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Cultural, Linguistic, Curricular And Financial Stories Of Andrews University International Undergraduate Students And Their Experiences Of Coping During The Academic Year 2014-2015: A Narrative Study

Renaude Etienne Saint-Phard
Andrews University, saintpha@andrews.edu
This research is a product of the graduate program in Higher Education Administration PhD at Andrews University. Find out more about the program.

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ABSTRACT

CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, CURRICULAR AND FINANCIAL STORIES OF ANDREWS UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF COPING DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015: A NARRATIVE STUDY

by

Renaude Etienne Saint-Phard

Chair: Gustavo Gregorutti
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University
School of Education

Title: CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC, CURRICULAR AND FINANCIAL STORIES OF ANDREWS UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES OF COPING DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015: A NARRATIVE STUDY

Name of researcher: Renaude Saint-Phard

Name and degree of faculty chair: Gustavo Gregorutti, Ph.D.

Date completed: July 2017

Problem

The internationalization trends indicate that global growth of international students moving from one country to another is predicted to exceed 7.2 billion in 2025 (IIE, 2011). This crossing of borders inevitably evokes that international students confront multifaceted challenges in their host country. Although many facets of research have addressed their multilayered challenges, most of these studies do not give a voice to international undergraduate students nor do they seek to understand their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial narratives. Most importantly, these studies do not explore how international undergraduate students cope with their challenges. It is essential to understand how international undergraduate students cope with their
challenges. It is important for their adaptation, empowerment, and the Higher Education Institution’s retention, rates, resources and services rendered to them.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to give a voice to international undergraduate students, and explore their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories and experiences. Furthermore, this study sought to understand how international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges.

Method

A qualitative narrative research design was used to explore the stories and experiences of 10 international undergraduate students (five males, five females) at Andrews University and to understand how they cope with their challenges. This method was chosen to facilitate an interpretative and naturalistic approach, to make sense of and simplify understanding of the coping phenomenon. The criteria for participation required that participants 1) be international undergraduate students, 2) range in grade level from freshman to senior, 3) attend Andrews University in Berrien Springs Michigan from 2014-2015, and 4) be willing to share their stories and experiences.

Findings

International undergraduate students at Andrews University are resilient people. Although living in a new county poses countless difficulties due to the new language, culture, curriculum, food, loneliness, stress, and financial issues, yet, the participants strategically managed to confront their challenges, motivate themselves and overcome
obstacles. Integrating into a new environment while being homesick can be daunting for international undergraduate students. Furthermore, the demands of the classroom, the curricular differences, and new university rules and regulations, can be overwhelming, especially for foreign students. Nevertheless, they purposefully coped with their challenges through the assistance from the community, the university system, and family, their motivation, determination, their hope for the future, and their faith in God.
Andrews University

School of Education

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A Dissertation

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Renaude Etienne Saint-Phard

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A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Renaude Etienne Saint-Phard

APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

______________________________
Chair: Gustavo Gregorutti

Dean, School of Education
Robson Marinho

______________________________
Methodologist: Gustavo Gregorutti

______________________________
Member: Jay Brand

______________________________
Member: Bordes Henry-Saturne

______________________________
External: Ruth Horton

Date Approved
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<td>AU</td>
<td>Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERASMUS</td>
<td>European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
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<td>IIE</td>
<td>Institute of International Education</td>
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<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
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<td>NAFSA</td>
<td>National Association of Foreign Student Advisors</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“’Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit’ says the Lord Almighty.”
(Zachariah 4:6)

“‘Ce n’est ni par la puissance, ni par la force, mais c’est par mon Esprit,’ dit l’Éternel des Armées.”
(Zacharie 4:6)

To God be all the glory!

God called me to acquire more knowledge by achieving this Ph.D. to better be equipped to carry out His vision in my life. It has been a long, painful, and yet rewarding journey where God became my resilience in coping with the various and unexpected challenges of writing a dissertation. Words cannot express my gratitude to God and all the people, Faculty, staff, friends, and family that He had put on my way to encourage, motivate, guide, lead, and help me.

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“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”
(Proverb 3:5)

“Confie-toi en l’Eternel et ne t’appuie pas sur ta sagesse.”
(Proverbe 3:5)
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For the past two decades, the paradigm has been globally shifting for higher education worldwide. Globalization and campus internationalization, privatization, culture, and diversity issues have been receiving, in “an analytical framework”, increased visibility around the world as they are “driven by market forces” (Duderstadt, Taggart, & Weber, 2008, p. 5). This international interest derives from the interlink of globalization to what Knight refers to as “the flow of knowledge, people, technology, values, ideas, capital, goods and services across the borders, [which] affects each country in a different way due to the nation’s individual history, traditions, culture, and priorities” (2004, p. 5-31). Over time, the increasingly rapid and evolving student mobility is gradually tightening this global phenomenon, creating new twists for higher education and its stakeholders. Wildavski (2010), in The Great Brain Race, refers to these new developments as “intense competition to enroll students, unprecedented student mobility, spread of branch campuses, the quest to create world-class research universities, the rise of global college rankings, and the growing role of privatization” (pp. 70-99). These new trends force all stakeholders to revamp their policies or recreate new ones to face the new challenges in higher education. The rapid challenges that are being introduced by globalization, privatization, and cultural diversity are enormous and require the full
attention and cooperation of administrators of colleges and universities in key areas such as admissions, academic affairs, student services, campus life, and student mobility.

As higher education is becoming increasingly international (McClellan & Springer, 2009, p. 120), students are progressively moving across borders in search of quality education. They come from 186 different countries, (Open Doors, 2013) and their enrollment in the U.S. dramatically escalated from 216,000 in the academic year 1974-1975 to 819,644 in the academic year 2012-2013 (Opens Doors, 2014) with a predicted global growth to exceed 7.2 billion in 2025 (Open Doors Data, 2013). As international students continue to cross the borders at an increasing rate, the need for the U.S. higher education system, policy makers, and educational leaders to ensure institutional readiness for the students becomes critical. Studies highlight the need for institutional promptness to ease adjustment issues, as international students face multifaceted experiences in the host country (Church, 1982; Mori, 2000; Wang, Puri, Slaney, Methikalam, & Chadha, 2012). Most universities experience the influence of internationalization.

According to McClellan and Springer (2009), internationalizing higher education brings a number of benefits to countries. Rice (2006) contends that people who express the desire to unlearn and relearn values about cultures, and government regulations are inclined to tolerate and embrace each other. Another benefit these authors report is economic gain. According to Bain and Cummings (2005) “national governments are increasingly concerned about their competitive share in the internationally mobile student market” (p. 20). The government has much to gain with the presence of international students in their country. According to National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA), between 2003 and 2006, international students on the average contributed
approximately $13 billion annually to the U.S. economy. Another benefit is seen in foreign policies. The Bologna Declaration in Europe is a great example of the role of foreign policy in student mobility. According to Bell and Watkins, (2006), the Bologna Declaration brings internationalization to significant learning outcomes such as, “developing a better understanding of self, identifying different models of success leadership, learning about and appreciating differences, developing multiple perspectives on international issues and developing interpersonal networks across the globe and social responsibility” (p. 70-75). The outcomes of this program are beneficial to internationalization.

In terms of the global growing of academic research, which constitutes another benefit for international students’ host countries, Wildavski (2010) asserts that while American universities are dominating the global research world, other countries such as China, India, and South Korea are on their way of development. The author strongly argues that all countries around the world can benefit from international students’ brainpower among their other numerous contributions.

Although globalization and internationalization prevail in most countries in the world and despite the positive contributions international undergraduate students bring to their host countries, they confront multifaceted challenges. Unprecedented research suggests that international students experience cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges among others (e.g. Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Church, 1982; Hwang & Goto, 2009). Cultural challenges include personal, social and religious development processes while trying to adapt to the larger culture resulting in stress and changes in personality and beliefs (Chi, 1997; Mori, 2000). Linguistic challenges are more complex
for most international students (Mori, 2000) due to the impact that they bear on their performance, and psychological adjustment (Lin & Yi, 1997) and their interactions with American students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Curricular challenges contain ‘social consequences of the globalization’ according to Killick (2015).

To illustrate the social consequences in internationalizing the curriculum and the challenging experiences of the international students, Killick uses Giddens’ (1991) “what to do”, How to act”, and “How to be” theory. Due to the “the brutal competition for funds that higher education faces at both state and federal levels,” Zumeta, Breneman, Callan and Finney (2012) in their book, Financing American Higher Education in the Era of Globalization, call for a reassessment of financial challenges of higher education in terms of the ‘core public values’ and most specifically, ‘the roles and responsibilities’ of all shareholders including students, and the costs of college education that are going to be met in the near future. (p. 3)

Although international students’ challenges differ according to their profile and behavior (World Education News and Reviews, 2012), studies suggest that they use psychological resilience to cope with the stress associated with their experiences (Cummings, Greene, & Karraker, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rutter, 2008; Snyder, 1999; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). Resilience is a process that can be discovered, studied and developed from the average person (Rutter, 2008). It represents the “processes for, capacity for, or patterns of positive adaptation during or following exposures to adverse experiences that have the potential to disrupt or destroy the successful functioning or the development of the person” (Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Disaster Preparation and Recovery, para. 5). Thus, resilience can be seen as the strength, the awareness, the
endurance and belief that an individual uses in face of adversity and prevail over it (Lightsey, 2006).

Practically, individuals who use their personal inner strengths, skills and environmental factors to cope and recover from problems and experiences with easiness and effectiveness are called resilient people (Cummings et al., 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rutter, 2008; Snyder, 1999; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). Research examining how international undergraduate students confront their experiences in terms of resilience remains scarce although literature is replete with studies on international students’ challenges (e.g. Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Church, 1982; Hwang & Goto, 2009). Therefore, this qualitative study explored and understood the individual stories of international undergraduate students and their experiences of coping. It also analyzed the role that personal, environmental, and institutional factors play in their experiences of resilience. This study took an open-ended approach that did not necessarily require an exploration of resilience except as it surfaced spontaneously from my interviews with the participants.

This study was conducted at Andrews University (AU), a national university with a worldview mission to equip and “transform” students to “change the world, understand cultural differences, and foster growth …” (U.S. News and World Report, 2013). Andrews University ranked fourth in the nation for racial diversity and ninth highest for percentage of international students in 2013 (U.S. News and World Report). Theoretically, this research is valuable to the fields of education and psychology in the understanding of international students’ perceptions of their experiences of coping in terms of their flexibility and resourcefulness in a new cultural environment. Not only
does my study give a voice to the international undergraduate students attending American universities, it also contributes to help them cope with their challenges and improve interactions with their environment and institutions.

**Statement of the Problem**

International students’ enrollment in the U.S. keeps escalating with a predicted global growth to exceed 7.2 billion in 2025 (Open Doors Data, 2013). As a result, a plethora of studies address the multifaceted challenges of international students. However, most of these studies focus on international students in general or address graduate students’ challenges. They do not give a voice to international undergraduate students nor do they explore or understand their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial narratives. Furthermore, these studies do not explore how international undergraduate students cope with their challenges. International students do not know how to confront their challenges and cope with them. It is essential to understand how they cope with their challenges for their adaptation, survival, empowerment, and for higher education institutions’ retention rates, resources, and services rendered to them.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of international undergraduate students, their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories, and experiences. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand how international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges.
Research Questions

The following questions guide this study: 1) What are the cultural (personal, social and religious), linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the challenges confronting international undergraduate students? 2) How do international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design because the variables that it explored were indeterminate (Creswell, 2008). In a qualitative research design, it is valuable to listen to the students’ stories to improve understanding of their challenges.

This study likewise required an interpretative and naturalistic approach because “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Creswell (2007) paints qualitative study as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures and various blends of materials” (p. 15).

Fundamentally, the purpose of qualitative study is to provide a complete understanding of these meanings, materials and colors. Hence, the use of qualitative methodology helped this study acquire relevant and comprehensive data from participants through in-depth interviews.

This study used a narrative research story, which means that somebody relates the story of someone else. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The idiom narrative originates from the verb narrate, “to tell (a story) in detail” (Ehrlich, 1980, p. 442). A narrative inquiry “focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of
stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual” (Creswell, 2008, p. 502). For educators who are in a quest to explore personal stories, “narrative research offers practical specific insights” (Creswell, 2008, p. 502). When “the stories told to you follow a chronology of events” with the focus on “micro analytic picture – individual stories – rather than the broader picture of cultural norms,” Creswell (2008) suggests that narrative research be conducted (p. 502).

This study was conducted at AU, a very diverse institution ranking seventh in national diversity according to the U.S. News and World Report (2016). Understanding the participants’ accounts of their cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular stories and their coping experiences was an asset for AU and for the globalization of internationalization.

**Rationale for the Study**

Living in a new culture poses serious challenges to any individual (Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001; Sodowsky & Lai, 1997). Navigating a new culture can become mentally perplexing and create conditions such as, depression, stress, and loneliness (Sue & Sue, 2003; Uba, 1994). Hence, the reasons to conduct this study are numerous and observable.

Primarily, most international students studies are conducted on international students in general or focus on international graduate students. International undergraduate students do not have a voice. Secondly, literature on international undergraduate students encompasses little qualitative explorations of the experiences of international undergraduate students (Takeuchi et al., 2007). Thirdly, conducting this study helps gain an understanding of the cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial
challenges that the international undergraduate students experience. Fourthly, this study provides an awareness of the international undergraduate students’ perceptions and an understanding of their coping strategies against challenges from an educational and socio-cultural perspective. Finally, research on international undergraduate students’ personal coping experiences is almost inexistent from a socio-cultural viewpoint (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

Essentially, this research study explored the pertinent themes that surfaced from personal interviews to explore the coping experiences in face of challenges. Thus, the results helped understand how international undergraduate students cope with their challenges and rise above them. The findings added knowledge to the fields of higher education, administration, counseling, and psychology.

**Theoretical Framework**

Finding a theory of resilience that exclusively resonates with the internationalization coping process and the experiences of resilience of the international students in face of challenges proves relatively puzzling. However, there are two models that promote the understanding of the stories of the international students and their experiences of coping with challenges. The Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological model of human development theories and the Australian Resilience International Student Education (RISE) guided this study to report the lived and told stories of international undergraduate students and understand their experiences of coping with challenges.
Psychology introduces resilience as a vigorous progression that brings a person to encouragingly cope regardless of tense and traumatic experiences (Masten, 1994; Staudinger, Marsiske, & Baltes, 1995). A person demonstrates resilience through his or her interactions with the environment in which he or she lives based on particular circumstances (Harvey, 2007). For instance, an international student may show high resilience in relationship to adaption and low resilience in academic achievement.

Personal, family, cultural beliefs and values collectively impact an individual’s way of navigating his or her surroundings (Ungar, 2008).

The awareness and knowledge of resilience all carry an impact on culture. Cicchetti and Cohen (1995) predominantly regard resilience as a natural phenomenon that can be supported by suitable interferences in the environment in which the participant lives. Notwithstanding, Cicchetti and Cohen (1995) consider resilience as a notion in various situations and frameworks.

The Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological Theory

The Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological systems theory of human development constituted the theoretical framework of this study. Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model speculates that human development naturally possesses biopsychological changes. Bronfenbrenner (2005) considered the ecological development “as the scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings, and by the larger context, in which the settings are embedded” (p.107).
Basically, human development represents the fusion of a person with his or her surroundings.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) covers five interrelated systems of human development in his bio-ecological systems theory.

1. The microsystem consists of functions, doings and interpersonal relations that a human being encounters;
2. the mesosystem represents connections between the microsystems;
3. the exosystem represent the implied outcome of a person’s development by the environmental systems;
4. the macrosystem represents a specific culture’s community design;
5. the chronosystem while connecting to time, provides an extensive viewpoint to the systems method.

This study also considered the bio-ecological model’s risks and factors in terms of resilience dynamics, which Martin-Breen and Anderies, (2011) conceptualize as ‘risk factor.’ The ‘risk factor’ approach accentuates two central intervention outlets: to reduce or treat it (Martin-Breen & Anderies (2011). When facing high risk situations in their environment, international students have adverse outcomes depending on their past stories and experiences (Masten, 2001). In terms of their resilience, Masten (2001) classifies international students as abnormal because of their invulnerability and their invincibility.

However, studies suggest that these students turn into ‘competent, confident and caring’ adults (Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1993). Expectantly, the Bronfenbrenner (2005) model illuminates this research to explore the stories of
international students and their experiences of resilience while coping. Residing in a host country places international students in a position where they suffer the influence of the subjects in all five interconnected systems in the bio-ecological model. This study uses Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) theory of microsystems in relationship to the mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chonosystem. This conceptual framework and the Australian Resilience Theory helped explore and understand the process of international undergraduate students’ cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges and experiences of resilience while coping in their host country.

The Australian Resilience Theory

The RISE represented the practical framework of this study. This study used helpful strategies to empower international students to gain access to resilience support, mentoring, supervision, and employment establishment. The RISE model includes four distinct elements that help international students to positively navigate the higher education system in their host countries. The first element, ‘Getting Settled’ addresses factors such as culture shock, integration, and professional challenges that international students face (Dickenson, Lock, & Carey, 2007; Hener, Weller, & Shor, 1997; Schreier & Abramovitch, 1996) and provisions of orientation (Klisch, 2000; Lin & Yi, 1997).

The second element ‘Learning,’ encompasses international students’ orientation, helping them to meet the demands of a new culture, refining their thought processes and illuminating their strategies to study (Wang, Hempton, Dugan, & Komives, 2008; Yoder, 2001). This element also provides them with a new curriculum tailored according to their needs (Yoder, 2001). The first two elements, ‘Getting Settled’ and ‘Learning’ are interconnected.
The third element ‘Communicating,’ stresses the significance of international students’ linguistic issues, embracing the overall topic of accommodating an English curriculum (Language Skills Review, 2006; Wilson, Chen, Grumbach, Wang, & Fernandez, 2005) and cultural challenges (Wang et al., 2008). One of the linguistic issues, ‘language development,’ is described as the influence of education on language aptitude and the correlation between the ‘Learning’ and ‘Communicating’ elements (Caputi, Engelmann, & Stasinopoulos, 2006; Guhde, 2003; Klisch, 2000).

The last element, ‘Coping,’ bears a similitude to resilience, referring to students’ reaction in face of adversity. This element is portrayed as ‘adaptive or endurance resilience’ (Sacre, Lock, & Nash, 2010, p. 840; Scheffer, Carpenter, Foley, Folke, & Walker, 2001). This element equally displays how students manage loneliness, nervous tension, and stress (Abramovitch, Koren, & Schreier, 2000), and focuses on the meaning of ‘social supports’ (Kinnear, Boyce, Sparrow, Middleton, & Cullity, 2008), and the consequences of discrimination (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007). The interrelation existing among the ‘Getting Started,’ ‘Learning,’ ‘Communicating’ and ‘Coping’ elements supports the validity of the RISE model.

Although the design of this model was initially to meet international students’ needs in Australian health care institutions, it “[This model] was transferrable to other health disciplines and other sectors where international students are enrolled” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 841). This model provided an underpinning for the employment place and the mentoring of international students, and ‘the contextualization of curriculum internationalization.’ This model also helped students see the world and the workplace through different lenses. In addition to providing ongoing support to international
students, the RISE model positively impacted learning and work experiences, and improved strategies to meet international students’ needs. “In the absence of such a model, there is a risk that the long standing concerns regarding the resilience and work readiness of international students will persist” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 841).

The Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bi-ecological theory and the Australian Resilience International Student Education model will help trigger the understanding of the international undergraduate students’ experiences of resilience while facing cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant on various levels. It improves the understanding of international undergraduate students’ confronting challenges and coping strategies. The superficial understanding of their stories, experiences, and mentalities is valuable to themselves, their peers, their future, their empowerment, their family, their community, the professionals working in the fields of education, and globalization. The results of my study, in a broad spectrum, added knowledge to the fields of higher education, administration, counseling, and psychology, internationalization and the higher global educational system. The personal stories would help equip educators and counselors by positioning them to interpose in international students’ experiences and empower them globally. The empowerment of international students seems to be Killick’s (2015) central recommendation in developing the global student. It provides advices for improvements for administrators and educators in their services rendered to international undergraduate students. The recommendations of this research study enhance pre and post arrival
preparations of current and future international undergraduate students not only at AU but also on a global level.

**Delimitations**

I conducted this study at AU, a single site. I delimited this study to five male and five female international undergraduate students ranging in grade level from freshman to senior years.

**Limitations**

The limitations that this study face were intrinsic to qualitative research. Despite the thorough evaluation of the data analysis, it still oversimplified the experiences of an entire population. The site of this study represented a serious limitation because AU is a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) school with a faith-based culture. Therefore, the religious aspect dominated in the interviews with the participants.

The authenticity of this story represents the next weakness in this narrative study. Although narrative study deeply relies on the participants’ attested information, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) contend that the participants “may fake the data” (p.10). However, to prevent data compromise in this study, Creswell (2008) recommends that the research collect multiple field texts, triangulate the data, and check with the participants. Transcribing the notes, reading them and comparing with the audio notes helped prevent data comprise.

The accuracy of the real story represented another limitation because the experiences could be compromised in disaster cases for instance. However, participants who shared traumatized experiences of earthquake, heartbrokenness, and sickness for
instance, were able to remember the accuracy of their stories. Although some of those stories happened a few years ago, participants remembered details of the experiences (Creswell, 2008). Nevertheless, Riessman (1993, p. 22) argues that stories are “truths of our experiences” regardless of misrepresentation or concerns for sanctions.

The human observer constitutes the best instrument for the qualitative researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2010; Creswell, 2008). As an international student who has gone through the journey of internationalization with its various challenges, experienced diverse difficulties, and overcome the majority of the challenges, I, as the researcher, represented the best instrument for this qualitative narrative research.

**Definitions**

*Culture:* An individual’s beliefs, language, values, behaviors, perceptions, religion, ideas and modes of social relationships (Manning & Baruth, 2009).

*Global:* Worldwide in scope and substance and de-emphasizes the concept of nation, but without negating it” (Guruz, 2011, p.1).

*Globalization:* “In general, globalization is the flow of technology, knowledge, people, values, ideas, capital, goods, and services across national borders and affects each country in a different way due to the nation’s individual history, traditions, culture, and priorities” (Knight 2004 in Guruz, 2011, p.1).

*International student:* A student who comes to the U.S. on a temporary visa to complete an undergraduate degree with the intention to return to the home country (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2009).

*Internationalization (of higher education):* Means “transnational” or “cross-border” higher education (Guruz, 2011, p. 20), “the movement of students, scholars,
programs, curricula, and institutions across borders” (Wildavski, 2010, p. 3), and “a process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p.11).

*International student mobility:* The phenomenon by which students and scholars leave their home countries to seek education and knowledge (Guruz, 2011).

*Linguistic:* The scientific study of language (Halliday & Carruthers, 2007), which includes language form, language meaning and language in context (Martinet, 1960).

*Mobility:* A strategy used by universities, states and markets to increase their global academic arena (Cantwell, 2009).

*Narrative inquiry:* Qualitative research approach that explores participants’ stories and experiences. (Clandinin et al, 2006).

*Resilience:* The strength, the awareness, the endurance and belief that an individual uses in face of adversity and prevails over it (Lightsey, 2006).

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 of this study represents a complete review of the introduction, the background and a statement of the problem. Chapter 1 also includes the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, the methodology, the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological theoretical model of human development and the RISE, a practical model that creates helpful strategies for international students’ support for resilience, mentoring, supervision, and successful employment. Furthermore, it contains the rationale, limitation, and delimitation of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the related literature on internationalization, the historical development of internationalization including U.S. higher education and
internationalization, the enrollment pattern of international students and their contributions to the U.S. economy followed by the international students’ cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial difficulties and the needs of international students. It also includes the two conceptual frameworks that guide this study: the Bonfrenbrenner (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development and the RISE model. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in the development of the study including the process of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 stipulates the narratives of the 10 international undergraduate students. Chapter 5 contains the cross-case analysis of the study. Chapter 6 recapitulates the findings of how international undergraduate students cope with their challenges. This study on international undergraduate challenges ends with recommendations that are valuable to current and prospective international students, universities educators and administrators, the need for additional studies and the conclusion.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review is structured into three main sections to support the findings of this study and foster awareness of the stories and resilience experiences of international students. These sections include:

1. The historical development of globalization, including related trends in U.S. higher education and internationalization, the enrollment pattern of international students and their contributions to the U.S. economy;

2. The international students’ cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial difficulties and their needs;

3. The two conceptual frameworks that guided this study: the RISE and Bonfrenbrenner’s (1979, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development.

Historical Development of Internationalization

Fundamentally, “the concept of internationalization itself appears too broad and means too many things to different people” (Schuerholz-Lehr, 2007, p. 182). To Guruz (2011) it means “transnational” or “cross-border” higher education (p. 20), and to Wildavski, (2010), “the movement of students, scholars, programs, curricula, and institutions across borders” (p. xi). To Killick (2015), in his book, Developing the Global Student, internationalization means “a complex series of processes, which an institution

International students come from 186 different countries, (IIE, 2011) and their enrollment in the U.S. dramatically escalated from 216,000 in the academic year 1974-1975 to 819,644 in the academic year 2012-2013 (IIE, 2014) with a predicted global growth to exceed 7.2 billion in 2025 (IIE, 2013). As international students continue to cross the borders at an extensive rate, the need for the U.S. higher education system, policy makers, and educational leaders to ensure institutional readiness for the students becomes critical. Studies highlight the need for institutional promptness to ease adjustment issues, as international students face multifaceted experiences in the host country (Wang et al., 2012; Mori, 2000; Church, 1982).

This movement started during the colonial period (Fatima, 2001; Jallade & Gordon, 1996). The imperial governments encouraged this movement in favor of certain countries to allow students to pursue their education. Students were expected to study abroad and in return they would put the skills and values of the colonial rulers learned to the service of their home countries (Barber, Altbach, & Myers, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Varghese, 2008; Waters, 2006). The Cold War seriously influenced International student mobility from 1947 to 1991. “Since World War II, the various political concerns, cultural issues and problems faced by international students have become topics for international research” (Fatima, 2001, p.15). The U.S. was not always the destination of choice for international students (Guruz, 2011). After World War II, the
enrollment of international students globally and gradually decreased from 9,961 in 1931 to 5,641 in 1936 (Guruz, 2011). As international students were becoming a source of economic revenue and “tacit” knowledge, a world of competition was created by rivalries to attract them from the developing countries, giving rise to the Fulbright program (Varghese, 2008; Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006).

Essentially, the Fulbright program came into existence in 1946 and was extended to 155 countries, investing in research, providing grants to students, scholars, and educators (Varghese, 2008). This international exchange program was created on the premise that “International good will go through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science” (United States Department of State, Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs, 2013). Fulbright alumni exceeded other academic programs in winning Nobel Prizes (Guzuz, 2011). The number of Fulbright alumni that started in the United States in the neo-colonialism period gave rise to the “brain gain” concept and raised the nation’s revenue by $30 billion dollars (Wildavsky, 2010). “Brain gain,” which refers to a benefit for the host country, a detriment to the country of origin, takes place when “a person with a good education goes abroad, or does not return, and severs ties with the home country, depriving the country of a global asset” (Guruz, 2011, p. 313).

Concentrating on human resource development in 1956, the Colombo Plan came into effect in 1950 to socially and economically reinforce the development of the Asia Pacific region. A total of 26 commonwealth countries participated in this movement, funding over 40 thousand Asian students to attend Australian higher education institutions (Colombo Plan Organization). The paradigm has completely shifted for the Colombo plan in 1994 to echo new governmental policies. It is now a non profit
organization, recruiting students through publications, exhibitions, and education counseling while providing research, marketing and consulting services in the fields of health, international education, health and governance (Guruz, 2011).

As students continue to increasingly move across borders, higher education is becoming ever more international (Cantwell, 2009; Collins, 2008; Guo, 2013; McClellan & Springer, 2009). Europe has seen the rise of the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) program and the Bologna Process (Findlay, 2011; Guo, 2013). The ERASMUS program, founded in 1987 with the intent to increase student mobility and promote higher education exchange of international students and cooperation, has been successfully progressing for almost 26 years. This program services close to three million international students from 33 countries with an annual budget of 450 million Euros (IIE, 2011). Built on the ERASMUS program, the Bologna Process was established in June 1999 with the participation of 29 European cities with the purpose of promoting the European higher education system and increase academic mobility within and outside of Europe, with a flawlessly outlined mutual goal to collaboratively create coherence in facing global challenges in their educational system by 2010 (IIE, 2011). “A global higher education market has thus emerged with annual revenue estimated at tens of billions of dollars” covering “publishing, testing, and counseling to the provision of education on one transnational form or another” (Guruz, 2011, p. 20).

Fundamentally, the Bologna Process goals consist of: (a) adopting a more readable and comparable degree system; (b) adopting a system of a three-year undergraduate level degree and a two-cycle graduate degree; (c) a transfer credit system
to stimulate student mobility; (d) fostering student, staff, researcher, and teacher mobility; (e) promoting collaborative quality assurance; and (f) raising the bar for European Higher Education by promoting joint degrees (Guruz, 2011). The Bologna Process has shifted the paradigm for the European Higher Education system (Wildavski, 2010) that “consisted of essentially closed national systems funded by the state until the late 1970s” through their exceptional changes and reforms (Guruz, 2011, p.181). The Bologna Process, in light of internationalization, equips students with a number of possibilities to find employment globally (Killick, 2015).

**U.S. Higher Education and Internationalization**

Internationalization can be best described as a continuing “process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p.11). From an internationalization viewpoint, higher education requires the instillation and sustainability of an intercultural and universal element into its program administration, stratagems, and organizational behavior (Knight, 2004). Increased support for higher education results is decreased support for other potentially competing programs, enhanced communication, technology, and the reallocation of the economic data (Knight, 2004). Theoretically, academic, sociocultural, economic, and political reasons cause higher education leaders to internationalize their institutions (Knight, 2004).

Internationalization in the U.S. can be competitively rationalized through “the cultural–political approach, the revenue-generation approach, the skilled migration approach and the strategic alliances networking approach” (Guruz, 2011, p. 319). The relationship that characterizes the international student market reaches annual revenue of
tens of billions of dollars and is manipulated by intense competition among institutions (Wildavsky, 2010).

International talent constitutes a reliant source of U.S. future economic growth (Guruz, 2011; Killick, 2015; Wildavski, 2010). Traditionally, the U.S. workforce significantly carries the highly skilled marks of educated international students (Guruz, 2011; Killick, 2015; Wildavski, 2010). This tradition is threatened by other host countries’ dedication to provide high quality education to international students and by the U.S. possible decline in the internationalization market due to its latent intransience in strategizing to attract international students (Killick, 2015; Knight, 2004).

The U.S. international market also suffers from federal and state policy makers’ unresponsive and inactive participation in the global market for talent (Guruz, 2011), which can moderately be caused by the decentralization of higher education and the customary independent operation of colleges and universities (Douglas & Edelstein, 2009). The U.S. position in the global market is also weakened by the public and state opinion that the presence of international students in the U.S. weakens the economy, ignoring the profits that resulting from these students’ contributions through their admission to colleges and universities (Killick, 2015; Stohl, 2007).

Economically speaking, Knight (2004) and Killick (2015) argue that it is incumbent on colleges and universities to ensure that their international students be prepared for the workforce in order for them to become contributors, taking an active part in income production in the face of increased competition in the global market. From a political perspective, Knight asserts that internationalization can help enhance students’ intercultural talent in coping with national defense and apprehension about overseas
procedures. Internationalization can academically help students to use their intercultural skills to face diversity and develop analytical and logical reasoning to deal with regulations. Socio-culturally, internationalization can help students to accept diversity through the use of their intercultural skills and their communication with others (Guruz, 2011; Killick, 2015; Knight, 2004; Wildavski, 2010).

U.S. colleges and universities’ participation in internationalization should intentionally include strategies for foreign language study, internationalized curricula, cross-cultural training, area studies, and faculty and staff mobility programs (Guruz 2011; Killick, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012). Research projects, agreements, exchange programs, conferences and publications can benefit from internationalization. Internationalization can play a positive role in extracurricular activities such as student clubs, associations, communication and relationship with intercultural groups (Knight, 2004). To extend intercultural relationships, colleges, and universities can build non-governmental, private and public collaborations to develop alumni foreign programs, overseas research, training and educational program transfers (Knight, 2004).

Internationalization necessitates the dedication of international students, the host institutions and foreign workforces (Coryell, Durodoye, Wright, Pate, & Nguyen, 2010; Killick, 2015). In a case study conducted on four institutions of higher education in the U.S. and the UK, Coryell et al. (2010) found that students, staff, faculty, administrators and the community at large need to understand and appreciate internationalization and its academic impact on students for positive and successful outcomes.

Contributions of International Students to Internationalization

The U.S. benefits from a ‘brain gain’ that derives directly from the foreign students who come to pursue their studies in the country. The scope of the gain has increased since the early 1990’s with “an estimate of $30 billion net worth of the...
graduates” who chose to remain in the U.S rather than to return to their home country (Guruz, 2011, pp. 138-139). The majority of these $30 billion net worth comes from international students’ funds. Family and friends provide 63% of these funds. The remaining 37% funding comes from U.S colleges and universities, 23.7%; students’ governments, 7.1%; U.S. government, 0.8%; foreign private sponsors, 1.1%; U.S. private sponsors, 0.6%; international organization, 0.2%, and other sources, 0.6%. International students’ current employment accounts for the remaining 5.3% (IIE, 2011).

In addition to the financial contributions that international students bring to the U.S revenues, they represent a channel of immigrant experts through their enriching social and political global networking (Guruz, 2011; Killick, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012).

They also build bridges between the United States and other countries; bring global perspectives into U.S. classrooms and research labs; support U.S. innovation through science and engineering coursework, making it possible for U.S. colleges and universities to offer these courses to U.S. students; and support programming and services on campus for all students by paying out-of-state tuition, funded largely by non-U.S. sources. (NAFSA, 2014).

The wealth of cultural, financial, and academic advantages that international students contribute to this country is recognizably irrefutable (IIE, 2011). Further, Richard Freeman, a Harvard University Economist, commenting on internationalization’s contributions to the U.S, posits,

My analysis suggests that the globalization of higher education should benefit the U.S. and the rest of the world by accelerating the rate of technological advance associated with science and engineering and by speeding the adoption of best practices around the world, which will lower the cost of production and prices of goods. (Wildavski 2010, p. 191)

Freeman concluded, “the country will be able to maintain excellence and leadership in the ‘empire of the mind’ and in the economic world more so than it views the rapid increase in graduates overseas as a competitive threat.” (Wildavski 2010, p.
Despite the various contributions that international students bring to the U.S., they face numerous difficulties in navigating the educational system.

**International Student Difficulties and Challenges**

International students face an array of difficulties and challenges caused by their cultural, linguistic, personal, social, and academic adjustment (Guruz, 2011; Killick, 2015; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sumer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008). Extensive research suggests that international students navigate stressful cultural, social, linguistic and other experiences while they are transitioning from their home into the U.S. higher education (e.g. Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Church, 1982). Cultural experiences include personal, social, and religious development processes while trying to adapt to the larger culture resulting in stress and changes in personality and beliefs (Chi, 1997; Mori, 2000). Linguistic experiences are more complex for most international students (Mori, 2000) due to the impact that they bear on their performance, psychological adjustment (Lin & Yi 1997) and their interactions with American students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Killick (2015) refers to the challenges of the curriculum as ‘social consequences of the globalization.’ Zumeta et al. (2012) in their book, *Financing American Higher Education in the Era of Globalization*, call for a reassessment of financial challenges of higher education in terms of the “core public values” and most specifically, “the roles and responsibilities” of all shareholders including students, and the costs of college education that are going to be met in the near future (p. xi).

This revision of financial challenges deems obligatory due to “the brutal competition for funds that higher education faces at both state and federal levels,” which represents a serious impact on college enrollment and retention for institutions and
students and an additional stressful disadvantage for international students (Zumeta et al., 2012, p. 3). A number of factors complicate adjustment challenges for international students such as, English language aptitude, social adjustment, insufficient financial support, and health issues (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Crockett & Hays, 2011; Killick, 2015; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sumer et al., 2008). The challenges are reviewed in the next sections through consideration of various relevant studies.

Even though a number of studies report similar challenges that international students face in the U.S. educational system, the significance of these struggles has been inconsistent throughout the information obtained (Olivas & Li, 2006). This inconsistency could be due to the complexity of classifying international students (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008). An example of these inconsistencies can be found in the Fritz et al. (2008) study of the enrollment of 102 international students and 128 U.S students in a Southern California diverse community college with the purpose to compare the level of stress based on their distance from family and friends, educational requirements, linguistic and financial concerns. The findings indicate that international and local students view and experience language and social difficulties differently. The difficulty of finding work and social relationships was higher among international European and Asian students. All three groups, European, Asian, and domestic students experience financial difficulties. While Asian students experienced more language difficulties, European students suffered more from the separation of their loved ones. In terms of satisfaction, Asian students were less pleased with their overall educational experience than European students.
Cultural Challenges

In view of these studies’ findings that students’ cultural surroundings play a critical role in the level of stress and anxiety resulting from acculturation, international students’ needs could be best met if services for them could be tailored according to their specific needs instead of stemming from the standardized measures (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005). This approach is decidedly useful for studies that address the correlated difficulties in faculty and students’ relationships. For instance, a study regarding students’ adaptation difficulties was conducted to evaluate faculty and administrators’ perceptions against students’ views. In the study, 215 international students and 44 administrators and faculty were surveyed at two California and Texas Christian institutions. The findings suggest that administrators and faculty misinterpreted students’ difficulties (Galloway & Jenkins, 2005).

International students report decreased understanding achievement, academic progress and complete liking of their academic programs (Grayson, 2008). However, in a comparative engagement in academic practices study between 2,780 international students and 68,480 U.S. undergraduate freshmen and seniors conducted by Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005) at 317 U.S. colleges and universities, international students were found to be active participants of “educational purposeful activities” (p.213). This same study suggests that international students are so focused on their first year that they do not take time to socialize and relax. By their last year, they tend to find time for relaxation and socialization. Yet, Zhao et al. (2005) reported that international students were found to be more socially, personally, and educationally advancing than U.S. students.
The study also indicated that international students, unlike U.S. students, did not participate in community services. Ultimately, this study was more consistent with international students’ experiences with diversity than it was with their need for a better support system. In general, studies consistently find that international students would have been better prepared for their educational adjustment if they had been educated on the cultural standards and learning procedures before their arrival to the host country (e.g., Kingston & Forland, 2008).

Further, international students, faculty, and staff’s experiences, and expectations often differ on different levels. Walker (2001) argues that student affairs staffs tend to make overly positive assumptions about international students’ adjustment period, their satisfaction, happiness, confidence, determination and trust (Walker, 2001). In a study conducted with 78 student affairs staffs, Walker (2001) examined their perceptions of international students in liberal arts universities to find that they do not see international students showing signs of discouragement, anger or sadness. They don’t see much difference between international and domestic students except for some cultural differences resulting in academic difficulties. This finding tends to be inconsistent with extensive research results on international students’ difficulties faced in the host country.

The transition of international students to the U.S. higher education system definitely requires the help of student affairs professionals and administrators to create and monitor multicultural proficiencies provide counseling services and other programs geared to meet their needs (Olivas & Li, 2006). Moreover, it is critical that they develop intentional programs and training that can meet both international and domestic students’ needs to foster acculturated interrelationships (Geelhoed, Abe, & Talbot, 2003). Lastly,
studies have shown that international students can positively influence domestic students through the sharing of their culture (Breuninger, 2007; Urban, Orbe, Tavares, & Alvarez, 2010).

**Linguistic Challenges**

The issue of international students’ inability or uneasiness to function in an English-speaking environment constitutes an ongoing concern (Bartlett & Fisher, 2011). Bartlett and Fisher made the following assertion regarding Chinese students applying for colleges. They contended that their recommendations (90%) are fraudulent; their personal essays (70%) are not their work, and their high school records are fallacious. Therefore, international students might prefer to interact, socialize and study with their own kind because of their uneasiness with the English language (2011).

Higher education institutions often find it intricate to meet the demands of sizeable groups of international students, which complicates their recruitment plan to increase diversity in their facilities (Bartlett & Fisher 2011; Killick, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012). Bartlett and Fisher posit that to ensure that learning takes place for international students, professors must take the initiative to change their teaching techniques to foster understanding for them. In some cases, they would minimize class presentations and participation activities (2011).

Assumptions about teaching and learning cannot safely be made regarding international students (Killick, 2015; Zumeta et al., 2012). In a study conducted by Reid (2002) with 300 international students, Asian students showed that learning through discussions is beneficial to them, which contrasts with the general understanding that international students learn best with a teacher present in the classroom. Nonetheless,
Another qualitative study conducted through 48 quasi interviews among college and university Australian students in their first year, demonstrated that these international Australian students do not feel comfortable to participate in class discussions, being concerned that they might not be understood (Hellsten & Prescott, 2004).

Another study with five groups regarding how East Asian students evolve in the U. K.’s higher education system indicated that these students, even though they comfortably practice public speaking with their peers in a relaxing setting, find non-discussion based learning more suitable (Kingston & Forland, 2008). The researchers reported that these students relied on their independent personal learning skills, which contrasts with East Asians’ passive learning style.

A study conducted by Olivas and Li, (2006) on international students’ adjustment, stress and coping factors, suggests that language deficiency was found as the main stressor since it impacts the students personally, socially, and educationally. Constantine’s et al. (2004) study of 320 Asian, African, and Latin American international students in the western, southeastern and southwestern regions of the U. S. indicates that the combination of inadequate level of English, acculturative issues and elevated stress can result in depressive state. Yeh and Inose (2003) survey of 359 international students at a U.S. northeastern urban university suggests that international students who have a good command of the English language find it less difficult to navigate their new culture. Their academic performance is superior and they accomplish their daily assignments with less difficulty. In this regard, international students experience less acculturative distress when their English skills are strong (Yeh & Inose, 2003).
In their journey, international students experience curiosity when facing cross-cultural differences, stress when confronting ignorance, confusion in face of different worldview categories, and awkwardness in face of cultural mediation (Bennett, 2009). Illustrating Bennett’s point, Killick (2015) argues that “Our students might complain at the unfairness of being asked to work in groups with students whose first language is not English, while seeing no unfairness in their own expectations with regard to how communication is enacted within those same groups” (p. 51).

**Curricular Challenges**

Curricula, from an international standpoint, are defined as the educational efforts to prepare students for professional and social performances in an international and multicultural context (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2011). Such curricula should be designed for both domestic and foreign students and should be considered as both a process and a product (Leask, 2009). As a process, international and intercultural aspects need to be incorporated in preparing the delivery and outcome of a program of study (Leask, 2009). As a product, its purpose is to develop the international and intercultural perspectives (skills, knowledge and attribute) of all students and prepare them for the global world market (IOC Report, 2010/11/12).

Parker (2008) argues that educators should examine cultural and global challenges of education through the lens of globalization. He contends that education combined with globalization can instill a sense of economic security by informing our students to be capable to globally compete in the workforce. In his book, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History in the 21st Century*, Friedman (2005) argues that our students are not just nationally but globally competing against other students for work employment as the U.S.
outsources goods and services to other countries such as China and India. Friedman (2005) accentuates the role of technology in communication and information, flattening the world, creating the need for globalized education.

The American Council on Education (ACE) refers to the educational globalization process as a ‘comprehensive internationalization,’ which is defined as “a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected” (2011, Part 1). In this regard, Stewart (2007) shares four trends to support the need for globalized education: economic, science and technology, health and security, and demographic trends.

Economically, he declares that the U.S. reduces employment access to students in the local to global outsourcing transition. As U.S. companies are moving to other countries, their employees become globally challenged. Scientifically and technologically, communication and research flatten the world, enhancing globalized production. In terms of health and security issues, Stewart (2007) posits that globalized education encourages international cooperation in finding solutions to environmental, epidemic, and global concerns. Demographically, international migration can increase diversity and foster cross-cultural competencies, efficient leadership skills leading to successful relation and communication with other countries (Stewart (2007).

Initially, curricula in the U.S. higher educational system were designed to create learning and “establish standards to judge ideas and problems” (Banta, 1966, p. 149). If years ago education perceived curricula as a benefit, today, due to globalization, it becomes equally accessible to all students (Eckel & King, 2004; Webler, 1997).
Advocating for the internationalization of the curriculum, Dewey (1916) asserts, “Isolation of subject matter from a social context is the chief obstruction in current practice of securing a general training of mind” (p 67). In order words, Dewey, in a global context, contends that ‘the training of the mind’ “needs framing as a more holistic development process if we are to ensure we can equip students for that same global context” (Killick, 2015, p. 26). Other advocates, in Killick’s opinion, could easily agree that learning cannot be significant if it takes place in isolation “from the disciplinary context of the student’s area of study” (2015, p. 26).

In evaluating the Canadian tertiary institutions, Bond (2003) classified three distinctive approaches to internationalization of the curriculum: The add-on-approach, the infusion approach, and the transformative approach. The add-on-approach consists of inserting international and intercultural contents to the original curriculum without pedagogical and structural changes. Bond’s research indicated that the infusion approach was the most commonly used in the Canadian institutions. This approach’s content enhances students’ knowledge and understanding of various cultures. However, the transformative approach produces reform, which requires a shift in the ways in which we understand the world. As an approach to curriculum reform… [it] has the potential to involve many people, and change in fundamental ways how faculty and students think about the world and their place in it. (p.8)

From a critical pedagogy point of view, this approach “encourages new ways of thinking, incorporates new methodologies, so that different epistemological questions are raised, old assumptions are questioned, subjective data sources are considered, and prior theories either revised or invalidated” (Marchesani & Adams, 1992, pp. 15-16). The transformative method pays attention not only to the curriculum’s content but also to the
students’ educational experiences and the challenges they face in creating learning (Killick, 2015). This last approach brings students to acknowledge the importance of values, consciousness, skills, knowledge, cross-cultural differences, and the multiple realities that exist in this global world (Banks 2002, 2004; Joseph, 2008; Khalideen, 2006).

Because different educational institutions ascribe their own meaning and realization to curriculum internationalization, ACE in 2006 and 2011 surveyed two and four-year U.S. colleges and universities’ internationalization activities. Findings from the 2011 survey indicated that 28 percent of U.S. institutions require college students to register for courses that feature international trends and issues. On the other hand, institutions that offer the courses that primarily highlight international views and occurrences have significantly declined throughout the nations. Institutions offering foreign languages as graduation requirements have seriously declined as well. From 2006 to 2011, the same data reported an increase of 10 percent of institutions offering courses in Arabic and 15 percent in Chinese in undergraduate studies. In general, 64 percent of institutions’ international tracks concentrate on certificate options for undergraduate students.

Despite institutions’ good faith in internationalizing the undergraduate curriculum, the data raise questions about strength as opposed to scope. The report concluded that while undergraduate institutions underscore the importance of offering global issue courses, foreign language courses with their increasing prevalence in general education do not constitute their priority. If the trends of international courses continue to decline, students may be at risk of not fully comprehending global issues and challenges.
Challenges Internationalizing the Curriculum

Institutionalizing the curriculum does not require one specific approach (Bond, 2003; Harary, 1992). The formal curriculum design demands the alliance of institutional administrations, academic departments, staff, students and faculty working with visionary leadership, intercultural sensitivity, open communications, interest, interdisciplinary and financial supports (Ellingboe, 1998). The absence of any of these requirements can create challenges for the curriculum design (Ellingboe, 1998).

A number of challenges in formulating the curriculum can be noted: The lack of engagement of faculty, considered as the key to curricular reform; lack of interdisciplinary competencies (Bond, 2006); the non-contribution of intercultural and pedagogical competencies of administrators (Mestenhauer, 1998); the neglect of faculty to appeal to international students’ experiences that could be used as relevant resources (Bond, 2003, 2006; Mestenhauer, 1998); the absence of institutions’ evaluation and curricular transformation (Knight, 2000); funds and resources scarcity in support of the process (Bond, 2003; Ellingboe, 1998); the non-participation of faculty due to their perception of this process as an invasion of their rights of academic freedom (Khalideen, 2006), the lack of understanding from faculty of the utmost relevance of the transformation (Bond & Thayer, 1999); ethnocentricity from staff and faculty, the belief that there is no need for the internationalization of the curriculum (Bond, 2006).

Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) stages of ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism represents a significant tool that can explain the challenges of internationalizing the curriculum and how personal transformation “may be associated with our students’ journeys to a more global sense of self-in-the-world” (Killick, 2015, p. 50).

Bennett’s chart, moving from extreme ethnocentrism to extreme ethnorelativism, is representative of students’ affective, cognitive and behavioral journeys “when confronted with new knowledge, engaging in new encounters, reflecting upon past / recent experiences, and so forth” (Killick, 2015, p. 50). From this theory, Killick (2015) argues that students must adopt ‘a meta-schema change’ by embracing ‘alterity,’ this feeling of otherness, in order to be able to acknowledge the curriculum changes.

Killick (2015) asserts, “learning involves learning in and through the affective, behavioral and cognitive (and spiritual) dimensions of our being” (p. 108). For learning to be effective, the international student must become “a full participant, a member, a kind of person as such a central feature of the learning community, the importance of inclusive learning environments and curricula” (p. 118). Referring to Bennett’s ethnorelativism, Walker (2010) points out that a university should be able to add to the international student’s potential of ‘social arrangements’ in order to institute ‘global identity’.

Social arrangements include “for example, pedagogic conditions or normative processes of universities that enable or diminish student capability formation” (Walker, 2010, p. 229), which will allow more truths and values to be shared, and ethical issues to be reasoned “with global applicability” (Killick, 2015, p. 126). Such arrangements will
create challenging spaces that will encourage the ‘self-in-the-world’ global sense (Killick, 2015, p. 126).

Killick (2015) affirms that the international student needs to undergo three curricula in order to engage with a holistic curricular experience: the formal curricula, the informal curricula and the hidden curricula. Killick refers to the formal curriculum as “program [me] documentation experienced through the planned learning activities and resources which support the aims, objectives and outcomes of those courses” (2015, p. 127). He defines the informal curriculum as “a combination of activities and experiences which are made available for their participation, but are not a requirement of their program” (Killick, 2015, p. 126).

The hidden curriculum represents “the messages about values, preferred behaviors, favored characteristics and disciplines of the institutions through their own practices, discourses, their organization of spaces and time, regulations, charters, choices of logo or motto, and the like” (Killick, 2015, p. 126). Killick reminds us of the diversity of our international student body who “need more support in building their identity security than do others” (p.126). Discussing the effectiveness of learning, Jarvis (2006) posits, “we rarely act unless we believe that we have the ability to perform successfully, and this belief is something that we have learned as a result of both past successful acts, and by watching other people behave” (p. 125). There seems to be coherence between our past and present learning behavior.

As King and Magolda (2005) suggest, “The developmental complexity that allows a learner to understand and accept the general idea of difference from self without feeling threat to self enables a person to offer positive regard to others across many types
of difference, such as race, ethnicity, social class, gender, sexual orientation and religion” (pp. 572-573). In other words, universities are called to structure their settings in a way to enable formal interactions for their international student body facing the challenges of the informal and hidden curricula in order to foster effective learning for international students. Designing the formal curriculum requires higher education to focus on “the content, outcomes, and modes of assessment of a unit of study” (Killick, 2015, p. 138). Although there might be variations in the curriculum content, the fundamental standard remains the same everywhere (Killick, 2015). Every student should clearly have access to the understanding of what a unit of study is about, what they will be expected to be able to do at the end of it, how their ability will be assessed, and how they are expected to engage with their learning journey and how they will be supported to do so. (Killick, 2015, p. 138)

In other words, universities should be held accountable to openly map out to students their learning journey.

The Curriculum and the International Student

Kreber (2009) argues, “One might suggest that a university that hopes to prepare students adequately for supercomplexity and uncertainty would offer an undergraduate program that affords rich opportunities for students to be exposed to conflicting frames of reference” (p. 6). Such a program would induce the international student to immerse and become better equipped to navigate the curricular system. Traditionally, the higher education curricular purposes in Germany, for instance, incorporated students career planning (Webler, 1997). Another goal of higher education curricula consists of providing academic, professional, personal, and social equipment to all students.
Therefore, “higher education graduates are expected to improve society and develop the economy” (Webler, 1997, p. 81). Killick (2015) notes that curriculum internationalization should be designed in a way for international students to be ready for employability.

The improvement of educational and career development often constitutes the primary motivations for international students to study in more wealthy countries (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). In a multi-method study with a group of 185 international students, Hazen and Alberts (2006) examined migration goals of international students using formal conversations and questionnaires, to find out that besides the desire to experience a new culture, participants were extremely motivated by successful careers. Obst and Forster’s (2004) study of 420 international students’ reasons to study in the U.S. demonstrates that they were motivated by their expectations to be internationally equipped to find employment after graduation. These international students’ hope for potential career opportunities whether in the U.S. or internationally mattered to 78% participants. Spencer-Rodgers and Cortijo (1998) found out, in a focus group study with 28 participants, that international students expressed the need to find part time employment on campus while attending school, and full time employment after graduation in the U.S. or elsewhere. In general, career planning constitutes a primary motivation for international students in their preparation to study abroad, which makes the internationalization of curricula most significant for higher education professionals (Spencer-Rodgers & Cortijo, 1998).

The internationalized curriculum’s purpose is to prepare international students for academic achievement, cultural knowledge, and global market and as well as for life (Killick, 2015). In their case study of a Muslim international female student at a Canadian
university, Arthur and Popadiuk (2010) posit that international students “develop new understandings of who they are, of relationships, and of the world around them” (p. 424). The curriculum design carries a significant impact on international students’ professional growth and career decisions (Crockett & Hays, 2011). Killick highlights the international curriculum’s central focus as being able to develop the ‘self-in-the-world identity’ and ‘act-in-the-world capabilities’ of the international student in the global world (2015).

In addition to social identity and ethnocentrism, Killick (2015) has identified intercultural competence and communication as another challenge to initializing the curriculum. Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, (2001) posit, “individuals exposed to heterogeneous cultural influences … can either become or resist becoming intercultural” (p.31). Ward et al. (2001) identified types of issues that can emerge in the host country: (a) embracing a new culture and rejecting one’s own culture, (b) withdrawing from own’s original culture, (c) wavering between first and adopted cultures, and (d) combining both cultures into a multicultural personality.

Numerous interculturalists view a person’s attitude toward the new culture as a relevant factor ‘in the acculturation journey’ (Killick, 2015, p.55). Berry (1990a, 1990b, 1994, 2005) associates this concept with students’ acceptance of rejection leading to integration, marginalization, assimilation, and separation.

Basically, “the process of crossing cultures has been associated with acculturative stress, a variant of culture shock… the various psychological phenomena which attach to acculturative stress loop back in to the process through their impact on behaviors” (Killick, 2015, p. 55). An understanding of cultural differences is necessary as well as “cultural variability dimensions, variations in value orientations, mind-sets, stereotypes
and communication styles among others” (Yershova, DaJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000, p.47).

This understanding of cultural differences can help students with stress and coping … and psychological well being (Zhou et al., 2008, p. 65) by helping them to manage stress (Killick, 2015). When facing challenges, “it is those who have a strong sense of their own identity who offer the best potential for resistance” (Tennant, 2009, p. 154). Stress can be reduced or managed if the international curriculum’s central focuses on developing the ‘self-in-the-world identity’ and ‘act-in-the-world capabilities’ for the empowerment of the international student in the global world (Killick, 2015).

Financial Challenges

Given that higher education is becoming a significant asset to the future of America, internationalization requires a reevaluation of the financial challenges of higher education, in terms of the ‘core public values’ and most specifically, ‘the roles and responsibilities’ of all shareholders including students, and the costs of college education that are going to be met in the near future (Zumeta et al., 2012, p.xi). This revision is needed because of the direct impact that the global financial crisis of 2008 has carried on the educational system after WWII. It is also needed due to the changes that the U.S higher education and policy makers have operated in their programs, structures and because public policy are not sufficient to globally compete with college enrollment and achievement (Zumeta et al., 2012).

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The OECD corroborates that the U.S. is at a noticeable disadvantage in college achievement and economic competitions with other nations. A recent study indicated that 19.4% of college students between the ages of 25 to 65 attended college without being graduated. Findings suggest that for the U.S., to positively compete with international higher education, will have to graduate more adult students (Zumeta et al., 2012, p179). Due to competitiveness and numerous other reasons, addressing the financial challenges of the U.S. higher education proves obligatory.

Among the overall challenges, “the brutal competition for funds that higher education faces at both state and federal levels” represents a serious impact on college
enrollment, retention for institutions, and students (Zumeta et al., 2012, p. 3). Culturally and intellectually, this particular challenge provides a ‘sour taste’ to the U.S. higher education, and an additional stressful disadvantage for international students. Although low income families receive less benefits than the wealthy for their attendance in public colleges and universities, education cost is higher for them than the wealthy, which becomes a burden to them (Kantrowitz, 2010). The most common financial challenges that international students face revolve around school tuition and basic living expenses (Constantine et al., 2005; Lee & Rice, 2007). Federal government, private, and international agencies have curtailed access to financial aid for international students (Selvadurai, 1991).

Because higher institutions face the challenges of meeting the needs of other minority groups, their assistance to these students has been considerably reduced. The stakes increase for undergraduate students because unlike graduate students, they do not have access to scholarships, fellowships and assistantships (Selvadurai, 1991). Immigration laws require that international students be enrolled full-time in order to maintain their student status (Selvadurai, 1991). Because a number of these students do not hold a work permit, it becomes exceedingly problematic for them to become self-sufficient (Selvadurai, 1991).

Additional financial stress comes from international students’ living expenses that come out of their own pocket. The tuition fees that local college students pay are much lower than what non-residents and especially international students pay (Sam, 2001). While university fees are very high per credit hour, international monetary exchange is rather low especially for students coming from third world countries (Sam, 2001).
According to the U.S. News Education, tuition fees for native and international students are costly in the U.S., which places substantial financial stress on students to pay four years of college often resulting in student loan debt (2013). International students are not eligible for loans unless they have their permanent residency and/or a co-signer. Otherwise they have to come up with 100% for their tuition and living expenses (Sam, 2001).

International students’ financial stress is real. Trombitas (2012), Inceptia’s vice president and former associate director of Ohio State University’s financial educator, conducted a study on the reality of college students’ financial stress. The study was conducted in five types of institutions. The data identified five different kinds of stressors: the cost of education, borrowing money, repaying loan, academic challenges and finding employment. The data also indicated that 15% of college students work part time and 74% of college students are working during the academic year putting an average of 21.1 hours of work per week. The study suggested that a correlation exists between behaviors, financial stressors and academic outcomes.

In anticipation of potential financial hardships, the majorities of international students intentionally educate and prepare themselves for employment in the U.S whether they are planning to return home or remain in their host country (Jachowicz, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers & Cortijo, 1998). In a focus group of 28 international undergraduate and graduate students study about career development conducted by Spencer-Rodgers and Cortijo, (1998), findings suggest that participants weighed down by financial difficulties expressed their desire to obtain part time positions on campus while studying, find a job position in the U.S. after their graduation, obtain
job experiences and work for a couple of years in the U.S. or abroad before returning home. Yet, international students who express the intent to return home after graduation will find the educational and technical transfer of skills difficult, not to mention their reconnection with family and friends (Crockett & Hays, 2011).

Acknowledging international students’ financial difficulties, the IIE has created emergency fund to assist students from all over the world by “providing emergency support to international students during times of crisis” (Open Doors, IIE, 2010). Over the past two years,

IIE’s Emergency Student Fund (ESF) has given over $1 million in urgent-need grants so that nearly 400 students from Japan, Haiti, Libya, Thailand and Syria could continue their study in U.S. colleges and universities and graduate in order to be better prepared to return home and help rebuild their countries” (Open Doors, IIE, 2010).

Though the availability of funding has been scarce for international students in the U.S., the situation is far worse in their home countries (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Education must be policy makers and educators’ fundamental priority for the U.S. to be well positioned in the globally congruent, successful, competitive market, (Zumeta et al., 2012). Among the numerous challenges the U.S. higher education is facing, the goal of a superior education for the nation must be met with a high-class plan that surpasses the one executed after WWII (Zumeta et al., 2012). Major improvements need to take place such as, the reinforcement of tuitions through aid allocations to affordability to needy students, new approaches of teaching, knowledge and skills certification, ‘quality of outcomes’ and the ongoing evaluation of ‘attitudes and incentives’ and “policy changes” based on ‘system performance and efficiency’ (Zumeta et al., 2012).
Essentially, Zumeta et al. (2012) advocate that only a “serious rethinking of the American higher education policy designed to ensure that the nation can meet the demands of the contemporary world within the resources is likely to be available” (p. 191). It is important for the higher education system to work on reorganizing its policies if it wants to remain in a competitive position. In this global era, such a reform will undoubtedly benefit international students in their resilient efforts to navigate the U.S. educational system.

**International Students Needs**

International students may have the misconstrued conception that their needs will be entirely met by their host institutions (Hellsten, 2002). In an interview conducted at an Australian university with nine international students, the international students assumed that their host institution would automatically meet their cultural and social needs, which would help them navigate their educational journey in a relatively short period of time. They also anticipated that their institution would provide them with social and community support to help adjust to their host country. The study was also consistent with their confidence that their institution would ensure their success through their collaboration with their community Hellsten (2002).

In assessing the needs and experiences of international students, Tidwell and Hanassab (2007) conducted an evaluation on 640 international students at universities from Europe, Asia, Middle East, Oceania, South America, Africa, and Canada. The study established that needs and concerns vary among students. The students expressed their need regarding visa and immigration information as their primary concern. Other interests resided in their need to be knowledgeable regarding career and academic talents.
American students from Brazil, Venezuela, and Mexico showed primary interest in acquiring information on visas and immigration, interaction ability, education and profession. The study is consistent with the understanding that as students’ knowledge increased with immigration policies, visas, and careers their cultural adjustment issues decreased. The totality of the students shared that their perceptions of the culture, viewpoint, values, English language and standard of living have revolutionized.

In the same respect, Bartram (2007) qualitatively assessed through a case study, two universities in the Netherlands and U.K. He interviewed 41 international students and 4 faculty professors through one of 12 focus groups. Findings were consistent with students’ expectations of the university staff’s social support, networks, events and trips. On the other hand, the study demonstrated that university instructors and staff found these expectations overrated. The study also classified the above-needs outside of their parameters, indicating that international students should create their own social set of connections and lean toward self-sufficiency.

Upon their arrival to their host institutions, international students unlike U.S. students tend to distance themselves in times of trouble (Olivas & Li, 2006) and it is possible that they don’t even know that help is available on campus (Frey & Roysircar, 2006). Some international students tend to be reluctant in taking advantage of counseling services, which could have alleviated their cultural and adjustment difficulties (Constantine et al., 2005). As their acculturation issues decrease, some international students tend to seek help and use campus resources.

Frey and Roysircar’s (2006) study of 110 Asian international graduate students, a Midwestern university, focusing on the report of international students’ acculturation,
prejudice experiences and the rate of their use of resources, demonstrated that East Asia students use campus resources less frequently than South Asia students. This discrepancy in using campus resources such as counseling is attributed to cultural differences (Frey & Roysircar, 2006).

International students, before crossing the boarders, assume that, unlike their home country, educational and social opportunities will be abundant in the U.S. Unfortunately, international students, especially Africans, often find their expectations empty despite their academic success (Constantine et al., 2005). Moreover, international students tend to become discouraged. According to Jung, et al.’s (2007) study of 218 international graduate and college students at Northeastern University, students feel that they are discriminated against in the host country.

Bartram (2008), in an article addressing the same case, shared that international students highly rate their academic goals, based on their language and study skills, evaluation guidance, and encouraging learning accommodations. International students also expect to be fully informed on pre-arrival matters, financial information, career opportunities and complete orientation. Concluding the study, Bartram (2008) highlighted international students need to be knowledgeable about pre-arrival requirements, institution’s support system, and social networks with peers.

In a study conducted by Sherry, Bhat, Beaver, and Ling (2004) where 402 international and domestic students were surveyed at a university in New Zealand, it was found that international students’ unmet academic support expectations are greater than local students. The study also demonstrates that these international students were “not confident that they are getting value for money, or that the skills they are being taught
will get them good results both academically and for future employment” (p.9). Findings did not indicate that international students’ needs were met or if the administrative staff and faculty were aware of their difficulties (Sherry et al, 2004). The institution seems to be held accountable for their experiences.

Extensive research explored the needs for international students’ support system on campus (e.g., Briguglio, 2000; Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007). In this respect, Briguglio (2000) conducted a study to investigate 18 international students and 24 academic staff. The study involved the examination of the perspectives of international students and the administrative staff. The researcher discovered that international students needed most help in writing, listening, speaking, note taking, essay writing, reading, understanding conversational English, theses editing, and delivering speeches. The study was also consistent with international students’ needs to socialize and communicate with other students. Findings also supported the claim that international students and faculty alike were not informed the existing support systems on campus.

Accordingly, higher education professionals, administrators and student affairs offices have the unique task of addressing the needs and the expectations of international students. The challenge that this duty poses is that each student case is different due to their local environment, major, class status, gender and their length of stay in the U.S. (Tidwell & Hanassab, 2007). In addition, international students, faculty and staff’s experiences and expectations often differ on different levels. Walker (2001) argues that student affairs staffs tend to make positive assumptions about international students’ adjustment period, their satisfaction, happiness, confidence, determination and trust (Walker, 2001).
In a study conducted with 78 student affairs staffs, Walker (2001) examined the perceptions of international students in liberal arts universities to find that they do not see international students showing signs of discouragement, anger or sadness. They don’t see much difference between international and domestic students except for some cultural differences resulting in academic difficulties. This finding tends to oppose extensive research results on international students’ difficulties faced in the host country.

Most of these studies conducted on international students’ pre and post arrival expectations indicate that many of them come with the assumptions that their social, cultural, linguistic, immigration, financial, employment, and curricular needs would be met. When facing the reality in their host country, some become disappointed and blame their institutions; others accused their educators and administrators of not providing enough for their money or discriminating against them. Although there were resources available on campus, some international students prefer not to request help and yet blame their institutions for not meeting their needs. On the other hand, there are institutions that make the automatic assumptions that their students’ needs are met. It is important that universities have a system that can survey the needs of the students and another to ensure that they are met.

**The Resilience Theoretical Framework**

The RISE project in combination with Bronfenbner’s (2005) bio-ecological human development theory constitute the conceptual framework of this study.
Resilience in the Context of Internationalization

Resilience is defined as the “processes for, capacity for, or patterns of positive adaptation during or following exposures to adverse experiences that have the potential to disrupt or destroy the successful functioning or the development of the person” (Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Disaster Preparation and Recovery, para. 5). Thus, resilience can be seen as the strengths, the awareness, the endurance and beliefs that an individual uses in face of adversity to prevail over it (Lightsey, 2006). “The interpretation of events is more important than the events themselves” (Lightsey, 2006, p.97). For resilience to transpire, a person must be able to find their way through internal and external reserves based on strengths and lessons learned. In a study conducted on incarcerated women, Bradley and Davino (2007) identified three components of resilience: A life narrative embedded with harrowing souvenirs, the capability of taking care of self, and the capacity of bonding with others.

In resilience, three developmental factors are found: The gifted adjustment to depressing life situations; the skillful recovery from and success with negative life outcomes, and the competence to face unexpected risks instead of avoiding them (Bernstein, Zimmerman, Werner-Wilson, & Vosburg, 2000). Despite the specifics of these studies, they contain helpful information generally connected to resilience.

In determining resilience in the context of internationalization, I choose to connect it with the risk exposure factor (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001) and to a person’s capability to surmount difficulties while functioning normally (Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001). Risk factors incorporate cultural, language, curricular challenges, and financial
hardships. Although a number of international students integrate fairly well in their host country and experience success in different areas of their lives, these challenges can negatively impact their worldview and growth. In the context of this study, resilience is connected to international student’s conduct in face of adversity. For instance, an international student who takes the risk to connect with other students despite the fear of being rejected instead of being alienated is considered resilient.

Although all international students’ cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular experiences differ according to their profile and behavior (World Education News and Reviews, 2012), facing adjustment experiences can result in a lengthy stressful period of psychological and developmental ineffectiveness (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). Effectively, studies indicate that international students go through stressful, psychological, and developmental adaptation experiences in their host country as they leave behind their familiar and safe environment for a better life (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1989). Although these experiences are collectively acculturative, the individual’s capacity to navigate resultant stress is known as psychological resilience (Rutter, 2008).

For researchers who work with international students, understanding the various features of resilience resulting between the person and the social context (Ungar, 2008) proves to be essential. Understanding international students and their resilient factors is important for people working with them. Fundamentally, resilience constitutes the resulting activities that take place between the person and surrounding events. The ecological, cultural and social contexts represent the places where shocking occurrences and shock healing happen (Harvey, 1996, 2007).
To understand international students’ cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial struggles, the consideration of their values, beliefs, race, and traditions needs to be done as they essentially impact their expression of resilience (Bradley & Davino, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Tummala-Narra, 2007). The understanding and recognition of the unique ways international students experience resilience can help administrators and educators in providing efficient help to them.

Research indicates a failure in understanding resilience throughout different cultures (Ungar, 2008) and a need to differentiate the different meanings according to cultural differences (Tummala-Narra, 2007; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, & Othman, 2007). For instance, in the Western culture, resilience refers to an individual’s self-sufficiency, successful career and protective rapport with others. These resilient aspects might be insignificant for people coming from other parts of the world.

Essentially, countless research outcomes have indicated that resilience, depending on the individual’s biological traits and his/her independence from the surroundings, has been found to be a complex process of constructive and affirmative adjustments (Cicchetti & Garmezi, 1993; Masten & Powel, 2003). Tummala-Narra (2001) emphasizes that resilience occurs when an individual uses his/her cultural, spiritual, familial, financial and relational resources to overcome life’s difficulties. In light of the above research and framework, understanding resilience as a personal, cultural, and contextual phenomenon is pivotal in bringing awareness to the challenges of internationalization.

The International Student (RISE) Model

The Australian Learning and Teaching Control created the RISE model, in partnership with Queensland University of Technology Health Department and the
University of South Australia. The intent of this partnership calls for the expansion and implantation of an accommodating model to support resilience and successful employment for international students with the purpose of mentoring, supervising and increasing helpful stratagems. This partnership also includes networking with tertiary institutions and healthcare networks to ensure the sustainability of the model and the expected outcome of international students being resilient, self-assured and ready for the workforce. Inventive online resources are offered to students as a support system to assist them with various situations.

Given the increasing difficulties of international students’ adjusting to the Australian higher education system, in regards to their cultural, language and academic struggles (Arkoudis, 2008; Carroll, 2005), the RISE model exists to address and provide support for this student population (Sacre et al., 2010). This model focuses on four main areas: “learning, communicating, adjusting and coping” (p. 839). This model can be accessed through online resources providing information, displays, and different approaches for international students. This comprehensive resilience model stems from literature reviews, focus groups, and broad tape videos performed to make a purpose-built, openly-available website, that is “developed, trialed and evaluated, prior to the development of the finalized resource” for international students (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 839).

Findings from conversations and focus groups indicate the need for an inclusive model addressing international students’ resilience in terms of cultural, linguistic, learning, integrating and coping needs (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 839). Various studies have unsuccessfully attempted to develop a resilience model. Ong (2009) and Kinnear et al.
(2008) failed to embrace the student body although it stresses the importance of the relations between the existing models. While Ong’s (2009) model centers on tactics to learn and develop without allowing for language or coping, Kinnear et al. (2008) does not bear in mind learning and linguistic needs while focusing on resilience and support.

Finding an effective model that develops resilience for international students and help them navigate the workplace represents a rigorous challenge (Jeon & Chenowett, 2007). The RISE model includes four distinct components that enable international students to positively navigate the higher education system in their host countries. The first component, “Getting Settled” deals with culture shock, integration, and professional challenges that international students face (Dickenson et al., 2007; Hener et al., 1997; Schreier & Abramovitch, 1996) and provisions of orientation (Klisch, 2000; Lin & Yi, 1997).

The “Getting Settled” component is linked to the second element “Learning” which encompasses international students’ orientation. This component helps them to meet the demands of a new culture, thoughts process, strategies to study, (Wang et al., 2008; Yoder, 2001) and a new curriculum tailored according to their needs (Yoder, 2001).

The RISE third component, “Communicating”, stresses the significance of international students’ linguistic issues, embracing the overall English subject (“Language Skills Review”, 2006; Wilson et al., 2005) and cultural challenges (Wang et al., 2008). One of the linguistic issues constitutes of “language development” as the influence of education on language aptitude and the correlation between “Learning” and “Communicating” (Caputi et al., 2006; Guhde, 2003; Klisch, 2000).
The last component, “Coping,” bears a similitude to resilience, referring to students’ reaction in face of adversity, which is portrayed as “adaptive or endurance resilience” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 840). This component equally displays how students manage loneliness, nervous tension, and stress (Abramovitch et al., 2000). It also stresses on the meaning of “social supports” (Kinnear et al., 2008), and the consequences of discrimination (Jung et al., 2007). The interrelation existing among the “Getting Started”, “Learning”, “Communicating” and “Coping” components supports the validity of the RISE model.

Though this model was initially designed to meet international students’ needs in Australian health care institutions, it “[This model] will be transferrable to other health disciplines and other sectors where international students are enrolled” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 841). This model provides an underpinning for the employment place and the mentoring of international students, ‘the contextualization of curriculum internationalization’ and helps students see the world and the workplace through different lenses. Besides providing ongoing support to international students, the RISE model, positively impacts learning and work experiences, cultural adjustment, targeted supplies, valuable information, technology operation, and improvement of strategies to meet international students’ needs. Sacre et al. concluded, “In the absence of such a model, there is a risk that the long standing concerns regarding the resilience and work readiness of international students will persist” (2010, p. 841). Therefore, it is important for the higher education system to globally deploy efforts to strategize toward meeting the needs of the international student.
The Human Development Bio-Ecological Model

The purpose of Bonfrenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological model of human development is to insert into the human development model, biological factors and the ecological system concept. This model, initially comprehends two central characteristics Bonfrenbrenner’s (1994). The first characteristic posits that through procedures, the proximal processes occur as the human development navigates life. The proximal processes constitute the increasingly intricate relations between the growing organism and its immediate surroundings. Certain forms of relations represent valuable motivations for development; for instance, gaining innovative proficiencies or nourishing a baby.

The second characteristic postulates that trend, subject matter, shape and control of the proximal processes change according to the features of the growing organism and its immediate surrounding as they engage in engendering the development products (Bonfrenbrenner’s 1994). Some areas in the surroundings may or may not help organism to positively develop specific individual properties. Financial resources and the individual’s perception also can positively or negatively impact ecologies (Bonfrenbrenner’s, 2005).

According to Bonfrenbrenner’s, (2005) bio-ecological model of human development,

The ecology of human development is the study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded (p.106).

Bonfrenbrenner implies that, in terms of development, there exists a dynamic interaction between the organism and its surroundings. It does not matter where the interaction
originates, a transformation starts taking place for both the organism and its surroundings (Bonfrenbrenner, 2005).

Bonfrenbrenner, (1979, 2005) postulates that human beings go through four stages of environmental blueprints, outlining a structured hierarchy ranging from the most proximal to the most distinct. The microsystem helps the developing person to socially experience roles, and modes of activities (Bonfrenbrenner, 1979, 2005). In terms of personality, physical and material traits, and disposition and values are also embedded in the microsystem stage in the organism’s interactions with its community. Socio-cultural differences often constitute barriers for international students’ association with students from diverse racial background.

The mesosystem represents Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) second stage of human development theory. The mesosystem, described as a system of microsystems, connects the developing person to two or more surroundings. As the developing person starts to actively participate, the microsystems begin to critically react in the developing process. For instance, such reactions are seen in the interactions between home and peers, and home and educational institutions. Although certain ethnic groups might not abide by their cultural gender functions, their interactions in their educational settings demonstrate assertiveness and independence.

The exosystem symbolizes Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) third stage of the bi-ecological theory. While exosystems constitute the connections between two or more surroundings, the developing person does not relate to them. Nevertheless, the incidences in the distant setting can impact the developing person’s surroundings. Cultural, political and family surroundings change such as, collective uproar, inundation in home countries,
naissance, and mortality powerfully influence international students’ academic success and emotional health.

The macrosystem epitomizes Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) fourth stage in the bio-ecological model of human development. The macrosystem culturally and sub-culturally encompasses and dominates the microsystem, the mesosystem and the exosystem, as well as resources, hazards, values, lifestyles, life decisions, prospect arrangements and models of societal transaction. However, he describes the macrosytem “as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture or other broader social context “ (p.150). Practically, this stage provides the international students with realistic adaption expectations stand a better chance at integrating in their host country. In order words, many factors influence international students’ adjustment in their host country such as, length of stay, school, work surroundings, quality of relationship, and people’s behavior.

The chronosystem constitutes a fifth stage that Bronfenbrenner (2005) added to his bio-ecological concept. This stage deals with time, prior life experiences and the individual’s growth. These experiences such as illness and menstruation, for instance, may stem from within the person or in the external settings such as naissance of a sibling or loss of a close blood relative. These occurrences may arise throughout the organism’s life and may be responsible for growth changes. For instance, gay international students might enjoy a better life in the host country as opposed to their home country due to different views and norms concerning homosexuality.
Summary

The choice of the cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial categories of the topic was the result of considerable research on international students’ studies that emerged, as their main basic needs. Essentially, these categories were based on this literature review, which reveals that internationalization does not come without challenges. Therefore, my study focused on the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial experiences of the international undergraduate students at AU.

Fundamentally, students encounter a number of difficulties when they pursue their education in host countries. A review of the literature illuminates that these students face cultural, academic, social, financial, linguistic, personal, curricular, and career-related difficulties in their host country. Although these difficulties seem insurmountable to some international students, others manage to overcome them due to their resilience. Using the resilience lenses to explore the intricacies of international students’ adjustment in their host country improved the understanding of their difficulties and challenges.

Chapter 2 reviews the contributing economic factors of international students’ presence in the U.S. higher education system, their potential to enhance the U.S. learning environments, their cultural value benefits, their personal and professional accomplishment that can enrich U.S. campuses and communities. Research has not yet found effective adaptive approaches to help international students culturally, linguistically, financially and academically to adjust in their host country. Chapter 2 also reviews international students’ various needs in the home country. Studies suggest that more often than not students’ needs are not met because they don’t share their difficulties and challenges with others due to their cultural differences.
The review, lastly, explores two different practical and theoretical framework approaches that guided the methodological and analytical aspects of this study. In the context of internationalization, this literature thoroughly reviewed the Australian RISE model, which supports resilience and career development for international students, and Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 bio-ecological model of human development that elucidates the concept of resilience. Although the latter lens was used to explore the needs of international students in a healthcare institution, it was developed to meet the needs of international students worldwide. These two resilience conceptual framework models were fundamental in collecting, analyzing and interpreting this study’s data.

Ideally, the findings of my study contribute to the fields of education and psychology in the understanding of international students’ perceptions of their experiences of resilience in terms of their flexibility and resourcefulness in a new cultural environment. Not only does this study give voice to the international undergraduate students attending American universities, it also helps them with their challenges and improves interactions with their environment and institutions.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study sought to explore and understand the cultural (personal, social, religious), linguistic, curricular, academic, and financial stories of international undergraduate students and how coping with these experiences illuminates the concept of resilience.

The fundamental questions that guided this study are the following:

1. What are the cultural (personal, social and religious), linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the challenges confronting international undergraduate students?

2. How do the international undergraduate students cope with their cultural (personal, social, and religious), linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges?

Chapter 3 states the research design, purposeful sampling, data collection, data analysis, instrumentation, and ethical issues for this research study. This study additionally addresses the concept of internationalization as the background interest in context for this research.

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research design because the variables that it explored were indeterminate (Creswell, 2008). In a qualitative research design, it is valuable to listen to the students’ stories to improve understanding of their challenges. This study
likewise requires an interpretative and naturalistic approach because “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzim & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Creswell (2007) paints qualitative study as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures and various blends of materials” (p. 15).

Fundamentally, the purpose of qualitative study is to provide a complete understanding of these meanings, materials and colors. Hence, the use of qualitative methodology helped this study acquire relevant and comprehensive data from participants through in-depth interviews.

This study used a narrative research story, which means that somebody relates the story of someone else (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The idiom narrative originates from the verb narrate, “to tell (a story) in detail” (Ehrlich 1980, p. 442). A narrative inquiry “focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual.” (Creswell, 2008, p. 502). For educators who are in a quest to explore personal stories, “narrative research offers practical specific insights” (Creswell, 2008, p. 502). When “the stories told to you follow a chronology of events” with the focus on “micro analytic picture – individual stories – rather than the broader picture of cultural norms,” Creswell (2008, p. 502) suggests that narrative research be conducted.

**Narrative Research Development**

Narrative research methods may be considered quite new among generally accepted practices amid social and behavioral science researchers and, in this regard, are rarely mentioned in the literature (Creswell, 2008, p. 502; Errante, 2000). Within
narrative designs, individual participants occupy particularly social and cultural contexts through the documentation of their voices and visions (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It was not until the year 1990 that the exploration of narrative methods started to become popular.

In the field of education, D. Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly were the first researchers, in 1990, to publish in the Educational Researcher in which they discussed stories of experiences and applied social science, detailed the process of collecting field notes, and reviewed the writing of structure of narrative research designs. In 2000, they subsequently developed their thoughts in their book, Narrative Inquiry, in which they promoted “what narrative researchers do” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.48). This approach serves me to respond the research questions.

**Types of Narrative Research Designs**

A narrative research design outlines a process that connects and collects the data, and analyzes the conclusions that derive from the initial questions in the study (Yin, 2008). Various types of narrative designs exist.

For instance, a biography consists of writing the experiences and records of another person’s life (Creswell, 2008). An autobiography occurs when an individual writes and records his or her own personal story (Ellis, 2005). A life history narrative entails the depiction of the individual’s entire life story in single or multiple episodes (Denzin, 1989). An oral history narrative comprises the grouping of cause and effect information of events regarding one individual (Plummer, 1983). A personal experience or story narrative involves the collection of information on an individual in single or several episodes (Denzin, 1989; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).
This research used the “personal experience story narrative” approach based on personal and social interactions to conduct this study at AU in Berrien Springs. It utilized a theoretical lens to conduct advocacy efforts. The theoretical lens is a guiding perspective or ideology that provides structure for advocating for groups or individuals in the written report (Creswell, 2008, p. 505).

**Personal Experience Story Narrative**

This study utilized a personal experience story narrative research method. Through a personal experience story narrative inquiry, this study explored and understood the stories and the meaning that international students ascribe to their coping experiences according to their perceptions.

In a personal experience story history, researchers assume that storytelling allows people to keep stories alive (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, & Orr, 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, (1990)). The use of certain descriptions is valuable to help people carve their activities of daily living into meaningful categories, such as news, diary, bedtime stories, literature, journals, blogs, rituals and oral history (Clandinin et al., 2010; Connelly & Clandinin, (1990)). Via these common assumptions on people’s involvement in history, personal experience story account inquiry remains the most convincing instrument for stories in educational research (Clandinin & Connely, 2000).

Therefore, the focus of educational research rests on various ways to theorize and reconstruct phenomena through the engagement of personal, social, and political stories in related study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Throughout the inquiry process, the participants and the investigator constantly switch roles from audiences to characters and storytellers. The responsibility of constructing the narratives rests upon both scholars and
partakers (Connelly & Clandinin, 2010). Accordingly, the researcher shares her power position with the participants while they listen and partake in the stories.

Although individual voices represent the focus of the narrative approach and help construct the metanarrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), every personal experience story narrative is a shared product “powerfully shaped by social, cultural and historical conventions and the relationship between story teller and interlocutor” (Pavlenko, 2002, p 63). The same author postulated that there is continuity between the past and the present. He shared the following points to support his claim:

1. Coherence: Stories ought to be coherent to be meaningful, understood and logical. “Coherence, both internal and external is the key to creating believable stories or accounts.

2. Truth: Allows the elements of stories to be consistent and compatible with other accounts. “Narratives aim at life verisimilitude rather than historical truth.

3. Linking narration and age: In telling their stories, participants link their past, to the present and the future. “The life- story narrative is inevitably articulates a story of again for it gives meaning to the human experience and change overtime by highlighting and interpreting the significant happenings in our lives” (p. 63-65).

Hence, in data analysis, narratives represent a dominant tool within the metanarrative; they may even reverse traditional social trends or create social accomplishments. Because narratives represent a partnership between the researcher and the participants, Pavlenko (2002) argues that addressing three different social characteristics of narratives are necessary.
1. As a socio-cultural product, namely, narratives change according to the community and its traditions. When the researcher works in a different cultural setting, certain factors such as, storytelling conventions, structure, rhetorical styles, and devices will structure the research (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 63-65). The researcher’s influence in silencing or privileging participants depends on the types of story conventions he or she uses. The contribution of social, historical, and political factors enhanced the construction of the metanarrative, which pre-introduces the participants’ performance. The influence of the co-constructive nature of the narratives helps the researcher to dissect the preexistent accomplishments of studied phenomena and make the participants comfortable in sharing their stories as a social action.

2. Narratives’ reputation grew for their powerful features of socially relating individuals to their surroundings where gender, sexuality, class, and race determine the different cultural and social settings. Settings play a powerful role in determining the acceptance, avoidance, and silencing of narratives, which facilitates the researcher’s role in balancing storytelling in terms of broadening or excavating narratives (Connelly & Clandinin, 2010; Pavlenko, 2002).

3. In personal experience story narratives, the participants also become the audience, having the opportunity to examine the story, re-story, and create strategies for the participants’ struggles (Beverley, 2000; Creswell, 2008).

Hence, storytelling benefits the outside community at large; as “other people learn their stories, the narrators simply re-direct the attention from readers or audiences to the issues they are facing” (Beverley, 2000, p.556). Therefore, in delivering people’s stories,
the narrators touch audiences with different convictions and values through their convincing and passionate voices.

Self as Research Instrumentation

Like any other international student, I experienced multifaceted challenges among which I could count cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges. Culturally, I was shocked to see the cultural differences in the U.S. educational system. For instance, I found the academic freedom and freedom of speech concepts somewhat shocking. Back home, in Haiti, educators were always right and students submitted to their instructors, and obeyed the institutions’ rules and regulations.

In terms of linguistic challenges, my English comprehension was extremely limited, which rendered communication skills exceptionally inadequate with my peers and faculty. I remember how challenging it was for me to communicate with my first English professor, which created frustration for her and distress for me, making learning particularly puzzling. In spite of the challenges that I confronted in that classroom, I successfully completed the course, which shocked my English professor.

Curricular challenges were more stressing because of the differences in the educational systems. Although I did not have serious financial challenges, my parents could not afford to pay for my tuition. Fortunately, I was eligible for a Pell Grant, which helped reduce tremendously my student loans, although I had to hold a part time position to meet my personal needs.

Facing all these cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial trials proved to be a daunting yet exceptional experience. Nonetheless, I overcame my academic challenges, which gave me the courage to pursue my education in this country.
When later in my life I started working with refugees, I started to feel the need for international people to tell their stories and their experiences of resilience. Refugees are people who have been forced to escape their countries due to war, religion, persecution or natural disaster (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). For years I worked with refugees from different parts of the world and I have seen the same vulnerability in their navigation of the system as international students do in this country.

I have had the privilege of listening to refugees’ traumatized stories, which helped me strategize to help meet their basic needs, gain their trust, and empower them until they could reach self-sufficiency. Their stories were powerful examples of experiences of resilience. Listening to their stories led me to see them as overcomers and resilient people. The same way, international students have stories to tell that can change the way we see them and the services we provide to them.

My interest in international students was enhanced when the department of Higher Education Administration introduced educational tours to expose students to the reality of globalization in 2010. Every two years, the Higher Education department organizes an international study tour to uncover the broad concepts of globalization and internationalization. My interest in international students’ experiences reached another level when I attended the first China-Japan tour in 2010. Subsequently, I attended the second (Russia) tour in 2012, and the third (Italy-Greece) tour in 2014, which further enhanced my observation of the diverse facets of internationalization and my understanding of diversity.

Fortuitously, these tours also allowed me to speak, listen, and interact with international students, faculty, and staff from China, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, Finland,
Belarus, Russia, Germany, Poland, Italy, and Greece among other countries. These people’s stories and experiences have helped me to understand that international students in general, regardless of their places of origin, have individual life stories and experiences of resilience to tell. These experiences with international students in the tours also helped me in the collection, gathering, and analysis of the information for my research. These valuable experiences with refugees and the tours that I have attended have helped me to narrow down my topic and focus on the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of international students’ experiences of resilience.

In sum, my experiences as a student, refugee program director, and an educational tour participant, promoted this study’s collection and analysis of data; improved the interpretation of the results; and provided useful recommendations for international students. According to Rudestam and Newton (2007), the human observer constitutes the preferred instrument for the qualitative researcher, the training, and practice of the observer. Therefore, my participation as the researcher strengthened and positively impacted the study in re-storying, generating data from participants’ life stories and experiences, and in analyzing the different emerging themes (Creswell, 2008).

**Purposeful Sample**

This study used purposeful sampling to distinguish participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is the process of intentionally selecting participants and sites “to learn or understand the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 206). Patton (1990) suggests that researchers choose participants and sites that are “information rich” (p.169). Creswell (2003) classifies determined selection as the best strategy to “provide help for the researcher in understanding the problem and the research question” (p.185). This
approach allows resolute selection of participants because of their knowledge. Dewey theorizes that the individual experience is viewed as the essential lens to understand an individual (1916). Creswell (2008) suggests that the sample size for narrative research designs should be small because “the larger number of cases can become unwieldy and result in superficial perspectives” since the collection of data and its analysis take considerable time (p. 209).

This research interviewed 10 male and female international undergraduate students from different ethnicities. The purpose of this research dictated the criteria for participation: (a) they were international undergraduate students, (b) they ranged in grade level from freshman to senior, (c) they attended AU in Berrien Springs Michigan, and (d) they were willing to tell their stories and experiences.

To find these participants, I used three different approaches.

1. I met with the director of the department of international student affairs. I requested that they sent a mass letter to all international students in which I stated the purpose of the study, the interview process and the confidentiality involved (Appendix A). Less than 25 percent of prospects replied.

2. I posted flyers in every department of the university (Appendix B). The return again was not productive enough to come up with even 50 percent of the participants needed for the study.

3. I met with two faculty members whose classrooms contained international students. One of them graciously introduced the study, passed the consent form (Appendix C) with the criteria and the purpose of the study, and encouraged them to participate, and another gracefully allowed me to come to her classes for personal
recruitment. The last strategy not only helped me to reach the number of the students, but it also provided me with an unbelievably diverse group. Among my participants featured the only Egyptian in the university, the first Eritrean to be on his way to graduate, and one of the two Vietnamese in the university. Ultimately, the international undergraduate students’ selection for the study had come to completion with 10 students, 5 male and 5 female.

**Data Collection**

Although a variety of methods are available to collect data (Creswell, 2008), researchers may use letters, field texts (notes), journals, and photographs in order to recall memories and record information for the interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2008). This research study primarily used a three-part interview for data collection. This study involves face-to-face interviews as a mode of data collection to explore the stories and the experiences of coping of undergraduate international students.

**Interview Protocol**

The purpose of interviewing is to know other people’s stories (Seidman, 2006). Conducting several interviews is essential. Scheduling one interview with a participant to explore a topic that is new to him or her, puts the researcher at a great risk of not reaching meaning and sense making (Locke, Silverman, & Sirduso, 2004, p. 209-226). The researcher’s interest gems from the understanding that stories make sense because they have a beginning, middle and an end (Butcher, 1902; Pavlenko, 2002; Schutz, 1967). When people tell stories chronologically with the past, present, and future (Creswell, 2008) while “selecting all details of their experience from their stream of consciousness”
(Seidman, 2006, p. 7), their interview can be comprehensive and momentous. Seidman, in his book, Interviewing as Qualitative Research, recommends a series of three interviews that Schuman (1982) advocates, must be conducted in a 90 minute format. This study utilized Seidman’s three interview-series in a 90-minute format and one-on-one interview. Creswell (2008) posited,

The most time-consuming and costly approach is to conduct individual interviews. A popular approach in educational research, the one-on-one interview is a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time. In a qualitative project, you may use several one-one interviews. One-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably. (p. 218)

The interview process used was structured according to Seidman’s approach to collect the data. Every student was interviewed privately and separately with a question answer model. They were comfortable in speaking, articulating and sharing their stories. Seidman (2006) suggests that the first interview be focused on life history including interactions with families, academic institutions, including tutoring, coaching, mentoring, and counseling.

After identifying and determining the one-on-one type of interview for this study, the selection of my phone, as an adequate tape recorder, to audiotape the questions and responses to record the conversations was carefully made. I took brief notes on the interview protocol form especially in terms of body language, which became useful in the data analysis stage. I located and reserved a room in the second floor of the library that was quiet and suitable for the interviews.

Thus, my opening questions for the first part of the interview were as follow (Appendix D):
1. Tell me about your family?
2. Tell me about your relationships with family members?
3. What motivated you to study in the U.S.?
4. What was your family’s reaction to your decision to study in the U.S.?
5. What was the rationale behind your decision to study in the U.S.?

The second part of the interview questions concentrated on the details of the experience. This part two interview was dedicated to reconstruct the innumerable details of the participants’ experiences in a social context.

In this case, my second part interview questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about your experiences with your instructors.
2. Tell me about your relationship with other students in the dorm or the classroom.
3. Tell me about your life as a college student here.
4. Describe an average day from the time you wake up to the time you fall asleep. Where might you go? With whom might you interact?
5. What do you think about as you reflect on that day?
6. If I were a student from your home country, what would you tell me that it takes to rise above challenges?
7. Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus.
8. Tell me a time of a reaction or approach that helped you overcome a challenging situation. What other factors have helped you face this challenge? What was not helpful about your reaction?
The third part interview series addressed participants’ reflection of their experiences’ meaning. Seidman (2006) uses the word ‘meaning’ to address the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (p. 18).

My questions were as follows:

1. Given that you shared in your last interview that you faced challenges, how do you understand coping? What does it mean to you?

2. Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?

3. What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here? How did these experiences change your opinion? How did they cause you to reflect?

4. Do you have any friends you know who left AU because of his or her inability to cope?

5. Where do you see yourself in the future? As we close the interview, is there anything else you would like to share?

6. Is there any friend you would like to refer for this study?

Since it is a qualitative narrative study, the context, the sequence, and the meaning that the interviewees ascribed to their stories and their experiences provided useful information and helped create historical themes for data analysis.

Interview Procedure

The interviewee signed the consent form to participate in the study after prayer. In certain cases, especially when the participant seemed introverted, the researcher probed to obtain additional information by encouraging them to expand on ideas, or explore the content and explain answers in more details.
The interview protocol/question form introduced, the topic of the study, the purpose of the study, the description of key terms, and the length of the interview and the manner in which we would conduct it through questions and answers. I also encouraged them to ask me to explain questions that were not clear to them and did the same by asking them as times, to reiterate obscure points in their narration. At the end of the interview, I thanked the participants and encouraged them to refer students they knew who would be interested in the study or who have left AU because of challenges that they could not overcome.

**Data Analysis**

This study analyzed data using Creswell’s (2008) re-story approach. Re-story refers to the gathering and analyzing of the stories that the research collects in the search for ‘key elements’ such as scene, place, time and plot of the stories (p. 509). Using Creswell’s (2008) re-storying approach, this study analyzed “the stories by identifying themes or categories of information to derive chronological information about the participants’ past, present and future” (p. 509).

These data were transcribed and coded using Nvivo to identify patterns and themes. The coding process made sense of the text data, which provided evidence for the emerging themes. The analysis of the assembled codes led to emerging themes that were connected to the research questions. Unexpected themes added to the existing list, as they overlapped with several themes upon further examination of the codes, created new categories.

The coding and thematization outcome displayed an interconnection with the interpretations and conclusions of how international undergraduate students confront
their challenges. The discussions, conclusions, interpretations, and implications contain references to literature and past studies that made sense of the findings. Decisively, the understanding of what helps international undergraduate students to cope with their challenges is an ongoing process because each situation is different due to the participant’s character, background, problems, and the environment among other factors in the host country.

For instance, I used Creswell and Miller’s (2000) method as follows:

Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection (eg., documents and interviews) in descriptions and themes in qualitative research. The inquirer examines each information, individuals, or processes. In this way, it encourages the researcher to develop a report that is both accurate and credible. (p. 259) Member checking is a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account. This check involves taking the findings back to participants and asking them (in writing or in an interview) about the accuracy of the report. You ask participants about many aspects of the study, such a whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate or include, and if the interpretations are fair and representative. (p. 259)

External audit is the process in which a researcher hires or obtains the services of an individual outside the study to review different aspects of the research. The auditor reviews the project and writes or communicates an evaluation of the study. This audit may occur both during and at the conclusion of a study, and auditor typically ask questions such as those mentioned by Schwandt and Halpern (1988): “(a) Are the findings grounded in the data? (b) Are inferences logical? (c) Are the themes appropriate? (d) Can inquiry decisions and methodological shifts be justified? (e) What is the degree of research bias? and (f) What strategies are used for increasing credibility?” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, pp. 259-260). This inquiry was conducted at the end of the study. An external auditor evaluated various aspects of the research and found them
satisfactory. A verbal report was given after extensive discussions on the data with the researcher, inferences, decisions and strategies used for ensuring credibility.

**Institutional Review Board**

This study was conducted under the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and AU’s criteria, protocol, and ethical standards. My first course of action was to complete and submit the Application for Approval for Research Involving Human Subjects to the IRB (Appendix E). Seconded was a submission of the overview of the study as the Research Protocol Document for the IRB. The next step was to create an informed consent form that was signed by each participant before the interviews.

Ethically, I made sure that each participant was aware of their right to withdraw at any time should they change their mind about the study to ensure its integrity. I was sensitive to their needs as they recalled painful memories of their past. As a SDA, I was open to the non-Christian student and listen to their different views with respect and open-mindedness.

**Ethical Issues**

Narrative researchers encounter several ethical issues in the research process. One of these issues constitutes the validity of the stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Another ethical issue may arise from the participants’ inability to tell their real stories based on the fear of sanctions against them. Sometimes participants cannot simply recall the real story because they deeply store it in “the subconscious” (Creswell, 2008, p. 512) or because it is based on old true stories that create unintended distortion and fiction (Lieblich, Tuval-Masshiach, & Zilber, 1998). The participants may feel psychological

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distress in reliving certain experiences. Although these possibilities exist, narrative
inquiry strives to present the “truths of our experiences” (Riessman, 1993) and there is
some truth in all stories told.

From the beginning and throughout the interview, data collection, analysis, and
reporting, my goal and focus remained on protecting the anonymity of the
participants and the accuracy of outcomes. I listed the anticipated field and
ethical issues that I needed to consider before conducting data collection. The
other goal was to compile enough data to layer the themes and support my
findings without having to stretch it. The layering and interconnecting of the
themes using tables, helped to reach findings that supported the research
questions. (p. 22)

Summary

The focus of this study was to explore and understand the cultural, linguistic,
curricular, and financial stories of AU international undergraduate students and their
coping experiences. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the
individual stories of international undergraduate students and their coping experiences
against challenges. Participants in the study were international undergraduate students
ranging in grade level from sophomore to senior. I interviewed 10 participants for this
study. This study used a qualitative narrative design and semi-structured interviews as the
primary tool to collect data.
CHAPTER 4

THE VOICE OF THE UNDERGRADUATE
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Introduction

*When the whole world is silent even one voice becomes powerful* - Malala Yousafzai

Chapter 4 is devoted to the voices perceptions of 10 international undergraduate students who have provided their stories, from their understanding, about how they coped with their various challenges at AU. Through the telling, their sentiments and impressions were explored as they described their adjustment process. Their trust in confidentiality allowed them to naturally and comfortably share their trials with sureness and straightforwardness.

The interview questions were tailored according to the research questions: 1) What are the cultural (personal, social and religious), linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the challenges confronting international undergraduate students? 2) How do international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges?

The table below introduces all 10 participants’ (five males, five females), name, age, sex, year in school, major, and country of origin. They came from different part of the world. They all share four characteristics:

1. They were international students;
2. They were all undergraduate students;
3. They all studied at AU;
4. They were all bilingual.

Different reasons motivated them to come to the U.S. to pursue their education. The majority of them were from 18 to 22 years of age except for two who were 25 and 41. They were all single with the exemption of the 41 year-old who was married. They constituted a diverse and rich group that contributes a special fragrance to this study and the field of research in internationalization and globalization. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants. In their adaptation journey, they faced diverse experiences and challenges, and handled them according to the meaning they attached to coping. Personal background information of all 10 participants follows to foster better understanding, purpose, and meaning to the data as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Country of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Akim</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Finance &amp; Risk Management</td>
<td>Eritrea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apollos</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Medical Engineering</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Radiology</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chen</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior Accounting</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esther</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Marketing &amp; Management</td>
<td>Peru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M= Male, F= Female
Participants Profiles

*Akim*, a 41-year-old male Eritrean and a junior, was majoring in finance and risk management. He was the only participant over 24 years old and married. He did not have children. He came to Virginia in 2003 and transferred to AU to pursue his education. He chose to come to AU, an SDA Higher Education institution because he was an SDA. Akim experienced personal, (housing, time management, stress), curricular (academic), financial and linguistic (True and False question format) challenges. Coping to Akim, meant being rational about a situation that was caused by another party and taking the initiative to peacefully solve it.

*Maria* was a 22-year-old female Peruvian and a senior majoring in marketing and management. She also chose to come to AU because she wanted to study in a SDA setting. Maria confronted personal (busyness), cultural (friendships), academic (difficult classes and cultural differences with power distance) challenges. Maria viewed coping as the assessment of a situation and the strategy to explore ways to resolve it.

*Chen*, an 18-year-old international undergraduate Korean male freshman, was studying accounting. He was motivated to study in the U.S. because he did not like the Korean education and he perceived the U.S. educational system as organized and provides freedom of choice. He had linguistic (listening, speaking, and understanding), and academic (information due to lack of environmental information and True and False question format). Chen coped by strategizing to find helpful techniques to confront his challenges.

*Esther* was a 21-year-old Canadian female and a senior majoring in education. Esther came to Andrews because she was a SDA who believed in Christian education.
She encountered a number of cultural and academic experiences and challenges including the university’s schedule policies, adjustment with the food, and communication with professors. She faced culture shock challenges with the students’ ethnic association and the community’s dynamics. Her understanding of coping resonated with her faith in God as she was confronting her challenges.

*Apollos* is an 25-year-old male and a freshman majoring in mechanical engineering. He was the only Egyptian attending AU. He was motivated to attend the school because he graduated from an SDA academy that was not accredited in Egypt due to governmental demands that were not met. He won a visa lottery and came to AU, an SDA university. He had a few experiences and confronted several personal, cultural, curricular challenges with friendship, the cafeteria food, his professors, the curriculum, and heart brokenness difficulties. He understood coping as handling a situation.

*Carmen* was a 22-year-old female senior from Columbia, majoring in radiology. Her parents motivated her because her dad was an SDA pastor who was doing his doctorate in ministry at AU. She experienced cultural (chaos in the dorm, linguistic (learning English), academic (different academic system from home), and financial (difficulty paying tuition). Coping, in her understanding, was a process involving the knowledge of oneself, the identification of the stressor, and search of the best way to confront it by exploring different avenues until the right solution was found.

*Wan,* a 20-year-old Vietnamese female student (one of the only two students in the university) was in her junior year and majoring in International Business. She chose to attend AU because of its peaceful environment and safe location. She did not face cultural and financial challenges because she travelled extensively when she was young.
and her parents were economically well positioned. However, she had linguistic issues as she found the language a bit challenging although she learned English in Vietnam. She only interacted in her native language with her Vietnamese friend, which did not help her English. She also had curricular challenges (True and False question format). Wan understood coping as identifying a problem and focusing on it to solve it.

*Linda* was a 21-year-old female Haitian student and a junior majoring in International Business. Her parents decided for her to pursue her education in Florida after her shocking kidnapping experience. Then they sent her to AU after the earthquake that happened in Haiti on January 12, 2010. Her traumatizing experience with the language was not challenging because most of the professors in her department were international and she related to them. She mostly experienced financial hardships that affected her clearance every semester. Coping, according to Linda, was not to ever give up and persist regardless of the issue at hand.

*Lee* was a 23-year-old male student from South Korea in his freshman year majoring in Finance. His decision to come to the U.S. was motivated by the language. He travelled extensively and was not concerned with cultural challenges. He felt more comfortable talking to Korean friends, although he had listening and understanding issues especially with his professors. He also confronted classroom communication and departmental problems. Furthermore, he experienced curricular (True and False) challenges. Lee understood coping as facing a problem.

*Paulo* was an 18-year-old male from Mexico and a freshman with a major in accounting. His parents decided to send him to the U.S. to pursue his education. Being in his first year, he did not appear to have faced significant challenges after the first week
because of all the help he received from his roommate and friends in the academy. He did have financial or curricular challenges except that he needed tutoring services that were provided to him. Paulo understood coping as asking for help. He trusted that help was available and American people like to help, therefore; all he needed to do with his challenges was to ask for help.

The next section introduces the data collected from the participants through the interview questions, which were framed into three separate sections. The first one is focused on life history, including interactions with families, academic institutions, tutoring, coaching, mentoring, and counseling. The second concentrates on the details of the experience. The third focuses on the reflections of the international undergraduate students’ experiences and meaning. In the context of this study, meaning addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants and life.

Life History

In the context of this study, life history embraces interactions with families, academic institutions, including tutoring, coaching, mentoring and counseling. Consistent with the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological model of human development theory, which asserts that human development represents the fusion of a person with his or their surroundings. Most of these participants seemed to have a strong relationship with their families. Being international, they all were separated from their families. When asked about their family, the first thought that came out was the reminder of their physical separation. These are some of the core responses, as follows, which report directly the opinions that represent in a meaningful way the question. Not all students are reported
here and some quotes that pertain to life history, details of experiences, and meaning of experiences, are selected to answer the research questions:

**Renaude:** Tell me about your family?

**Maria:** My family is in Peru. My parents: my dad, my mom, my sister, my brother, [and I], we had an accident. We don’t have my brother anymore. It was 13 years ago. So, they are all over there. My sister used to come here but she graduated. Oh she was here at AU. Hum! She graduated two years ago. So she’s back in Peru now. My dad, he’s a businessman. He works in the import / export. He also has a gas station in the North of Peru. He has different types of businesses and stocks. My mom is a housewife.

**Chen:** My mother is living in Korea and my dad lives in Japan.

**Paulo:** Both of my parents are accountant. They live in Mexico. My sister is studying at SWU (Southwestern University).

**Linda:** Hum! My parents are in Haiti. My sister is working in Ohio and I am living with my brother.

**Akim:** My family? My father passed away 20 years ago. My mom is still living and I have four brothers and two sisters. My mom still lives back home in my country. I am the only one in the states. My two brothers live in Israel. Other than that, the rest of the family is back home in Eritrea. So I have been here since 2003. I used to live in Virginia before I came to Andrews.

**Esther:** My family’s from Jamaica. They moved to Canada. It’s been a while since they’ve moved. I’m the first born in my family. They had me in Canada so that they could have their citizenship and I was in Jamaica when I was one. We went back and forth between Jamaica mainly because my mom wanted me to have both French and English because I went to a French emergent school in kindergarten. They wouldn’t teach French in Jamaica. They teach Spanish. I guess it was a combination of wanting me to be still immersed in the culture by going back and forth between Jamaica and Canada and also having the French background with my education. So with my sister also, they did the same thing with Kindergarten. She was not immersed in our culture as much, you know? because of the economy. It became more expensive to buy plane tickets. It’s not cheap. Definitely, they are well cultured from living in Canada for a long time. They have good careers. So far their jobs, praise God for that… so far, it’s only four of us in my immediate family. The extended family is very big.

Although these participants were far away from home and family, they did not seem to allow the distance to impact their relationship with them. Their ties to their
families appeared to be strong. While for some participants, this question represented “where are your family?” to others; it was perceived as, “tell me about your family history?” A flow of sentiments seemed to emerge from their sharing that showed regret, for not communicating enough with loved ones, for others, it took the form of pride, achievement, and caring. It appeared that they had a good relationship with their parents.

When asked about their relationship with their family, they answered as follow:

**Renaude:** Tell me about your relationship with your family?

**Chen:** I have a good relationship with them. My mother and father support me financially and emotionally.

**Wan:** We are quite close.

**Akim:** My relationship you know, is good sometimes because of my studies, you know? Phone calls, my mom wants, heu! My friends, they call quite often compared to me, especially my brothers who live in Israel. They call her more than I do. There are some family members, extended ones. I don’t call them like my mom. But I do call her. But I should call her more.

**Maria:** My parents – huh! - We have a good relationship. My parents support me economically. I don’t have to worry about money. I am really blessed about it. I am really grateful for that. But by doing that, they are also - they support us my sister and I. But our role is to do [well] in school. We have a good relationship but we also have this role that we need to fulfill to keep them happy.

**Lee:** We were quite close with our grandparents. Since my parents got a job in the rural area. So they go back and forth.

**Linda:** I think I’m pretty close with everyone. As a family, it’s important to be close to each family member. As a unit, I try to give them as much time as I can. I try to speak to my parents at least twice a week. My brother and my sister, I talk to them every day. We have a chat group we talk daily, every minute. My family is the only people that I trust.

**Carmen:** My parents are really nice, you know, I admire them a lot. They are very loyal to me. I always look after them.

**Apollos:** It’s a strong relationship. We always care. They care about everything that I did. They made sure that I did everything the right way. There was some
good supervision. I’ll be on FaceBook the whole time. I have my family and my friends in Egypt. That’s how I communicate with them. We kind of talk like that and try to make it social. We talk and stuff like that. It’s good for me. But when I’m alone I tend to lose my attention very quickly. I try to do something that makes noise. I can’t study in a place [that is] hundred percent silent. If I don’t have a person around me, I lose my attention very quickly. That’s it!

Esther: In my immediate family, all of us are really close. So we have our own relationships among the four of us, my mom, Dad, my sister and I. But even me and my mom, my sister, all of us have our own mini-relationships among all of us. We get along very well.

Renaude: If you had challenges, whom would you go to?

Esther: Depends on what kind of challenge. If I were home I’d call my dad because he is less into technology. I would technically call my sister. His cell phone is like a cardboard box. Either way, it all depends on the stuff I’d be dealing here. If it was something funny, if I had problems with my friends, social stuff, I guess I’d talk to my sister just to kind of say “hey this is what I’m going through now and when you get to my age” you know just to prepare her-kind of thing! If I were dealing with, let’s say, if I wanted spiritual advice I’d call my mom or my dad- whoever would be available or I could talk to them both equally. Anything that had to do with school, it would be my mom. She is more in tune with school stuff, papers to sign, that kind of thing. But even if I need advice about education or my master and stuff like that, I’d talk to my dad about that. It really depends on the subject [Esther]

Relationships with the participants’ parents, grandparents, and siblings seemed to matter much to the participants. Their relationship with their parents went from good to strong. Some perceived their relationship with their parents as good, like in Maria’s case, because they financially and emotionally supported and cared for them. Others identified it as a steady communication pattern that connected them to their grandparents or their parents’ devotion, supervision, or caring for them. Some participants, like Esther’s case, seemed to have mini-relationships with their family members depending on their needs, which did not appear to impact their overall closeness. Despite their ties and allegiance to their parents and families, most of the participants were motivated to leave their home to come to the U.S. in quest of quality education.
Renaude: What motivated you to come to the States?

Wan: I am not sure. I always wanted to challenge myself and discover new things.

Lee: I thought I would have the opportunity to learn English as well as studying at the same time because in Korea, speaking English is considered very advantageous, a very significant plus.

Linda: What motivated me? Hum! Seeing how my parents had to fight to have what they have now in Haiti and seeing that I could get a better future. That’s what motivated me to come study in the U.S.

Carmen: First, they motivated me to come. I didn’t want to come. They motivated me. I wanted to learn French. But they thought that English would be more useful. Then I agreed to learn English first and then I would study French. They were like “ok”.

Chen: Because I think Korean education sucks because you know, Koreans go study from 7:00AM until midnight. I really hate those educational systems. I heard that education in the U.S. is more organized.

Apollos: The high school that I went to in Egypt is the only Seventh-day Adventist school, the academy. It was not accredited by the government. There are some conditions, the school management, the school administration, and the church in Egypt does not feel like it needs [to be] accredited. To be accredited, you need to have a mosque in the school and other things, [other] conditions. They never told us everything they wanted us to have. After I finished high school, we had to go somewhere [to] college. We can’t go to college in Egypt because I went to a SDA high school that was not accredited, To be accredited, you need to have a mosque in the school [among other requirements]. They never told us everything they want[ed] us to have, but I know about the mosque and the church [did] not want that. You have to have a lot of Muslim students as well. I don’t think they want Muslim influence in the school. It is a Seventh-day Adventist academy. I went there because I didn’t want to go to a government high school.

Akim: Because when I became an SDA, I took a high school exam. I refused to take an exam on Sabbath. I missed the math exam. That was critical for the result. Since then I developed the desire to pursue my education in a faith-based university. And of course when I came to America, Andrews was the best place. Maria: I always wanted to come from the very beginning. I guess for different things. For example, over there in Peru, SDA University is not good. I wanted to go to another university. I actually got into a good business school in Peru. But they have classes on Saturday. The big factor was, when I went there, I would not be a good Adventist. My father is really strict too. So I’m like, I need
a break. My sister wanted to come too. She was undecided. I was like, if you don’t want to come, that’s not my problem. But I want to come anyway. And then she decided to come.

It appeared that the participants had different motivations to come study in the U.S. Some participants’ motivation resided in their curiosity, others in personal necessities, inspiration, English learning, educational freedom, or their faith. For instance, Wan seemed to be intrigued by cultural and educational differences. Lee wanted to seize the opportunity to study in English. Chen desired academic freedom. Linda appeared to be inspired by the possibility of a better life in the U.S. Akim, Maria, and Apollos, like most SDA students looked like they chose to study in the U.S. because of their faith that would not allow them to attend classes on Saturdays. It appeared like a pattern for the SDA students whose chief motivation to come to AU was connected to their refusal to violate the Lord’s Sabbath.

Essentially, SDAs believe that the Lord “rested on the Seventh day and instituted the Sabbath for all people as a memorial of creation.” On this day, SDA joyfully observe “this holy time from evening to evening, sunset to sunset, as a celebration of God’s creative and redemptive acts” (See Gen 2:1-3; Exod 20:8-11; 31:13-17; Lev 23:32; Deut 5:12-15; Isa 56:5, 6; 58:13, 14; Ezek 20:12, 20; Matt 12:1-12; Mark 1:32; Luke 4:16; Heb 4:1-11).

Consequently, SDA international undergraduate students in this study gave priority to Sabbath rest over schoolwork or attendance. Many SDA international students shared how they missed exams on Sabbath, which had significant weight on their grade point average (GPA) outcome like in Akim’s case for instance. Sabbath observance was the main reason the majority of the SDA students decided to pursue their studies at AU. It
was crucial for them not to endeavor school activities on Saturdays during Sabbath hours.

Maria may have captured what for many students attending AU was understood as being a “good Adventist.” The families’ reactions differed from student to student.

**Renaude:** What was your family’s reaction to your decision to study in the U.S.?

**Chen:** Actually my mother persuaded me to study abroad because I was quite afraid when my mother first just said to me because I can’t speak English fluently; I just thought that most Americans would be bias. I mean they would mistreat you because of my race. This was my first impression of Americans. I have one Korean friend here. He is older than me. He talked about life here.

**Wan:** They supported me especially my mom.

**Linda:** It was not my decision. It was my parents.’ They decided to send us here.

**Maria:** They wanted us to come. My mom was really sad. But she had mixed feelings like, “I know you guys want to go, but is it going to be better over there?”

**Esther:** Well my dad really wanted me to stay because it’s so much more expensive to come to Andrews and with the dollar exchange rate it’s so much more. Literally, I think one full year at Andrews is the equivalent to four years – like the whole four years at a university in Canada. It was that much more. He said why don’t you want to stay here? I thought you wanted to do psychology because when you study psychology you can’t work until you get your doctorate. So you are going to be in school for a long time. You got to think and know you have a plan. I was like “ok” this is something I want to do. My mom was more supportive. She said anything you want to do will end up working out. Like I know you’re ambitious so if you want to do your BA (Bachelor of Arts), I am fine with that. If you want to go to that school, you must be serious about it. It is so expensive we can’t even afford it. So you know their reaction—my mom was still Ah! She was supportive. Dad was even till the last day when I was leaving he was “are you sure? We can turn back now. It is not too late. Is it really what you want to do?” I said “yes Dad let me go” and then I said to myself “you know? It is an opportunity and one of the main schools at home were very close to home and my mom works there. It is down the street from my high school and for me if I’m making a change in life I must feel like I’m making a change. I can’t be getting on the same bus going to the university with the people from my high school and saying “hello” to you like I just graduated. It is not a change! I need change you know? I’m making moves in life you know? He is different. Yeah and that all comes back from the way he was
raised. His experience you know? So I can understand why he was concerned but at the same time, I said, “sorry Pappy I have to go.”

Although the motivation derived from the students’ preferences, the decision and rationale to pursue their education in the U.S. seemed to come primarily from their parents. It seemed that those parents wanted the best for their children as they invested in their education. It looked like that some parents experienced and reacted differently to the separation with their children. Ultimately, the final decision was the participant’s.

**Renaude**: What was your rationale behind your decision to study in the U.S.?

**Linda**: Well, we got kidnapped in Haiti. So they sent us here. And at first, I was living in Florida. That was by myself while my brother and sister were here at Andrews. And then I went back home and came to Andrews University.

**Maria**: My dad was having mixed feelings. You guys need to study. You should not be partying. He’s like the typical Hispanic guy. He studied in Mexico. He came after he had a career. He had the same dream for us. But my mom said “No. They’ll come to visit.”

**Esther**: I kind of touched on it. It is a combination of wanting to go to an Adventist school and getting the experience because I knew that this opportunity would never arise again. The need to go to the states will never be there again to get an education. It would not make sense for me to go to school in Canada and go to the States and get my Masters you know? I mean if there were ever the need for me to study in the States that was it. So I just decided I’d just take the opportunity and just go there. I mean I’ve gained a lot of experience from being here a lot of opportunities that I have here and who knows maybe I would have the same ones but it’s life. So I don’t regret it.

**Chen**: I decided to come study here because I hate Korea and I chose Andrews because my friend told me about it.

**Wan**: I think it’s quiet and peaceful and because of where Andrews is located.

Although parents seemed to agree for their children to go study abroad in preparation to a better life, some mothers appeared to be more inclined to accept the sacrifices that such a move would impose on them despite feelings of uncertainty. It looked like some were motivated by the possibility for their children to learn the English
language like in Chen’s case. Others wanted a better life for their children like in the case of Maria while another category of mothers was encouraging although they seemed to have financial hardships to support such an endeavor. Although most students came here because of their parents’ decision, a couple voluntarily chose to cross the borders to study here like Chen and Wan for personal reasons such as location, safety, and freedom.

It appeared that some of the fathers were more reticent in letting their children go. Despite their good intentions, like in the case of Esther and Maria, their dads found it excruciating to “let go” of their daughters because they had always been their protector and they wanted them to follow their footsteps. The bottom line seemed to be that they were concerned for their safety.

The pattern is not always black and white. Some students, like Wan, made the decision to cross the borders because they liked challenges. For others like Linda who was forced to flee her country because of lack of safety and for Apollos because he was not allowed to pursue his education in his home country, circumstances outside of their control led them to leave their country in quest of education. While they had their personal reasons and rationales for leaving their country, their parents’ seemed to differ from them.

Details of Experiences

This section focuses on particulars of the participants’ experiences. It addresses the students’ college experience, their average day, and interactions with instructors, how they approached, confronted, and overcame their challenges. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994) second characteristic of the five interrelated systems of human being, the mesosystem (connection between the Microsystems: functions, doings, and
interrelationships) and the exosystem, which symbolizes the implied outcome of a person’s development by the environmental systems, resonate with this section. The RISE model’s components, getting settled, learning, and communicating which stress on the importance of factors such as, culture shock, integration, curriculum, linguistic issues, and professional challenges also resound with this section as they focus on the details of the participants’ college life experiences.

**Renaude:** Tell me about your life as a college student?

**Maria:** I like to be busy and I like to have good grades. So then hum! I am really studious. So most of the time I am really studying and try to get good grades. I like to have A’s and stuff because of my family- because of their expectations they’ve ingrained it in me now I have to study a lot to make it happen. Now I also have great expectations for me. And I have to think about my future. I can’t just socialize. I do have a social life because I have a boyfriend here too. But he’s American. So then that’s a lot of culture shock for me. But I mean I kind of balancing everything. My GPA is 3.69. I was hoping for 3.70. I guess it’s not happening. So I mean that I also go the Peruvian club. I also like to help people. I volunteer to help people—it’s a business entrepreneur place. It’s outreach. When you do business you do outreach as well. So you combine them both. So I do that too. Like it’s really busy- like my friends are like, “why are you always running around?” We never see you- stuff like that. But yea I mean I like to be friends with different diversities. Like people who know me say: “you go out with Korean. You go out with like all different people.” That too. But then I like to keep it small. I will say “Hi “ to everyone. I like to be nice to everyone. But I would like to keep it small.

**Renaude:** Tell me about your life as a college student?

**Wan:** I think it’s ok. It’s a little bit busy.

**Renaude:** Tell me about your life as a college student?

**Akim:** My life as a college student is a good one because you know the closer I get to- you know? I am determined. Before I came here it was kind, I always say to myself “I could have come earlier” but I decided and I am determined to finish. The challenges really are the financial challenge sometimes but they are kind of - I - you know – like- I am a full time student.

**Renaude:** Are you working?
Akim: I work at PMC as a tutor-I am closer to finishing.

Renaude: Tell me about your life as a college student?

Esther: Culture shock one, and there was adjusting to the area two, and then Andrews rules three. I just- I don’t. My family and I are really close and really trusting. I didn’t have curfews. I just didn’t know what that was. I usually asked my mom permission for “hey is it ok if I go to my friend’s house?” And I got my license very early so I would just be driving. Her thing was that she was happy she didn’t have to get up and take me anywhere. Dad was like “Do what you got to do” you know things at how were chill and I’m here at 11:00? I was like what” and for what? You know I was coming to a university- I didn’t think that they had things like that. It is university. Was it a college? Things like that eh! “Ok. Cool. Fine. 11:00PM is fine” Then I got extended and over time you know- I guess there is nothing to do in Berrien Springs anyway. It’s not like I’m missing out you know. Or I’m going to McDonalds you know. It’s just that being in a small town things are closed early. I never thought that McDonalds could close. I thought it was a universal rule that McDonalds has be open 24 hours until I came to Berrien Springs. I said, “You got [to] be kidding! Gas stations closed! I’m like What? It is the weirdest thing. I’m like “sure” and things other little things. I got to travel to go to Walmart- so far? It was weird for a while and then.

Lee: Well first time I came here, personally I did not know about SDAs at all.

Renaude: You are not SDA?

Lee: I am not, but my aunt is. She is because she is studying in the seminary. I took religion class in the first semester. It was a complete disaster. I didn’t have any background at all. The first time I was into religion in 101 class, I am getting in class, people are praying and the instructor, she makes us to write an essay about the Bible. At that time I did not know anything about that. Like for instance, I am not that uncomfortable writing an essay about the Bible, but back then I was.

College student life seemed to mean different things to participants depending on their experiences. For some, it signified the busyness of life like it was the case for many, specifically, Wan. Others related it to financial and academic challenges that represented barriers from graduating like in the case of Akim. For most, it translated into the adaptation to the culture, academic success, and socialization with other ethnic groups, or culture shock, a balanced lifestyle, knowledge, and appurtenance to the SDA religion. A
couple of participants expressed their ignorance of the Adventist religion before attending AU like in Lee’s case and how at the end, they were more comfortable with writing biblical essays and participating in biblical class discussions. For other students, it encompassed the adjustment to the culture, adaptation to the environment, university rules and regulations, like in Esther’s case and the disappointment of having to re-adapt and relearn. Other students were focused on increasing their grades and keep a high GPA like in the case of Maria.

Renaude: Tell me about your life as a college student?

Apollos: It’s, my life as a college student is: I don’t have a car. So it is really hard. There [are] harder thing[s]. I don’t have a car and there are lots of places to go around here. Like where I grew up in Egypt you can go everywhere without a car. You have to have a car and I have to ask my friends and all my friends are international and most of the do not have cars so.

Renaude: So that represents a challenge?

Apollos: Hum hum! It is challenging. But I think it’s going well. I have arranged with one of my friends who [has] a car. Every two weeks she goes to Wall-Mart. I go with her to buy my groceries and stuff. It is going well.

Linda: It’s terrible to drive in the snow. Five minutes of driving and my life is like: I’m praying in the snow. It’s just terrible. If you come out of the house and make it back safely, it’s a blessing. I don’t know if you understand that. It’s tough and I don’t feel confident but I try to go as slowly as possible.

Renaude: How do you face this challenge?

Linda: Hum! I know that I have to go to school. That’s my goal. I want to see… If Andrews does not close, I’m gonna be in class, class or no class. If I have to leave 30 minutes before, I will leave 30 minutes just to make it here on time. No hum. I try to leave on time. [Linda]

For Apollos and other students, college life was difficult without transportation because most of the shopping areas were not at a walking distance like home.

Fortunately, he had friends who could provide him with transportation especially for food
shopping, helping him confront his car challenge. In Linda’s case, college life was more about her challenge driving in the snow, which she found seriously risky. She perceived it as terrible, unbelievable and relied on God for her safety. She faced this challenge by leaving home thirty minutes earlier to arrive to school on time. Her motivation was that she had to go to school, as long AU was open.

While most participants’ college life challenges seemed to focus on the busyness of their lives, their grades, strategies to achieve, and their expectations to succeed, others, such as Apollos and Linda faced transportation and snow-driving challenges.

Many students expressed their experiences with their instructors, which were primarily the language and communication. Due to cultural diversities, communication among people from different languages and cultures was not always smooth and seemed to create discomfort and misunderstandings.

As college students, they had countless experiences in their interactions with their instructors. When asked about them, they answered the following.

**Renaude:** Tell me about your experiences with your instructors?

**Paulo:** Pretty cool. I mean I can talk to them if I have any questions with an assignment. They can take the time to help me. And answer my questions.

**Wan:** They (instructors) are nice. They know what it is like to be international students. They are international themselves. They help us a lot.

**Carmen:** In the beginning it was hard because I didn’t know their language. I think if I knew the language better, I would make different choices. For example, when I came to talk to my adviser, she told me, “you could take these classes because you don’t know that much English.” So she gave me some classes but some of those classes you know, now that I see it, I didn’t need them. I have extra credits. That is money that I paid for and that I didn’t need it. Back then, if I knew more English, the system, I could pick my own credits. I could just ask her for my pin number. It would have been different. But besides learning the language, for my program, it would be that, they have professors with different backgrounds. They have European, African American, and
American. I think they would present everything. I think it helps their program to grow because for speech pathology they are actually looking for people that speak different languages so they could understand their background and their patients as well. But it is really hard because some of the classes you know, for example you have to see articulation that would be very scary for some students that are from different backgrounds and their main language is not English. So I think at the beginning, the program didn’t have that much people but it started growing because they had professors from different backgrounds. But this professor I like a lot because their main language was not English and seeing that she did the same thing that I want to do in the future, she inspired me to keep going through my career. I also think that she also went through the same challenges. You need to explain that to other students and help them know what going through adversities feels like and is fine.

Linda: I did not learn English before coming to the U.S. Most of the teachers in my department, the business department, are international and they all have an accent. So it is not really hard for me to understand them. I feel like we are here and I can relate to them. So when I hear students make fun of them, it’s offensive because I’m here and I sure have an accent when I have to present in front of the class. So I think it is easy for me to relate to the instructors because of where I come from I don’t have a problem going up there and tell them that.

Maria: Hum! I feel like it’s really, I mean- when I was in Peru, my relationship was like that I could reach them easily. Like it wasn’t a huge school I could reach them easily. I think that they are really nice and they are approachable. Here Andrews is a diverse university with a lot of international students. I have never had any bad experience with a professor. If anything they would understand. For example the language is different. I mean they would not grade you differently but they would understand.

Renaude: Was it the same for you over there. Did you feel culture shock when you walked in the classroom? The way the instructors interact with students. Is it the same at home or different?

Maria: It is kind of similar because – like my school has a lot of American influences. Like other schools find us not similar because of my school has a lot of American culture. Like we work with a lot of Americans. Back home there is a big distance between students and their instructors. There is power distance. But here they are more approachable. At the beginning, how are you really talking to the professors? Like in Spanish there are two ways you can address your professor.

Renaude: Like usted and ustedes?

Maria: Right. But here it’s you, you (Like usted and ustedes). You, like now even now. When I am using you- I feel rude sometimes. It’s just different.
That’s completely one of the things that make a difference. I don’t know – I
guess it depends on the professors too. I guess it depends on the culture.
Sometimes it is like how they learn in the country- they think that’s the way
they are supposed to be. Even they see the American way they still keep what
they learned in their culture. So I think they keep their culture. Like in Peru
everyone is Peruvian. But here I saw a lot of diversity so people deal with their
stuff completely different.

**Renaude**: Tell me about your experiences with your instructors?

**Chen**: When the professors talk slowly I think I can understand. But the
problem is when students ask questions the professor speaks fast and I can’t
understand. That is the only problem that I have.

**Renaude**: Do you stop them when you can’t understand?

**Chen**: No! I just try to understand them. It’s not that easy.

**Renaude**: Tell me about your experiences with your instructors?

**Apollos**: My experience with the professors. Some of them are easy to deal
with. Some of them like to give you the impression that they understand you.
They understand that you will have struggles in the class. Some others are very
challenging. They have high standards for the class to pass. For example, my
history class teacher he has high standards. It’s not easy to have a discussion
with him. It’s not easy at all. It is really challenging. I don’t think I can ever
convince him of passing a deadline, or an assignment or getting a few points
back or anything like that. On the other hand, the calculus teacher, I won’t say
she is breaking the rules, bending them maybe, maybe she’s showing a little
mercy. At the end of the day she is the one making the rules anyway. She is
kind of sympathizing, passing a deadline or getting a few points back. Even
though I tell all my teachers that English is not my first language that it is kind
of challenging. I make sure I say that to my teachers so that they understand
how things are going. My computer science teacher is kind of good too. I told
him about my struggles for a few weeks. He is encouraging me. He gave me
some good speeches. He’s giving me some grace period to finish my
assignments. Some are like that. Some are hard to deal with.

**Renaude**: Is English a problem for you?

**Apollos**: Their mindsets: if you pass ESL then you are fine. If you are not fine,
go back to ESL. There are people who will sympathize. There are others who
will tell you that these are the rules. Sorry, I can’t do anything for you.

**Renaude**: How do you intend to deal with the pressure?
Apollos: Well there is pressure. Like this ESL we divide the pressures on both of us, it will make it easier for both us. If he does not share the pressure with me, then I will be more responsible and take on the pressure on me. The pressure will have to be dealt with. If he does not want to take that responsibility, I will have to take the pressure on my own, be sleepless, less time to socialize and study more.

Renaude: Have you ever asked them about tutoring? Is tutoring available?

Apollos: I know that tutoring is available. I went to sign up for tutoring but I have a medical hold on my transcript. My high school has a really bad communication. I have contacted them I have been trying to communicate with them to send the high school transcript here.

Renaude: You don’t have time for tutoring?

Apollos: No it’s not that. Once the holds are removed I can sign for tutoring.

Renaude: Oh so when the hold is removed you can sign for tutoring?

Apollos: I already tried. But they said you have a hold. Sorry. I can’t even drop a class. One of the classes I need to drop, I can’t. It is not my fault. It is the high school’s. Everybody is dropping the pressure. I am the one who must take it.

Although Paulo perceived that he did not have trials, it appeared that most of the participants pointed to the English language as their primary challenge because of mispronunciation, or misunderstanding or the fear of speaking. Others struggled with understanding and lack of information while keeping up with the speed in which professors and students interacted in the classroom. Due to their linguistic handicap, it seemed that their decision-making was impacted, resulting in taking more credits than necessary. As a result of such choices, some participants shared the financial challenge rising from those situations. They appeared to be more comfortable with international professors although domestic instructors made them feel welcome. Their experiences with professors in the U.S. seemed to amaze them as they found them more approachable with no power distance like home. However, they seemed to classify their home
educational system as showing more respect to professors especially for Hispanic participants who used a different way of addressing their superiors, a concept that does not exist in the English language. Although some participants were exposed to the American educational system, they still needed to adapt while showing appreciation and respect for diversity.

For others, like Apollos, their experiences with their professors were different although English was their focal challenge. These students seemed to come to the U.S with presuppositions that they should be treated differently from their classmates who were fluent in English. It looked like they counted on their professors’ understanding, leniency, and compassion to help them face their linguistic challenges. Fundamentally, it appeared that some professors were empathetic towards them while others held them equally accountable as domestic students. Despite Apollos’ disappointment, he became aware that he had “to deal with the pressure” by making plans to sacrifice his sleep and social time in order to study more and do whatever necessary to succeed. He could not even have access to tutoring, which made it even more difficult to confront his academic challenges and overcome them.

For other students, like Esther’s case, their experiences with their instructors were of a different nature.

Renaude: Tell me about your experiences with your instructors?

Esther: Oh wow! Where to begin? Well for the most part, my experiences with my instructors have been ok for the most part a certain level of professionalism when it comes to preparing the class and teaching it and even with the response when students have questions and when it comes to grading normally that’s been ok. Hum! and also hum! the Adventist side of things you know when they have certain kind of concern I guess their approach of addressing certain topics is different. There have been instances where I have had some difficulties with some teachers where I really had to fight with them in order you know to get in
my classes. One of the main issues that I have had was in relation to my sophomore year. I got very sick. I had like three different diagnoses. They basically sent me home- the Doctors were like, “you’re too sick to stay here. You have to go home.” And they sent me home for a good two almost three months.

Renaude: Did you go back home?

Esther: Yeah I did go back home. I was too sick. I had to go back home. Mainly to recover and on top of that they said that you have do classes on line. So one of my teachers was telling me how I was going to fail his class and I had to retake it and I said, “No, I am not retaking your class because I am going to finish it this semester. I’m [going to] do everything that needs to be done.” He said no: “that is impossible. You have to retake the class. A good chunk of your grade is based on attendance, which I’m not [going to] give you because you’re not [going to] be here. You’re [going to] be sick and you’re [going to] be at home.” I said, “I don’t care. I’m not retaking this class” I said “I do not have the space in my schedule to retake this class. Every other teacher is ok with me continue until I get back and do as much work as possible at home.” He said “I’m not [going to] give you work at home because you need to recover” I had to pick a fight with him. I said “I don’t know how many times I’m [going to] tell you that I’m not retaking this class. How can I make you understand? This is not happening! I came back to his office before I left. I went to see him and I told him “Sir, I don’t think you understand me. I am not repeating this class. I am going to do the work. Give me my assignments. I am [going to] pass your class. I’m [going to] have good grades. I said, “Sir, I don’t have the space on my schedule. I don’t know why you are so excited to have me in your class again but it’s just not happening” He looked at me and said” It is just not possible” I’m like “to you it is not possible but I’m [going to] show you today that it is more than possible because I’m [going to] get an excellent grade in your class” I think he had to see the determination on my face and he said” I’m [going to] give you a chance. There are two exams that you will have to do and write a couple of papers” I said, “cool, that is what I wanted to know.” I finished everything before the due date and I got a good grade in the class. Then he came to say, “Well you know, what’s your background?” “ I am Jamaican”, I said. He said “ I know a couple of people who are Jamaican and they all proved to be diligent people” and I was like “so if I wasn’t Jamaican, this would not have made sense? “I was so mad. I said “you know what! I am just [going to] take my grade and leave his class because the Lord is still working on me. I’m not going to lose my salvation over some teacher. I’m not doing it! No, no, no. Not today. So, other than that, couple of times I found some teachers to be absolutely ridiculous- like being tooth and nail – like you know? fighting to get the grade. I’ve never heard of teachers holding students back from excelling. It just doesn’t make sense. Oh yeah I guess, I don’t know. Overall it’s been mainly good except for those few people.
Although Esther’s experiences with her professors were not always fluid, her main challenge came from an incidence that occurred with a professor. It seemed that the cause stemmed from a medical condition that she developed as a result of what appeared to be an allergic culinary reaction. Consequently, she had to leave the university to go back home for healing. It appeared that she had to make arrangements to do her schoolwork at home, which worked with most of her professors, except for one. That challenge seemed to be intense and required persistence, motivation, and determination to overcome it. Finally, her professor gave in and allowed her to work on her assignments at home, which she appeared to have overcome. It looked like she passed the class successfully. Although she deployed serious efforts to struggle and became victorious, she gave glory to God for the outcome.

To understand the experiences of these students, it helped to have an idea of how they spent their days, arranged their schedules, and their interactions with others.

**Renaude:** Describe an average day from the time you wake up to the time you fall asleep. Where might you go? To whom you might interact?

**Akim:** An average day would be that I get up at 5:00AM. I do my homework. First when I wake up at 5:00AM I review all my syllabuses.

**Renaude:** Your syllabi?

**Akim:** Yea my syllabi. Then I give priority to the first classes. I do it. Then when it comes at 1:30 I do my Spanish class because I have Spanish at 4:00. When I finish that one, I do my reading and my other assignments after my Spanish class. After that I go to bed at 10:00PM and then when it is like Sunday, no I work on Sunday- but when I have time in the morning until 10:00. I leave home at 10:00.

**Renaude:** Describe an average day from the time you wake up to the time you fall asleep. Where might you go? To whom you might interact?

**Maria:** Oh my God, my days are not average. They do not look the same. But I try. I wake up very early just because I like to study in the morning. I wake up
at 4:30 AM. It’s difficult to concentrate sometimes. So I concentrate better around that time. I know I can leave my phone around and nobody’s [going to] call me. It’s quiet. So then I wake up. I do my devotional. I’m trying right now and then I study around 4:30-5:30. I work right now from 6:00-9:00. Right! I have more courses. Then I try to do homework between classes. I always have meetings for the Peruvian club for example. I always have meetings in the afternoon. At night I try to finish my homework and then yea, like I go to sleep around 10:30 or 11:30PM.

**Esther:** An average day for me is that I wake up well depending on what class I have first. If I have a fitness class, my Bible class and then go back home and take a shower-change. Hum! either 8 or 10 o’clock depending on what time I have classes. If I have classes at 10:00 I’d wake up at 8:00, take my shower, get ready for my second class, trying you know, slicing a little sandwich for my next class because I don’t get a break until 1:5 and usually I’ll go and get a late lunch. Then trying to get some assignments or homework done and I have work at, I usually work pretty late until midnight. They usually close after midnight and then I’ll go home, get a snack because I’m always hungry, and then go to bed around 1:30.

**Linda:** Ok. I wake up at 7:00AM, try to do devotions, shower, go to work, go to class, go to work, go to class, go home. That’s my day I don’t hang around campus. If I’m not needed somewhere then you’re not going to find me anywhere. I’m mostly home. Actually I may come to the library if I need to write a paper or I need quiet[ness]. And I don’t have, I don’t eat at the cafeteria. So I have to go home and cook things.

**Carmen:** Everyday is different. I wish I could say, “I wake up everyday and sometimes, you sleep early other times you don’t sleep. My ideal day is waking up at 5:30 in the morning- do my devotion, you know, do my exercise. Stress makes me lose weight. [Whereas] for other people they gain. I would do exercise to be awake to go to class. Class would be around 8:00AM sometimes 9:00AM. I would eat breakfast and go to class. Usually classes are between 8-11:00. So I don’t have classes. In the afternoon I would take a nap and I would go back to classes in the afternoon. Then I would go to work.

It appeared that most students dedicated their entire days to their academic needs. Their average day seemed to be similar, spent between their devotional time, attending classes, studying, doing assignments, going to work for some, cooking and sleeping. They did not seem to have room for socialization. Although they had different schedules, their focus was the same. It looked like they were serious about their academic
achievement and unfolded unique efforts to succeed. However, as they reflected on that day, their outcome differed, based on their foci and priorities.

**Renaude:** What do you think about as you reflect on that day?

**Akim:** Stress! Exactly! There is stress! Sometimes I tend to take time for my sleep and I stop that. Sometimes I decide to do really whatever I have to do at 9:00 or 10:00. But there is stress.

**Renaude:** How do you deal with the stress?

**Akim:** I try on Sundays to do a lot of my assignments and then to do all the school projects as early as possible, to do early exams with good grades as much as possible. I try to avoid a lot of stress as possible at the end because if I have lower scores at the beginning, at the end it will add a lot of stress. I try to do well on the quizzes and the homework early on the semester.

**Renaude:** What do you think about as you reflect on that day?

**Maria:** Like it’s so busy. It’s so busy I mean. It’s really busy. I’m always finishing something. It is a good feeling. I have goals for today and I finished them and I made goals for the next day. I feel like, I mean it’s working well. Like compared to the other semesters, this semester I need to study more because my grades are not like they should be. I am trying to find a job that takes much of my time too. But I mean I know like sometimes I overwork myself. Like I only have one hour free a day. Like today I went to wash my car and then I was trying to think that tomorrow I am going to Chicago for an interview or Friday.

**Esther:** It’s a long day. I do a lot. I’m usually running a lot especially if I’m singing on praise team, I usually have practice there. I would try to cook dinner depending on the time. I have a ceramic class. I’m working on projects there-or I’ll be doing somebody’s hair.

**Renaude:** What do you think about as you reflect on that day?

**Linda:** Busy. Awh! I’m always busy. Hum yeah.

**Renaude:** Is it stressful when you say “busy”?

**Linda:** It is not stressful. I like to stay busy because that doesn’t give me time to think about other stuff. I don’t know. I just like to stay busy and knowing that whatever I am doing is…. is… hum! How do I put this? Is allowing me to be a step closer to where I need to be.
Renaude: Tell me of an instance where you had to do something that would take you a step closer to where you need to be.

Linda: Hum I know that I have to go to school. That’s my goal. I want to see… If Andrews does not close, I’m gonna be in class, class or no class. If I have to leave 30 minutes before, I will leave 30 minutes just to make it here on time. No hum. I try to leave on time. [Linda]

Renaude: What do you think about as you reflect on that day?

Carmen: My challenge would be keeping up with schoolwork. Sometimes I think the amount of homework is not reasonable. I think it is how you know how to be a normal person, how you keep yourself living, doing things like eating, and sleeping or going to the bathroom. You can’t really do those three things how you would want to do. For instance, it is like it is either you eat or you study or you study or you don’t eat.

Renaude: What else do you find challenging?

Carmen: Yeah! I think driving is really hard in the wintertime. And if you don’t have a car it is really hard. Yet when you have a car, it is really hard with the snow, which is new to me. It can be very scary. Driving around winter is a serious challenge. To me, it was really hard to change the habit that it is ok to be 2 or 3 minutes late. I could not be exactly or before time. To different culture, you know, it is disrespectful not to be on time. If I want to keep my professors happy, I need to be in class on time. [Carmen]

Renaude: What helped you to get to school on time with the snow?

Carmen: Getting on time? I pretty much had to study myself to count how much time I spent doing each thing you know? I had to give myself, in my mind you know I think it takes just 5 minutes doing this but in reality, it takes 15 minutes. So I studied myself and rearranged my schedule just to make things happen at the time I wanted to. [Carmen]

Renaude: What do you think helps you when you are stressed out?

Carmen: When I am really stressed out, I think that my devotionals help me out. I try to wake up everyday in the morning to do my devotionals because no matter what happens during the day it is going to help me through. Exercising makes a huge difference if I have time to exercise. What else helps, keeping the schedule, trying to find times for everything besides just the schoolwork and also you know, on the week end, relaxing: going to church, a day off, not doing anything.
As they reflected on their average days, some students found them stressful, others busy, and another category long. For those who worked, stress was more real to them as they had to struggle to find time to prepare for their quizzes and exams while working on their assignments and projects for their classes. It looked like they strategized, spent time with God, relaxed, went to church, observed Sabbath rest, exercised, prioritized, made sacrifices, were proactive, and managed their time, which seemed to help reduce their stress. Surprisingly, some working students did not consider themselves stressed. They perceived work as an opportunity to produce as much as possible. Being busy seemed to be a positive concept to them.

Busyness did not seem challenging to these students, as they perceived it as a sign that they were positively and fruitfully walking toward their objectives. It seemed to make them feel productive as they accomplished much during the day. Others perceived their days as long. The demarcation line between long and busy was not clearly defined. This group gave the impression that a long day was as productive as a busy day. The exposure to stress, busyness, and long days seemed to have given these students enough knowledge to structure their days according to their needs and yet remain focused and in control. Despite their stressful, busy, and long days, this group of students gave the impression that they were confronting their challenges and rising over them. Having experienced those challenges and overcome them seemed to qualify them to advise prospective international students.

**Renaude:** If I were a student from your home country, what would you tell me that it takes to rise above challenges?

**Wan:** Learn English as much as you can. Like to me it wasn’t a problem. Lots of my Korean friends, when they came here they didn’t know as much. In their English classes, it will take them longer to finish their degrees. If you can, travel
as much as you can. Me, I didn’t get culture shock because I travelled a lot and I adopt[ed] new things. I know a lot of people who went to other states. They got sick because of the food and [went] back home.

**Esther:** I’d tell you to get all the general courses you need out of the way before you come to Andrews because you’re [going to] waste your time and your money. Because there are a lot of classes, dumb classes that I am taking that have nothing to do with my major that I am paying so much money for and just because it is a general class. Get as much education as you can. Do it before you come to Andrews and when you come here just stay focused and do everything you need to get done and be on top of everything. Everything your advisor tells you, double-check it. Teachers are giving you grades, double-check them. Look at your bulletin year. Look when you need to graduate. Make sure you know everything because the end time comes for you to graduate that’s when all the funny business are happening and I’m experiencing it now and it’s driving me insane. It’s really frustrating.

**Linda:** Hum! Knowing how to motivate yourself. A lot of people wait for encouragement from other people and rewards and being seen or being appraised and that’s not what you’re [going to] get. Being an international student you have to learn to motivate your own self because sometimes you will feel like quitting but you cannot. You really have to have a pep talk with yourself and to motivate your own self. And I think these that are the most important things.

**Renaude:** So what do you do to motivate yourself?

**Linda:** Hum to motivate myself? There are so many different ways. Like if I want to raise my GPA, I would say to myself “you can get yourself something you’ve always wanted. Or like hum you cannot quit because your parents sent you for a reason. Or your parents are struggling to keep you here. Everything that revolves around my family, I have to make it. There is no other choice. There is no way around it. I have to make it. I have no other choice. I give myself a pep talk.

**Renaude:** What other factors have helped you motivate yourself?

**Linda:** Umm, just I guess, my personality. When I say I want something and I have that thing in my head then there is nothing that can stop me. So, and again it goes back to that motivation and being able to reinforce and motivate yourself. So umm, what helped me is knowing that I practically tell myself there is no other way. You are already here so you have to make it work.

**Renaude:** So you’re persistent?

**Linda:** Yeah, persistent. And I treat myself harshly. I push myself.
Renaude: If I were a student from your home country, what would you tell me that it takes to rise above challenges?

Akim: First I would tell them to find people from their home country so that they could have a good transition. They should not face things by themselves. It is a new country they should find people who can help them to transition. I always say to myself at the beginning if I had done that it could have been better for me. When I came to Virginia I was by myself. I had cousins in Maryland but they didn’t know even that I came to the States. They could have been a support system for me. I could have gone to their home, we could have talked our own language and made me feel welcome. I didn’t do that. I came straight to the college. That shouldn’t be.

Renaude: What else would you tell me?

Akim: After that they should be active line in the university club in the chapel. They should not isolate themselves you know. Then involve in different compass in ministry like going to church and then taking [the] initiative to know people from other countries instead of being like isolating themselves.

Renaude: If I were a student from your home country, what would you tell me that it takes to rise above challenges?

Carmen: The best advice would be, “even though you try, you cannot get control of everything. First just have a relationship with God. The rest you know, finances, health, schoolwork, what else? Your relationship at some point, some things may not work out, but you don’t have to give up on the rest you know. If your health is not ok at some point, try to do your schoolwork. Try to keep your devotionals and keep your friendships.

Renaude: When you say friendships. With Jesus? With people around you?

Carmen: With all people around you. Just try to keep everything in balance. Even if things are not going right, you have to remember your family you know, friends may need you sometime. You may have to give up precious time to do school work to be with a friend or help a friend. So, you will never have control even if you try very hard. Just try your best.

Based on the various challenges that the participants confronted, they shared pre and post arrival recommendations to potential incoming international students. The pre arrival suggestions challenged these students to learn English, travel if possible, be exposed to new cultures, take education courses, and search for family and friends in the
host country to help with transition. Many perceived targeting relatives was helpful like in the case of Akim, to create a support system, bond through the same language, and enforce the feeling of being welcome. Prospective students should verify all information provided to them from the university of their choice, especially on graduation and their grades.

Post arrival recommendations include, verifying information provided by advisors to avoid unnecessary surprises that could be costly. Building and nurturing a relationship with God through daily devotions, total submission and giving the first place of their lives to God seemed to resonate with the suggestions of many. They also echoed that it would be important for them to invest in friendships with everyone around them, avoid isolations, and mingle with others in chapels, clubs, and churches.

Another approach that the participants suggested was to use motivation as their main source of approach. Several understood that they were dialogical beings by talking to themselves, and self-motivated and did not expect others to encourage them. They did so by offering themselves incentives, convincing themselves that succeeding is their only option, making themselves accountable to their parents and persisting to the point of pushing themselves in certain cases. International students in this group of interviewees gave the impression that they had confronted challenging experiences and developed distinctive approaches to overcome them.

**Renaude:** Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus and what approach helped you to overcome it?

**Paulo:** I don’t have challenges.

**Linda:** I don’t think the international student services department has done enough for international students. Like, the awards that they are giving- some of the awards are on the low-low. Like if you don’t do your research you won’t
know that Andrews gives those awards. It took me, and I had to be working with students’ enrollment to know that Andrews gave those awards. If you’re trying to help international students, I don’t mean that you need to help everyone but the ones that deserve it. Be helpful. You are a Christian University. I mean you cannot hide things. Don’t hide them. But if you can provide it, do it willingly. I think that international services can do so much fun things than having engaging international students because I didn’t go through it. But after school starts, you’re not in touch with anyone else but your classes and your instructors and then they have the PMC day where you get to walk with your flag. That’s the only day that they emailed me about, the flag. Then church services and food they have afterward and then my I-20. They just provide you with social info and social events but not what could actually help students. Not things that could actually help the students.

Renaude: And why do you think they are not doing what they are supposed to be doing to help the students?

Linda: Maybe it’s because they don’t have time to do it. Maybe they’re just busy helping with other stuff and they don’t know what’s happening? That they think that they are less important than other things? Hum! So I would suggest that –let students know what help is on campus because they need it. They need the help. And when you are an international student in a foreign country with no help the worse can happen, it can lead to depression.

Renaude: Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus and the approach helped you to overcome it?

Carmen: Academically, we don’t know that we can get a tutor for 1 credit and it helps so much. I was struggling with radiology. I didn’t know we had the option of tutoring. I thought I had to pay for it. Later on, they told me that I could get a tutor. I tried it and I got an A for that class. So getting a tutor definitely helps, plus going to worships, vespers, and chapels. They have a lot of advices that you could not imagine you would find there.

Renaude: Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus and what approach helped you to overcome it?

Apoll0s: Well, I’m having a financial challenge. The financial department people are good people. My financial advisor is a nice person. He’s always got suggestions. We always talk about things. We are always trying to get solutions. Well I’ve got my theory. He is from a country in Africa. I don’t remember which country exactly.

Renaude: So then he’s helping you with the financial challenge?
Apollos: It is not that he is financially helping. He has got suggestions. I didn’t have a job. He gave me a few people to call. He told me how many hours I could work. He did the calculations. He told me how that it’s going to be. So he is really a nice person. He’s really done extra efforts. So I mean finance is still a challenge but he’s making it easier.

Renaude: Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus and the approach that helped you to overcome it?

Lee: I’m having a challenging experience now since I took the business classes this semester. It’s been really hard for everyone.

Renaude: So that’s your first business class?

Lee: No I took business classes before. This is a finance class my first semester. But these finance courses are really difficult. It’s not just me. I asked other students. They all say the same thing: this class is crazy

Renaude: Why do you think it is?

Lee: This class is complicated. The material is complicated and difficult.

Renaude: Have you addressed it with your teacher?

Lee: I don’t think that will help because most of the people have problems.

Renaude: That’s why you don’t want to go to him?

Lee: Well he teaches well. The problem is we don’t understand. The material! Huh! I studied for four hours for a test today. I studied a whole day yesterday. The problem is the test (how can I say?). I think he wants us to fail.

Renaude: Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus and the approach that helped you to overcome it?

Esther: I think oh maybe the food- adjusting to the food. I’m foodie. I like food and I’m not a vegetarian. So coming from a Caribbean background, we can cook anything. Anything we cook it can taste nice. We can take tofu and make it taste nice. What are those people doing in the cafeteria? The tofu looks white and blank. They don’t do anything to it. Every time I have to eat at the cafeteria, I go to the seasoning bar and add seasoning to it. I re-season all my food because it’s so blah! I don’t know what they are doing to these things. And on top of that I am allergic to cinnamon. So for breakfast, I don’t know why every food they put cinnamon in it. What happens to regular French toast? Up to regular pancakes? No. I started going every other day. I stopped going to the cafeteria. If I go to the cafeteria it has to be because I am very busy and the
gazebo line is too long and I have no other option. It would be my last resort. I just love food. I eat a lot and I am slim- my metabolism is very high. People tell me all the time “I don’t know where it goes” I don’t know either. I eat a lot like a huge portion. In my home I have a big sandwich to hold me while I am waiting to finish diner and I’d eat a huge portion of pasta, chicken, and rice. I don’t waste anytime and I’d probably eat again before I go to work because I am [going to] be hungry while I am at work and when I come back I am [going to] eat a snack before I go to bed.

Although most of the students shared their experiences with challenges that they confronted on campus, Paulo seemed to genuinely suppose that he did not have any. A couple of participants’ experiences gave them the impression that AU did not advertise their awards to international students, like in the case of Linda. They were under the impression that the awards were not intentionally promoted. According to a student’s experiences, it looked like some international students were not aware of social events besides Pioneer Memorial Church’s Flag Day, church services, food and information on I-20. She alleged that some international students seemed to feel left out and missing out on help and available resources that could be beneficial to them. She perceived international students as a vulnerable group because they are far away from their family and home, and in need of the services that are not advertised. Linda’s experiences led her to assume that this neglect could lead into depression.

However, other students seemed to have positive experiences on campus. It appeared that some did not know that tutoring services were optional and available. It appeared that the knowledge and use of such assistances helped them improve their grades like in Carmen’s case. She was under the impression that doing devotion, attending chapels, and worships were credited for getting good grades besides tutoring services. On the other hand, a couple of students seemed to have found guidance with their financial advisors who provided them with a list of employers and assisted them in
finding a job, which did not appear to be in their job duties, which was Apollos’ case. Although a part time employment did not make the students’ financial challenges go away, it, however, alleviated their burden.

Other students seemed to have experienced challenges with courses that they perceived to be difficult and complicated like it was the case for Lee. It appeared that the material was challenging, causing the tests to be difficult. In his disarray, his experiences gave them the impression that his professors wished for the students in his class to fail. There was another category of students who expressed their disappointment with the cafeteria and gazebo food, like in the case for Esther, accusing it to not be tasty or fulfilling enough and unable to adjust to it. She seemed to find it challenging to satisfy her basic needs for nourishment.

It looked like the overwhelming majority of the participants confronted different kinds of challenges. In terms of the factors that helped them face those challenges, they responded as follows:

**Renaude:** What other factors have helped you face this challenge? What was not helpful about your reaction?

**Paulo:** Again I don’t have challenges. I am comfortable with my professors, the classes, and the methodology.

**Linda:** Hum! God is in control. I just have to remind myself not everything I do will get me there. It automatically belongs to what God has for me. So I have to keep reminding myself that God has me. I keep my relationship with God. I nurture my relationship with God. Yes, and sometimes it’s hard. You have so many things you need to do. Lets say you go to sleep at midnight and then you have to wake up at 7:00 am to have devotions and you are not going to want to do that. So you have to have a time in the day to talk to God. He is the one who knows what you are going through.

**Carmen:** I think it is the outlook. Thinking that if I continue and I fight really hard with this class, then everything is going to be fine. Yes. Outlook!
**Apollos:** Well when I talked to the history teacher nothing he told me was helpful. All he did was to put more pressure and he asked me to put more hours into my study like I am not taking my studies seriously. I have made a big investment in my school. [He was] sounding [as if] I am not dedicated enough. I am dedicated. I’m making a big investment I am taking it seriously. I am taking student loans. Nothing he said was useful to me. I have to find my own way. Not like the financial adviser. He helped me. He gave me a list of people’s name I could contact. I finally found a job. He was very useful.

**Renaude:** What other factors have helped you face this challenge? What was not helpful about your reaction?

**Lee:** He wants us to get C’s or B’s. He doesn’t want us to have A’s.

**Renaude:** Why would you think that?

**Lee:** When I took the test today there [were] 20 problems. Three were about the calculation. It was complicated, but it was the easy part. It took me 10 minutes to complete it. The problem is the True and False and multiple choice [questions].

**Renaude:** Back home you don’t have this testing format?

**Lee:** We do have multiple-choice questions but not true and false. The problem with true and false is if you slightly change one word, it changes everything. I heard that there are only two A’s for the semester.

**Esther:** Actually it’s not (hard to go buy food). I have a good friend. I don’t mind cooking for other people too. If I say “hey, I’m making diner tonight” they’d say, “what do you need?” It’s like a fair exchange that we have now. I cook for them. I know that I don’t have a care. They’d even say, “Hey you can borrow my car and leave” even give like gas money and say “hey would you take me to get groceries? Or the repayment could be that I cook for them. It’s a good arrangement. Praise God!

What actually seemed to help these students confront their challenges was mainly their relationship with God, their faith and belief that God is in charge of their lives like in the case of Linda and many others. God appeared real to her as she had a relationship with Him. She talked to Him and trusted that He knew all about her life, needs, and challenges. Others perceived their confronting factor to be their outlook and the belief that everything would be fine as long as they deployed the necessary efforts to fight
toward their goals like in Carmen’s case. Other students seemed to understand that they could not lean on professors or other people to achieve goals, as it was the case for Lee. He counted on his personal strengths to face and overcome his challenges. He struggled with their challenges and identified the factors that caused the challenges, not the ones that would help him confront them. Others, such as Esther, sought help from friends and strategized to exchange services and food. Cooking for friends in exchange to using their cars to go buy food seemed to be the factors that helped her with food challenges in the cafeteria and the gazebo.

Meaning of Experiences

This section of the interview focused on the meaning of the reflections of the participants’ experiences’ meaning. The word meaning refers to the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants and life. Consistent with the Bronfenbrenner model (1979, 1994), and the fifth of the five interrelated systems, the chronosystem, which provides an extensive viewpoint to the systems method, and the RISE’s fourth component model, which focuses on the resemblance between coping and resilience, referring to students’ reaction in time of adversity, this last section focuses on the participants’ interactions with their challenges and how their understanding of coping.

Renaude: Given that you shared in your last interview that you faced challenges, how do you understand coping?

Lee: Facing it.

Maria: I think that when you have a challenge, you put a lot of your emotions in [it]. Because I really care, when I meet a challenge, a lot of my emotions are in there. When the challenge comes, you need to adapt first. Then remove yourself from the challenge and then see it from like- act neutral as possible. Not to put feelings in it- and say, ”Ok this has happened. This is bad. But most of the time things can’t be fixed.” How do I fix it? How do I adapt with it?”
“What do I have to work this out?” so that’s basically what coping with challenges mean and then seeing what the solution is.

**Carmen:** Hum! I think that the time you [take to] [struggle with things. First of all, you get to know yourself; you get to know what makes you calm down. So, from the beginning if you can figure out what makes me calm down? To me, what makes me calm down is to spend time with friends, eating, cooking for someone else. I like also going to another place. Once I went on the beach, it helped me to relax. Just knowing how to make yourself calm down. And also, why you are stressed- find out the stressor. If the stressor is something I can really change myself. Sometimes, I can try harder, organize myself better, and make the time, or say, “I really can’t do it” or find someone else. For example, say ‘no” to a friend is ok if I have too many things to do. You know the person will understand.

**Linda:** Coping means that, to me, even though you are going through stressful stuff, you are still able to go through things. You still do what you need to do but you do not give up.

**Apollos:** Yes. Like handling.

Every participant attributed a meaning to coping according to his or her understanding and perceptions. To some, it meant, “facing” “handling,” a problem or a situation. To others, it was a process between separating it, evaluating it, and realistically accepting it. The next step was to weigh the challenge on a fair balance and debate whether or not it was adaptable or fixable, which would lead to a viable solution like it was the case for Carmen. To another category of students, it meant, “struggling” with an issue, as it was the case for Linda. The process seemed to indicate that the meaning of coping varied from individuals to individuals. There was the underlying assumption that each person coped differently conferring to his or her personality according to what worked for him or her. Identifying the stressor seemed to facilitate the coping process. Sometimes it appeared that it required to change habits and systems of operation to cope with certain challenges. To other students, it meant the power and strengths to attend the
activities of the daily living while going through challenges without caressing the thought of giving up.

When asked about challenges hindering their integration process, they answered as follows:

**Renaude**: Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?

**Lee**: Well there is [a] composition class, English writing. Now it is called composition writing. At first I was afraid to go to that class. I keep pushing the class. I took it last semester. I wasn’t really confronting the problem. I just kept pushing it [and] running from the class. I was afraid of it. It was hard, but I did it.

**Carmen**: Hum! first [there was] the language (adjustment). Sometimes you feel so home sick. You wonder why you came here. It is so cold. I don’t like it. I think it is part of the experience. It is normal. At the end you see it was worth it. I always remember why I came here and [what] my goals were. That is what keeps me going.

**Linda**: Umm! I would say being financially cleared on time. It is hard to adjust to that every semester because, you don’t know if you should go to class or if you shouldn’t. If I didn’t have my sister or brother pushing me, telling me I need to go, then I believe that would have been the hardest thing for me to adjust to. But because I have a back up system, my siblings are telling me I have to go then that has helped me.

**Renaude**: And why are the reasons you would not be financially cleared in a timely manner?

**Linda**: Umm! One of the main things people don’t understand [is that] my parents are not here. They are in Haiti. So, the Haitian money that they get has to be changed [in]to American dollars. And if anyone knows Haiti, they know that it is not an easy stuff. I don’t know what the currency is now but it’s a struggle. Yeah, so it’s a financial struggle.

**Renaude**: Okay, okay. So, usually, what helps you overcome this challenge or how do you deal with it?

**Linda**: At first, I didn’t know how to deal with it but every semester God comes through. So, at a point you are just like, “why am I stressing?” Every semester is the same thing. But I always make it where I need to be. So just leave it up to God. He’s got you. But you really have to remind yourself of that.
**Renaude:** Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?

**Apollos:** Yea! One of the challenges that I had recently [was that] I had a girlfriend that I dated for three years and a half. We actually got engaged. We broke about three weeks ago. That was a big challenge. At one point I couldn’t take it anymore. I skipped a few classes. I couldn’t do my homework and my quizzes. It [schoolwork] did drop so fast. Boom! Trouble! I dropped to Ds and Fs for some classes. Such a challenge! I could not handle. I’ve been praying about it. It took me four weeks to get back up. And I am doing double efforts to get back up to where I was.

**Renaude:** How did your experiences cause you to reflect?

**Apollos:** The hardships made me tougher and stronger. I was, to be honest with you, broken at some point. Mentally I was not prepared for class at all. I went to class and looked at the teachers. Hear the teacher, but nothing was in my brain. It was a big challenge and my brain was not ready at all. I had to force myself to focus to accept this.

**Renaude:** Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?

**Maria:** Hum! I mean I feel like I’m not really emotional. I feel like it was easier for me to adjust. I’m not the kind of people who are going to cry for her friends. No! I mean I miss them. I mean for being Hispanic, I am more independent. And I don’t blame my problems on being in the U.S. or on being international. I don’t think I should blame my problems on anything like that. So I don’t put myself in the position like, “I have this problem because I’m here so that I should go back home. I feel like they are independent. I have a problem because it’s life. Even if I have a problem here or home, I see it like it’s life.

As the participants went through various challenges, it appeared that there were times they hindered their adjustment process like in Lee’s case. He seemed to have experienced linguistic challenges outside and inside the classroom. He perceived writing English as daunting and created fear in him, which he overcame at the end by reminding himself of his purpose for being here.

Other students’ obstructions seemed to be financial hardships, like in Carmen’s case, impacting her academically. She faced financial clearance every semester because
the money exchange from her country to the U.S. did not work in her favor. It looked like that situation created much stress for her. But at the end, she submitted that challenge to God for a solution.

For other international students, like it was the case for Apollos, his most significant challenge was sentimental where he found himself disconsolate over broken relationships taking over his life, significantly impacting him academically, sentimentally, emotionally and psychologically. It looked like it took him prayers and personal efforts to overcome that challenge.

On the other hand, there was another category of international students. Nothing seemed to be able to hinder their adjustment here because of their viewpoints on life like in Maria’s case. She perceived life as being the same anywhere, whether at home or in the host country. She did not seem to blame her challenges on internationalization but as a reality of life. Therefore, nothing appeared to hinder her adjustment.

It looked like that the participants have learned meaningful lessons from their coping strategies as they adjusted here. They are as follows:

**Renaude:** What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here?

**Lee:** I think [that] the most [challenging] problem, the most important thing I learned is patience and I learned that people want to help if you ask them they are willing to help. I think if you ask for help, they will help you.

**Renaude:** How did your experiences change your opinion?

**Lee:** Well I did not really have an opinion when I got here. Oh, there is something, in South Korea, SDA is considered like “bad religion” because they believe in Sabbath Saturday unlike other denominations they go to church on Sunday. So there was some like – hum- hum stereotype (it came to me). But I came here I saw it was not true. When I came here I saw that SDAs are most moderate and polite and quiet people. I knew the good thing when I entered the airport an officer was working in the custom. I got stuck in the custom for like half an hour, I don’t know why he did it. He is not supposed to do it. He saw my
I-20, he said SDAs are cool, moderate, polite, and quiet. I am not sure he was supposed to do that.

**Renaude**: What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here?

**Maria**: I learned a lot about how people react to different things because it’s not how you know it. People deal differently to different things in every culture. So, I learned a lot about that. It helps me to understand to know people more and to be able to reach out to people. So, that bettered my relation with people. It’s going to better my life with people. I learned a lot about that. Like with my relationship with my boyfriend I learn a lot how to interact because it is a different culture—different way of seeing—different beliefs. I also learn to be more flexible because like I feel like it’s not how I see life. For example, back home, everyone is Peruvian, everyone sees life the same way, and so I also learn how people are different. So I am more flexible with that. Like if I am more flexible I will accept things. Hopefully, I am open-minded now. Hum! yea!

**Carmen**: Sharing? It is not easy. It is crazy. I came here you know. I met so many people. I changed so much. I have grown so much. And it is definitely; you know, spiritual growth, physical growth. I look differently now. You know how do you say “corpus men spirit?” You know, body, mind and spirit. I have changed in all those aspects. Despite of the challenges that you face here, it was a good experience. Right! Positive experience. You feel that you are leaving AU with things that you didn’t bring in with you.

**Renaude**: How did your experiences change your opinion?

**Carmen**: Well, I think one of the good things from going another place is that you get to know yourself better. People who don’t know you surround you. You get to know yourself better, to know how you interact with people. Sometime you say I don’t like to talk to other people. In reality you are shy you don’t know how to approach people. Also, another thing I learned: to stress less. Definitely, stressing won’t solve my problems. What else did I learn? It is not about degrees. Achieving something in life is about giving yourself opportunities. Staying here is hard. When you get here you will figure it out.

**Renaude**: What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here?

**Linda**: I learned that you would have to adjust everywhere you go. Life is about adjustments. You have to know when to sit down and chill and relax or when to get up and go, when it’s to get up and run. It’s all about the right moments and the right actions.

**Renaude**: Okay. So how do you know the right actions?
**Linda:** Umm, you will know. One of the main things again is prayer. Prayer is the main thing. And umm sometimes you will just know because you feel like, I don’t know, as a person you will feel like hey, this is what I need to do now.

**Renaude:** Okay. So, how did these experiences change your opinion?

**Linda:** Yeah, I thought life was easy. It’s not. I thought life in America would be so much easier. That’s a lie. Even for non-international students, they are still struggling. So, I’ve learned that life is not easy. You have to have a backup system and you have to believe in something or in someone. You have to believe in God basically and you have to have your family behind you. If not, I seriously don’t know how others make it. I don’t know. That’s my opinion. You have to trust.

**Renaude:** Okay, Okay. So, how did these experiences cause you to reflect? I guess you already answered that.

**Linda:** Umm yeah. It showed me how to be appreciative. It showed me how to be content with what I have and umm. And not to take anything for granted. Yeah, that’s one of them. I used to… anyway. Be grateful. Be thankful for every little thing. Yes.

**Renaude:** What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here?

**Apollos:** Well I think if I am in school I have to be focused on school. If I have a girlfriend I have to be committed on a girlfriend because they both need a lot of commitment. That’s why she broke up because she asked for commitment. They both need a lot of commitment it’s this or that. So focus on school.

**Renaude:** What lessons have you learned in general as you are adjusting here?

**Apollos:** It’s not easy to be a student. It’s not easy but I understand that fire shapes medal. So college is challenging. I think it should be designed this way. I think College is not just homework. It’s not just homework and assignments and projects. College is a major perspective. I heard of a lot people saying that they don’t use 100% of what they learn in college in their career like in engineering. But I think what they use is how to face all these challenges and still keep going. That’s a lesson that I’m trying to apply in my life.

The international students’ experiences and challenges confronted, helped them to learn and change their opinions, and caused them to reflect as they adjusted here. Some seemed to have learned patience and the notion that American people like to help if you ask for it as it was the case for Lee. His experiences gave him the impression that some
non-SDA students were under the assumption that SDAs’ reputation was questionable due to their observance of the Sabbath day on Saturday. Lee’s experiences led him to admit that his conception about SDAs was erroneous as they were “moderate, quiet, and polite people”, which was confirmed by an airport custom officer.

Others improved their understanding of people, hence, their relationships, and communication with them like it was the case with Maria. She has learned the joy of diversity, which taught her the notion of flexibility and open-mindedness. Several learned how to have a better knowledge of themselves, which helped extirpate timidity and foster relationships with others such as Carmen’s case. She learned to reduce stress in her life. Another lesson learned, seemed to indicate that obtaining good grades was not her real purpose in life. It was more about the learning opportunities that were offered while she was confronting her challenges.

Another category of participants, like Linda’s case, learned that adjustment is necessary everywhere, not just in host countries because life is about change, “the right actions and the right moments.” Ultimately, she assumed that prayer was her primary concern. She trusted in prayers and a relationship with God as her main mechanism. She also learned that her presuppositions about life being easy in the U.S., was a myth. She witnessed that even domestic students had to struggle. She seemed to have realized that she could only count on her relationship with God and her family support as her main coping mechanism. As she reflected on her issues, she learned to be grateful and appreciative for everything and not take anything for granted.

Another group learned that school couldn’t be mixed with romance, as it was the case for Apollos. Having a girlfriend required a commitment while school demanded full
focus. He learned that he could not handle both romance and school together. As he reflected, he understood that college was a challenging undertaking that required more than homework, projects, and assignments. The real challenge remained to keep focused and remained committed as he was confronting his problems and yet overcome them. That lesson seemed to be ongoing.

When asked about friends who might have left AU because of their inability to cope with their challenges, very few had knowledge of such information.

**Renaude:** Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?

**Carmen:** Hum! Many people. As I said, if you decide to come here you need to remember why you came here. It has to be a really strong reason because classes are not easy at all. I don’t like winter at all. Just to keep myself happy during wintertime is another real struggle. So, you know, surrounding yourself with people who also have the goal of graduating here helps. If you are surrounded of people who are thinking of leaving, you will leave too. You know I always had to remind myself that I am not them, I am not like them. I have my goal and I have to keep trying. Reminding myself that I am not them and that I don’t have the same challenges, you know, we don’t have the same problems, the same abilities, reminding myself of things that I have already accomplished in the past. Things are not easy. If you make it through the first year you have to be proud of yourself. Celebrating every success and achievement. I think that is the key to getting all the way.

**Renaude:** So, your friends who left because they couldn’t cope, do you know what challenges they had?

**Carmen:** Everybody had different challenges. I have friends who left because of stress, they get sick. Extremely sick like stress expresses itself in the body in so many ways. Sometimes this person has this. But in reality it is stress. I have friends that left because they were sick. I had friends because of finances, because they didn’t like the school, the environment, the religion, the institution “they don’t let me do what I want.” They don’t like curfews. They don’t like…yeah, as you said, because not enough freedom. I have friends for example who left because she already had a degree. She decided to leave because she did not need another degree.

**Renaude:** Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?
Linda: Umm! I don’t think they leave, from the stories I’ve heard, they leave because they can’t pay, not because they can’t cope. When you talk to other people, even if they want to quit they can’t because of their. I don’t know, being international somehow shows you that your parents are really trying to make you successful. So they don’t really quit because they want to, they quit because they can’t afford it.

Esther: Yea. I have a friend who came here during my freshman year and left. I think for him, coming from home, I mean he grew up differently than I did. We go to the same church. He couldn’t. Hum! That was too much. Being away from home not being able to connect with his siblings and mom and dad. He didn’t have anyone to push him to keep up with work and stuff like that. And it was very easy to fall into like- we call it- winter depression. It gets really cold and dark and gloomy. You really need to make sure you properly get your vitamin C- you know I went through that too. I just wanted to make sure. I guess because of the person that I am I had to talk myself out of it a lot of times. I mean it’s hard. I know with him too. He really struggled with getting out of bed and actually wanted to go outside. He went through this depressed phase to the point he started doing bad in his classes and said “this is not the place for me” He is back home. He is doing much better now.

It appeared that leaving AU half way because of the inability to survive the rigorous winter depression or the various challenges in their academic journey was not a new concept for some participants such as Carmen, Linda, and Esther. They seemed to have seen other students and friends pack up and leave for diverse reasons and the temptations to do the same flared them. It seemed that those students left because of stress, sickness, financial challenges, their dislike of the university rules, the religion, lack of freedom, the inability to adjust, and because they already obtained a degree and did not need a second one. According to Carmen, Linda, and Esther’s friends’ experiences, those students have struggled and came to a point where they decided that they could not stay here anymore because they could no longer cope with their challenges despite of their efforts.
However, those who remained seemed to face the same kinds of trials and yet appeared to survive them because of their attitude. They talked to themselves; they reminded themselves why they were here; they set their eyes on their goals; they stayed away from negative students; they took their vitamin Cs, they relinquished control over their lives to God, and they celebrated every success or achievement like booking the first year for example as it was the case for Carmen.

The participants in this study did not seem to give any indication that they wanted to give up with their challenges. Their eyes appeared to be set on their future as a motivation to complete their degrees until the end. When asked about their future plans, they answered the following:

**Renaude:** Where do you see yourself in the future?

**Lee:** Well I’m not quite sure. I’m trying to go back to Korea after I graduate. Some of my advisors and my pastor, they recommend that I stay here longer.

**Maria:** Hum! I want to work for a while. I want to work in the U.S. I’m hoping I’ll get a job when I get my visa. Hum! I don’t want to go back to Peru. I feel like my life is already here. I feel like I like the culture here too. And then I have friends here- I have people here who appreciate my values- over there my family does, but no one else. I feel like I have already adapted to this type of culture and environment. I’d like to stay here. There are a lot of indecisive things in the air. I don’t know if I am going to get the visa. I don’t know. I feel like it’s a lot of stuff because of the visa. So that’s a little scary. But I would like to find a stable job. But ultimately I’d like to do my master too there years after I start working. I know I am not gonna get my doctorate. So, I’d like to go to a university.

**Renaude:** Not Andrews?

**Maria:** No. I mean it’s just because of business when you start working and people look at you and they ask you where you came from. What university? I want to go to a well-known university. I would really like that. And my parents would like that too. I say I want to get married and have kids before thirty. So when I get 26 I’ll get engaged and get married after that. But I mean, no one knows. Hopefully it will work out.
Renaude: As we close the interview is there anything you would like to share?

Maria: I feel like that God guides every step I make. I feel like every time I have an issue even though I wasn’t praying at the time or like maybe too tired to go to church, I could just pray about it. I feel like it has helped me a lot. Now I am trying praying in the morning- praying in the night. It needs to be better. But when I came here, I was “yes, no, maybe not right now.” I had a roommate. She was very nice. She would pray every morning- every night. It really helped me out. I guess now all the values that I was taught at home I am using them now here.

Renaude: Where do you see yourself in the future?

Carmen: I still have to do my master.

Renaude: Are you planning to come back here for your master?

Carmen: Here the program is new. I don’t want professors to be experimenting with me. It is expensive. I really want quality education. I am not planning to go back home anytime soon. I see myself as a missionary. I have applied for the OPT.

Renaude: What does OPT mean? What does it stand for?

Carmen: OPT is the opportunity for international students to stay in the country after their undergrad to work with a company.

Renaude: Where do you see yourself in the future?

Linda: Umm, I haven’t really thought about the future yet. I am hoping I can get a Master’s degree, not at Andrews but somewhere else.

Renaude: Why not at Andrews University?

Linda: No problem. I don’t think I get… I think that other schools can offer me more for what I am worth. I think if that makes sense. I think that Andrews I think that I am in a bubble. God says go preach go tell people of the gospel. Everyone here knows the gospel. What is my point? What is the point of me staying here? I felt like I can accomplish more of what God wants me to do if I go to somewhere else, somewhere else where people don’t know him somewhere else where I can have more of an impact and be more useful to God.

Renaude: As we close the interview is there anything you would like to share?

Linda: Um, I think it is good for international students to benefit from meeting other international students, not for anything else but to know that there are
others going through the same stuff. I remember I had a friend that I worked with and it wasn’t until their graduation that they told me that they would cry every Friday night and they were not SDA and they had no one who invited them to vespers (Loneliness) they had no one to relate to. I know that Andrews is an international school and prides itself on being an international school with international students. But when you have 3500 students it’s hard to find that one student that is international and locate them that can help you go through it but again everyone should have a support system so I think that they can do a better job of having them in the same room and having them keep in touch with each other. I don’t know. And no one likes to go to that counseling center that they have because no one likes to think that they are depressed or have a problem. You know?

Renaude: Where do you see yourself in the future?

Apollos: I see myself as airspace engineer. When I am done with my mechanical engineer degree. I am going to take [on] a bigger challenge of aerospace engineer, which is [a] little complicated. But I am really interested in that field. I see myself as a manager in some institution that has something to do with aerospace engineering

Renaude: Are you planning to stay here or go back home?

Apollos: It depends on the opportunities. Hum! First when I came to the U.S. I was planning to remain in the U.S. But I want to go to those Arab countries that have a lot of money. They have some good use for mechanical engineers like Dubay, I mean. In my country, 70% or 80 % of engineers and teachers they all go to those Golf countries. They have a lot of money. What happens with these people is that they are so smart. They want to take teachers. Give them a lot of money – teach my generation and my generation will come and I won’t need you anymore. They always need engineers. Have you ever been to Dubay?

While some students were planning to go back home like in Lee’s case, others wished to remain in the U.S. as in Maria’s, acquire employment, pursue their education, get married and create a family. It looked like most had no desire to return to AU because they were under the impression that they needed to achieve their master’s from a “well-known university” or a program that has a long-standing history as it was the case for Maria, Carmen and Linda. Others preferred to attend another university to pursue their education because they seemed to understand that they would have better opportunities to
spread the Gospel and witness for God as they did not think that particular need would be
met here where the dominant majority of people were SDAs like in Linda’s and Carmen’s
cases.

Immigration issues seemed to be a huge concern to them to obtain a visa that
would allow them to remain in the country, as it was the case for Maria. Others were
more interested in mission work such as Carmen’s case. She was hoping to acquire the
OPT, which translated into the opportunity for international students to stay in the
country after her undergraduate studies to work with a company. While several students
were interested in missionary work and the fulfilling Jesus’ Commission to preach the
Gospel, many where motivated by their future plans to obtain good paid jobs, which was
the case for Apollos. He had no definite plans; it all depended on where the highest salary
was offered, whether in the U.S. or elsewhere. Consequently, he chose majors that were
in demand that would help him fulfill his dreams.

These students’ refusal to return home was based on the premise that they had
adapted to the culture, values, and the friendships that they have made here, as it was the
case for Maria. Ultimately, Maria gave credits to God for her achievement, as she
believed in God’s constant presence in her life whether she prayed or not. She also
appreciated the learning experiences through her challenges. Several expressed the need
for AU to have international students mingle together and have a support system for them
especially the non-SDAs as they tended to experience depression and loneliness as they
would not ask for help as it was the case for Linda. Carmen conveyed her gratitude to AU
for partaking in their “corpus, men, spirit” (physical, spiritual, intellectual) growth. In the
section below, the participants expressed their sentiments about their journey at AU and
made some suggestions to improve services for forthcoming students although they are addressed to both students and administrators.

**Renaude**: Is there anything else, as you close the interview, you feel you would like to share? Something I didn’t ask, something you think is important to the study that people could benefit from?

**Wan**: I think make it more fun and invite interesting people. Like for the week of prayer, the preacher’s topic was very interesting and a lot of people came. Some people don’t talk about their experience and they make it boring.

**Apollos**: I think arrange international events. My sister is at La Sierra. I went to visit her. They have an international office where they always arrange events for international students. One time, they went to Hollywood. They attended a TV show. People laughed during TV shows. I went there with them actually. They have a lot of activities for international students. If I say to my friends back home that the events are so exciting, it will have a good effect on them. They would want to come here. It will be so exciting that it will bring a lot of international students here and more diverse.

**Linda**: Um, I think it is good for international students to benefit from meeting other international students. Not for anything else but to know that there are others going through the same stuff [confronting the same challenges]. I remember I had a friend that I worked with and it wasn’t until their graduation that they told me that they would cry every Friday night and they were not SDA and they had no one who invited them to vespers (loneliness) they had no one to relate to. I know that Andrews is an international school and prides itself on being an international school with international students. But when you have 3500 students its hard to find that one student that is international and locate them that can help you go through it but again everyone should have a support system so I think that they can do a better job of having them in the same room and having them keep in touch with each other. I don’t know. And no one likes to go to that counseling center that they have because no one likes to think that they are depressed or have a problem.

**Renaude**: Do you think students could be more open to other international students rather than going to Counselors?

**Linda**: Yes, exactly. They can cope better. They can relate to each other.

**Renaude**: Besides these recommendations, are there others you could make to Andrews University to make international student’s life better, less difficult, if not easier?
Linda: Um! Be on top of things! Like, SFS, again the I-20 stuff, students should not have to call 5 times a day to get their I-20. No! You are a school. You have things to do. Do not let people call you and be mad because it causes you to lose students and money and you do not want that. So, a lot of international students would be more than happy to come here. Because anywhere you go, you say Andrews is the sanctuary to them. Anywhere you go in the Caribbean once you say Andrews, it’s like, and “I want to send my kids there.” But in reality, it’s not right! Yeah, it’s not as nice as it sounds.

Renaude: So, what do you think Andrews could do better for international students?

Linda: Um! I know that they provide the APS. But that’s okay, if you are paying 20 something thousand dollars per year. 13 something a semester and you offer 7500 dollars for a year, not a semester, a year. What is that really going to do for an international student? I mean I don’t think when they created that APS scholarship process and that’s basically the only thing international students get. It depends on your ACT and GPA. Even non-international students get it too. But that depends on your GPA and SAT. And when you are international, it’s hard to calculate your GPA and SAT. I don’t think its fair process.

Renaude: So, you think it’s not a fair process?

Linda: Exactly. Most of them do not speak English. So they cannot have a high score of the SAT. It’s catch 22. Why are you giving me something based on SAT and my GPA? In Haiti, we don’t technically have GPAs. So, they have to do a translation and when they translate it, it lowers your GPA, which devalues. You know, transferring your credits to Andrews is the most difficult thing you have to do because Andrews is so picky as to what it takes and doesn’t take. I remember I was transferring my school classes from the High School to Andrews Academy and they wouldn’t accept it. They wanted me to take the classes again and I was like what? From Berrien Springs High School to Andrews Academy? I had to write to the board because I said no. I passed it with an A, and I was like I am not taking the class again, no way. I am not going to pay for that class when I took it for free. It’s the worse thing ever.

Renaude: How did you overcome this challenge?

Linda: Oh, I wrote a letter to the board, explaining that there was no way I would take the class and they would have to take the credit.

Renaude: Did they waive it?

Linda: Sometimes you just have to do what you have to do. I understand they think more of the domestic students because it’s easy for them. They just have
to make sure they get good grades and do SAT and GPA. But really, that’s the only scholarship you have to offer to international students when they get scholarships for leadership and being a leader at their schools or like other things that international students cannot have. Exactly! We get that we are international and we have to pay to be here, but you got to help us.

Renaude: How do you think that they can improve in this area? What can they do better?

Linda: More scholarships could help them improve in this area. Even if you make it something they have to fight for. At least you know you offer it. Although not everyone can get it, but if they fight enough they can get it. Everyone can’t get it just seems like okay. What you have to have is one thing that everyone can get and then the best international student can get it.

Renaude: How do you think they would compete for it? What do you think would be the best way?

Linda: Let’s say for each department, the person with the highest GPA for that semester. Let’s say in the social work department there are 10 international students in that department and the person who has the highest GPA for both semesters combined gets a scholarship for next year and it doesn’t have to be a 4 year thing but it can be like one year and if they want it again then go for it again. And then they have this thing where you can cosign a loan. Well let’s think about this. An international student from France is coming here and has no family here and you want that person to find someone who is in the USA to cosign their loan when that person doesn’t even know that student and we all know that no one in America wants to mess up their credit. So how exactly does that work?

Renaude: As we close the interview, is there anything you would like to share?

Esther: Hum I did find the general requirements weird. I’m not good with math and science. So, I thought that out of high school, I’d go to the university. But there are so many general questions that I thought that it felt like going to high school all over again in terms of the curriculum. Other than that I know that there is a big ministry to be in the Deliverance Mass Choir. It’s important that you find your purpose and make sure you are doing some kind of ministry. Being involved in ministry is very important and should be something you really pray about when you come to Andrews because it is easy to get caught up and just be a student. But you realize you’re at a time now where you have a lot of opportunities to reach out and do a lot of good things for people. In doing that it helps you to get closer to God and helps bring out a lot of your own purpose as an individual for yourself because as for me I know specifically being in the choir, learning and master my vocal cord led me to praise team opportunities and realize that people actually consider this as a gift and a
ministry. I m like, “hey God is my music considered like a ministry to people? I realized later in the game that people do get blessed in their ministry. I really had to sit down and reflect on my own contribution to this whole spiritual society. What am I contributing to? Is my involvement in ministry something I’m proud about? I also love the fact that I had opportunities at Andrews. Even though I had so many challenges I wouldn’t change it. I would not regret it. I would do it all over again the exact thing because in other school you wouldn’t have those opportunities to excel spiritually. That’s not a factor in public schools. So having the opportunity to excel and figure out what I need to do in terms of my career and who I need to be in terms of my purpose and who I need to reach in terms of my mission and my spiritual goals, all came into play. I am glad I came to Andrews and I am grateful for that.

**Renaude:** Is there anything that you see that AU could have done differently?

**Esther:** Oh yea oh yea! They could something with their information system. Like you would think that your advisors are supposed to tell you the things that you are supposed to know, the resources? I understand that there are a lot of things students are responsible for. There is a lot of miscommunication amongst departments and between heads at AU. When graduation time comes up you do a lot of running around between teachers and advisors, departments’ heads and the record administration. I have not seen anybody not having difficulties trying to get their stuff in. so I feel that AU needs to work on that a lot- even revising certain requirements- like for example, I was at the education system. One of the reasons was the MTCC= one of the test that Michigan requires and for me it was a challenge to do that because it is a standardized test for one. I’m not a US citizen, so the first questions they asked, I don’t know. So, I automatically failed twice. I am not planning on staying here to teach. So why do we have to take a MI test? I have friends who are not staying here and returning to NY, GA. So, why do they need to take a MI test? A state test is required when you are trying to teach in the state. They told us we had to take certain courses because of the requirements. I know a lot of people had a challenge with that too. I don’t know if revising that would be better. I know a lot of people had issues with their department getting all the things they need to get done to graduate, having a level of consistency because not everyone is on the same page. Whether they are using the same rules, there is no consistency that I see through the departments. There is no cohesion there. So I think that’s one place they really need to work on.

**Renaude:** What do you mean by consistency?

**Esther:** Consistency? One person does not know what the next is doing and then in terms of the requirements I’m required to take a set of general courses for education. Those courses are different. So if I were to change from education to French, they don’t. You know, what I mean is that level of communication was not expressed. My advisors did not tell me that those
general courses change for psychology to education. A lot of people told that there was ways you can do things and they change those ways and those loopholes and not everybody is aware of them and depending of which advisor you’re talking to, you get different responses. So, there are multiple advisors in a department. It depends on which one you find, you get a different route or a different method to complete your degree. I mean it’s crazy. I mean you can get messed up depending on the advisor you get. They give you general information on paper, but the advice they give you is very different. I know it for a fact because I have multiple people who were in classes with me. Their advisors would tell them to do one thing and another would tell them something else. I’ll go back and check and say ok “which one is better for me?” which one makes more sense? And this is the thing. If I’m going to be independent and do all this work by myself, why do I need an advisor? You know? What is the point? I have to do all this work, all this stuff on my own anyway. I double-check everything. What was the purpose of that?

As the participants shared their opinion about recommendations for improvement in serving international students, their answers varied from a personal to a general scope. Wan, a non-SDA, raised her personal interest in her spiritual need that could be better be addressed if preachers were to share personal stories to make sermons more engaging. In sharing the activities that took place when Apollos went to visit his sister at La Sierra University, he implicitly invited AU to emulate them, which, he understood, would increase enrollment. Linda’s sharing took a different tone, from specific to general, and was more deeply engaged between students and administrators. She addressed the need for AU to get more involved in the lives of international students to decrease or prevent loneliness as they are confronting challenges. In an attempt to address this issue, she suggested that AU organizes meetings to allow international students to meet their peers to create friendships with the rationale that students could be more open to their peers than therapists in facing loneliness. Linda’s also addressed suggestions to the international student department that handles pre-arrival legal services to forthcoming students on the basis that the needs are not being addressed in a timely manner. She
recommended that AU raise the bar to meet to defend its reputation and marketable position worldwide.

Linda did not think that the scholarship process for international versus domestic students was fair due to the American College Testing (ACT) and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) standardized tests and the GPA assessments. She shared an experience at the Andrews Academy where they asked her to retake a course for admission. She had to write a letter to the board for approval as she found it unnecessary to pay for a course that she already took for free. She asserted that AU ought to develop new criteria for competition that would seem fair for international students to have a fighting chance. With the linguistic challenge, she understood that international students were at a disadvantage competing against domestic students. Therefore, she recommended that AU explore more scholarships for this group and revamp the criteria to allow a fighting chance for all.

Esther’s comments were of a different nature. Although she complained about the curriculum that she found challenging because of the differences from her former home school, she focused more on her spiritual experience at AU. She expressed her contentment to have partaken in a singing ministry for the Lord. It looked like this experience was meaningful to her spiritual life. As he closed, her sharing took a different turn as she recalled unfortunate experiences with different departments as she was getting everything ready for her approaching graduation. She complained not only of a lack of system thinking between the different departments, but also of the unnecessary need to take the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC). She did not feel it necessary for international students who are not going to teach in the US to take these tests. She also
touched on the communication system between students and advisors, which she felt was inconsistent. The underlining suggestion was for AU to provide a uniform orientation to all advisors and revamp the MTTC policies.

**Summary**

Chapter 4 sought to identify bridges not only in the academic and professional knowledge but also to understand the multifaceted challenges confronting international students and their coping mechanisms. It also analyzed 10 international undergraduate young adult students who provided their personal stories, experiences, and challenges in a qualitative manner to add to this group gap. Through the interview process, each participant narrated their life history, the details and meaning of their experiences. Chapter 4 described the reality behind the international undergraduate student’s experiences and challenges through their voices, and understand their personal, environmental, and motivational coping factors.

The stories of these participants were apportioned into two significant categories: the SDA and the non-SDA international undergraduate students. It was interesting to see that there were similarities and differences among the participants’ stories based on their cultural (personal, religious, and social experiences), their needs, their diversity, their upbringings, their ties to their families, their challenges, their viewpoints, their finances and their meaning of coping.

The sharing of these participants were useful and constituted positive and productive recommendations for prospective international students, administrators, and student life services.
The most shared challenges seemed to be linguistic, curricular, and financial. One student stated that every semester she experienced financial clearance issues, which caused her much stress. Another student experienced heart brokenness, which he overcame both with his faith in God, his own strengths, and his friends’ help. Faith in God appeared to dominate the participants’ coping strategies in all the themes. These similarities and differences in the experiences and challenges confronted will constitute the base to find the emerging themes in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative research study was to explore the cultural, linguistic, curricular, financial challenges, and coping mechanisms of 10 international undergraduate students at AU. Chapter 5 cross-analyzed the previously collected data from the 10 participants, interconnected, and synthesized the themes that emerged from the data. It took the themes and the cross-themes beyond what participants said and why they said it, to come away with some deeper and richer understanding and significance.

Four themes emerged from the data as follow:

1. Community support with family support and university system serving as sub-themes,
2. Motivation and self-motivation and sub-themes such as, academic activities, driving through the snow and future plans serving as examples,
3. Self-determination, and
4. Relationship with God and sub-themes, namely, prayer and belief in the power of God, emerging as examples. These themes and subthemes helped answer the research questions:
1. What are the cultural (personal, social, and religious), linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the challenges confronting international undergraduate students?

2. How do international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges?

**Definition of Coping**

Coping, bears a similitude to resilience, referring to students’ reaction in face of adversity, which is portrayed as “adaptive or endurance resilience” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 840). Psychology introduces resilience as a vigorous progression that brings a person to encouragingly cope regardless of tense and traumatic experiences (Masten, 1994; Staudinger et al., 1995). A person demonstrates resilience through his or her interactions with the environment in which he or she lives based on particular circumstances (Harvey, 2007). For instance, an international student may show high resilience in relationship to adaption and low resilience in academic achievement. Personal and cultural beliefs, and values collectively impact an individual’s way of navigating his or her surroundings (Ungar, 2008).

The awareness and knowledge of resilience all carry an impact on culture. Cicchetti and Cohen (1995) predominantly regard resilience as a natural phenomenon that can be supported by suitable interferences in the environment in which the participant lives. Notwithstanding, Cicchetti and Cohen (1995) consider resilience as a notion in various situations and frameworks.

Therefore, coping, in the context of this study, refers to the international undergraduate students’ use of personal, inner strengths, endurance, skills, and environmental factors to confront challenges and overcome them. When their challenges
hindered their adjustment, how they understood coping and what it meant to them helped them to overcome. Coping mechanisms were described in this study, as a participant’s support from family, the community, and the environment, their inner tools, techniques, or strategies, and conceptions of God to rise above their challenges.

All the participants, in this study, faced challenges to some degree and have unpacked their own meaning and understanding of coping. The overpowering majority of the participants defined “coping” as “an “exercise of faith in God,” “going through the motion,” “facing a challenge,” “a strategy to fix a challenge,” “do what needs to be done,” or “handling.” The majority of the students, especially the Adventists, used their faith, prayer, and spirituality as their major impetus to rise above their trials. Throughout their stories, their definition and how they coped with challenges, made a significant difference in the outcomes. Table 2 describes the main themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data in response to the research questions.

**Community Support**

“Community for long cannot feed on itself; it can only flourish where always the boundaries are giving way to the coming of others from beyond them - unknown and undiscovered brothers.” (Thurman, 1971, p. 6).

This section discusses how the support of family and the university system as a community helped international undergraduate students confront their challenges and rise above them.

**Family Support**

Ungar (2008) maintained that family values collectively stimulate an individual’s way of navigating his or her surroundings.
Table 2

**Background Information**

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<th>Sub Categories</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
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<td>Determination</td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal, academic, religious, cultural, linguistic, curricular, financial</td>
<td>Potential, belief in their personal strengths, skills and desires.</td>
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<td>Community Support</td>
<td>The university system</td>
<td>Personal, academic, religious, cultural, linguistic, curricular, financial</td>
<td>Help, resources available on campus, university culture, diversity, friendship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Support</td>
<td>Personal, loneliness, linguistic,</td>
<td>Sense of gratitude, respect, love and indebtedness</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>curricular</td>
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In this study, international undergraduate students’ method of coping with challenges is tinted with their parents and family’s positive influences. One common trait found in international students was their close relationship with their family abroad. Many conveyed their closeness to their family using different expressions such as, “my parents, huh! We have a good relationship,” “my relationship, you know, is a good one” [Akim] “my parents are really nice, you know? I admire them a lot. They are very loyal to me, I always look after them” [Chen]. “It’s a strong relationship. They made sure that I did everything the right way. There was some good supervision” [Apollos]. “I think I’m pretty close to everyone. We were quite close with our grandparents” [Lee]. “As a family, it’s important to be close to each family member. My family is the only people I trust” [Linda]. International students expressed the bond and loyalty that linked them to their family members. They valued their relationship and closeness, and showed their admiration for their loved ones. One student shared the kind of relationship she had with her family.

In my immediate family, all of us are really close. So we have our own relationships among the four of us, my mom, dad, my sister and [I]. But even my mom my sister, and [I]. We have our mini relationships among all of us. We get along very well. [Esther]

She appreciated the sub-relationships with her family that kept them close. She considered her family members as a support system on which she could count on to assist her with their problems. For every challenge, she particularly addressed the person she knew was equipped or positioned to help her confront it. A student asserted, referring to her relationship to her sister, “We have this type of relationship that when we are far, we are fine. We are there when we need each other [Maria].
They could pull family whenever needed to help with their challenges. Although the distance between international undergraduate students and their family was far-removed, they communicated in various ways. They spoke on the phone, “sometimes I call her (Mom)” [Akim]. One student stated,

As a unit, I try to give them as much time as I can. I try to speak to my parents at least twice a week. My brother and my sister, I talk to them every day we have [a] chat group so we talk daily, every minute.” [Linda]

They communicated with their parents and siblings regularly. Their relationship with their siblings seemed closer than her parents. They also communicated via Facebook, Skype, and other electronic devices. One student communicated with family and friends on Facebook.

I’ll be on Facebook the whole time. I have my family and my friends in Egypt. That’s how I communicate with them. We kind of talk like that and try to make it social. We talk and stuff like that. It’s good for me. But when I’m alone I tend to lose my attention very quickly. I try to do something that makes noise. I can’t study in a place [that is] hundred percent silent. If I don’t have a person around me, I lose my attention very quickly. That’s it! [Apollos]

He found studying in a quiet place challenging. His friends and family helped him study on Facebook. Communication constituted a tool that international undergraduate students used to confront challenges. Family support seemed to create a sense of responsibility toward parents. By responsibility, I mean, a sense of sensibility, respect, gratitude, expectations, indebtedness, and pride that pushed and encouraged them to find ways to cope with their challenges. Family support was also significantly relevant to international undergraduate students especially when it came to financial matters. A student posited,

My parents - huh - we have a good relationship. My parents support me economically. I don’t have to worry about money. I am really blessed about it. I am really grateful for that. But by doing that they are also – they support us my
sister and I, but our role is do good in school. We have a good relationship but we also have this role that we need to fulfill to keep them happy. [Maria]

She perceived her parents’ economic support as an obligation for her to achieve educationally like it was the case for most students. There was the underlying understanding that they had to please their parents by getting good grades. International undergraduate students’ parents’ financial support not only fostered gratitude from students, but also created the need to please them by succeeding academically. A student shared how she was committed to meet her parents’ expectations of good grades.

I like to have good grades. So then hum I am really studious. So, most of the time I am really studying and try to get good grades. I like to have A’s and stuff because of my family [and] because of their expectations they’ve ingrained it in me. Now I have to study a lot to make it happen. Now I also have great expectations for me. [Maria]

Another student made the same comment about parental expectations of good grades in exchange for sending him to the U.S.

My mother and father, they are not rich. They have to really work hard to support me. I had to promise my mother, “I am really going to get A’s and B’s here” [for her] to send me here. [Chen]

These students felt indebted to their parents and they were appreciative of their efforts to send them abroad. In return for their parents’ financial provisions, they felt indebted to them and accountable to get good grades. They were committed to fulfill their agreements with their parents because they understood that they made sacrifices for their coming here. In fact, the latter student declared, “I think my parents have other relatives who helped them financially.” [Chen]

In some cases, students received financial help from family members to help them meet tuition expenses for their children. International students valued their parents’ investments in their education. The thought that their parents could be disappointed in
them gave them the courage to face their challenges. Several valued family’s emotional support. A student shared how he would have loved to contact his relatives when he first came to the country.

When I came to Virginia I was by myself. I had cousins in Maryland but they didn’t even know that I came to the States. They could have been a support system for me. I could have gone to their home, we could have talked our own language and made me feel welcome. I didn’t do that. I came straight to the college. That shouldn’t be. [Akim]

Family support was very significant to international students as much financially as it was emotionally in their adjustment process to overcome challenges. The welcoming, language, and support seemed to be important to them. Many students were grateful and appreciative of their family ties, caring, and assistance. Their acknowledgment of their parents’ sacrifices and their efforts deployed to provide them with a global education constituted a strong incentive for international undergraduate students to show their gratitude and appreciation for their parents by excelling academically.

The University System

This section addresses services provided by AU, namely, educators, administrators, professors, advisors, and available resources to international undergraduate students. Consequently, it covers the international students’ appreciation to the university system. Several participants were thankful to the American culture for helping them face their challenges.

One student posited, “Being a student here, it feels like a privilege. Here in the U.S. I think we have much more freedom. We have more free time. We can study, we can research and can get information or we could just rest” [Chen]. He was grateful for the
American educational system, which gave him the freedom of speech and exposed him to the U.S. educational opportunities such as time, rest and access to research. International students appreciated the academic autonomy in the American educational system.

Furthermore, many students addressed their gratefulness for “tutoring options” which helped them to “bring their grades up.” Keeping them high was primordial for these students. A student shared,

A month later, the professor told me. They told me that I could get a tutor. I tried it and I got an A for my class. What also helped me, I think it’s the outlook thinking that I continue and if I fight really hard with this class, and then everything is going to be fine. The outlook helped me. So, getting a tutor definitely helps. [Carmen]

She appreciated the advantages of tutoring services that helped her improve her grades like it was the case for many. She was grateful to the university for being instrumental in her grades’ outcomes. International undergraduate students were grateful to AU for helping them achieve good grades. Another area of appreciation was in the provision of free food on campus. One student admitted how free food was helpful to her.

I think “there is] something that Andrews does very good. I think that there is free food everywhere. True! In the calendar, the vespers, there is always something going on that has food. You can at least have one meal a day. Yes. Yeah. You just go to worships, to potlucks. That is why I don’t always go to the same church because they don’t have potlucks all the time everywhere. International students come to be very good at knowing where potlucks are. [Carmen]

International undergraduate students appreciated free food provided at AU’s vespers and potlucks. Access to free food saved them the cost for at least two meals and helped them spiritually and financially. The university staff seemed to also guide them with employment.

The university also supports students by finding jobs for them. For example, the counseling center provides jobs to students and promotes them. Other times, it
is hard to know such as scholarships and other things you can get. I think what they advertise the most are social events. [Carmen]

International undergraduate students learned to appreciate assistance with employment opportunities among other social events that AU offered to them. Beside job filled positions, they would have liked to receive the same courtesy for scholarships information. Working was important for most of the international undergraduate students especially for those whose parents were not financially stable. Nevertheless, more students articulated their gratitude for the university system. Linda expressed her gratitude for AU.

[In] this university, people are really nice here. I feel like they work together to help you succeed in life. Even if you want or not, there [are going to] be people here to help you and you will want to take advantage of that. So I would say “it’s [going to] be hard but there are people who are helping. It showed me how to be appreciative. It showed me how to be content with what I have and not to take anything for granted. Yeah, that’s one of them. Anyway, be grateful; be thankful for every little thing. Yes! [Linda]

Linda was appreciative of the system established at AU to help international students with their challenges. She understood it as a partnership where the student needed to contribute personal efforts to make the collaboration work toward a positive outcome. Linda’s thoughts went into direction as Maria who believed that the U.S. educational system indeed worked.

I ’d say everything is there for you to succeed but not because everything is there that means that you’re going to succeed. It’s hard but everything will fall into place. If the person says “let me come to America let me chill with the Americans,” it’s not going to work. At least, if they want to get an education and go back to the country, then that’s fine. But when they come here, they have to start building their future right away. [Maria]

In the same vein, Linda valued the American Higher Education system and understood that it was designed to help international students succeed. She agreed that
students needed to be intentional about succeeding for the system to work for them.

Apollos expressed his gratitude to AU for its diversity.

One of the things that I love about Andrews University, they are so diverse. There are a lot of international students that give me a good chance of having good friends. Almost everybody is international. I have a lot of friends now. When I was having that problem, my friends were there and they supported me the whole time. [Apollos]

Apollos valued the diversity at AU because it allowed him to befriend other international students. It appeared that he was grateful to his friends who they helped him confront challenges in times of trouble. Carmen also expressed her gratitude to AU for friendship, understanding professors, and tutoring services.

Here, you have tutors available to you, you have friends, you have groups where classes have groups and say hey let’s do homework together and then you have teachers available after hours. Where you can call them, Skype them, and ask them for help. Then you have lenient teachers who say, “Hey I didn’t do my homework. Can I bring it in tomorrow?” You have email. You have so many ways where you can, where you shouldn’t be able to NOT make it. So many things are available. [Carmen]

Carmen conveyed her appreciativeness to AU for the opportunity to make friends who helped her with her schoolwork and the availability of professors. She was grateful that she could communicate with them through various technological channels such as emails, Skype, after hours face-to-face, and other means.

Most of the participants expressed their gratitude to AU for providing them with an institutional culture and behavior in a diverse atmosphere that was conducive to learning and to meet their needs. The diversity allowed them to befriend other international students. They appreciated that educators, faculty, and staffs were accessible in case of needs and had the best intentions to help them succeed. They were not only appreciative for resources that contributed to their growth, successes by overcoming
challenges, but they also recognized that the university provided them with a culture that led them to achieve. Yet, they understood that they had to unfold their full potential and deploy their efforts to succeed. Fundamentally, they were grateful to the American education system in general. A student shared her thoughts about the U.S. educational system in terms of the culture.

I think something good about the American education and people in general, [are] that they like to teach. They love when you ask. So in some cultures, if you ask something it is bad. You can never question. But in this culture, they are very open. They like to talk about everything. Like you never have to be shy. You can tell the professor you don’t understand this and they would be more willing to spend the time with you. [Carmen]

Commonly, international undergraduate students appreciated the U.S. culture of the higher education system, which allowed them freedom of speech, fostered communication between professors and students, and encouraged them to seek help.

It is interesting to see how much the notion of family played a significant role in building a support system in the lives of the international students, which constituted a positive factor in their efforts to confront their challenges. They esteemed the U.S. higher education coordination and the values of AU’s spirituality, exposure to the word of God, access to resources such as food, availability, and willingness of people to help, leniency of professors, freedom of speech, diversity of the student body, provision for employment, being equipped for the global market, opportunities for friendship, and social events advertisement. The community support seemed to help them build resilience in coping with their challenges in their adjustment process.

**Motivation**

*Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do. Benjamin Spock.*
Elliot and Covington (2001), categorized motivation as a person’s repeated behavior caused by their needs and wishes. The person’s actions characterize the behavior in connection to him or her, or their environment. In this study, motivation is considered as an incentive that moves the international undergraduate student to confront their challenges and overcome them.

International undergraduate students used incentives and self-motivation such as academic achievement, and plans for their future to overcome their challenges. It was fundamental to know what, why, and how to motivate themselves. One student declared, “Hum. What motivates me? Hum! Seeing how my parents had to fight to have what they have now in Haiti and seeing that I could get a better future. That’s what motivated me to come study in the U.S.” [Linda]. She added, “So, and again it goes back to that motivation and being able to reinforce and motivate yourself.” International undergraduate students’ strongest motivation seemed to come from their parents because of the sacrifices they made to send them to the U.S. in quest of quality education to secure a better future for them. They were self-motivated individuals throughout their efforts to confront their challenges. A student shared her strategies to motivate herself.

Hum! Knowing how to motivate yourself. A lot of people wait for encouragement from other people and rewards and being seen or being appraised and that’s not what you’re [going to] get. Being an international student you have to learn to motivate your own self because sometimes you will feel like quitting but you cannot. [Linda]

She did not rely on others to motivate herself although the temptation to give up was ever present. She self-motivated by recompensing herself, which helped her to face her challenges and overcome them. International students learned to be resilient and not
quit. How they motivated themselves was extremely important. Another student communicated her self-motivation techniques to improve her GPA.

How to motivate myself? There are so many different ways like if I want to raise my GPA, I would say to myself “you can get yourself something you’ve always wanted. Or like, you cannot quit because your parents sent you for a reason. Or your parents are struggling to keep you here. Everything that revolves around my family, I have to make it. There is no other choice. There is no way around it. I have to make it. I have no other choice. I give myself a pep talk. [Linda]

Linda bought herself rewards and incentives to motivate herself into improving her GPA. There were times, she reminded herself of her parents’ sacrifices to send her to the U.S. to pursue her education. She seemed to care much about her family’s struggles for her. She would convince herself that her only option was to succeed. Maria also shared her strategies to raise her GPA to please her family.

I like to be busy and I like to have good grades. So then hum! I am really studious. So most of the time I am really studying and try to get good grades. I like to have A’s and stuff because of my family- because of their expectations they’ve ingrained it in me now I have to study a lot to make it happen. Now I also have great expectations for me. [Maria]

These students held themselves accountable to their parents and to themselves by academically self-assessing their motivation and interest. Keeping a high GPA seemed to be their best way to show their parents that they were grateful about their education and please them. As dialogical human beings, they evaluated and convinced themselves that they could not give up. Another student posited, “I don’t put myself in the position like, “I have this problem because I’m here and I should go back home. I have a problem because it’s life. Even if I have a problem here or home, I see it like, it’s life” [Maria]. They also used logical reasoning to persuade themselves to stay focused, reasonable, and
motivated to confront their challenges and rise above them without blaming their problems on adjustment issues.

Umm, just I guess, my personality. When I say I want something and I have that thing in my head then there is nothing that can stop me. So, and again it goes back to that motivation and being able to reinforce and motivate yourself. So umm, what helped me is knowing that I practically tell myself there is no other way. You are already here so you have to make it work. [Linda]

It appears that her personality was the primary factor that helped motivate herself. Persistence is another tool that these students used by pushing themselves harshly to motivate and convince themselves there is no other option but to confront their challenges and overcome them.

It is interesting to see how these students used internal strengths and incentives to self-motivate to cope with their challenges. They did not seem to use pity parties, the university system, or their upbringings to share their blames. Instead, they were courageous in their thinking, self-assessment, decision-making, logical and analytical reasoning that built resilience in them and motivated them to create strategies to cope with their challenges. They found several ways to stimulate themselves to confront their challenges with academic difficulties, the danger of driving in the snow, and making plans for their future. The next sections address the examples of strategies they used to motivate themselves.

Academic Motivation

*Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts. Winston Churchill.*

Academic motivation is a sub-theme that represents an example of one of the factors that motivated the participants. Academically, international undergraduate
students struggled with a number of challenges inside and outside of the classroom. Their desire to succeed motivated them to understand how to navigate their difficulties. For instance, a student posited, “You are given a syllabus. Not understanding the syllabus can be frustrating, desperate, and challenging” [Carmen]. Using a syllabus was alien to several students. Some found its reading and understanding rather cumbersome, which appeared to be a real and serious challenge. To rise above that challenge, that student stated, “You need to read it on your own. You teach yourself pretty much. I think I had to adjust [to] that.”[Carmen]. She developed self-teaching strategies to foster understanding and adjustment with the use of syllabi. Certain challenges required more than their motivation. She sought outside help. She recalled her struggles with a radiology class.

She recalled how tutoring helped her face her academic challenges

Academically, we don’t know that we can get a tutor for 1 credit and it helps so much. I was struggling with radiology. I didn’t know we had the option of tutoring. I thought I had to pay for it. Later on, they told me that I could get a tutor. I tried it and I got an A for that class. So getting a tutor definitely helps, plus going to worships, vespers, and chapels. They have a lot of advices that you could not imagine you would find there. [Carmen]

It took tutoring services to help her overcome her challenges with a radiology class although she also relied on her spiritual connections. Tutoring actually motivated her to keep up with schoolwork and improve her grades. Other problems surfaced in the classroom due to lack of English that required motivation to face them. Another student shared how he overcame his challenges with an accounting class.

I didn’t mention that there is [a problem] when I was taking [an] accounting class. My professor gave an example of a company story. Everyone in the class knows about the company and I am the only one who does not know about [it]. I don’t know the environment, the details of the U.S. When someone says that they are from such and such place, I have no idea what they are talking about. [Chen]
Chen felt excluded from class conversations because of lack of English and geographical information. He found it difficult to participate in class discussion because of his absence of knowledge about the community. He coped with this challenge using personal techniques to enhance his English skills. He shared how he strategized in some cases to improve his English by watching videos.

I try to watch videos in English. I also listen to music in English. I’m just trying to be familiar with English. I think the more time I spend with the students here I think I ‘m getting more familiar with student friends. [Chen]

His degree of motivation was so high that he strategized by watching English videos to improve his English, which helped him to confront his challenges. The motivation to listen to English through music and videos enhanced his knowledge and understanding of the language and the environment. Chen could not communicate with other classmates over a group project due to the challenge of the English language, strategized, “I think writing letters is quite [a] useful strategy to solve misunderstandings. I wrote like: I really want to help you. I really want to contribute to the project. And if I have something I can do for your guys, please let me know” [Chen]. He strategized by writing a letter to the group to address his challenge. Putting in writing his thoughts that he could not verbally expressed, rendered communication possible. This letter helped the group of students to realize his real problem and they started to speak clearly.

Several students expressed their challenges dealing with their professors in the classroom. One student asserted, “In the beginning it was hard because I didn’t know their language. I think if I knew the language better, I would make different choices. [Carmen], another student posited, “When the professors talk slowly I think I can understand. But the problem is when students ask questions the professor speaks fast and
I can’t understand. That is the only problem that I have.” [Chen]. Another, “I did not learn English before coming to the U.S.” [Linda]. Another student conveyed his challenges with his professor’s rationale that did not seem to make sense to him.

Their mindsets: if you pass ESL then you are fine. If you are not fine, go back to ESL. There are people who will sympathize. There are others who will tell you that, ‘These are the rules. Sorry, I can’t do anything for you.’ [Apollos]

All these challenges revolved around the English language that most students confronted. Most of these students reported that their professors identified themselves to them because they were international themselves and helped them. Diversity seemed to have been the key that motivated them to relate and learn. Other students such as Apollos, felt the need to embrace the pressure when professors would not meet his expectations.

Well there is pressure. Like this ESL we divide the pressures on both of us, it will make it easier for both us. If he does not share the pressure with me, then I will be more responsible and take on the pressure on me. The pressure will have to be dealt with. If he does not want to take that responsibility, I will have to take the pressure on my own, be sleepless, less time to social[ize] and study more. [Apollos]

He recognized that he needed to address the pressure created by his lack of English needed. The motivation to confront the need to know the language required the motivation to sacrifice sleep, socialization, and increase study time. The motivation to succeed academically helped international undergraduate students to find new ideas to overcome their challenges such as improving their English understanding through watching and listening to videos, writing letters to foster communication, tutoring services among other strategies, embracing diversity, and increase study time through sleep and socialization deprivation. The following section is an example of how they motivated themselves in front of challenges.
Motivation Driving in the Snow

The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting out aim too low and achieving our mark. Leonardo Da Vinci.

Driving in the snow was a sub-theme, which represented an example of the ways international undergraduate students motivated themselves. Essentially, winter driving can be a dangerous hazard especially for students who have never driven in the snow before, as it requires the necessary skills to avoid unnecessary accidents. It happened to be a new commotion for most of the international students. A student communicated her challenges driving in the snow.

Driving around winter [is a serious challenge]. To me, it was really hard to change the habit that it is ok to be 2 or 3 minutes late. I could not be exactly or before time. To different culture, you know, it is disrespectful not to be on time. If I want to keep my professors happy, I need to be in class on time. [Carmen]

She found it extremely challenging to drive in the snow as it caused her to be late to class. Driving in the snow was arduous for international undergraduate students. For some, the time required and the tactics to navigate the road had a domino impact on their arriving on time to school. It often caused them to be late to classes, which could not be considered an excuse just because of cultural differences. They were motivated to arrive on time because they did not want to be impolite to their professors. Although driving in the snow was challenging, not having a car while snowing, presents another issue worth addressing. Carmen struggled with driving in the snow because it was a new concept to her.

Yeah! I think driving is really hard in the wintertime. And if you don’t have a car it is really hard. Yet when you have a car, it is really hard with the snow, which is new to me. It can be very scary. [Carmen]
Although she was cognizant of the petrifying potential danger that posed driving in the snow, she was still motivated to confront the snow challenge. Several international undergraduate students came up with different strategies to overcome it. Two students planned to face the problem. Carmen shared her strategies to arrive to school on time despite the confronting challenges with the snow.

Getting on time? I pretty much had to study myself to count how much time I spent doing each thing you know? I had to give myself, in my mind you know I think it takes just 5 minutes doing this but in reality, it takes 15 minutes. So I studied myself and rearranged my schedule just to make things happen at the time I wanted to. [Carmen]

She admitted that she had to be proactive in making plans to leave early after assessing her habits to rearrange her schedule. It looked like it worked for her. Another student seemed to have made the same decision as her to leave home a few minutes earlier to give her time to face the potential snow dangers.

Hum I know that I have to go to school. That’s my goal. I want to see… If Andrews does not close, I’m gonna be in class, class or no class. If I have to leave 30 minutes before, I will leave 30 minutes just to make it here on time. No hum. I try to leave on time. [Linda]

Linda did not seem to give herself another option but to go to school regardless of the snow challenge. Her motivation appeared to be the achievement of her goals. Technically, these students realized that the key to arrive on time to school when driving in the snow was to leave home early to drive slowly and carefully and make it to class. In doing so, they reassessed their lives, reprioritized, and reorganized their schedules. Their motivation to succeed and arrive to school on time, came from their willingness to respect to their professor and keep them happy, which helped them overcome the snow challenge. The section below is another example of how planning for their future motivated them to cope challenges.
Future Plans Motivation

When you concentrate your energy purposely on the future possibility that you aspire to realize, your energy is passed on to it and makes it attracted to you with a force stronger than the one you directed towards it. Stephen Richards, Think Your Way To Success: Let Your Dream Run Free.

Future plans incentive is another example of the factors that helped motivate the sample students. This sub-theme included the pursuit of graduate studies or the quest for employment either in the U.S. or in the global world. In this study, the overwhelming majority of the participants were motivated by future plans that were based on either their eagerness to pursue their “life calling,” the search of a “successful career,” or their education. One student posited, “Now I also have great expectations [of] me. I have to think about my future” [Akim]. The drive to prepare for their future pushed international students to make sacrifices to confront challenges. Several were genuinely motivated by the expectations of their life calling as stimuli to confront their challenges. A student enthusiastically shared how her plan to become a missionary motivated her.

I see myself as a missionary. I’m not planning to go back home anytime soon. I have applied for the OPT, which is the opportunity for international students to stay in the country after their undergrad to work with a company. [Carmen]

Carmen desired to remain in the country to work as a missionary, which fueled her with the courage and motivation to confront with her challenges. The desire to work carried the connotations of wanting to serve as a missionary and to join the workforce. Another student affirmed, “I see myself, in the future, in the area of finance. Like I do audio recording and upload on You Tube. Those will be my thing really within the church in my country- and working in the area of finance.” [Akim] It was common for SDA students to assimilate work with a sense of ministry in the church. Another student was motivated by the thought of being called by God to serve Him.
I fell like I can accomplish more of what God wants me to do if I go somewhere else, somewhere else where people don’t know Him, somewhere else where I can have more of an impact and be more useful to God. [Linda]

Linda was under the impression that God called her to share the Gospel with people who have been exposed to the Word. The drive to go find these people to teach them seemed to motivate her to overcome her challenges. Their priority to work after obtaining their undergraduate degree seemed to be overridden by their sense of calling rather than to find employment for their personal needs. Serving God was their main focus. For many international undergraduate students, the future portrayed a successful career as a call to ministry in the church, which they found extremely motivating.

The hope of a successful career stirred several students. One student stated, “I still have to do my master. But I would like to find a stable job” [Maria]. Another asserted, “Hopefully I’ll be out of here, working somewhere in the U. S.” [Paulo]. Another, “Hopefully I will financially be independent and have my own career” [Wan]. Another, “If I find a job in Korea, I can find a job in the U.S.” [Chen]. Another student, “I want to go to those Arab countries that have a lot of money. They have some good use for mechanical engineers, like Dubay, I mean” [Appolos]. Another, “Hum! I want to work for a while. I want to work in the U.S. I’m hoping I’ll get a job when I get my visa.” [Maria]

International undergraduate students were motivated to overcome their challenges by their hope and dream of a successful career or an educational pursuit. Very few expressed the need to pursue their studies right away after graduation. One student expressed her concern about her lack of interest in continuing education. A student nodded, “I think when you integrate more people with people who know more than you,
so we will learn more from them. They could motivate us to pursue our studies” [Wan]. They attributed their lack of motivation for graduate studies to the school’s absence of interactions and mingling of graduate with undergraduate students to foster interest, understanding, and provide positive inspiration in their decision for the future. They perceived that international undergraduate students could be influenced and encouraged by graduate students to trust the educational system here and remain at AU.

In short, the international undergraduate students through their self-motivation, academic motivation, their motivation to drive in the snow, and their future plans coped with their challenges and rose above them. Their motivation to succeed based on their future plans seemed overpowering. Another factor that seemed to dominate their coping strategies was their self-determination, which follows in the next section.

**Self-Determination**

* A dream does not become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination, and hard work. (Colin Powell)*

Fundamentally, “self-determination is a combination of skills, knowledge, and beliefs that enable a person to engage in goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous behavior. An understanding of one’s strengths and limitations together with a belief in oneself as capable and effective are essential to self-determination” (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998). In this study, self-determination brought the international undergraduate students to self-knowledge, potential, and beliefs in their personal strengths, skills, desires, and boundaries while being willing to use them toward a targeted goal.
In this study, the overwhelming majority of the participants used a high level of self-determination to confront challenges in order to reach their educational objectives. A participant shared her experience when she overcame one of her most puzzling challenges. She became too sick to remain in school. She was prescribed to go home for healing. She was supposed to work on her school assignments at home. Unfortunately, not all professors believed in home schooling and online studies’ capabilities. Some of them were still holding on the traditional classroom teaching style and could not comprehend how a student who was so sick could work on school assignments while recuperating. The participant replied, communicating her unwillingness to retake that class.

I said, “I don’t care. I’m not retaking this class” I said “I do not have the space in my schedule to retake this class. Every other teacher is ok with me to continue until I get back and do as much work as possible at home.” He said, “I’m not [going to] give you work at home because you need to recover” I had to pick a fight with him. [Esther]

Her argument stemmed from her perception that her professor should give her the assignments to take home because her other instructors did. Although her professor appeared to be genuinely concerned for her health, she refused to face the possibility of retaking that course. She shared the steps she took to argue her case with her professor and make a case about her ability to work on her assignments at home.

I said “I don’t know how many times I’m [going to] tell you that I’m not retaking this class. How can I make you understand? This is not happening! I came back to his office before I left. I went to see him and I told him “Sir, I don’t think you understand me. I am not repeating this class. I am going to do the work. Give me my assignments. I am [going to] pass your class. I’m [going to] have good grades. I said, “Sir, I don’t have the space on my schedule. I don’t know why you are so excited to have me in your class again but it’s just not happening” He looked at me and said” It is just not possible” I’m like “to you it is not possible but I’m [going to] show you today that it is more than possible because I’m [going to] get an excellent grade in your class.” [Esther]
She wanted to convince her professor that she could handle the challenge and her determination came from her refusal to retake that class. She believed in her ability and inner strengths to overcome that challenge and rise above it. Her self-determination brought her to challenge her professor. She did seem to consider other options than the one she set her mind on for the determination to complete that class.

I think he had to see the determination on my face and he said “I’m [going to] give you a chance. There are 2 exams that you will have to do and write a couple of papers” I said, “cool, that is what I wanted to know.” I finished everything before the due date and I got a good grade in the class. “I was so mad. I said “you know what! I am just [going to] take my grade and leave his class because the Lord is still working on me. I’m not going to lose my salvation over some teacher. I’m not doing it! No, no, no. Not today. [Esther]

Her professor seemed to have capitulated before her determination. He gave her the assignments for the class to complete at home while recuperating from her sickness. She overcame the challenge by finalizing her coursework and obtaining a good grade. Despite her determination to succeed, she attributed the credit to God because she kept her faith while confronting her challenges.

Hum I guess you really brought me to a place where I had to exercise my faith in God. He [God] actually helps me in overcoming these challenges [health and school] and getting victory. It allowed me to change my perspectives on life and help me realize that life is [going to] throw you things that you really have to fight for. You really… now that I am over it. It feels good. [Esther]

She perceived it as a trial, which she surmounted because of her beliefs in God. She esteemed that her paradigm shifted with that experience. One of things she learned was that determination is necessary to achieve. In that same vein, another student shared the stress that he faced in the busyness of his activities.

Yea, stress- there is stress. Sometimes I tend to take time for my sleep and I stop. Sometimes, I try to go somewhere, really whatever I decide to do, there is
stress. Because there is a tendency I used to do that—when I’m busy I sacrifice myself, I don’t eat, I don’t sleep enough. Things get messy. [Akim]

Akim admitted that he found it particularly difficult to manage the stress in his life because he used the wrong tactics of sacrificing his sleep and eating habits. Stress was common among the participants. This specific student experienced stress and to the point that he had to sacrifice his sleep, and appetite in his busy time. He realized that he needed to find a system that could help him confront his stress. He stated, “Now I have made a determination. Now I’ll be consistent. I’ll eat breakfast. I will go to bed on time. That’s the confession I’ve made this past summer” [Akim]. To confront the stress challenge, with determination, he consistently changed his eating and sleeping habits in a healthy and positive manner. Furthermore, he decided to be proactive with his assignments.

I try to uh on Sundays, to do a lot of my assignments and then to do all the school projects as early as possible – to do early exams and have good grades as much as possible…I try to do well on the quizzes, the homework early on the semesters. [Akim]

He managed to have an early start with his assignments and projects. He used Sundays to do most of his work preparation towards his quizzes and exams to help him ensure good grades. These tactics helped him overcome his stress challenge.

Many students showed their strengths in facing curricular and linguistic challenges as well. For instance, one student told his story of how he was assigned to participate in a group project and could not communicate to the others for lack of English and how his determination helped him find a workable strategy.

I had a group assignment and actually I was the only one who can’t speak English fluently. So I could not contribute to the project. It was difficult. I didn’t know what to do. One day I decided to write a letter to the group. I wrote like: “I really want to help you. I really want to contribute to the project and if I
have something I can do for you guys please let me know.” They realized my real problem and they started to speak clearly. [Chen]

Chen communicated through writing as he found it less challenging than speaking because of the accent barrier. It took determination and creativity for him to overcome that obstacle. Communication for international undergraduate students was challenging. But when they were determined, they found techniques to interconnect. Another student shared his determination,

My life as a college student is a good one because you know the closer I get to- you know – I am determined- before I came here it was kind – I always say to myself I could have come earlier but I decided and I am determined to finish. [Akim]

Akim’s determination to complete his studies gave him the courage to keep on. Students, who were determined to succeed, managed to find ways to cope with their challenges. International undergraduate students’ inner strengths helped them confront their challenges because of their motivation, and self-determination not to mention their sense of commitment, persistence, and endurance.

**Religion / Spirituality / Relationship with God**

*Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I set you apart. (Jeremiah 1:5).*

Researchers Marek Jantos and Hosen Kiat (2007) classified both religion and spirituality as synonymous. Throughout the years, people have come to adopt the word spirituality and continue to use it in lieu of the word religion because they perceive it as “an individual’s personal quest for hope, purpose, and ultimate meaning in life” (Jantos & Kiat, 2007). The majority of the international undergraduate students were SDAs. They used their relationship with God as their major coping mechanism.
Seventh-day Adventism

Fundamentally, SDAs believe in the love, and power of God. Principally, they trust in God’s lasting and renewed relationship with humanity through love, wisdom, grace, and infinite love. They also have faith in God’s omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. Essentially, they focus on the Three Angels’ messages found in Revelation 14 that address the importance of worshipping God, the fate of Babylon, the keeping of the Commandments of God and the rejection of the Mark of the Beast. The Adventist credo resides in 28 fundamental beliefs that are categorized in six classifications: God, Man, Salvation, the Church, the Christian Life, and Last Day Events. One of the doctrines refers to the Sabbath, Saturday, that they understand as the seventh day, as stated in Genesis 2:2 and on the seventh day, God finished His work that He had done and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done, v. 3 so God blessed the seventh day and made it holy… (ESV).

Consequently, SDAs worship and rest on Saturdays. They do not undertake nonspiritual activities on that day. Therefore, Adventist international undergraduate students give priority to Sabbath rest over schoolwork or attendance. Many international students in this study shared how they missed exams on Sabbath, which had significant weight on their GPA outcome. Sabbath observance was the main reason the majority of the Adventist international students decided to pursue their studies at AU, which, globally, represented a dream for most of them. It was crucial for them not to endeavor school activities on Saturdays during Sabbath hours. One student shared the importance of Sabbath observance in his life.
When I became SDA I took a high school exam. I refused to take an exam on Sabbath. I missed the math exam. That was critical for the result. Since then I developed the desire to pursue my education in a faith-based institution. Of course, when I came to America, Andrews was the best place for me. [Akim]

Akim placed the observance of the Sabbath before his exam’s outcome and chose AU because it was a SDA institution. Adventist students placed their observance of the Sabbath as their primary factor to choose a university. Another student told her story of what prompted her to come to AU.

I always wanted to come from the very beginning. I guess for different things. For example, over there in Peru, SDA University is not good. I wanted to go to another university. I actually got into a good business school in Peru. But they have classes on Saturday. So the big factor was [if] I went there I would not be a good Adventist. [Maria]

She attended AU because of the Sabbath observance. She perceived that she would not be a “good Adventist” if she had attended a nonspiritual university. This study used Relationship with God as synonymous with spirituality while the participants employed them interchangeably.

**Spirituality / Relationship with God**

Relationship with God, constituted the central priority of the overwhelming majority of the participants, mainly the SDA students. The Adventists experienced a deep sense of spirituality, and led a faithful prayer life through their relationship with God. A participant posited, “First just have a relationship with God. The rest you know, finances, health, schoolwork, what else? Your relationship at some point, some things may not work out, but you don’t have to give up on the rest, you know?” [Carmen]

She believed in her relationship with God, which she gave priority over everything in her life as her central focus with the understanding and the expectation that
God would handle everything else for her. Most Adventist international undergraduate students placed their relationship with God above everything else. A student asserted, “God guides every step that I take” [Linda]. Hence, the students’ telling is throughout impregnated with their experiences with God via their spirituality, prayer, and belief in the power of God as their strong coping mechanism.

Prayer

*Prayer should be recognized as an important resource for coping with pain and illness and improving health and general well-being. (Marek Jantos and Hosen Kiat, 2007)*

Prayer has always made significant ink flow throughout the ages, as much in the religious affiliations as in personal beliefs. Although prayer is not clearly defined in the Hebrew language, it is focused on communications (Harper, 2017). In the New Testament, the Greek word for prayer comes from pros (towards, exchange) and *euxomai* (to wish, to pray); yet, the Latin word *tefilah*, means to beg, to entreat (Harper, 2017), expressing the idea of a two way communication between two active beings and indicating a dialogue between a superior and powerful Being as the giver and an inferior being as a receiver. In this study, prayer is conveyed in the form of worship, devotion, and communication between these students and God. It also represented their fundamental building block in coping with challenges.

Most of the Adventist international undergraduate students identified prayer as being everything to them. In light of a participant’s testimony about a student’s traumatizing experience with the earthquake that took place in Haiti on January 10, 2012, she sighed, “One of the main things again is prayer. Prayer is the main thing. And sometimes … you feel like, hey, that’s what I need now” [Linda]. She viewed prayer as
the key to her relationship with God, the sole answer to her problems, and the coping mechanism for her challenges. Another participant communicated the significance of God’s presence in her life.

I feel like God guides every step I make. I feel like every time I have an issue even though I wasn’t praying at the time or like maybe too tired to go to church, I could just pray about it. I feel like it has helped me a lot. [Maria]

Maria perceived prayer as a lifestyle because of her intimacy with God, which explained that even when she didn’t pray, God still took care of her needs. Normally, daily prayers and devotions took precedence for the Adventist participants. They were not afraid of spending time praying. A student noted, “Now I am trying praying in the morning, praying [at] night” [Maria]. They committed their life to prayer because of their relationship with God. Similarly, another student shared, “My ideal day is waking up at 5:30 in the morning- do my devotion, you know, do my exercise.” [Carmen] International undergraduate students started and closed their days with prayers. When feeling stressed out because of their challenges, several students found a private place to pray, which helped them to cope. One student shared her experience with God in her life.

What works for me sometimes? If I have time I go to Lansome. They have a prayer room. I like to go there, just pray and sleep. And I didn’t feel bad about it. I would just talk to a friend and devotion, that time in the morning, you know? And I feel reenergized after doing these things. So, I get my strength from the Lord to go on. [Carmen]

Carmen found refuge in a prayer room where she confronted her stress through prayer, sleep, devotion, and spend time with friends. She drew her strengths from these spiritual exercises, therefore, from God. That same student added, “It is an exercise of faith” that required endurance, which encouraged her to continue to trust in God. Her faith in God gave her the necessary strength to confront her challenges. International
Adventist students trusted God to help them face and overcome their challenges. A student shared her reflections on her relationship with God regarding her clearance issue that was occurring every semester.

Hum! God is in control. I just have to remind myself not everything I do will get me there. It automatically belongs to what God has for me. So I have to keep reminding myself that God has me. So you have to have a time in the day to talk to God. He is the one who knows what you are going through. At first, I didn’t know how to deal with it but every semester God comes through. So, at a point you are just like I am like why am I stressing? Every semester is the same thing, but I always make it where I need to be. So just leave it up to God. He’s got you. But you really have to remind yourself of that. [Linda]

Linda understood that God controlled and governed her life. She trusted that God came through for her every semester with her financial clearance challenge. She surrounded that problem to God with the expectation that He would deal with it and make it right. Therefore, many Adventist participants let God control their lives as a coping mechanism in their multifaceted challenges.

Another student told his story about how his heart was broken because his girlfriend left him.

One of the challenges that I had recently, I had a girlfriend and we’ve been dating for three years and a half. We actually got engaged. We broke about 3 weeks ago. That was a big challenge. At one point I couldn’t take it anymore. I skipped a few classes. I couldn’t do my homework- my Quizzes. It did drop so fast. Boom trouble. I dropped to Ds and F’s for some classes. Some challenge like that I could not handle. I’ve been praying about it. It took me 4 weeks to get back up. And I am doing double efforts to get back up to where I was. [Apollos]

It was challenging for Apollos to cope with the break up with his fiancé that he dated for three years. The separation impacted his schoolwork, attendance and grades. He admitted that coping appeared impossible. He had to pray besides her inner efforts to overcome that challenge, “I’ve been praying about it. It took me 4 weeks to get back up. And I am doing double efforts to get back up to where I was” [Apollos]. Prayer seemed
to be the Adventist participants’ mechanism to rise above that challenge and reposition himself in his educational journey besides her profound efforts. He recognized that it takes discipline for an international student to meet the high demands of a relationship.

While the overpowering majority of the participants were SDAs and attended AU because of their religion, the overwhelming non-Adventist international undergraduate students did not have knowledge of the Seventh-day-Adventism. One student with confusion asked during the interview, “what is SDA?” I answered that it stood for, “Seventh-day-Adventism.” He added, “I have no religion. My parents also don’t have any religion.” He came to Andrews because his friend attended the university. “My friends came here also two years ago. He is not an Adventist.” [Chen]. Some students did not know that AU was a Christian university at the time of the interview. A couple of them said, “I am not a Seventh-day Adventist.” [Wan]. Essentially, although these non-Adventist students were biblically inexperienced, they were spiritual beings. They followed the university’s requirements, which exposed them to prayer and the Word of God not only in class meditations and reflections but also in chapel attendance and vespers.

A non-Adventist student shared his disarray when he first attended a religion class where the professor conducted a prayer in the beginning of each class and meditation of the Word. He dropped the class and finally retook it and said, “still struggling, but acceptable to me now” [Wan]. It took resilience for these students to embrace a new life of prayer and meditation of the Word of God.

Although the exposure to the Word of God made some non-Adventist international students feel awkward at first, it excited their curiosity and aroused their
spiritual interest. One student disclosed that as he took a religion class for the second time, “I am less uncomfortable because of the Word of God; and my view of God is changing” [Chen]. The religion courses and chapel requirements not only brought Adventist students close to God, they also facilitated non-Adventist students to search their spiritual beliefs. A non-Adventist student expressed her interest in spiritual meetings by linking it to the curriculum process,

I think it would make more fun and invite interesting people [speakers], like for the week of prayer, the preacher’s topic was very interesting and a lot of people came. Some people don’t talk about their experience and they make it boring. [Wan]

The exposure to the week of prayers stimulated their interest as Wan was adapting to her new spiritual environment. Ultimately, the Word of God made a difference in their views of God. Another non-Adventist confessed his presuppositions about the Adventist religion.

Well I did not really have an opinion when I got here. Oh, there is something, in South Korea, SDAs [are] considered like “bad religion” because they believe in Sabbath Saturday unlike other denominations they go to church on Sunday. So there was some like –hum! stereotype “it came to me.” But I came here. I saw it was not true. When I came here I saw that SDA are most moderate and polite and quiet. I knew the good thing when I entered the airport an officer was working in the custom. I got stuck in the custom for like half an hour. I don’t know why he did it. He is not supposed to do it. He saw my visa. He said SDAs are cool, moderate, polite, and quiet. [Lee]

Lee admitted that he had preconceived, negative, and unsupported ideas of the SDA religion, which were misconstrued in his home country. Upon his arrival, he learned that those allegations about SDAs were not true. His journey at AU confirmed what the airport officer had told him. As a result, his experiences with Adventists caused him to change his opinions of the SDA religion and members in his journey here.
In short, prayer is a powerful force that connected Adventist international undergraduate students with God who they considered their dominant coping, and overcoming mechanism. On the other hand, not only did non-Adventist international undergraduate students overcome their ignorance of the religion, they also became comfortable, curious, less opinioned, and interested with the university’s biblical requirements process.

Belief in the Power of God

*Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible”* (Matthew 19:26 NIV).

Seventh-day Adventist international undergraduate students believed that the Power of God could help them overcome all kinds of challenges. Paul, referring to Jesus, shared in Ephesians, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (3:20, NIV). Paul, in this passage, called us to not only look at the power of God as a tool, but also as an inner stimulant to face our trials.

In this study, most of the Adventist international undergraduate students portrayed the power of God as an expected source of solutions to confront their challenges emanating from their faith in Him. Several responses were concomitant with the power of God in their lives, “God is in everything,” “I can only go back to God,” “I thank God for that,” “You have to believe in God basically, if not, I seriously don’t know how others make it. I don’t know. That’s my opinion. You have to trust,” “Oh I didn’t tell you the story about what God did for me.” They attributed all their victories and successes to the power of God.
Several stories regarding belief in the power of God were quite intense. Some of them took place prior to the participants coming to the states serving as a catalyst or were connected to the process of their arrival. The unfolding of that student’s traumatized earthquake experience earlier noted, that occurred in Haiti on January 10, 2012, depicted her belief in the power of God as her coping agent that helped her cope with that shocking experience. She narrated the rest of the story as follows:

Oh men! It was the worse thing ever. Yesterday I was talking to my mom about it. She just left on Sunday. It was yesterday? Hum! We were talking about it. She was praying the whole time. She thought I could not speak. It was the worse feeling ever. I don’t know who’s alive and who’s not. Cell phones are not working. The house is shaking. You can’t move. You just have to pray. [Linda]

Linda recalled the traumatic experience that she and her mom faced during the earthquake that happened in Haiti on January 12, 2010. It was a desperate situation that took all hope from them with the thought that her house was on the verge to collapse. “My house is a two-story building. I thought that if it collapsed there was no way we would survive. There was no way we could make it out alive. It was bad.” She assessed the situation and despaired with the thought that she was not coming out of it alive. She had no means of communication as the phones were down. However, she had no doubt that only God would help her rise from that traumatic experience. “I had to count on the power of God to get out of this awful experience alive” [Linda]. Her belief in the power of God helped her overcome that challenge.

Many students confessed that their belief in the power of God has helped them to overcome their financial crisis. For instance, one student shared her testimony, about her graduation that almost did not take place because she found out at the last minute that she needed to go on a six-credit tour; however, her visa had expired. It took her a leap of faith
to apply for a Canadian visa that came two hours before she left for the trip. It took another miracle for her to receive a scholarship related to her status as a pastor’s kid that came unexpectedly for the exact amount needed to pay for her six credit course tour. She proudly added, “I didn’t tell you the story about what God did for me?” Carmen shared her story of how God intervened to perform a miracle for her.

So, the day of the departure of the study tour, my passport arrived two hours before the trip. It was a miracle! Yes. I called [those] people in that embassy. I told them that it was not ok not to give me the visa and that I just wanted my passport back. I needed to travel [so that I would go to Europe. The professor, the head of the department, was very nice. So, I got my visa… Now she is telling me, you have not have it for four years. I think, $2,000.00 per semester. It’s a lot of money when you think about it that they didn’t give me. So, I went to a committee, and they approved it. They paid for everything. Praise God! This is my big challenge story that I overcame. God is good! [Carmen]

It appeared that God performed a miracle for Carmen. Her faith helped her to apply for her visa renewal because she needed her passport to travel to Europe in an educational tour. Not only did she receive her visa, she also mysteriously received money that accrued from a scholarship that was denied to her. It came at the right time to pay for her tuition. She automatically attributed the credit to God and praised Him.

Belief in the power of God was common in the experiences of the international students. Many confessed that they would not have overcome their financial crises without the power of God. Although they have faith in God, they used persistence to overcome. For instance, one student shared his testimony how he experienced the power of God through policies and procedures with the immigration process in Egypt, which can be daunting. He told his story of “what God has done” for him, which happened before he came to the U.S. and opened the door to this country for him.
The Egyptian educational system had laws that required private institutions to accept a certain percentage of Muslim students and erect a mosque on their ground. High schools as well as academies that did not abide by those rules would not be nationally accredited. Graduates from those schools who wanted to pursue their studies, had to go outside of the country. The government’s decision affected students and parents who could not afford the cost of international studies. Therefore, those students faced the challenge to apply for a visa, which required a lengthy, exorbitant, intimidating, tedious, costly, and discouraging process. A student shared his sister’s story about her challenges to obtain a U.S. visa.

My sister went through that. Sometimes they would give you a booklet to read about giving you reasons why you got rejected. And they are like, “have fun reading it” even after they take your money, a good amount of money that you pay each time you apply. Every time my sister would bring some money, she would go and get rejected. [Apollos]

Apollos’ sister went through the rigorous, costly, and lengthy immigration process that rejected her repeatedly without a plausible explanation. It took persistence, patience, and money to repeat the process. Ultimately, it worked at the end for some people. Referring to his sister, a participant affirmed, “I think she got the visa the 9th or 10th time she got there. She was so persistent.” Yeah! Finally she got it.” [Apollos]. It took tenacity, perseverance, and resilience for his sister to obtain her visa.

Some students did not like to go through that chaotic experience because they had no guarantee of succeeding. Therefore, they would apply for the lottery visa, which does not require as much money and time. “I just participated just once in the lottery. I did [pray]. God has a plan, a good plan for me. Praise God!” [Apollos]. He applied for the visa, which he miraculously won. He understood that God orchestrated it according to
His plan for him. He believed that he overcame that challenge because of his belief in God. That lottery visa allowed him the right to enter the U.S. legally, and become a green card recipient and holder. The other advantage that international undergraduate students who won the lottery visa was that they had access to student loans, which represented an unbelievable relief when the family was not financially secure.

Fundamentally, the stories told, portrayed the Adventist students’ relationship with God through their spirituality, prayer habits, and belief in the power of God as their central coping mechanisms. Despite their deep attachment to God, these participants have shown their willingness to develop the necessary skills to survive. Several shared their gratitude to AU for the exposure to the Word, the power of diversity, and the spiritual and personal growth. A student at the end of her educational journey at Andrews shared how much she has changed.

It is not easy. It is crazy. I came here you know. I met so many people. I changed so much. I have grown so much. And it is definitely; you know, spiritual growth, physical growth. I look differently now. You know how you say, “corpus men spirit”? You know, body, mind and spirit. I have changed in all those aspects. Despite of the challenges that you face here, it was a good experience! Right! Positive experience! You feel that you are leaving AU with things that you didn’t bring in with you. [Carmen]

At the end of her journey here, she expressed her gratitude to God for operating spiritual and physical growth in her. She perceived her challenges and experiences as positively contributing to her growth and change. In summary, Adventist international undergraduate students seemed to understand that their relationship with God helped them rise above their challenges as a result of a number of factors: their prayer life, spirituality, and belief in the power of God, not to mention their connection with Him, their faith life, and the notion of God’s leading and being in control of their lives. It
appeared that God was their resilience in their coping strategies. It does not mean that they did not build self-confidence, develop or unfold inner strengths. The Adventists seemed to be resilient through their belief in God and prayers and used their inner strengths such as motivation, and determination as their coping mechanisms, which are analyzed in the following section.

Summary

International undergraduate students at AU used their community, family assistance and support, motivation, determination, and their relationship and belief in God, to cope with their challenges and rise above them.

It is interesting to see how appreciative and grateful international undergraduate students were to AU. It looked like the school system helped them with their shortcomings, their discomfort with the culture, and direction with their issues. In general, they were grateful to the higher education system in the U.S and the values of AU’s spirituality, exposure to the word of God, access to resources, availability and willingness of people to help, leniency of professors, diversity of the student body, provision for employment, being equipped for the global market, opportunities for friendship, and social events, which seemed to foster resilience in coping with their challenges, and rise above them. Family support also played a significant role in building their resilience to confront their difficulties. It was very significant to international undergraduate students, as much financially as it was emotionally, in their adjustment process in overcoming challenges. Many students were grateful and appreciative of their community support, the university system, and their family ties and assistance, for helping them in their adjustment process. Their efforts deployed to show their gratitude.
and appreciation for the resources, culture, and support of their community, the university system, and the sacrifices of their parents, seemed to have unfolded their resilience to cope with their challenges.

It is also interesting to see how these students used internal strengths and incentives to motivate themselves to cope with their strategies. They did not seem to use pity parties, the university, or their upbringings to share their blames. Instead, they were resilient through their motivation, their self-motivation, academic motivation, motivation to drive in the snow, and future plans to strategically cope with their challenges and rise above them. Although their faith in God predominantly appeared to override their coping strategies and seemed to be their resilience, nevertheless, their motivation to succeed was overpowering.

Another factor that seemed to dominate their stories was their self-determination. It was interesting to see how the international undergraduate students were determined in overcoming cultural, academic, personal, linguistic, health, and stress challenges. They did not give up. They kept pushing, knocking, asking, and refuting when need be. At times they did not take “no” for an answer. They faced their challenges through their sense of achievement, and determination until the end. It looked like they were resilient through self-determination in overcoming their challenges. Beside their determination, in the following section, they also used the community support as a resilient means for them to cope.

Their prayer seemed to be a powerful force that connected Adventist international undergraduate students with God through their relationship, which they considered their dominant coping, and overcoming agent. They appeared to understand that their
relationship with God helped them rise above their challenges as a result of a number of factors: their prayer life, spirituality, and belief in the power of God, not to mention their connection with Him, their faith life, and the notion of God’s leading and being in control of their lives. It looked like God was their resilience in confronting their challenges and coping with them. It does not mean that they did not build self-confidence, develop, or unfold inner strengths.

Non-Adventist international undergraduate students seemed to overcome their ignorance of the religion and became comfortable, curious, less opinioned, interested, and resilient with the university’s biblical requirements process. Although the Adventists seemed to be resilient through their belief in God and prayers, nevertheless, all participants, Adventists and non-Adventist alike, used their inner strengths such as motivation, and determination as their coping mechanisms. In short, international undergraduate students, in this study, coped with their challenges through their resilience in the community system, their motivation, self-determination, and their relationship with God.
CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY

Introduction

International undergraduate students confront multiple challenges in their host countries. Unprecedented research suggests that international students experience cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges among others (e.g. Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Church, 1982; Hwang & Goto, 2009). However, little is done to analyze their coping strategies. The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore with a sample of the international undergraduate students, their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges, how they coped, and rose above them.

Research Design and Sampling

A qualitative research design was used due to the indetermination of the variables under exploration (Creswell, 2008). This method was chosen to facilitate a better understanding of the international students’ challenges and coping mechanisms. Purposeful sampling was found suitable to select 10 participants and “to learn or understand the central phenomenon,” which was coping, (Creswell, 2008, p. 206). The criteria for participation required that students be (a) international undergraduate students, (b) ranging in grade level from freshman to senior, (c) attending AU in Berrien Springs Michigan, and (d) willing to tell their stories and experiences.
Conceptual Theory

The Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological human development theory and the RISE were used to guide this study in exploring the stories of international undergraduate students and understand their experiences of coping with challenges.

The Bronfenbrenner’s Bio-Ecological Theory


1. The microsystem consists of functions, doings and interpersonal relations that a human being encounters;
2. The mesosystem represents connections between the microsystems;
3. The exosystem represent the implied outcome of a person’s development by the environmental systems;
4. The macrosystem represents a specific culture’s community design;
5. The chronosystem while connecting to time, provides an extensive viewpoint to the systems method. Expectantly, the Bronfenbrenner (2005) theory illuminates this research study by exploring the stories of international undergraduate students and their experiences. Residing in a host country places international undergraduate students in a position where they suffer the influence of the subjects in all five interconnected systems in the bio-ecological model.

In other words, human beings fuse and connect with their changing properties and immediate settings. Hence, this theory portrays how international undergraduate students
naturally blended and connected with AU, the community of Berrien Springs, administrators, educators, the culture, and other students. This model helped explore the interpersonal and developmental connection and relationship between the international undergraduate students and the people, their living environment, and the outcomes.

The Resilience Theory

The concept of resilience transpired the international undergraduate students to be able to find their way through internal and external reserves based on strengths and lessons learned (Bernstein et al., 2000; Davino, 2007). In this study, resilience is connected to the international student’s conduct in face of adversity (Bradley & Davino, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Tummala-Narra, 2007).

The RISE theory was created to support resilience and successful employment career for international students with the purpose of mentoring, supervising, and increasing helpful stratagems. It focuses on how they learn, communicate, adjust, and cope (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 839). In this model, “coping,” bears a similitude to resilience, referring to students’ reaction in face of adversity, which is portrayed as “adaptive or endurance resilience” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 840). They face their challenges by either believing in God, motivating themselves, being determined, strategizing to come up with a solution, or they press on it until they will find a way out, and receiving help from others. Although this model exists to address and provide support to international students’ adjusting to the Australian higher education system, in regards to their cultural, language, and academic struggles, (Arkoudis, 2008; Carroll, 2005; Sacre et al., 2010), it also applies to all international students regardless of the country or their field of study. Besides providing ongoing support to international students, the RISE model, positively
impacts learning and work experiences, cultural adjustment, targeted supplies, valuable information, technology operation, and improvement of strategies to meet their needs.

While the Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological theory suggests that international undergraduate students’ interact and develop interpersonal connection and relationship with the people around them and their environment, the RISE model addresses and provides support to the international students’ adjustment struggles. It also impacts learning and work experiences, and makes provisions for coping, which resembles endurance in adversity. These two models, the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994, 2005) bio-ecological human development theory and the RISE, complement each other to guide this study.

Findings

Four themes and sub-themes emerged from the data as follows:

1. Community support with family support and university system serving as sub-themes,

2. Motivation and self-motivation and sub-themes such as, academic activities, driving through the snow and future plans serving as examples,

3. Self-determination, and

4. Relationship with God and sub-themes; namely, prayer and belief in the power of God, emerging as examples.

They are followed by the discussions, recommendations, implications for additional research, reflections, and conclusion sections.
Community Support

This research expressed that community support, such as family and the university systems, helped them to cope with their challenges. Fundamentally, these students had a close and strong relationship with their parents, grandparents, and siblings. The distance with their loved ones back home did not alter the solidity of their relationships. They communicated with them regularly through the phones, Skype, or Facebook. Most of them didn’t worry about financial hardships for which they are quite thankful. They were extremely grateful to their family for the sacrifices they made and the expenses they occurred to send them abroad to pursue their studies. These students stretched themselves thin to give their utmost to overcome their challenges and succeed. Most of them held on to the promises made to their parents to obtain good grades, which prompted them to rise above their challenges.

International undergraduate students in this study are extremely grateful for the help, the resources, and the encouragement that the community of AU provided to them that abetted them to confront their challenges. They valued the American culture because of their mentality and willingness to teach others. They considered themselves privileged to study in a higher education system that allows freedom of speech and personal choices of changing majors, questioning professors, and making their own schedules. They particularly liked the thought of being in control of their own destiny for those who did not share a relationship with God. They appreciated the resources such as tutoring services, free food potlucks, employment assistance, and social and spiritual events that contributed to their efforts to cope with their challenges. These students showed
resilience as they drew from their internal strengths to do their best to succeed in order to please their parents.

Motivation

This study coped with challenges because of self-motivation that was crucial to succeed. Motivation impacted the following areas: academics, life experiences, future plans. Academically, the international undergraduate students motivated themselves to overcome their challenges. They inspired themselves to embrace and cope with the curriculum, which was new for most of them. They did their best to understand and navigate the syllabi as a new method that was inexistent in their educational system back home. They coped with the new educational system mostly on their own and by teaching themselves. They adjusted with their linguistic classroom struggles by getting help with tutoring services, watching videos, and listening to music in English. These techniques improved their understanding, listening, and speaking, which fostered communication with other students and professors. This study overcame challenges because of high motivated to succeed.

For instance, driving in the snow represented a new, stressful, and scary challenge for most of the sampled students. It was challenging for several reasons. First, it was a new experience for them, which was terrifying because they were afraid of getting into car accidents. Second, it caused them to arrive late in their classes. Third, it impacted their performances as they missed out on lectures. They overcame their challenges by convincing themselves that they had to brave the snow, reorganize their schedules, wake up before the usual time, and leave up to thirty minutes earlier. They also motivated themselves with the concept that quitting was not acceptable.
The thought of a bright and successful future also motivated international undergraduate students to cope with their challenges. Seeing their future and making plans for it gave them the courage to face their trials. Several planned to pursue their education. While many aspired to find employment, a number of them were motivated by their life calling. The pursuit of graduate studies, the thought of being global and ready for employment, the longing for a successful career or their life calling enthused international undergraduate students to confront their challenges.

Self-Determination

In this study, the overwhelming majority of the international undergraduate students used a high level of self-determination to confront challenges in order to reach their educational goals. Their self-determination helped them face their challenges, not to mention their sense of commitment, persistence, and endurance.

The sample students are self-determined individuals as their beliefs, potential, and desires motivated them to overcome their educational objectives. When facing health situations, they fought with a positive attitude of a winner, strove, and worked at home without supervision, passed their exams and obtained excellent grades. When dealing with stress, they deprived themselves of their sleep and food, rearranged their schedules, and worked on their assignments and projects in a proactive manner to meet their classes’ demands. When facing classroom miscommunications due to the language, they wrote letters to converse with their classmates to do group projects. The thought of their imminent graduation kept them more determined than ever.

Another example was the case of a student who became depressed as a result of a broken engagement with his fiancé. He was so depressed that he could not function in
any capacity. It took him four weeks to bounce back. Although he prayed, he also deployed personal efforts to move on. Other students strategized in the classroom to face linguistic challenges. They wrote letters to face the barriers of communication to partake in class projects. The thought of completing their degree soon helped them become self-determined.

Self-determination stories were numerous within this group of students and they all rose above their challenges. Analyzing their challenge, separating their emotions from it, adapting to it, and removing themselves from it, helped them to evaluate it and see what they needed to do to overcome it. Their sense of self-determination and experiences gave evidence that they rose above their challenges. The manner, in which the sample students managed, represents a key element in coping by going through the recognition of their emotions, adaptation, removal of themselves as being neutral, assessment and acceptance of the degree of the problem and taking the initiative to fix their problems. Going through this process requires not only self-determination but also resilience.

Religion / Spirituality / Relationship with God

This research study’s belief’s system was evident in searching spirituality as a mechanism to cope with their challenges. They have developed fervent relationships with God through prayers, devotions, worships, and vespers. Although their experiences were imbued with challenges such as culture adjustment, financial and personal hardships, health issues, stress management, curricular and linguistic trials, and visas difficulties, yet they portrayed God as the power behind their strengths that enabled them to cope with their challenges. They valued God’s active participation and involvement in their lives. Although they described their college life as “busy,” yet, they made the time to pray and
to their devotion in the morning and night. Sometimes they went to prayer rooms to communicate with God. They took their prayer life seriously. They went to God for all kinds of challenges including their stress and they had faith that He would come through for them. It appeared that God became their resilience.

The Adventist sample students believed in the power of God to help them face their trials even when they didn’t pray. Their stories of how God performed miracles for them in relations to winning the visa lottery or the survival of an earthquake, or surfacing from depression from heart brokenness or surviving winter gloominess or sickness or academic successes were permeated with the belief in God’s power. Their relationship to God was a lifestyle. Even when they deployed personal efforts to overcome their challenges, they attributed the credits to God. Although the non-Adventists did not report a relationship with God, they were exposed to prayers, vespers, worships and meditation of the Word.

The non-religious participants managed to confront their challenges by relying totally on their capacities without having recourse to prayers and beliefs in God. This attitude suggests that God empowers all of us with the necessary resilience to face adversities regardless of our religion, spirituality, faith, or relationship with Him. It can also be drawn from this study that when we have challenges, we either turn to God, to others or ourselves for help. Whether we turn to God or not, we all develop inner strengths, motivation, and determination to cope. Therefore, our resilience measures the outcome of our ability to overcome challenges.
Discussion

Researchers of internationalization argue that international students confront multifaceted challenges in their host country, namely, cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges among others (e.g. Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Church, 1982; Hwang & Goto, 2009). As they confront these challenges, they develop the need to blend with people in their new environment. This concept resonates with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) bio-ecological model that suggests five stages that international students go through in their developmental phase, namely, the microsystem in their interpersonal stage, the mesosystem as they connect to others, the exosystem as they interconnect with the environment, the macrosystem as they adapt to the new culture, and the chronosystem, as they connect with time. All the 10 participants in this study went through Bronfenbrenner’s stages of bio-ecological of human development, which portrays how these students naturally blend and interact with their families, and connect with their new university environment and people.

This study especially embraced the idea that people in the community are warm and willing to help them achieve their goals. The sample students expressed their love for diversity at AU, which made it possible for them to have worthy friends who helped them cope with their challenges. They were equally appreciative of the university’s diversity where the professors showed them grace, leniency, and mercy and related to them, as they were also foreigners. This concept echoes with Killick (2015) who has identified intercultural competence and communication as other challenges to initialize the curriculum, and Ward et al. (2001) who posited, “individuals exposed to heterogeneous
cultural influences can either become or resist becoming intercultural” (p.31). Ward et al. identified four types of issues that can emerge in the host country:

1. Embracing a new culture and rejecting one’s own culture,
2. Withdrawing from own’s original culture,
3. Wavering between first and adopted cultures, and
4. Combining both cultures into a multicultural personality.

Wavering between both cultures, these students, at first, found it challenging because they felt culturally restrained to fully embrace the American culture. Yet, they managed to motivate themselves and be self-determined to confront their challenges and rise above them.

While the first model theoretically depicts this research adaptation process, the RISE theory reverberates with the students’ empowerment process with support, mentoring, supervising and employment opportunities. Although this model was specifically designed as a lens to explore the sampled students’ needs in the Australian Health Care institutions, it provides an underpinning for the employment place and mentoring for them. It impacts learning and work experiences, and improves strategies to meet international students’ needs in other institutions globally although the study was delimited to one university.

As the international undergraduate students in this study navigated college life and confronted challenges, their main motivation to cope was their plan for the future. Their primary drive to confront their challenges was the outcome, the thought that they would be employed and earning sizeable incomes. Their employment motivation resonates with Hazen and Alberts (2006) who purported that the improvement of
educational and career development often constitute the primary motivation for some international students to study in more wealthy countries. It also resonates with Bronfenbrenner’s (1994) theory, which posits that financial resources and the individual’s perception also can positively or negatively impact ecologies.

The thought of being global and ready for employment, the pursuit of graduate studies, and the longing for a successful career or their life calling not only resonate with the RISE model, but also with Killick’s (2015) suggestions that curriculum internationalization should be designed in a way for international students to be ready for employability. He also supported the idea that the internationalized curriculum’s purpose is to prepare international students for academic achievement, cultural knowledge, and global market and as well as for life (Killick, 2015). The RISE model accentuates an underpinning for the employment place and the mentoring of international students, the contextualization of curriculum internationalization, and helps students see the world and the workplace through different lenses.

According to Knight (2004) and Killick (2015), it is incumbent on colleges and universities to ensure that their international students be prepared for the workforce in order for them to become contributors in taking active part in income production and increased competition in the global market. Killick (2015) noted that curriculum internationalization should be designed in a way for international students to be ready for employability. He also supported the idea that the curriculum’s purpose is to prepare international students for academic achievement, cultural knowledge, and global market and as well as for life. The thought of making money in the near future motivated many students to cope with their challenges and caused them to develop resilience.
Their attitude echoes with researchers of resilience, in the context of internationalization, that contend that there are three developmental factors: the gifted adjustment to depressing life situations; the skillful recovery and success with life negative outcomes, and the competence to face unexpected risks instead of avoiding them (Bernstein et al., 2000). Further, Rutter (2008), categorized these collective acculturative experiences as the individual’s capacity to navigate stress, known as psychological resilience. Although these students faced all three developmental factors, yet they coped with their challenges.

This research coping with multifaceted challenges in different ways, resounds with the RISE model where “coping, bears a similitude to resilience” (Sacre et al., 2010, p. 840). Resilience is understood as the ability to “bounce back” from adversity, to manage stress effectively, and to withstand physical and psychological pressure without showing major debilitation or dysfunction (Brooks & Goldstein, 2001; Jordan & Hartling, 2002). As Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) and Ungar, (2008) posited, fundamentally, resilience constitutes the resulting activities that take place between the person and the surrounding events. Furthermore, a person is capable of surmounting difficulties while normally functioning (Lightsey, 2006; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001).

The sampled students did not wait for other people to encourage them. Despite their relationship and connection with God and their faith, they unfolded their inner strengths to become self-motivated and self-determined to rise above their challenges. According to Bronfenbrenner (1994), the proximal processes, which occur as the human development navigates life, constitute the increasingly intricate relations, such as valuable motivations for development, between the growing organism and its immediate
surroundings. These students used a few techniques to inspire themselves, such as, reminding themselves of their parents’ sacrifices to send them to the U.S. to pursue their education or self-appraisal, or using self-rewards.

In short, the international undergraduate students, in this study, struggled with their new environment, culture, language, financial hardships, curricula, spiritual, social, physical, and emotional challenges. Although for some students, God became their resilience, yet, they were motivated and self-determined to overcome their challenges and expressed their gratitude for the help that the community and their family contributed to their coping mechanisms to rise above their difficulties. Their drive to succeed resonates with Tammala-Narra, (2001) who postulated that resilience occurs when an individual uses his/her cultural, spiritual, familial, financial, and relational resources to overcome life’s difficulties. Their experiences gave evidences that they were resilient people.

The Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the RISE’s supplementary models served as a theoretical lens to understand coping mechanisms. The collaboration of these two models was necessary to answer the research questions and address the possible emergence of the concept of resilience in confronting challenges. As resilience emerged in the students’ coping strategies, the RISE model was essential to join the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) biocological of human development theory to explore the international undergraduate students’ experiences and understand their coping strategies. Essentially, this study confirmed that these two models guided the exploration of this research in confronting challenges, coping strategies, and embedding the emerging resilience. Although the theories served as lenses to meet this study’s needs, researchers are encouraged to continue to develop one single theory that could serve as a single lens to address all the
needs of the international students including the role of resilience in their confronting challenges and overcoming them.

This study’s findings are unique in various ways. First, the choice of the cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial areas of the topic was the result of considerable research on international students’ studies that emerged, as their main basic needs. Further, these categories were based on the literature review in Chapter 2. Therefore, the recommendations from the findings are not only significant to AU but could also be used worldwide.

Second, the study was unique because of the diverse sample student pool comprised of the only Egyptian student, one of the two Vietnamese students, the first Eritrean student who made it this far. He proudly stated that he will be the first to graduate and that the Eritrean flag will be erected for the first time at AU.

Third, two participants did not know that they were attending a Christian university until at the time of the interview. Apparently, their parents were only interested in the location of the university, which they found safe for their children. Security appeared to be their only criterion in choosing AU.

Fourth, non-Adventist students who had never been exposed to the Word of God, although they felt intimidated at first, became comfortable and passed their religion courses. One of those students shared how she was interested in the week of prayers. She elaborated that she liked the last speaker that they had because he shared his personal stories with them. She addressed her desire to have more speakers like that.

Fifth, although all of the sampled students developed reliance in the confrontation of the challenges, some of them shared stories of their friends who could not cope with
their challenges and returned home. This factor is relevant in broadening the scope of this study and reinforcing the rationale for using the Bronfenbrenner’ bio-ecological model of human development and the RISE model as the right lenses of choice. Sixth, most of the sampled students, Adventists or not, expressed their gratitude to AU for their spiritual growth resulting from their exposure to spiritual activities, chapel requirements, choir participation, prayer rooms where they could do their devotion and release their stress. One student shared that she felt that she had experienced spiritual, physical and emotional growth as she navigated her academic journey at AU. Finally, on a personal note, this study has uniquely helped me grow spiritually because of the complexities of research, the extensive journey in navigating the various steps of writing the dissertation caused me to seek God in a way that I never did before, which brought me to a more intimate relationship with God and increasing my faith and trust in my walk with Him.

**Recommendations for Students**

The sampled students made the following recommendations based on their experiences, challenges, and lessons learned. They are addressed to current and forthcoming international undergraduate students, and university’s administrators and educators:

1. Get as much information about the attending university because the material packet that they provide is limited. Find someone from your nationality before coming to this country. It can help with the transition and the adaptation process. Conducting early personal research and attending the orientation are considered important steps.

2. Start thinking in English to avoid the temptation of translating everything. Patience can help with the language challenge because of the difference in the academic
language. Acquire as much knowledge as possible by reading and learning English before coming to the country.

3. Keep a relationship with God, do devotionals, and nurture friendships with everyone. Do not blame challenges on being international or in another country. See them as life trials. Conduct introspections when things are not working out and re-arrange school schedule to make things happen in a timely manner. For instance, arrange to leave home a few minutes early to arrive to class on time especially when it is snowing.

4. Mingle with other cultures to get a bigger picture of the world. It will help evaluate the new American culture and choose values and principles that are deemed necessary. The university provides academic freedom of speech that helps in communicating with professors. Ask questions when facing misunderstandings because American people like to teach people and they are very open. Do not leave challenges unaddressed because help is available.

5. Do not fall into the trap of using native language with friends. International students tend to remain in the circle of friends from their home countries because of the language that makes jokes more interesting. It will delay progress with the language. College is different from high school life. It is a new level of challenge that requires a serious transition and a new level of commitment. College students have the misguided impression that college is easy.

**Recommendations for Universities’ Administrators and Educators**

These recommendations are based on the sampled students’ experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms.
1. Have a system-thinking mind-set among the different departments and revise interdepartmental policies and procedures due to alleged inconsistencies that seem to provoke students’ complaints, frustrations, and delays in advancing with their degrees. Provide the same training to all advisors. In my data, advisors seemed to contradict each other with inconsistent information. Students in my group seemed to believe that there are loopholes in the academic navigation process that affected them financially and made them waste time. It also looked like the general information given on paper did not match advisors’ verbal instructions or guidance. When nearing graduation date, students from my study, seemed to become frustrated by miscommunications among departments’ staff.

2. Revamp policies on the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification, which require students to pass the test in order to be qualified to teach in the state of Michigan. Out of state or international students in my group appeared not to be prepared to take the exam, and did not believe that they needed it to teach in their country. Ultimately, they repeatedly failed it.

3. Get in touch with international students by sending them a monthly mass message asking them how they are doing and reminding them what help is available. Advertise help available to them. The experiences of some students evidenced that some of them did not have anyone in the country. It always feels good to know that someone cares. It appears that students in my group were under the impression that the university only advertised help related mainly to social activities.

4. Continue to organize weeks of prayer for undergraduate students and try to request that speakers share personal stories to foster interest and make it attractive. Continue also to reinforce chapel requirements.
5. Prioritize services that address students’ requirements. In my group, it appeared that there is not enough manpower to address the needs of prospective international students. Prepare separate orientation packets for international and domestic students. Most international students in my group appeared to have linguistic challenges that prevented them from comprehending the literature and everything during orientation meetings. It would also help to employ caseworkers that speak the language of the international students who are in greater majority to foster better communication between them and ensure that their needs are met.

6. Explore ways to possibly create other scholarships for international students besides the $7,500.00 Andrews Partnership Scholarship if possible. It depends on the student’s ACT scores and GPA. The stakes increase for international undergraduate students because unlike graduate students, they do not have access to scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships (Selvadurai, 1991). The irony is that not only is it hard for them to calculate their GPA and measure the value of the American educational system (several countries don’t have a GPA system), but their SAT scores tend to be low because of their linguistic issues and challenges with the unfamiliar structures of the test. Therefore, it appears that scholarships are generally awarded to domestic students. Students in my group seemed to have experienced this challenge.

7. Consider passing a survey in the cafeteria at the beginning of each semester, or provide a box of suggestions and complaints to be cognizant of students’ challenges with the food and address their concerns. A couple of students from my group gave evidence from their experiences that they faced particular challenges with the food. Addressing their issues may prevent future occurrences of the same kind.
In adhering with these recommendations, AU can benefit from them by providing better services to its current and incoming international undergraduate students. Due to its spirituality and faith in God that constitute these students’ resilience, AU empowers them, helps them grow and succeed. Furthermore, AU can positively reposition itself in this competitive world of internationalization and globalization to increase enrollment and retention rate, revenues, and profitability while continuing to foster quality education.

**Implications for Additional Research**

A plethora of studies are conducted on international students’ challenges in their host countries. However, little research was published on how they cope with their challenges and rise above them. This study portrays, in a unique way, the exploration of the international undergraduate students’ cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges and their coping strategies with the resilience factor playing a significant role in overcoming challenges.

The Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological human development theory and the RISE model’s complimentary resources have revealed to be the most valuable theoretical lenses for exploring the experiences and the confronting challenges of the international undergraduate students. The analysis of the experiences and challenges resulted in four major themes and sub-themes where resilience played a major role. As already stated, international undergraduate students coped with their challenges through their resilience in the community system with family support and university system as sub-themes, their motivation and academic, snow driving, and plans for the future as sub-themes and examples, self-determination, and their relationship with God and prayer and belief in God as sub-themes.
The above emerging themes and sub-themes have implications for additional research on international students’ confronting challenges, coping strategies, and resilience factors. The following future studies are recommended:

1. A Quantitative study exploring further coping strategies of international students with their challenges in a larger sample in various mixed secular and faith-based universities. This study was delimited to one Christian university and limited to 10 students.

2. A qualitative study exploring international students’ coping mechanisms in a non-faith based institution. Although the SDA students deployed efforts and their inner strengths to face their trials, they completely relied on their God to confront their challenges. At one point, God became their resilience.

3. A qualitative study investigating the impact of resilience in the lives of international students. Although all the participants were proven to be resilient individuals, friends of the sampled students were not as they quit and returned home because of their inability to cope with their challenges.

4. A qualitative study describing alternative policies that can be explored to better address a healthy integration of international students in the American Higher Education system.

5. A qualitative study exploring the two theoretical lenses, the Bronfenbrenner (1979) and the RISE model might give rise to one new theory that can frame the study of international students’ confronting challenges and their resilience. Although each theory proved to be extremely useful in conceptualizing this study, the resulting combination between the two models could suggest the birth of a tentative model, leading to a new
possible theory that would explore the needs of international students. Since the topic only addressed the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial experiences of international undergraduate students, there exists the possibility that the conceptual alignment might leave out a missing area in internationalization that would require the need of another theoretical lens to completely meet the needs of this population. Theorists might find it useful to develop, explore, and research this gap, which could lead to a new model for integration in the higher educational system worldwide.

Thus, all students have the propensity to confront challenges, and rise above them. Yet, some develop the inner strengths to do it, unfold strategies, and depend on their relationship with God while others simply rely on their own resources, parents, the community, their motivation, and their self-determination. With further research, it remains to be seen if better coping strategies can be more useful, or religion and resilience matter, or one single conceptual theory can produce a more useful frame.

**Researcher Reflections**

As I near the completion of my study, I am pausing to reflect on my exhaustive journey (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). I came to the Leadership department in 2009, a semester after completing my MDiv from the AU Theological Seminary. My acceptance into the Higher Education program came about three days after my interview with the program coordinator and submission of the required documents. My navigation of the course plan was not as challenging as the writing of the dissertation. I completed all my courses within two years. My real trial started with the writing of the dissertation.

Finding this topic was not as automatic as I expected it to be. After struggling with a couple of other subjects, I reflected on my life and early years in college, and
understood that I needed to explore the experiences of international undergraduate students to see if they cope differently from the way I did with my challenges. Attending three international tours with the Higher Education program at AU confirmed my initial decision and has caused me to develop a passion and interest in internationalization.

Once I found the theme, writing the Chapter 1 took more time than I imagined because it was a learning process. Although the next two chapters were not as dramatic as the first, yet, writing them took what seemed a lifetime. But once I successfully defended my proposal, the fear that crippled me in the beginning was gone. I understood that, as the researcher, I needed to remain as unbiased and in control as possible in order to capture, in the interviews, the essence of the findings. There were times during the interview process that I related to the participants through their challenges. I was curious to see how different their experiences were from mine. I realized that they were about the same. Once the data was collected, the next challenge was the transcription that was tedious, time-consuming, and exhaustive. Coding was a bit disappointing because of my expectations of Nvivo that were not entirely met.

One of the initial challenges came with reporting the data. Finding the right way presentation was very painful and challenging. It took me a while before I could overcome it. After reviewing a few dissertations in search of the right structure, I decided to model one that my methodologist found acceptable. After I overcame that challenge, I realized it was the less thought-provoking part of my dissertation. I finally figured out that my challenge was that it was not so much the presentation that was troublesome, but it was because I inferred more than what the participants were saying.
In terms of findings, it took sweats to “dig and find gold nuggets” to repeat my former chair, Dr. S. Gonzalez because it was the last push, she said. I found my Ah! Ah! moment, which my methodologist referred to as the findings of my study, on my knees. The whole process of recording, transcribing, coding, and analyzing was exhausting but enjoyable at the end. Although there were times, I felt discouraged and tired, quitting was never an option. My relationship with God and my trust in Him gave me the courage to continue my journey and keep going. God became my resilience.

The most significant contribution of my dissertation came at the end of the discussion and the implications for further research. The Bronfenbrenner’s bio-ecological model of human development and the RISE model collaborated into the theoretical lens to guide my research study. Although each theory proved to be extremely useful in conceptualizing the study, the resulting combination between the two models could suggest the birth of a tentative model, leading to a new possible theory that would explore the needs of international students. Since the topic only addressed the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial experiences of international undergraduate students, there exists the possibility that the conceptual alignment might leave out a missing area in internationalization that would require the need of another theoretical lens to completely meet the needs of this population. Theorists might find it useful to develop, explore, and research this gap, which could lead to a new model for integration in the higher educational system worldwide.

I certainly hope that I “lit the candle that may help demystify the process” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 278) of coping with challenges for international undergraduate studies. I also hope that the light will not die, as more research will be
conducted on resilience in international students. I am genuinely grateful to God for all that I have learned as a doctoral student, and as the researcher that I have become.

**Conclusion**

Further studies on international undergraduate studies can continue to use the Bronfenbrenner’s (1979, 1994, 2005) bio-ecological model of human development with or without the RISE model, depending on the variables. Bronfenbrenner’s conceptual theory is a valuable tool to understand the various stages and the dynamics of navigating life in a new environment. It helped answer the questions that follow:

1. What are the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges of the international undergraduate students?

2. How do they cope with their challenges?

The RISE model helped to explore the impact of resilience in the study. Together, these two models communicated this study’s answers: The international undergraduate students coped with their challenges through their resilience in the community system, their motivation, self-determination, and their relationship with God.

These study’s findings can sustain an evidence of culture for international undergraduate students and the professionals working in the fields of education, psychology, counseling, internationalization, and globalization. This study can inspire all those students who left AU or other universities by providing them with better ways to cope with their challenges. The higher education global competition can use this study’s findings and recommendations to improve retention rate, attract diversity, and increase enrollment and retention ratio of new incoming international students by improving services, revamping policies, and adding new procedures based on international
undergraduate students’ needs and challenges. The U.S. higher education system can benefit from this study by strengthening their policies and procedures with law providers, educators, administrators for brain gain in research, increase their economy through profits and revenues, and repositioning itself in the internationalized and globalized competition. Furthermore, this study adds to the research world by strengthening the understanding of international undergraduate students’ stories, and the resilience needed to confront and cope with challenges. Finally, the greatest contribution of this study resides in its implications for further research in giving rise to a possible emerging theoretical lens that could explore the holistic needs of international students.
APPENDIX A

LETTER TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT OFFICE
July 8, 2015

Andrews University  
8975 U.S. 31  
Berrien Springs, MI 49104  
Att: Robert Benjamin, Director

Dear Dr. Benjamin,

My name is Renaude Saint-Phard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration Program at Andrews University. I am conducting this research study on the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the international undergraduate students and their experiences of coping in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree. Specifically, I am seeking to understand the role that coping plays in helping international undergraduate students confront their challenges and rise above them.

Each participant in this qualitative study will be required to partake in a three interview series with the researcher. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information that will aid in understanding the meaning that participants ascribe to their challenges and the impact of coping on their experiences. Information collected throughout the research will remain confidential. I will use pseudonyms to keep participants’ identity private.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The recorded information and materials, the signed consent form, the participant’s various artifacts along with the field notes will be safely kept in a locked file cabinet in the Researcher’s home. The researcher will be the only person with access to the cabinet. Upon completion of the study, the audio recording will be discarded. Three years following the completion of the research study, all consent forms, collected data and, transcribed notes will be extinguished. Immediate destruction of collected data will take place for participants who have withdrawn.

I am requesting that the attached letter be sent to potential participants, namely, international undergraduate students studying at Andrews University.

Should they be interested in volunteering to participate in my study and would like further information they may contact me at (269) 277-3928 or email me at saintpha@andrews.edu or call my dissertation chair, Dr. Gustavo Gregorutti at (269) 471-6163 or email her at ggregoru@andrews.edu.

Cordially,

Renaude Saint-Phard
APPENDIX B

STUDY FLYER
Are you an undergraduate international student?
Here is a research project opportunity for you!

The research study is entitled:
Cultural, Linguistic, Curricular, and Financial Stories of Andrews University International Students And Their Experiences of Resilience During the Academic Year 2012-2015

Please contact the researcher: Renaude Saint-Phard
Phone #: (269) 277-3928
Or the International student office to schedule an interview session

There is a possibility of winning a prize if among the first 20 individuals to schedule and participate in an interview
APPENDIX C

NEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Andrews University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
I am conducting a research study as part of my ___Dissertation___ project, in partial fulfillment for my ___Ph.D____ at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

Reserach Title: Cultural, Linguistic, Curricular, and Financial Stories of Andrews University International Undergraduate Students And Their Experiences Of Coping During The Academic Year 2014-2015: A Narrative Study.

Purpose of Study: I have been told that the purpose of this qualitative study is to give voice to international undergraduate students, explore their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories, and how they cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges. I must be 18 years or older to participate. I must be willing to share the stories about my experiences and give insight on how I coped with my challenges giving the best and clearest picture in the semi-structured interviews conducted by the primary researcher.

Duration of participation in study: ______ I have been informed that I will participate in a face-to-face interview, which will take approximately an hour to an hour and a half of my time.

Procedures description of procedures to be followed ___ I have been told that participation in this study will involve two follow up interviews. I also understand that the interviews will be recorded. Further, I understand that the study will be conducted by mutual consent in a private and confidential place where I will feel comfortable and safe.

Benefits: (description of any benefits to the subjects or others which may reasonably be expected from the reserach) ___ I have been told that I will not receive any monetary compensation or other type of inducement for participating in this study. I have been told that there will be no cost to me for participating in this study.

Risks: (describe any forseeable risks or discomforts to subjects) ___ I have been told that there will be no implied liability whether oral or written of my legal rights. There are no forseeable risks or discomfort beyond minimal risks.

Voluntary Participation: I have been informed that my participation in this study is completely voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. That I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled.
Confidentiality: (statement describing the extent, if any, to which confidentiality of records identifying the subjects will be maintained) I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document. And that the researcher will keep the records in a cabinet at home for a period not less than 3 years. The researcher will be the only interviewer and the only one with access to the cabinet.

Contact: I am aware that I can contact the supervisor, Gustavo Gregorutti, Ph.D. (269 471-6163- gggregoru@andrews.edu) or myself at (269 277-3928 – saintpha@andrews.edu) for answers to questions related to this study. I have read the contents of this Consent and received verbal explanations to questions I had. My questions concerning this study have been answered satisfactorily. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. I am fully aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact Renaude Saint-Phard at 269 277-3928, and or the advisor, Gustavo Gregorutti, Ph.D. at 269 471-6163 gggregoru@andrews.edu

____________________   ________________________
Signature (Subject) Date

____________________  ________________________
Researcher Signature Phone Date
Renaude Saint-Phard
June, 2015

INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to give voice, explore, and understand the cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular stories and experiences of undergraduate international students who use the concept of resilience to cope with their challenges.

- Do you know what I mean when I say “coping with challenges?”

Description: I mean, the use of personal inner strengths, skills and environmental factors to face challenges and overcome them.

We will use a three-interview series format. We will conduct the first interview today and will make two consecutive appointments for the other two interviews. Each interview will take about 60-90 minutes.

A- The first interview questions are focused on life history including interactions with families, academic institutions, including tutoring, coaching, mentoring, and counseling.

First interview questions:

1) Tell me about your family?

2) Tell me about your relationships with family members?

3) What motivated you to study in the U.S.?

4) What was your family’s reaction to your decision to study in the U.S.?

5) What was the rationale behind your decision to study in the U.S.?

6) Tell me about your relationship with other students in the dorm or the classroom.
B- The second interview questions focus on the details of the experience.

Second interview questions:

1) Tell me about your life as a college student here.
2) Tell me about your relationship with other students in the dorm or the classroom.
3) Tell me about your experiences with your instructors.
4) Describe an average day from the time you wake up to the time you fall asleep. Where might you go? With whom might you interact?
5) What do you think about as you reflect on that day?
6) If I were a student from your home country, what would you tell me that it takes to rise above challenges?
7) Tell me about a challenging experience you had on campus.
8) Tell me a time of a reaction or approach that helped you overcome a challenging situation.
9) What other factors have helped you face this challenge? What was not helpful about your reaction?

C. The third interview series concentrate on the reflection of your experiences’ meaning. The word ‘meaning’ addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between your and life.

Third interview questions:

1) Given that you shared in your last interview that you faced challenges, how do you understand coping? What does it mean to you?
2) Can you think of any times when your challenges hindered your adjustment here?
3) What lessons have you learned as you adjusted here? How did these experiences change your opinion? How did they cause you to reflect?

4) Do you have any friend you know who left Andrews University because of his or her inability to cope?

5) Where do you see yourself in the future? As we close the interview, is there anything else you would like to share?

6) Is there any friend you would like to refer for this study?

I appreciate the time you dedicated for these interviews to share with me the stories of your challenges and experiences of resilience. Once I have analyzed my interviews and reached my findings, I will contact you so you may review my draft and provide me with possible recommendations for improvement.
Application for Approval of Human Subjects Research

Please complete this application as thoroughly as possible. Your application will be reviewed by a committee of Andrews University IRB, and if approved it will be for one year. Beyond the one year you will be required to submit a continuation request. It is the IRB’s responsibility to assign the level of review: Exempt, Expedited or Full. It is your responsibility to accurately complete the form and provide the required documents. Should your application fall into the exempt status, you should expect a response from the IRB office within 2 weeks; Expedited within 2 weeks and a Full review 4-6 weeks.

Please complete the following application:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Research Project</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) Title: Cultural, Linguistic, Curricular and Financial Stories of Andrews University Undergraduate International Students And Their Experiences of Resilience During the Academic Year: 2012-2015.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Will the research be conducted on the AU campus? <strong>X</strong> Yes ____ No</td>
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<td>If no, please indicate the location(s) of the study and attach an institutional consent letter that references the researcher’s study.</td>
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<th>b) What is the source of funding (please check all that apply)</th>
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<td>Award # / Charging String:</td>
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<td><em>If you do not know the funding/grant information, please obtain it from your department</em></td>
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<th>2. Principal Investigator (PI)</th>
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<tr>
<td>First Name: RENAUDE Last Name: SAINT-PHARD Telephone: 2692773928 E-mail: <a href="mailto:saintpha@andrews.edu">saintpha@andrews.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>X</strong> Yes I am a student. If so, please provide information about your faculty advisor below.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Name: SYLVIA Last Name: GONZALEZ Telephone: 269-6702 E-mail: <a href="mailto:sylviag@andrews.edu">sylviag@andrews.edu</a></td>
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Advisor’s signature:
Department: Leadership  Program: Higher Education Administration

3. Co-investigators (Please list their names and contact information below)

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4. Cooperating Institutions
Is this research being done in cooperation with any institutions, individuals or organizations not affiliated with AU?
___ Yes _X_ No If yes, please provide the names and contact information of authorized officials below.

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5. Participant Recruitment
Describe how participant recruitment will be performed. Include how and by whom potential participants are introduced to the study *(please check all below that apply)*

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<td>Other, please specify: International Student Office emails</td>
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Please attach any recruiting materials you plan to use and the text of e-mail or web-based solicitations you will use.

6. Participant Compensation and Costs
Are participants to be compensated for the study? Yes ___ No _X_ If yes, what is the amount, type and source of funds?

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Will participants who are students be offered class credit? ___ Yes _X_ No ___ NA

Are other inducements planned to recruit participants? ___ Yes _X_ No If yes, please describe.

Are there any costs to participants? ___ Yes _X_ No If yes, please explain.

7. Confidentiality and Data Security
Will personal identifiers be collected? ___ Yes _X_ No

Will identifiers be translated to a code? ___ Yes _X_ No

Will recordings be made (audio, video)? ___ Yes _X_ No If yes, please describe. Interviews may be recorded to facilitate the results of the study.

Who will have access to data (survey, questionnaires, recordings, interview records, etc.)? Please list below.
8. Conflict of Interest
Do you (or any individual who is associated with or responsible for the design, the conduct of or the reporting of this research) have an economic or financial interest in, or act as an officer or director for, any outside entity whose interests could reasonably appear to be affected by this research project: ___ Yes _X__ No
If yes, please provide detailed information to permit the IRB to determine if such involvement should be disclosed to potential research subjects.

9. Results
To whom will you present results (highlight all that apply)

___ Class  _X_ Conference  _X_ Published Article  _X_ Other  If other, please specify:
Committee Chair: Gus Gregorutti, PhD.

10. Description of Research Subjects
If human subjects are involved, please highlight all that apply:
___ Minors (under 18 years)  ___ Prison inmates  ___ Mentally impaired  ___ Physically disabled
___ Institutionalized residents  ___ Anyone unable to make informed decisions about participation
___ Vulnerable or at-risk groups, e.g., poverty, pregnant women, substance abuse population

11. Risks
*Are there any potential damage or adverse consequences to researcher, participants, or environment?*
These include physical, psychological, social, or spiritual risks whether as part of the protocol or a remote possibility.
Please highlight all that apply (Type of risk):

___ Physical harm  ___ Psychological harm  ___ Social harm  ___ Spiritual harm

12. Content Sensitivity
Does your research address culturally or morally sensitive issues? ___ Yes _X__ No  If yes, please describe:

13. Please provide (type in or copy - paste or attach) the following documentation in the boxes below:

Protocol:  **SEE ATTACHED**
### Survey instrument or interview protocol: SEE ATTACHED

### Institutional approval letter (if off AU campus): N/A

### Consent form (for interviews and focus groups): SEE ATTACHED

### Participants recruitment documents:

---

**Principal Investigator’s Assurance Statement for Using Human Subjects in Research**

_____ I certify that the information provided in this IRB application is complete and accurate.

_____ I understand that as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of IRB approved studies, the ethical performance of protocols, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to the study’s protocol and any stipulation imposed by Andrews University Institutional Review Board.

_____ I will submit modifications and / or changes to the IRB as necessary prior to implementation.

_____ I agree to comply with all Andrews University’s policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regarding the protection of human participants in research.

_____ My advisor has reviewed and approved my proposal.
APPENDIX F

LIST OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS
List of Potential Participants, 18 Years and Older. Print the following information on this form:

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APPENDIX G

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Renaude Saint-Phard successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 04/26/2015

Certification Number: 1752960
APPENDIX H

PROTOCOL FOR THE STUDY
TITLE:

RESEARCHER:
Renaude Saint-Phard, Doctoral Candidate
Department of Education, Higher Education Administration.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:
Chair: Gus Gregorutti, PhD
Methodologist: Gus Gregorutti, Ph.D.
Member: Jay Brand, Ph.D.
Member: Bordes Henry-Saturne, Ph.D.

OBJECTIVES
This study is being conducted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration Program at Andrews University.

PURPOSE
The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore and understand the cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular stories and experiences of international undergraduate students
who how they cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges. I will ask the participant to individually participate in a three interview series in a 90-minute format.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE
This study states the need for international undergraduate students’ cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular stories and their experiences of coping to be voiced out, explored and understood.

The reasons to conduct this study are numerous and observable. Primarily, most international students studies are conducted on international students in general or focus on international graduates students. International undergraduate students do not have a voice undergraduate students.

Secondly, literature on international undergraduate students encompasses little qualitative explorations of the experiences of international students (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

Thirdly, conducting this study will help gain an understanding of the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial challenges that the international undergraduate students experience.

Fourthly, this study can also provide an awareness of the international undergraduate students’ perceptions and an understanding of their coping strategies against challenges from an educational and socio-cultural perspective.

Finally, research on international undergraduate students’ personal experiences with coping is almost inexistent from a socio-cultural viewpoint (Takeuchi et al., 2007).

This research study will explore the pertinent themes that will surface from personal interviews and stories to explore the coping experiences in face of challenges. The results
will add knowledge to the fields of higher education administration, curriculum instruction, counseling and psychology.

**PROCEDURES**

This study will seek to explore and understand the cultural, linguistic, financial and curricular stories of the international undergraduate students and their experiences of coping. The fundamental questions that will guide this study are the following: 1) What are the cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial stories of the challenges confronting international undergraduate students? 2) How do international undergraduate students cope with their cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges?

**Research Design**

This study will use a qualitative narrative design. I will interview five male and five female international undergraduate students from diverse ethnicities ranging in grade level from sophomore to senior who attend Andrews University. The selection criteria will be open to students who have or have not faced cultural, linguistic, curricular and financial challenges in their academic journey. Interview sessions will range from 60 to 90 minutes. The results will be communicated to participants who request them upon data completion, interpretation and analysis.

Interviewees will be comfortable to share their stories in a friendly ambiance. Data collection will primarily be based on semi-structured interviews and field notes. Participants may use artifacts such as photos for interpretation and credibility to their stories, and journals to trigger their memories. They will tell their story in a chronological manner to help in the analysis process.
Sample
This study will interview 10 male and female international undergraduate students from different ethnicities. The criteria for participation will require that students be 1) international undergraduate students, 2) Be 18 year of age or older 3) ranging in grade level from sophomore to senior, 3) attending Andrews University in Berrien Springs Michigan, and 4) willing to tell his or her stories and experiences. Interviews will be conducted in a private setting in order to provide comfort, privacy and confidentiality. I will email a letter to the International Student Office to request that it be sent to students that fit the criteria for the study. I will request permission to the office of Student Affairs to post flyers to recruit participants for the study. Once potential participants contact me, I will make appointments with them to conduct the interviews, which will last about an hour to an hour and a half.
This study will utilize field notes as a supplement to the semi-structured interviews collected from the participants. All three interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The field notes will be useful in recording non-verbal observations and impressions.

Measurement/Instrumentation
The human observer constitutes the best instrument for the qualitative researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2010; Creswell, 2008). As an international student who has gone through the journey of internationalization with its various challenges, experienced diverse difficulties, and overcome the majority of the challenges, I, as the researcher, will represent the best instrument for this qualitative narrative research.
Detailed Study/Procedures

The participant will be asked to individually participate in one and a half hours interview with the researcher. During the interview he/she will be asked to tell his/her story as an international student and describe the experiences of coping in face of challenges. He/she will specifically be asked to tell about his/her life with his/her family in his/her country prior to his/her arrival to the U.S, his/her life in an American University, and describe his/her experiences of coping while facing challenges. Field notes will be taken and the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. A follow up meeting may be requested for his/her to review the analysis of his/her recording for clarity and accuracy. The study does not provide compensation. Nonetheless, he/she will not be required to make any financial expenses.

Confidentiality

The study provides full confidentiality for participation, the data, and their identity in the data analysis. I will provide a pseudonym for participants and I will disguise their references to people and places. I will be the only person interviewing the participants. In the event that they might mention their names or that of a family member, I will safely change them to pseudonyms. I will safely keep the recorded information and materials, the signed consent form, and the participant’s various artifacts along with the field notes in a locked file cabinet at home. I will be the only one to have access to that cabinet. Three years following the completion of the research study, I will extinguish all consent forms, collected data and, transcribed notes.
Risks and Benefits

International students will benefit from their participation in the study that may generate findings and recommendations for improved support, even though they may not directly profit from it.

Compensation

While the study does not provide compensation, the participants will not be required to make any financial expenses for their participation. However, I am dedicated to paying attention to reciprocity by finding a way to give back to the participants or provide them with an award to foster motivation for sharing their experiences, thus enhancing continuous participation.

Right to Withdraw

Participants have the right to withdraw at anytime without penalty. They simply need to make their decision to withdraw known to the researcher and their data will be deleted.

Summary Results

Participants have the right to request a summary of this study, which I will provide to them.

Internal Validity

Narrative researchers encounter several ethical issues in the research process. One of these issues constitutes the validity of the story (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this regard, I will collect multiple field texts, triangulate the data, and check with the participant to protect the validity of data.
Another ethical issue may arise from the participant’s inability to tell the real story based on the story or the fear of sanctions against him or her. Sometimes participants cannot simply recall the real story because it is deeply stored in “the subconscious” (Creswell, 2008, p. 512) or because it is based on old true stories that create unintended distortion and fiction (Lieblich et al, 1998). Although these possibilities exist, narrative inquiry thrives to present the “truths of our experiences” (Riessman, 1993, p. 22), and there is some truth in all stories told. In light of these ethical issues, I will fully collaborate with the participants so that this narrative study reports the truth behind the stories and the re-story of the international undergraduate students.

The owner of the story is another ethical issue. I will ensure that I have proper permission to report the story. I will, finally, ensure that the story does not have any negative implications for the participant. More often than not, ethical dilemma follows the narrative researcher due to conflict and tensions created for participants after the completion of the study (Creswell, 2008). In such cases, Clandinin et al., (2010) recommend the use of “fictionalized interim research texts” for participants to be protected. These texts refer to field texts from different studies experiences that can remind and help participants to be aware of the vulnerabilities.

I will use the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Andrews University criteria protocols, and ethical standards to protect the anonymity of the participants. I will ensure that they know that they have the right to withdraw at any time should they change their mind about participating.

**Data Collection**
Although a variety of methods are available to collect data (Creswell, 2008), this research study will primarily use semi-structured interviews for data collection. It may additionally use letters, field texts (notes), journals, and photographs in order to recall memories and record information for the interviews (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2008).

**Data Analysis**

This study will analyze data using Creswell’s (2008) re-story approach. Re-story refers to the gathering and analyzing of the stories that the research collects in the search for ‘key elements’ such as scene, place, time and plot of the stories (p. 509). I will re-story the narratives in numerous ways (Creswell, 2008) and I will use a table to reflect the five important factors in re-storying: setting, characters, actions, problem and resolution (Ollerenshaw, 1998).

Using Creswell’s (2008) re-storying approach, this study will analyze the stories by identifying themes or categories of information to derive chronological information about the participants’ past, present and future. I will collaborate with the participants when analyzing the data. I will write the story in convenient storytelling style. I will evaluate the story based on the depth, truthfulness, expressiveness, and practicality of the account.

In transcribing the raw data, I will identify the key elements of the story referring to the texts analysis. I will describe the information and develop themes. I will locate findings within larger meanings as I re-story the stories. I will identify the setting, characters, themes, categories and the events in a historical sequence (Creswell, 2008, p. 509). I will
identify the various themes, which I will incorporate into the passages about the participants’ stories.

Ultimately, I will systematize the codes into a progression of activities (Creswell, 2008). I will use the Hyper RESEARCH, which will enable me to “code, retrieve, build theories, and conduct analysis” of my data (Creswell, 2008, p. 242). Lastly, I will use the NVivo software program for these purposes.

I will describe in detail the setting or context in which the participants experience the central phenomena. I will glean rich details about the setting of the participants’ experiences, which may include friends, family, workplace, home, social organization or school, the place where the story physically occurs (Creswell, 2008). I plan to closely collaborate with each participant throughout the process of my research study.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

The participant will acknowledge that he or she read the above-statement and he or she understands all the requirements. He or she is fully aware that he or she voluntarily participates to this study and he or she has the right to withdraw his/her consent at any time. He or she certifies that he/she is willing to participate in this research study on these terms.

He or she understands that for further information he/she can call contact Renaude Saint-Phard, Doctoral Candidate at (269) 277-3928 or email me at saintpha@andrews.edu or call the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Gustavo Gregorutti at (269) 471-6163 or email her at ggregoru@andrews.edu.
APPENDIX I

LETTER TO INTERNATIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
Dear International Undergraduate Student,

My name is Renaude Saint-Phard and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Administration Program at Andrews University. I am conducting this research study on the cultural, linguistic, curricular, and financial stories of the international undergraduate students and their experiences of coping in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my doctoral degree. Specifically, I am seeking to understand the role that coping plays in helping international undergraduate students confront their challenges and rise above them.

Each participant in this qualitative study will be required to partake in a three interview series with the researcher. The purpose of these interviews is to gather information that will aid in understanding the meaning that participants ascribe to their challenges and the impact of coping on their experiences. Information collected throughout the research will remain confidential. I will use pseudonyms to keep participants’ identity private.

Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The recorded information and materials, the signed consent form, the participant’s various artifacts along with the field notes will be safely kept in a locked file cabinet in the Researcher’s home. The researcher will be the only person with access to the cabinet. Upon completion of the study, the audio recording will be discarded. Three years following the completion of the research study, all consent forms, collected data and, transcribed notes will be extinguished. Immediate destruction of collected data will take place for participants who have withdrawn.

Should you be interested in volunteering to participate in my study and would like further information you may contact me at (269) 277-3928 or email me at saintpha@andrews.edu or call my dissertation chair, Dr. Gustavo Gregorutti at (269) 471-6163 or email him at ggregoru@andrews.edu. I would be happy to discuss with you my research study.

Cordially,

Renaude Saint-Phard
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Education, Higher Education Administration, Andrews University
APPENDIX J

Eligibility for Participation Table
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Participant’s Contact Information</th>
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REFERENCE LIST


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VITA
VITA

RENAUDE ETIENNE SAINT-PHARD
7201 US Highway 31
Berrien Springs, Michigan
(269) 277-3928

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Curriculum and Instruction, Doctoral Candidate
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, anticipated degree August 2015

MDiv., Theological Andrews Seminary
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, 2008

MAOM., Organizational Management
Phoenix University on Line, Phoenix, Arizona, 2005

B.A. Languages: French & Spanish
Brooklyn College, Brooklyn, NY, 1989

Professional Experience

Graduate Assistant to Associate Dean
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, March 2017 to Present

Adjunct Professor
Lake Michigan College, Benton Harbor, MI, January 2009 to Present

Volunteer Pastor
Sion and Nouvelle Jerusalem Churches, Chicago, IL, April 2013-August 2014

President of Group Francophone of Andrews, (GFA),

Director of Refugee Resettlement
Diocese of Catholic Charities, St Petersburg, Florida, June 2001 -2003

Director of Refugee Resettlement
Diocese of Catholic Charities, Rockville Centre, NY, August 1999- October 2000