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ACCULTURATION AND BELONGINGNESS: THE KEYS TO INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENT SATISFACTION

BY

SEMEHAR GHEBREKIDAN

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science

Major in Sociology

South Dakota State University

2018

ACCULTURATION AND BELONGINGNESS: THE KEYS TO INTERNATIONAL  
STUDENT SATISFACTION  
SEMEHAR GHEBREKIDAN

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Science in Sociology degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Meredith Redlin, Ph.D.                      Date  
Thesis Advisor

Mary Emery, Ph.D.                      Date  
Head, Department of Sociology

Dean, Graduate School                      Date

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all first generation, minority college students who are products of immigrants. Have the audacity and tenacity to continue reaching for your dreams, even when it seems impossible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis could not have been possible without the expertise of Dr. Meredith Redlin, my thesis advisor. I would like to thank the entire Sociology department, especially Dr. Mary Emery for giving me giving me the opportunity to prove that I am not only capable, but exceptional. Thank you to Kas Williams who overall supported me from undergraduate to now. I would not be here on this stage without your encouragement and your dedication to making sure minority students on this campus feel welcomed, safe and engaged.

I have to thank my wonderful, compassionate and hard working parents, especially my mother who fuels me with the morale I needed to get through school and life. Ewedishalo. Lastly, I have to thank my brothers for always being able to give me perspective and constantly remind me of who I am when I am down on myself.

Atticus wrote “we are made up of all those who have built and broken us” and the people I named and many more, have helped build me, so thank you.

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## ABSTRACT

ACCULTURATION AND BELONGINGNESS: THE KEYS TO INTERNATIONAL

STUDENT SATISFACTION

SEMEHAR GHEBREKIDAN

2018

The purpose of this thesis is to explore if acculturation in conjunction with belongingness, affected international student satisfaction. With the changes in immigration, the political climate as a whole and college campus demographics, it was important to evaluate what stress factors international students faced while being undergraduate students at a Midwestern University. In addition to using secondary research, primary research was conducted in the form of 4 interviews and 59 electronic surveys. The independent variables that were measured were reorganized into 2 categories: the students' religious beliefs and the country where the student is from. Themes that came across throughout the results that were supported by the literature, were when international students were people of color and Christian, they had a more difficult time being satisfied at the institution. Themes of discrimination, classroom challenges and domestic students lacking empathy were also noted. It is hoped this study will inform international educators and university administrators about the difficulties international students face and how to better advise them to navigate the new culture around them.

## **Introduction**

Research indicates that “belongingness”, “acculturation” and “adaptation” on the part of international students are key for positive experiences on American campuses (Cho 2014:13-15). However, there is ample evidence that challenges and stresses do exist (Cho 2014:13-15). This review will discuss each of the following key challenges: acculturation, adaptation and assimilation; belongingness; dietary changes; financial hardships; internationalization of the curriculum, and cross-cultural relationships.

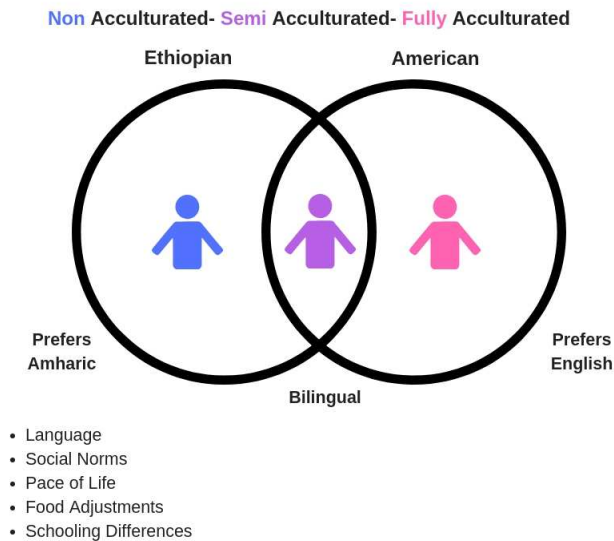
## **Literature Review**

### *Acculturation, Adaptation, and Assimilation*

Originally, acculturation was looked at as a uni-dimensional process that was used for migrants only and it was assumed that the people coming into the new culture would discard their own beliefs and adopt that new culture’s beliefs (Gordan 1964). For the purposes of this thesis, acculturation can be defined as the process that takes place when two or more cultures meet for a prolonged period of time (Berry 2005; Gibson 2001). Many international students hit a point where they become a westernized version of their cultural backgrounds and they have not only modified their cultural practices but also adapted to the new culture around them (Sam and Berry 2010). However much a person may acculturate, it does not mean that they will automatically dispose of their own cultural background, beliefs, values, and practices (Berry 1980).



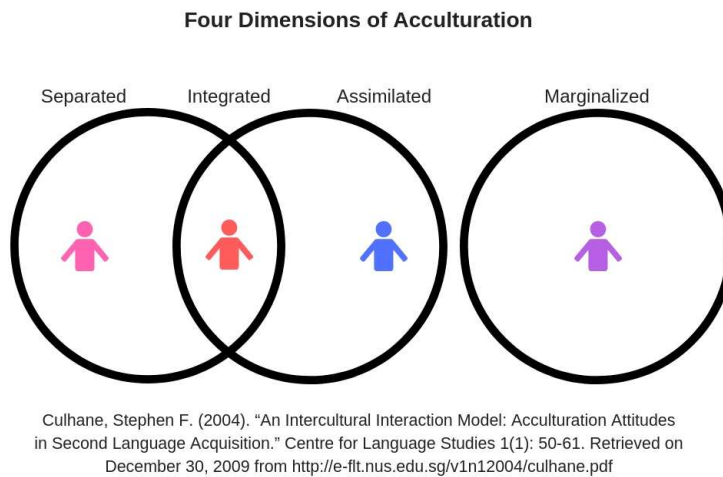
Acculturation can be identified as a visible process but it is not always. It can be talked about as a “dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members” (Berry 2005).



Adopted from Goffan, Havi. 2008. "Understanding Hispanic Market Segmentation – Part 1." Target Latin. Retrieved (<http://hispanic-marketing.com/lets-talk-segmentation/>).

International students who come to the United States for the purpose of education generally acculturate to the culture well. However, acculturation can have negative or positive effects depending on what is being changed in those said cultures. They don't just stress out over the process of getting used to English but also to the “more generalized stress of lacking culture-specific knowledge necessary to make sense of social situations” (Markus and Kitayama 2003). There are four different dimensions that people can go through which are separated, integrated, assimilated and marginalized. In the separation stage, they may reject the dominant culture and only maintain their own. In the integration dimension, participants will abide by social norms of the dominant

culture but still remain true to their own. The assimilated dimension is when the participants abandon their own culture for the new culture. During the marginalized dimension, participants may feel they are alienated from their own cultural group and the dominant culture.



Political dominance implies that a group is in a position of power and, in the normative structure, says that one cultural group is complacent in a position of superiority (Weber 1922:631). This can cause the acculturation process to be tougher on international students since they are not the cultural rule makers but the followers. So it isn't up to them to create the social norms but to follow them. For example, the teaching style of the new culture may be completely different, which can throw international students off when they have been taught differently their whole life (Edgeworth and Eiseman 2007). International students have to navigate throughout this process.

"Adaptation is thus considered a consequence of acculturation... Adaptation is not synonymous with acculturation, but it follows from the change" (Berry 1997:7). These statements refer to the change that occurs in

order to maintain who they are in various aspects of a social system. Even when students have mentally prepared themselves to adapt to go through culture shock, that won't automatically mean that the student will acculturate well. As international students migrate to a new place, it can be hard for them to adapt because of "various characteristics of individuals, grief, fatalism and selective expectations of enhancement of life" (Zhou 2008: 2). Secondly, mental health impacts the migration experience of that student. "Negative life events, lack of social support networks and the impact of value differences can also affect a student's mental health" (Zhou 2008:2).

Assimilation and acculturation are two separate processes. Assimilation is the process of absorbing a culture to the point that the individual resembles, as much as possible, the new culture (Berry 1974; 1980). They differ for reason that "acculturation does not require out-group acceptance, whereas assimilation does. Secondly, unlike acculturation, assimilation requires a positive orientation toward the out-group" (Teske 1974:359). An example of the first difference that can be used is on the occasion of students' study abroad. If they have the language, abide by social and cultural norms and prefer the new culture to their own, they will be acculturated. Park and Burgess also describe the second point as participants needing to have a constant "unity of thought" (1924). It takes people to change not only on the outside, but the inside as well for assimilation to fully take place. Woolston argues, "assimilation is more than simply making individuals alike in appearance or manners" (1945:416). Rather, it incorporates the idea of "cooperative cultures," where individuals come to be part of an

association, as well as contributing to the correction and improvement of this association (Teske 1974:359). In the process of assimilation, removing your hijab or straightening your hair is not enough. There also needs to have a change in mentality, ideology, and socialization.

### *Belongingness*

“One of the most frequently cited factors for college students’ persistence and academic success is their sense of belongingness” (Hausmann et al. 2007; Osterman 2000). The international student population has increased by 6% since 2012 in the United States (Institute of International Education 2013) and it is vital to identify improvements that need to be made in order to improve international students’ experiences, academically and socially, as they are a major student population group of the American University system.

“Belongingness facilitates a secure base from which to explore relationships” (Wang and Mallinckrodt 2006:144) which then facilitates positive outcomes such as beneficial cross-cultural interactions (Glass and Westmont 2014:144). An example of this would be a rural domestic student and a rural international student getting acquainted with each other. They may both be from a rural area, but they may have different cultures that they then will be sharing with each other. When international students feel like they belong, it not only provides them with a better social and academic life but also provides domestic students with cross-cultural experiences as well and can be mutually beneficial.

Experimental research has indicated that even minimal cues of social connectedness, or “mere belonging” (Walton et al. 2012:513), such as sharing

preferences for music or the university sports team, affect people's achievement: "Belongingness creates a secure base to explore cross-cultural relationships" (Wang and Mallinckrodt 2006:5).

## **Stress Factors**

### *Language and Social Challenges*

The repeated theme that was apparent throughout all the literature was that a language barrier was the most difficult challenge. "A lack of fluency of American English undermined the students' ability to communicate with peers and others, occasionally leading to miscommunication and misunderstandings, as well as the inability to form friendships" (Yueoung 2015:464). These misunderstandings can detract from the feeling of belongingness because if students aren't able to communicate effectively with other classmates, their ability to get involved on campus and having essential cross-cultural experiences are hindered. But having strong English competency can be an advantage for international students. Barrat and Huba (1994) found that international students' English competency helped boost self-esteem. Language and cultural barriers may limit opportunities for friendship between international and domestic students. However, domestic students may also be disinterested in initiating friendships with international students (Ward et al. 2001; Zhang and Brunton 2007). The language barrier also can affect academic performance as well. Without these key experiences, international students may self-segregate themselves. "Self-segregation, by definition, means members of a subpopulation

withdraw and create a self-sustaining 'society' within the broader society" (Cui 2013:3). International students do this frequently because of familiarity and comfort, but also because it is easier to communicate. However, this self-segregation can lead to students not learning about different perspectives outside of their own (McPherson et al. 2001). A study from Norway reported that students from Europe and North America were more satisfied than students from Asia or Africa with their experience abroad (Institute of International Education 2013). This can be because of the perception that they may not be wanted in the country they are going to or the perceived racism/discrimination the student had faced.

International students may also face challenges when it comes to what they expected schooling to be like and what it actually is like for them. For example, teaching styles for many Asian schooling systems are very formal, whereas in the United States they are very interactive, which can really be concerning for Asian students as they may not be used to student-teacher relationships which are so informal and appear to be lacking respect (Aubrey 1991; Liberman 1994).

### *Dietary Changes*

Food can represent major cultural changes for international students who are studying abroad. Many students do not adjust well to American food because of the differences in preparation and cooking styles. Chinese students said that although Chinese food was available in the area, it was not authentic Chinese food and that they are loaded with Chinese salt (MSG) and preservatives

(Yueong 2015:465). So although the “food” was readily available, the students expressed fondness for food that was authentic to their culture. Although ingredients can be purchased to make their cuisine, certain spices, herbs, and vegetables are not available for the students to purchase, which makes it difficult for students to create authentic dishes. In a survey conducted at South Dakota State University, the question was asked whether students were able to get certain home foods easily in the Brookings area. Overwhelmingly, people wished that there was more access to spices and ingredients that are local to their country/cultural identity (Ghebrekidan 2016). Students at most universities are required to have a meal plan, which may not match what the students have been used to eating. Many students experience sickness in the first weeks of school trying to transition to the highly fried and heavy food.

### *Financial Difficulties*

International students may bring in over 19 billion dollars annually to US economies, but international students still face financial issues while attending universities (NAFSA 2010). International students are not able to work off-campus unless they have CPT, known as Curricular Practical Training, where the work must pertain to the students’ educational major, it must be approved by the students’ academic advisor and the international office, and the student complies with the federal guidelines for student work. The only time an international student can work off campus is during OPT, known as the Optional Practical Curricular. This can only be done when a student has finished schooling and the work must relate to their major as well. Although there are jobs on

campus, it can be difficult for international students to find a job that aligns well with a students' school schedule and that is student worker eligible. There can also be a stigma being international and working on campus. This stigma is felt because of the lack of knowledge domestic students have about international students' working requirements. This can exacerbate the feelings that international students may have a perceived preference of jobs on campus when in reality on campus is the only place they can work. Additionally, international students are not qualified to receive federal financial aid so many international students try to graduate early so they can reduce their cost of attendance (Cadieux and Wehrly 1986). This also means that international students are not eligible for work-study positions that are more readily available on campus. Many students also expressed the guilt they felt about asking their parents for money (Dessof 2010:3). When a student is on campus and things financially change back home, this can really create problems for that student. Not being present with their parents and actually seeing what they could be sacrificing to give assistance can be reason enough for international students to not ask their parents for assistance.

#### *Lack of cross-cultural experiences in the classroom*

Globalizing the curriculum is imperative when talking about international students. "Inclusive curriculum, such as courses that involve multicultural content or discussion among students with different backgrounds and beliefs, are significant predictors of cross-cultural interaction for all students" (Gurin et al. 2002; Saenz, Ngai and Hurtado 2007). Creating courses that can get everyone



in the classroom talking can expand students' knowledge base. For example, there is a lot of history that is presented in a singular viewpoint. When a class is designed to explore other perspectives outside of a traditional approach, it can make students' learning have more depth and give them the opportunity to have better conversations inside and outside of the classroom. They are able to give both domestic and international students the practical tools to talk with others and understand each other's perspectives.

When students cannot personally connect with the material, students can feel disconnected. Leask (2009) uses four different points that need to be reviewed. First, it is necessary to address the structural issues of the curriculum to get any real engagement out of international and domestic students. Second is to not underestimate the challenges with intercultural interaction in a learning environment. Third, task design is crucial. Last, faculty and staff need to be equipped with particular knowledge and skills (Leask 2009: 210-12). Each of these components is important when talking about the classroom experience because if the classroom only caters to domestic students, we are missing out on the experiences of these international students who have valuable information and dialogue that needs to be heard and validated. Being cognizant of these issues can create a better academic environment for students and help them overall be satisfied in their academic experience.

#### *Cross-Cultural misunderstandings outside of the classroom*

Cultural misunderstandings occur when differing cultural norms clash (Yueong 2015:464). Yueong (2015) described the experience of two students.

The first was the experience of a Chinese male who mistakenly ate his roommates' pizza because in China, when food was laid out in that supply, it was customary for it to be shared. When the student was reprimanded, he was overwhelmingly embarrassed. The second situation was between two Chinese women who were walking on campus and holding hands. In Chinese culture, this behavior was common for female friends, but the connotation differs in the American context--instead, they were seen as lesbians. These differences in cultural norms become awkward for international students who experience these situations because they are being subjected to a judgmental environment without the other people understanding their cultural norms.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout the literature review, we can see that acculturation and belongingness are not always talked about together, but they are intertwined. When looking at stress factors that affect international students, we can see that the processes of acculturation and belongingness can separately create stressful environments for international students. Much of the literature either follows international students who are in the United Kingdom or Australia, or speaks directly to minority students. Every country has its own climate and, although many of them are predominantly white countries, that doesn't necessarily mean they have the same climate as it is in the United States. Although some of the literature may not have spoken directly to international students in the United States, I believe the experiences that international students may feel can be universal. The literature review also had little information on whether academic

and social satisfaction was affected by acculturation and the sense of belongingness. This paper strives to explore international students' feelings and experiences in higher education in the US.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research follows Berry's theory of acculturation and the concept of belongingness (Locks et al. 2008:260). Berry has produced extensive research that has helped provide the framework for thinking about acculturation.

Acculturation is a "dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (Berry, 2005). The main question to consider is "what happens to people when they move from the culture in which they have been born and raised to a new and unfamiliar culture?" (Sam and Berry 2010:1)

#### *Conceptualizing Acculturation*

Acculturation can be defined as:

Those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups... under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation (Redfeils, Linton and Herskvossi 1936:149-152).

When two cultures meet for the first time, and continue to meet, changes can occur within both cultures. Immigrants coming to the United States for the first time to live here will come with their own cultural norms, values, and beliefs. When that person continues to have contact with the new culture, they

may try to assimilate or resemble the majority culture. Whether it be through actions, dress, or mentality, assimilation takes many forms. But acculturation doesn't require assimilation. People who go through the acculturation process bring a variety of information with them because they are constantly navigating a new culture and that comes with challenges. "The congruity (or incongruity) in cultural values, norms, attitudes, and personality between two cultural communities in contact needs to be taken into consideration for a basis of understanding the acculturation process that constantly goes on" (Berry and Sam 2010:473).

Berry further notes that acculturation can be a result of a major life event (Berry 2010:474). For international students, simply flying overseas to a university with the possibility of not seeing your family for a long time can be that major life event. Since becoming an international student can be very stressful and hard to simply adjust just by altering your behavior, then it can result in acculturative stress (Berry 2010:474). "Acculturative stress can easily be defined as stress that comes from the acculturation process" (Berry 2010:474). For international students, that can be language, cultural habits, or the pace of life.

International students experience a unique situation where they are not only trying to adjust to a different country's schooling system, but they also are dealing with the stress of feeling like they belong. Measuring acculturation and stress will help me explore what international students experience. They will

also help me find the relationship of certain stress factors and how they affect student satisfaction.

### *Conceptualizing Belongingness*

The term belongingness is used as a means to understand human interpersonal behavior (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Glass (2013) focused on "meaning-in-life," engagement in inclusive curricula and participation in co-curricular activities as factors that positively affect an international student's experience. "Meaning-in-life reflects a sense of purpose, direction, and integration of personal values" (Pan 2011; Glass et al. 2013:119). For international students, it can be hard to see what the meaning-in-life may be because of the lack of a physical support network on their campus and advice. It can be particularly hard because international students may be subjected to the feeling of alienation when they first come to campus because they are alone. A sense of purpose in life is one of the most consistent predictors of positive affect and student satisfaction (Pan et al. 2007). When students feel like they are impactful and necessary on a campus, students have their most positive experience.

The main outcome for belongingness refers to when students "feel like part of the campus community" (Locks et al. 2008:260). For the term belongingness, research shows that in the last two decades there are many risk factors documented for international students while attending American universities that link stress, lack of social support, and language proficiency to

academic difficulties and poor psychological adjustment (Smith and Khawaja 2011; Zhang and Goodson 2011).

Risk factors can include discrimination, financial stresses, and language barriers. Research has “found that elements affecting African American students' adjustment to college were pressure from White students to disclose their racial background, encountering a negative reaction to their minority status, and encountering colorblind ideologies” (Morley 2003:169). Although this quote directly addresses African American students, it can also apply to international students. Disclosing international status can open a student to micro-aggressions and preconceived notions of their national identity. “The negative relationship between racial prejudice, student academic success and sense of belonging is well documented” (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Locks et al. 2008). It can be a problem students may not have felt regularly in their home countries. If not racial prejudice, being a non-resident alien alone can have students facing discrimination issues. “Immigration problems can be defined by their positive relationship with a negative outcome like low academic performance, marginalization or other negative effects” (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker 2000:547). With immigration, there are a lot of processes international students have to go through to be able to obtain schooling in the US. They may be costly, which can affect a student’s life when they reach campus.

“Acculturative stress is the psychological impact of adaptation to a new culture” (Smart 1995). Despite the stress international students are feeling, regardless of being white presenting or not, international students are acculturating.

However, “non-European international students experience intensified acculturative stress” (Markus and Kitayama 2003). International students of color can be more at risk for discrimination based on their color alone. Research provides evidence of neo-racism toward non-European students (Lee and Rice 2007), particularly students from Eastern Asia, Middle Eastern and African countries (Gareis 2012; Hanassab 2006).

### **Methodology**

This section explains the methodological approach used to study the experiences of international and domestic students at a Midwestern land grant university. The chapter describes the sample size, sampling processes, and techniques for collecting and analyzing data. It also discusses operationalization of the process of acculturation, challenges encountered on campus while collecting data and how it was resolved.

### *Target Population*

This research was conducted at a Midwestern land grant university, located in a small college town. It is a predominately white, homogenous community with a small foreign and minority population. Being that the community is predominately white, there is a high possibility that these students most likely faced numerous types of acculturation issues. The university has a larger international community, making it a prime place to have research

conducted on these processes (10 percent of the student population is international).

The targeted population is undergraduate international students who are currently enrolled at the university full time. All participants reside in the community. To make sure the quality of the data is secured, each international student had to meet certain requirements in order to participate. For both the electronic survey and interview, all students were required to be F-2 visa holders (Salganik and Heckathorn 2003). Students could be living on- or off-campus to participate. English-as-a-second language (ESL) international students were not included because ESL students are technically not admitted into the university system until they complete ESL classroom requirements. Assuming that an ESL student means that you are going to be an undergraduate student isn't always the case. They could be permanent residents or graduate students. Lack of English proficiency was also a factor used to disqualify ESL students.

For the electronic surveys, I collected 59 survey responses. For the face-to-face interviews, I collected four interviews with international students, although only three were used in this research.

### *Operationalization*

I explored three potential links. The first link that was explored was if acculturation and belongingness affected social and academic satisfaction. The second was if acculturation, adaptation, and belongingness affected academic



and social satisfaction. The final link explored was whether acculturation alone affects academic and social satisfaction. I adopted various short acculturation scale models and adapted them for my purposes (Hamilton 2009: 2022; Marin et al. 1987:183). How each was measured was by breaking it down by food, language, and social norms using a Likert scale varying from strongly disagrees to strongly agree.

To measure stress around food norms, I asked how available their cultural foods are on- and off-campus, if they like the food options available here, and if they like the taste of the food around them in general. For language proficiency, I asked the participant if they are comfortable speaking English to native English speakers, if they understand classroom topics, if they understand slang, and to self-report their level of English. For social norms, I asked the participants if they understand the region's social norms, nonverbal body signals, and forms of interaction. These questions give a good background for understanding how the students feel they have acculturated. This is because without understanding the risk factors that are associated with each and seeing what students had self-reported, I wouldn't have the full picture.

### *Sampling and Recruitment*

Different types of recruitment were used to gain enough participation in both electronic surveys and interviews. To recruit initial participants for both the survey and the interview, I asked my friends who are close to me that are international students to participate. Chain referral is also known as snowball

sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981). It is one of the best techniques used to recruit hard-to-reach populations for which there is often no sampling frame(s), where one is difficult to create, and to research sensitive topics (Penrod et al. 2003; Salganik and Heckathorn 2004). Participants normally refer people that are in their networks, which is important for obtaining information that may be hidden in those networks (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004; Browne 2005). This can also increase potential participants if the students have a good experience being interviewed and they tell their friends to participate. From January 2018 to March of 2018, I was able to obtain 20 responses for the electronic survey and two face-to-face interviews. This process included outreach on my end and from the International Office. At that time, I went to the International Office to seek additional help with outreach. With the International Office's help, I was able to better control who took the survey by having the International Office send an invitation out to undergraduate international students only to participate. Collaborating with the International Office helped because I didn't directly have access to the students' information and the office didn't force students to take part in the survey, in keeping with IRB requirements. Two more interview participants came forward at this time.

### *Methods of Data Collection*

Interviews were used to gather data on background attributes of informants like age, cultural background, social life and how involved they are on campus. Four participants engaged in interviews, although only three were

used in this study. This data helped me connect, first, if the student feels as if they have acculturated and, second, if they feel like they belong on campus. Data on types of stresses and stress factors were also collected using interviews. This data is important because this gives me more individual experiences that I can use to help build a better picture of what the experiences of international students are like.

Before conducting each interview, I read an introduction on what my work is about and offered each participant the interview protocol in advance for his or her records. I also requested participants to sign the consent form (Cho et al. 2005) as a sign that they had agreed to be interviewed and as confirmation of confidentiality. All interviews took place on campus. During interviews, I took field notes and observed/recorded participant's nonverbal behavior (Bordoloi 2015). This data is important in interpreting and contextualizing findings. This helped me look for similarities throughout interviews as well as be able to write down data that I found significant. The three interviews I was able to obtain were 1<sup>st</sup> tier students that I first reached out to. Two were female international students, one being from a European country and the other being from an African country. The third student was a male student from an African country.

For the electronic surveys, chain referrals were first used as a tactic used to gain more student participation. I informed undergraduate students that I knew from my own networks that I was researching international student experiences and asked if they would not only take the survey, but also reach out to their friends who were international students as well. From there I had about

20 responses to the survey. I followed up with the International Affairs office to see other ways to potentially reach students. With the permission of the International Affairs Office and IRB, we created a recruitment email to send out to all the undergraduate international students. From there, I had a total of 23 participants. The last outreach was to table in the Student Union with treats and a sign to encourage international students to take the survey. I had three computers out that had the survey link connected and was able to have a final number of 59 responses, which means I gained 36 more responses this way in two days after polling for four hours at a time. This may have changed the survey results as well because it was convenience sampling instead of sampling from the whole.

### *Ethical Issues and IRB*

I took the following measures to protect research participants: I used pseudonyms instead of real names to avoid any references to the participants' identity. I also explained to participants the benefits and the likely dangers of participating in the study and assured them of confidentiality of their information and of their identities. For electronic surveys, I scratched the category of gender because I didn't want anyone to be easily identified, especially with students from countries that have smaller populations. When the electronic surveys were not getting the numbers I desired, I decided to go again through IRB and to obtain permission to hold a polling station in the

Student Union for two days to try and gain more participants so I could analyze data in the aggregate.

### *Data Processing and Analysis*

I have two types of data for analysis: quantitative data covering background characteristics and experiences of the sample, and qualitative data on the main themes of this research about belongingness and acculturation. “An analysis of qualitative data involves a process of moving back and forth between materials being analyzed, the theory and different analytical perspectives adopted by the researcher” Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). This research follows the same procedure with the aim of making sense or meaning out of the data (Nayebare 2016; Cresswell 2007; Babbie 2004).

The purpose of deriving the total demographics of the research population was for two reasons: 1) to describe the sample, and 2) to use the description as a basis for discussing themes derived from the analysis of qualitative data on adapting, acculturation and belongingness. In addition to knowing what activities or practices international students were engaged in, it was vital to know their nationalities, religious tradition, academic and social backgrounds, and how they felt on campus. It was assumed that international students from different cultural backgrounds might rely on different activities to adjust. Similarly, it was also assumed that the participants went through some form of acculturation. The research process was also a time for international

students to reflect on their experiences. There are not many opportunities provided for the international student to critically examine their feelings on campus.

The questions have been adapted from three different questionnaires were used in previous research (Yeh 2003; Celenk and Van de Vijver 2011; Kang 2006). Since there were a lower number of participants, re-coding the original variables was done to help create more comparable measures across values. When coding where students were from, students were grouped into three categories: Africa, East Asia, and other countries. When looking at student religion, the religions were grouped into two categories: Christian and all other religious identities. Likert scale questions were compressed from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree to two values, Agree and Disagree, also to compress answers and ensure representation in all cells.

Data was analyzed through the use of cross tabulation tables, as all variables were either nominal or ordinal level of measurement. Chi Square was also used to determine if statistical significance existed in the associations tested.

Short answer questions from the electronic survey were grouped by key themes. The themes were financial issues, the perception of discrimination, forced assimilation, cultural shock, food, and social norms. Forced assimilation was interesting to me because it described how students felt like they had to look a certain way in order to belong. I believe some of the weaknesses were that some participants really described what they were feeling, while some kept their

answers rather short. For the interviews, the main themes were coded in the student's answers.

## Results

Throughout the results section for the electronic surveys, cross-tabulations were created to see if there was anything significant in the data as well as to compare and see if different factors affected students' experiences and processes of acculturation and belongingness.

In Table 1, the independent variable is the re-coded religious beliefs (religion2) of the students and the dependent variable was "easy to make friends who aren't from the same background" (friends2). There was no significance but it is important to note that students who identified as Christian felt less comfortable making friends at 58.6% versus 73.9% of all other religions.

Table 1: Friends x Religion

**Crosstab**

		friends2		Total	
		Disagree	Agree		
religion2	Christian	Count	12	17	29
		% within friends2	41.4%	58.6%	100.0%
	All others	Count	6	17	23
		% within friends2	26.1%	73.9%	100.0%
Total		Count	18	34	52
		% within friends2	34.6%	65.4%	100.0%

Chi Square: 1.325    Significance: .250

For Table 2, the independent variable is the recoded religious beliefs of the students (religion2) and the dependent variable is "if the students feel that SDSU is welcoming" (welcoming2). This test measured the association of

belongingness on campus. There was no statistical significance but it is important to note that 28.6% of Christians believed that SDSU was not welcoming versus 8.7% of all other religions.

Table 2: Welcoming x Religion

**Crosstab**

		welcoming2		Total	
		Disagree	Agree		
religion2	Christian	Count	8	20	28
		% within welcoming2	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
	All others	Count	2	21	23
		% within welcoming2	8.7%	91.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	10	41	51
		% within welcoming2	19.6%	80.4%	100.0%

Chi Square: 3.165    Significance: .075

For Table 3, the independent variable is the recoded country of origin of the students (country2) and the dependent variable is “are financial difficulties something you face?” There was no statistical significance, but it is important to note that East Asian students face financial difficulties at 61.9% versus African students at 50% and all other countries at 40%.

Table 3: Countries x Financial Difficulties

		Are Financial difficulties something you face?		Total	
		Yes	No		
Countries2	Africa	Count	11	11	22
		% within Countries2	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	East Asia	Count	13	8	21
		% within Countries2	61.9%	38.1%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	6	9	15
		% within Countries2	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	30	28	58
		% within Countries2	51.7%	48.3%	100.0%



Chi Square: 1.724 Significance: .422

Tables 4 through 8 address the recoded country of origin as the independent variable. Country of origin may impact students' perceived discrimination and issues with acculturation.

Table 4 examines the recoded country of origin (countries2) and the recoded "comfortability to make friends outside of your national identity" (friends2). There was no statistical significance, but it is important to note that African students disagree with this sentiment at 40.9% versus all other countries at 33.3% and East Asian students at 23.8%.

Table 4: Country of Origin and Comfort making friends

			friends2		Total
			Disagree	Agree	
Countries2	Africa	Count	9	13	22
		% within Countries2	40.9%	59.1%	100.0%
	East Asia	Count	5	16	21
		% within Countries2	23.8%	76.2%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	5	10	15
		% within Countries2	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	19	39	58
		% within Countries2	32.8%	67.2%	100.0%

Chi Square: 1.429 Significance: .489

Table 5 examined whether SDSU is welcoming to International Students from different global regions. There was no statistical significance in the Chi-Square here at 0.17. African students disagreed with this sentiment at 33.3% versus all other countries at 20% and East Asian countries at 0%. East Asian

students agreed with this statement at 100%, following all other countries at 80% and African countries at 66.7%.

Table 5: Countries x welcoming

		welcoming2		Total	
		Disagree	Agree		
Countries2	Africa	Count	7	14	21
		% within Countries2	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
	East Asia	Count	0	21	21
		% within Countries2	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	3	12	15
		% within Countries2	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	10	47	57
		% within Countries2	17.5%	82.5%	100.0%

Chi Square: 8.150    Significance: 0.17

Table 6 examines the relationship between recoded Country of origin (Countries2) and the question “Are financial difficulties something you face?” This test was used to determine financial stress experienced by students from different global regions. There is no statistical significance, but it is important to note that East Asian students face financial difficulties at a higher rate than all other students. 61.9% of East Asian students face financial difficulties versus African students at 50% and all other countries at 40%.

Table 6: Countries x Financial Difficulties

		Are Financial difficulties something you face?		Total	
		Yes	No		
Countries2	Africa	Count	11	11	22
		% within Countries2	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

	East Asia	Count	13	8	21
		% within Countries2	61.9%	38.1%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	6	9	15
		% within Countries2	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	30	28	58
		% within Countries2	51.7%	48.3%	100.0%

Chi Square: 1.724    Significance: .422

Table 7 examines the relationship between recoded Country of origin (Countries2) and the recoded “I share perspectives in the classroom” (perspectives2). This test was used to determine if international students felt that there was someone in the classroom that shared a similar perspective. 38.1% of East Asian students disagree with the statement, versus African students at 27.3% and all other countries at 26.7%. There was no statistical significance.

Table 7: Countries x perspectives

		perspectives2		Total	
		Disagree	Agree		
Countries2	Africa	Count	6	16	22
		% within Countries2	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
	East Asia	Count	8	13	21
		% within Countries2	38.1%	61.9%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	4	11	15
		% within Countries2	26.7%	73.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	18	40	58
		% within Countries2	31.0%	69.0%	100.0%

Chi Square: .768    Significance: .681

Table 8 looks at the association between the recoded Country of Origin (Countries2) and the recoded Likert measure “I feel like I belong at SDSU” (belong2). This test was used to determine if International students felt like they belonged on campus. 90.5% of East Asian students agree with the sentiment versus 71.4% of African students and 60% of all other country students. There was no statistical significance.

Table 8: Countries x belongingness

		belong2		Total	
		Disagree	Agree		
Countries2	Africa	Count	6	15	21
		% within Countries2	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
	East Asia	Count	2	19	21
		% within Countries2	9.5%	90.5%	100.0%
	All other Countries	Count	6	9	15
		% within Countries2	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	14	43	57
		% within Countries2	24.6%	75.4%	100.0%

Chi Square: 4.675    Significance: .097

### *Qualitative Findings*

The major themes that came from qualitative research are cross-cultural differences, assumptions, classroom differences, and discrimination.

There is a stigma involved in being an international student and working on campus, which impacts financial stress. One student noted:

“They come here and steal our jobs” is what I hear from domestic students a lot and it’s like, well, we can’t work off campus and I have to work 3 jobs because if I worked off campus, I would only have to work one job because most jobs aren’t minimum wage. (Student 1, page 3)

There seems to be a lack of understanding by domestic students on work requirements for international students and because of those understandings, there is a stigma with anything regarding finances with international students. As seen in the literature review, this happens to students often. The same student also commented:

I received a scholarship within my department for my hard work and academic standing. I was then asked by several students who weren't receiving a scholarship, "But they are not from here. Why would they get a scholarship and not me?" Which made me feel really uncomfortable. (Student 1, page 3)

This environment of entitlement can make international students feel pressured into feeling like 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens at an institution quickly and slowly disintegrate the feeling of belongingness. The assumption that a student is undeserving of a scholarship as well because they are international, also can create a hostile classroom environment for international students. International students want domestic students to empathize with them.

International students also feel the burden of discrimination out of the classroom. Student 2 talked about an experience on a student trying to be engaged on campus.

The black face (incident) and with everything that goes on and our campus not saying that we stand with you guys. Whatever happens outside, we have our own little community and we take care of our own. And when the university doesn't do that for us (as black students), that is when we feel like outsiders. When I was involved in student organizations and tried to run for a position, I heard many people calling me bad things because I was a black guy on campus and that was hard to hear (Student 2, page 2).

These very negative interactions can diminish belongingness and cause friction while acculturating. When the other group you are trying to engage with discriminates you, it can put a halt on the acculturation process.

The classroom can also be a place where students may feel targeted. Student 3 talked about an experience they had within a classroom, where a student was hyper aggressive with them:

One semester I had this one kid in my class who would constantly just like make racially charged statements like [he would] call me a baby mama ...and he would constantly compare the Ku Klux Klan to like the Black Panther group. And he would just say make the most stupid statements ever--talk about, like, all the shootings that were going on and just think the little black people and black lives and he (would just) pop up you just because and my professor literally did nothing. And then one day I went off on him (Student 3, page 2).

This incident resulted in the professor asking if the student was okay, although the student before had experienced this type of behavior. It seemed that only because the student who was attacked verbally vocalized their discomfort that the professor tried to address her, instead of handling the situation from the beginning. The student felt like the professor was reacting to a "hyper-aggressive black girl" (Student 3, page 2) versus a student who had been "bullied 4 days a week by a student in the classroom and felt the point of authority in the class did nothing to stop it" (Student 3, page 2). There does seem to be a pattern in a perception of professors being unequipped to handle difficult situations in the classroom and, unfortunately, international students suffer. The situation does not always have to be extreme either. How students interact with

international students can make international students feel like not participating in classroom discussions. Student 1 noted:

(In my class), most of them are like either married or they're older people. It's a masters (level) class and so in that class, we're heading up for a discussion and then some people like always try to shut me up with this discussion. Like, just have some respect for me and they would like always shut me off and what's the point of discussion. And like you just kind of really feel like I don't see anything or like they don't understand what I'm trying to say and I'm just like there's a teacher who just looks at me while this happens (pages 3-4).

This incident left the student feeling unwelcomed to talk in the class and left the student further frustrated with the professor as well. This links back to the cultural competency of faculty and connects with belongingness as well.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to discover patterns in the different experiences of international students, and to understand the experiences of individual students through interviews and a survey analysis of experiences and levels of academic and social satisfaction. It was important to understand these differences or similarities because then we can further identify what we can do to improve these experiences, whether institutions should establish a transition period for these students or raise TOFEL score requirements so that students will be able to succeed socially and academically. It has been proven numerous times those students from countries that are not European and Australian experience a harder time adjusting and fitting in on campus (Markus and Kitayama 2003; Lee and Rice 2007; Gareis 2012; Hanassab 2006). Evidence from

this research indicates the following best practices for universities in working with international students in the United States.

The first broader impact of the proposed research is that there will be evidence of how international students feel about their level of belongingness and whether they have had a good or bad experience at a Midwestern University. From what I see, I believe that, depending on the country you are from, you may or may not have had a positive collegiate career at a Midwestern university. Throughout the research, we learned that students faced numerous problems, in and out of the classroom. The university is called to be proactive on how they have evaluated training for faculty and whether they kept cultural competency in mind. Everyone has their biases, but professors are called to teach without presenting biases and without possibly alienating a student based on international status. When classroom discussions happened, very few faculty are equipped with the necessary tools to deescalate hurtful conversations according to the literature. International students repeatedly conveyed that they weren't always comfortable in the classroom because they knew that the other students didn't always empathize with their experiences or respect their perspectives.

Throughout the research, it has also become apparent that classroom experiences of students aren't asked in relation to international students. As an institution, the university seems to have forgotten that international students are intersectional beings who are not only international, but may also have a marginalized racial and/or religious identity, and they may have encountered issues more frequently because of this. Time and time again, the different levels



of the university didn't address the racial issues that were happening on campus. They continued to brush everything off and different organizations victimized and ostracized international students for even having commented on the matter. The university should have actively and compassionately listened to the students and created a statement that said that they were welcomed here and they would handle the situations. Instead, the university continued to be complacent in the face of hate. University personnel should have been active bystanders. In addition, I don't understand why they haven't included racist behaviors in the student handbook as a way of expulsion for a student.

According to the Student Code of Conduct at SDSU,

Clause 3 Section a. Standards of Behavior

i. Attendance at the University is optional and voluntary. When Students enroll at the University, they voluntarily accept obligations of performance and behavior that are consistent with the University's lawful mission, processes, and functions. In general, these obligations are considered much higher than the obligations imposed by civil and criminal law for all citizens.

That would mean that the university can instill policies that give international students a way to not only report behavior, but to know that justice will be served since it is in the code of conduct. At the end of the day, universities have always seen enrollment as a priority but with the changes in demographics of higher education, you would think they would have understood the benefits of standing up to injustice. The population of this university shifted and instead of trying to understand that population, they have continued to find ways to silence them. Diversity has continued to be seen as a problem instead of

as an opportunity, which is why this university has remained the same environmentally.

### *Limitations*

The first limitation I experienced was the lack of participation from international students although several factors can explain this outcome. One would be the change in the political climate. When starting this research, the political climate of the Midwest, and the United States as a whole, was not as unwelcoming to international students as it was while collecting responses from students. Second, from what I have had reported to me as an employee in diversity affairs, there have been incidents that may have contributed to the lack of welcome that international students have been feeling. One example would be when the travel bans were implemented by the Trump Administration on 11 countries and the poor response the University had for international students because of these bans. In addition, issues have come straight from the campus. There were three incidents that in the 2017-2018 school year that took place: the Identity Europa (a known white supremacist group) flyers being placed on the campus, a white student wearing blackface during Halloween which was distributed on social media, and harassment reports of white students yelling out "terrorists" and other obscenities to Saudi Arabian students. I believe those two points can really explain why students may have been reluctant to participate. Because of these events, the international student population also

decreased by about 150 students, reducing my pool to attain 100 student survey responses.

This research also relied on a small sample of international students so it may not be able to reflect international students' experiences across the United States or in Midwestern land grant universities.

I have also experienced some trouble with not having a diverse student population responding to the survey. For example, while a majority of responses came from students from Asian and African countries, there were few responses from Saudi Arabian students, the second largest international student population. Another limitation is the lack of diversity in the town and the political climate, which can affect students in and out of the classroom experience, negatively or positively. As political climates shift, it may make international students feel unsure about responding to these kinds of surveys and interviews.

### *Areas of Further Research*

The examination of international orientation and outreach when students are here needs to be examined. The American university system is hard to navigate if you are not familiar with it or did not have parents who attended the same university. This would help provide more information when talking about acculturative stress and how, if a university system is hard to navigate how it can add more acculturative stress.

A study of international students and their adjustment to foods in the area where their school is located and the availability of authentic cultural food restaurant and ingredients would be interesting as well. I believe such a study would benefit the field of public sociology because findings would be relevant to local communities and indicate the need to recruit more international restaurants and stores in the town.

More research on how class curriculum can be built to be more cross-culturally beneficial for both international and domestic students is equally important. In addition, this can help instructors build confidence in the classroom to be able to handle differences when it comes to diversity and inclusion. "Research suggests class discussions are effective in ameliorating the negative effects of microaggressions" (Boysen 2012; Sue et al. 2011) which often occur in classroom discussion. I think that is imperative for professors to not only know how to defuse a situation but to be able to create it into a learning moment.

Having more data from the institution would be another area for the future. It would be good to implement a yearly international student satisfaction survey that measures satisfaction and belongingness. I think this would be great for future researchers to have a localized data set to look at but also as a scale the university itself can use to see if they have improved international student satisfaction over the years. Although mandatory surveys don't always go over well, I think this would help make sure that everyone has a chance to vocalize their feelings on what the institution is doing well and what could be improved.

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## Appendices

### *Student 1*

So number one is why did you decide to come to us to see you and have you had friends or family attend SDSU before and how did you learn about the two.

So I actually was admitted to go to school in Temple University in Philadelphia and I was where I wanted to go to school. And then they kind of likes screwed up my documents. And there was like already August so they said told me well try to apply to a smaller Midwestern school. They would be able to help you because they are the wait list of 5000 international students. Well here is like much smaller so and they still have my major, so I was basically looking for a smaller school that had my major and had international students obviously to get me admitted here. And then I rolled like five different schools. Around the area and one in Utah and this so the first school is like send me an email then yes will be a willing to help you out because it was past the time period. So SDSU responded to me right away like the next day and said okay we'll get you in so that's how I ended up here. No, I didn't know a single soul when they came here. So. And then so basically the process was you got

All right. And then on was it difficult to come here for you know whether it was financially socially

It was kind of a mix of both because what Temple University told me like they wanted me to have a certain amount of money and they said yeah it's fine. And then they told me they have to pay like 15000 dollars more. So I was like. Ok, I don't have kind of, like, 30000 dollars out of pocket for you right away so they were like OK well sure you can come next semester. I'm really kind of like screwing up my whole situation. So I looked at SDSU you like kind of cheap I was like kind of surprised and was like is this legit like you know we didn't even seem legit because compared to all the schools that I looked to and then I'd been admitted to. They were much more expensive kind of like and like wow that's like kind of cheap but. I mean, of course, it was hard to come here because I'm a social person but it's still at times I felt weird like because I didn't know anybody here. I had a random roommate like she was American and then she moved out you know because of me so. It was I would say more socially why below that it was hard that only you can ask questions. Why. Because all because she got a concussion and then she told me that I asked her to help me out to bring me some medicine. And she's like I don't want to like babysit you too.

Oh, so she just basically was not trying to be a nice roommate?

Yeah, and she was like I don't want to babysit you. And then she was telling me like oh blah blah blah and I'm like whatever. And then another moved in and I moved out.

Tell me about your first year here.

Tell me about the hardest time and the best time in your first year so all together.

It's all insane. My hardest time was definitely just getting acclimated to and figure out how the college works in America because the educational system that I know in Russia is completely different like you cannot change your classes or pick out your own stuff like can figure major here and then you can change. No problem. Like I didn't know none of them and some of the stuff was really hard since I wasn't aware of the opportunities that I had yet to know later in my time you kind of like me harder than me like knowing that I actually apply for the scholarship that exists. I didn't know the resources that exist in a school and like I said maybe a. When my roommate moved out of the way you know we could be friends and everything like a came from another country and kind of like. What they don't like Russian people you know and. My best time was definitely of me getting my first job here on campus. Definitely was like kind of a highway that I sunk in France and getting to know people like. Can. Help me get out of my comfort zone.

And then how do you feel about SDSU now from now that you look. I mean

Personally, I came here I feel like living because of farming school you know and just like since everything was Ag Based. But I realize that we have a lot of potential like the school definitely throughout my time that I've been here I've actually been in this period of time where we had like about 300 international students. That's when I came and now we're like almost 1000. Like that's a big increase in just seeing that a lot of people are more willing to come and pursue their education from a different country, SDSU does a great job of recruiting international students and making them feel like home like international affairs office definitely help me like insuring me like now you have to do this. Like there was a great resource on campus there. But still, there's a lot of ignorance on our campuses. You know there are some people. I'm just like don't feel like we international students belong here. They, like, go well you come here like steal our spots bring jobs and stuff like that. Or when I was at the banquet for entering my department. I got a scholarship and there I was the only one international student getting a scholarship and a lot of my fellow classmates didn't get a scholarship.

And then when I got that e-mail they saw the e-mail and then some of them in the class were "That she's not from your life. Why would she get a scholarship? What about me. Do they even qualify" like oh that's like a lot of people like yeah but you're an international student, like, even I work have so many different jobs on campus. Because that's the only place I can work. And again people like Oh why you have all these jobs. Well because like I cannot go work anywhere else. I'm sorry I have to support myself.

You know and also if you work off campus you could get a job one job that pays a lot of money just like jobs that pay that one job.

That's why I have 4 different jobs. Right. So I think that's what we need to work more and just on awareness like you know if you don't know what struggle first we go through like just being here in our own learning a new language and stuff like. It's more than just being in an international student who has a bunch of jobs you know.

Tell me about recent good experience like recently. And then tell me about a recent experience that was difficult.

OK, so I really really enjoyed just working on my communications job. I would say my internship was one of the great experiences ever here. Like right away I felt really welcomed and it's right on campus here and just people caring about me as you seen. We go hang out and stuff and I would say. Just working in the office made me realize that like you know I'm worth something like people actually think I'm worth something. They care about me and they need me as a worker. I would say that's a really great experience. Definitely. And something that didn't go so well on. Like one time in life. One of my classes I was open for discussion and a lot of people like I was the only one person who is not married there. Well, I don't think. Most of them are like either married or they're old older people. It's a masters class and. So in that class, we're heading up for a discussion and then. Some people like always try to shut me up with this discussion. And I want to see some and never say anything. And now. Like I started crying in there because I felt like someone told them I was like OK and you're saying you don't have kids but I'm the only one here who is still not done with my undergrad and I'm doing a masters class and I'm from another country and I'm not married you know yeah like just have some respect for me and they would like always shut me off and what's the point of discussion. And like you just kind of really feel like I don't see anything or like they don't understand what I'm trying to say and I'm just like there's a teacher who just looks at me while this happens.

Those says anything I mean I've had the same kind of experience happened to me too.

And I started crying and no one to really apologize except one girl she's like I'm sorry you feel that way.

That's not an apology. You'll feel that way is like such a backhanded like because you feel that way I apologize or like I apologize but it happens and it sucks.

Yeah, I started even tearing up and this one chick who was sitting in front of me.

She was a friend. He was a journalism major as well. All of them are student affairs majors and I'm the only one was not even in that area I just took that class as an elective. Yeah. And then. They were like Oh no I understand you're like that. You know I'm just not aware. And I'm thinking like OK if you are one of them in this profession soon enough for years you need be aware of why I'm in the first place. Like you know I'm trying to express my thoughts in another language like first have some respect for me. Can you speak a different language? So no one saw me cry not a lot of people see me just one person was next to me excited just like. I felt down like I don't feel welcome anymore to talk in that class was like why would you I was really you know it's frustrating.

I totally feel you there. So go into this question. Do you feel like you belong at SDSU? Why or why not.

Depends where and when.

OK. Explain.

So I definitely feel welcomed at most of my jobs that we feel are respected there. Sometimes I don't feel welcome you like clubs/organizations we go to a lot of students are international students are not involved. Then. Overall I do feel welcome. But at the same time. Sometimes not really like I would say you definitely. All my jobs my most of most of my classes. I feel welcome. I do like to speak my mind is what I try to do. Yes. Not everywhere I can but at some point, you know you do. So well. Now it's a way that certain situations like. you see get in the scholarship, for example, you know you feel weird because you're the only one there and you always right away trying to look like. Everywhere you go you'll try and look for someone who. Is like you know and like you don't see them like you know I may look white. You know but still, I know that there is not an international student with me and that means I'm alone even though I'm I look like you them.

So on a scale of 1 to 100 percent. If you look at that percentage how long do you feel like?

I'll say 85 percent or so.

I wouldn't say I don't belong here at all. You know people definitely care about me here and I really appreciate that. They just know the struggle that I go through there. Be completely on my own. So or shall I say 85 percent which is pretty good. You know that's why only the reason I stayed at the school because I felt comfortable I stayed here from

Tell me about a time that made you feel like you belong to it and told me about a time you didn't feel like you belong. And we're kind of covered by this stuff but

Oh definitely say that that class situation definitely made me feel like I belong there at all whatsoever and situation that I felt like I really felt that people cared about me. Trying to get an example where other international students were involved. Like working at my office, in the Yeager media center there too as a reporter you know that they selected me not some other Americans student to do that. And. I definitely feel like I will do my job around the environment that.

Is anything else you want to add to the mix. Anything like that like when you first came here to you was it. You said it was very difficult. Were you prepared for how difficult it was going to be?

Some parts yes but I had to grovel on my own kind of learn mistakes more of like social life and just like figuring out how to live on my own like knowing that I'm parents right now. They're you know I want to you know I was 17 years old. Just kind of like my parents don't talk so I would say that's kind of hard when your parents are not supportive. And they don't even think that education is important and it's hard on you and you are trying to prove them wrong, my dad he doesn't talk to me at all. And they're trying to prove to him like you know see what I can do I be on my own in other countries. The language in graduate college at. He doesn't think it's necessary to do this. So I'm definitely saying that that is something hard. And I think what American domestic students just need to be aware and look you know me something just as like I always feel really welcomed and cared about when someone asks about my family or something. oh Like, You want to come do this with me you know like. Just kind of like. Just at. What. Students don't go home. And a lot of international students who are parents like I haven't seen my parents in five years. And just like every time when they say oh I'm going home sweet I'm going to do this and that was my family you know. I mean you don't need to take me with you. But you could always ask, Like all where I'm doing or like me when we're here just has to go you want to do something similar with you as my family or just be interested in someone's culture I think. So I think that's kind of my point. I think more Americans students is new. And definitely, people should not judge. Like before I open my mouth people think I'm an American Student. Once I say something there you go where are you from. You know. So.

if you could fix something on campus fix? Now knowing what you went through and seeing what you went through if you could have fixed something what would you have fixed. Just

Kind of like maybe letting students know that so many resources exist. I should not be afraid of applying for a job knowing that like you know I will get and even though I'm from other countries. So it's like building up the confidence and they started doing that. Like you know we have an international night where we represent.

*Student 2*

I had a lot of opportunities for a person like me and a lot of friends that were coming to SDSU. So I decided to join them. How did you learn about SDSU? Your other friends and family? Actually, when I was in high school I would hear about the African night. And that was the first time I got back to like the first African. That was my first time on campus and going to campus and seeing the people there and the atmosphere. And by that point. That's when I started looking into it.

The second question is Was it difficult for you to come to SDSU like financially socially difficult. Financially.

Yes. First of all, because I'm not from here and trying to. I just hear. It's so. Difficult And socially it was because I didn't allow many people to come in. Like being the new kid who was. Different. He was a whole different environment because a lot of my friends went to USD or they went out of state and me coming to you I only knew a few people and like with just too many kids and new people. And that's always hard

So tell me about your first year here. You see.

It Was just like. I was just trying to adjust to the whole environment get to know people and tried to build my network And. That was the whole first year. Get to know people and try to move forward. With my stuff. My junior and senior year.

Tell me about the hardest time. And the best time of that first year.

Hardest time was wandering into the dorms. Going into the dorms to get to meet a lot of different people from different environments. But at the same time, there was the best time for me because that opened up a lot of doors for me because I met people from different countries that I've never been to speak like specifically like Nigeria. I've met Nigerians living on the floor. I met people from different towns in the South and South Dakota. I met people from Minnesota. So it was kind of an advantage and a disadvantage at the same time because well. You don't know the people at the same time that you were getting to know. I'm an extrovert. So. Getting to know people, it's kind of... It's an easier process for me than other people. It. Was a difficult process. But. Just like any barrier you get through it. As we move forward as we get to know those people. Because nobody opens up to you the first thing that comes forward as you get to know them is whether they like what they like what they like to do for fun. Like. That was the whole transaction just made in the first book the first time. To know who they were. And. When. So I say. For the first step yes. But...

How do you feel about SDSU now?



It is a growing community. Especially city wise. And That's what I always say. It's a step forward. And the system has created for a lot of our students. I cannot wait to see where he goes from here. When I graduate like, I can, see you, like.

Tell me about a Recent good experience.

The opportunities on campus. So open to me coming to them for help. Like. Basically how I would describe him. For me the faculty that I've been working with. And. Like where I'm trying to. Crawl. My. Is asking them Hey. Look. So. I'm new to this country. I don't know much about it. Hush move forward. Because of you leave like my professors and everybody else Like everybody else. I'm networking like. My. Bubble. I should say. My preachment can point to. Point. And. Me searching For jobs or internships, especially since it is my junior year. And getting a lot of help from officers. The fact. Is. That. A. Lot. Of. Students. Feel like. It's been a great experience for me being able to. Go to the events. And ask them to speak to them about what.

Tell me about Recent Difficult experience

Recently I should say. Working with everything that's going on around the country and how it's affecting even small schools like SDSU standing in solidarity with each other is something that we are not. Like US students and A lot of the faculty. I Feel like the school and people should stand for what is right. This be able to up for what is right. Instead of jumping on the defense to protect themselves. Well, that it's their pride. It is difficult. When situations like. The blackface incident happened. And people try t justify and defend actions that are wrong. It has been difficult for me. You cannot tell me that you welcome me in one particular place but not give me and other students what we need to survive in a place that I and others like me are not welcomed.

That just shows me that you welcome me only for a specific purpose and that you don't really care about me anymore.

Do you feel like you belong at SDSU? Why or Why not?

Since my freshman year. There's a lot that I've been through There's. A lot of love come through and there's a lot that I've learned because it's just you opened the door for me. And those. Doors. Well. There are doors I'm going to walk through for the rest of my life. I've had the opportunity To Teach and learn from others. And. It is not that the Perfect place but at the same time it's not what it used to be. Moving forward when I do graduate. I'll feel like I'll have the pride to say that I went to SDSU. So I think what you said is true every year that makes me feel like. Because. That's like. It's what a lot of people pray for, for countries people coming together. International nights make me feel like I belong because different cultures and people get to come together to enjoy themselves and

learn. That is some of the times. I think part of it is because of a lot of fingers. Don't have access to events such as an international event.

Name a time that made you feel like you didn't belong.

The black face and with everything that goes on and our campus not saying that we stand with you guys. Whatever happens outside. We have our own little community and we take care of our own. And when the university doesn't do that for us, that is when we feel like outsiders. When I was involved in student organizations and tried to run for a position, I heard many people calling me bad things because I was a black guy on campus and that was hard to hear.

*Interviewed student 3*

Why did you decide to come to SDSU?

It was cheap and it was far?

Was it difficult for you to come here financially socially?

Not a first. It was pretty easy financially speaking because it was cheap. It just kind of got tough when my economy tanked back home. But social it's just been really I guess assimilation wise. There's a lot of covert racism like you come and everyone is smiley and then you just slowly discover that it's just pretty much fake and there's just a lot of microaggressions that you face on a daily basis. So I think anything in particular just the usual stuff like for me personally I will say mine has been more centered around the fact that I'm black rather than international just because I think because of my accent a lot of people assume I'm African-American. I don't think I sound African-American like I don't think I have the like the accent of Ebonics. But I guess people are just as African-American. But so it's usually more along like hyper aggressive people touching my hair it's very annoying people and when I went well I disclose that I'm international like people asking me things like just stupid questions like do you live in a hut do people drive. They're like just really enjoying things they like. I don't think should be OK, or normal to say. I've had professors who like intentionally ignoring class like just pretend they can't hear me speaking and stuff like that. So it's just so weird.

Tell me about your first year here. The hardest time and the best time.

My first year was pretty interesting because I was still kind of finding my way around like I mentioned a lot of people assumed I was African-American. Then the African-Americans knew I wasn't African-American. And so it was a really weird mix because international people wouldn't talk to me as much because they didn't think I was international and then African-Americans wouldn't talk to me because I knew I was an African-American. And that was really weird. I

think I hung out a lot with people on my floor and it was just weird. I think it was weirder just because like I was kind of doing the college thing really far away from home because I live in Texas and the rest of my family lives in Nigeria. So it's like a lot of the layers were going on and then the best thing about freshman year was just probably the fact that like my economy hadn't tanked then. So I just had a lot of money like a lot of money and I wish I did. But it's not really the money but thank God it's just a joke. But part is that because I didn't have to like stress about working or all of those things because I was just good for that. Think the worst part was definitely like oh my god my second semester I had this one kid in my class who would constantly just like make them racially like charge statements like you call me a baby mama like just like he would talk about like he would constantly compare the Ku Klux Klan to like the Black Panther group. And he would just say make the most stupid statements ever talk about like all the shootings that were going on and just think the little black people and black lives and he was just like she was popped up you just because like my professor literally did nothing. And then one day I went off on him and then she started asking me Are you OK. Do you need anything? I'm just like do your freaking job. That's what I need. I need you to like literally tell this kid that the things he's saying to me are not OK. I got over it in my class is going to have to deal with his dumb ass again.

How do you feel about SDSU now? What grade would you give SDSU from A-F?

In what regards?

In General.

In general, I give it a D.

Why.

If you're talking about like personal faculty in my department would give it a definite give it an A but even those beautiful wonderful people are just not enough to justify the bull crap that this school is. It is just super pretentious a lot of people don't care.

It's very fake. They're understaffed where you need like there's like 900 international students and there is literally only I believe four advisors are now. And at some point, there was just three. I've had like multiple friends fall out of status and not even know because like there's not enough people to just like the people over there at the International Office they definitely have like I guess good intentions but they're just grossly understaffed like there's literally nothing three or four people can do for 900 kids. So it's just like people fall out of status they don't even know the replication process is just ridiculous because people are like literally confused people don't get their appointment time right. Like it's just and it's different for each country you know. Every country has a different

application process. For the most part. And so I just know that it's just crazy. And then the overt racism the things that you deal with I come from a predominantly Muslim country. And so I cannot like just like coming here and just seeing how stupid people are to me. Yeah, it's just it's just really weird. It's just that it's like it's a lot of mental strain that just makes even the good parts seem like not enough.

Talk about a recent experience at SDSU and tell me about a recent difficult experience.

The diversity Academy kind of kicked off I thought that was like a good approach to what was going on. Personally, I haven't had anything personally that I was like so I got drafted for journalism academic journal to go for English for so sociology submitted anything so I guess that's kind of good. and difficult would be the same old same old microaggressions that make everything really difficult and frustrating.

Do you feel like you belong to you? Why or why not.

Definitely not. I don't think I ever meet an international person on this campus that thinks they belong there just simply because of how the US handles and treats international students like a lot of our economies like OK I know for sure Nigeria's economy tanked and a couple of other countries have were poor lately and it's just like no one even goes oh are you guys doing okay. How are you guys feeling? The Muslim ban went up and I know a bunch of students who they got like stuck in the US because they can't go home because they go home they can't come back in. And it's just ridiculous really to mean just like no one's actually looking out for them.

Tell me about a time that made you feel like you belong to us. Tell me about a specific time that made you feel like you didn't belong.

I never felt like I've belonged at SDSU. I'm not even going to lie.

What a time that you feel like you didn't belong?

There's too many one, in particular, comes to mind. I think it was probably the blackface incident happened. There was zero talk and we kind of had to create a response to get a response. And I think that was also very blurry. I was like oh shit yeah you don't give a fuck.

Is there anything that you wanted to add.

I think some of the faculty are awesome. The Wiltses are great. I always talk about them and such a great support without even trying to be supportive. And I think that's kind of what faculty should strive for in general like speed decent

human being. That's literally all it takes to be a decent human being and make you know that you're also there as the point of authority. So like I was literally getting bullied day after day four days a week by this kid and my professor sat down and said nothing. And then as soon as I lost it I became this hyper aggressive black girl. She needed to, like, calm down and ask are you OK. So but yeah I just think they need to do better. But you can do better. The administration needs to hire better staff and actually give a shit and find things that matter and they need the international office needs an expansion like staff while others are building like they're doing the best they can but literally so understaffed is ridiculous.

If you could pick one thing to fix what would you fix right away if you had literally no limitations whatever that would have helped you as an international student coming in?

I would hire more staff for at the international office. I think I would just or maybe just fund their programs more like I just create more programs for them. I feel like you're not able to reach the numbers you need to reach so many students get lost in kids. It's just so crazy or open.

### *Electronic Survey Instrument*

#### **First, I'd like to know about your participation in campus activities.**

1. Are you able to practice your religion in the community? (Is there a mosque, temple, church, etc available)  
Yes/No
2. Are you on a sports team on campus?  
Yes/No
3. Are you part of a social fraternity or sorority  
Yes/No
4. How many student organizations are you involved in?  
1,2,3,4,5 or more
5. List the student organizations you are involved in
6. What did you hope to gain from joining a student organization? Check all that apply. (pick what applies to you)
  - Learn more about yourself
  - Develop people skills
  - Learn to work as a team
  - Networking
  - Gain leadership skill
  - Make friends
  - Expand your resume
  - Give back to the community
  - Other (please specify)

7. How often do you go to campus events in a month? (Academic or Social)  
0,1-2,3-4,5-6,7 or more

**Next, I'd like to know a bit about your work and economic opportunities.**

8. Your current employment status

Employed/Unemployed

9. Do you work on campus?

Yes/No

10. Working hours align well with my class times. (Likert Scale)

11. Are financial difficulties something you face?

Yes/No

**Now, I'd like to know what your experiences have been with food and daily diet.**

12. I like the food that is available here. (Likert Scale)

13. I have adjusted well to the food here. (Likert Scale)

14. Foods that I grew up with are readily available on campus. (Likert Scale)

15. Foods that I grew up with are readily available in the community. (Likert Scale)

16. There are restaurants available on campus that have foods I grew up with. (Likert Scale)

17. There are restaurants available in the community that have foods I grew up with. (Likert Scale)

**It's often difficult to negotiate language and culture in another country.**

**Please let me know your experiences with these elements as an international student.**

18. I am comfortable with the English language. (Likert Scale)

19. I am comfortable with answering questions in class. (Likert Scale)

20. I understand American slang. (Likert Scale)

21. Are cross cultural misunderstandings a normal part of your life? (Example would be do people think something you do is weird but normal where you are from like kissing each other on the cheek as a welcome)

Yes/No

**Next, I'd like to know if you felt prepared to come to SDSU for study.**

22. I am comfortable with making friends who are not of my nationality. (Likert Scale)
23. It's easy for me to make friends on campus. (Likert Scale)
24. What is something you wish you knew before you became a student at SDSU? (open ended question)
25. I believe people interact with me or my friends with accents positively. (Likert Scale)
26. I felt prepared before I got to SD for school. (Likert Scale)
27. People in the Brookings community are welcoming. (Likert Scale)
28. I am able to talk about cross-cultural experiences in my classrooms. (Likert Scale)
29. I am able to talk about my culture or background in class. (Likert Scale)
30. Other students normally share my perspectives in class. (Likert Scale)
31. I feel like I belong with other students here at SDSU. (Likert Scale)
32. I feel like I belong at SDSU overall. (Likert Scale)
33. Overall, I am satisfied with my academic experience at SDSU. (Likert Scale)
34. I intend to graduate from SDSU. (Likert Scale)
35. I am confident that SDSU was the right decision for me. (Likert Scale)
36. I see myself as part of SDSU. (Likert Scale)
37. List different entities on campus that helped you transition to SDSU. (Open ended question)
- Last, please tell me a little bit about you, and remember that your responses won't be able to be used to identify you and will only be reported in the aggregate.**
38. Your current GPA range
- 4.0-3.6
  - 3.5-3.1
  - 3.0-2.6
  - 2.5-2.1
  - 2.0-1.6
  - 1.5-1.1
  - 1.0 or below
39. What country are you from? (Open Ended Question)
40. Religious Identity (Open Ended Question)
41. Do you know of other people on campus who are of your religious identities?
42. Year in school
- Freshman
  - Sophomore
  - Junior
  - Senior
43. I know the traditions of SDSU (Hobo day, football cheers, SDSU history, etc.)(Likert Scale)

*Interview Questions*

1. Why did you decide to come to SDSU? Have you had friends or family attend SDSU? How did you learn about SDSU?
2. Was it difficult for you to come here? (i.e., Financially? Socially?)
3. Tell me about your first year here. Tell me about the hardest time and best time in that first year.
4. How do you feel about SDSU now?
5. Tell me about a recent good experience at SDSU. A recent difficult experience?
6. Do you feel like you belong at SDSU? Why or why not?
7. Tell me about a time that made you feel like you belonged at SDSU. Tell me about a time that made you feel like you didn't belong at SDSU.
8. Is there anything else you want to add that I may have missed?