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ADJUSTING TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS AN
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IN APPALACHIA

by

Deirdre T. Guyton

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

May 2017

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ABSTRACT**ADJUSTING TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS AN
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IN APPALACHIA**

Deirdre T. Guyton

Old Dominion University, 2017

Director: Dr. Christopher R. Glass

The study examines the primary aspects of academic, cultural, and social challenges affecting international students attending community colleges in rural Appalachia.

Through qualitative interviews with international students, this study explores academic, cultural, and social challenges. Implications for programs to assist international students in their adaptation to rural U.S. community colleges is discussed.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my parents. Without you, I would not know the importance of education.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

International student enrollment at U.S. colleges and universities is growing as a result of national, state, and institutional initiatives for comprehensive internationalization (Chalungsooth & Faris, 2009). The presence of international students at U.S. universities is not new; however, international students have become one of the fastest growing populations at U.S. community colleges in the past six years (Lamkin, 2000). The White House Summit on Community Colleges (2011) reported that students around the world are discovering the U.S. community college system, and are benefitting from the affordable, innovative education these institutions provide (Irwin, 2010). International students attend U.S. colleges and universities for educational quality, the opportunity to experience another culture, and their proximity to major U.S. cities. These same students now select community colleges based on individualized instruction, support services, low tuition, and opportunities to transfer to 4-year institutions. International students have unique needs and circumstances, and their presence necessitates university policies and services specially designed for them (Lamkin, 2000).

Problem Statement

The combination of student demand for 2+2 enrollments and campus recruitment efforts has generated a surge in international student enrollment at U.S. community colleges (Mamiseishvili, 2012). According to the *Open Doors 2012 Report* from the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2012), 87,997 international students enrolled at community colleges in the United States during the 2011/2012 academic year.

International students are assets to the community college's goal of internationalizing their college campuses; international students make substantial financial contributions and

diversify the classroom. By opening college doors to international students, community colleges may be the only prospect for U.S. students to become exposed to intercultural encounters (Mamiseishvili, 2012). At the same time, as increasing numbers of international students matriculate at community colleges, administrators must support their persistence and success (Choy, 2002; Gardner, 2001). This support can be especially challenging at rural community colleges, which receive only a small percentage of the federal support urban community colleges receive (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). Federal and state governments disproportionately distribute dollars to urban community colleges due to funding formulas that may be biased against rural institutions that already lack sufficient infrastructure to support the increase in international student enrollment (Mullin & Honeyman, 2007). Fluharty (2006) cited an annual federal disadvantage of \$5.5 billion to rural areas as rural community colleges have smaller numbers of personnel to support grant-writing efforts to aid in funding, as well as fewer personnel to support the variety of missions of the rural community college. Consequently, urban community colleges are better prepared to provide services for international students, because they receive a majority of federal resources (W. G. Johnson, 2009).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The growing number of international students enrolled in rural community colleges has called attention to the need to provide support services to assist students in the adjustment. Difficulties such as academic and social acculturation may lead to how students handle these adjustments (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). For example, in 1993 Daugherty and Kunkel reported that almost 20% of students experience depression, and the risk for first-year students is even higher (as cited in Beeber, 1999). The purpose of this

qualitative study is to examine the adjustment challenges international students experience when so few services are available. I will examine the following question:

1. What are academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment issues that international students experience as they adjust to a rural community college?

Significance

This study examines these experiences in a relevant, real-life setting that will assist identifying pertinent services needed to support international students better. The findings of this study will be of value to rural community college leaders in their efforts to internationalize their institutions. By serving international students more effectively, rural community college leaders advance the mission of the community college. The information obtained from this study will be useful in either improving existing services or identifying needed services for international students. It is imperative that international students are given the same opportunities all students have. Therefore, the findings of this research should be of interest to rural institutions enrolling international students to provide support programs to ensure the achievement of their educational goals.

Overview of the Methodology

The researcher will use qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Students attending four community colleges will participate in the study in four rural areas in Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The data will be collected through interviews and analyze the data during the collection period. I will impart the results in a narrative text describing the experiences international students had at rural community colleges.

Delimitations

The study is limited to international nonimmigrant students from the Asian continent attending small 2-year public community colleges in rural Appalachia in four states and enrolled full-time.

Limitations

The limitations of this study consist of its many challenges. The institutions selected may not have a large enrollment of international students, or the institution may not be willing to comply with my request to interview their students. Also, students may not have a suitable understanding of the English language which could make them apprehensive to take part in the research. Additionally, the researcher's familiarity or knowledge of the background from which the student comes could have adverse effects on the research.

Conclusion

This chapter explains the relevant importance of the research and identifies challenges international students encounter when enrolled at rural community colleges. The impact of international students affects every aspect of the institution and the institution's plans to implement support services to assist international students in adapting to rural U.S. community colleges.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on the experiences of international students and the level of support they receive while attending rural community colleges. I review three categories of literature: (a) the internationalization of community colleges; (b) the experiences of international students and (a) an overview of U.S. rural community college demographics. I focus on literature that explores the experiences and perceptions of international students attending U.S. community colleges.

Internationalization

Internationalization, defined in this dissertation as the process of planning and implementing cultural programming, plays an integral part in higher education today. Internationalizing the campus is especially compelling for rural institutions because of the isolation and parochialism characteristic to their geographies (Vickers & McMellan, 2004). Internationalization activities will help internationalization at community colleges (Harder, 2010). The importance of helping students develop skills includes surviving in culturally and ethnically diverse societies, working with multinational employers and companies, and globally integrated economies:

This permeation is important to create student recognition of the importance of internationalization so that students may be more receptive to international related requirements put forth by their colleges. For example, a foreign language requirement could encourage students to learn more about the cultures which speak the language they are learning. (Harder, 2010, p. 123)

The path of international education at community colleges is quite different from the path of international education at 4-year institutions. Four-year institutions have a research mission, whereas the mission of community colleges is multifaceted and unique to the service region. The

mission of international education, whether 2 or 4 year, is to place effort, inquisitiveness, and open-mindedness at the service of understanding (Morentin, 2011). Colleges can achieve this goal by promoting projects that could teach and encourage intellectual stimulation and growth (Morentin, 2011). The goal of international education Raby & Valeau (2007) declared is to “accelerate knowledge and to boost communication across the cultures to enrich cultural, ethnic, class and gender interactions among diverse groups.”

College campuses, particularly community college campuses, now recognize the importance of global education as they attempt to prepare the next generation of college graduates. More than half of the U.S. adult population takes courses at community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2012). Thus, having the opportunity to experience international education would help those attending community colleges to become introduced culturally and to build on international learning skills (Raby, 2012). Providing international education at community colleges, including various programs and curricula throughout the community, people could go beyond the borders of their service area to aid in the awareness of global activity (Raby, 2012). Raby concludes that by providing international education at community colleges to include various programs and curricula targeting students, faculty, cultures and local community people to go beyond the borders of their service area to aid in the awareness of global activity. Nevertheless, without adequate funding available, recent studies by Green, Luu, and Burriss (2008) found that international education continues to be negligible activity community colleges. Harder (2011) further adds that rural community colleges are at a further disadvantage than suburban and urban community colleges.

(International Student Experience

Fifteen years ago Desruisseaux (1998) suggested community colleges offer a first-rate education in many fields that appeal to international students. These fields include intensive English language programs and training in technical areas. U.S. community colleges provide educational opportunities to international students who may need academic assistance, and the low cost attracts students who could not otherwise afford to study in the United States. Ewing (1992) reported that one reason community colleges are so attractive to international students includes small class sizes that provide a greater level of individual attention, as well as the emphasis, is on teaching, rather than an emphasis on research at four-year research universities. International students play a major role in contributing to the cultural diversity of society by providing a variety of different beliefs and perspectives. They provide a learning opportunity for U.S. students regarding global awareness, cultural sensitivity and diversity (Lamkin, 2000).

In 1989, Baker and Siryk developed the Student Adaptation to College Auestionnaire (SACQ) to measure the effectiveness of students and their adjustment to colleges and universities in the United States. The four concepts consisted of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment. These four concepts measure students' success, the demands of college, students' physical and mental health, and finally, students' overall satisfaction with the institution. The four concepts in the questionnaire assist in the present study to address the adjustment experiences of international students.

Acculturation

Sin, Kim, Yang, Park, and Laugheed (2011) defined acculturation as the process in which individuals acquire knowledge of and acclimate to the sociocultural standards of the host country. They examined acculturation process of 188 international students in the United States

with a focus on three types of information seeking: everyday life information seeking (ELIS), life information seeking (LIS) and acculturation information seeking (AIS). They concluded that international students perceived the most challenging task for them was information on everyday life information seeking. Everyday life information seeking includes familiar, ordinary routines of everyday life such as where to shop for food and clothing, where to attend religious activities, and proper greetings.

International students are more likely to experience greater difficulties in adjusting to the new college environment than their U.S. counterparts (Hechanova-Alampay, Beehr, Christiansen, & Van Horn, 2002). Meyers (2001) stated the importance of recognizing all international students as unique individuals with their own culturally conditioned conceptions, expectations, sensitivity, and understanding which influences their adaptation to college. Nonetheless, these students also share commonalities such as being away from home, unfamiliar culture, unfamiliar educational environments, and the absence of local family and support networks. This section will review empirical research on major factors which influence adaptation to college.

Language Barriers

Prior research reports that language proficiency is one of the major challenges for international students (Zhai, 2002). Language proficiency is often the determining factor in whether or not the student will be successful in the academic arena (Hanassab, 2006). Language proficiency impacts both the academic and social acculturation stress (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). To transition smoothly, institutions often implement programs designed to help students adjust in their first semester. These programs include modules on test taking strategies,

classroom instruction, study techniques, note taking, and oral communication skills (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Poyrazli and Kavanaugh (2006) found that lower levels of English proficiency are related to greater levels of acculturation stress. Due to language proficiency, a substantial number of undergraduate students enroll at two-year colleges as a means of gaining language training (Stearns, 2009). Gillette (2005) noted that differences in accent, enunciation, slang, and use of special English words are among the most common language issues. These issues are consistent with other studies correlating English proficiency and academics. Trice (2003) reported that staffers perceived language proficiency as the main challenge affecting international students' academic performance. Zhang and Goodson (2011) recently found that the language proficiency also played a major role in the adjustment of international students to both academic and social acculturation.

Academic Issues

Achieving academic success is a common need of all college students (Rai, 2002). Some differences exist between the needs of international students and the needs of domestic students in achieving academic success. A majority of international students dedicate a large percentage of their time and effort to achieving academic goals, and much of their stress is attributed to academics (Rai, 2002). Due to pressure from families or governments, academic success is imperative –failure is not an option (Rai, 2002).

Second, international students quickly adjust to educational differences between the U.S. and their home country to be academically successful. Third, the majority of international students are from non-English speaking countries (IIE, 2010), and, they have to succeed in a second language academically. These challenges make achieving academic success difficult and

stressful for international students. Meyers (2001) stated international students should (a) become acquainted with the U.S. educational system, (b) adjust their academic routines and classroom behavior, and (c) develop new learning strategies. Zhai (2002) and Littlemore (2001) stated educators have assumptions and expectations of what is considered to be appropriate class behavior. The learning environment in which international students are most familiar is representative of learning environments universally; however, the rules, procedures and behavior within the educational system are not universal values, but rather culturally based expectations.

Classroom participation is influenced by numerous factors such as cultural backgrounds, discussion topics, and peer dominance in the discussion (Kwon, 2009).

According to Hanassab (2006), international students are easily left out and feel ignored by host country students and professors in English speaking classes. Some international students are uncomfortable speaking a second language, and this impedes interaction with fellow students, faculty, staff, administration and the community as a whole (Kwon, 2009).

Zhai (2002) also cited academic difficulties which included adjusting to the amount of individual responsibility and accountability expected of international students for their academic work. For example, the U.S. understanding of cheating and plagiarism; exams, attendance, and participation; and the pacing of coursework is not considered a major infraction in some countries. Students come from systems where the teacher is a respected individual, and their teaching is sacred truth (Anderson & Powell, 1991); the student is not to question the information received. Classrooms in the United States reflect more of a Socratic ideal, where teacher and student interact a great deal in pursuit of knowledge (Anderson & Powell, 1991).

Social Issues

Poor language skills are not only detrimental to the academic process but detrimental to social interaction with U.S. students. Hechanova-Alampay, et. al, (2002) indicated that international students who have little contact with U.S. students report more isolation and alienation than students with more contact with U.S. students. Poyrazli, Arbona, Nora, McPherson, and Pisecco (2002) concluded that language proficiency hampers international students in their ability to make friends and their adjustment to the local community. Poole (2005) concluded that two of the greatest hurdles international students find they must clear are making new friends and language proficiency. Furthermore, he concluded that making new friends can be difficult for international students. For example, when asking an international student how they are adjusting to classes and instructors they respond as being “okay or fine.” When having a more intense dialogue with the student, they are easily frustrated and become defensive because they do not fully comprehend the word meanings in the conversation.

Pederson (1991) conducted research on the support systems of international students and found that being uprooted and away from family and friends were common factors for self-esteem. Zhai (2002) in his research confirmed that many international students tend to seek out students or community people from their country as sources of support. Gillette (2005) also affirmed that international students seek people from their country as resources for social support. Nonetheless when establishing relationships with U.S. students, Trice (2004) concluded that interactions by international students depended upon what region of the world the student resided. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) reaffirmed Trice’s research by stating that social interaction with U.S. students is important.

Financial Resources

Documentation of financial support is requested during the application process. When international students are interviewed at their U.S. Consulate, they are requested to show proof that they have sufficient funding to cover tuition and living expenses during their period of intended study (U.S. Department of State, 2011). If the student is sponsored, the prospective student must bring a copy of the sponsor's tax documents and original bank books or statements with them to the consulate.

According to the United States Department of Commerce (2010), international students contribute nearly \$20 billion to the U.S. economy, through their expenditures on tuition and living expenses. Also, Open Doors (2010) reported that 62% of all international students who attend college in the U.S. receive the majority of their funding from personal and family sources, and almost 70% of all international students' primary funding comes from sources outside of the United States.

Support Services

International students are no different from host-country students in that they require support services (Green, Lou, & Burris, 2008). However, not all colleges can provide services in the same way or with the depth and breadth (Knight, 2004) if funding or resources are not available to provide these services. Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) conducted a study of 640 international students at a large university and reported undergraduate international students had more problems and a higher need for support services than their international graduate students.

Retention

Student retention and success continues to be a topic of concern for institutions and their leaders (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009). Retaining students is a fundamental practice in

the continuous ability of institutions to carry out its mission (Tinto, 2007). Tinto (2007) defines retention as staying in school until the completion of a degree or normal progression.

Ozturgut (2013) found that while international student enrollments continue to rise, is not clear what institutions are doing to retain students. Studies find that the main issue international face while attending colleges in the U. S. is everyday life experiences (to include friend/social support). Ozturgut's (2013) identified best practices in retaining international students (a) the establishment of an international student and scholar services staff; (b) academic programming and support; (c) social and cultural engagement and support; (d) financial aid, health services, religious support, and immigration support.

Successful retention of these students depends on the time and effort the institution devotes to developing support mechanisms to assist them in transitioning at the institution and to the community.

Rural Community Colleges Demographics

This study defines rural as low total population, low educational attainment, high rates of illiteracy, slow job growth, low per capita income, and high poverty (Cromartie, 2008).

According to official U.S. 2010 Census Bureau definitions, urban and suburban areas comprised of all persons living in urbanized areas (UA's) and in places (cities, towns, villages, etc.) with a population of 2,500 or more. Areas with a population of 2,500 or less are considered rural (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). Rural communities consist of all territory, population, and housing units located outside UA's, and they appear to be falling behind suburban and urban areas in economic, educational accomplishments, diversity, economic and employment opportunities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Rural community colleges are the fastest-growing of all community colleges in the United States, facing many challenges as they expand (Nelson, 2010). Cavan (1995) defined the rural community college mission as meeting the educational needs of students at every level of the service area and developing a tradition of education to include the importance of higher education. Pennington, Williams, and Karvonen (2006) later found the mission of the rural community college changing largely from transfer education to workforce development, skill enhancement and economic development for the service region of the institution.

The 2012 Carnegie Classifications Report identified 964 publicly administered two-year colleges. Among these institutions, 570 were identified as rural-serving. In 2010, 7,136,348 students were enrolled at community colleges, and 2,467,331 of those attended rural public community colleges. Racial demographics could be a significant defining factor in rural community colleges enrollments. Hardy and Katsinas (2007) discovered that white students account for 45% of all urban, 54% of all suburban, and 74% of all rural community college enrollments. Urban and suburban community college districts often have majority-minority based enrollments, whereas rural community colleges are less likely to be majority-minority (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). African American students comprise the largest racial minority group of urban community colleges, particularly in the southeastern United States (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007). Hispanic students only make up 15% with 7% of the population of community college students (Hardy & Katsinas, 2007).

Rural Community College Funding

Changes in state allocations to higher education have prompted concern for the long and short term stability of community colleges (Kastinas, Tollefson, & Reamey, 2008). For example, community colleges rely heavily on income streams of (a) tuition and fees (comprising of

federal, state, and private loans and student aid. Colleges also receive federal, state and local government appropriations, grants, contracts and college foundations (private gifts), and scholarships. Also, colleges receive endowment incomes and investment returns or income from assets including dividends, interest earnings, royalties, rent, gains, and losses. Although the community college system does not utilize the full-time equivalent model to derive a headcount, it uses an unduplicated headcount model providing a more accurate account of the students served in rural settings.

Vineyard (1979) and Phillips (1983) wrote about the special problems faced by rural community colleges. The detachment encountered in the rural regions; (b) a low tax base; (c) absence or lack of adequate community resources; and (d) the inability to take advantage of the economic scale. In one of the first articles Vineyard (1979) wrote, he addressed four specific challenges rural community colleges needed to answer. The nonexistence of diversity when looking at the institution's economic base. Financial instability and an unstable infrastructure to research the needs of the institution. The absence of a media relations team to broaden institutional awareness within and outside the higher education system and the absence of financial partnerships for a surplus which would assist in maintaining institutional stability. Rural community colleges are forced to anticipate community needs and funding sources, as it relates to local and state financial shortfalls (Cavan, 1998) because a majority of these rural community colleges are in states suffering from underfunding and service students who are from low-income status (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). Rural community resources by pointing out that rural community colleges only receive a small percentage of federal support (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). With poverty rates higher in rural areas, support is needed to aid rural-serving community college program development. Over 950 community colleges exists in

rural areas where the average income of its residents are lower than average, and the poverty rate is high.

Rural community college leaders realize that their institution's function as catalysts for educational and economic opportunities in their service regions (Fluharty & Scaggs, 2007). These administrators are also aware that by solidifying the rural community colleges' ability to prosper as successful, inclusive institutions also enables them to serve as important agents of development for the community and economy. Despite having more students and less money than in previous years, rural college administrators are now initiating new programs, to include those focused on preparing workers for growing industries moving into their service regions.

Conclusions

There has been a lack of empirical research on international students and the issues faced when attending rural community colleges. Harder (2010) claimed there is a specific gap in the knowledge of international culture existing for audiences wishing to compare internationalization levels among urban, suburban, and rural community college. International students play an integral role not only in internationalizing college campuses but also in the interaction process with students, faculty, staff and administrators (Boggs & Irwin, 2007). Community colleges need to develop strategies and skills that will facilitate cultural understanding, communication, and adaptation for the international student (Meyer, 2001). A comprehensive international student orientation can assist them in developing these strategies and skills.

There is a clear need for additional research on adjustment factors international students meet while attending community colleges. It is necessary to understand the academic and cultural background of international students to provide these students with the skill set needed to obtain the educational goals they have established. Research is strong in the area of U.S.

community colleges presenting studies on the transitioning challenges of international students in community colleges in urban and suburban regions, however; lacking in the area of international students attending rural community colleges in Appalachia.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study is to examine the experiences affecting international students attending community colleges in rural Appalachia. This chapter outlines a research design and describes the context of the study, including study participants, data collection, and analysis methods. The chapter concludes with a description of the strategies that validate the study and the ethical protection of the participants.

Research Design

A qualitative research study will be conducted to examine the determining factors playing a role in international students' experiences at community colleges in rural Appalachia. Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding of social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture formed with words reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting and used as a rationalization for specific changes. Qualitative researchers focus on participant interpretations and perceptions on a central phenomenon within a particularly social-historical context (Creswell, 2005). Creswell (2003) asserted that in qualitative research, "claims of knowledge are based on constructed perspectives from multiple social and historical meanings of individual experiences" (p. 18). Factors playing a role in the selection of the methodology are the setting for the study, the goal and the reason for the study.

Because each community college is responsible for the quality of education of each student enrolled on their campus, the researcher will conduct in-depth, 60-minute interviews with a minimum of 16 international students purposefully sampled from 4 rural community colleges in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia. This qualitative research method is the

most appropriate research study because it is an exploration of a phenomenon that is present in the natural flow of social life (Neuman, 2006). Also, it examines the support services provided to international students and the method in which administrators can assess support services at community colleges and to continually evaluate the entire framework by which they recruit, educate and retain international students (Altbach, Reisburg, & Rumbley, 2009).

Qualitative research studies involve field notes, interviews, photographs, documents, and journals to explore the perceptions of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. The qualitative research method is most appropriate when the variables are unknown and need to be identified (Neuman, 2006). The current research study was an exploration of one central phenomenon, the experiences international students encounter when attending community colleges in rural Appalachia. Qualitative researchers focus on participant interpretations and perceptions on a central phenomenon within a particularly social-historical context (Creswell 2005; Neuman, 2006).

This study will examine these experiences in a relevant, real-life setting that should add to an institution's understanding of the factors pertinent to international students when attending rural Appalachian community colleges. The study will take place at four community colleges located in the southern region of rural Appalachia. With the goal of examining the experiences of international students attending community colleges in rural Appalachia, 16 international students will be interviewed from four community colleges in rural areas. The goal was to determine the role support services played in the experiences of international students. This research is important because will enhance the knowledge of those who are in daily contact with these students and can provide support mechanisms enabling the student to achieve success.

Therefore, the findings of this research should be of interest to rural community colleges enrolling international students to provide support services similar to TRIO or Student Support Services to ensure the achievement of their educational goals.

Data Collection

To gain multiple perspectives in the area of the experiences of international students, this study will use a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell, 2007). Purposeful sampling can be defined as gaining different insights on the same problem (p. 75). To achieve purposeful sampling, 16 international students from 4 rural community colleges will be recruited to participate in the study. The 16 students will be selected based on two criteria: (a) international student status and (b) full-time enrollment at a rural community college. Participants are given a pseudonym to protect their identity and the institution's identity. Each participant will be given a consent form to sign and told that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Students at the institution participating will be identified by the researcher with the assistance of a gatekeeper. In qualitative research, a gatekeeper is defined as being a member of the group or one that has gained the trust of the group (Creswell, 2007). The gatekeeper will be the individual designated by the administration of the institution to solely identify the students, invite the students to participate in the study, and schedule and attend the initial meeting between the students and the researcher. Once the research begins, the gatekeeper does not participate in the interview process.

The process of collecting data will involve in-depth interviews (Creswell, 2007). In-depth questions are an appropriate method to obtain qualitative data on a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2005). Conducting interviews will be the appropriate data collection technique for the current research study because the phenomenon is an event that has occurred in the past and

cannot be observed firsthand (Creswell, 2005). By using the general interview guide approach, McNamara (2009) stated respondents might not consistently respond to the same question or questions depending on how the researcher poses questions.

The data collection process will consist of one-on-one interviews with open-ended questions (Creswell, 2005). Patton (1990) described the nature and purpose of the typical open-ended interview as seeking to develop a set of questions carefully worded and arranged, with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking respondents the same questions with essentially the same words. This format allows participants to contribute as much detailed information as they want and the researcher is allowed to ask probing questions for follow-up; the researcher may be limited depending on the nature of the interview and the skill of the person interviewing the respondents. In this study, standardized open-ended questions will be developed to collect data from international students attending the four community colleges located in the southern region of rural Appalachia. Field notes will be taken by the researcher during all interviews and compiled into a Microsoft Word document.

Interviews

Merriam and Simpson (1995) recommended measures like the interview guide for comparing data. I will use a set group of questions, provided to the participant at the start of the interview. I will serve as the interviewer for all the interviews conducted in this study. With one researcher conducting the interviews, the process maintains congruency. International students participating in the study will be interviewed individually. Individual students will be given a pseudonym to protect their identity for one month in a concentrated period. All interviews will be conducted in a private area of each institution participating in the study during scheduled times throughout the semester so that the study will not disrupt the students' daily routine. Each

interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The questions will be directed to the participants' experiences while attending the institution. Interview questions will be semi-structured, varying slightly from the research questions. Participant perceptions and responses to the experiences encountered at their respective community colleges will assist in answering the research questions. Field notes will be taken by the researcher during all interviews and compiled into a Microsoft Word document. Memoing after each interview will be helpful during this stage of the collection.

An interview protocol was developed for this study. This protocol is divided into three sections and consists of ten questions. The sections include questions about the overall experience that international students had at their institutions, questions concerning the academic experience they had and questions about the support services in place at their institutions. Participant perceptions and responses to the experiences encountered at their respective institutions will assist in answering the research questions about their experiences using support services, the types of support services available and beneficial to their success and the role the support service played in assisting them.

Reflective Journals

The researcher will keep a reflective journal throughout the research process, demonstrating a dedication to reflexivity. Keeping a self-reflective journal is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers will use their journal to examine personal assumptions and to clarify individual belief systems and partisanship (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Ortlipp (2008) stated that keeping and using reflective journals will enable the researcher to make one's experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research

design, and to create transparency in the research process. The journals will offer additional data for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings of events Creswell (2009). Data analysis in qualitative research refers to a series of relationships existing among sets of data (Kyung, Mi, & Seung, 2009). This study will include data organization and transcription; reviewing and coding the data; theme development using the coded data; and data validation. Researchers using qualitative data tend to use an inductive process meaning that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis come from the data (Johnson, 2007).

Data Organization and Transcription

I will transcribe all interviews, journal entries and field notes. For the current study, I will be taking notes during the interviews in a journal, and the interviews recorded digitally. The notes will consist of the questions asked of the participant during the interview. During the interview, I will be observing the participants for nonverbal communications (hand gestures, voice rising, facial expressions, etc.) as they may mention something that would also have an additional effect on their experience. I will write that down in the journal and follow up with another question or ask the student to elaborate on what they meant by the comment before proceeding to the next question if necessary. In addition to the follow-up questions, I will take notes on the conversations that I have during the interview with participants. Concluding the interview, I will ask each participant if they may have any other insights to add. Once the interview has been completed, I will set aside at least ten minutes to reflect on what my unbiased experience was with the participant during the interview. For example, I will reflect on how the

interview went; what worked, what I could have done differently and the tone of the interview. Also, I will reflect on what was the attitude of the participant as to whether or not they were emotional, were they scared and what I could have done to change the atmosphere and to calm down the participant.

I will then transcribe the interview into a Microsoft Word document and review it for accuracy and completeness. Transcribing allows the researcher to become acquainted with the data. Additionally, this allows me to read and reread the notes and interviews for meaning “from the words and actions of the participant in the study” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123). Listening to the audio recordings again while they are being transcribed will also assist in familiarizing the researcher with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The most important step to remember in data analysis is that the research should reflect what will be sought from the data as the researcher co-creates the story told using the data (Foss & Waters, 2003). In my research, I will be diagraming information from the international student experiences through words and phrases to find out if any of the acculturation determinants such as stress, language barriers, academics, financial resources support services play a role in the all-around adjustment of these students.

Coding

Once the data is transcribed and placed in document form, I will read and reread the data looking for specific things pertinent to answering the research questions (Foss & Waters, 2003). During this step I will be to see if any international students I interviewed mentioned stress; language barriers; difficulties with academics such as understanding the assignments and instructor assistance; financial resources and support services as being adjustment obstacles for them. Seidman (1998) referred to coding as the “process of noting what is interesting, labeling it

and putting it into appropriate files” (p. 123). In qualitative coding, a single word or short phrase symbolically assigns a collective, significant, essence-capturing, and/or reminiscent characteristic to a portion of language based or visual data (Saldana, 2009). Coding involves succinct labels for important categories of the data as codes capture both semantic and conceptual readings of the data (Braun & Clark, 2012). For example, when coding the data, I will go through the transcribed data searching for words relevant to a response indirectly relevant to the research question. The conciseness of the research question will suggest what pieces of information should be coded and what should be set aside for further review.

The first research question will assist me with the types of problems or challenges international students have encountered. I want each of them to tell me about the experiences they have had and it is here that I will be looking for words or phrases describing their experiences and code it as an experience. The second research question will assist me with the services international students identified and research question three discusses the level of support international students receive and whether or not they were satisfied with those services. When I find a meaningful segment in the passage having to do with the research question, a code relevant to the passage will be assigned. This step will be repeated for each question asked and will continue until all the data has been segmented, and the initial coding completed. This step will be repeated many times and reapplied to new segments each time a new segment encountered. During this step, I will keep a master list of all codes developed. Once the data is coded within each passage, the data will be compiled into themes. Data unrelated to one of the expected themes will be coded separately.

Themes

During coding, the data collected were divided into segments and dissected for commonalities which could reflect categories or themes. Creswell (2005) explained that “[t]hemes (also called categories) are similar codes aggregated together to form a major idea in the database” (p. 239). Similar codes will be aggregated into themes, and the themes will be used to generate results of the study. In the initial coding of the research, similar codes were grouped into themes, and the themes will be broken down into smaller ones to generate the results of the study (Saldana, 2009). This process allows central themes to emerge, based on each unit of information identified. The themes I looked for are types of problems the international students had and where did they go for support; the support services they identified and the level of support received. This step is called the interpretation of the data and is the most important step in the analysis because it makes sense of the data (Foss & Waters, 2003). Data unrelated to one of the expected themes will be coded separately. For example, responses categorized under the codes “experiences of international students” and “identified support services” led to the theme of providing learning programs for student success. Once all of the codings were completed, I will then summarize and organize the segments and continue to review and enhance any codes.

My next step is to create a table of the code patterns and to organize the categories or themes of each research question to discover the comprehensive trend through the students interviewed. This table will consist of the categories, descriptions of the categories, examples and the frequency. In this process, the enumeration is the process of counting the number of times the code was used or applied. This process provides the audience with information concerning what international students understood about the services in place and levels of

support the institutions provided. Once data analysis is completed, an analysis of the interview will be conducted, and the results compiled.

Validation Strategies

Validity, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2001), is the accuracy, meaningfulness, and credibility of the research project as a whole. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated in any qualitative research project, four issues of trustworthiness demand attention. Credibility is a term describing an evaluation of whether the research findings represent a “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data. Transferability is the degree to which the findings of the inquiry can apply or transfer beyond the bounds of the project. Dependability is an assessment of the quality of the integrated processes of data collection, data analysis, and theory generation. Finally, conformability is the measure of how well the inquiry’s findings are supported by the data collected.

Creswell and Miller’s (2001) eight strategies are used in qualitative research by most researchers to make their studies true and certain. Credibility is achieved by triangulating the data through peer debriefing, and member checking. I will convene a focus group of the participants from each institution to reflect on the themes.

Ethical Considerations

To preserve confidentiality, no identifying information is recorded. Interview participants will be kept anonymous and given a pseudonym to be placed on each recording, transcript, and journal entry. Participant consent will be obtained. Before interviews begin, participants were reminded that participation is voluntary and that they may discontinue participation at any time. Additionally, participants were reminded that information obtained in the interview will remain confidential. Interviews will be conducted at four different sites with permission of the President,

Vice President of Academic Affairs, and student participants. Consistent with interview procedures, students will be reminded that participation is voluntary and can be discontinued at any time. Also, all documentation from this research will be locked in a secure filing cabinet where I will be the only person with access.

Researcher's Role

Although there were no apparent risks from participating in this study, several concerns were considered when going through the interview process. Because the researcher is a lifelong resident of rural Appalachia and has worked in the higher education system for more than 24 years, objectivity is established. Moustakas (1994) explained that “establishing the truth of things” (p. 123) begins with the researcher's perception. One must reflect, first, on the meaning of the experience of oneself; then one must turn outward to those interviewed and establish “intersubjective validity,” or the testing of this understanding with other persons through a back-and-forth social interaction.

I am employed at a public 4-year institution in rural Appalachia and have been engaging international students for some years. By interacting with these students, I have established relationships allowing for a level of support and trust. International students are comfortable discussing private issues, family, and institutional challenges with me; thus, it is imperative that I remained unbiased throughout the research study. To assist with unbiased actions, I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process, demonstrating a dedication to reducing researcher bias. Keeping a self-reflective journal is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers will use their journal to examine personal assumptions and to clarify individual belief systems and partisanship (Russell & Kelly, 2002). Ortlipp (2008) stated that keeping and using reflective journals will enable the researcher to make one's experiences,

opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, and to create transparency in the research process.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the findings from this study. The previous chapter described the study and the methodology applied in this study in selecting the sample. The first section of this chapter consists of participant profiles, compiled to introduce participants who shared their experiences and assisted with this research. The second part of this chapter presents the thematic structures that emerged from the analysis of the data. I identified four central themes in this study that were common in the adjustment of international students: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment. I substantiate these themes with writings and comments from study participants. The third section presents the findings from participant interviews as they relate to the research questions of this study. The final section presents the data analyzed, aligned with the research questions and summarizes the findings.

Throughout my interactions with participants, I felt compelled to tell a story that would require readers not only to make a connection with the students but to understand the students and their needs. My interest in telling this story is quite simple: The students have commonalities; that is, how well will the student adjust to unfamiliar surroundings and the effect it will have on their success. I understand their plight, as I had those same experiences as a family member with a nephew who studied abroad for one year.

I interacted with a majority of these students on a daily basis, even if merely to say hello and ask how things are going. Some I interacted with when they had challenges; however, I did not influence the research. In some ways, we influenced each other, providing me an opportunity to sit down and listen intently to their issues. These 13 students were willing and eager to speak with me about their experiences, which is unusual from faculty, staff, peers, and administrators.

They wanted me to tell their story in hopes that it will assist the institution and the community in assisting them.

Participants

As a result of the in-depth interviews and the use of a reflective journal, student profiles developed. As promised to participants, their names have been changed to protect them and reflect my perceptions of their characteristics, their personalities, and their styles. These students maintained grade-point averages (GPA) of 3.00 or higher. Because of that, all participants received academic scholarships. Also, these participants took no less than 14 credit hours in the semester of the study and no more than 22 credit hours.

These students participate in all aspects of the institution. They participate in student government, tutoring American students, employment, and share information with each other when “a new international student arrives here on the campus.” The institution has off-campus housing for those students who come from outside the state. These students stay in this housing unless they remain with their host families, and associate with each other on a daily basis. They become allies—brothers and sisters to each other—despite their country of origin, and their activities include all of them. For example, they celebrate their birthdays. One participant told me that they all get together around midnight on the day of someone’s birthday. If the birthday is on a weekday, they sing and go back to their respective rooms to study or sleep. If it is a weekend, they have cake and ice cream and celebrate with a party.

During my observations, international students are secretive, and if a problem or challenge arises that they cannot handle, they will only ask for help from people they know. They are personable people and ask for nothing because, as many participants stated during the

research, *“I don’t want to bother you. And, we do not want you to feel sorry for us. We want you just to understand us and help us.”*

Participant Sample

Patty. Patty is a 20-year-old student who came to this country from southwest Europe as a high school junior. She is now a sophomore at the institution. She has lived in this area for one year and two months. Patty is a very disciplined person and very outgoing. Patty responded to my email request for participants within 1 hour. She contacted me immediately wanting to tell me about her experiences and how she has transitioned to the United States. After I asked the first question, she immediately began telling her story. She is a double major and has a GPA of 4.00.

Adam. Adam is a 21-year-old student from Europe who is, a very caring person. He has been in this country for two years. He is outgoing once he knows a person and, after my interview with him, constantly asked me how my dissertation was going and if he could do anything to assist me more. He is a business major with a GPA of 3.63.

Adam was also very eager to participate in the study. He was the second person to respond to my email and was excited to tell his story. Additionally, he wanted to know more about what I was doing and why I selected international students for my study. Adam was my biggest supporter. He introduced a friend so he could tell his story.

Aeryn. Aeryn is a 22-year-old business major with a GPA of 3.59. She is very guarded. She has been in this country for three years but has been to this country previously. She is a business major and is also from Europe. Aeryn is a quiet person around people she does not know. Aeryn had a financial crisis/question with which she needed assistance. She had another

international student bring her to me to tell me her problem and to seek advice on what she should do.

Michael. Michael is a senior from South Asia. He is 25 years old and has lived in the United States for four years. Now that his scholarship has run out, he must fund his final year. When I asked him how he was paying for his final year, he stated,

I had to go back home and work for one year to save my money and return so that I could complete my goal. I am currently working three jobs. With the jobs that I have now, I pay for my school with some of it and live off the rest.

Brittnei. Brittnei is a 20-year-old sophomore majoring in business from Southwest Europe. She has been in this country for three years, including completion of high school. One of Brittnei's advantages is that her host family assisted her in getting into college. Like Patty, her host family treated her as though she were part of the family.

One of the most important things about my host family is that it was very selfless of them to welcome me into their home and accept me as someone not foreign, but to accept me as part of their family.

Although the others attended big high schools, Brittnei completed her high school with her host family in a very small rural setting. One of her most enjoyable attributes was how she made the decision to come to the United States and study.

I always wanted to experience international education because I don't want to have limited options. I want to be at the top, and that is why I am honestly here. I am just grateful to have this opportunity because it is God given to everyone and I feel like I was chosen and given a full ride. I have no room for failure.

Nicholas. Nicholas is a 22-year-old who has been in this country for 3.5 years. He first came to this country from Central Europe as a high school exchange student who decided to stay in this area and further his education. After graduation, he plans to attend graduate school. Nicholas is very quiet and alert. He has a 4.00 GPA. He lives apart from his friends but participates and associates with U.S. friends and internationals. He speaks his native language with another student from his country and a professor to “practice” and get a sense of being at home.

Seth. Seth is from Europe, majoring in business with a GPA of 3.46. He started his academic career at 20 years old. He is 21 years old and has been in this country for two years. He is an athlete taking 21 hours, attempting to graduate in 3 years because he was misadvised when he first arrived on campus. His reasoning for taking so many hours is “I am doing things faster and if I think that I have time enough for or if I can’t succeed in the class, then I can drop the class. Thus, I try and succeed, and I try, and I succeed.” Seth is quiet and appears to me as “the watch and learn type.” After graduation, he will take what he has learned in just a short period and use it to his advantage as he knows what he wants to do.

Micah. Micah first arrived on campus 3.5 years ago, from South Asia. He has a 4.00 GPA in business. He remembers his first day on campus, waiting to be advised and then finding out that the classes in which he registered for were not in his major. He tested a few classes his first semester. Micah has an outgoing personality and adapts to changes quite easily.

Sam. Sam is also from South Asia and has been in this country for three years and in this area for 2.5 years. Sam has a 3.55 GPA, majoring in business. He remembers his first day on campus:

I remember that I was still jet lagged and I remember that I was lost on campus and late for classes because I had visa problems. I was just getting my schedule, and I was a little bit lost. I didn't know what was going on, but I was okay.

Sam is 23 years old, funny, and outgoing; he is in his 3rd year at the institution and still adjusting.

Meschelle. Meschelle transferred to the institution. She is 22 years old from central Europe with a 3.03 GPA. When she entered school for the first time, she was the youngest in her class at 17. Today, she is portrayed as the “mother” of the bunch as she keeps her “family” straight. She has family here in the United States and says, for her, it is much easier than for those who have no family here. Meschelle said,

I think my transition from my first college to here was harder than my hometown to there.

I think it was because when I first came to the U.S., I didn't know what to expect. Then when you are already here, you just have to keep working hard and keeping up your grades to figure out what you are going to do later is added pressure. The culture here is more different than it was where I was before because I guess we had dorms we were more like a small community always all the time.

Julie. Julie is from central Europe and has been in the United States for four years. She is a 22-year-old business major, and her GPA is 3.38. Julie is the quietest of the group. She lives with a host family, and although she does not have the same living arrangements as the others, she interacts with the group and participates in activities they plan. When I asked her what her plans were, she said she would stay for the summer and then transition back into her home country. “That will be the hardest part for me. Getting use to my home country again.”

Laila. Laila is one of the youngest of the group. She is from southwest Asia. The very first encounter I had with Laila is when she approached me on campus and said, “I need a hug. I

miss my family so much.” We stood in the middle of campus on an October day and hugged. She is exceptionally quiet. Laila is 20 years old and has a 3.29 GPA. Laila, like Meschelle, has family in the United States and she has made a few U.S. friends. Her transition, especially to her program, has not been a very good one but she has persevered and stayed in the program.

April. April is another young person of 20. She is a business major with a 3.10 GPA, hailing from southwest Asia. This semester, April is taking 15 credit hours. Like Laila and Meschelle, April has family in the United States and goes to visit them on holidays. April is very shy and quiet. As with all participants, she likes to go unnoticed during her days on campus. April has been instilled with family values and believes that although she has been in the United States for three years, she continues to need her parents’ permission to do most things.

Methodology Summary

The research began in the fall of the school year. The research was designed for international students’ participation; thus, my pool was small. Of the 34 international students attending the institution, I narrowed my pool to 16 students who had been in this country for 2 or more years. Although some participants had completed their final year of high school in the area, others had come directly from their home country to the institution. I emailed each student directly, explained my dissertation project, and requested their participation. I had several international students respond immediately and schedule interview times. Several brought in other international students for me to interview and for some, I sent second requests or met them in the student center and scheduled appointment times. The interviews took place in the privacy of my office, an isolated area of the library, or a secluded area after business hours in the administration building. I interviewed 13 international students whose majors ranged from

engineering to nursing, computer science, and business, with a few of the participants being athletes.

Each participant gave me permission to audiotape the interviews. I recorded each interview and backed up each interview with a digital recording. I used cassette tapes, and I used digital taping. During one of the interviews, the digital recorder's batteries failed, but I could proceed with the interview using my backup recording. Each interview lasted 60 minutes as I asked participants a series of questions, driving my research questions. Each participant appeared relaxed throughout the interview and excited about the opportunity to tell their story.

Data analysis began once the interviews were transcribed. Data reduction began by reading and rereading the transcribed data. Emergent themes driving the analysis were the research questions: First, when international students have adjustment issues, where do they go for support? Second, what types of support services do international students identify as the most beneficial to their academic and social adjustment?

It was apparent during the interviews that participants had a strong sense of their character and unique personality. Their determination to achieve their goals and in moving forward to the next phase. Each participant maintains a GPA of 3.00 or better and the bonds they have developed with each other showed, as each depicted that they would not allow their fellow international friends to fail. In the pages that follow, I provide direct quotations from participants, expressing these experiences by each theme. Their quotations appear in everyday vernacular, allowing the reader the opportunity to draw their conclusions after giving thought to the responses of each participant.

Thematic Structures

Introduction. International students traveling abroad leave family, friends, and culture to which they were accustomed most of their lives to studying in a country where they know no one have not mastered the English language, and know very little concerning the culture. Before participants in this study arrived on campus, they had gone through several stressors: applying for college abroad, obtaining J-1 visas, interviewing with the U.S. Embassy, and traveling abroad.

Academic adjustment. One concern I have harbored is how well international students adjust to the academic side of attending college in the United States. Academic issues go beyond the classroom. Challenges emerged in advising these students. Students interviewed informed me that they were “bored” because they are in classes that were not challenging them. One participant expressed he was placed in general classes and used college algebra as his example:

I had algebra at 8:00 in the morning. I didn't want to take algebra because I had taken it in high school and my initial advisor said that I could not CLEP [test out] of the course. I was able to CLEP out after discussing my issue with someone else.

International students also have language barriers in the classroom. Several participants stated they have challenges with U.S. slang, the heavy accent/dialect of the region, and the enunciation of words. One item separating international students from U.S. students is that international students are unfamiliar with plagiarism/cheating policies at colleges/universities in the United States. During my interview with Patty, she stated that knowing the rules has helped her learn to do research properly.

In my country, when writing a research paper, I could just go to Wikipedia and copy and paste. Here in the United States, I cannot do that. So, teaching me to research is very important as it will help me when I study for masters.

Another adjustment international students must make is participating in study groups. Patty has been in the United States since the beginning of her senior year in high school and participates on an organized athletic team. She compared her academic experience in the United States as totally different from her home country. Her comments follow. (Note: follow-up questions by the interviewer are in bold).

Writing the papers is much more difficult here, but it prepares me for masters and doctoral level studies. So I like that. Back home people could just copy it from Wikipedia and turn it in. I like doing the research. It also teaches you not to steal from others. You cite everything. You just get prepared for things. Because I play organized sports, it is hard to get your class work sometimes done. The counselor has established a plan where we are scheduled to go in and talk to her once a month, but we can go in and talk to her anytime about academic progress, but if you don't make progress, then there are some support services such as tutoring available to you.

Like the comments made by Patty, Adam had similar comments about his academics: I had a problem with the composition course my first semester, and when I went to the professor, he was very tough on me. So, I asked him if I do better and improve on my perfection can I get an "A." He replied that only perfection could improve on perfection. I said okay, thank you very much. [chuckle] I tried for this "A" so hard the first semester. My GPA went down, but my knowledge went up. I can thank him for my knowledge increase—I got a "C"—but my knowledge increased.

However, Aeryn's situation was different. Not only did she have issues with testing the first semester she arrived on campus, but she was accused of cheating.

Like whenever I have a test, it's like my first semester when I had a 60-minute test, and I had to read and answer the questions, it was not possible for me. I read the question, and it took longer because I had to understand the question and then answer. Like last semester I had to answer 120 questions in 80 minutes—which was less than a minute for each question and it was impossible to me to do it. English is my second language, and I need more time to read and understand the question.

My second semester here I was taking a principles course. So, I was taking Principles of [topic]. I consider myself a good student. I always do my homework, I always study for my tests, and I was in the doghouse with one of my teammates, and I had done my homework for the weekend, and he asked me for my homework. I did not feel like he was going to copy it. He told me that he did not know how to do it and could he see mine to see if he could. So, I sent my homework to him, and he turned in the same thing. In Spain, it is no big deal. The next day I was out of the class—I had an “F.” And I had no options I was out of the class. **So, what did you do?** I went to my coach, and he tried to do something, but that was the solution an “F.” Because like in Spain it was no big deal, but I thought that it was very unfair for me because I didn't know. And like I did my homework, and I told my teacher that it was his fault and not mine because I did my homework. It was something that I did not like at all. **Did anyone explain to you why you were dismissed from class?** Uh uh. [No] **They just told you that you had an F for the class and you were being put out of the class.** That teacher was not nice and did not like international students. **Okay, okay. So, you had some problems with that teacher?**
Yeah

Michael echoed Aeryn's situation when he first arrived here on the campus:

The first day of class was easy. Uh, I didn't have many classes just basic 101s and 102s. My guidance counselor and advisor put me in easy classes. My SAT scores were good to where I didn't have to take the developmental classes. I wish I had taken the English 101 and 101 math. Because when I took business classes and had to write papers, I would get my papers back with "this is wrong." And I would say what is wrong with my paper—I know how to write papers, and they would say "no, this is wrong." Then I find out that all this stuff was taught in English 101. And that was shocking. I know how to write a paper—it was Professor [name], and the [topic] professor who is not here anymore—they were real picky.

Another problem that I had was with the books. The books were so expensive that I could not afford them. There were not rentals back then, uh, then I went to one class and told the professor that I didn't have the book and she told me, "not my problem." So, I asked her should I get the book or do I need the book and once again she repeated to me, "As I said, not my problem."

Laila, who is a senior, shared her academic experience about her first day on campus and attending class.

Oh, My God—I got lost four times on my first day. [chuckle] I was 10 minutes late, and I sat at the very front of the class and took out my pen and notebook and tried to listen to the instructor and did not hear a word that he said. The accent was too thick for me. I could not hear anything or understand anything he was saying. Not that I did not understand what was being said, was um, mostly because of the accents. Here, people say things so many different ways, and so it is because of that that I don't know what people are saying. But I have a friend and she is in my class who lives in an area where her

accent is very, very thick and people are always asking her is she from that area. We are in a study group together, and I cannot understand what she is saying [smiles]. As time goes by you, start to hear what they are saying and understand.

Laila then talked to me about study/support groups. Because of Laila's major, she must constantly and consistently study. She had some challenges at first in adjusting to her program.

I remember the very first semester; we had lab groups. We had taken our first test, and I had told them how I struggled on the first day, and they talked about hearing that the previous class had a study group and maybe we could study together. Well, everyone did not agree. So, the first study session it was just three of us. And we studied, and it worked out. Me, the single mom and the lady from Colorado. We did well on our tests from than the others tried to get into our group but we would not them in our group. But it has been a great experience yet exhausting as an international student.

Brittnei like Laila had an experience on her first day.

It was very interesting, and I was very nervous because I did not know what to expect.

But at the same time, I had an advantage because I came here for my final year of high school. So, that gave me an idea of what to expect. I felt a little uncomfortable because

English is my second language and no matter what, there is always going to be that

language barrier, so I tried to take as many notes as I could because you don't know how the professor works and how he is. So, you just try to catch everything. So, I just tried to

know my professors and classmates, work with them, and you will be fine. [chuckles]

I participate in athletics, so most of my friends are from teams. I had one of my home

boys—I did not know him, but he is someone that went to the same high school in my

country. When we are together, we can speak our language. Then there are some others in

another college town not far from here that we visit. When I went to the cafeteria, I meet new people, or when I went to class, I meet new people. We have a group, so I meet with my [topic] friends.

Seth explained that when he has a challenge or cannot understand an issue, he goes to his coach.

My first semester, I was new here, and I didn't know how the school system was working. And then, uh, I ended up in the registrar's office, and they fixed me a schedule. I then showed my schedule to one of the teammates, and he told me that some of the courses were not even in my major. Then my teammate told me that I was losing my time because I was taking classes that I did not even need to. Then I asked my coach what to do? He told me that I need an advisor and he found me an advisor.

Julie had similar challenges when it came to academic advising,

When I was having some trouble in the classes, I went to Student Support Services, and I was shocked that those are not for international students. So, I was like, what do we do if we are in a situation where we need help. They told me that I could go to tutoring but in some instances, there is no tutor for some classes.

So how did they help you with that if you did not qualify for their program? How did that go? Did you go back to Student Support Services? I went down the line and tried to find help there. But I think back home it is much easier because you have to find programs or places that you can go or either people if you pay them they will help you if you are struggling in classes. But here, I was not so much out there, and talking to others.

Of the 13 students interviewed, a majority (eight) had challenges at first with the language. Either they did not understand their professors or they did not want to speak with their

instructors because they thought their English was poor because it was their second language. I had one participant who stated that she was in a study group because of the major she selected. All participants thought that when they first arrived they would have no problem with their classes, about 30% (4) of the students believed they were misadvised or not informed of their options.

Social adjustment. Comparable to any new experience, students had a feeling of euphoria when first arriving, and many are in awe of the differences and experiences they are encountering. The language barrier, like that in the classroom, seems to be a challenge in making friends and acquaintances. In a study, when establishing relationships with Americans, interactions by international students depended on what region of the world the student resided (Trice, 2004). Several international students did not have U.S. friends outside their classes, and some have no friends at all. One described her experience of being an outsider: “These people have grown up together, and they have been together all of their school lives.” I had the opportunity to observe that participant in my strength-training class (where the students must pair up to lift). I noticed she seldom interacted with classmates and stayed mostly to herself. She would only ask another student or me to spot her while she lifts weights. Toward the end of the class and semester, I noticed that she interacted, yet it was with one student. Another student stated during her interview that her first semester on campus, she was invited to go home with a classmate for Christmas. Although their majors have taken them separate ways, she continues to keep in touch with the person she considers a “friend.” But, she does say she prefers to “hang out” with her teammates who are international students.

For women, living in the United States is very hard. I compared the answers the men gave to those of the women and found they are not as social as the women. Although the men

like to spend time together, they are quite reserved about what they do to have fun. Most of the young men were content to stay in and read a book, watch television, or go to the gym. The women, in contrast, liked to shop, go to the movies, listen to music, and travel to activities to have a good time. When I asked questions concerning social experiences and making new friends, these students had similar responses. One male participant said that he did not have any problem adjusting as he likened social adjustment to taking a tour. He would sometimes go to the student center and introduce himself to other students.

April could tell me what she does for fun while going to school in the United States.

I do have U.S. friends, however; everyone I know is international. So, I did not make friends out of the box. I mean I may say “hi” to them, but I don’t hang out with them.

What do you do for fun? Well, sometimes I go to the movies with my friends, or we just hang out in one room and watch movies, or we just play music from different countries.

We hang out with the guys sometimes. **What do you do to relax?** I listen to music a lot, and sometimes I read when I don’t have homework, and I go to the gym. Mainly, just hang out.

Brittnei laughed when she talked about her social life in the United States

It was just hard because you have that curiosity of knowing more but at the same time

what we do for fun was not what they do for fun. So it was hard to find a middle

background where you say oh we have the same things, so I will get to know you better.

I grew up in the city my entire life and would walk everywhere. And we had those plazas like where everybody got together and hung out. And like coming to this country and this state, I could not walk anywhere. Initially, I had to be dependent on someone or others.

Once, I had access to transportations, we now just get together and hang out. We like do

small parties but no alcohol because we are underage a minor and everything. And when I came here, people just hang out at their house or watch movies. But for me, it was something different because every time we hung out we go out. So, coming to [state] I say, okay where do we walk? We had to go out into the woods, and I got to enjoy hiking and camping, so that was a positive thing. But at the end, I met some like heart friends, and I am thankful for that. It was hard for me.

Laila has several U.S. friends, one of whom she speaks often. She also takes the blame at times for U.S. students being distant.

If you are in the same room with American students and you start speaking your language—which we don't do purposely—they pull away. I do have one good friend. And she has taken me home with her for Christmas. We met our first semester here, and now we are graduating so we have been friends that long. But, we hardly see each other anymore because of our schedules and she plays softball.

Julie's answer was most interesting. She put social adjustment into perspective.

I think Americans think they are very friendly. For example, they may see or greet you in Walmart and say things like I haven't seen you in a while—come over sometimes, but they don't mean it. It is just on top of the surface, so it is hard to get those deep friendships. **What do you think is hard about getting those friendships?** I think the comments like, "It's good to see you and come on over" and then you ask yourself, "do they want you to come over and do they want to see you again?" It is just their way of being friendly.

Aeryn said it well.

All my teammates are international. We all stay in the housing provided by the school. That is good because when you get homesick, or you have trouble with the language you know that you can talk to one of your teammates and they understand. They have been in that situation before, and they know that solution. It seems that the only friends that I have here are the tennis team and it was very sad because when I came here two of them were seniors and I only had them for one year because one graduated, so I will miss all of them I like them.

We don't have a social life here—there is nothing to do here. **So, what do you do for fun?** We hang out in the room; we go to movies. This semester on campus I have a car. It was difficult without transportation. We have tournaments and leave the area. **And do you have U.S. friends?** No. I am interested in having U.S. friends, but I have people in my classes, and I hang out with them in class, but outside of class, I don't hang out with them.

Micah has been here the second longest of the participants. He spoke about the advantages he has had because he could meet people in the community.

Um, relaxing. Sam and I watch a lot of NBA, and we play a lot of NBA on our PlayStation. Then the Americans, we just have one person that we hang out with from the golf team and what we do is pretty similar. There is one family that a couple of their people go to school here and over time I have gotten to know them pretty well, and I am like their adopted son, so I spend pretty much a lot of time with them ... 3 or 4 nights a week at their house. Their youngest son plays basketball at the middle school, so I go and watch a lot of games with them. Uh, the son plays football at the high school, and I go

with them to watch him play football. So, they have treated me and taken me in like one of their family, and that has pretty much helped me a lot.

Although Sam, who is Micah's roommate, spends time with Micah, they are different when it comes to socializing.

Um, I have many friends around here so ... I am in a different city most weekends, or I go to the city and hang out most times. I am doing something. Here, I am sitting in my room, or I go to the gym or practice. That is doing my sports season. But I mean if I had a car ... and had my friends, I would be in [cities] somewhere every weekend if I had the opportunity but the people around here don't have the adventurous side to them. Only when I go out and do things on the weekends ... of course there are some that are going to get out. **Do you have someone who will include you when they go out of town?** No, not really. The only trips that I go on are my sports trips. I suggest things, but it never materializes. [chuckle] I mean it is pretty disappointing because I would like to see more of the country, but it just doesn't go like that. I mean if I had the means or someone to help me, I would get a car and get my driver's license, but it is not that easy.

Laila, because of her study group, has what she calls international friends and U.S. friends.

It is refreshing to have a different group of friends that you can talk to and be close to as you are with your other friends. And when I have good news I cannot wait to share it with both groups of friends. Because you get different reactions, but it is good. It has been a good support system for me as well.

Social adjustment is a difficult task for anyone, however; it is particularly stressful for international students. Although they would like to make friends with U.S. students, and

although I interviewed the participants, I am unable to discern why the two parties will not socialize. I have observed both entities at school activities, and the internationals come to the activity together, dance, play games together, and leave together. One participant said,

Um, most of my friends are international because we all live together. There aren't many Americans living in the housing provided by the school besides the tennis team and golf team. And when we have fun, we go to the gym and work out that is what we enjoy doing because that's when we have a lot of fun.

Personal-emotional. Dealing with acculturation is another aspect of being away from home that international students face. Acculturation or adjusting to everyday life away from home I again found it harder for women than for men. Some seem to have problems adjusting to everyday life expectations. They have no transportation or must rely on someone who does not have to take them places but does not mind taking them.

Homesickness exists in four groups: missing family and friends, feeling lonely, and home reflections or comparisons such as, "If I were home, my friends and I would be ..." Such stressors occur on an everyday basis as the students also worry about their living conditions. Some participants, when asked where and what they do when stressed, professed to go to the gym and work out. Others get emotional and cry. Several participants talked about calling their mothers either every day or every other day. Aeryn discussed,

When I was back home, my mom cooked for me, and she did my laundry. So, when I came here, I had to learn to cook and do my laundry. I was calling my mom every 5 minutes. "Ma, Mama, how do you do this?" I didn't know how to do anything. Even when I had a math test, I called my aunt all the time asking her how to do this. She told me that I could go and ask my teacher and I told her "no, I cannot ask my teacher." I told

her no I couldn't go to my teacher because I was not confident about my English. I was all the time calling home because I needed.

Meschelle answered by saying,

I used to come to the U.S. for summers, Christmas, and holidays to visit my family in Florida but never like someone living up north. I started to understand American culture once I moved to the Midwest and attended a community college there. It was a very small town—smaller than here—we barely had a Walmart, but it was awesome. Like all the students were in one dormitory and we always had something to do. My coach was nice to me. He helped me out a lot. I was the youngest in the school because I was only 17 my freshmen year and I was spoiled. Like I had an amazing support group with my teammates, my professors. ... I have family in Florida, and you can always depend on that, but it's not like others where they may not see their families for a while. ... Like I was home sick one day, and that was it. I loved it.

Adam said,

My mom came with me to the U.S. to make sure that things were right. She made sure things at the upperclassman (now the Mt. View) were good. She met my roommate and went with me to get sheets and things for my room. So, the transition was good until I started school—trying to adapt—but when I came to school it was same as my school. They were the same classes, so I know what to do. I know I have to do assignment every day, so it was just like being at home, so it was no different than my home when we start the university.

In Michael's case, his struggle began upon arrival.

It was a cultural and language issue. I practically learned English and about the U.S. from watching movies. It is totally different from that. Here is very different. I landed in New York first and then to here where it was a shock. It wasn't a huge shock, but it was just different. It was not what I expected at all. **What did you expect?** I was expecting a bigger town because if the college is big, the town is big. I mean compared to other colleges, I didn't know. I thought that the athletic programs were going to be so big—I thought that the program had football, basketball and baseball teams and it was big. I thought that was what it was supposed to be. But I did not know that. If I knew then what I was getting into, I probably would not have come here. I would have ended up in DC. Brittnei talked about leaving 2 million people to come here and complete her final year of high school,

My freshman year of college I didn't talk to anyone. I just took care of my business. I went to classes, did my homework and went back to my room. It came to the point that I thought that no one was there for me. Nobody understands me; nobody understands what I am going through because I was getting homesick and sometimes you feel like you don't belong here. So, I shut down—I shut down until I became the president of the international student special services. And then I realized that you have to fight—I mean you have to fight. And no one wants to be around negative people. They do not want to associate with people like that. So I focused on going to class and getting my homework done and whatever happens happens. So I decided the second semester of my freshman year that this is not the way it is supposed to be uh you need people. People talk to people they hang out with; I became more sociable I started talking to people especially when I went to the cafeteria to have lunch with your classmates and introduce yourself. It helped

me a lot because when you have too much time on your hands, and you are not around other people you overthink things. And that is what leads to some depression, and I was stressed. But I am glad that I came.

Micah said,

The hardest part is leaving my family. Before I was scheduled to come here, I went and stayed with my brother for one year so that helped so the transition would be a little easier and I would be more self-dependent. When I came over here, I had just turned 17, so it was quite a big change for me. Being on the [athletic] team we had the coach and some other players that were here at the time made it comfortable for me.

Nicholas spoke of his adjustment:

I think that it has been a real adventure every day in this country. Very often people ask me why I came here to study when I could do it at home. And I think you should grow and changes. That is why I am doing it. I think that this region is characteristic of this adventure because the people here are supportive and they are interested in international students. You are doing your research on the international students, and I wonder if there is this much support in big cities.

April told me that stress for her was very emotional.

I don't say anything at all. And like it bothers my friends because they say that I talk a lot and you are not talking. I don't talk—I cry a lot, and sometimes my friends think that it is a miscommunication and that I am mad at them, but it is just that I am stressed and I don't want to talk because I don't want to say something that may hurt anybody. So I think that just not saying anything is the best. Sometimes I like practicing when I am stressed because it takes my mind off everything. I play music to destress.

When Sam stresses, he shows no emotion.

When I am stressed, my lips crack, and I develop a cold sore [fever blister] so when those come I know I am stressed. I am taking 21 credits every semester that I have been here so yeah, you stress yourself.

Why are you taking 21 credits a semester? Ummmm, I came here when I was 20. I am now 21. I am doing things faster if I think that I have time enough for or if I can't do it, I can drop a class. So I try, and I succeed, and I try, and I succeed so ... **okay.** And the thing is like its time, and I will finish in three years with my major and the last year will be for me to do what I want. I mean like it is in my hands. If I can do it. ... I guess, I will succeed in the future—If I try and succeed ... I can't say that I did not do it. No regrets.

With personal-emotional adjustment, the participants I interviewed did several things. Some cried, some did not talk, and others went to the gym. The family is very important to these students, and while they may not speak with their family every day, some participants associated their friendships with each other as being with family. Only one male participant in the group spoke with his mother on a regular basis. Another used to call home every day. She now calls home every other day.

Attachment (to the institution). As an international student, they have been recruited, admitted and enrolled at the institution. How does the institution keep them engaged and retained? How attached one becomes to the institution depends on the resources the institution provides when they are attending. The most important theme derived from my conversations with the students was financial resources: money for tuition and finding a job. International students seek employment only on the campus site. Students expressed their concerns about being unable to save enough money before they arrive because of scholarship misinformation.

Once they arrived, something new developed and those “full rides” turned into balances owed. Sam tells the first story.

When I first got here, I told them that I was not going to have a lot of money coming in and would I have the opportunity to get a job here. I was told, “oh yeah, we will set you up.” I never had a job the entire first semester. I went to human resources, I was asking people around campus, and I finally found a job, and it has been very helpful. Dr. [name] helped me the first semester for two semesters, but then out of nowhere the money was taken from me, and I later found out that it was given to people from the business—School of Business—that won awards for \$500. They were high school seniors enrolling here to major in business—that money given to those students as scholarships. That is the information give to me, and that is not right in my opinion. I am getting money from the school but not a fair amount. I have been talking to her this semester about trying to get more scholarship monies.

Laila has struggled for most of her years here. Now that she is an expensive program, her struggles continue.

So, in my 1st through my 3rd semesters, I was not as financially stable as I am right now. I would pay what I had to pay and then have a few dollars left over. Whenever I had a problem like when books are not paid for, I would go to my coach, and he would tell me that that is all the money that I had and the degree that I am in is more expensive than all the other degrees because they have all these little-hidden fees. Like almost every week, there is something that they want you to pay for, and I would go to him, and he would explain to me that this is all the money I would be getting because this is how much the others are getting. He would tell me that he could not help me it was the best that he

could do. So there were some scholarships that helped out. So now, I now know that when I go to my coach, and he tells me that he cannot help me, I go to several offices. I go to the Vice-President of Student Affairs (VPSA), and she will tell me that she cannot help me. I come to you, and you tell that you cannot help me but you always refer me to people that may be able to help me. So I usually know who will be able to help me and I have a list of people that can help. Now that I have worked, I can go over to the Business Office, and they tell me that I have this amount to pay and how much do you want to pay today? I am glad that they are flexible because sometimes it is a lot of money to pay and I just don't have it all at one time. The CFO is really good because she knows that I cannot pay and she lets me pay what I can.

Michael tells when he first arrived on campus and went to seek employment what transpired.

When I was an athlete, the room, and tuition was covered, and I received a little back from the school. And, eight people on the team. The money dried up. I kept my grades up and still no assistance. That should have prepared me. I didn't appreciate it enough as how much help was coming from the school. I had no intentions of staying here longer than I did. And as an athlete, we took this team from practically nowhere in the conference to a top 16 team in the country and the school gave no recognition. I don't think the school was appreciative nor did anything for it. No support for the coach or the team.

How did you pay for school after your eligibility was up? Okay, I dipped into my savings and got a job. **What now?** Okay, I am working three jobs. I have a job as a student assistant coach; working as an intramurals assistant and a resident assistant at the

Mt. View. I pay for my school with some of that money. I also was forced to take a year off from school, so I worked a year at home to save up.

Patty imparted a story that was very emotional.

There have been times after spring break that you live off of \$5 for a week. It happens to every student—not connected to just athletes where you have to eat bread with ketchup. I was on my way to DC, and I did not want anything to spoil so I have bread and a bag of ketchup and that is what I ate. I don't have a financial crisis. I work, and internationals are only allowed to work on campus because of my visa. Even if I didn't have a job, it would be stressful. I don't complain because I get a little scholarship money. My first year I did not get what I was supposed to. My tuition and fees, books, room and board, and transportation. I only got the tuition waiver, so it did not cover what it was supposed to. Not even personal expenses. So, I did an experimental protest my first year. I did not buy a single book. I finished the first semester with no books. It was embarrassing because I would ask people in my class if I could take a picture of their book or just read your book until class starts. So the athletic director that was here before was not very concerned about us and didn't care, but the person here now works hard for us to make sure that things work out for us much better. I finished up that first year without books, but now I have my books; they are not that expensive. I was ignorant because I did not want to pay for the books. (**So are you renting your books now?**) Not all. Some of them I want to buy. Some of them I don't think that I need to keep or buy. I just borrow some of my friends. All of my books and because my scholarship did not go through. ... I am grateful that I can buy some books. Not all Americans can go to college and pay for books, but as an international, my parents are worried because they think that

I am not eating, but I tell them that my paycheck is enough for me and I can travel. There have been times when I have had just \$5, but it is not very frequent.

Brittnei told me what has transpired at college for her since arriving late in the United States in November of her senior year in high school.

I came to the United States kind of late in November. I had to catch up with the high school and start the application for colleges and apply for the scholarship. I knew that my family could not support me financially because of the circumstances in my country and it would not be fair to them. I knew that I could not apply for financial aid because I am not a U.S. citizen so I had to apply for scholarships and at that time the only thing that they could give me was 50% of the base and that was not enough.

So when I went to the college, I had a meeting with the president of the college and the VP of Student Affairs and I explained to them my situation so I am receiving a combination of scholarships private scholarships as well, which would give me a full ride for four years. I just need to keep my grades up.

Adam told me of his challenges with books and fees.

I got into trouble with my fees. I went to see my coach and told him that I could not afford these fees. Can you help me with this? So my coach helped me with this, and I don't have trouble anymore. I now have trouble with the books, and I try to find books. So what I do is try to find the best deal on the Internet with books, because books are so expensive here. So it is hard or almost impossible for us to pay. There are some that can pay, but when I see one book at \$300 for one semester, it is a waste of money. I would spend money on a book that I can use for life and not just one semester.

April said,

When I enrolled, I would have a full scholarship. I didn't stress about money, but my first semester I am pretty sure I was stressed because I had to pay like \$500 and I just did not know where I was going to get the money because I did not have a job on campus at that time. But then one of my friends talked to me and encouraged me to apply for the Alumni Scholarship to add to my athletic, and since then everything has been good. So now sometimes I even get money back, so it's good.

In summary, the theme during the attachment module was a lack of funding and books for students. Jobs were the next critical aspect, and with the funding for higher education shrinking in the state, jobs on campus will become scarce for international students. In past practices, students who were athletes were allowed to pay in-state tuition or a prorated fee. Now, students are mandated to pay full tuition or out-of-state tuition to help defray the costs of the institution.

Summary of Findings

When international students have adjustment issues, where do they go for support? In this study, the data indicated that overall, they first turn to each other for support and assistance. These findings suggest that international students tend to first seek other international students and gain insights from those international students, especially if they are upperclassman, depending on the circumstance and the challenge. If the challenge is greater than they expected, that is, if it is something with which their international peers cannot assist them, they turn to their coach to guide them in the right direction or assist them with their challenge. Some staff member(s) or faculty member(s) have made the decision that these students need a little more assistance. Three students had "host" families. Two of the international students continued to

live with their host families after high school graduation. The third student met a fellow student who invited this student into their home for various activities and family gatherings.

What types of support services do international students identify as most beneficial to their academic and social adjustment? The main thrusts of challenges dealt with language. A majority of students stated they had challenges writing or comprehending English because it is considered their second language. Some said they did not understand things that were said because they acquired their mastery of the English language through various learning tools. Others said that it was hard because they learned British English, which is different from U.S. English. The dialect/accents were a challenge to some, and a few did not want to speak to their instructors because they were afraid their instructors would not understand them. Misadvising the students was another challenge many faced. All said that some faculty members made it easier for them to adjust in their classrooms.

When it came to social support, students preferred to be with their peers from other countries or their home country. They found that many U.S. students would hang out with them during classes but not afterward. Not having anything to do on the weekends was another social liability for international students. Because of the rural location of the college, many stated they had nothing to do on the weekends and went shopping or to movies when they got a chance. Usually, they listened to music from other countries and spent time with their teammates each weekend. Weightlifting was the norm for the men to relax and have fun.

Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter described participants' experiences at a rural college. The data provided significant perceptions into their academic and social experiences and their perception of the challenges they encountered. The question guiding the study was, what are academic,

social, personal-emotional, and attachment issues that international students experience as they adjust to rural community college? Chapter five addresses the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPLICATIONS

Chapter five highlights the major findings from this study about adjusting to community college as an international student in Appalachia. In this study, I researched the experiences of 13 international students at a rural college and examined their academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment adjustments and the types of challenges they faced at their institution. I addressed the research questions by collecting data from 13 international students attending college in rural Appalachia. This qualitative research study examined the determining factors that play a role in international students' experiences at community colleges in rural Appalachia. Qualitative researchers focus on participant interpretations and perceptions on a central phenomenon in a particularly sociohistorical context (Creswell, 2005). Creswell (2003) asserted that in qualitative research, "claims of knowledge are based on constructed perspectives from multiple social and historical meanings of individual experiences" (p. 18).

Factors playing a role in the selection of the methodology are the setting for the study, the goal, and the reason for the study. Each participant was willing to share their experiences at their institutions by responding to open-ended questions led by the research question: What are academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment issues that international students experience as they adjust to rural community college? All students interviewed under the same 60-minute protocol. The protocol consisted of specific questions relating to their perceptions of support services socially and academically as well as general questions about their background and the length of their stay in the United States.

The interviews were transcribed and divided into statements, capturing the information relevant to the study. In this chapter, I discuss how the findings address the research questions, relate the findings to the literature review, and discuss the implications of the findings. Also, I suggest possible directions for future studies.

Summary of Findings

When international students have adjustment issues, where do they go for support? In this study, the data indicated that overall, they first turn to each other for support and assistance. These findings suggest that international students tend to first seek other international students and gain insights from those international students, especially if they are upperclassman, depending on the circumstance and the challenge. If the challenge is greater than they expected, that is, if the challenge is greater than their international peers can assist them with, they turn to their coach to guide them in the right direction or assist them with their challenge. Also, some staff member(s) and faculty member(s) have made the decision that these students need a little more assistance. Three students had “host” families. Two of the international students continued to live with their host families after high school graduation. The third student met a student who invited this student into their home for various activities and family gatherings.

What types of support services do international students identify as most beneficial to their academic and social adjustment? I found in the data as it pertains to the academic aspect of support services that the main thrusts of challenges dealt with language. A majority of students stated they had challenges writing or challenges comprehending English because it is considered their second language. Some said that they did not understand what was said because they acquired their mastery of the English

language through various learning tools. Others said it was hard because they learned British English, which is different from U.S. English. The dialect/accents were a challenge to some, and a few did not want to speak to their instructors because they were afraid their instructors would not understand them. Misadvising students was another challenge many faced. All said that some faculty members made it easier for them to adjust in their classrooms.

For social support, students preferred to be with peers from other countries or their home country. They found that many U.S. students would spend time with them during classes but not afterward. Not having activities on the weekends was another social liability for international students. Because of the rural location of the college, many stated they had nothing to do on weekends; they went shopping or to movies when they got a chance. Usually, they listened to music from other countries and spent time with their teammates on the weekend. Weightlifting was the norm for the men as a source of relaxation and fun.

Findings and Review of Literature

As I compared my findings to the literature, three of the four areas of the SACQ model did emerge: academic adjustment, social adjustment, and personal-emotional adjustment. The fourth, attachment to the institution, was not as important; however, it was relevant to the students in many ways.

Academic Adjustment

According to the literature, the majority of international students are from non-English-speaking countries (IIE, 2010); thus, they must succeed academically in a second language. These challenges make achieving academic success difficult and stressful for

international students. To buoy success, international students should (a) become acquainted with the U.S. educational system, (b) adjust their academic routines and classroom behavior, and (c) develop new learning strategies (Meyer, 2001). Moreover, some international students are uncomfortable speaking a second language, which impedes interaction with fellow students, faculty, staff, administrators, and the community as a whole (Kwon, 2009). For example, the U.S. understanding of cheating and plagiarism on examinations, lack of attendance or participation, and the pacing of coursework are dissimilar in the colleges and universities in some countries. Students come from systems where the teacher is a respected individual, and their teaching is considered sacred truth (Anderson & Powell, 1991); the student is not to question the information received. Classrooms in the United States reflect more of a Socratic ideal, where teacher and student interact a great deal in the pursuit of knowledge (Anderson & Powell, 1991).

Due to language proficiency, a substantial number of undergraduate students enroll at 2-year colleges as a means of gaining language training (Stearns, 2009). Differences in accent, enunciation, slang and use of special English words are among the most common language issues (Gillette, 2005), consistent with other studies correlating English proficiency and academics. Staff perceives language proficiency as the main challenge affecting international students' academic performance (Trice, 2004). Language proficiency plays a major role in the adjustment of international students to academic and social acculturation (Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Based on study findings, one concern is how well international students adjust to the academic side of attending college in the United States. Academic issues are

restricted not only to the classroom. Students are misadvised. Students interviewed informed me that they were “bored” because they were in classes not challenging them or that they had already taken in high school. Of the 13 students interviewed, a majority (eight) had challenges at first with the language, which also impeded their social interactions. Either they did not understand their professors because the wording used was unfamiliar, or they did not want to speak with their instructors because they thought their English was poor because it was their second language; thus, the instructor would not understand them. I interviewed only one student who stated that she was in a study group because of the major she selected. Although all the participants thought that when they first arrived they would have no problem with their classes, about 30% (4) students believed they had been misadvised or misinformed of the options they had. Several stated they had one common person place them in classes that they did not need and were not in their majors.

Social Adjustment

Poor language skills not only impeded academic success but impeded social interaction with U.S. students. Many international students sought students or community people from their country as sources of support (Gillette, 2005; Zhai, 2002). When establishing relationships with U.S. students, interactions with international students depended upon or, the location of the student’s home country (Trice, 2004). I noticed that American student in this region friendlier to international students who are not from the Middle Eastern countries or dependent upon their religious beliefs. Social interaction with U.S. students is important (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Some even sought outside support from people they have lived with since attending high school in the area. Many

international students sought students or community people from their country as sources of support (Gillette, 2005; Zhai, 2002). They preferred to continue to stay in their compatriots' homes and participate in their social activities.

Findings showed the language barrier, like that in the classroom, was a challenge to making friends and acquaintances. When establishing relationships with Americans, Trice (2004) concluded that interactions between international students depended on the region of the world in which the student was a citizen. Several international students imparted that they did not have U.S. friends outside their classes and it was hard to make friends or "fit in," primarily because these peers had established friendships or bonds with their peers throughout their schooling years, and internationals considered themselves to be outsiders.

Social adjustment is a difficult task; however, it is particularly stressful for the international student. Although they would like to make friends with U.S. students, despite completing the interviews, I have not yet discerned why the two parties will not socialize. I have observed both entities at school activities, and the internationals come to the activity together, dance, play games together, and leave together, never mixing or mingling with others. While there is no literature to back my observations, I do know that in this area, people are not as open to associating with people from other countries. One participant said,

Most of my friends are international because we all live together. There aren't many Americans living in the housing provided by the school besides the teams that I participate. Several say that they are only here for academics and if they had

to do it all over again (to attend or not to attend the institution) they would not. No social interaction or activities provided.

Personal-Emotional

Dealing with acculturation is another aspect of being away from home international students face. Sin et al. (2011) defined acculturation as the process in which individuals acquire knowledge of and acclimate to the sociocultural standards of the host country and concluded that international students perceived the most challenging task for them was information on everyday life information seeking. Meyer (2001) recognized that all international students are unique individuals with their culturally conditioned conceptions, expectations, sensitivity, and understanding, which influences their adaptation to college.

For personal-emotional adjustment, female participants found it harder than men in adjusting to everyday life away from home. They cried. Some seem to have problems adjusting to the everyday life expectations such as lacking transportation or having to rely on someone who does not have to take them places but does not mind taking them. Missing family and friends, feeling lonely, and home reflections or comparisons abounded, such as, "If I were home, my friends and I would be ..." Some did not talk, and others went to the gym. The family is very important to these students, and although the males may not speak with their family every day as the females do, some participants associated their friendships with each other as being with family. Several participants talked about calling their mothers either every day or every other day. Only one male participant in the group spoke with his mother on a regular basis. One female called home every day. She now calls home every other day.

Attachment (to the Institution)

International students have been recruited, admitted, and enrolled at the institution. How does the institution keep them engaged and retained? Ozturgut (2013) identified best practices in retaining international students: (a) establishing international student and scholar services staff; (b) academic programming and support; (c) social and cultural engagement and support; and (d) financial aid, health services, religious support, and immigration support. How attached anyone becomes to the institution depends on the resources the institution provides while they are attending. The most important theme derived from my conversations with the students was financial resources: money for tuition and finding a job. International students on campus can only seek employment on the campus site. Students expressed their concerns about being unable to save enough money before they arrive in this country or on this campus because they were misinformed about their scholarships. Coaches informed five students that they would receive full rides yet, when the athlete arrived, they were told that only partial scholarships would be given. Institutions sanctioned by the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) (2017) is able to compete on the Division I, II and III level. Division I colleges may offer full athletic scholarships up to a maximum of tuition, fees, room and board, course related books up to \$250.00 in course related supplies and one-time travel. Division two college are limited to awarding tuition, fees, course related books and and \$250.00 maximum course related supplies. Division III is the colleges discretion. Coaches say things to students to get the student to sign on the line without first checking with the Athletic Director as to what he/she can offer these students.

The theme during the attachment module was a lack of funding and books for students. Jobs were the next critical aspect and with the funding for higher education dwindling in the state, jobs on campus become scarce for international students.

Summary Statement

In summary, the study revealed that international students form a bond with each other and stay in their niche. They interact among themselves and depend on each other for their support in academics and social adjustment. Participants in this study were quite vocal in informing me of their challenges, confirming my assumptions that services were not provided through their interviews. I wanted to know if needs of the international student are satisfied. The students' academic and social adjustment require more assistance. This theme falls into personal-emotional adjustment as well.

Implications for Practice

International students come to U.S. colleges to receive a different type of education and to experience studying abroad. For them, it is a decision they make because they may not have the same opportunity in their country. Most told me that if they wanted to have a specific major, they would not be able to do so in their home country. When the study began, there were 24 international students ranging in age from 20 to 24 years of age interested. Although I did know a small percentage of them by name and through introductions, it was during my interviews with each of them that I found them like U.S. students away from home for the first time, but mature beyond their years. All knew why they were majoring in their subject and some even knew what they wanted to do after graduation. All were concerned about their financial status from semester to semester and concerned especially during the summer months when they had

to work and could not find a job on campus. They were concerned about how they could live and where they were going to live, as they could not afford the expense of going home like most U.S. students do. Some were shy and did not like talking about their experiences, whereas others had no problem expressing themselves. In addition to those challenges, they were addressing a new language, learning new words, and definitions every day.

Implications for International Offices and Recruiters

For international students to succeed, it is essential that colleges expand their services. International students on campus are ill-prepared for studies due to a lack of orientation. I recommend the institution provide an Office of International Student Scholar Services (OISSS), dedicated specifically to assisting international students in their needs, whether on or off campus. In addition to this office, the institution should provide a counselor for this office to serve the students. For example, there should be an intense orientation for international students covering information about the institution and its policies on academic and more administrative assistance when it comes to registering for classes. Because some international students arrive on campus just in time for classes to begin, the week before classes starting should attend a mandatory orientation. Additionally, these students need assistance filling out an Optional Practical Training (OPT) for F-1 visa students who are graduating and may wish to stay in the country for one year to receive additional experience in their field of study. They may also file for a Curricular Practical Training (CPT). A CPT is for international students pursuing an internship or find work off campus in his or her coursework area. The office should be a one-stop service for international students. For example, the Office of

International Student Scholar Services should be able to provide the same services that Student Support Services provides to its clients.

Implications for Student Support Directors

Student Support Services is a TRIO program organized under Title IV, a federally funded program enacted through the Higher Education Act of 1965 intended to assist first-generation students, students with disabilities, and students who meet the guidelines of low-socioeconomic status (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The program is responsible for sponsors workshops and events to enhance the academic, career, cultural, and leadership abilities of program participants who may have difficulty adjusting not only to college life but to the culture of the area in which they are attending college. Although the program cannot assist all students, it can provide assistance in other ways.

I recommend that the Student Services Director collaborate with the OISSS to provide international students access to their programs by videotaping and uploading those workshops to channels such as YouTube which would allow students to view their workshops at leisure and seek assistance from their OISSS adviser when needed.

Implications for Faculty, Staff, Community and Family Involvement

There is an assumption from faculty that all international students arriving on college campuses are prepared educationally for the task however, not all are (Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). International students lack the services institutions provide for American students (Meyers, 2001). Zhai (2002) stated that colleges and universities should understand the cultural challenges international students face when they come to the United States and assist them in their academic pursuits. In 2009, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative, committing \$12 billion to the nation's 2-

year colleges (W. G. Johnson, 2009). Since this time, policy makers have focused on increasing the attention on community colleges to enhance the delivery of their education so students may succeed in careers, employment, future university studies, and communities.

I strongly recommend the institution provide training to its administrators, staff, and faculty and student leadership in the area of cultural sensitivity. Although some faculty members are willing to assist these students in their courses by ensuring they understand the processes in their classrooms necessary to be successful, some do not favor international students being in their class or at the institution. I recommend that the institution provides mandatory training to faculty in learning styles and internationalization.

Activities for these students in assisting them to adjust are a necessity. I recommend the Office of Campus Life provide activities acquainting international students with U.S. students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Additionally, these constituents should be encouraged to mingle with international students. School mixers involving the college and their families as a whole are very important. They assist the college by providing cultural awareness to the campus community.

Involving the community is another recommendation. The community, in turn, is now able to welcome students who will be spending their dollars in their establishments. Such integration would assist the community to understand the culture of international students. I recommend the following

- International students should be partnered with U.S. students for 1 academic year as mentors/mentees, acclimating them to the college and the community;

- Volunteer faculty, staff, and administrators and their families should be asked to host international students in their homes monthly and include them in some family outings
- The community and board members should interact with international students.

Moreover, I recommend that the community becomes more involved by providing summer internships for these students and allowing them to gain experiences in their fields by allowing them to become more competitive in the job market. If students can gain experience, they will be able to bring a stronger knowledge of their base education to their home countries. Again, this would involve community businesses, faculty and the OISSS to collaborate with the student to advise and assist allowing the student to work in the community and gain credit hours in the process.

Implications for Athletic Directors

Although the institutions have some college sports sanctioned by the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA, 2015), there has been a debate as to who is responsible for international students who are student-athletes. A majority of colleges and universities when they recruit athletes, an athlete does not have to show that they are financially equipped to pay for the four years. With the NJCAA, institutions can fall into one of three categories: Division I, II, or III. Division I colleges may offer full athletic scholarships to include a maximum of tuition, fees, room and board, course related books, up to \$250 in course supplies, and travel costs one time per academic year to and from the college. Division II colleges are limited to awarding tuition, fees, course related books, and up to \$250 in course supplies. In being a Division III institution may or may not

provide assistance to the student. In this instance, the institutions chose to go D-II. Of these colleges, they pay for the student's time here because the student is providing a service to the institution and that is playing in a college sanctioned activity.

Finally, the question that needs answering is the responsibility for the student-athlete. As the institution recruits international students who are student athletes, who becomes the responsible party? Does the institution involved in the recruitment of these athletes become the sponsor of the athlete? By sponsorship, as stated in Chapter 2 related to F-1 visas, international students matriculating must show financial sustainability when entering colleges in the United States. I recommend that the Board of Governors/Trustees and the president of the institution come together and decide who is responsible for international student-athlete's academic and financial resources. Board of Governors (Trustees) and the president should make a decision as to whether or not institutions will be responsible for the student-athlete or if the student-athlete would continue to be financially responsible. This allows the coaches to inform the students as to their responsibility when it pertains to finances.

Implications for Further Research

When interviewing the students, I found more questions emerged; more research should focus on international students. For example, the most important factor to sort out is the role of international student influences versus two-year influences versus rural influences. Future studies are needed to discern the impact international students have on the institution and the community where they are attending. This research would confirm the role of the international student attending the institution and their contributions to the institution and its community. Such research may answer the question why international

and U.S. students do not socialize together. Such research could encompass the perceptions of the constituents (faculty, staff, and administrators) of the institution and the roles they take in academic and social interaction with international students. Another needed study is the level of language proficiency international students develop as they enter the institution and matriculate through the institution. In particular, such a study would discern if their level of expertise progresses.

Relationship of Findings to Theory

The conceptual framework for this study focused on the SACQ developed by Baker and Siryk (1989) to measure the effectiveness of students and their adjustment to colleges and universities in the United States. The four categories were an academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment. The purpose of developing the SACQ was to create a way to assess needs for early counseling interventions and to provide the research needed for institutional interventions (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Although this model is a questionnaire used in measuring a participant's adjustment to college, I used the model's categories to assist in classifying the interviews and place each of them in the appropriate category. For example, the academic adjustment category measures a student's success in answering the various educational demands of the college experience. Social adjustment measures the interpersonal demands of college; personal-emotional adjustment measures how the student is feeling psychologically and physically; attachment is the student's overall satisfaction with the college experience, mainly addressing the student's attachment to the institution.

Limitations

This study had several limitations that restrict generalization of the results. The sample consisted of students who had been in the United States for more than one year and less than five years, majoring in business, economics, science, and engineering. The sample group consisted of athletes and nonathletes and totaled 13 in all. Due to the small sample size and the limited number of colleges involved in the study, I do not recommend this study be considered a reflection of all colleges or universities that have a large population of international students with resources readily available to them. I gathered data solely on a voluntary basis.

Closing Remarks

When I first started to work on this project, my fear was that international students would not want to participate in this study. They are a private group of students who largely stay to themselves or other students like them. In the spring of 1990, I developed a friendship with a student who was from Saudi Arabia. He was in my class, and at the time I did not notice that he would only talk to me. It was during the Gulf War that I noticed all the international students would almost become invisible on campus. They would come to class and leave immediately afterward. I finally understood that they were here, but did not feel embraced by the institution.

In my many years of observation and experience, I realized that international students should develop a bond of trust with other members of the academic community. They do not want people to “feel sorry for them.” These students want to feel welcomed and a part of the institution, just as do U.S. students. I laud everyone who assisted or is assisting them and has made them feel they are part of the college community. They

chose to come to the United States to be educated, away from their families and friends, to receive a quality education and to comprehend U.S. culture. I hope we all can learn from them: that the free world can be educated and be accepting of all cultures.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

International Students Attending College in Appalachia

As the researcher, I will schedule personal interview appointments with 16 international students attending colleges in Appalachia. All interviews will be conducted in a private area on the student's campus. The interviews will be conducted and completed at times not to interfere with the student's class schedule. The researcher will schedule an interview appointment with the student and call one week before the interview to confirm the time and the place.

My name is Deirdre Guyton, and as part of my dissertation work, I would like to know more concerning your experience at this institution as an international student. I would like to ask you about your experiences academically during your time at this college.

With your permission, I would like to tape record our interview, so that I may have an accurate account of our conversation. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and any information obtained in this investigation that can identify you, or your institution will remain confidential. The information will be disclosed only upon your permission. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to discontinue at any time during the interview process. Is this okay?

At this point, the researcher will turn the tape recording on and repeat the two paragraphs above and record the student's answers.

Do you have any questions? If not, we will begin. Where is your home country?

How long have you lived in the United States?

How long have you lived in this area?

Tell me about your transition from your home country to the United States.

What has been your experience being an international student in the United States?

How has it been for you since your arrival on campus?

- o (If short two-word answer. . . Tell me your story about your first day on campus).

How did your first day of classes go?

Have you had any difficulties?

- o (If yes, What types of difficulties have you had?)

RQ1: What are academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment issues that international students experience as they adjust to rural community college?

“I want to talk to you today about your experience. . .

Tell me about your social experiences. Tell me about the U.S. friends you have met and what you do for fun. What do you do when you have time to relax? Who do you go with and where do you go?

When people have problems adjusting to new places, ideas or people they go to someone to discuss the issues. Did you have problems adjusting? Tell me about your problem and where on campus did you go to get advice or just to talk.

We all handle stress differently. For instance, when I am stressed, I don't talk, or I snack. Others feel sad and shut down. Tell me about a recent time when you were stressed and what you did to distress and who did you speak?

I am familiar with the application process and the financial status when it comes to athletes and non-athletes. As a(n) _____ where do you go when you need assistance with a financial crisis on campus? Tell me about a time when you had financial difficulties.

The English language is full of different meanings for the same words. For example, "Down." Of course, it is the opposite of "up, " and yet it can mean "unhappy." And, there is the word "Bright." It can mean "intelligent" or "full of light." Then there is the slang. Tell me about a time when you did not fully understand something said and what you did.

Tell me about a time when you shared your culture (beliefs/values) with someone else.

We talked about some difficulties you've experienced here, but we never discussed how you solved them. For example, *(give the student the example that was given to you when you talked about difficulties during the first part of the interview).*

Can you elaborate (go into detail) with me about the difficulty you are experiencing here at this institution? Where did you go? How did you solve the problem?

Lastly,

Can you tell me about your academic experiences since arriving at this institution? Tell me what have been some of the academic challenges you have had while attending this institution? Are these problems solely related to being an international student?

Are you familiar with any services here at the institution that help with your learning experiences? Did you pursue any of these services on your own?

In your course work here at this institution, have you been referred to any services? Tell me the story of the faculty that led you to these services? How did you this referral impact you? What was it like for you when you approached the service?

Do you think your language barrier has had an effect on you adjusting to your academics? Tell me a story of a time when language has been an obstacle to your learning experience.

Tell me if you had access (right to use) to support groups or programs to assist you with your academic work while at this institution.

Our interview session is concluded. Are there any additional comments you would like to add? I would like to thank you for your participation. I want to reiterate that your input will be confidential. I do believe that your input will be valuable to the research I am doing. I wish you success throughout your academic experiences.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM

Thank you for participating in this study which will take place in the spring semester of 2015. This form summarizes the purposes of this research study and provides an explanation of your association and rights as a participant.

The purposes of this project are:

1. to partially fulfill the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Community College Leadership and
2. to examine the experiences affecting international students attending colleges in rural Appalachia.

The methods being used to collect information for this study are explained below. From this information, I will write a dissertation and integrate data obtained for the study from a qualitative study.

Research Design

In order to examine the determining factors playing a role in international students' experiences at colleges in rural Appalachia, I will be conducting a qualitative research study. The information collected will assist college officials toward making better-informed decisions and to take institutional action in assisting international students experiencing adjustment challenges, by alleviating the sources of these experiences and to better prepare incoming international students to handle better the pressures they are likely to encounter.

You are encouraged to ask any questions at any time in regards to this study about any methods used. Your suggestions are very important to me throughout this research and welcomed. If you should have suggestions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address/phone number/email listed below.

It is my guarantee that the following conditions upon completion will be met:

1. Your vital information such as your name and the name of the institution you are attending will not be used at any time during the research. You will be given a pseudonym in all reporting.
2. Should you grant permission for an audio recording, no audio tapes will be used for any purpose other than this research study. No one other than myself will have access to the materials.

3. Your participation in this study is strictly on a voluntary basis; you have the right at any time during this study, for any reason, and without prejudice to discontinue your participation. If this should occur, all information related to you will be discarded.
4. If you would like a copy of the final report, I will reciprocate upon written request.

By signing below, I agree to the terms of this Research Consent Form:

Respondent _____ Date _____

By signing below, I agree to the terms of this Research Consent Form:

Researcher: _____ Date _____

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VITA

Deirdre T. Guyton was born on August 6, 1963 in Bluefield, West Virginia. She attended Bramwell High School in West Virginia and participated in athletics. She was selected to the National Honor Society before graduating as salutatorian in 1981.

She received her undergraduate degree from Bluefield State College in Physical Education; her Masters of Science in Educational Media from Radford University and an Ed.S. from Marshall University in Leadership Studies.

She is employed at Bluefield State College currently as the Director of Alumni Affairs and adjunct professor.