph.D., I know that I have learned something, and I know that I have something and if I go back it is better than before. So that is why I keep pushing and so far, I have been able to do it.

It is important to see Hector’s development from the first semester to the present day. He reflected towards the end of the interview about what he has learned through this journey. He continues to endure all the challenges that come his way, explaining:

It is not an easy journey. You have to have tough skin if you want to do this. There are two options, you either have the money and not worry, or if you don’t have the money then you have to put in a lot of work, because there is not an easy way. It changes your life. My friends say that they see me differently. Yes, I push myself too much sometimes, but I think we all have that in our selves. We all can go through this, but it does require
for your mind to be in a different mindset. You have to be tough on yourself. You have to be willing and comfortable with change. If you are comfortable with change, it makes it easier and not all of the students are comfortable with change. I have seen many students going back because they just don’t want to deal with this and that’s okay.

**Self-efficacy.** All of the participants in some way have developed professionally and academically through their experiences working and studying in the U.S. In the beginning, many of the participants experienced doubts about their abilities as teaching assistants or being students themselves in the classroom. Phrases that the participants expressed relating to self-doubt include expressions like, “not at the same level as Americans, but I was chosen for my skills somehow” (Hector), “I learned how to manage my emotions and I realized I am not the best in the class” (Hector), “I had to realize this was my life right now” (Hector), “I see my deficiencies and that I am lacking in rigor” (James), and “I did not have pedagogical training for TAing” (Rajit).

The participants’ self-doubt transforms into self-efficacy through the acculturation process at both work and school. By working hard every day to pursue their passions, and become a better version of themselves the participants have more skills and are more confident in finding employment post-graduation. Hector’s adversities have subsequently helped him recognize his self-growth. Hector explained,

I think once I get a full-time job, my life is just going to be amazing because I am a totally new person. I have changed a lot and grown a lot. I doesn’t matter how old you are, you keep growing in different ways and I think that this is what is important about doing this.
Rose finds herself transforming into the best possible version of herself, by stating, “If you told me this when I moved in January 2012, I would have never thought this to be possible. Over the years, you just become a different person in a good way.” Joan shares her experience with teaching poetry and trying new things. She finds herself developing into a different person after studying in the U.S., finding,

For instance, I am not a big fan of poetry and we have a poetry section in our textbook. I was honestly going to skip it, but kids said, “no, let’s do poetry.” So, we started studying poetry. We started from the beginning of the 20th century and I have to read. Mostly, I am not interested in the music of a poem, but I am interested in the biographies of the poets on Wikipedia. This is my teaching stance. This is not what we are used to. According to that, you need to study a piece of literature apart from the author’s personality. I do not like that, because this makes things less engaging. So, I am always interested in the point of departure. We have an expression in my language, ‘where the legs grow from.’ What events in their life influenced them, so they wrote this poem. This is pretty informative to me personally.

**Understanding the Evolving Self through a Career Lens.** All the participants started this journey at a different place in their lives. Some of the participants came to the U.S. very young and some more mature with families. A few of the women shared how important freedom is for their development and future. Aneeb disclosed how most of his personal development happened in the U.S., explaining, “India is my home, but I have grown a lot here. When I was in India, I was just a bachelor’s student. I have family and all, but the real personal development happened here.” Nina found herself breaking away from the support of her family and embraced American independence, as she explained,
Staying with her means I would always be dependent and that is why I did UNM. They offered me the Amigo over here and there was a possibility that I would get a GA, so I wouldn’t have to worry about my tuition fee and ask for the expenses from my father. So that’s why.

Rehm (1989) believes that the aim of education is not to prepare obedient and subservient workers, lacking one of the most humanizing qualities known as creativity, but enlightened and emancipated workers. Hector shared how this chapter in his life as a graduate student has evolved immensely since his time as an undergraduate student. Due to heightened self-interests and more focused passion, he feels more purposeful in his work, as he explained,

Once you get to graduate school it is different, because you are supposed to find your passion for what you want to do. So, you put more effort, you have more skills, maybe you have been working for a while. It is a different mindset. I would still be as I would be in college. I have never considered myself as a good student. I have always been told, you can do better than this. I do well, but I can always do better. I was still the same person from college, but with more determination, more passion, more like this is what I want at the end of this.

Summary

The U.S. education system prepares students for the work-force by incorporating cooperative education. The participants value the opportunity to learn skills from American employers. The participants in the STEM disciplines appreciated the extra attention devoted to learning how to do research, communicate better academically, and develop professional skills for their future careers. Ten of the twelve participants said there is a negative stigma associated
with working while studying in their home countries. It is for the lower class. But, while in the U.S., they found it extremely valuable and necessary for their futures.

Creating financial stability played a major role for many of the participants. Past, present, and future financial concerns were all mentioned. The students here with a family felt a greater responsibility to succeed. Also, the students who owe money to their parents for their education shared similar concerns. Five of the participants left a full-time work position to go back to school. This change was devastating financially and the job restrictions in the U.S. make it extremely difficult for these students.

International students essentially leave behind their support system. They do not want to constantly worry their family over the telephone. Some of the participants mentioned giving up after the first week, but eventually pulled through. Every participant mentioned acculturation stress. The normal adjustment time was about a semester. Initially, the participants found comfort when sticking with people from a similar culture, but gradually made friends from classes and work. While acculturating and understanding one’s new role, health concerns became a major factor. An unhealthy lifestyle was lived by many of the participants. After reflecting on the mistakes of neglecting their body, many of the participants vowed to never take their health for granted again.

External factors which can negatively impact international students include the laws surrounding employment and visa restrictions. Every participant shared a concern either, small or great, about visa restrictions and experiencing self-doubt towards future employment. For all the participants, education in their home country is affordable. The idea of paying students loans for a lifetime is unheard of for them. To gain the most from this expensive education, the participants did not waste their time. They make sure to ask professors, councilors, and advisors
for help in order to maximize success. The participants are go-getters and find the information they need. They are always willing to do more to get ahead and researching what skills they will need to be successful. This type of success strategy requires maintaining an outgoing mindset and pursuing all opportunities for advancement.

Nine of the twelve participants found their passion during this process and three of the participants are following a family legacy in education. In the beginning, many of the participants experienced doubts in their abilities as teaching assistants or being students themselves in the classroom. During the interview, all the participants shared personal stories about transforming self-doubt to self-efficacy. The participants are ambitious, as four of the five participants pursuing a Master’s degree plan to eventually pursue a Ph.D. While, eleven of the twelve participants are hopeful for a career in the U.S. after graduating.

Developing skills and cultural knowledge from minor employment opportunities on-campus eased the transition for off-campus internships. The female participants shared their thoughts on having financial and personal freedom from their families. They believe that they are breaking away from a predictable future back home and pushing boundaries. Sarah statically would not have graduated from high school in her home country, but she is determined to graduate with a Ph.D., the first woman in her family to accomplish this goal. By working hard every day to pursue their passions and becoming better versions of themselves, the participants have more skills and are more confident in finding employment post-graduation.

To easily review the major themes and subthemes from Research Question One, Figure 4 below displays the data. The color codes separate the expectations, costs, and outcomes along with the corresponding themes.
Figure 4. Summary of themes and subthemes used to understand the interplay between working and studying in the U.S. as an international student.
Understanding Culture and Immigration

In order to fully sense the lived experiences of international students who migrate and pursue a career in the U.S., the research cannot ignore the conflicts and battles concerning self-identity. Research question two aims to answer the personal growth towards better understanding one’s culture and the interplay between life in the U.S. and maintaining relations in one’s home country: 2) How has being in the United States impacted international students’ journey towards better understanding their own culture and their outlook on life and the world?

Through Research Question One, I studied the professional transformation of the participants. Through Research Question Two, I studied the personal transformation of the participants. Just as in Research Question One, for each theme exposed through the coding process, there was the constant impression of gaining, but at a cost.

Theme Development. Common themes among the participants are organized in Figure 5 by the same three categories as in Research Question One: expectations, costs, and outcome. Expectations refer to the motives shared by the participants for studying the U.S. Costs refer to the sacrifices shared by the participants while studying in the U.S. The outcomes refer to the personal transformations of the participants, which developed through their experiences in the U.S. The major concept for research question two is to explore the personal development and self-identity of the participants. Each participant, in one way or another, has a better understanding of who they are, where they come from, and how their self-identity fits into their new life in the U.S. The major themes are listed in Figure 5.
Figure 5. Common themes illustrating the expectations, costs, and outcomes of the international student journey through the lens of self-identity

**Expectations**

Research Question One is focused on the career development of the international student journey. Research Question Two is focused on the personal and psychological development of the international student journey. The themes in this section include access to a better life with more opportunities and access to a less complicated world. I use the word access, because not everyone has access and can come to the U.S. There is a visa and interview process, which makes the experience exclusive and sporadic. There are Americans who can travel almost anywhere in the world, without any restrictions who fail to apply for a passport. While, international students are very hopeful and thankful for the golden ticket to come to the U.S., also known as their student visa.

**Access to a Better Life with More Opportunities.** Every participant in one way or another had the belief that coming to the U.S. would be a new beginning, an adventure abroad, and access to a better life. Most of the participants did not realize how far this journey would go or the impact it would have on their families. Goopman’s (2005) phenomenon of true hope is defined as, “the elevating feeling we experience when we see in the mind’s eye a path to a better
future” (p. 193). The following excerpts from the research participants illustrate the common reasons for wanting to start a new life in the U.S., such as lack of resources in one’s home country and more opportunities for their families and children. Joan revealed her need to escape from her life back home, stating:

Before that in my home country, I was an associate professor in English. It happened that things went really bad in the system of higher education in my home country. We had to do a ton of paperwork, instead of prepping, reading, etc. No normal teaching work, just paperwork. So, I decided to escape. I was not ready to fight against it like I normally would do as a citizen.

Kushal finds a lack of opportunity for growth and job experience in his home country. The extreme competition in higher education back home forced him to explore other opportunities abroad, as he stated, “There are less jobs and a lot of competition, so I couldn’t succeed in that. Plus, I wanted to pursue a higher degree, which I thought would be helpful for me, as well as for getting a better job.”

Rajib believes the education system in the U.S. will eventually supply a better life for his child. He finds his socioeconomic status to be equal back home and, in the U.S., but the personal benefits become eminently different, as he explained:

I think the education system is better, that is why I came here. That would be my number one motivation. Two and three, we are considering a better way of life here. If we went back and I have a Ph.D., anywhere I go I will have plenty of money, but I will not be able to enjoy that money like I can in the U.S.

James shares similar feelings regarding his stance on a better life for his family in America. He shared a cathartic moment in his life, which moved him and his family to the U.S.
James described, “I wasn’t happy with my life and I wanted more opportunities for my family… When you start getting into a nervous breakdown, that is when I really had to change my life. I suffered and now I am here.”

After being in the U.S., Sarah shares her feelings and the sacrifices she has made for her child and the opportunities she will have as a U.S. citizen. According to Sarah, all the sacrifices up to this point have been worthwhile, as she stated:

My baby was born in the U.S. I don’t care if I have to go back. When my child is eighteen or nineteen they can come to the U.S. and not fight. This is the greatest accomplishment of my life.

**Access to a Less Complicated World.** For Americans, the notion of the American dream sounds like a distant memory from the 80s and 90s. For the international students I interviewed, the American dream is still alive and well. Movies, social media, news, and other media affect how students perceive the world. At some point, an opportunity arose to study in the U.S. and each participant found the motivation to migrate to the land of opportunity. Two sub-themes developed in this section, the physical environment and the socioeconomic environment. Both themes stem from the experiences and reflections shared by the participants about life before coming to the U.S. and their expectations post-arrival.

*The physical environment.* The participants were asked about home and where that is for them. The responses ranged from physical places to emotional connections. Many of the participants, though missing their home countries, started comparing the physical environment between the U.S. and their home country. Population size, pollution, and weather were mentioned.
Nina talked about the pollution and political issues in her home country, by stating, “If you want a decent life and better living, then the U.S. is a better place, but over in my country there is a political stance going on and a lot of pollution.” Sarah appreciates the lack of traffic in her new American life; she compares this to her home in Asia, by describing, “I don’t like crowded places. Asia is overcrowded and I don’t like traffic.” James illustrated the physical circumstances for wanting to migrate to the U.S., by stating, “I don’t want to be in Europe anymore, because of the weather. I don’t want a long commute. I don’t want to expect traffic jams.”

*The socioeconomic environment.* Socioeconomic advancement was valued highly by the participants. The pursuit of higher education from any country should boost socioeconomic status, but participants like Kushal did not have the option in his country of origin for an advanced degree. Many of the participants spoke of the lack of jobs in their countries. Nina, Kushal, and Aneeb are all from an Asian country and shared many of the same struggles with their socioeconomic environment. The struggle for economic advancement is mainly due to an extremely competitive culture. Nina desolately talked about the struggle for a good life in her country, by stating, “There are no jobs at all. You always have to struggle to make a good life.”

Kushal justifies his move to the U.S. by describing the educational struggles he experienced back home. The lack of education opportunities in Asia forces students, like Kushal, to look for opportunities abroad, as Kushal explained:

So, again there are less jobs and a lot of competition, so I couldn’t succeed in that. Plus, I wanted to pursue a higher degree which I thought would be helpful for me, as well as for getting a better job. So, I started looking for higher education opportunities in Asia, and again, it is a lot of competition. The amount of good schools are very low. You can count
on your fingers. Those really good schools are like a 10 million to 1 ratio. So, it is really hard. I officially applied to those really good schools for my Masters, but I didn’t get an opportunity.

Aneeb addressed the variation in socioeconomic status among citizens in his home country and what he has observed in the U.S., as he proclaimed,

I like in the U.S. that the lifestyle is the same if you are earning average money to the top. Starbucks rate won’t change. Sure, luxurious cars and houses are different, but the rest of the stuff is the same. In India, it is not like this, it clearly differs. You can see the variation.

Cost

This section analyzes the personal sacrifices shared by the participants when coming to the U.S. The themes, which developed in this section include, the interdependence between home and host culture, sense of belonging, and challenges of remigration. International students need to give up so much of themselves to be here.

Interdependence between Home and Host Culture. All the participants do not identify as being American, regardless of their time spent in the United States. Most of them will never identify as Americans, even if they become U.S. citizens. Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) describe the phenomenon of biculturalism and multiculturalism as individuals who have internalized more than one culture. Bicultural individuals deal with two central issues, the extent to which they want to retain identification with their home culture, now the non-majority culture, and the extent to which they allow themselves to identify with the new dominant culture (Berry, 1990). The major themes in this section include the acculturation process, perception of Americans, and ties to home culture.
The Acculturation Process. Only three out of the twelve interview participants completed their bachelor’s degree in the United States, therefore, for nine of the participants, their time at UNM was one of their first experiences studying in the United States. A few of the participants have been to the United States before for shorter programs, but for many, this experience was a huge culture shock. Kushal shared his first experiences in the U.S. by stating,

I was with my brother for 30 days and it was all fine up until then and then came the day that I had to leave. I had to go to Albuquerque with all of my luggage. I had roommates and they were helpful, but I have never been out of my country. Forget about country, I have never been out of my home state.

Ariel talked about the initial struggles of everyday life when moving to a new country, by stating:

The first semester is very hard, because we don’t know how things work. There are a lot of things to overcome. You learn the language, but to actually use it in lessons and everyday life is hard. Like asking the light company, renting, and all the stuff in college.

The acculturation process is best described as a transformation of one’s self and self-discovery in a professional and social environment. Acculturation occurs at both the group and individual levels when intercultural interactions develop within social structures and personal behaviors (Berry, 2005). It is normal to experience culture shock when moving to a new country. Amid much cultural adversity, all the participants started acclimating to their new life in Albuquerque within one or two semesters. Every participant was happy that they chose to study at the University of New Mexico. Many describe UNM as a hidden gem, because it is easier to acculturate to a new country when there is less competition. Many students expressed their appreciation for the American lifestyle and independence of being able to work and study
simultaneously, because in their home countries it is unheard of to work part-time while completing an education. Nina spoke of independence multiple times during her interview. She compared her life in the U.S. with her life back home by stating:

For students like me in Asia, once you are a fulltime student you don’t get a chance at the work-life, because there are no part-time jobs over there so you have to be full-time. And you have to depend on your parents for educational expenses and pocket money. So, that is a little bit hard. Over here if you have a GA or on-campus job, you don’t have to depend on your parents.

The participants with families are worried about their children, because their level of biculturalism is more intense than their parents. The extent to which they are motivated to identify with American culture is higher than their parents. Parents worry about their child’s cultural identity. Securing a green card would be a moment of relief for these parents because there is a lot of anxiety surrounding the remigration of their families. Joan shared her emotions and thoughts about raising a child in the United States as a nonimmigrant:

I don’t know. Here is a question. How much I want to assimilate?... This is our stance in most cases. That we need to preserve our national language by our children and that is why we organize playdates and that is why I teach at the European school. The European school takes a lot of time. I hate it. But, anyway. Our children will be Americans, so we do our best to keep their first language. This hinders our own adaptation and acclimatization in this country. If I had no kid, for instance, I would find a hobby and I would have an American circle and not a European circle.

Perception of Americans. The University of New Mexico ranks very high in racial diversity as a college campus in the United States, where 66 percent of students are minorities or
students of color (University of New Mexico, 2020). Regardless, the international student population is a small percentage of the entire student body and international students need to interact with Americans in one way or another. As graduate students, the participants did not express much interest in having an active social life, but rather focused more attention on research and future employment opportunities.

Luis felt more racism in the southern part of the United States and wanted to come back to the southwest as soon as possible. He shared, “It happens. It was one of those things that are in ‘the south.’ White Americans from the north were also not treated very nicely, because they were Yankees. It was like that.” There is a range of difficulties international students experience when studying in the United States. They encounter perceptions of unfairness and inhospitality to cultural intolerance and confrontation (Lee & Rice, 2007).

Joan finds many cultural differences between Americans and her home culture, as she explained, “There are some cultural things that seem to me pretty rude. For instance, when you talk to a person and then very abruptly they say, “have a good day!”

This is not to say that all Americans are rude or racist, because both participants addressed the good things they have experienced and see in Americans, as Luis explains,

It wasn’t bad and certainly by no means was it most people. Most people were perfectly nice people, but it is enough to hear it enough times in the street or on the way home, or something like that. Why am I doing this to myself? I am here and I am not leaving. Why stay here?

Joan wants to have more American friends and mentions wanting a serious relationship with an American. She believes this will help her move forward and truly start her new life in the
U.S. She explained her thought process this way, “I know I will have to do this because that will mean moving forward. I got a weird feeling, it is a good feeling. I want an American girlfriend.”

I cannot assume that the participants do not have any American friends, but rarely were friendships with Americans mentioned. The participants did mention sticking to their own communities because of the convenience and comfort. Nina stated, “We have this group of Asian people who go play basketball, make dumplings, have fun over there, music, drinks.”

*Ties to Home Culture.* The participants are caught between the interrelationship of opportunities in the U.S. and their families and friends back home. Technology has made the bridge between worlds much easier for both parties. There are applications on smartphones that allow for free long-distance calling and video conferencing. In the past, especially for immigrants in low socioeconomic statuses, speaking to loved ones back home would be a treat and would not be for more than a few minutes. Now, students can easily call and talk to their friends and families, stay connected on social media, and stream the local news from their home town. Rose shared what friendship means to her after a life abroad, and how she remains connected to friends and family in Africa. Rose shared,

I figured this out throughout college and I have friends from UNM who I have their phone numbers, follow on social media, and see time to time, but it is not like I will be with them all the time. My friends from South Africa from high school, I only have three friends; I still talk to them to this day. Those friends from Africa become part of your family. You stay with that.

James listed all the different technological applications he and his family use to stay connected to their friends and family abroad. He illustrated how he stays connected, by stating,
“We have friends coming over this summer from Europe, and we video chat, Skype and FaceTime, with our friends. Compared to 15 years ago, now it is much more convenient.”

**Sense of Belonging.** There was a strong consensus among the participants surrounding the dilemma of sense of belonging. As more time is spent studying and working in the U.S., the more confusing a sense of belonging has become for many of the students. The immigration paradox is highly relevant in this section because a sense of belonging goes both ways; the participants share mixed feelings about their connection to their home and host countries. Preskill and Brookfield (2009) explained, “people who are part of a community give up some of their individual identity to identify with the whole” (p. 191). The sub-themes that emerged include connecting and disconnecting, perceptions of being foreign, and professional ties in the U.S.

**Connecting and disconnecting.** This phenomenon of connecting and disconnecting is something unavoidable by the participants, because physically not being present makes maintaining relationships in their home countries more difficult. It is like a long-distance relationship. Wanting to stay connected from abroad can be painful and difficult, as many of the participants have come to terms with their new reality. The rationale for biculturalism or multiculturalism is the idea that multiple cultures may coexist independently or may fuse so that a hybrid combination emerges in the form of multiple identities (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). Hector communicates how he has settled into his new life in America. Hector now sees relationships differently after being on this journey. He has developed American independence as he disclosed,

I am used to life here and the American way. When I go back home, I feel like I am not from there anymore. It is not like I am not from there, I do value my culture and where I
am coming from, but I don’t feel related to any of my friends anymore, even in the basic ways. Conversations we are different now. We are still friends and we love each other, but they say I have different ways of seeing things, I have different ways of expressing myself, I have different ways of thinking about life.

Rajib wants to stay connected to his home culture, but the more time he spends in America, the more he needs to commit towards disconnecting because of his child. He believes his child will have a difficult time moving back to Asia. He explained his thought process as follows:

I still consider Asia my home. After coming here, I have not had a chance to visit, because I have been through a lot. My family has visited twice…If I stay for a long time, get the green card, the thing that would motivate me is my kids’ education. He has been here since he was one, so if we have to go back to Asia, he would have a hard time and he would not be as competitive as an Asian kid.

For Mohit, the U.S. is where he feels most connected. His origins will never be replaced, but he has found his purpose in the U.S., as he stated:

The U.S. is home, but it is never going to match. It is like comparing your real mom to your step-mom. I miss family and the food back home. I went to Asia for two weeks and that was enough. I am used to the U.S. and I see myself here.

Ariel tries to stay connected with her home country through technology, but confessed that she finds herself disconnected, as she revealed,

With technology now, we are still connected, but it is sad to think about it because I don’t feel connected to anything anymore other than my family and some friends. The very
close friends, friends that were not so close you start to lose connection. Everything that is happening in my life now is here.

*Perceptions of being foreign.* Discrimination is a difficult topic to discuss. This unpleasant topic is unavoidable. All the participants who completed their internships in a government entity shared their experiences with being labeled as foreign. They talked about how they were separated from the rest of the group and how awkward and insulting it felt. Rajib and Mohit share identical stories about their internship experiences and the perceptions of being foreign in two separate government agencies. Rajib described his experience with feeling unwelcome through microaggressions, as he stated,

They also asked me there to say what I like and dislike. What I mostly disliked there was the access. In every stairway, everywhere they classify if you are international or not. Even on the bus tour. Everywhere. Even through your badge. It makes it feel like internationals do not have that much access, which I don’t mind because I don’t need that access. I do not feel that welcome when everywhere it is separated.

Mohit assessed the separation of foreign nationals as a safety measure, but despite his modesty, he is annoyed by the extra security, as he explains:

There is nothing I disliked, but sometimes the security steps and safety thing kind of seems like too much or seems annoying, but when it comes to safety as an engineering student, that is our first concern. Even though we get annoyed, it is designed for our own good.

*Professional Ties in the U.S.* Eleven out of the twelve participants expressed an interest in staying in the United States to work after graduation. More than half of the participants have secured employment in the United States after graduation. Many factors influence international
students to stay in the U.S. for their future careers. Kushal explained his career-decision making logic as owing a debt to the U.S. for providing him an opportunity to further his education when his home country did not. He proclaimed, “I have a soft color for the U.S., because the U.S. gave me the opportunity for higher education in the first place.”

On the other hand, students with families in the United States have a different take on their career-decision making rationale. James, who is studying here with a family, reflects on how important his family’s happiness is for him to continue his U.S. journey, by stating, “My wife and my kids loving it. If they feel a part of it, then I will do all I can to stay.”

The one participant who has secured employment abroad is ironically planning to return to the United States once his wife completes her Ph.D. They both plan to live in the United States in the near future.

Outcomes

This section addresses the transformative processes experienced by the participants throughout their journeys. This is not a mathematical equation where the costs are subtracted from the expectations and the outcome is revealed as either positive or negative. This section is meant to understand how do the participants see themselves now and what do they expect for their future. The themes in this section include the challenges of remigration and opportunities to value home culture.

**The Challenges of Remigration.** This is a very worrisome and complex topic for the participants, because many variables may influence the direction of their futures. Immigration policy and the bureaucracy involved with staying and working in the U.S. is the most unpredictable section. The psychological impact of acculturating to then having to move back is also a major concern for the participants. The subthemes included in this overarching theme are
immigration and visa restrictions, the psychological impact associated with returning home, and coming to terms with uncertainty.

**Immigration and Visa Restrictions.** Work authorization for international students is complicated, unpredictable, and highly bureaucratic. Many of the participants expressed deep concerns and frustrations regarding work authorization, both during and after the academic programs. The largest concern regarding work during their programs is the hour restrictions. The largest concern regarding work after their programs is the unpredictable lottery of an approved H1B application. Hector explained his relationship with work authorization and immigration concerns by stating:

> My goal is to get the green card, because I hate worrying about these visas, CPTs, OPTs, and all of these things. I have been doing this for seven years, which is tiring. I hate worrying about the visas, it is a lot of time and stress. Every semester I am not sure if I will be able to stay here.

Aneeb addressed the same concerns, as he did not expect the bureaucracy to be as extreme as it is in the U.S. by explaining:

> Before coming here, I thought I would do very good. I didn’t estimate the visa restrictions and such, but after coming here where ever you are you are constrained by these factors. Basically, this affects how many times you want to go out and visit your parents. Which status you are in. If you think about getting married. Relocation is not that easy for immigrants.

**Psychological Impact Associated with Returning Home.** This subtheme relates to a condition referred to as reverse culture shock. Reverse culture shock is the process of readjusting to one’s home culture after living abroad for a significant period of time (Gaw, 2000). The
phrase that many of the participants used and alluded to was starting from zero. The participants believe that the information and skills that they have learned and developed during their time in the U.S., somehow, becomes irrelevant in their home countries. Ariel, Aneeb, and Hector each recalculated their return to their home country as starting from zero. Ariel explained, “I want to go back to Latin America at some point. Right now, things are really bad in Latin America and I don’t want to go back now. It will be like going back to zero again.”

Aneeb finds great concern with the lack of professional opportunities in his home country. He will be happy with his personal life and family, but professionally he feels he will be returning to zero, as he explained:

I wouldn’t be able to do research back home. Personally, it would be great back home, but professionally it would be bad. If the visa things become tightened and we have to go. Then we start again from ground zero.

Hector explained the same psychological phenomenon of starting again, as if returning home is perceived as a failure. Hector stated,

So, maybe if I go back to Latin America, it is going back to zero. If I find something better then I will go back, if I find something better in the U.S., I will stay in the U.S. I think that in the education you can find something better in the U.S. first. There is good in Latin America too, but you have to go higher levels and I don’t have that experience yet.

Coming to terms with uncertainty. Half of the research participants have an advantage over the other half because of the current immigration laws on students in STEM disciplines. The students in the STEM disciplines have more opportunities for H1B work permission and every participant who is currently in a STEM discipline mentioned pursuing an H1B or National
Interest Waiver visa after graduation. The National Interest Waiver can be completed by the student, which means they do not need to depend on their employer to sponsor them as they would for an H1B. The catch is the student needs to prove an exceptional ability and that their employability in the United States would greatly benefit the nation.

Based on the feedback from this study, international students would love nothing more than to settle down and pursue a career in America. When this topic came up, multiple people mentioned feeling like they would be starting from zero if they had to move back home. They see the potential for growth in the U.S. It is upsetting to hear the lack of control the participants have for their own futures. Luis expressed how he copes with an uncertain future and how he has changed his mind-set regarding what he can and cannot control. He stated, “It teaches you to say, that is something I cannot control. It is what it is. It isn’t going to go away, even if you focus on it.”

Some would say this sounds like complacency, but it becomes a means for survival. Sarah explained how there is the life that she wishes for but is not sure what will transpire, as she proclaimed, “I think I will have to look for something in the U.S. This is what came to mind. And once more, this is just what I want, but I don’t know how it will happen in reality.”

Mohit, just as Sarah, is hopeful for a future in the U.S., but cannot fully commit to the dream, because of the immigration limitations. He stated, “As a foreign national it is tough to say I want to do that, I can do that. There is something that I want to do and then there is reality.”

James works towards attaining his objectives in life. He is on the search for opportunities and keeps as open mind, as he mentioned:

I just take life like destiny. If I get the right opportunity and I like it, I will take it. It is really narrow objectives. I don’t want to be in Europe anymore, because of the weather. I
don’t want a long commute. I don’t want to expect traffic jams. These are my objectives. I want my family to open up. How do I get there? Then I start looking for the opportunities. I think of the objectives first and then I figure out how to get there.

**Opportunities to Value Home Culture.** Being in another country inevitably causes individuals to compare and contrast their new home to their old. One of the participants spoke of the physical differences between the youth in his home country and the youth in the U.S. In his home culture, you would never see someone with blue hair, tattoos, or being so expressive in the community. Some of the participants compared the behavioral changes that they witnessed in their professional settings between the U.S and their home culture. Their experiences abroad help them reflect on their journeys, but also, on where they come from and how that fits in the bigger picture. The subthemes referencing the opportunities to value home culture include the desire to give back to community and understanding the evolving self.

*The desire to give back to community.* Half of the research participants mentioned their desire to give back to their home communities. For many of the participants, living and working in the U.S. while still maintaining a meaningful connection with their home culture is optimal. Hector wants to inspire others from his home country when he has made something of himself in the U.S. He stated,

I feel like I want to go back to my country and help other people. We can use ourselves to inspire other people. And my country lacks a lot of resources that maybe students can use my knowledge and my experiences to do that. I can give a little bit of myself to my country.

Sarah revealed the way she wishes to stay connected to her home culture, while still maintaining her professional life in the U.S. She explained, “I see myself working in the U.S.
and being a professor in Asia over the summer to share my experiences. Trying to bridge the gap, this is my highest ambition.”

*Understanding the evolving self through a self-identity lens.* All the participants acknowledged some type of growth or transformation during this journey. Their worldview and their self-image transfigured throughout the process. This period for cultural adjustment, regardless of age and time spent in the U.S., is a process that all international students experience. All the participants experienced positive and negative moments, which have influenced them culturally, academically, and professionally. James talks about how nostalgia is an expected emotion for students abroad and how his mindset has transformed for the betterment of himself and his family by stating:

In terms of culture, that is not here. One of my professors in [his home country] wrote a book on nostalgia and home can be dramatized ‘like, oh, it is so much better over there,’ but there is a reason why we left and you should never forget the reasons why you left that country. It is still part of me, and that is why I use it in class and to get jobs, but family are the people that matter most.

International students who view their host country as home when they can form a family, make friends, or establish community networks, therefore influencing the decision to settle in the host country (Geddie, 2013; Soon, 2014). Hector speaks of how his relationships have evolved in a very mature way during this journey, as he explained:

I used to think Latin America, but now home is more where my feelings are and now it is several homes, not just one and I like it, cause I am not attached to something anymore and it makes your life easier. That is the fun part of studying abroad, you have several homes.
Rose came to the U.S. as a freshman and has developed into an entirely new person because of all the profound life experiences she experienced through her academic programs, but also her internships. Rose alluded to her progress, by explaining:

I became a vegetarian because this girl influenced me and taught me about the vegan lifestyle. I am also doing kickboxing now. I learned there is no limit in life, just go and be respectful of others all the time. All of these things I started learning through my internships.

Mohit sees himself in a different life and a higher person intellectually and globally. He talked about his trajectory by stating:

I can see my path. I won’t work for the space industry or research in Russia, because I feel indebted to the U.S. for all of the support and scholarships. Even though my home country has good relations with Russia. The things I want to do are not for the U.S. or Russia, it is for mankind.

The transformation of one’s self through this journey is comprised of many internal factors and personal characteristics, including socioeconomic status, self-efficacy, and personal values. For the Ph.D. student participants, they talked about the journey as a life achievement. This is a terminal degree and a major accomplishment for the participants and their families. Three of the participants are following a family legacy in academia, but for the other nine, they will be one of the first people in their families to acquire this level of education. This accomplishment comes with great responsibility for those participants, because now their family and friends see them differently. They now see themselves as most prosperous with a career in the U.S. The reality is that the participants have sacrificed time and money to chase a successful career and it is still not absolutely certain.
Summary

Every participant in one way or another had the belief that coming to the U.S. would be a new beginning, an adventure abroad, and access to a better life. The reasons why they left includes lack of resources in their home country, a better education system in the U.S., a need to escape to fulfill one’s purpose, to feel unique and valued, for their family to have a better life, and to live the American Dream. From a physical location point-of-view, the participants wanted to escape pollution, large populations, and weather. The participants all come from lower to middle level socioeconomic families. The opportunity to come abroad would mean a higher socioeconomic status for themselves and their family. They believe they would struggle for a good life in their home countries. The participants believe there is less competition for jobs and things are fairer in the U.S., especially income-wise.

All the participants do not identify themselves as Americans, regardless of their time spent in the United States. Bicultural individuals deal with two central issues, the extent to which they want to retain identification with their home culture, now the non-majority culture, and the extent to which they allow themselves to identify with the new dominant culture (Berry, 1990). The participants with families are worried about their children, because their level of biculturalism is more intense than their parents. The extent to which they are motivated to identify with American culture is higher than their parents, and the parents worry about these things. Their stay in the U.S., as of right now, is not permanent, which causes a lot of anxiety for students with families.

The participants understand that they have adapted and transformed through this process. When they visit home, things are not the same. They are temporarily there and they do not have a permanent need to be home anymore, because their life is in the U.S. This leads to a fear of
having to return. Almost all the participants refer to this fear as starting from zero. Participants with families do not rest on the weekends, but prepare their children academically in their native language. This is precautionary in case they need to return after their visa expires. They miss their family and culture, but their new lives are in the U.S. where they feel they have a professional purpose.

International students learn to deal with uncertainty, because there are many factors that are out of their control. All the participants worked extremely hard during their internships, because they want to make a great impression with hopes of a full-time position after graduation. Rose explains, “I put in a lot of work and late nights. I didn’t document some of my hours, because interns aren’t supposed to work after 4 PM. You are supposed to have free time after that, but I was just focused.” Although it is a painful process, international students continue to persevere. Six of the participants confessed to emotional breakdowns when arriving, but what kept them going is remembering why they left in the first place and what they are working towards.

To easily review the major themes and subthemes for Research Question Two, Figure 6 below displays the data. The color codes separate the expectations, costs, and outcomes and the corresponding themes.
**Figure 6.** Summary of themes and subthemes addressing the personal growth towards better understanding one’s culture and the interplay between life in the U.S. and maintaining relations in one’s home country.

**Summary of Phenomenon**

This chapter presented the participants’ experiences transitioning, living, studying, and working in the U.S. The phenomenon I set out to uncover is: What meaning do international
graduate students at the University of New Mexico who have worked in an internship ascribe to their academic and personal experiences? After dissecting the two main sub-questions relating to the international student journey, the final evaluation is as follows.

As graduate students, the participants feel grounded in their research and areas of expertise, therefore making their career decisions more intentional and final. For example, none of the participants see themselves changing career paths, because all the participants have found and are striving towards a career in their areas of interest and passions. Overall, the participants have difficulty in understanding how to stay in the U.S. permanently. Their university provides limited immigration advice outside of their student status. The participants are left to research and find solutions for their and their family’s future wellbeing.

The role of STEM was a clear divider among the participants, because participants in a STEM field have an advantage compared to the other participants. Therefore, the participants without the extra two years of work authorization find themselves in a more chaotic career model. For the Ph.D. students in non-STEM fields, their main goal is to find a tenure position at a research university. The university would then sponsor them for work authorization after one year, and universities are not subject to H1B lottery regulations. Securing a faculty position gives these participants a better chance of staying in the U.S. The secondary solutions for remaining in the U.S. include marriage, starting another degree, or simply coming to terms with returning home.

I found a strong connection across the participants in their wanting to remain in the U.S. It was more than I anticipated. The participants still have connections with their home countries and cultures, but they do not need to live there to remain rooted in their home cultures. They would rather live in the U.S. and be the best versions of themselves professionally, rather than
have deeper connections and a happier social life back home. The students with families, specifically with young children, are finding time in their busy schedules to teach their children reading and writing in their home language. Immigration policy is unstable in the minds of the participants, therefore, if they are forced to return home, they want to make sure their children have a working level of competence in their home language. None of the participants have romantic or long-term relationships with Americans. Their connection to their home food, culture, and marriage are very much embedded in their new American lifestyle.

This study examined international students who gained work experience in the U.S. Initially, human resource practices caused confusion and anxiety among the participants, but international students are adaptive. Every step in the journey is another opportunity for survival, adapting, and triumph. Through much adversity, the one concept that remained constant is the passion for their field of study. Every participant expressed, in their own way, that they were meant to be here; studying, completing their degrees, and working towards their future careers. All the participants acknowledged how happy they are with their decision to study at UNM.

The master’s students all mentioned the potential for a Ph.D., but for the Ph.D. candidates, this is the end of their safety net. The university is no longer there to support them and their fate is now in the hands of employers, lawyers, and government agencies. This can be terrifying. To ease the panic, the participants remain resourceful. One of the initial codes documented in the transcriptions was constantly improving, because the participants continually found ways to be resilient through their journey and ways to stand out. To be successful, the participants felt that they needed to work harder than their peers because the stakes are higher for them. A strive-for-better mindset gives international students an advantage in the U.S.
Chapter Five - Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

There has always been a give and take relationship between U.S. immigrants and the American Dream. International students who come to the U.S. often abandon the comfort of their home culture and find themselves working tirelessly to secure a better future for themselves and their families. Bloomberg (2012), the former mayor of New York, where more than a third of the population is foreign-born, stated:

I don’t think there’s any question, it’s the immigrants who are willing to work harder, on average. Plenty of native-born Americans, tenth-generation here, that work very hard. So, I’m not dissing everybody. But on balance, it’s no question that people come here, and they come here because they want to live the great American dream, and they don’t think it’s just going to be given to them or that they deserve it. They come with the ethic of wanting to work for it.

Russel, Rosenthal, and Thomson (2010) believe the international student population in the U.S. to be highly motivated, high-achieving, and essential to the U.S. economy. It is of no surprise that 84% of these highly motivated individuals compete for higher levels of education and job opportunities post-graduation, and only 14% return to their home countries immediately (Gribble & Blackmore, 2012). As a leading destination for international students, American universities must understand the academic and non-academic challenges for international students (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). Khanal and Gaulee (2019) determined that the attention on international students must be refocused from tuition and taxation policies to preparing these students for studying abroad, helping them through challenges during their studies, and supporting them post-graduation.
This is a transcendental phenomenological study that explored the lived experiences of twelve international students who have worked or are currently working in an internship and pursuing a master’s or Ph.D. degree. I asked every participant fifteen interview questions related to three broad categories: acculturation, internship experience, and reflection. Chapters Three and Four thoroughly explain the data collection methods and analysis results, while Chapter 5 encapsulates the summary of the study, limitations, researcher reflection, discussion of results, future recommendations, and concluding remarks.

**Limitations**

All research is subject to some form of limitation, as is the case with this study. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) favor mixed-methods research designs as opposed to a single qualitative or quantitative approach. A mixed-methods design helps to strengthen the credibility and neutralize some of the disadvantages of a single methods research design. This study is perspective-based without statistical argument, which can be viewed as a limitation, but the uniqueness of the data justifies the purpose of a qualitative research design.

Undergraduate international students were not included in this study. This decision was based on my assumption that the graduate students’ internship experiences and plans post-graduation would vary immensely compared to undergraduate students. By restricting the undergraduate international student population, a more consistent analysis and a more homogenous internship experience could be captured. A volunteer sample may be of some concern as a limitation, because the interviews were not random or intentionally selected. A true representation of the student populations would have resulted in one or two students from the Middle East.
The relationship between the participants and the researcher can be viewed as a limitation, because the researcher is a Designated School Official and has access to the participant’s immigration records. The participants may see the researcher as an individual with authority, and this relationship may have influenced the participants to disclose fewer details about their experiences. The participants did disclose many personal experiences, but the study may be omitting illegal activities or other illicit information from the researcher.

Summary of Research

I conducted this study to answer two research questions: How does the acculturation process for international students affect their career decision making self-efficacy after graduation? And, how, if at all, has being in the United States impacted international students’ journeys towards better understanding their own culture and outlook on life and the world? These questions dissect the main phenomenon of the international journey by focusing on the professional and personal transformation of the participants. As indicated in Chapter Three, a qualitative approach was the best approach to support this type of research. I was determined to uncover the international student experience on a deeper and more meaningful level.

The data obtained from approximately 12 hours of recorded interviews from 12 different international student participants produced 13 major themes. The responses to each research question are organized into three larger frameworks, the expectations, the costs, and the outcomes. Expectations refer to the common motivating factors, costs refer to the sacrifices, and outcomes explain the transformational aftermath that developed through the phenomenological experience. The findings in this study agree with previous research surrounding the international student experience in the United States.
Kobourov (1999) credits American professors for being highly engaged with their students’ lives and overall welfare, which is very different from many other education systems abroad. This same student/professor dynamic was mentioned by many of the participants. For some, their professors personally introduced them to other specialists in the field and helped them develop a connection for future work opportunities. The professor/student relationship in the United States is essential for succeeding and also relieves some of the tensions for finding internships.

The literature around the international student experience undeniably mentions challenges for international students. Acculturation, cultural progressions, transnational migration, and perseverance through major life decisions are all themes from previous research and are alluded to by the participants in the findings in Chapter Four. Cultural progress occurred for one of the participants from a country in Asia. She talks about the oppression of women in her old world and how she sees herself differently after living abroad. She can pick up a friend from the airport at midnight without feeling unsafe or judged by her neighbors. This is unheard of in her home country and she wants to create change for other women regarding equality, safety, and education.

Previous research relating to self-determination theory explains that the desire to meet one’s innate needs is the fundamental motive for human behavior. At the same time, the motivation cannot be taken for granted because the environmental factors can either encourage or thwart the innate tendency to act (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness are considered the cornerstones of human motivation (Sun, Li, & Shen, 2017). I found that every participant implemented different elements from self-determination theory throughout their journeys abroad. This strongly aligns with the transformation of one’s identity, a
theme that emerged in response to Research Question One. The sub-themes explore the topics of discovery and access to one’s passion, grit, persistence, and ambition, and self-efficacy.

Wormeli (2014) professes how important grit is towards developing a long-term commitment mentality. His suggestions to educators are to, “cultivate trust, make connections, be happy, provide descriptive feedback, show growth, provide constructive responses to relearning and reassessing, provide meaningful work, clearly articulate the goals, provide multiple tools and models, and to make sure students experience success” (p. 19). The students felt the most successful when these needs listed above were addressed by their professors, peers, and employers. The students do not have friends or family from back home here with them in the U.S., so friends from work, classmates, managers, professors, and mentors become their U.S. families. Building these long-term relationships and connections are part of the long-term commitment mentality for many of the participants, as most of them want to indefinitely immigrate to the U.S.

**Researcher Reflection**

Moustakas (1994) believes that the researcher is responsible for introducing the phenomenon from a personal point of view; “a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 193). Throughout the interview process, coding, and data analysis, my own assumptions and experiences as an immigrant consistently made an appearance. I found myself thinking about my parents and their ties to Bulgaria. When Joan exposes her difficulties with assimilating because of her child, that statement immediately took me back to the 1990s when my parents tried to enroll my sister and me in a Bulgarian school on Saturdays and I was already too “Americanized” to keep up with the other children. Joan believes that without a child, the assimilation process would be much easier. She would marry an
American, have American friends, and make her best attempt towards a new life in a new
country. But with a child, Joan and my parents find themselves staying connected to the culture
that they value most.

During this process, I was able to reflect on my life growing up, but also my current
working relation with international students. I speak with international students daily, go on trips,
and engage in campus events with the students many times throughout the semester, but rarely
am I fortunate enough to hear one’s full biography. Once I had heard these impactful stories, I
was worried about how I was going to be able to bring their truth to life. There are many ways to
interpret and analyze qualitative data, but after spending many months reviewing and analyzing
the data, I am pleased with the results and my interpretations of the interviews. Now it is difficult
for me to see the data through a different lens or through a different analysis. The data is
extremely rich and there are many more possibilities for interpretation and this can become very
conflicting for researchers. I was conflicted during the coding and theme development process,
but I maintained a journal and consistently revisited my ideas and thoughts, to help me
confidently report my results.

Discussion of Results

The theoretical framework used in this study is Pryor and Bright’s (2011) Chaos and
Complexity Theory. The Chaos Theory of Careers (CTC) is an integrated framework for the
modern career development process. Schlesinger and Daley (2016) developed a comprehensive
framework for the practical use of the CTC embodying complexity, chance, change, and
construction. Uncertainty is an emotion that all the participants have learned to accept. Because
there are so many bureaucratic and unforeseen possibilities, many of the participants have
learned to dominate in the affairs that they can control.
**Concept of Complexity.** The concept of complexity is the exploration process. This process helps students focus on what they already know about themselves, or their complexity, and assists them in exploring the patterns and themes allowing them to see the complexity of influences in their lives (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). The major themes in Chapter Four relating to the concept of complexity are the value of a U.S. education, the benefits of gaining U.S. work experience, and access to a better life with more opportunities. The participants came to the U.S. to explore the education system and employment opportunities.

For international students who are graduating with a Master’s or Ph.D., they have done much of the exploration piece through their undergraduate programs, internships, and recent academic programs. Nine of the twelve participants expressed finding their passion through this journey, which is exactly what this theory aims to advise and understand. Students need to keep an open mind and recognize that there is a learning curve. Aneeb originally came to the U.S. pursuing a Master’s degree, but once he found his passion for research, he quickly shifted his focus to earn a Ph.D. When he talks about his career ambitions and his love for research, he said, “Then I realized, this is going to be my life. That is how my Ph.D. career started, from research.” Milliman, Czaplewski, and Ferguson’s (2003) Essential Self Theory from the literature goes hand-in-hand with the Chaos Theory of Careers, because part of finding one’s purpose in life requires exploration.

**Concept of Chance.** The concept of chance considers careers, majors, and student life. These variables are all complex and open systems, meaning there are multiple external and situational factors influencing each level of being a student (Pryor & Bright, 2011). Students who attempt to control or limit all the outside factors affecting their lives become less successful in preparing for inevitable life changes, ultimately engaging in closed-system thinking rather than
healthy open-system thinking (Schlesinger & Daley, 2014). The concept of chance is to prepare for the unpredictable. The major themes in Chapter 4 relating to the concept of chance are relentlessly competing to stay in the U.S. and access to a less complicated world. The participants practice open-system thinking and focus on what they can control. For example, working twice as hard during their internships and performing at a high level during their academic classes.

All the participants addressed uncertainty in their future career plans. Uncertainty is inevitable as the world, economy, and job market change constantly. The first thing that international students do to minimize uncertainty is fact-finding. They are asking their mentors, peers, advisors, lawyers, and many other sources for information that will help their future careers. Nina talked about her experience in Texas where she shares her career aspirations with her brother-in-law. Nina gathered as much information as she could about having a successful career in the U.S. and with this guidance, she changed her career path. She explained, “My brother-in-law’s friends told me that it is pretty hard to get a job with a finance degree over here as an international student so I thought accounting will be fine for me.” Aneeb explained his strategy for dealing with constant uncertainty from the external environment stating, “I am into energy, materials, and not so much climate change…If you are smart enough, you know how to dodge that. What I am doing right now is diversifying my skill set.” Rajib and many other participants abide by this same strategy to maximize their chances for being successful in the U.S.

**Concept of Change.** The concept of change considers two systems, cognitive and affective, which equally influence and embrace students during the active engagement process (Flum & Blustein, 2000). The concept of change is to actively start and learn from new
experiences. The major themes in Chapter 4 relating to the concept of change are lifestyle changes, financial concerns, the interdependence between home and host culture, and sense of belonging. For the participants in this study, *cognitive information* refers to working in the U.S. and *affective information* refers to the participant’s feelings towards their experiences. After analyzing the combination of these two systems, the participants shared positive responses about their experiences with the Concept of Change. The participants all enjoy their new lives in the U.S. and view the changes in the U.S. as positive, but having to change to a career and life back home is viewed negatively by almost every participant.

Internships are fundamental for strengthening the learning section of the Chaos Theory of Careers. Gaining U.S. work experience helps international students with acculturation, making American friends, developing professional connections, and helps aid the discovery and access to one’s passion. Starting small with a part-time on-campus student employment job is very helpful for international students, because this is a small but important step towards understanding what a career would be like in the U.S. They are able to practice interview skills, work with Americans, and acquire U.S. employment customs. Being physically present and experiencing the real world of jobs, international students start to understand their personal career aspirations, expectations for working in the U.S., and how to better position themselves into the path of opportunity.

Aneeb describes his first experience working in a government agency as having impostor’s syndrome, because he was working with people who had more experience in the field and more education. He explained, “My internship was difficult compared to UNM, but it gives me hope for my career. I can do things and my confidence increased. Until you enter it, it seems intimidating, because you see smarter people than you.” In order to start a successful career in
the U.S., international students need to act. This means stepping out of their comfort zone and building confidence in their career fields. Ariel finds her competitive side while studying and working in the U.S., because her career path is extremely competitive, therefore she does not have time to question her skills. She explains, “Some people say, I am not going to do this until I am totally ready. But, you are never going to be totally ready, that is why I always take opportunities.”

**Concept of Construction.** The concept of construction is the art of adaptation. Adapting is essential in a fast-paced society. The term adapt is based on a multiplicity of a decision made with limited and changing information (Schlesinger & Daley, 2016). The major themes which developed in Chapter 4 relating to the concept of construction are the transformation of one’s identity, understanding the evolving self through a career lens, challenges of remigration, and opportunities to value home culture. The migration process forces international students to overcome adversity and recognize uncertainty. For the students who desire to work and permanently immigrate to the U.S., they must remain hopeful through this burdensome endeavor.

Learning to adapt is magnified for international students compared to their American peers, because of additional obstacles they must overcome in order to have a career in the U.S. All the participants experience career stress due to immigration and employment uncertainty. Being prepared for uncertainty and learning to adapt during unplanned events is essential for the wellbeing of international students. Their stay in the U.S. is not permanent, therefore, these students need to be open-minded and have multiple career plans. The students who are here with families feel extra pressure when addressing remigration. The thought of starting again in their home country is scary because their children are used to the American way. Schlesinger and Daley (2016) find it important to understand change, because even undesired change can lead to
positive outcomes. For international students like Rose, she believes her career can be anywhere in the world, because as long as she is working in a field that she has a passion for then she will be happy. As mentioned, the students with families feel uneasy when discussing relocation and this is due to family complications and remigration. Davey, Bright, Pryor, and Levin (2005) found that showing students examples of other students who have experienced uncertainty during their career journeys, while highlighting different coping techniques for overcoming uncertainty and making uncertainty seem normal had a positive effect on students’ career decision making and self-efficacy post-graduation.

Implications for Policy

To stay within the parameters of this research, the main policy recommendations relate to institutional policy. Governmental or national policy is addressed, but cannot be implemented as easily. The institution where the research was conducted will benefit greatly from the policy implications that emerged from this study. The resource centers and personnel that can benefit most include the Office of Student Affairs, Career Services, academic advisors, and faculty. All these resource centers must learn to collaborate and collectively help their international student population. Institutional policy should be rooted in benefiting both domestic and international students. University administrators and leaders need special skills and knowledge to manage diverse populations, like international students (Gochhayat et al., 2017).

The Office of Student Affairs oversees 24 entities on the university campus, making them an extremely integral resource for international student success. The Office of Student Affairs needs to review its current policy on internationalizing the university campus and develop a long-term strategic plan on how to support international students academically and socially. Staff training should be developed to prepare employees to work with and understand international
students and their diverse needs here in the U.S. The Global Education Office staff currently serves as the primary contact for all things international and is mainly accountable for helping international students. All departments that encounter international students, which are mostly all student affairs offices, need proper training for supporting international students before, during, and after their studies in the U.S. Offices, such as Alumni Relations and Career Services, should review the current processes for maintaining connections with alumni abroad, as these efforts can better help international students post-graduation.

**Implications for Faculty**

Faculty interact with international students on two levels, as professors and as supervisors. At the graduate level, many international students are currently working or are looking for assistantships to help with their tuition costs, therefore, faculty should understand the needs of these students. Faculty members become important mentors and advocates for these students. Adjusting to the U.S is most difficult during the first semester; therefore, faculty should be aware of the acculturation challenges international students are facing when starting their graduate programs. All the participants agree that the first semester is the hardest, because adjusting to the U.S. education system is difficult, especially in a second or third language. We cannot expect faculty to be experts in cultural norms and education systems from around the world, but to just be mindful of their international students. In many cultures, speaking to the professor is unheard of, but it is completely acceptable in the U.S. Once these students have more confidence and start excelling in their programs, they will greatly benefit from affirmation and praise from their professors and supervisors. As many of the participants stated, they have worked tirelessly to be the best. I believe that if international students were commended for their
good work more often, then health concerns would not have been a common theme among the research participants.

As for employment through internships, these same principles stand. It is important for faculty to understand the difficulties international students face in their first semester. They are adjusting to a new life abroad, everything is new, and in a new language. The students want to be successful in their assistantships, academia, and personal life. It can be overwhelming and faculty must understand that these are human-beings and not research machines. Kushal mentioned that his faculty member did not let him take a break for four years. He was working on his Ph.D. and research assistantships during the spring, summer, fall, and winter. That is unacceptable for faculty, because that is taking advantage of someone who needs the assistantship and wants to be successful at all costs. His health suffered for this and the faculty member should have never let this happen.

Implications for Academic Advisors

Academic advisors interact with international students many times throughout their academic programs. The first interaction is normally when the students arrive in the U.S. for an initial advisement session. The Global Education Office holds a meeting with all the graduate student academic advisors once a semester to address any immigration, academic, or global initiatives and updates. Unfortunately, all the departments do not come to this important meeting and those who do not attend are doing a disservice to their international students. International students follow different rules from domestic students. For example, most international students cannot take advantage of the courtesy policy when finishing doctoral dissertations, because they need to be enrolled full-time for immigration compliance. But, to make things more complicated, this can be done if students apply for their OPT work permission in the prior semester. It
becomes complicated and academic advisors are not expected to know immigration compliance, but it does affect their international students when they are advised improperly and their misguidance can have negative consequences. Graduate student advisors who make an effort to come to the GEO meeting once a semester to better advise the international student population is critical and can easily be done.

**Implications for Student Affairs**

International students are a unique and complicated student group, yet their influence and impact on university campuses is essential. Khanal and Gaulee (2019) determined that the attention on international students must be refocused from tuition and taxation policies to preparing these students for studying abroad, helping them through challenges during their studies, and supporting them post-graduation. There needs to be an institutional commitment towards understanding the academic and non-academic challenges for international students. The Department of Student Affairs at UNM should be more involved with the international student populations by means of physical presence and becoming more mindful of the major challenges specific to this student population. It is important to always welcome the new international students and encourage them to be more involved on campus. For the last two years, an international student has been elected as the president of the graduate student government. This year another international student is running for election. This is the new and exciting trend, because international students are becoming more involved with campus-life and student government. Huseyin (2010) conducted a study in Turkey researching participation in student councils. The student council representatives often attended the elections held in faculty, department, and program levels, but had little influence in the decision-making process.
Programming. It is important to involve international students with campus-life in America, because they do have influence in the decision-making process, which may differ from universities in their home country. Every year, the Indian Student Association hosts a Holi festival on Johnson Field. The students welcome spring with colorful chalk and it is a wonderful event for all of UNM to see. The greater UNM community should consider supporting programming specific to international students. Larger events like the International Festival and International Education Week, hosted by the Global Education Office every year, would largely benefit from more institutional involvement and commitment. Currently, the Dean of Students Office provides tax help for students who are filling resident taxes, leaving little to no resources for international students who mostly file non-resident taxes. Utilizing existing campus workshops and resources and enhancing them to better service international students will be optimal.

Student Health and Counseling. Health concerns became a major topic of discussion in this study and could have serious consequences for international graduate students. Becoming more involved with campus-life and better familiarity with campus recourses, like the Student Health and Counseling Center, may ease health related stressors. For the student participants from Asia, their family values and cultural norms include, conformity, emotional self-control, and family recognition through achievement, while mental illnesses are stigmatized and can be seen as shame for the family (Abdullah, 2011). The participants found their first semester to be the most difficult as they were adjusting to a new life abroad. Making sure that international students become familiar with the services provided by the Student Health Center is critical, but not through common terms like therapy or counseling services, as this may deter students from participating in these valuable resources; it would be more effective to use terms like wellbeing.
check or 360-degree health review. Also, helping international students understand health insurance and how this differs in the U.S. compared to most nations. Resources to help international students understand the U.S. healthcare system combined with patience and understanding when visiting the Student Health Center are imperative for helping international students adjust to the U.S.

**Implications for Career Services**

The Career Services Office is under the Division of Student Affairs at UNM, but since this study is focused on the working experiences of international graduate students, they are an important department to highlight. The benefits of gaining work experiences stated by the participants included making American friends, becoming familiar with U.S. employment customs, and gaining practical experience in the field. To help international students with the process, one recommendation would be for the Career Services Office to maintain data on international students who successfully completed their CPT internship experience. This data can help connect new international students in the field to alumni or current students in the field. Students would need to opt into being contacted. If administered properly, this can become an important tool for networking.

The participants talked about the importance of working on campus before applying to a more serious internship off-campus. On-campus jobs provided cultural knowledge about how HR works, interviews, and working with Americans. On-campus employment is a rehearsal for an off-campus internship. International students would greatly benefit from mock interviews or an annual career day competition. The competition would include all the basic skills needed during the hiring process; resume reviews, mock interviews, and peer-to-peer competition. The Career Services Office currently updates and provides a list of employers who have hired
international students, but more can be done to prepare international students for a career in the U.S.

**Implications for U.S. Government Agencies**

Government policy and regulation is beyond my knowledge and experience, but a key takeaway worth mentioning is the work authorization for STEM students compared to non-STEM. Academic departments and programs are motivated to reclassify as STEM eligible in order to attract more international students. International students become conscious of the STEM benefits and many will change programs for the post-graduation work benefits. Students also spend time researching and calling universities to confirm which programs are STEM eligible. The underlying issue is that there are many unfilled STEM jobs in the U.S. and the 24 extra months of authorization is enticing for international students who can fill these positions. I propose three years of OPT for all students, because extra stressors relating to STEM eligibility can dissuade international students from finding their passion and essential-self during their journey abroad.

**Guidance for University Leaders and Administrators**

This guidance is meant to provide helpful information about the international graduate student population based on the findings from this study.

1. The first semester is known to be the most challenging, therefore, be mindful as these students may have greater levels of stress and anxiety compared to other students.
2. These students will sometimes work tirelessly and will prioritize academic and career goals above anything else, including their health. We must be mindful and make sure not to take advantage of these students.
3. Participation in campus events, on-campus employment, and student-lead communities become an important gateway towards adjusting to professional and personal life in the U.S.

4. New Mexico and the university have become home and a place of comfort for these students. They are away from family for major holidays and life events and we need to be more thoughtful about this.

5. There are many barriers related to job restrictions and employment options for these students. Assisting these students with networking opportunities and being an advocate for their career aspirations will help them overcome some of these barriers.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The literature on international students and their mobility tends to focus on their initial arrival abroad, but rarely considering their migration post-graduation (King & Raghuram, 2013; Naidoo, 2007; Perkings & Neumayer, 2014). There are several possibilities for future research related to post-graduation for international students and modern migration. This study did not explore the Middle East. Middle Eastern students are extremely diverse among themselves.

Future research relating to this study should consider different academic and institutional settings. For example, conducting this study at a smaller private school, a more rural setting, or a larger metropolitan city on the east or west coast. Some of the participants in this study believe that schools in Texas have better pathway programs with employers, but still believe it is more difficult to find employment outside of STEM fields. Perhaps conducting a longitudinal study with STEM majors who find H1B opportunities and how this influences their self-identity and
future career plans. Another longitudinal study can be to study the children of international students and their perspectives on becoming bicultural, migration, and life in the U.S.

Future research may also consider a comparative study between domestic students and international students who pursue internship opportunities during their studies. International students have a different cultural and bureaucratic experience when searching and participating in internships, but domestic students may have the same or similar barriers during the process. This type of study can help university policymakers better understand the different needs between domestic and international students.

Concluding Remarks

The findings from this study are meant to help international administrators, university policymakers, and all professionals from university resource centers who come into contact with international students to better understand the needs of this unique student population. The literature review mentions other studies that focus on recruiting and engaging international students in American colleges to illustrate how most research on the topic is focused on the before and during. This study is an analysis of the chronological international student journey in the U.S.

Three larger concepts emerged to explain the phenomenon: expectations, costs, and outcomes. The study participants were analyzed through various lenses, as some of the participants are here with a family or spouse, some with U.S. bachelor’s degrees, and others with many years of work experience in their home country. Interviewing students from multiple world regions brought to light the unique challenges experienced by this student population. The notion of finding one’s passion, socioeconomic challenges, remigration uncertainty, and coping with immigration and work barriers all became fundamental in understanding the essence of this
phenomenon. This is a complicated area of study and would greatly benefit from more scholarly work related to international students.
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Appendix A: Approval Letter from the IRB

DATE: March 29, 2019

IRB #: 02319
IRBNet ID & TITLE: [1397086-2] An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of International Students’ Internship Experiences in the United States
PI OF RECORD: Allison Borden
SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up

BOARD DECISION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: March 29, 2019
RISK LEVEL: MINIMAL RISK
PROJECT STATUS: ACTIVE - OPEN TO ENROLLMENT

DOCUMENTS:

- Advertisement-ADEmail(UPDATED:03/26/2019)
- ConsentForm-ConsentForm(UPDATED:03/26/2019)
- Letter-Point-by-pointLetter(UPDATED:03/26/2019)
- Protocol-Protocol(UPDATED:03/26/2019)
- Training/Certification-CITIBorden(UPDATED:03/26/2019)

Thank you for your Response/Follow-Up submission. The UNM IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an acceptable risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks to participants have been minimized. This project is not covered by UNM's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) and will not receive federal funding.

The IRB has determined the following:

- Informed consent must be obtained and documentation is required for this project. To obtain and document consent, use only approved consent document(s).

This determination applies only to the activities described in the submission and does not apply should any changes be made to this research. If changes are being considered, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to submit an amendment to this project and receive IRB approval prior to implementing the changes. A change in the research may disqualify this research from the current review category. If federal funding will be sought for this project, an amendment must be submitted so that the project can be reviewed under relevant federal regulations.

All reportable events must be promptly reported to the UNM IRB, including: UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to participants or others, SERIOUS or UNEXPECTED adverse events, NONCOMPLIANCE issues, and participant COMPLAINTS.

If an expiration date is noted above, a continuing review or closure submission is due no later than 30 days before the expiration date. It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to apply.
for continuing review or closure and receive approval for the duration of this project. If the IRB approval for this project expires, all research related activities must stop and further action will be required by the IRB.

Please use the appropriate reporting forms and procedures to request amendments, continuing review, closure, and reporting of events for this project. Refer to the OIRB website for forms and guidance on submissions.

Please note that all IRB records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the closure of this project.

The Office of the IRB can be contacted through: mail at MSC02 1665, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; phone at 505.277.2644; email at irbmaincampus@unm.edu; or in-person at 1805 Sigma Chi Rd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. You can also visit the OIRB website at irb.unm.edu.
Appendix B: Electronic Announcement of Research

Electronic Announcement of Research
The University of New Mexico

Explanation of Research for Participants

Hello, my name is Ivet Rosev and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New Mexico in the College of Education. Under the supervision of my faculty advisor, Dr. Allison M. Borden, I am conducting a research study that explores the lived experiences of international graduate students who are studying and working in the U.S. The title of my research project is An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of International Students’ Internship Experiences in the United States.

Through one-on-one interviewing, I hope to collect data in order to better understand the unique process of acculturating while studying and working abroad. The results from this research can potentially create, update and change university policy. Also, trainings may be developed to help university officials, staff, and faculty understand what can be done to support international students on campus and in the workforce.

This study is not sponsored by the Global Education Office. Your decision to participate or not is completely voluntary. Your participation or not will have no effect on your educational status.

If you would decide to participate you will receive a $5 gift card to Starbucks as a small token of appreciation for your time.

Participants in this study must meet all of the following criteria:
- Be an international student currently in F-1 visa status
- Have (or had) an internship experience while studying (CPT authorization)

Your participation in this study will be confidential, as I will be the only one who knows your identity. The names of the participants will be omitted from the final dissertation. The gathered data will be kept confidential in accordance with the UNM IRB Policies.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. If you choose to participate please respond to this email: irosev@unm.edu

I will schedule the interview at a time that works best for you. We will meet at a location that is comfortable and convenient for you.

Thank you, Ivet Rosev
Appendix C: Example of Coded Interview

**Questions 5 What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

**Participant 1. Luis: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**
My goals are, first to just finish, graduate, defend, be done. So, I have been promised a job back in Latin America. A tenured position, that is what I am going for, I want to teach, that is one of my professional goals.

It would be teaching physics, which would be nice. Maybe some elementary math courses. I want to keep doing research. The person that hired me in CS, that I will continue to work with and a professor in Physics that I will have some collaboration with. So those are my goals, to finish, get that job, teach, and do some research. 18:00

I will be in Latin America, maybe down the road if something works with UTEP, but probably not. I will probably stay in Latin America. 18:30

**Participant 2. Hector: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**
My goals right now are to finish my dissertation. If I can do this, hopefully. I just want to finish my Ph.D. It has been five years so far and I feel like it is time to be at the end of this path.

It has been seven years since I have moved to the U.S., so seven years as working as a student. So I think that is a lot of time that I have. It is not wasting your time, but I think it is time for me to get a full-time job. That is one of my professional goals now.

If you don’t come from a wealthy family you have to work during college 6:50 I worked all of my college and it was fine. I have been working through my college program and graduate program and it has been fine. 7:00

It would be better if I can work full-time, because of all of the expenses I have to go through in another country. Because in Mexico, I would be living with my parents. Let’s just say that and it would be cheaper. Here, they limit you to work 20-30 hours a week and that is it. So, how is a person supposed to survive with 20 hours a week, with a salary of let’s say 10 dollars an hour? It is impossible. You need to have back up from your family, or scholarships, or assistantships. Something like that to survive.

**Themes**

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<td>Professional ties in the U.S.</td>
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**Participant 3. Kushal: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

Honestly, I don’t have any personal goals at this time. Wow, yeah this is almost as difficult as a job interview. 31:30

I can say professional goals, but I don’t know how much sense they will make. 31:52 I am not tied, or any bonds to Albuquerque. I am single and I don’t have any family. I can travel, I don’t have those logistics problems. 32:00

That is why I applied all over the world. Once I have a great opportunity, I will take that. I should have a personal life now after school. I should and I will.

I don’t know if it is a goal. I have had a lot of health issues in the past, so I want to set that as a goal. To be healthy. 33:00

Professionally, I have millions of goals, but none of them make sense as of now. Personally, staying fit and healthy is the only goal for me now, because I have sacrificed many things, which I shouldn’t have done in the course of my four year PhD. I think I should get on track and focus on being healthy. 33:30 Trading your health for anything is not worth it. I realized that the hard way. 33:39

Someone asked me in the job interview, why do you need this job? I have applied for jobs, but I really want to jump start my career. This is going to be my first opportunity. It is not like I am shifting from company to company. I really want to give it a good start. That is why I applied for so many all of the world, except for North Korea.

This isn’t like a regular job, 9-5, that is not what I am looking for. I just hope to make the most out of it. I want to climb up the ladder, as quickly as possible or as much as possible.

That is my goal professionally. And not to just do any job. That is what I am looking for. 35:15

**Participant 4. Ariel: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

I am almost done. I have one more semester and my final course is the recital 6:00

Right now I got a job on CPT at a professional orchestra and this was one of my goals 6:10

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<td>Understanding the evolving self through a career lens</td>
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I know I can’t live forever with this job, cause it is not full-time. Even if I could stay, I would have to work with something else, but anyways it didn’t change my plan. 6:40

My plan is to apply for a Doctorate in Arts 6:45
I want to take advantage of where I am living and what I am doing. I plan on applying for OPT, so I can work and have experience on my resume 6:58

To play in a professional orchestra is a big deal because you have to audition. I am also going abroad to Mexico this summer for another orchestra tour. 7:30

Normally, orchestras don’t work during the summer. Some full-time orchestras, like the NY Philharmonic are still getting paid in the summer, even though they only have a few concerts here and there. Other part-time orchestras will perform at music festivals, but generally do not work during the summer and that is why I am going to Mexico 8:30

This is not a paid gig, it is just a festival orchestra, but you have to audition and there are thousands of competitors and you get to tour with the orchestra for a month, which is very exciting 8:54

Do you see yourself working in a full-time orchestra or be a professor? I actually want to do both. To be a college professor you have to have the PhD degree. Here or in South America 9:35
If you get to play in one of those orchestras who are full-time then it will be hard to be a professor. If I don’t get into a full-time orchestra my back up will be to be a professor. 10:04

You can be a professor/teacher with a master’s degree, but the competition is really hard, so you will have a much better chance with the doctorate. Most colleges now require a doctorate. 10:29

What age did you start the violin? I am a little unusual. No one in my family plays an instrument. No one is a musician 11:06
My mom always wanted to keep me busy. It was one day during swimming class where there was also a violin class and she signed me up at the age of ten.

When I continued to play through my teenage years it becomes who you are, because it takes so much of your time. 11:44
I played in this orchestra and all of my friends where from there, and we would travel. It was a lot of fun. 12:01
When I was sixteen/seventeen I realized I wanted to go to music college. 12:21 My parents were excited. They tried to make my brother play, but he didn’t want to. They have always supported me.

From 16 to 19, I started playing more seriously and started my bachelors program at the age of 19. I didn’t do many competitions, because I am not into competitions, but later in life I started doing competitions. 12:50
It is good to get the experience with competitions, because eventually you have to complete for jobs and there are not that many jobs. So, it is not really to with the competition, but to get use to competition for auditions. 13:14
So, I didn’t do a lot until I was 22 or 23, because I realized I need to get a job at some point. 13:25

Participant 5. Joan: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?
My goal is to get my degree on time. I am supposed to finish May 2021. That will be good, but I do not know if that will be feasible. 25:10

Besides dissertation, conferences, publications, we also have service. Sitting on different committees. And even on sitting takes a lot of time. 25:24 In many cases, you actually have to do something on these committees, and this bothers me a lot. 25:32
On the one hand, it is possible not to do that, but we need these lines on our CV, because it makes us more marketable That’s the issue. 25:39
These are the basics: dissertation, conferences, and publications. But to get outstanding for the job market, we need to add something more, that is the issue. What job market? To be an assistant professor that is the goal.

What about your free time? Free time? I don’t know what that is. I am enjoying my free time now. I don’t think I have any personal goals. After I finish my studies and move somewhere to work, I will have to get married and I do not want to.

My husband was in Europe, but he died in December, so now I have no reasons not to do it. 27:22
It sounds weird, because do not do something if you do not want to, but this is just my constant mood. 27:31
I remember when I was young, I did not want to go to a summer camp. And my mom would say, “Well, do not go if you don’t want to” and I would reply, “but I know that I will like that and I will come back full of impressions.” 27:56

At the beginning I have to push myself really hard, so same story with this. 28:04 I know I will have to do this, because that will mean moving forward. I got a weird feeling, it is a good feeling. I want an American girlfriend. A woman. 28:22

Because, what is happening now is that I mostly communicate with Europeans. This is our stance in most cases. That we need to preserve our home language by our children and that is why we organize play dates and that is why I teach at the European school. 28:40 European schools takes a lot of time. I hate it. 28:50

But, anyway. Our children will be Americans, so we do our best to keep their first language. 29:03 This hinders our own adaptation and acclimatization in this country. 29:16 If I had no kid, for instance, I would find a hobby and I would have an American circle and not a European circle. 29:26

Spending a lot of time with Europeans will make no sense. 29:33 Do you see a lot of Europeans like that? I cannot say “a lot of”, because each parent has their own paradigm of how much Russian they want in their family and some parents do not want. For instance, that girl that was mentoring me, had a kid here and she thinks that she does not need the home language, because she is sure that she has seen a lot of Spanish speaking student here who’s English is not good and she thinks...bilingual is a good goal, but I all depends. So she does not speak the home language to her daughter. 30:33

Some parents think we will speak the home language and nothing else, that will be enough. They will be watching American cartoons and movies. Other parents are not allowing their children to watch cartoons, because cartoons are bad. There is such a stance that cartoons are evil. (I do not think this) That means, I will be only reading books to them. 31:05 How much can you read to your kid every day? That is not enough. 31:12

In my situation, I like her to watch YouTube videos in our home language. There are a lot of interesting materials there. 31:18 After that, we have a lot of topics to discuss, based on what she saw there.
A lot of parents, okay we will be speaking the home language at home, but they do not believe that they will need the home language later on in their careers. 31:41 My goal is I want her to be able to work with the home language. You never know, sometimes people are offered positions where they can speak, but they cannot write. 31:54

I want her to be able to work with our home language and English. Some parents say, “what’s the point?” She will be able to find a job with just English. She does not need the home language. The home language is only needed to communicate with grandparents and nothing else. 32:20

I cannot tell you how many parents think each way, that would be an interesting study. 32:22 Those who are interested in this development of events try hard to allow their kids to get together and communicate, they believe the language is meaningful. So, but again, this is not good for some parents. 32:54

**Participant 6. Rajib: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**
Throughout my life, I never thought I would be a teacher. When I decided to do the PhD, I have to make one of two decisions: either go back to a non-profit or I will teach. 15:09

Right now, being international, it is really hard to go directly into non-profit. I have been searching from jobs since last October (9 months). I got lots of interviews. I have been searching for academic positions. Non-profits there are a lot of difficulties starting a job with them, but I always have in the back of my mind that I will start an academic career and then go into non-profit. 15:57

I already have a placement and it is an academic job. I really like the work. 16:20

**Participant 7. James: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**
To finish my PhD. One more year for a master’s and four more for the PhD 18:28 My academic advisor set it up for me. I first asked if it can be done in three, but she said “I don’t think so.” I plan to use parts of my master’s theses in my dissertation, because I don’t’ have time 19:42

Personally, my kids love it here, so they want to stay as long as possible 20:47
I like to become a university professor. I have some experience, but for example, last semester I got a 300 level course to teach and those are usually give to PhD students and I loved it. It was very challenging and the students worked hard. 21:37

This semester there is a different dynamic in the department and I won’t be teaching the 300 level class anymore, but maybe next semester 21:50

My wife sees me very well as a university professor 22:00
If I get my PhD from UNM and I will not be able to work here. I want to stay in the Southwest and not the East Coast 22:56

The thing missing in my skills to be a professor right now is academic rigor 23:24 The grade on a paper is not that important, but the notes on how to make it better. I wish I had more time to redo our papers. It is crazy time we have, so we don’t have time to redo 23:45

Much more is expected for a PhD student than a master’s, so I would not have felt comfortable going straight into the PhD 24:15

**Participant 8. Sarah: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

My professional goal this time is to be CPA as soon as possible 20:24 I don’t know when it will be happen, but I am super busy. I am not getting much chance to study for that. Every part needs over 150 hours of study, 4 part test (18 months to pass)
I am afraid for that, but that is my professional goal. I could get a job with CPA resignation, but I would love to have the CPA resignation.

I hope to get work experience for 5/6 years then go back to school for a Ph.D. 21:41 I can go now for Ph.D. in accounting, but I feel I would lack some practical experience.

I have noticed professors with more practical and professional experience are better professionals, networking, and everything 22:15

Us, mostly international students, we go directly to the Ph.D. school. We have a little less experience. We couldn’t make that good connection with the student as a professor. That is what I thought. Maybe by the sixth year I can finish early. I hope to manage everything within five to six years.
I am working with the accounting firm now, so maybe before graduation I will have one year experience in my desired field.

For my personal goal, I would really like to work for the women. If I have chance to work for Asian women, I don’t know how. I would love to do something there. 23 min

Currently, I volunteer with Women to Be: an organization providing menstrual kits to women from undeveloped countries: Nepal, Gambia, and next year Mexico 23:37

As students what do we do? We measure the impact for that project. How that goes. Are they going to school more after getting their kits and how they are feeling. 24 min

I could really understand the importance of that project because I am from Asia and I know how girls are suffering for those kinds of stuff. We are poor. We maybe we just use cloth. Here they are trying. I feel this is a good project.

I asked if they can help my home country with the kits. That is one way I want to help Asian people, especially girls. That is my personal things and I want to continue that one.

**Participant 9. Rose: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

July 8th, I cannot wait for that. I still don’t know what my assignment is, they have me starting manufacturing engineer conversion. It all depends maybe in a year.

Learning from the internships that I participated, my internship is a lot of assembly line work and I will be working on how to improve. I am looking forward, but I don’t know what my goal is, because I don’t really know what my work assignment is. 26:50

Personally, I am working on an invention with some of my engineering friends. 27:15

I am bored and I want to come up with a proper plan. I cannot sit, I want to decorate. I was an RA, we used to have door decks. I decided to put all of them in frame. I try to find things to do. 28:26

If you have the time to be creative. When I was doing my master’s thesis that was the most nerve breaking time in my life. 28:50

Becoming familiar with U.S. employment customs

The desire to give back to community

Understanding the evolving self through a self-identity lens

The desire to give back to community

Uncertainty

Ambitious/Passion
After that phase your stress level dies down and you can really focus on what is your passion. 29:14

Cannot image taking five years or more to do a PhD, but if I do a PhD, I would love to go to Cornell (hopefully they accept me this time), but I have to figure out what is my work situation 30:36

**Participant 10. Nina: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

I am almost done with the accounting right now and will be doing Information Systems Assurance. 9:30

I know that most of the public accounting firms want to hire people who have knowledge of IT and Accounting, so I am looking forward for the advisory role, like an IT auditor. 9:30

My personal goal is to live in the U.S., I don’t want to go back to my country and again start a new life over there. Because I know my family is going to move over here pretty soon. 10:30

That’s the reason I want to stay over here. I am planning to move to Texas. Especially Austin. 11:00

We have this group of Asian people who go play basketball, make dumplings, have fun over there, music, drinks. 11:20

**Participant 11. Mohit: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?**

I want to work for next level space systems and LANL has a program (through NASA) 14:50

As a foreign national it is tough to say I want to do that, I can do that. 15:05

The bottom line is I will do something that I love. 15:46

It has been a long journey for me, most of my friends who are still in academia are still in school, getting ready to finish their PhD, but I am behind because I follow my heart and there are so many obstacles in the way, which have diverted me in a different direction. 16:37

Easiest path would have been to study something else, make good money, but I don’t see myself on that path. 16:58

Life is easy right now with work and school, but I miss the challenges and I would love to go back to my internship. 17:54
Participant 12. Aneeb: What are your personal and professional goals at this time?
Professionally, I want to become a scientist. If it is national lab or academia. 11:00 It depends on a lot of factors: your visa and how your political situation is effects your research. Not only in this country, but it is a fact around the world.

Whatever your government focuses on the funding comes for that. As soon as a new president comes to power, he shut down the environmental production industry. So, whoever is working in the energy related field, their funding got severely affected. 11:30

There are all factors. Also, national labs, you have to prove your worth. It is not impossible, but it is really difficult. I am really grateful that I got the opportunity to work an internship. 12:00

I am hoping to be a good scientist. I am working on mission learning to solve the problems in chemical engineering. I am working on contamination studies at my internship. Where is the origin of the contamination? 12:45

My life goal is to using data science and mission learning principles, and solving science problems as my professional goal. This is what my life is going to be. 13:00

This is my objective, where it will be I don’t know. It could be industry or academics, I would be happy. I have taught for two semesters and I know how to present to people. Thermodynamics is a hard subject, when you are coming from India you are coming with a strong math background. You do calculus very fast.

Here, people take a break and come back to math again. So, I understood on the first two classes that we had to come down to the level so all of the class can understand. I got those skills also. 14:15

Even if some industry is looking for a computational scientist, I can do that too. 14:30

As for personal goals, I was an introverted fellow, there are people who are playing cricket and badminton and I am joining them. I started paying violin about a month ago. but trying new things like violin. I thought now is the time to do something. 15:00

I feel old to start an instrument, but I really don’t think so and I am
learning a lot of things, reading musical notes. Now, I feel like you can do it at any age. 15:16

Becoming a scientist is my professional goal, but it is not that easy. In the four years of PhD, your learning curve is so much. You need to be better at communicating, articulating a problem, writing and decimating the results. It is very underrated this in PhD. You can do the research, but if you don’t know how to tell them, then people don’t know what you are doing.

You need broader feedback from people. 16:11 These are all that I am doing and that I am not having a life, that is not healthy. Then I started the violin and it is very fun. 16:30

Personally, I need to maintain a proper personal and work-life balance. When a student back home there is no student/work life balance: 1-16:30

Another goal is to hopefully play good music by the end of next year or something like that. Properly. 17:00

| Enthusiasm for American teaching style |
| Unhealthy lifestyle |
| Lifestyle changes |