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Acculturation and Important People and Programming for
Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Laura Tokuza Arenstein

2015
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Acculturation and Important People and Programming for Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

by

Laura Tokuza Arenstein

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Robert A. Rhoads, Chair

This dissertation examined the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students attending liberal arts colleges. Through the dissemination of questionnaires and by facilitating focus groups and interviews with students, faculty, and staff, I was able to understand what Chinese students struggled with and where they succeeded at different intervals of their college experiences. Interactions with students highlighted the importance of certain academic and social programs. Interviews with faculty and staff revealed the institutional perspective of the increased enrollment of Chinese students, their perceptions of the acculturation experience for these students, and the programs they thought were most helpful. Additionally, analysis of campus websites offered insight into campus programming targeted at international students.
Although the Chinese students did not experience severe acculturative stress, many struggled with homesickness, the language barrier, academic adjustment, and engaging meaningfully with Americans. Students revealed that faculty, friends, and international programming professionals, in that order, were the most supportive people in their experiences.

Faculty tended to have incomplete perceptions of Chinese students’ struggles with acculturation because their interactions with students were limited. Whereas the Chinese students said that homesickness was the most pervasive component of acculturative stress, faculty cited the language barrier, rarely mentioning homesickness. While professionals in international programming understood more about what the Chinese students struggled with, they were not always attuned to student perceptions of campus social programming. Chinese students did participate in some events and practical workshops planned by their international programming offices, but they generally chose to participate in broader campus activities in order to engage with a wider population.

The dissertation examined these issues and reveals several ways in which the experiences of international Chinese students on liberal arts campuses can be improved. Implications for educational leaders and recommendations for other liberal arts colleges are also addressed.
This dissertation of Laura Tokuza Arenstein is approved.

Mark Kevin Eagan
Beverly P. Lynch
Linda P. Rose

Robert A. Rhoads, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2015
I dedicate this to my mom, dad, brother, and husband. Thank you for your endless support through every part of my educational journey.
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To Randy, Louise, Stacy, and Vance, thank you for welcoming me to your family and supporting me through these past three years.

Last by certainly not least, to my husband Scott. You have listened to me and soothed me through three very challenging years. Thank you for understanding why I chose to do this, and for supporting me every step of the way. I could not have done this without you. Our next adventure will be even better.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Colleges and universities across the United States are directing increasing amounts of time and resources at the recruitment and enrollment of international students (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Du & Wei, 2015; Hu, 2011; Keller, 2008; Marklein, 2012; Thomason, 2013; Trice, 2003). Open Doors data show that in the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 886,052 international students, both graduate and undergraduate, studying in the United States. In the 2001-2002 academic year, 582,996 international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (Institute of International Education, 2013, 2014). This shift reflects a nearly 52% growth over the past twelve years. More specifically, undergraduate enrollment for international students has experienced growth of approximately 42% over the past twelve years. In the 2013-2014 academic year, there were 370,724 enrolled international undergraduate students, compared to 261,079 in the 2001-2002 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2013, 2014).

Although there are other countries, such as Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia, competing for international students, the U.S. remains the leading destination for most international students (Altbach, 2004; Institute of International Education, 2014) and there are many reasons why American institutions of higher education have increased recruitment and enrollment efforts of international students. International students contribute to campus diversity and expose American students to global perspectives (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Trice, 2003). American students are able to engage in cross-cultural dialogue with international students which presumably broadens their global horizons. These enhanced global perspectives develop cultural competency and prepare students for professional lives in an
increasingly interdependent and globalized world (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Andrade, 2006; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). Continuous contact and friendships between students of different cultural groups can also decrease prejudice, increase empathy between groups, and allow for a greater understanding of different cultural perspectives (Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew, et al., 2007).

There is also a strong financial component. In the 2013-2014 academic year, international students contributed 26.8 billion dollars to the U.S. economy (NAFSA, 2014). More than 64% of international students receive their funding privately, meaning that they do not require institutional financial aid (Institute of International Education, 2014). Only about 21% of all international students studying in the U.S., both graduate and undergraduate, considered their institution to be the primary source of funding.

Although diversity and cross-cultural perspectives are valuable incentives to enroll international students, colleges and universities are also considering international students under the lens of what Slaughter and Rhoads (2004) refer to as “academic capitalism.” Academic capitalism suggests that “as the boundaries between university and market become increasingly permeable, universities act more and more like profit-seeking organizations in a knowledge market” (Hanley, 2005, p. 3). Budget cuts in states like California, Washington, New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania have led institutions of higher education to seek tuition revenue from both out-of-state and international students to help balance budgets (Hu, 2011; Keller, 2008; Nimmer, 1994; Thomason, 2013). At state universities this can create feelings of resentment among in-state students who do not gain admission to a particular university; state residents may feel it is unfair to reject the students the university was originally intended to serve (Keller, 2008; Lewin, 2012). Although the concept of increasing international enrollment to
compensate for state budget cuts applies directly to public universities, private colleges and universities also see financial incentives in recruiting international students.

Although private institutions may have similar tuition rates for domestic and international applicants, these institutions also experience financial benefits when increasing international enrollment. Because most international students do not seek institutional financial assistance when attending a U.S. college or university, they pay full tuition and thus generate tuition revenue for their respective institutions. This tuition revenue can be used to help colleges balance budgets and provide financial aid to underrepresented students. Some private institutions acknowledge at least some level of dependence on tuition revenue from enrolled international students to provide financial health (Blumenstyk & Thomason, 2012; Thomason, 2013). It should be noted that when students experience discrimination and feel excluded from their institutions, they sometimes feel that they have been reduced to their economic value to their university (Houshmand, Spanierman, & Tafarodi, 2014).

**Statement of Problem**

Though many students who enter colleges and universities in the U.S. experience some difficulty with transition, international students face a unique set of challenges specifically related to cultural transitions (Bektas, Demir, & Bowden, 2009; Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). When individuals from different cultures come into personal and long-term contact with another culture, they experience a process known as acculturation. There are different categorical changes that international students may experience during acculturation, including biological, cultural, social, and psychological. Removed from their homes, families, and friends, international students may feel
pressed by the need to adjust to such different cultural settings without the support of their usual social networks (Mori, 2000; Wei, et al., 2007). When international students believe that they are unable to effectively cope with the challenges associated with acculturation, they experience what is referred to as acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987; Wan, Chapman, & Biggs, 1992). While stress is a “generalized physiological and psychological state of the organism, brought about by the experience of stressors in the environment, and which requires some reduction (for normal functioning to occur), through a process of coping until some satisfactory adaptation to the new situation is achieved” (Berry, et al., p. 492), acculturative stress refers to that which is rooted in the acculturation process. Acculturative stress can have negative emotional and mental health consequences, including anxiety and depression, as well as social isolation and sentiments of alienation.

There are different potential components of acculturation that can potentially lead to acculturative stress. International students may experience homesickness, depression, academic anxiety, language barriers, and/or cultural barriers (Constantine, Kindsaichi, Okazaki, Gainor, & Baden, 2005; Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Lee, 2010a; Wei, et al., 2007). Not all international students who experience acculturation will experience acculturative stress and there are varying levels of severity for those who do (Shupe, 2007; Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung, 2008). Acculturative stress can contribute to both academic and social challenges as many students feel insecure in the classroom and in the community.

Cultural distance, the difference between one’s home and host cultures, suggests that international students from different cultural backgrounds and countries of origin may experience the acculturation process in different ways (Li & Gasser, 2005; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Shupe, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). Cultural distance can lead to
misunderstandings both in the classroom and in the general community, which can create challenges for both faculty and students (Mori, 2000; Shupe, 2007; Wan, et al., 1992). Cultural distance implies that Asian international students may be more likely to experience acculturative stress than international students from European countries because of the larger fundamental differences between home and host cultures (Li & Gasser, 2005; Yan & Berliner, 2011a; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). The concept of cultural distance is particularly relevant because of current trends in international student enrollment.

Although many countries send students to the U.S. to study every year, just over 50% of all international students come from China, India, and South Korea (Institute of International Education, 2014). China currently sends the most international students to the United States for higher education. In the 2013-2014 academic year, 274,439 Chinese students attended U.S. colleges and universities, indicating a 334% increase since the 2001-2002 academic year when only 63,211 Chinese students were enrolled in American institutions (Institute of International Education, 2013, 2014). During the 2013-2014 academic year, international students from China accounted for approximately 31% of all international students studying at an American college or university. In the 2000-2001 academic year, students from China comprised just about 11% of all international students studying in the United States.

Alienation resulting from cultural distance, combined with other dimensions of acculturation, can sometimes lead to social isolation among Chinese international students (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Some Chinese international students gravitate toward others of similar backgrounds because of shared language and culture and intimidation by American peers, making these relationships convenient and comforting (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2010; Zhang & Goodson,
Fischer (2013) asks the important question of whether these Chinese students receive the full value of higher education in the U.S. if they culturally isolate themselves by refraining from interactions with Americans or other international students.

The Project

Research indicates that students at small liberal arts colleges participate more frequently in diversity-related activities than do their peers at larger universities where there may be a larger number of diverse students (Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Umbach and Kuh (2006) therefore suggest that it is not the quantity of students that matters, but rather the quality and frequency of interactions. Although liberal arts colleges may not enroll the same numbers of international students as larger universities, these institutions are growing their international populations so the potential for cross-cultural interaction is great. When international students feel that they are isolated from American peers, the potential for cross-cultural dialogue is not realized.

Additionally, Cho and Yu (2015) assert that institutional identity can lead to stronger perceptions of institutional support, higher levels of school-life satisfaction, and lower levels of acculturative stress. However, students create institutional identity through frequent interactions with others so, if international students isolate themselves, they are unable to establish a sense of institutional identification and will not experience the benefits of such.

Initiatives intended to support international students as they experience acculturation on college campuses have included orientation programs, first-year academic seminars, and social programming intended to connect international students with host-national mentors (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Andrade, 2009). However, these programs and studies tend to take place at large, public universities. Most research focuses on the experiences of international students at
large universities where there tends to be a large volume of international students (Constantine, et al., 2005; Du & Wei, 2015; Fan & Ashdown, 2014; Lee & Rice, 2007; Lee, 2010a; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Rice, Choi, Zhang, Morero, & Anderson, 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2011). This research also tends to study the international students as one group, failing to recognize the different ways students from different countries and cultures experience acculturative stress (Wang, et al., 2012; Yan & Berliner, 2011).

Clark (1972) suggests that different institutions of higher education can have distinctive characteristics and experiences. A college’s mission, the implementation of that mission by faculty and administrators, and its traditions create a sense of institutional uniqueness. Different schools may have perpetuated different personalities throughout their history. Clark (1972) refers to “the organizational saga” as concept that “presents some rational explanation of how certain means led to certain ends” (p. 178). The “unified set of publicly expressed beliefs about the formal group is rooted in history, claims unique accomplishment, and is held with sentiment by the group” (p. 179). Though the organizational saga can help us to understand certain institutional histories, it is not a concept that is universally applied to institutions of higher education.

While not all institutions have an organizational saga, a broader and more applicable concept is Tierney’s (1988) explanation of organizational culture. While institutions may have similar mission statements and academic programs, the institutional experience can still be unique based on leadership style and other institutional factors. Different institutions have different cultures, and certain actions are possible at certain institutions but not at others (Tierney, 1988). In order to be effective campus leaders, professionals must understand how to implement strategies within their own institutional culture. Community members are socialized
into the organizational culture in ordinary, everyday ways (Tierney, 1997). While some more obvious displays of socialization may include major campus events or traditions, Tierney (1997) suggests that socialization into organizational culture also occurs in “less dramatic, ordinary daily occurrences that take place as we go about the normal business of being a professor, student, administrator, or staff member” (p. 3). An important consideration for students and staff is how they fit into the cultural setting (Tierney, 1988).

An institution’s mission and the implementation of that mission deeply impacts institutional culture and how different community members interact with one another. Individuals and institutions spend their time and resources in different ways, and these different cultures can then create different experiences for students. Different institutions, though they may have similar academic opportunities and mission statements, offer students unique cultural experiences. The concept of organizational culture suggests that beyond adjusting to American culture, international students also acculturate to institutional culture, indicating that acculturation at a liberal arts college may be different than acculturation at a larger university where most research to date had been conducted. It also suggests that there is not a universal liberal arts college experience, as schools with similar characteristics may still have different organizational cultures.

My research questions explored how liberal arts colleges have adjusted to increases in Chinese international student enrollment. While half of the questions considered the students’ acculturation experiences and the people, programs, and institutional elements that helped them, my other questions considered the perspective of professionals who work in offices across both campuses. Through interviewing faculty, international programming professionals, leaders within campus administration, and admission professionals, I gained a sense of the conceptual
premises that led to various institutional adjustments. Through analyzing data from both students and campus professionals, I was able to understand the occasional lack of alignment between students’ experiences and needs, and campus programming and other initiatives.

**Research Design**

I conducted two qualitative case studies to understand how liberal arts colleges with large numbers and high graduation rates of Chinese international undergraduate students support their Chinese international populations, and how these institutions have adapted to their changing international student demographic. I gained an understanding of Chinese international students and acculturation from both a student and an institutional perspective.

This project required a qualitative study because I sought to understand the lived experiences of Chinese international students and their experiences with acculturation. I wanted to understand the process for international students adjusting to their new environments and how the context of a liberal arts college impacted their experiences. The qualitative designed allowed me to remain open to unanticipated results that may not have emerged if I conducted a quantitative study.

A case study approach was most appropriate for this study because I sought multiple perspectives and an understanding of how those perspectives interacted. Yin (2014) suggests that a case study is needed when context and phenomena cannot be divorced and when multiple sources of evidence are required. While I wanted to understand the Chinese international students’ experiences, I also wanted to understand how the administration perceived international students’ experiences and how, if at all, these institutions adapted to the changing demographic.
I conducted my case studies at two American liberal arts colleges who have proportionally large populations of international students, specifically higher populations of Chinese international students, and high rates of retention. More specifically, I selected institutions where the international student population comprises between 8% and 15% of total student enrollment, suggesting that such schools were successfully working with their undergraduate Chinese international populations.

**Research Methods**

For this study, I utilized document analysis, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews. The project began with analysis of the websites of both host institutions. This analysis helped identify some of the people and programs that both sites offered international students.

Then I disseminated a questionnaire to degree-seeking Chinese international students in their second, third, and fourth years at both sites in order to gain background information about their potential struggles with acculturative stress and the people and programs that were most supportive during their cultural adjustment. The final item on this questionnaire asked students if they were willing to participate in a focus group to be held on their campus. The student participants were enrolled on a full-time basis and seeking a degree at each respective institution; exchange students were not included in this study.

After questionnaires were digitally submitted from both sites, I scheduled visits to each institution. At each institution I interviewed key community members who helped me to understand different institutional perspectives on the growth in the Chinese international student population. I spoke with faculty and administrators about campus climate surrounding the
increased enrollment in Chinese international students and supportive programming that has helped these students manage both social and academic challenges.

**Significance of Study**

The aim of this study was to make recommendations to liberal arts colleges that are growing their Chinese international populations but which do not yet understand how to wholly support these students as they endure acculturative stress. The intent was to reveal the unique struggles that Chinese international students may face during their time at liberal arts colleges, as well as shine light on the programs, people, and other elements that support these students through the acculturation process. With these perspectives and threads of success, the goal of this study was to enable liberal arts colleges to create action plans and programs to support their growing Chinese international student populations.

The findings can also help educators from educational institutions other than liberal arts colleges to understand the transitional challenges for Chinese international students. Educators at large universities with growing international populations can also utilize these findings, though their context may be different from liberal arts colleges.

Additionally, American college students may benefit from the outcomes of this study as international students are an increasing presence on college campuses, increasing the opportunities for interaction between American and international peers. An understanding of acculturation can help American students be more culturally-sensitive and supportive of their international peers.

Beyond the values of sensitivity and understanding, colleges and universities have an economic interest in the enrollment, retention, and graduation of international students. Because
most international students pay the full cost of attendance, they contribute a significant amount of money that institutions can use for a variety of purposes (Keller, 2008; Lewin, 2012; Thomason, 2013). Retaining international students will help colleges and universities generate tuition revenue that can be used to balance budgets or provide financial aid to other students.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review begins with an examination of current trends in college recruitment and the enrollment of international students, including the potential benefits of international enrollment. Research and theories related to acculturation and acculturative stress will then be examined, along with a review of the literature regarding specific elements of acculturative stress, homesickness, and discrimination. This will be followed by a review of the research regarding social integration. Because it is important to understand that international students may endure acculturative stress in isolation, forbearance, a concept that suggests that international students may prefer to conceal their mental health struggles rather than seek professional services (Constantine, et al., 2005; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Lu, Dear, Johnston, Wootton & Titov, 2014; Mori, 2000; Nilsson, Butler, Shouse & Joshi, 2008; Yi, Lin & Kishimoto, 2003), will be discussed. The literature review concludes with research regarding social and academic programs designed specifically for international students and the impact of such programming.

Internationalization of American Higher Education

Cultural Benefits

As mentioned in Chapter One, colleges and universities in the United States are directing an increasing amount of resources toward the recruitment and enrollment of international students (Cho & Yu, 2015; Du & Wei, 2015; Institute of International Education, 2014; Lee, 2010; Lord, 2013; Mori, 2000; Pope, 2012; Trice, 2003). Part of the impetus for the internationalization of higher education is to incorporate more global perspectives. Students from different cultural backgrounds may be able to incorporate diverse perspectives that some
American students may not have previously considered (Lord, 2013; Trice, 2003). International students increase cultural awareness for American students. A more internationalized campus can help students engage in cross-cultural dialogue which in turn enhances cultural competency, better preparing students for professional lives that are becoming increasingly globalized. Particularly because research suggests that students at small liberal arts colleges engage in meaningful diversity activities (Umbach & Kuh, 2006), students from small liberal arts colleges potentially have much to gain from an increasingly internationalized campus.

Beyond the potential to expand the cultural horizons of American students, intergroup contact theory suggests that consistent contact with individuals from an “outgroup,” a term referring to a non-dominant group, can decrease prejudice. These relationships, according to Pettigrew (2007), “can provide extensive and repeated contact in a variety of social contexts with opportunities for self-disclosure and access to cross-group friendship networks. And research has repeatedly found friendship negatively and substantially related to prejudice” (p. 412). Individuals who create friendships with students from different backgrounds learn how to empathize with them and understand diverse perspectives. Such participants in intergroup friendships develop more favorable attitudes toward the outgroup. This ability to understand the outgroup comprehensively leads to reduced discrimination.

Research suggests that the reduction in prejudice against and anxious sentiments about interactions with an outgroup can be a result of both direct and indirect contact (Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007). Not only do participants in intergroup relationships develop a greater understanding of different perspectives; non-participants who are friends or acquaintances with participants in such relationships similarly benefit. Pettigrew, et al.’s (2007) study suggested that individuals who did not have personal intergroup relationships
still felt reduced prejudice against an *outgroup* if their friends participated in intergroup relationships.

Intergroup contact theory, applied to this particular research setting, suggests that the increased presence of international students at liberal arts colleges has the potential to broadly reduce prejudice against international citizens. Because of the typically small, cohesive, and residential nature of liberal arts colleges, there is much potential for American students at these institutions to have consistent contact with those international students who attend. Because benefits can be indirect, even students who do not know any international students may experience benefits if they have friends who have relationships with international students.

**Financial Benefits**

Beyond the potential for enhanced global horizons and cultural competency lies another motivating force for increasing international enrollment. The majority of international students studying at both the graduate and undergraduate level in the United States receive their funding privately. This suggests that colleges and universities do not frequently provide need-based financial aid to international students. On the contrary, some public universities are looking to international students to help balance budgets (Chea, 2011; Hu, 2011; Nimmer, 1994). Because international students are often charged higher tuition or additional fees to attend, universities have become increasingly dependent on international students who do not require financial aid in order to generate tuition revenue (Lewin, 2012). Tuition for out-of-state students can be up to three times the tuition paid by in-state residents.

This increase in international students has created some resentment among in-state residents who have been denied access to state institutions. Sharp increases in international
student enrollment have created barriers to enrollment for some in-state students and have increased selectivity in the admission process. The University of California at Berkeley, in particular, saw a decrease in California resident enrollment accompanied by a larger increase in international enrollment during the fall of 2011. Some question whether the increased enrollment of international students is decreasing opportunities for underrepresented students because they are not given priority as in-state residents (Hu, 2011).

Although not as susceptible to state budget cuts in the same way as are public institutions, private institutions may have similar financial motivations. A survey administered by the Chronicle of Higher Education indicates that colleges and universities that increased their international enrollment were more likely to meet both financial and enrollment goals (Blumenstyk & Thomason, 2013; Thomason, 2013). As these private institutions strive to enhance socioeconomic diversity, tuition revenue from international students can help schools provide financial aid to underrepresented American students. Some private institutions have even come to depend on the tuition revenue generated by international students. Thomason (2013) cited a private college in Pennsylvania which admitted that without the enrollment of international students it would not be in a good financial position. This occasional dependence on international students as a source of consistent and dependable tuition revenue suggests that it is not only the initial enrollment that is important rather, in order to maintain this steady stream of money, colleges must also retain these international students.

The emphasis on the financial benefits of international students highlights a concept coined by Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) as “academic capitalism.” Driven by a desire to generate tuition revenue, colleges and universities have in some sense become profit-seeking organizations with students as consumers and knowledge transformed into a raw material.
Colleges promote and market a certain lifestyle to students in order to convince prospective students of the potential for financial and professional return after graduation. The relationship between student and institution shifts when a student’s identity changes from prospective student to enrolled student and then to alumnus. Within this framework, college admission practices are seen through a marketing lens.

**Global Trends**

Although international students arrive in the United States from approximately 200 countries, the majority of students come from Asian countries. International students from China, South Korea, and India account for half of all international students studying in the United States (Constantine, et al., 2005; Fan & Ashdown, 2014; Hanamura & Laid, 2014; Institute of International Education, 2014; Liao & Wei, 2014). For China in particular, the number of families having sufficient finances to support sending their children to the U.S. has increased and there is a heightened awareness among Chinese parents of the long-term professional and economic benefits of seeking an education in the United States (Feng & Martin, 2008). Because of both the awareness of the benefits of American higher education and the prevalence of students with the ability to financially support themselves, colleges and universities are devoting an increasing amount of resources to recruiting Chinese students. This is true for graduate and undergraduate programs and is particularly true for liberal arts colleges that participate in collaborative and individual recruitment in China in order to increase their Chinese enrollment.
Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

Though many students who enter U.S. colleges and universities experience some difficulty with transition, international students may experience a unique set of challenges (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Bektas et al., 2009; Constantine et al., 2005; Du & Wei, 2015; Fan & Ashdown, 2014; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Liao & Wei, 2014; Maundeni, 2001; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Berry, et al., (1987) define acculturation as “[a] cultural change which results from continuous, first-contact between two distinct cultural groups” (p. 491). This cultural change happens on both a group/collective level wherein the culture of the group is impacted and, on an individual level, where the psychology of the individual is impacted.

Berry, et al., (1987) posit five general categorical changes that international students may experience during acculturation. The first is physical, where students adjust to different physical settings, potentially different population densities, and new housing situations. The second is biological, in which students may be exposed to different food/diets and diseases. The third category is cultural, with differences in political, religious, and linguistic habits, beliefs, and practices. The fourth category is social and involves relationships and interactions that may be quite different for students from different cultures. The fifth category is psychological, with students who may experience behavioral changes, including mental health struggles, as they adjust to new cultures. Most studies that apply Berry’s (1987) conceptualization of acculturation to international students studying in the United States focus on the latter three categories: cultural, social, and psychological.

When experiencing any degree of acculturation, international students face two dimensions of adjustment: psychological and sociocultural. Psychological adjustment refers
feelings of satisfaction, emotional well-being, and strong mental health. *Sociocultural adjustment* to acculturation, on other hand, refers to an individual’s ability to fit in, adapt to new cultural settings, and sometimes adopt new habits (Berry, 1992, 2008; Hanamura & Laid, 2014; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Searle & Ward, 1990; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006).

Individuals coping with the acculturation process consider two salient issues: *cultural maintenance* and *contact/participation* in the new culture (Berry, 1997; Du & Wei, 2015; Wadsworth, et al., 2008). How much of their home cultures do these students want to retain, but then what new elements are they willing to embrace? Unlike immigrant groups, these international students generally intend to return to their home countries after the completion of their American education, so the balance of cultural maintenance and contact/participation can be difficult (Mori, 2000; Ye, 2006).

Berry (1997) suggests four strategies for managing acculturation. The first is *assimilation*, a strategy wherein the individuals from the non-dominant culture do not aim to maintain their cultural identity and instead seek frequent contact with the dominant or host culture. A second strategy is *separation*, in which individuals from the acculturating group want to maintain their home culture and avoid interaction with the host culture. The third strategy, *integration*, is somewhere between separation and assimilation. With integration, some cultural identity is maintained, but the individuals simultaneously seek contact with the host culture. The last strategy is *marginalism* in which the individual experiencing acculturation wants neither to maintain home culture nor experience host culture.

Berry (1997) states that, for some, the process of acculturation is simple and involves “learning a new behavioral repertoire that is appropriate for the new cultural context” (13). In
situations where individuals are unable to learn and adjust to the new “behavioral repertoire” acculturative stress occurs.

Acculturative stress is a specific kind of stress that finds its source in acculturation (Berry, et al., 1987). Individuals perceive a challenge with which they are unable to cope with the resources at hand (Chen, 1999; Wan, et al., 1992). Transient international students are far from the familiarities of home, so they also may feel as if they have to adjust and acculturate without basic social support networks (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Du & Wei, 2015; Mori, 2000; Wei, et al., 2012). International students may experience homesickness, depression, academic concerns, language barriers, and cultural barriers (Constantine, Okazaki, & Utsey, 2004; Dao, et al., 2007; Wei, et al., 2007).

Cultural Barrier

When international students move far from their homes, families, and cultures, they may feel a sense of loss upon arrival in the United States (Constantine, et al., 2005; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004; Maundeni, 2011; Mori, 2000; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Rice, et al., 2012; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Beyond the difficulties of academic adjustment, international students have to adapt to a culture that is different from their own (Du & Wei, 2015; Fan & Ashdown, 2014; Liao & Wei, 2014; Lu, Dear, Johnston, Wootton, & Titov, 2014; Ye, 2006). Cultural barriers can create a sense of alienation among international students and can have mental health consequences (Du & Wei, 2015; Hanamura & Laid, 2014; Lu, et al., 2014; Sherry, et al., 2010; Yan & Berliner, 2011b).

International students may be confused by cultural norms regarding personal space, social engagement, and different communication patterns (Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Yan & Berliner,
For Asian international students, the transition from collectivist cultures that encourage obedience and compliance, and where students tend to remain quiet unless called upon, is vastly different than American classrooms that require more initiative and vocal expression of personal perspective (Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In order to fulfill American classroom expectations, some international students are forced to act in a way completely dissimilar to prior experiences. Cultural adjustment can also be challenging for students who come from conservative Middle Eastern countries where the power distribution between men and women is unequal, genders are segregated in public, and religion may play a large societal role (Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015).

Outside of the classroom, some Asian international students come from humble, communal, and self-effacing cultures. It is challenging for them to adjust to American culture with its emphasis on individualism, independence, and assertiveness (Constantine, et al., 2004; Yeh & Inose, 2010). Yeh and Inose (2010) suggest that these cultural differences can lead to social dissatisfaction because international students may perceive their relationships with Americans to be superficial. Basic social communication with peers can also be challenging because of different communication styles. Wang and Mallinckrodt (2006) state that American conversation, which involves assertive expressions of feelings and perspectives and sharing of personal information, may be stressful for international students for whom that style of conversation is foreign.

Sometimes researchers may predict a pervasive cultural barrier based on certain predictors such as language and cultural distance; however, not every student who is prone to struggle with a cultural barrier will. Lefdahl-Davis and Perrone-McGovern’s (2015) study of female Saudi international students predicted that because of the significant difference between
Saudi Arabian and American cultures, Saudi students would experience acute acculturative stress. However, interviews with and survey responses from Saudi women studying in the U.S. found that, despite some complicated areas of the cultural transition, such as the integration of both genders in public spaces and the increased freedom accompanied by the ability to drive, Saudi women did not struggle with acculturation. This was surprising for many of the study participants who expected to experience discrimination or more stress. Some of these women explained that their ability to adjust culturally was due to previous travel within the U.S.

**Language Barrier**

In addition to cultural barriers, an equally challenging feature of the acculturation process is the language barrier (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Constantine, et al., 2005; Du & Wei, 2015; Hanamura & Laid, 2015; Liao & Wei, 2014; Lu, et al., 2014; Mori, 2000; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007). Mori (2000) posits that the language barrier is the most significant component of acculturative stress for international students. Developing proficiency in a foreign language as an adult, Mori states, is a difficult task. Even though many school administrators and students believe that the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) examination is an accurate assessment of English language ability, it is not a guarantee of sufficient skills (Mori, 2000). Consequently, even though international students may perform well on the TOEFL and receive a high score, these students will not necessarily avoid language problems.

Constantine, et al.’s (2004) study of 320 international college students at four public universities in the United States found that English language fluency was negatively associated with depression, meaning that international students who had lower levels of English fluency tended to experience higher levels of depression. Similarly, Yan and Berliner (2013) conducted
semi-structured interviews with 18 Chinese international students attending a large public university in the southwestern region of the United States; these students identified language problems as a major component of their acculturative stress. In particular, these students struggled with listening comprehension and oral communication.

Yan and Berliner’s (2013) study found that Chinese students felt that Americans spoke so quickly that they were unable follow what the Americans said. One particular student also felt that Americans were impatient and did not want to adjust the pace of speech in order for the Chinese students to understand. Another dimension of the difficulty experienced by Chinese students was the use of slang. One student commented about his inability to understand subtleties and idioms, claiming that he once misunderstood a man saying, “Give me five” and thought that he was being robbed (p. 74).

In the classroom, difficulties adjusting to a new language can be discouraging. Students for whom English is not their first language sometimes require extended time to read assignments, may not understand examination questions, have difficulty comprehending faculty lectures, and struggle to articulate their thoughts (Constantine, et al., 2005; Dao, et al., 2007; Liao & Wei, 2014; Lin & Yi, 197; Mori, 2000). When students are completely immersed in a learning environment taught in their second language, they can struggle with articulating their thoughts both in writing and in speaking (Liao & Wei, 2014). These struggles can lead to feelings of insecurity among international students. Additionally, faculty and peers can sometimes exacerbate these insecurities. A study of 24 international students at a public university in the southwestern U.S. found that faculty and peers treated some international students as inferiors, mocking their lack of English fluency (Lee & Rice, 2007). One particular student commented, “One professor didn’t like me because my English was bad. He was
impatient…” (p. 397). A separate student commented that when she asked a question in class, “…the professor will say, ‘I don’t understand’ and so that makes me very embarrassed. I don’t ask questions anymore. I ask other students, I don’t ask the professor” (p. 397). The challenges associated with the academic experience can be particularly severe because of the academic pressures that international students, particularly Asian international students, tend to feel (Lu, et al., 2014).

Wan, et al.’s (1992) study emphasized the potential positive impact of confidence in English language fluency. Their study of 689 international graduate students attending a U.S. university found that students with stronger English language skills perceived academic situations as less stressful than their peers who did not have strong English comprehension. The students with stronger language skills similarly felt that they were more equipped to manage stress if and when it did occur. Similarly, Karuppan and Barari (2011) found that higher proficiency in English led to higher confidence among international students. These students felt more poised to express themselves in a classroom and better able to collaborate with American peers. The idea that fluency in the host language can lead to fewer struggles with acculturative stress is not unique to American universities. Akhtar and Kroner-Herwig (2015) found that for international students in Germany, higher fluency in the German language was associated with lower levels of acculturative stress.

Struggles with a language barrier can have psychological and social consequences for students (Hanamura & Laid, 2014; Houshmand, et al., 2014; Mori, 2000; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Wang, Wei & Chen, 2015). Students who struggle with the language barrier may experience anxiety and social isolation, and they may also struggle to perform academically. A struggle with adjusting to the host country’s language can prevent international students from
feeling connected to mainstream society and host-national peers. It can also exacerbate feelings of homesickness, as students feel increasingly isolated (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Liao & Wei, 2014; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007). Students suffering from a severe language barrier may feel low self-esteem and depression (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015).

**Homesickness**

Homesickness is a major component of acculturative stress for international students (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Constantine, et al., 2005; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Maundeni, 2001; Poyzrali & Lopez; 2007; Tognoli, 2003). Particularly when students arrive in a country whose culture is very different than their home culture, students feel a sense of loss as they are unfamiliar with their new settings (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Constantine, et al., 2005; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Maundeni, 2001; Poyzrali & Lopez; 2007). Students feel a longing and desire for their familiar environments and their families (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Hendrickson, et al., 2011).

Tognoli (2003) suggests that although every college student is susceptible to experience homesickness, the severity and pervasiveness of homesickness increases as students travel farther away from their homes to study. This indicates that international students are prone to feel the most acute levels of homesickness because this distance is vast both physically and culturally. There are various consequences to homesickness including loneliness, sadness, social anxiety, and difficulty adjusting (Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007). Homesickness can be difficult for international students to manage because they are separated from their families and other familiar support networks (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015). International students experiencing homesickness can be comforted by the fact that they are able
to communicate with their families in a variety of ways (e-mail, telephone, Skype, etc.), however, international students also long for physical contact with their families (Maundeni, 2001).

Cultural and language barriers can exacerbate experiences with homesickness (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Maundeni, 2001; Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007). Students with lower levels of fluency in the host language are more susceptible to experiencing pervasive homesickness (Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007). A larger cultural gap can increase a sense of alienation (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015). One reason why the language and cultural barriers can exacerbate homesickness is because they can prevent students from building social networks which help manage homesickness (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015). International students who have more social support are less likely to struggle with homesickness, as are students from a European background where there are more cultural and linguistic similarities (Poyzrali & Lopez, 2015).

**Discrimination**

Discrimination is another discouraging component of acculturative stress (Ee, 2013; Houshmand, et al., 2014; Karuppan & Barari, 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007; Wadsworth, et al., 2008; Wong, Tsai, Liu, Zhu, & Wei., 2014; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). International students may experience discrimination based on language barriers, cultural barriers, or general xenophobia on behalf of peers and faculty (Lee & Rice, 2007; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003; Wong, et al., 2014). These experiences are isolating and discouraging and negatively impact international students’ self-esteem (Schmitt, et al., 2003; Wadsworth, et al., 2008). Discrimination, according to Wadsworth, et al. (2008), “involves overt and covert actions to exclude, avoid or distance and is a pervasive experience in the United States for minorities and people from other countries” (p. 26).
66). Perceived discrimination can impede international students’ abilities to create host-national relationships because it can lead to discomfort and a general lack of confidence (Wadsworth, et al., 2008).

Research indicates that international students from different cultural backgrounds experience discrimination on different levels. For example, Lee (2007) states that women who wore veils or similar clothing that identified them culturally experienced discrimination even prior to the enhanced post-9/11 xenophobia. As stated above, international students also experience discrimination based on their language, with both faculty and peers mocking their accents and/or linguistic skills (Houshmand, et al., 2014; Lee, 2010; Wadsworth, et al., 2008). Houshmand, et al.’s (2014) study of Chinese students attending Canadian universities found that the international students were aware that they were treated differently, and generally worse, than their non-Chinese peers. These students reported being victims of microaggressions in both academic and social settings on campus. These students wanted to engage meaningfully with their Canadian peers so they could feel more connected to the host culture, but often felt rejected. Chinese students experienced hostility because of their accents and were excluded from activities. At times, the sense of rejection and exclusion led some of the Chinese students to feel that their value on campus was reduced to their tuition revenue (p. 382).

Lee (2007) explains the theory of neo-racism and its relevance to international students. *Neo-racism* is discrimination based on cultural or national origin and implies “notions of cultural or national superiority and an increasing rationale for marginalizing or assimilating groups in a globalized world” (p. 389). In an academic setting, neo-racism can be seen in the unfair or negative treatment by administrators, faculty, and/or peers.
Because of cultural distance, neo-racism is more prevalent for students from Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries. European students in Lee’s (2007) study indicated that they felt welcomed and content with their experience. The White European students were able to integrate somewhat seamlessly and had minor or no difficulties adjusting to their new settings.

International students may be subject to cultural stereotypes generated by a lack of cultural understanding. International students from non-European cultural backgrounds who are perceived as more different to American culture experienced negative treatment largely because of “negative social images of particular racial groups [that] are thrust upon immigrants” (p. 395). Perceptions of discrimination make international students feel uncomfortable and unwelcome in their new settings. International students experience discrimination in the classroom and in their communities. It occurs in academic, professional and social settings. It can be verbal or it can even be physical (Ee, 2013; Lee & Rice, 2007; Schmitt, et al., 2003).

**Cultural Distance**

Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) define cultural distance as “the extent that a student’s home culture differs from the predominant culture of the U.S.” (p. 609). This theory of cultural distance suggests that students from Western cultures will have an easier time managing the acculturation experience, and therefore will experience less severe acculturative stress than students from Asian cultures, because their home culture may be more similar to American culture. There are social and academic consequences of cultural distance (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Constantine, et al., 2005; Wadsworth, et al., 2008; Yan & Berliner 2013).

Socially, international students from cultures dissimilar to the host culture notice many differences in their daily lives with different food, language, values, and traditions (Akhtar &
It can also be seen through gender roles. Gendered socialization differs greatly in different cultures, and while some cultures may encourage women to maintain their traditional gender roles, female college students also receive messaging regarding assertiveness, independence, and the ability to pursue one’s own goals (Constantine, et al., 2005). This clash of value systems can be challenging for international students, particularly female students, to manage.

Yan and Berliner (2013) state that there are three factors that can increase cultural distance. Coming from a non-European background, a developing country, and/or an Eastern country generally led to elevated levels of acculturative stress. Because China fits two of those categories, there is at least moderate cultural distance between China and the United States. The degrees of cultural distance may differ throughout China because it is such a large and diverse country. While some parts of the country may be highly developed, there are also rural areas that are underdeveloped. Therefore, there are areas in China where the cultural distance with Western countries will be greater than others. The greater the cultural distance, the greater the degree of psychological stress students may experience. Cultural distance is evident both in academic and social life.

Yan and Berliner’s (2013) study found that Chinese students hoped for more social contact with American students, but found it difficult and complicated. These students did not understand foreign social norms and rules and thus tended to avoid social situations. These students blamed their social struggles on the cultural distance between China and the United States.

Wadsworth, et al. (2008) state that classroom communication can be problematic because of cultural distance. American college classrooms have different expectations and interactions
than classrooms in other countries. Whereas American classrooms value active participation and questioning, typical Asian classrooms defer to listening to and observing faculty. Chinese students are generally taught to be quiet and compliant in class, refraining from voicing perspectives unless directly requested by a teacher (Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). Coupled with these students’ perceived classroom discrimination because of their lack of English proficiency (Lee & Rice, 2007; Wadsworth, et al., 2008), this lack of confidence in speaking and different cultural backgrounds can discourage active classroom participation, thus some Chinese students struggle to meet academic expectations.

Beyond struggling to meet academic expectations, another dimension of the cultural distance is the potential to feel isolated because of superficial conceptions of incompetence by peers (Hsieh, 2007). Introverted personalities may lead to peer perceptions that international students are not as equally intelligent as American students. Reticent behavior may prevent accolades from peers, professors, and supervisors in professional settings. The lack of support and negative comments from American peers can be both discouraging and frustrating for international students who do not feel that their intelligence is understood or acknowledged (Hsieh, 2007).

Beykont and Daiute (2002) and Chen (1999) discuss the contrast between American college classrooms and Asian university classrooms. Chen (1999) suggests that Asian universities have rigid classroom regulations and expectations, characterized by “distance between professor and student to emphasize respect and order” (p. 54). Beykont and Daiute (2002) define this paradigm shift as one from a teacher-centered environment to a student-centered environment. In a teacher-centered classroom, the focus is usually based on “the pedagogical assumption that information is transmitted from the teacher to the students through
lectures or teacher-led discussions. In contrast, student-centered classrooms are based on the premise that students learn when they actively participate in their own learning through collaborative problem solving” (p. 36).

The educational model in Asian universities, according to Chen (1999) is that the professors provide information and the students receive that information. Because of this apparent one-directional flow of information from professor to student, Asian students may feel confused and surprised in American classrooms where participation, discussion, and student presentations are regular components of the academic experience. Beykont and Daiute (2002) affirm the importance of understanding divergent cultural perspectives in the higher education classroom. Their study suggests that although international students experience a paradigm shift in classroom design between their home country and the U.S., they are able to do well in certain learning environments.

Beykont and Daiute (2002) interviewed 18 graduate students at a private university in the northeastern region of the United States, asking them about the roles that students and faculty play in an American college classroom in comparison to their home country’s classrooms. The graduate students interviewed described their education in their home country as teacher-based, with little discussion and formal tone. There was distance between students and faculty, and also a sense of heightened authority given to faculty. Few students mentioned student responsibility to contribute to class discussion, rather they were urged to listen closely to the professor.

**Social Integration**

One of the most prevalent components of acculturative stress is social integration (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Chen, 1999; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2010). Removed
from family and friends, international students can feel lonely and isolated. It’s a daunting task for these international students to establish new social support systems, particularly when experiencing other dimensions of acculturation (Constantine, et al., 2005; Du & Wei, 2015; Maundeni, 2001; Yeh & Inose, 2010).

Social connections and support networks are important mechanisms by which international students cope with the challenges of acculturation (Poyzrali & Lopez, 2007; Yeh & Inose, 2010). Sometimes international students who experience acculturative stress choose to socially and culturally isolate themselves (Bektas, et al., 2009; Constantine, et al., 2005; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Fisher (2013) asks the important question of whether these students, who have traveled far distances to receive an education in the United States, will receive the full value of American higher education if they live in cultural isolation.

Research indicates that international students tend to have more friends from their home countries, referred to as co-national relationships (Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Maundeni, 2001). However, research also suggests that the more friendships international students develop with students of the host country, referred to as host-national relationships, the more effectively those international students are able to integrate socially and culturally (Bektas, et al., 2009; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2010).

Co-national relationships offer international students the opportunity to experience acculturation as a collective group rather than as isolated individuals. By creating and maintaining relationships with peers who have similar cultural origins, international students sometimes feel better able to maintain their cultural identity. Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) posit that these comforting relationships can “serve to buffer students from the effects of problems associated with a lack of assimilation to American culture and an inability to effectively interact
with Americans” (p. 700). Their study’s findings suggest that co-national relationships can enhance the self-esteem of international students. Additionally, co-national friendships can help students manage their experiences with homesickness (Maundeni, 2001). Co-national relationships are often created early in a college career and can endure long periods of time. These relationships offer extra social and even spiritual support to students, when they miss their homes (Maundeni, 2001). The ability to share a linguistic and cultural connection, particularly early in a college career when international students are most susceptible to homesickness, can help students to manage the challenge and avoid social isolation.

While co-national relationships can offer collective comfort and cultural identification, they can also prevent cultural growth (Maundeni, 2001). Bektas, et al.’s (2009) study of Turkish students studying in the U.S. found that although perceived social support from co-national peers helped students manage the acculturation process, those co-national relationships were only a short-term solution. Similarly, Maundeni (2001) found that when international students build a social network that is predominantly co-national, their host language acquisition is slower. An isolated, culturally-limited social network will bring long-term disadvantages including stunted integration and limited personal growth. A more inclusive social network will not only help students adjust to their new setting, but provide them with a broader global perspective.

Yan and Berliner (2013) found that co-national relationships offered necessary support to Chinese international students. These co-national relationships offered emotional support as Chinese international students experienced challenges associated with acculturation. Because many international students, particularly those from Asia, choose not to utilize mental health resources (Lu, et al., 2014; Mori, 2000; Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012), co-national friends are often important resources for struggling international students. However, these
relationships also enabled cultural isolation from host-national culture. One student from the study commented, “Going abroad is supposed to provide an opportunity for broadening a person’s perspective; however, it turns out that most Chinese international students here confine their lives to a small circle of friends and activities…I want to escape this besieged fortress and have some real interactions with Americans” (p. 535).

Although many international students opt to create co-national relationships, international students desire more contact with host-nationals (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Hendrickson, et al., 2011). Research suggests that increased social interaction with host-nationals leads to better sociocultural adjustment (Du & Wei, 2015; Li & Gasser, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). International students who form more relationships with host-national students are better able to effectively adjust to life in a new country and improve their ability to communicate. Consistent contact with host-nationals provides international students with cultural windows through which they can understand foreign methods of communication and interaction (Hendrickson, et al., 2011).

Hendrickson, et al.’s (2011) study of 86 international students at the University of Hawai’i found that international students who had host-national relationships experienced higher levels of satisfaction and lower levels of homesickness. International students who had more co-national relationships than host-national relationships experienced the opposite; these students were less satisfied with their social experience and felt lower levels of social connectedness. Li and Gasser’s (2005) study of 117 Asian international students studying at two state universities in the Midwestern region of the U.S. similarly found that that contact with host-nationals positively contributed to successful sociocultural adjustment of international students.
Sometimes international students isolate themselves because of perceived rejection by American peers (Gareis, 2000; Lee & Rice, 2007). Although international students seek friendships with American students, many are unhappy with the quantity and quality of their relationships with Americans (Gareis, 2000; Marklein, 2012). Some international students feel confused by perceived lack of depth in their American friendships, and some feel culturally misunderstood by Americans (Gareis, 2000). Other international students may simply feel rejected and excluded because American students have not initiated friendships or invited them to participate in social events (Lee, 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007).

Whether they are creating co-national or host-national relationships, social connections are important to international students as they manage cultural transitions. Yeh and Inose (2003) found that social connectedness and satisfaction with social networks were predictors of acculturative stress, meaning that students who were more satisfied with their social networks and who felt socially connected tended to experience less acculturative stress. Perhaps because of cultural backgrounds that emphasize interdependence and the value of relationships, feeling socially connected helped students to manage the acculturation process.

A similar study of 100 international students from twelve different U.S. colleges (Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002) found that students who were not satisfied with their social network experienced higher levels of loneliness than did their international peers who were satisfied with their social networks. Of the students who expressed dissatisfaction with their social network, 67% felt lonely. For the students who felt either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their social network, only 18% felt lonely. In terms of contentment, 72% of students who were “not satisfied” with their social network claimed that they felt content, but 96% of students who were
“very satisfied” with their social network felt content. This study indicates a strong connection between social satisfaction, contentment, and loneliness.

There are different ways to perceive the process, benefits, and challenges associated with creating host-national relationships. Du and Wei (2015) found that students who were better acculturated and who adjusted more to the host culture were happier and generally felt closer to their American peers. On the other hand, students who were less adjusted to American culture and who chose to instead maintain more of their home culture felt less connected to American culture, less connected to their American peers, and less satisfied with their college experience. Although research suggests that relationships with students from the host culture helps international students adjust culturally (Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Li & Gasser, 2005; Yeh & Inose, 2003), Du and Wei’s (2015) study suggests that the relationship between acculturation and friendships with Americans can flow in the opposite direction as well. Du and Wei’s (2015) study suggested that cultural adjustment can help with the creation of friendships with Americans.

The struggles with different elements of acculturative stress can be very challenging for international students and it may take an emotional toll and damage self-esteem. However, many international students choose not to seek professional help as they endure these emotional challenges.

**Forbearance**

Although international students experience psychological challenges as they adjust to new environments, these students are less likely than American students to seek and maintain psychological support (Lu, et al., 2014; Mori, 2000; Wei, et al., 2012). This concept of
forbearance suggests that some students may choose to conceal or minimize struggles in order to not burden others (Lu, et al., 2014; Moore & Constantine, 2005; Wei, et al., 2012). Forbearance is a particularly relevant concept to collectivist cultures, such as Chinese culture, where individuals aim to avoid interpersonal conflict and do not want to burden others with personal problems (Constantine, et al., 2004; Moore & Constantine, 2005; Wei, et al., 2007). There is a cultural belief that the disclosure of personal struggles is burdensome for the receiving party so, in order to minimize this burden placed on others, students often hide their emotional struggles (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Wei, et al., 2012). In order to maintain harmony in personal relationships, students will refrain from sharing their adjustment problems. Counseling, especially for students from Asian countries, is considered a last resort (Constantine, et al., 2005; Lu, et al., 2014). In addition to avoiding potentially burdening others with personal problems, in some cultures people believe there is a stigma attached to seeking mental health services.

Students from Asian backgrounds tend to believe that they should be able to solve their problem independently (Kim, et al., 2008; Lu, et al., 2014). The concept of forbearance can become particularly challenging when students do not have a strong cohort of co-national peers in whom they feel they can confide. These students “are less likely to have people who can be sensitive to their difficulties and provide support for them when they conceal their difficulties” (p. 103). In addition to hesitation in seeking mental health support, some students from Asian backgrounds also believe that their co-national peers should be sensitive to and aware of their needs, and thus able to offer support without having to request it (Kim, et al., 2008; Wei, et al., 2007).

Wei, et al.’s (2012) study suggests that there is a relationship between forbearance, identification with home culture, and acculturative stress in predicting psychological struggle.
Their study found that for students who have a weaker connection to home culture, there was a positive association between psychological distress, acculturative stress, and forbearance. This means that “concealment of problems, lack of cultural resources to support them, and high acculturative stress might put such students in a vulnerable position for psychological distress” (p. 103). On the other hand, when perceived acculturative stress was low, there was a weak association between psychological distress and forbearance. Wei, et al. (2012) posit that this could be because lower levels of acculturative stress are easier to manage independently. The ability to conceal these struggles can also make these students feel that they are maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships by not burdening peers. This is meaningful because maintaining harmonious relationships is an important value in Chinese culture.

Yan and Berliner’s (2011) interviews with Chinese international students found different perspectives regarding why mental health services tend to be underutilized by this population. One student revealed, “The Chinese culture teaches us not to share our personal problems with outsiders. Talking to a counselor about psychological problems or admitting emotional difficulties is viewed as bringing disgrace and shame to the family” (p. 538). Another student believed that counseling services were not used because Chinese international students are unaware of the process and practicalities of seeking and participating in counseling. Further, beyond wanting to conceal mental health concerns from others because of social stigma and the desire to maintain harmonious social relations, some international students choose not to seek mental health support because of a lack of familiarity (Mori, 2000). Mori also suggests that there may be elements of distrust and fear among international students who believe that they may be sent home as failures or that counselors have ulterior motives such as mind control. Mori (2000) believes that perhaps the biggest obstacle for international students who may need mental health
support is a dearth of counselors “who are unaccustomed to the history, traditions, value and belief systems, religious practices, family structures, sex role expectations, and language styles of the students’ cultures” (p. 140).

Similarly, Lu, et al. (2014) found there were many barriers to Chinese students seeking mental health services. Even though the students felt depressed and needed services, sometimes students did not know how to access those services. Students were unaware of costs of or transportation to those services. Even when students did seek mental health services, they tended to have fewer sessions than their peers and often chose not to address their real issues.

International students experience varying degrees of cultural transition when they arrive on American college campuses. Their social patterns and integration influence their ability to manage the acculturation process and adapt socioculturally. These students may endure stress in isolation because of cultural attitudes towards counseling. While there are many challenges that international students face, universities and scholars have attempted to mitigate such struggles. Studies that examine social and cultural programming offer some direction to institutions that are growing their international populations and can help suggest methods to support students who experience acculturative stress. These studies tend to take place at large universities.

**Suggestions and International Student Programming**

There are different components to the international student experience and acculturation process to consider when making recommendations regarding how to best support these growing populations. Scholars and universities have proposed and attempted solutions to both the social and academic dimensions of such struggles with acculturation.
Cho and Yu (2015) assert that institutional identification and support are of critical importance. Their study found that university identification positively predicted the international students’ perception of support from the university and predicted school-life satisfaction. The study also found that university support negatively predicted international students’ stress and positively predicted international students’ school-life satisfaction. Essentially, support from the university increased the international students’ sense of school-life satisfaction, which also reduced their struggles with acculturative stress. Citing organizational identity theory, Cho and Yu state, “Active interactions among organizational members are the most critical components of organizational identity. This is mainly because, through active interactions, members can build a sense of belonging and oneness with a particular group of people” (p. 22). These active interactions may be limited because of cultural and language barriers that intimidate or discourage international students from engaging others within the institution. Limited interactions can create barriers to establishing university identity. Because of the potential positive values of university identification, it’s important for colleges and universities to consider the ways in which they help international students connect with their peers.

Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) explored the efficacy of a peer-mentoring program at a public university in the Midwest that connected 36 international students with returning students who volunteered to serve as mentors. While most of the participating international students were from Asian countries, most of the host students were White and American. The hosts’ responsibility was to maintain consistent interactions with the new international students in order to help them integrate into and adjust to the university community. The program was referred to as the International Peer Program (IPP).
The volunteer host students participated in a brief training prior to making any connection with the incoming international students. Many hosts exchanged e-mails with their international peer prior to arrival. Once the international students were on campus, they met their volunteer host, exchanged contact information, and planned future engagements. Findings from this study indicated that students who participated in this peer mentorship program experienced more positive social adjustment than did international students who chose not to participate in the IPP, suggesting that “the ongoing, organized interactions created by the IPP enhanced the international students’ interpersonal skills, which are crucial for success in the campus environment” (p. 545). Though this program indicated positive social gains for international students who participate in the peer mentorship program, it did not contain an academic focus.

Andrade (2009) analyzed the effectiveness of a first-year seminar for international students at a private, religiously-affiliated, four-year undergraduate university with a large population of international students. All international students who needed assistance with their English-speaking skills were required to enroll in this seminar. Although international students who demonstrated sufficient English language proficiency could opt out of the seminar, only about 15% did so, meaning that the majority of enrolled international students participated in this seminar. The objectives of the seminar were to help the international students understand American culture, American classroom culture, regional history, and campus policies, procedures, and available resources. Andrade’s (2009) analysis suggested that this seminar was successful across many dimensions.

Participants in Andrade’s (2009) study felt the seminar accomplished its objectives. These international students understood the campus resources available to them, as well as campus policies and procedures. They adjusted to American classroom culture, identifying
themselves as active learners. These international students also culturally adjusted, expressing an appreciation for different cultural viewpoints and feeling comfortable interacting with their American peers. Lastly, students felt comfortable with their local area and community; they understood how to navigate the community and understood the local culture and history. The international students credited their adjustment to campus life and American culture at least partially to their seminar. These students agreed that the seminar positively impacted their involvement on campus and active learning behavior. Andrade’s (2009) study of this seminar indicates that an academic program constructed specifically for the adjustment of international students can be successful; however, the seminar is not a complete solution. Though these students reported regular participation in extracurricular activities, they still felt less comfortable with their American peers.

Andrade (2000) and Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998) studied the ways in which universities can support growing populations of international students in social and academic settings. Though these programs have been successful, studies are limited to large universities. Although the university settings for both studies were different than small liberal arts colleges, they are still good models to consider. In particular, because Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed’s (1998) program involved only 36 students, the size of the program is of similar scope to what a small liberal arts college may attempt. The next step in understanding how college campuses have been able to successfully support international students as they endure social and academic challenges associated with acculturation is to examine and evaluate the efforts of small liberal arts colleges which are experiencing growth in their international populations.
Conclusion

For a variety of reasons, colleges and universities across the U.S. are increasing the recruitment and enrollment of international students (Keller, 2008; Lord, 2013; Thomason, 2013). Although international students come to study in the U.S. from nearly every continent, the vast majority of these international students arrive from Asian countries (Institute of International Education, 2014). As students from different home cultures come into contact with American culture, they undergo a process known as acculturation (Akhtar & Kroner-Herwig, 2015; Berry, et al., 1987; Wang, et al., 2015). These students may experience acculturative stress if they are unable to effectively cope with deep levels of acculturation (Chen, 1999; Hanamura & Laid, 2014; Wan, et al., 1992).

Although some research has explored academic and social programs intended to support international students as they adjust to their new environments (Abe, et al., 1998; Andrade, 2009; Guo & Chase, 2011), such research was solely conducted at large universities. Additionally, research that focuses on campus programming for international students tends to group international students into one classification rather than disaggregating them according to cultural background or country of origin. The concept of cultural distance suggests that students from different cultural backgrounds experience acculturation in differing ways, depending upon the similarity or dissimilarity of their home culture to American culture (Shupe, 2007; Wadsworth, et al., 2008; Wan, et al., 1992).

Current literature does not focus on the experience of Chinese international students at smaller liberal arts colleges. Although these institutions may generally have smaller enrollments than large universities, liberal arts colleges are also increasing their enrollment of Chinese international students. As these colleges continue to increase their enrollment of Chinese
international students, it is important to understand more about the social and academic challenges that these students experience, as well as what programs and services have been helpful to these students.
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Introduction and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which liberal arts colleges have supported Chinese international students as they endure the acculturation process. This is a particularly relevant topic because China routinely sends the highest volume of students to study in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2014). This study was intended to highlight the various people, programs, and elements that have enabled Chinese international students to adjust to and thrive in new cultural, social, and academic settings. This study also aimed to understand how institutions have adjusted to an increasingly international student population, and why certain modifications, if any, were made. The following research questions guided my study:

1. In what ways have liberal arts colleges adapted and adjusted to the growth in their Chinese international student population?
2. What are faculty and administrator perceptions of the growth in the Chinese international population and the acculturation experience for these students?
3. In what ways do Chinese international students attending liberal arts colleges experience challenges with various components of the acculturation process?
4. What programs and services do liberal arts colleges offer to help undergraduate Chinese international students manage the acculturation process from the time of admission through graduation?
   a. What specific programs, people, or elements do undergraduate Chinese international students believe have contributed to their ability to manage the challenges of the college academic experience?
   b. What specific programs, people, or elements do undergraduate Chinese international students believe have contributed to their ability to manage the challenges of the college social experience?
   c. What programs and/or activities have helped to create meaningful social engagement between Chinese international and American students?
   d. Is there alignment between the academic and social needs of Chinese students and the programs coordinated by their institutions?
Research Design

This study reflected what Creswell (2014) refers to as a “constructivist worldview.” Individuals assign different meanings to their experiences and researchers rely on participant perspectives. This reliance on participant perspective encouraged questions to be framed broadly so that participants were able to more freely and fully respond.

A qualitative design was most appropriate because I sought to understand the meanings, contexts, perspectives, and actions of international students. These students had diverse experiences and different perspectives. Even for students who come from a single country like China, there can be great diversity in experience. There are 23 provinces, 4 municipalities, and 5 autonomous regions in China, each different from the other. Therefore, I did not assume that, though they came from the same country, these students came from the same cultural experience and background.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003), Maxwell (2013), and Merriam (2009) highlight the various goals and characteristics of qualitative research. One goal of qualitative research is to understand the meaning of events or experiences in which participants are involved. One aim of this study was to understand the degree to which Chinese international students experienced acculturation and acculturative stress and how students made sense of those experiences. Beyond theories that dissect the sociocultural and psychological dimensions of acculturation, the study sought to understand, from the student perspective, what acculturative stress at a liberal arts college involved. As Merriam (2009) states, the goal of qualitative research is “understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s” (p. 14).
A second goal of qualitative research is understanding the impact of context (Maxwell, 2013) and this is where this study differs from previous research. Most research has been conducted at large U.S. universities; however, this study examined Chinese international students within the context of two small liberal arts colleges with the aim of understanding if the issues of a smaller student body, closer interaction with faculty, and more residential nature impacted their experience with acculturation.

Tierney (1988, 1997) suggests that different institutions have organizational cultures that create a unique experience. Even though certain institutions may have similar histories, mission statements, and curricula, these institutions can also have different organizational cultures which could have a deep impact on the operationalization of that mission statement. Students, faculty, and staff are socialized into organizational culture, both through major and ordinary daily events. The concept of organizational culture suggests that different institutions offer distinct experiences and that these differences can be detected in subtle ways that influence the general campus community. Tierney’s (1988, 1997) articulation of organizational culture reiterates the importance of context, suggesting that student experiences at peer institutions can be very different. Not only might a liberal arts experience differ from a large university experience, but different liberal arts institutions may have different organizational cultures which would also create a different experience.

One other goal of qualitative research stated by Maxwell (2013) is to locate items that the researcher did not anticipate. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) suggest that a qualitative study “demands that the world be examined with the assumption that nothing is trivial, that everything has the potential of being a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied” (p. 5). Because qualitative studies often are inductive and build theory based
on data rather than testing hypotheses, I did not develop a predictive outcome. Instead, I understood that unanticipated details could emerge that would add valuable insight.

I chose a case study approach because I sought various perspectives within the unique context of liberal arts colleges. The study’s first research question focused on how two liberal arts colleges adjusted to an increasingly international population. The second questioned asked how various community members perceived the acculturation experience for Chinese students. These questions could be answered only by college faculty and administrators. The third research question asked about the ways that Chinese international students who attend liberal arts colleges experienced acculturation and potential acculturative stress; this question could only be answered by students. Thus, the first three research questions asked about the same experiences, but from various perspectives.

The fourth research question asked about the people, programs, and elements that liberal arts colleges offered to Chinese international students, and which of those people, programs, and elements were most supportive in experiences with acculturation. This final research question required both student and institutional perspectives as it involved alignment between what students found to be most helpful, and what faculty and staff thought was most helpful. It is a question that would be incomplete without various perspectives.

Site and Population Selection

The two sites selected for this study were liberal arts colleges because, as referenced above, research tends to focus on the international student experience at large universities. While there are many liberal arts colleges distributed throughout the country, the site selection focused
on liberal arts colleges that have comparatively large populations of Chinese international students. “Comparatively large” is emphasized because site selection was based on percentages and not just raw numbers.

On a list of 177 liberal arts colleges in *U.S. News and World Report* (2013), institutions had anywhere between 1% and 39% international student enrollment. Eight of these institutions reported between 16% and 39% international student enrollments, which represented only 4% of the list. Thirty-two liberal arts colleges, representing 18% of that same list, reported international enrollments between 8% and 15%. Although over half of the liberal arts colleges on this list reported international student enrollment between only 1% and 5%, the sites selected for this study reported higher international student enrollments. This enabled greater access to Chinese international students.

The two institutions selected for this study had international student populations that comprised between 8% and 15% of total student enrollment. These demographic compositions are representative of liberal arts colleges that have larger-than-average international student populations according to *U.S News and World Report* (2013) data, but not significantly larger proportions of international students. Because of this, outcomes of this study can be applicable to institutions that are looking to increase their Chinese international enrollment.

The first site, Columbus College¹, is a liberal arts college located on the West Coast of the United States. Columbus is a highly-selective, independent, coeducational, residential liberal arts college with a total undergraduate enrollment of fewer than 1,500 students. There is strong domestic and international diversity at Columbus, with students coming from many different states and countries. Like most liberal arts colleges, the average class size at Columbus is

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¹ The names of all institutions and individuals have been changed to protect institutional and personal confidentiality.
relatively small, at fewer than 20 students. The vast majority of Columbus students live on-campus. Additionally, Columbus boasts very high rates of first-to-second year retention and four-year graduation. Approximately 15% of Columbus College’s student population is international.

The second site, Lakeford College, is an independent, coeducational liberal arts college with a total undergraduate enrollment of approximately 2,000 students, located in the Midwest. Similar to Columbus, Lakeford students come from many different states and countries. Approximately 8% of the student population is considered international. Nearly all of Lakeford’s students live in on-campus housing. Similar to Columbus College, the average class size at Lakeford is fewer than 20. Lakeford also has a high first-to-second year retention rate and four-year graduation rate.

Sample Selection

I selected degree-seeking Chinese international students in their sophomore, junior, and senior years because they had spent more time on campus than students who were in their first year in college. Because many liberal arts colleges have orientation programs during the first week of school for new students, I wanted to understand what happens beyond that orientation period, and what Chinese international students needed beyond that first week of programming. Additionally, because exchange students may have different experiences because their time on campus is shorter, I deliberately did not include any exchange students. Only degree-seeking students were asked to participate.
Table 3.1 Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mingxia</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiang</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boqin</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qiaohui</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilei</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lixue</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheung</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiahui</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huiliang</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renshu</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanqing</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weiling</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the institutional perspective, I selected campus professionals who interacted with international students in different capacities and at different intervals. To understand the philosophy behind recruitment and enrollment of Chinese international students, I spoke with individuals within the admission office. This included the professionals who were most connected to the international recruitment, as well as the leadership within the admission operation. To gain a sense of academic transition and potential academic struggles, I interviewed faculty members who taught international students. Lastly, to understand the social programming and other institutional elements that have supported Chinese international students, I interviewed professionals from international programming offices. These professionals were often best connected to international students and most aware of the non-academic struggles these students experienced.
Table 3.2 Faculty and Staff Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Admission Professional</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Admission Professional</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>Admission Professional</td>
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<td>Faculty</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>International and Intercultural Life</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>International and Intercultural Life</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Dean of Students</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Second Language Writing Specialist</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erica</td>
<td>Academic Support Center</td>
<td>Lakeford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katherine</td>
<td>Admission Professional</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Admission Professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus</td>
<td>International Student Life</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Chris</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Second Language Writing Specialist</td>
<td>Columbus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection Methods

Faculty and Staff Interviews

Interviews with faculty and staff contributed to responses to the second and fourth research questions that asked about administrator perceptions of the growth in the international student population, the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students, and the programs and services offered to help these students manage acculturative stress. I identified faculty and staff members at both sites by first contacting colleagues in the admission office who knew which individuals worked most closely with current international students. In order to generate a larger list of potential participants, particularly faculty, I emailed various department chairs, who I found on the schools’ websites, and invited them to either participate in the study.
or recommend other faculty members in their department who might be interested. This emailed explained my study and my professional connection to their institutions and yielded a number of interested faculty members.

I interviewed 12 faculty and staff at Lakeford and 10 faculty and staff members at Columbus. These interviews allowed me to understand the various institutional perspectives on the growth of the Chinese international population and the programs that have been most supportive for those students.

These interviews took place at the study sites in the respective participants’ offices. I visited both sites personally in order to be accommodating to the participants. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded on two devices, an Olympus recorder and an iPhone. Although I expected the Olympus recorder to be my primary recording device, there were a few occasions when the quality of sound was much better on the iPhone.

**Student Questionnaire and Focus Groups**

An initial anonymous questionnaire (Appendices J and K) disseminated to all Chinese international students in their sophomore, junior, and senior years at both sites helped answer research questions that inquired about the people, programs, and elements that have supported Chinese international students through the acculturation process and provided those students with opportunities for meaningful social engagement with their American peers. This questionnaire was distributed electronically by a liaison at each site. At Lakeford College, an Assistant Director in the International and Intercultural Office (IIO) sent the questionnaire to the Chinese students. At Columbus College, a professional from the IT department who manages electronic messages that are sent to student lists disseminated the questionnaire.
The questionnaire asked about students’ experiences with acculturation and the programs/services and people that have been most supportive during that process. It contained both fixed and open-ended responses. The final question asked if the students were interested in participating in a focus group with their peers. Students who indicated that they did want to participate in the focus group were then given the option to provide their contact information. Otherwise, no identifying information was collected.

The focus group was an appropriate method of data collection for this student population because students felt comfortable in a group setting. Whereas individually students might have offered brief responses to interview questions, in this group setting they seemed very comfortable speaking and elaborating on their experiences. At times, students responded to comments made by their peers, agreeing and disagreeing with certain points, leading to a livelier discussion.

Seven Lakeford students and 3 Columbus students participated in focus groups. I also interviewed 2 Columbus students individually on Skype. Both Skype participants indicated that they were interested in participating in a focus group when they completed the questionnaire, but both were engaged in off-campus programs during the time I visited their campus. Both students insisted that they still wanted to participate, even if they could not join the focus groups on-campus.

To give each student both the comfort of peers but also the space and time to speak, focus groups were limited to four people. Because of this, I conducted one focus group at Columbus and two focus groups at Lakeford. All focus groups were conducted on-campus at meeting spaces with which the students were familiar. To be accommodating to the students’ schedules, these focus groups were all conducted in the evening when no classes were in session. I provided
the students with some refreshments and each received a $15 cash stipend. The Skype students received their compensation through electronic transfers.

These focus groups were recorded via both an Olympus recorder and an iPhone. Focus group participants were not linked to questionnaire responses, as the questionnaires were anonymous. Even though the focus groups were my first and only personal meeting with the students, the small group sizes and the clarity of the students’ voices on the recordings allowed me to attribute specific comments to particular students.

Documents

The added dimension of document analysis was important because international programming websites helped me to preview the programs advertised to international students. Additionally, individuals at both institutions revealed that rather than mail documents or handbooks to new international students, they relied upon the website to provide incoming international students with important information. There were two general reasons for this. First, international post can be unreliable and very time consuming, so even if documents were mailed in May, they may not arrive until July. Additionally, in an effort to be more environmentally conscious, the campuses did not want to print information that could be communicated equally effectively online. The one exception to this policy was the I-20, the document that most international students need in order to gain a visa to enter the United States. This document must be mailed to students as it required official institutional signatures.

The websites were easily accessible to the public. Although both websites have portals to be used only by enrolled students with login credentials, there was a significant amount of public information. The more secure areas were likely for class registration and e-mail purposes.
Data Analysis Methods

Questionnaires

I first analyzed the questionnaire responses from the Chinese international students. Responses were evaluated both by each site specifically and then together for broader analysis that suggested similar trends at both institutions. Some questionnaire analysis was separated by site because site-specific academic and social programs were addressed. Because both sites offered different programs, the questionnaires were a little different at those specific points, and thus could not always be analyzed together (see Appendices J and K).

In analyzing the questionnaire responses from both sites, I paid particular attention the items that were the same on both questionnaires: the various components of acculturative stress and the people that had been most important to these students. Though this study did not include statistical analysis, percentages were calculated to indicate how many participants felt various levels of nervousness prior to their arrival.

Focus Groups

At the end of each focus group, I noted general observations that were not necessarily recorded by my devices. These general observations included students who voiced different opinions, student responsiveness to each other, and the general atmosphere. After the focus groups were complete, the audio files from both my iPhone and Olympus recorder were downloaded into Express Scribe. I listened to each of the audio files and transcribed the contents into separate Word document. After all of the focus groups had been transcribed, I read the transcripts and looked for some various themes for coding.
Coding of the focus groups was both deductive and inductive, with some codes created prior to the focus groups and some codes that emerged during the data analysis process. Because the questions posed in the focus group related directly to the research questions, a set of important codes was deductively anticipated. However, because the purpose of focus groups was to allow for open and unanticipated responses, some codes emerged inductively during the analysis process.

**Interviews**

After analyzing the focus groups from both of my sites, I analyzed the interviews with faculty and campus administrators. Because the interviews were conducted over a period of six weeks, after each interview I downloaded the audio file from both my iPhone and Olympus recorder into Express Scribe. I listened to each of the audio files and transcribed the contents. Similar to the focus groups, I anticipated that some themes would emerge prior to analysis because of the questions I posed. However, because of the semi-structured nature of the interviews, other codes emerged during the analysis process that I had not predicted.

**Documents**

The last method of data analysis was document analysis. I closely examined both institutions’ websites to get a sense of how these colleges market themselves to international students, what programs they promote for current international students, and what kinds of general information they provide for new students. I reviewed programming calendars to see at what intervals these institutions offered certain programs.
Ethical Issues

The most important ethical considerations for this study were maintaining the confidentiality of each of the participants and of both study sites. It is not difficult to determine a liberal arts college given the information regarding state, city, and setting (e.g., there are only a few liberal arts colleges in Los Angeles). In describing the sites, I was intentionally vague in order to protect institutional identity. In order to maintain institutional confidentiality, the schools were referred to by pseudonyms and their region (Midwest and West Coast) rather than giving more specific information such as state and/or city. Institutional confidentiality was preserved even though faculty, staff, and students at both sites asked me to reveal the identity of the other site.

The next ethical consideration was the confidentiality of the student, faculty, and staff participants. I created pseudonyms for each student, faculty member, and administrator who participated in the study. All transcripts and audio files were saved on my computer, which was always password protected and in my possession. No transcripts of the focus group were provided and, although I offered each of the faculty and staff the opportunity to review their individual interview transcripts, none requested such. Additionally, student participation remained confidential so that the identities of the students who participated in the focus groups were not revealed to campus administrators. No actual student names were given to any institutional staff members at any point.

In terms of maintaining confidentiality with the initial questionnaire disseminated to the students, I used Qualtrics and the questionnaire did not collect any identifying information that the student did not elect to provide (i.e., if the student wanted to participate in the focus group, he or she left his or her email address, but was not required to do so at any point). This prevented
the ability to connect questionnaire responses to any particular student. I created separate questionnaires for both sites so that I could separate respondents by institution, but that is the only piece of identifying information to which I had access.

To receive consent for this study, I first completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process through UCLA. I subsequently participated in the IRB process at both study sites. Both sites required completing an official form. The application at each site was supplemented with the protocol for interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires, along with a list of the intended site participants. The IRB application guaranteed confidentiality of both the institutions and the individual participants. Lakeford College approved the study quickly, placing good faith in the UCLA IRB process. Columbus College had a fuller process of approval and in addition to securing its IRB approval, I also had to gain official approval from Vice Presidents of various divisions in order to gain permission to work with students, faculty, and staff.

Reliability and Validity

Yin (2014) articulated the importance of construct validity and “identifying correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (p. 46). This suggests that the researcher needs to carefully select methods that will reflect the study’s phenomenon and not just the researcher’s predictions, observations, or impressions. To mitigate the threat of construct validity, Yin (2014) first suggests defining the study’s topic in terms of precise concepts and relating those concepts to the objective of the research. For this purpose, my study defined acculturation in both psychological and sociocultural terms, and discussed the academic and social consequences of acculturative stress. The research questions focused on academic and social support at liberal arts colleges, and specifically referenced opportunities for meaningful
engagement with American students. The second step Yin (2014) suggests is selecting the most appropriate data collection methods to measure the desired constructs. Document review, questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews were the most appropriate methods for collecting data in order to respond to each research question given that these procedures allowed for a certain degree of flexibility.

One challenge in this study was external validity because of the small sample size used. Although there are many liberal arts colleges throughout the United States, only two were selected. Additionally, although there are thousands of international students studying in American liberal arts colleges, I only spoke with 12. In terms of how congruent the findings are compared to all Chinese international students studying at American liberal arts colleges, I cannot claim that this small sample size is representative of or generalizable for such a large and diverse student population. Although this sample size is small in number, it was rich and abundant in the quality of data collected.

There was also the threat of internal validity. Merriam (2009) defines internal validity as “the question of how research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality. Do the findings capture what is really there?”(p. 213). Maxwell (2013) reiterates that using the word “validity” does not imply that there is such a thing as objective truth.

Because the research questions asked about campus programming that was helpful to Chinese international students, it was important not to assume that these programs actually contributed to the Chinese students’ abilities to manage acculturative stress. That is why the research questions included the terms “people, programs, and elements” rather than just “programs” so that I did not make an incorrect link between a campus program and successful management of acculturative stress.
Reactivity

Another potential threat to the validity of my study was *reactivity*, a phenomenon created by the influence of the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). Participants may have felt as if they need to respond in a certain way, eliciting certain emotions and avoiding others, in order to give a more pleasant or seemingly “correct” response. Participants may have responded with what they perceived to be desired responses, even if such desired responses did not actually exist. There are a few reasons why reactivity can happen. First, the particular population I studied comes from a culture that respects educators and tends not to criticize educational institutions. The Chinese culture is more communal and complacent and not as individual and assertive as American culture. Even if students had complaints, they may not have felt comfortable voicing them. Second, the threat of reactivity could have deepened if students believed their responses would be connected to their academic standing or scholarship consideration in any way. They may have feared that I would share their identity and/or any unfavorable remarks with administrators. Because of the threat of reactivity, in the beginning of each focus group I reiterated the confidential nature of participation and provided students with documentation that verified that their names and identities would not be connected with their participation. I specifically told each student that his or her name and comments would not be shared outside of the meeting room. Although I transcribed the contents of the focus group, I did not release these transcripts to any campus administrators; likewise, they were never requested. Both participation and specific comments remained confidential.

One of the best ways I managed and mitigated the threat of reactivity was by emphasizing that I was not an employee of either institution and that students’ responses would
not be connected with their names. I also emphasized how their candid responses could potentially help higher education leaders better support future Chinese international students.

Summary

Findings from this study may help higher education professionals understand more about the unique experiences with acculturation at small liberal arts colleges, the programs, people, and elements that have supported students through the process, and the conceptual premises that have guided campus programming and adjustments to an increasingly global student population. Leaders within higher education should look to the findings to better understand how to create a well-supported experience for Chinese international students.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This study employed a case study method approach to explore the experiences of Chinese international students attending two liberal arts colleges in the United States. This enabled me to understand Chinese international students’ experiences with the acculturation process, as well as the people, programs, and institutional elements that supported those students. Additionally, conversations with faculty and staff at both research sites allowed me to understand different institutional perspectives about the increased enrollment of Chinese international students, different levels of understanding of the acculturation process for Chinese international students, and perceptions of the Chinese international student experience. As other liberal arts colleges in the United States seek to increase their enrollment of Chinese international students, the ultimate goal of this study was to provide information to help these institutions understand the institutional and student perspective so that such colleges can then best support this growing population of students. This chapter offers insights about various institutional perspectives on the Chinese international students, as well as the Chinese international students’ perceptions of their own experiences.

Findings were identified through analysis of questionnaire responses, interviews, focus groups, and campus websites. I first deductively coded the interviews and focus groups based on anticipated general categories. After careful analysis of focus group and interview transcripts, I also inductively coded the data in order to generate more specific findings. Campus websites, more specifically the international programming office’s websites, were also coded based on predetermined categories.

I interviewed 12 students, 9 faculty members, and 13 institutional staff members who worked in international programming, admission, student life, and campus writing support
centers. This chapter is presented in four sections. The first section considers the institutional perspective and explores the ways in which both sites reacted and adapted to growth in their Chinese international student population. This section also includes as an analysis of how these community members perceive the international student experience and the conceptual premises and philosophy behind supporting these students with academic and social programming. The second section of this chapter addresses the ways in which the Chinese international students experienced acculturative stress. The third section describes the people that have been most helpful for the Chinese international students in their college experience and acculturation. The fourth section describes the academic and social programs that the Chinese students utilize and find to be helpful.

Section I: Reactions, Adaptations, and Perceptions

Reactions to the Increased Presence of Chinese Students

At both sites the faculty and staff were supportive of the increased population of Chinese international students but referenced that the support was not universal. Eleven individuals at both sites articulated the belief that faculty from different departments experienced the increased enrollment of Chinese international students in different ways because the Chinese students tended to gravitate toward certain academic programs such as economics. Elizabeth, a professor of Art History at Lakeford College, articulated this sentiment, saying:

The dramatic influx of international students, and particularly from China, presented greater challenges for certain programs and departments than others. Because of the
clustering in certain majors, there were some logistical challenges insofar as majors like economics or computer science saw incredibly exponential demand for courses.

Faculty and staff were pleased with the work ethic and discipline displayed by most Chinese international students. Frank, a Vice President in student affairs at Columbus College stated:

Ninety or ninety-five percent of our faculty I would estimate are happy with our Chinese international students because of the work ethic, because of the seriousness with academics, because their references in class conversations are not about drinking, and they’re not obsessed with internships. They are not having stereotypical American conversations, and the faculty like the perspective that they bring.

Carroll, a professor of Chinese Studies at Lakeford College similarly believed that the increased enrollment of Chinese international students was well received on campus. When asked how community members reacted to the growing population, she said, “Actually, people were very positive about it. They think it’s great and all the Chinese students work so hard. They all come in with very high standards, they push themselves.”

As Frank mentioned, Chinese international students bring with them a perspective that American students do not have because of their different background. Faculty similarly appreciate the different cultural perspective that Chinese students bring. Particularly in courses that explore global themes, Chinese international students are able to draw from their personal experiences living in China, reading the newspaper, watching the news, and listening to their families’ nighttime conversations about global and domestic politics and other societal issues. Recognizing the influence of cultural perspective in media, faculty articulated that Chinese
international students offer a perspective that is nearly impossible for domestic citizens to have unless they have also lived abroad. Charlotte, a faculty member in the International Relations program at Columbus College said, “I teach foreign policy, international relations, war, and security, and China comes up again and again and again. So to have a kid in my class who can say, ‘Oh, that’s funny that you’re so concerned about that because that’s not something that even shows up on our radar,’ is important.”

Beyond the classroom experience, many faculty and staff believe that interaction with students from other cultural backgrounds, particularly China, better prepares students for professional futures in an increasingly interconnected world. Ted, an international admission officer, stated:

Once you’re done here and you’re working for Baine or Deloitte, you’re going to be working across time zones. You’re going to be working with people in your team from different cultures, and you have to have that intercultural understanding. Having a large Chinese international student population on our campus is a part of that learning process, both for the Chinese students and for our domestic students.

Staff also highlighted the financial benefits to enrolling Chinese international students. This was not a dominant theme and was rarely mentioned by faculty, but the admission professionals explained the financial incentives to increasing the enrollment of full-pay Chinese students. The financial situation was slightly different at each institution, but one similarity between the two was that neither offered much financial aid to international students. At Columbus College, soon after the financial crisis of 2008, the financial aid budget ran significantly over the targeted budget. This happened just two years after the decision to adopt a “need-blind” policy, meaning that applicants would be considered for admission regardless of
the extent of their financial need. Admitted students would then have all of their demonstrated financial aid met with institutional grants only. Rather than retract this policy for all students, administrators at Columbus determined that they could generate the needed tuition revenue by increasing the enrollment of the full-pay international students. Katherine mentioned, “Everyone could be happy about having international students on campus, even if they were full-pay, because they were so qualified. Suddenly the Chinese happened to be the highest in quantity and very high in quality, and most of them did not need money.” The increase in full-pay Chinese students thus allowed Columbus College to maintain their need-blind policy, though the policy only applies to domestic students.

The only time when the financial composition of the Chinese international students was mentioned by faculty was at Lakeford where the loss of a grant ten years prior changed its ability to offer financial aid to international students. The previous grant provided funding for Lakeford to offer cross-cultural curriculum and to financially support international students from Asian countries. Because of this, earlier populations of Chinese students at Lakeford were often scholarship recipients. However, after the loss of the grant and the ability to offer such scholarships, Lakeford’s Chinese population changed from one that frequently received aid to one that rarely received aid. As mentioned, this was a comment made in passing and only by staff that had been employed by Lakeford for at least ten years. It was not a dominant theme at Lakeford.

Despite the fact that each of the 22 faculty and staff members I interviewed supported the increasing population of Chinese international students, 14 of them mentioned that campus reactions were varied and included some negative responses. While some individuals attributed this to frustration with perceived struggles with writing and classroom presence, others attributed
it to a lack of familiarity with Chinese students. Each faculty and staff member indicated that the individuals who were wary of increasing enrollment of Chinese international students were in the minority. Sarah, the Coordinator for Second Language Writing Support at Lakeford College, believed:

There has been a huge range in reaction. Some faculty are very understanding and go out of their way to welcome students and invite their participation. And some are almost nervous about having Chinese international students in their group and really don’t know how to approach it and perhaps occasionally seem to underestimate the ability of the student who participates.

Some faculty believed that the resistance to the increased enrollment of Chinese students went beyond a lack of familiarity and cited a lack of patience and flexibility in long-time faculty who struggled to adjust to a different kind of student. Amy, a professor of French Language & Literature at Lakeford College believed that it is challenging for some faculty who have been teaching for many years to adjust to students who enter the College with different cultural and academic backgrounds. Some resistance, according to Amy, comes from a faculty sentiment that:

[They] used to be able to do this; [they] used to not have to explain this. It’s always in the past, feeling this never used to be this way… That can scare people in terms of questions like, will they need to change their curriculum? Will they have to change their ways? [They’re] getting tired and closer to retirement.

Although 14 individuals interviewed indicated that the faculty who were resistant to the increasing enrollment of Chinese international students were isolated and in the minority, one faculty member offered a critical perspective of the community response. Amanda, a chemistry professor at Columbus College, stated “[Columbus College] is not a diversity-affirming place by
any stretch of the imagination… it’s a place where you are going to suffer slings and arrows because of who you are.” Later in the interview she characterized faculty members as “moderately irritable” and impatient when it came to Chinese international students’ writing skills. Amanda was the only faculty member at either site to offer such a perspective; the other participants articulated beliefs that the resistance to increased enrollment of Chinese students was isolated to a few faculty members. Amanda believed this was a more systemic issue, saying, “The prep school tradition runs very deep. The centrality of specifically British tradition and thought runs very deep.”

Although the faculty and staff members interviewed referenced varying degrees of and reasons for resistance to the increased Chinese international student population at both sites, many also cited growth in cultural sensitivity among other faculty and staff. Thirteen faculty and staff members believed that over the past few years other community members who may have initially struggled to adapt to the influx of students from China had made an effort to adjust and be more culturally understanding. Erica, the Director for the Academic Support Center at Lakeford College, articulated a shift in faculty response to and support of Chinese international students. When she first arrived at Lakeford, she was often shocked by the insensitive comments of faculty. However, over several years, as the faculty has become increasingly diverse, she’s seen faculty be more open and supportive of Chinese international students: “They even use phrases like ‘accented English writing,’ you know? They won’t get so wrapped around the axle because someone has left off an article. I think there is more of an understanding.” So although some faculty may have struggled initially when the enrollment of Chinese international students increased, many became more sensitive and understanding.
Adaptations and Academic Programming

Both institutions recognized the need to make certain adjustments in order to adapt to this new population. Katherine, an admission professional from Columbus College, explained the sentiment that drove the College to be thoughtfully responsive to the changing needs of the student population. The previous Dean of the Faculty believed that the faculty and administration owed it to the Chinese students to help them to be successful saying, “They were not going to arrive all perfectly wrapped up and ready to go, and we needed to support them however we could.”

One major adjustment shared by both sites was the hiring of a full-time staff member to help students who are second language writers. Although these services were not offered to the Chinese international students exclusively, the Chinese students tended to be the ones utilizing the services most. At both institutions this was once a part-time position because the need to comprehensively support second language writers was not present. All students, including international students, were served by general writing centers, with an additional part-time staff member trained to support students who were second language learners. However, when the enrollment of Chinese students increased, it became clear that the needs of these students were different. Not only did Chinese students need thorough proofreading and monitoring of syntax, they needed a different kind of support that individuals not trained in supporting second language learners were unable to provide.

As the population of international students, and particularly Chinese students, started to increase, both institutions realized that the demand was beginning to outgrow the supply. Because both sites are liberal arts colleges where writing is an integral component of the
academic experience, and because one of the most common concerns expressed by faculty is the lack of writing skills of international students, making this position a full-time appointment signaled an important change and a recognition of the needs of this group. Ted from Columbus College said that the administration “finally saw the need for someone, and finally got funding for it.”

The acknowledgement of the need for a full-time second language writing specialist was important because it signaled the understanding that these students, though very bright, needed fundamental language support, and that it didn’t signal a lack of intelligence. Both institutions were very selective in the admission process and required proof of English language fluency. For both sites this proof could be established with a high TOEFL score or enrollment in a high school where the primary language of instruction is English. Despite elevated levels of selectivity in the admission process, the Chinese students were still struggling. Erica from Lakeford College noted that although students were coming to campus academically well-prepared, they came from a different tradition of writing:

For some students from China, even though they are very fluent in English verbally, some have little experience writing in English, you know, expressing themselves and then learning the different rhetorical styles. You know, thesis driven essays… Even if you know how to write a perfect sentence, you might not know how to write an argumentative essay.

Staff members who work at the writing centers at both sites agree that awareness of the existence of writing services geared toward international students is important, therefore both centers were very proactive and promoted their services to all international students early in their college career. Writing specialists at both sites reached out to all international students during
their orientation week, before any classes begin. Susan, the Second Language Writing Specialist at Columbus College, emails all new international students at the beginning of the academic year informing them of her services. Her initial emails invite students to schedule individual meetings with her so that the burden is not on them to request a meeting and make any kind of admission that they are struggling; they are simply responding to her open invitation. The secret to her success is to convince students to come into her office for that first meeting. If the students come in for a private academic consultation, not just a general workshop, they are almost always hooked after their first meeting. She says, “Once they came in with something they were writing… they continue to make appointments with me.”

Similarly, Sarah from Lakeford College speaks to new international students during their orientation, which occurs a few days before the orientation for the entire freshman class. Sarah offers a quick seminar to the new international students about American traditions of writing and academic integrity. Although both Sarah and Susan agree that providing Chinese students with too much new information during their orientation can be overwhelming, both feel it is important to “get in front of them early” in order to make sure the Chinese students are aware of these critical support services.

Faculty and staff are also careful to portray the second language writing specialist as a supportive individual and not as a form of punishment or shaming. During the brief workshop during international student orientation at Lakeford College, Sarah promoted her services “as a place that is not remedial and not just a place for struggle, but a place for everybody. We really work hard at sending the message that you don’t have to have a problem to come here.” Faculty acknowledge that it is a difficult and delicate balance between encouraging a Chinese international student to see the second language writing specialist while still affirming their
efforts. Andrea from Columbus College says that while she acknowledges the good effort of her Chinese students, she’ll suggest that students seek Susan’s support. “I’ll say something like, ‘I think it’s a really good idea if you go to see Susan…she’s worked with excellent students.’ I just kind of sell it as, ‘everybody goes there’. They get it, they go to her, and they’re hooked.”

Columbus College soon discovered another challenge that the Chinese students face. The mission statement of Columbus College articulates a goal to educate its students “to live thoughtful lives,” particularly in leadership in business and government. This emphasis on government is found not only in the institution’s mission statement, but in academic requirements as well: all students are required to take a course in American government. For the students who are U.S. citizens, although the course is intended to be challenging and thought provoking, the subject matter has been covered in their high school curriculum, is discussed in the news, and is possibly a dinner time discussion at home. Basically, much of the material is at least somewhat familiar to American students; such is not true for Chinese (or any international) students.

Chinese students are not required to take courses in American politics (or American history). These students’ parents may discuss American politics in passing, but it’s fair to assume that media and dinnertime discussions, if they include a discussion of politics, would focus on politics of China. While it seems like an item that could be easily overlooked, Katherine from Columbus College suggested that it was a deeper institutional issue, saying, “There are assumptions about what students are coming in with, and their understanding of U.S. government and history is just one of those things.” To accommodate for this challenge faced by Chinese students, faculty at Columbus created an American government “crash course.”
Charlotte from Columbus College explained that though this was a reactive measure, it was a necessary and very helpful one that students took full advantage of:

Our Chinese international students were really struggling in the basic American government course because they didn't have the kind of intuitive background at this point that American students had. They didn't have the natural familiarity because they hadn’t been exposed so routinely to U.S. history and U.S. politics.

Though this support course was never required of any students, Charlotte remembers that the classrooms were overflowing with Chinese and other international students eager to learn more about the American government and to ask questions.

It’s very understandable that international students would require a support mechanism to be able to survive the introductory American government course. Although the initial description of the course from the online catalog seems benign, stating that the course “introduces students to the scholarly study of government with special reference to the political principles and constitutional structure of the American system,” one look at the course syllabus, also available on Columbus’s website, paints a slightly more intimidating picture. The syllabus says that if students object to the specified approach articulated in the syllabus, they should not take this, nor any other course taught by this faculty member. The online syllabus also threatens that if you struggle think quickly and critically and participate thoughtfully in class on a regular basis, “your grade will suffer.”

**Social Programming**

The two research sites had different programming philosophies and approaches to planned programming. Interestingly, even though the two institutions had different structures
within their international programming offices, there were some philosophical similarities, specifically in how those offices tried to encourage cross-cultural interaction between Chinese and American students.

Lakeford’s campus integrates international and multicultural students with the International and Intercultural Office (IIO). This office serves many purposes and plans many different kinds of programs for different student populations. While it plans events like International Orientation and coordinates activities like the Host Family Program that are relevant only for international students, it also coordinates events that are of particular interest to Lakeford’s multicultural students, like a Martin Luther King, Jr. dinner. The office’s website states that its mission is to foster a climate of respect on campus and that the office’s role is to “enhance the overall quality of life for students of color and international students by focusing on retention, programming, leadership development, training, and education.”

Diana believes that Lakeford’s IIO is proactive, saying that even when students don’t ask for help, the office reaches out to them: “Even when you’re running from us, and we’ve had students running from us, you’re going to be found and you’re going to be supported… It’s not a sink or swim kind of place.” The IIO’s ability to be proactive and notice the students who are struggling is largely enabled by the small size of Lakeford’s enrollment, which is fewer than 2,000 students. Diana and Maria acknowledge that, even with a small enrollment, they do not know every student’s name, especially because their office serves both international and multicultural students. However, they believe they are able to create more relationships with students because of that integrated nature of their office. Maria explained that, while some campuses may have one person in charge of visa and immigration issues, another person involved in programming, and then an entirely separate office devoted to multicultural students,
each person who works in IIO can support students in those different arenas. Because of this, Maria feels that students will come to talk to her about more than just their visa status, and likewise international students will talk to other staff members in IIO when they have questions.

Lakeford’s IIO was not always a combined operation, and international and multicultural students formerly had their own respective offices. Because of a change in funding several years prior, the offices integrated. Administration is positive about this change. Diana said:

International students didn’t feel like they were integrated into the community, so this is one way of connecting international students with the broader community… They were seen as their own little island and others perceived them as being on their own island and wondered why they hadn’t integrated. I had heard from international students that it was harder to connect with American students. So having a combined office provided that connection in a different way than just being thrown into a community and having to form your own relationships.

So while the integration of international and culturally-diverse American students was initially the result of funding, it has continued because the directors of that office believe that integrated programming benefits both student populations by providing opportunities for interaction. Looking at the programming calendar on IIO’s website lists a diverse array of programs. These programs range from film screenings, to a Martin Luther King Jr. celebration, to informal “Chili Nights” where students come in for chili and conversation. Diana sees this integration as beneficial to the entire community, saying, “Because our programming isn’t limited by a sense of citizenship, it is more integrated along lines of thinking about cultural heritages.”

Maria and Diana also highlighted the Peer Leader Program within IIO, a program that was originally created to support new students of color on campus but has since been expanded
to also support new international students. Peer leaders are sophomores, juniors, and seniors who have succeeded academically and socially, and who want to support incoming international students and students of color. Diana explained that the summer prior to arrival, peer leaders contact the students and introduce themselves and the Peer Leader Program. This offers the international students to have the benefit of already knowing at least one student when they arrive on campus. Maria believes that this is an effective program because it is peer-led and students may feel more comfortable speaking to their peers:

This is very helpful because the peer leaders get different questions than me [sic]. They tend to be more personal or they’ll ask about social or dating life here. When the new students arrive they are excited to meet their peer leader that they have already connected with, and I think it breaks the ice initially on their arrival, versus everything being foreign and not knowing anyone.

Columbus College does not integrate its international and multicultural programming, with those student populations served by different offices. However, Marcus, the Director of International Student Life (ISL), believes that the way his office encourages cross-cultural engagement with American students is through inclusive programming. Marcus admits that his office does not plan events with the express intent of helping Chinese students to engage with American students, but he has confidence in his model. He referenced high attendance at international-themed events such as the Chinese Lunar New Year and the annual International Festival. When recalling the Lunar New Year celebration that had occurred just one week earlier, he said, “There were plenty of non-Chinese students there last weekend in the auditorium. It’s open to everybody. There were 500 people in the auditorium!”
While the staff in Lakeford’s IIO described their operation as “very high programming” and “proactive,” Marcus takes a slightly different approach. While he does not believe that his operation has a sink-or-swim attitude, he does not necessarily characterize it as proactive either. Rather, he described it as a “challenge and support” model wherein his office enables and encourages students to support themselves. He reminds international students of the resources within ISL, but allows the students to take responsibility for their own experiences. Earlier in his career at Columbus, Marcus admits that he had a different approach. He used to get together with his staff to think of programs that would be fun and interesting for the international students. However, more recently, he changed his approach, saying:

I started to take more of an approach of engaging students to get them to utilize our office so that they can develop programs for themselves. So we try to support individual students and groups of students getting together and organizing things. We’ll still organize some of our own programs, like weekend trips or the International Festival, but that's been a big change in our approach to supporting international students. Trying to get them to support themselves.

This has been a successful model for Columbus and Marcus says that the Chinese students in particular have successfully taken initiative to plan their own events.

**Institutional Perceptions of Chinese Students’ Acculturation**

Faculty and administrators have limited perceptions of the acculturation experience for the Chinese international students. Even though many of the faculty and staff involved with this study had relationships with the Chinese students outside of the classroom, those relationships still tended to be mostly academic. Because of this, most faculty and staff members did not seem
to understand the students’ struggles with acculturation that occurred outside of the classroom. Charlotte’s thoughts capture what many other faculty also said: “I don’t know what happens outside of class. I come to campus, I teach, I do my work, and then I go home. I don’t see the students on campus. I just focus on work when I am here.”

When asked what they thought the Chinese international students struggled with, in general, when they arrived on campus, the most common responses were language and the culture of learning. The faculty and staff members believed that language was the biggest struggle for Chinese international students. Each of the 22 faculty and staff interviewed mentioned Chinese students’ struggling with the English language. However, these individuals were also careful to note that the struggle with English fluency was not universal and not always acute. Sarah commented, “There’s a big range in the extent to which they have been immersed in English before they started at Lakeford. Some of them have not had a lot of exposure to English before and so they will definitely struggle with both speaking and writing.” Faculty often commented that while students had basic fluency in the English language, when they were expected to complete high volumes of reading each week and follow discussions with American peers and professors who spoke at a rapid pace, it could be difficult to keep up. Elizabeth suggested that sometimes the fluency was actually strong, but others who have not been exposed to Chinese accents may assume a lower level of fluency. Elizabeth commented:

The Chinese students’ knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and all that is actually quite good. But they have varying degrees of pronunciation, accuracy, and skill. One of my students knows all the content, but her enunciation is not great so although I can understand her, my colleagues sometimes struggles with what she’s saying.
The faculty I interviewed articulated a sense that although the Chinese students often struggled with English both in writing and in speaking, the students progressed with guidance and support; these professors understood that struggles with the English language did not indicate a lack of intelligence. Sarah, the Second Language Writing Specialist at Lakeford College, believes that a lot of growth happens early for students, saying, “A lot of progress happens in the first term, it is just such a steep learning curve. But I think the turning point is at the end of the first year because by that time they have taken nine classes, so they have really had the chance to explore.”

Many faculty members also understood that the Chinese students’ struggle with writing often came from a fundamental conflict between the writing styles in China and the United States. Faculty commented that sometimes students initially entered college using flowery language and circuitous logic because that was how they learned to write in China. Susan said, “I have learned that you have to say to them that it’s just different here, and you really have to lay it out. You have to tell your teacher in your thesis what you are going to be writing about. But that is very hard for some of them to grasp.”

Although faculty admitted that English language fluency was a challenge for Chinese students, the individuals interviewed also referenced that the struggles were not necessarily unique to the Chinese students. Eight of the study participants mentioned that American students also struggled with using proper grammar and syntax in writing. When commenting on the English fluency of her Chinese students, Elizabeth said, “It’s not that the Chinese students have worse language skills than the other students. In my experience that is not the case. In fact, they often have excellent skills. In some cases, they have no problems and are even better than some of the native English speakers.”
Closely related to the perceived struggle with English, 14 faculty and staff members commented that they believe the Chinese students struggle with the American culture of learning which is different than the academic model in China. Marcus, the ISL Director at Columbus College, explained this challenge for students:

The educational culture here, the Western versus Eastern culture of what it means to be in an education setting, is different. The notion of students as a partner in the educational experience as opposed to students as recipients of knowledge. The student as someone that is expected to engage with their faculty and with their peers. That critical engagement, that’s very big, particularly in a liberal arts setting.

Faculty and staff commented that the different educational model can be challenging for students as they adjust to a new style of learning and a new language at the same time. Faculty commented that the Chinese students sometimes struggle to participate, not out of a lack of intelligence or comprehension, but sometimes as a result of insecurity with language or aggressive American peers who are quick to raise their hands. This concept was articulated by Diana, who said that “learning a foreign language is very different than leaning in a foreign language.”

Sometimes faculty commented that they needed to pay particular attention to their Chinese students in order to draw them out. These faculty members acknowledged that the students were bright but indicated that the Chinese students sometimes needed encouragement to engage more actively. Andrea said:

I work really hard to draw them out a bit. I think some of them tend to be really quiet, in part because they have this really unfounded assumption about themselves that they are not the smartest kids in the room. And they feel like they cannot contribute immediately.
So I just try to give them pep talks and tell them that they will find a way to contribute, and maybe it will be making a comment in class out loud, or maybe it will be during a conversation in office hours.

Faculty were also able to highlight Chinese students who excelled in that academic setting. They described students who were unafraid to participate in class, eager to debate, able to display personality, and even able to display a sense of humor. When asked to describe some of the Chinese students in her classes, Charlotte said:

When I think about Chinese students, I automatically think of three different women who have been very prominent in my classes. Very confident, very capable, actually very good writers and forward thinking. They were very interesting and good participants in class. I know some of my colleagues have sometimes complained because some of the Chinese students don’t participate, because they don’t have the same background as Americans. But I have not found that to be the case.

Roger had similarly positive experiences with the Chinese students in his class. Similar to Charlotte, the Chinese students who enrolled in Roger’s classes tended to be enthusiastic and assertive, willing to participate and actively engage in class. Some of the students were even able to add humor. He recalled:

One the students, her name is Manjun, found that there were three other young women in the class named Caitlin, so on the second day of class, she flipped over her name plate, because I insist that they use nameplates, and it said “Caitlin.” She said she’s temporarily adopting the name Caitlin, just to plague me.
As mentioned earlier, language and academic culture were the struggles most frequently observed by faculty and administrators because their interactions with the Chinese students tended to be a bit more limited. Individuals who worked more closely and socially with these students were able to speak about other challenges that the Chinese students tend to face. Six faculty and staff members were able to discuss the challenges associated with homesickness. Katherine said:

They come here and everyone is so happy and loves the place, but suddenly they are having to go through so many other transitions than everyone else. How to open a bank account, figuring out what a Wal-Mart is. The food… I always say that when we admit students, think about it physically for a moment. The further they are physically from Columbus, for every five hundred miles or so, that’s one other hoop that they have to jump through. And now you’ve gone across the ocean, in a place that is wildly different.

Another part of homesickness that these faculty and staff spoke about was the challenge of time difference. Not only were students living in a different culture and language, but they were also living in a very different time zone. This means that it could be challenging to stay in contact with family. Maria described the situation well:

If you’re a domestic student, you can pretty much pick up the phone and call home. If you’re calling to China you have to make sure you look at the time difference and either stay up really late or get up super early to reach your family at a decent time.

A few faculty and staff members also commented on one other item that made the transition difficult for the Chinese students: food. Although the Chinese students very infrequently referenced food as being an item that they missed, the faculty and staff
lightheartedly referenced this challenge. Seven faculty and staff members commented that they thought Chinese students struggled with the absence of Chinese food. Elizabeth joked:

There are some lived realities of being in the middle of the United States. The food, it’s a problem. It sounds funny, but if you know anything about China and Chinese culture, it’s really darn important. The food here is terrible, I mean the cafeteria here is okay, but we’re in this small town and it’s not a culinary Mecca. There’s this Chinese buffet in town, and it’s awful.

Carroll mentioned that she would even invite Chinese students to her home for homemade Chinese dumplings because the students would tell her how much they missed the food. When asked what she thought the Chinese students struggle with outside of academics, Carroll responded:

Food, of course. Number one is their food. I totally understand it, because think about it. You grow up eating Chinese meals with all the stuff. The first time they come here, they get excited and eat hamburgers, cheese, and French fries. So most people come here and eat everything and gain weight. Suddenly they realize at the end of their first term that they miss Chinese food. They come to me constantly saying that if I open up a restaurant, they will come because they love the homemade food.

Section II: Chinese Students’ Experiences with Acculturation

This section will highlight what was learned from questionnaire responses and conversations with the Chinese students regarding their nervousness prior to arrival, what challenged them when they arrived on campus, the people that have been most important to
them, and the social and academic programs that they believe have been most effective and supportive.

**Participant Background**

A total of 12 Chinese international students were interviewed across both campus sites. Two focus groups were held at Lakeford College where I spoke with a total of 7 students, and I conducted one focus group and two Skype interviews with students from Columbus College, which enabled me to meet 5 students. I conducted two Skype interviews because 2 of the students who indicated that they were interested in participating in my study when they completed initial questionnaire decided to spend their spring semester off-campus. When I e-mailed the students from Columbus College to schedule the focus group, those 2 students insisted that even though they were unable to participate in the on-campus focus group, they still wanted to contribute to the study.

A total of 31 students completed the online questionnaire. Twenty-four of these students attended Lakeford College, and 7 were from Columbus College. Of those who completed the questionnaire, 15 students (48.4%) were sophomores, 6 students (19.4%) were juniors, and 10 students (32.2%) were seniors. Fourteen of the respondents (45.2%) were male and 17 (54.8%) were female. Twenty-five (80.7%) listed Mandarin Chinese as their first language, 4 (12.9%) listed English as their first language, 1 student (3.2%) listed Cantonese Chinese as his/her first language, and 1 student (3.2%) listed French as his/her first language. All students had entered their respective institutions as freshmen.

Most students spent the majority of their high school careers studying in China. Twenty-two students (71%) stated that they spent the majority of their high school years in China. Three
students (9.7%) specified that most of their time was spent attending high school in the United States, 2 students (6.5%) spent most of their high school career in Singapore, 2 students (6.5%) spend their high school years in Hong Kong, 1 student (3.2%) attended the majority of high school in Canada, and 1 student (3.2%) spent his/her high school years in France. Although most students thus spent the majority of their time studying in China, some students were exposed to education outside of China through exchange programs. Seven of the respondents (22.6%) participated in an exchange program in high school. Five students studied as exchange students in the U.S., 1 in Singapore, and 1 in the United Kingdom.

While the majority of the questionnaire respondents and participants in the focus group and interviews did attend high school in mainland China it’s important to note that 9 questionnaire respondents attended high school outside of China. This means that 29% of questionnaire respondents were educated outside of the Chinese system. These students spent a prolonged period of time outside of China, indicating different cultural, academic, and linguistic exposure. This exposure to cultures and ideologies outside of China suggests that the students were less likely to experience struggles with acculturation, because many were already exposed to Western cultures. This is particularly true because many of the students were educated in countries where English is the primary language of instruction. As will be discussed below, sometimes English language fluency and the related consequences of the linguistic transition can lead to at least mild acculturative stress.

**Nervousness Prior to Arrival**

Data from the questionnaires suggests that, for the most part, Chinese students felt low levels of nervousness about certain components of the acculturation process. The questionnaire
utilized a four-point Likert scale that ranged from “Extremely Nervous” to “Not Nervous.” Very few respondents noted feeling “Extremely Nervous” about any of the six components of acculturative stress included in the questionnaire. The level of nervousness most frequently selected by respondents was “Not Nervous,” which was selected a total of 77 times (43.5%). A close second was “Slightly Nervous” which was selected a total of 69 times (39%). “Extremely Nervous” was the least selected level of nervousness, selected only 11 times (6.2%), with “Very Nervous” selected 29 times (11.3%).

Of the 31 students who completed the questionnaire, 2 were extremely nervous about the language barrier, 2 were extremely nervous about cultural differences, 2 were extremely nervous about social concerns, 1 student was extremely nervous with academic concerns, 2 students were extremely nervous about discrimination, and 2 students noted that they were extremely nervous about mental/emotional health. Only 7 students (22.6%) expressed that they were extremely or very nervous about the potential language barrier. Twenty-four students (77.4%) stated that they were either only slightly nervous or not nervous about the potential language barrier. Similar trends hold true for the level of nervousness in regard to cultural difference, with only 4 students (12.9%) expressing that they were extremely or very nervous about cultural differences, while 27 students (87.1%) stating that they were either only slightly nervous or not nervous about cultural differences. More students expressed more nervousness in regard to social concerns, with 12 students (38.7%) stating that they were extremely or very concerned about social challenges. Eight students (25.8%) were extremely or very nervous about academics, while 23 students (74.2%) stated that they were only slightly or not nervous about academic issues.

Few students expressed high levels of concern regarding potential discrimination, with only 4 students (12.9%) expressing that they were extremely or very concerned with
discrimination. Mental and emotional health did not seem to be a major concern for these Chinese students either as only 5 of them (16.1%) expressed that they were extremely or very concerned about those issues. Twenty-six students (83.9%) expressed slight or no nervousness in regards to emotional health. Discrimination and mental/emotional health were the two components of acculturative stress where the Chinese students were most likely to indicate that they were not nervous at all, with 17 students (54.8%) stating that they were not nervous about discrimination, and 18 students (58.1%) stating that they were not nervous about mental/emotional health issues.

Table 4.1 Chinese Student Nervousness Prior to Arrival

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component of Acculturative Stress</th>
<th>Extremely Nervous</th>
<th>Very Nervous</th>
<th>Slightly Nervous</th>
<th>Not Nervous</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Differences</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Concerns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Concerns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental/Emotional Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the student responses to the questionnaire, it appeared that most students were most nervous about social concerns, and less concerned about academic issues, language, culture, discrimination, and mental/emotional health. Although some students did indicate elevated levels of nervousness about each of the above-mentioned components of acculturative stress, the vast majority indicated lower levels of nervousness. This concept was echoed in the conversations I had with students. Nine students said that they did not feel nervousness prior to their arrival at their respective institutions. Mingxia, a senior at Lakeford College, felt carefree, saying:
I wasn’t worried about coming here because I knew how everyone is really nice. Lakeford is famous for its community. I wasn’t worried about academics at all because I felt like academics and language… you will just get used to it. It’s the same problem everywhere. Even if I went to college in China I might have problems.

While some students, like Mingxia, were able to take a carefree approach, other students attributed their lack of nervousness to high school experiences that helped them adjust. While careful to clarify that it was not necessarily due to abundant confidence, prior experiences helped students to emotionally prepare for the potential challenges that awaited them in college. Weiling stated, “I don’t think it’s about confidence. I was excited about new things. In the past, I had enough experiences, like switching to a new environment and making friends with new people. I didn’t see coming to the U.S. as any different than those experiences.”

Although Lilei attended high school in Beijing, she was not in a traditional Chinese national high school; rather, she opted for an academic program based on the British Cambridge A-Levels. She felt that this program prepared her well for studying in the United States, and most of her peers were applying either to British or American universities. Because the language of instruction was English, she had some immersive experiences so she felt more confident when she initially enrolled at Lakeford.

Similarly, some students felt that their prior experiences in environments outside of China had helped them to prepare for their transition into American higher education. Qiaohui, a senior at Lakeford College, spent her high school career in Singapore where she was exposed to different people from different cultural backgrounds. She refers to Singapore as a “hot pot where you are in Asian culture, but also exposed to a lot of western ideologies,” so she was not very concerned with culture shock when she came to Lakeford for college. Cheung had spent two
summers in the U.S. participating in academic programs at universities on the East Coast. He credits those experiences with his lack of nervousness because his first weeks at Lakeford were not also his first weeks in the United States.

Although most of the students interviewed articulated a lack of nervousness prior to their arrival on their respective campuses, a couple of students did articulate concerns about language and discrimination. Boqin stated, “Before I came to Lakeford, my biggest concern was probably language. For people here, the medium of instruction in high school was English, but for me, because I went to high school in China, everything was 100% in Chinese, except for my English class.” Boqin noted that he was concerned with language because it could have broader implications and consequences. It could lead to social problems if he was unable to interact with American peers, or he might not be able to understand professors who taught his courses. Xiang was the only student to express a concern about discrimination, but his concern was informed by his experiences attending a U.S. high school. Candidly describing his experience, Xiang said, “I went to high school [with people] who would abuse me verbally, physically, overtly, covertly, whatever it is. I was worried about that.”

Hanqing expressed a similar nervousness about language. Similar to Boqin, Hanqing attended high school in China where the majority of his instruction was in Chinese. He stated, “I learned English in China, and I didn’t know whether my English was up to being in the United States and trying to understand classes and lectures. Can I get along with American people and American students and professors?” Hanqing and Boqin’s responses suggest an awareness of the challenges of learning a foreign language in a different culture without the immersive experience.
As a whole, although a few students indicated nervousness about a potential language barrier because they had limited experiences in an English-speaking environment, most students entered with very low levels of nervousness prior to arrival. However, most students also found that once they arrived on campus, things did not proceed quite as smoothly as they had anticipated.

Challenges

Although all students expressed that they felt a lot of excitement prior to their arrival on campus and that they did not feel high levels of nervousness, once they arrived on campus most realized that the experience was more challenging than anticipated. The realization of how distant, culturally and geographically, their campuses were from their families in China, was foreboding as, for most students, this was the first occasion where they were spending a significant amount of time in a completely different time zone than their parents. Qiaohui noted that although she didn’t really worry about language, being in a completely different time zone than her parents was a challenging experience: “I knew it would be much harder to talk with them. The distance created barriers in communication.” Renshu similarly felt that the physical distance was a bit intimidating, noting that any nervousness he felt during his first year was amplified by the sense that he was adjusting to a country and campus that was far from his home and his family. He stated, “There was definitely an element of nervousness, but that's mostly due to starting college in a place that is not near my home. And I think that made the most difference. It would have been the same anywhere else if I wasn’t near my home.” Lixue articulated a similar sentiment regarding the physical distance, noting that the United States is very far from her home in China; however, she also noted that the distance was felt not only physically, but
culturally as well because she “…didn't know much about American society. I had watched American television shows, sitcoms, and movies, so I knew something about it, but I didn’t know what actually living here would be like. “

Homesickness

The item that was challenging for most of the students was homesickness. Ten out of 12 of the Chinese students articulated a struggle with homesickness, yet there were different times and ways in which students experienced it. Eight of the students experienced homesickness during their first year in college. There were various items that exacerbated the feeling of homesickness. Some students struggled with the cultural transition. Others found they missed their previously urban settings and cultural food. Many students missed their families. Lilei experienced homesickness early in her college career. Her adjustment to Lakeford’s setting was challenging: “I missed my family, the food, and city life. Most of the weekends were filled with homework, and I wasn’t used to that.” Boqin similarly experienced homesickness early in his college career, saying “I felt very homesick when I first arrived here and I had to call my parents often due to the language questions and culture shock.”

For some students, they had to adjust to sharing a space in the residence halls with a student. Renshu noted that at home, “I could go anywhere, find different places to study. I could go to different places. Now I am confined to my dorm.” Other students noted that, whereas at home their families helped them with weekly chores such as doing laundry, on campus they were responsible for their own weekly chores. Jiahui noted “you have to learn important things like how to open a bank account, file taxes, how to use a laundry machine, and how to use the dining hall.” The feeling of homesickness was exacerbated by a feeling that, though students previously
enjoyed the abundant support of their families at home, they had to learn to navigate many seemingly basic tasks on their own.

Although most of the students were able to manage the challenges of homesickness, it proved to be an overwhelming experience for Jiahui. Part of the shock to her was that she previously considered herself to be a very independent student, and she did not expect to feel any kind of homesickness. She mentioned feeling no nervousness prior to arrival; rather, she felt only excitement when she thought about coming to Columbus College. However, during her first year she discovered that her grandmother was very sick. She said, “This was a really critical period for me to reconsider a lot of things and I think it kind of shaped my values as well. I went home and decided to take a year off. Thinking of how many years I can still spend with my parents, that scares me a little.” Jiahui took a leave of absence during her first year at Columbus College so that she could be closer to family. Even after she returned to campus one year later, she still admits that she feels strong sentiments of homesickness, saying, “I find it harder and harder to leave home and come here just because I feel like there is nowhere better than home. Even though Beijing has pollution and bad weather, whenever you go back you see your family and you get your favorite food and you feel like a princess. It just feels so nice.”

Students suggested that homesickness could be aggravated by a variety of circumstances. Predictably, for some students, the feeling of homesickness worsened when they experienced personal hardship. Renshu noted, “Homesickness is particularly bad when I’m having academic difficulties or just difficulties in general.” Similarly, Hanqing said:

Homesickness usually happens when I am not doing really well. For instance, when I first came to the U.S., I spent my first night with the host family. That was the first time I truly felt homesick because I was unsure about my future. The second time was when I
was on a wilderness trip. At first I had some language barrier issues and I could not communicate well with the Americans. Sitting in front of a large group of people without saying anything made me feel extremely lonely and I just wanted to go home.

When students are far from home, surrounded by students from a different cultural and linguistic background and separated from their families, their personal struggles can be intensified because of sentiments of isolation.

Feelings of homesickness were also intensified by a sense that families home in China were continuing on with their lives, even though the students were studying in the United States. The students all articulated feeling very family-oriented and being closely connected with their families. It was difficult for them to grasp the concept that life could move on, even if they were not present. This was especially true for Renshu. I spoke with him one week prior to the Lunar New Year, which is a huge celebration for Chinese people worldwide. He said this was previously a very important holiday for him and, even though he was studying in the U.S., his family continued to celebrate the holiday, as they always had: “They are leaving now on their Chinese New Year trip, and I’m not there. They’re still continuing on with their lives and I’m here.” Similarly, Jiahui, the student who took a leave of absence for a year so that she could be with her family, struggled with the fact that her family could live their lives without her at home: “On weekends they go out together and they’re living their lives out there without me. I’m here, and I guess I have my life here. I just have to deal with it.”

Homesickness was not a concept restricted to only the first year. Huiliang explained that she did not experience severe challenges during her freshman year because everything was so exciting and it seemed that time went by so quickly. However, in her sophomore year she started to feel homesick:
I got really homesick in my sophomore year, really homesick. My freshman year was so smooth, so much smoother than I could have expected, it was filled with many good things. And then it got worse during my winter break of my sophomore year when I went home. All good stuff—food, parents, a warm house. I felt so homesick that I didn’t want to come back. I was homesick for several weeks.

For the students, homesickness was most often felt during the first year in college when they experienced cultural and linguistic traditions, and when they realized just how far they were from their families, familiarities, and homes. For Huiliang, the only reason why the feeling of homesickness was delayed was because she felt such excitement during her first year. Her social experience was positive, she did not struggle with linguistic or cultural transitions, and the year just seemed to whiz by. However, once the luster of the new experience wore off, she felt homesick.

Another issue that made homesickness more challenging for most of the students was their reluctance to speak with their parents about the challenges they faced. Four of the students articulated a hesitance to share their struggles with their parents because they did not want to worry their parents any further, especially during their first year in a new country. Huiliang stated:

You don’t want them to worry about you, so it’s even harder for you… You don’t want to tell your parents because they are so far away. Maybe you will tell them that you feel a little depressed and you’ll feel better the next morning, but for them, they keep thinking about it until you talk to them and tell them that you are feeling better. So you do not talk to them about this.
Renshu disagreed, saying that he felt comfortable telling his parents about his struggles. His parents generally offered him good advice, even though his mom still worried about him a little. Renshu said, “My parents know about me and they tell me, even though it might be hard and it might not be what I want to do, they tell me what is right and what I should do.” Some of the other students in the focus group attributed this difference to the fact that Renshu, unlike the other students, is not an only child. He has two younger sisters at home so he admits that his parents’ focus was not solely on him.

Only 2 students claimed that they did not experience homesickness. For Qiaohui, the experience of moving to a new country and immersing herself in a new culture was not new. She attended high school in Singapore so she had experienced uprooting and transition at a younger age. She said, “I left home when I was fourteen-years-old. My experience of studying abroad molded me into a more independent person compared to a lot of my peers.” Cheung admitted that he occasionally missed Chinese food, but that he did not really feel homesick. In general, throughout the focus group Cheung displayed a more laid back attitude. He didn’t worry much about the linguistic transition because he felt he was sufficiently prepared to succeed academically. He spent his summer prior to enrollment playing video games with his friends, enjoying his last summer of freedom. While he’s a serious and dedicated student, he did not seem like the kind of student who was easily stressed or upset.

Most students felt that they overcame homesickness quickly, but for 3 students the feelings of homesickness lingered. Homesickness was revived during times of personal challenge or immediately following a trip home to China. When students returned home, they were reminded of the many things they loved about their home; leaving their home did not necessarily get easier with time. Sometimes they even struggled during their visits home because
the time spent away left them feeling that they perhaps didn't belong at home anymore. Renshu said, “During my most recent trip back home, I felt like I didn't belong as much as I used to. I couldn’t find my shoes; I couldn't even recall what shoes I had. I couldn’t find my things. It was a big indicator that I don't permanently live there anymore.” However, even though homesickness was a major challenge for students to overcome, they learned to manage that challenge. Mingxia noted that “I have never gotten over it, but somehow I got used to it. I am now used to being thousands of miles away from home.”

**Language Issues**

Homesickness was the most common challenge faced by the Chinese students who participated in this study, but it was not the only struggle they endured. Although 10 of the students said they had not been nervous about language prior to their arrival on campus, once they arrived they realized it would pose more of a challenge than anticipated. For some students, the complete immersion in English was challenging because most had never experienced it before. These students all demonstrated high levels of English proficiency through a comprehensive application review that included standardized test scores, essays, and potential interviews. Mingxia, a student who had expressed a carefree attitude prior to her arrival on campus, stated, “By the end of the first year, I actually felt that [language was] something I should have worried about. It’s definitely not as natural for me to talk in English, compared to when I talk in Chinese. I did really badly in my first year at Lakeford.” The challenges associated with language were often closely related to struggles with culture for the Chinese students. They were not raised in the same culture or country, so many references simply went over their heads. Some of their peers were kind enough to pause and ensure that they understood various cultural
references, but it was often exhausting for the Chinese students to continue asking for clarification.

Huiliang noted that her experience learning colloquial terms was mixed, depending on the group of people with whom she spoke at the time:

Some Americans will ask you if you know what they mean, and it’s easy to say, “Oh no, I don’t know, can you explain it to me?” But it’s harder if people just speak at length about stuff and you interrupt them and ask them to explain what they said… Sometimes it’s just so hard. There are too many new things that we just don’t understand, and it’s so hard to keep on asking why and how.

While some students appreciated when their American peers were willing to slow down and take the time to explain what they said, not everyone felt the same way. Renshu said he would actually feel offended if someone were to ask him if he didn’t understand, saying, “I feel like if they asked me if I understood something, and I actually did understand, I would feel offended a bit. Because it's like, why do you expect me now to know that?”

For other students, it was the lack of speaking Chinese that proved to be difficult. For the students who had lived in and attended high school in China, this was the first time they were not only surrounded by a new language but not able to speak and hear the Chinese language daily. It was an abrupt change for students. Weiling noted:

For the first time in my lifetime, I didn’t have the chance to speak Chinese for five days, which made me kind of crazy. I never imagined that before, and I just realized how different my background was from my American peers. I knew some of the television shows they talked about, but most of them I didn't know anything about.
Class Participation

Language had consequences for students beyond learning new colloquial terms. Another component of that academic experience which was challenging for some of the students was participation. Both institutions in this study have small average class sizes and students are expected to participate thoughtfully in class. This aspect of the academic experience was different from what students had experienced in China. Jiahui explained: “It is very different from our own culture. In China, especially a traditional Chinese high school, it’s a lecture style class and it discouraged discussion.” This challenge differed for students depending on their chosen academic major. Boqin admitted that because he is a science major, most of his lower level courses were lecture-based. Interestingly, he wished that the classes involved more interaction and engagement, saying, “Some classes like mathematics were actually kind of dull and boring. I found the lectures not interactive enough for the students to just copy a question on the board.”

Sharing thoughts and perspectives in class could be intimidating for other reasons. Because participation is an expectation of many courses and is actually incorporated into the semester grade, all students, not just the Chinese students, are eager to participate. For the Chinese students, sometimes their American peers could appear aggressive or very quick to raise their hands, which creates some classroom intimidation. The Chinese students first had to think of something thoughtful to say, but they often needed a little extra time to determine how to best articulate those thoughts in English. Because this did not happen instantaneously, sometimes the Chinese students found that by the time they had organized their thoughts and decided how they wanted to articulate their thoughts to their professors and peers, either someone else had made the comment, or the class had moved on to a new point. These students described difficulties in
interjecting in a class discussion that was often fast-paced and dominated by their American peers. Huiliang claimed that “In classes, when you organize your thoughts in your mind, you do it in Chinese. Then you have to translate it into English. By the time you raise your hand, someone has already spoken. Oh well, you just wait for the next question.”

Because of this situation, Chinese students appreciated professors who would call on various students in their classes to ensure that more students, and perhaps those who did not always raise their hands, were able to contribute. Although sometimes it put pressure on these students because they could not predict when they would be called upon to speak, the students were eager to contribute to discussions. Lixue said, “I think professors can be supportive in making students take turns. You can say your opinion and you get the chance to say something. Otherwise, American students can be really aggressive in expressing themselves.”

Classroom participation could also be uncomfortable for Chinese students who worried about voicing a perspective that their peers did not share. Coming from a different cultural background, the Chinese students often had perspectives that their peers did not share or comprehend. Huiliang noted that even though participating in class discussion was not a major challenge for her because she felt comfortable speaking in front of her peers, she sometimes felt that “My points were different from other American students, they looked at me in a weird way or just didn’t understand because what I expressed was not from their system of thoughts.”

Weiling shared that even though she sometimes felt uncomfortable participating in class when she first arrived, she realized that she had to speak up more:

I cannot just stay quiet for a long time; I didn’t want to think about my arguments so carefully before I spoke. So I just raised my hand. I sometimes seem awkward or it seems
like I can’t organize my argument, but I still want to do it because I feel like I will improve if I keep doing it. If I stay quiet, I will ever have the chance to improve.

**Academic Work**

Academics were not a concern for most students prior to their arrival. Only 2 of the 12 students who participated in the study struggled academically during their first year in college. Most students felt confident in their academic abilities prior to their arrival and continued to feel comfortable once enrolled in courses in the fall semester. Although 11 out of the 12 admitted that they had to work very hard to do well, most students were able to succeed academically. Students immediately noticed two aspects of their new academic lives to which they would have to adjust. One of these was the new peer group. Jiahui noted that in her high school, “I never studied hard at all, and I was still in the higher rank of my class. But after you come to Columbus, you are stuck with a bunch of super-brilliant people, so it puts you in a different position.” The second aspect of adjustment was the work required of them. Most of the students came from a different academic model wherein they were not required to turn in assignments routinely and there was an emphasis on summative testing. Huiliang noted that not only were her peers very bright, but she had to do more work to succeed:

At my high school, as long as you were smart and got the knowledge that the teacher wanted to teach, you were able to get a high grade in the final exam and you were good. So if the teacher knew you were a smart student, you could skip class and not do homework because the teacher knew you would get the knowledge. Here, it’s not just about how smart you are, it’s about how consistently hard working you are. So you can’t skip class, or if you do, you will lose a participation grade.
Huiliang realized that, unlike her high school experience, she could not rely on her natural intelligence to succeed academically at Columbus.

The biggest academic challenge for the students was the volume of reading. Nine of the students referenced the challenge of reading, sometimes hundreds of pages weekly, in English. This particular challenge was more pronounced for students who did not choose a major in science or math because a greater proportion of their curriculum involved heavy reading. Combined with the above-mentioned concept that students had to consistently work hard and not rely only on their intelligence, nightly reading was a difficult adjustment. Weiling said:

I had two hundred pages of reading each week from the very beginning of the semester. My reading and writing ability was not enough for me to complete all this work, so I had to stay up very late every night to finish my readings and sometimes I still couldn’t finish it because it was just too much for me. I was stressed.

It was comforting when these students discovered that their struggle with the volume of readings was not unique to them. Qiaohui recalled when she discovered that her American classmate in her political science class was also struggling with the volume of reading: “I talked to another student in the class, and she’s American, and I was so surprised when she told me that she could not finish the readings either. I imagined that, you know, she’s a native English speaker and it would be a piece of cake for her but it was not.”

Social Challenges

Beyond the academic experience, the social experience was also important for these students. Both sites describe themselves as residential colleges and their promotional materials and websites highlight the amount of social activities in which their students participate.
Although each institution’s website and promotional materials highlighted its academic programs, research awards, and various rankings to appeal to an international audience, it also advertised social and cultural opportunities, giving the perception that students who chose either of these institutions would have the opportunity to engage with their peers inside and outside of the classroom.

None of the students who participated in the study articulated struggles in their social lives. Responses to the questionnaire showed that only 2 of the 31 students who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they felt extremely nervous prior to entering their respective institutions. Although 10 students (32.3%) did indicate feeling very nervous, the majority of students who completed the questionnaire indicated that they were either slightly or not nervous at all about social concerns. Although these students may not have felt high levels of nervousness prior to their arrival, there were some social challenges once they moved into their residence halls and started their lives as college students.

None of the students articulated that they felt isolated or alone or that the social life was too intimidating for them to feel able to participate. Some of the students felt that they had a broader social network, while others were happy to maintain a smaller circle of friends. None of the students expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to make friends and each seemed to have found a social niche that felt comfortable and appropriate.

One challenging issue for some Chinese students was the college party culture. Although most students were eager to socialize and experience American culture, 5 of the students critiqued the party culture at both of their institutions. Weiling said:

I like some of the parties, especially the ones on Saturday. Those are interesting. But on Thursday, people are just drinking and dancing. I’m okay with the dancing part, but I was
so not used to people drinking just to get drunk. Drinking is common in China; I feel that I try to keep calm when I’m drunk. But I realized in the United States, it is the exact opposite. People are trying to get drunk.

Jiahui similarly said that “sometimes at parties people tend to do very childish things. And I don’t understand it. You’re a college student, you’re not supposed to be doing this.”

Lixue was not as bothered by the drinking but was puzzled by some of the social habits of her peers. Speaking of her experiences living in China, she said that she and her friends would meet beforehand, attend a party together, and then if she or one of her peers wanted to leave the party before the rest of their group, that friend would inform the group and say “Goodbye” prior to actually leaving the event. Such was not always true for the parties at Columbus and it shocked her. She said, “When people think they should leave, they just left. They didn’t even tell me. It was so weird to me. In China, when you’re finished you tell everyone that you will see them another time, but here, they just left. And I was so shocked.” Interestingly, some faculty and administrators also articulated this challenge for the Chinese students. Charlotte noted, “The Chinese students find themselves at odds with the culture that is so focused on partying and drinking and casual hooking-up and all of the things that they probably have not experienced in high school.”

Although each of the students had different personalities, with some being more outgoing and even gregarious and others seeming a bit shyer, in general the students agreed that parties were not places to create meaningful friendships or have deep discussions. Weiling felt that it was difficult to make friends at big parties, instead preferring to engage her peers over brunch or a more private conversation. Despite criticisms, some of the Chinese students also enjoyed the party scene and felt happy to be included in that part of the campus culture.
Another social challenge for the Chinese students was engaging with American peers. Ten of the students (83.3%) articulated experiencing some kind of challenge interacting with Americans. The challenges varied from intimidation and hesitation in reaching out to students, to a couple of students who felt they could not engage in deep discussions with many of their American peers. This was not only because of a language barrier, but rather because some of the Chinese students felt their American peers did not want to engage in deeper discussions outside of class. Qiaohui said that during her first year in college she realized that she was unable to have deep conversations with her American peers. Part of this was because she still preferred speaking Chinese, but another part was a stereotype she held about American students:

I just had this stereotype of American students that they would not be thinking the same way as I do, and that prevented me from getting to know the American students. Now I would say I am much more willing to learn about them and have a better relationship with them, but that’s something I did not really do well in my first year. I was not willing enough to open my heart to them because I just thought there would not be any of them who are worth being my best friend because they are not Chinese.

Lixue was probably the most critical of her American peers; she found it very challenging to interact with American students initially. She was clear in stating that it was not purely a language barrier as she felt comfortable in her English skills and she also spoke with other international students in English. Rather, she felt it was a cultural and value difference between herself and her American peers. The conversations, in her opinion, seemed shallow and inconsequential. She recalled her first year, attending dinner with some of her peers from her residence hall:
They would talk about topics like, what is your favorite food at a potluck, or what is your favorite type of apple. First of all, I’ve never been to a potluck before and I don’t find it useful to talk about my favorite food from a potluck. I feel like, what kind of topic is this? It’s so boring. And when they’re talking about your favorite apple, I feel the same thing. I don’t know the difference between American apples.

Not all students were quite as critical as Lixue and Qiaohui, but a few other students did articulate cultural challenges associated with creating relationships with Americans. The students admitted that the creation of relationships had to be a “two-way street,” with Chinese students who are willing to ask questions and American peers who are willing to pause to explain various cultural items. Huiliang said, “It’s a two-way street. Americans should have more general knowledge about the Chinese culture and Chinese people need to step out more. They need to be more open-minded and just be brave and ask questions.” Huiliang recalled a specific social example when she wanted to have fun and engage with her American peers, but she did not really understand what was happening around her. She was at a party on a Saturday night and her friends were playing a popular drinking game, flip cup. Things were moving quickly, and although she could tell that everyone was having fun, she had no idea what was going on. She remembered:

   Everyone was so happy playing the game; it was so hard to ask them to explain it to me. You kind of have to break into the scene to be an outsider, so you tend to be silent. But the more silent you are, the more ignored you are. They just don't know what’s going on… The first time you feel like you don’t know what’s going on, what they are doing, and you are not participating. The next time, you just won’t go to the party.
Although most Chinese students were eager to create relationships with American students, a couple of students were not bothered by their lack of interactions with Americans. They articulated that it was not a result of intimidation but rather just not sharing common interests. For Cheung, he didn’t really have the interest to ask his peers what they were talking about. He said, “I don’t really try hard to get into conversations and I tend not to talk to people much. Sometimes I don’t get the point of what they’re talking about. Why are they talking about this? They enjoy it so much. So I just try to avoid getting into conversations.” Cheung’s comment is similar to the above discussion regarding linguistic challenges associated with colloquial terms and references to popular culture. While some students did not ask for clarification because they were intimidated and did not want to interrupt the flow of conversation thus drawing attention to themselves, others didn’t request clarification because they chose not to enter into the conversations in the first place, or they were not bothered by the fact that they did not comprehend the entire conversation.

Another challenge that the Chinese students faced with American students was the feeling that American students did not necessarily understand their cultural background, or that they made assumptions about them. Seven of the students articulated a frustration with their American peers who did not try to understand the Chinese culture. For these students, they felt that while the broader college community expected them to adjust to American culture and make the effort to understand their new cultural settings, it was not always an equal exchange. Renshu noted, “Generally speaking, Chinese students are more open to American culture than American students are open to Chinese culture. I really feel like the Chinese students are more open to American culture.” Another issue Renshu articulated was that many of his American peers
seemed to have outdated understandings of China. Jiahui agreed, saying that even those students who were more interested in Chinese culture often did not understand her home country:

Sometimes they’re super sweet and they ask me questions about China, but they will ask a question like, “Are you all riding bicycles to work?” That’s how they perceive China, but China is changing at a very fast speed, and I feel like they don’t know that… It’s not their mistake, they’re just not exposed.

Lilei echoed these sentiments, saying that she wished her American peers would realize that “China has changed a lot, and Chinese students have also changed a lot.”

Although many of the students did experience challenges interacting with American students, some students found it to be easy. Hanqing admits that he could be shy at first, so when asked about what it was like to interact with his American peers, he responded:

I think it depends because I feel like people here are nicer to each other and they will say “Hello” to each other. So it’s easier for me to talk to them because they will talk to me first. I don’t feel like I have to be the one to speak first. I feel like the situation would be different at other colleges because, based on my experience, people are shier and quieter, and it’s harder for them to make friends because they don’t want to talk to you. But being at Columbus, this doesn't exist.

Some students, like Lilei, didn’t necessarily see a clear distinction between interacting with American peers or other peers. Although she acknowledged that the different cultural background between American and Chinese students could lead to challenges in finding a topic of discussion, when asked how she felt about interacting with her American peers she responded, “I never really thought about it. Because it was just normal, like how I would interact with most people.”
The Chinese students articulated various benefits from relationships with Americans. American friends introduced the Chinese students to other Americans and included them in social activities. Xiang mentioned the value “of sometimes knowing just one person, and that one person introduces you to the next and the next and the next person. And that’s what happened for me. Initially I just knew two people and they introduced me to two hundred.” Similarly, although Qiaohui was hesitant to create relationships with Americans when she first arrived at Lakeford, assuming that she would be unable to have deep conversations with them, she chose to live in a house with other Americans during her junior year. She recalled:

It was just mind blowing for me. Living with them I learned so much about American culture. Like tiny things I never picked up if I had not lived with them. They would take me to parties. After ten weeks I knew so many more people.

Huiliang similarly attributed her ability to successfully socially integrate with her American peers, saying, “I met such a great group of people. They took me to lunch and dinner, and they asked me to go out to parties, so I had an easy time transitioning from high school to college.” For the students, American peers helped them understand culture and also included them in social activities that allowed these students to broaden their social networks.

Section III: Important People as Sources of Support

In this section I will highlight the three key groups of individuals who served to support the adjustment of Chinese international students: faculty, friends, and support staff.

Faculty and a Source of Support
Data from the questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews suggested that faculty and friends were the most helpful people for the Chinese international students who participated in the study. Faculty were mentioned most frequently, as they were discussed at length in the focus groups and interviews and then also referenced in some of the questionnaire responses.

Each of the 12 students stated that faculty were the most important people in their college lives and in helping them manage the different challenges they experienced. Some students identified with faculty who were sympathetic to international students, others found faculty to whom they felt they could relate on a more personal level. Students appreciated the amount of personal attention they received from their faculty members. Cheung particularly appreciated that faculty worked with him on his chemistry thesis, even though his topic was not their specialty:

I think the most positive thing I’ve found here is the amount of personal attention I get from professors. Right now I am doing my thesis in chemistry with the chair of the department. She has the responsibility as the chair to teach class and do her own research, but she’s willing to spend time with me and work with me and talk a lot about my work. Even though what I’m doing is not her expertise, she’s willing to spend extra time on it herself so that she can talk to me about it.

The Chinese students appreciated that faculty were willing to be honest about their academic work. Huiliang recalls that in her freshman year she received a C grade on her first paper. She said:

I was shocked. My professor was a hard grader in general, but I felt like my writing sucked. I appreciate that professors don't separate us from the American students. They don't say “Oh, you’re an international student so the grade will be lower for you.” They’ll
tell you if your logic sucks and if your writing doesn’t make sense. At first, I felt stressed and wondered, “Why are you doing this to me?” But later I appreciated it, because it really helped me to improve.

Not only were faculty willing to communicate areas of improvement to the Chinese students, they were also willing to commit the requisite time to help the students improve. Jiahui recalled that with her freshman writing seminar, she started the semester with a low grade. However, her professor required that she see her during office hours to talk about her writing. This writing professor had high standards and Jiahui wanted to do well so, for her second paper, Jiahui said, “I met with her six times before I submitted the paper. She really pushed me there, because once I met with her I got really good advice and then it’s a process.”

Faculty were important as academic mentors but also provided support for the Chinese international students in other capacities. Qiaohui appreciated the fact that:

Professors are willing to share their personal lives… For example, my research advisor would be willing to invite us to her house for dinner… As a foreigner, it’s hard because you don’t know exactly how everything works here, but by talking with them they provide a lot of useful information like how I should get started on finding work in the States, or how it’s useful to have my driver’s license.

As Qiaohui mentioned, faculty offered practical support and could help the students consider unknown important items. Faculty were able to recommend various opportunities for students, act as references, and help guide students in their applications to graduate school. Lixue remembered that her math professor recommended her to her first on campus job, and that she received her first off-campus internship through a connection with another professor’s connections. Huiliang recalled that one time she applied to a special program and did not realize
her professor had written a letter in support of his own accord: “He did it behind the scenes to back me up, which is so sweet. I didn’t know beforehand, I only knew after I got my results when they told me someone recommended me.”

Chinese students also appreciated that faculty members respected and appreciated them. Students did not feel like they were tokenized or treated differently by faculty, nor did they feel that their different perspectives were not valid or trivial. Lixue said, “I feel like most professors are really helpful and if you ask for help, they will try their best to help you and they are really patient with you. They don't discriminate against students, and that’s a really important thing.”

Jiahui recalled the first time she took a class in religious studies:

I was never exposed to God or Christianity before, so I found this class to be a little challenging because I felt like the other students had been exposed to it for twenty years.

I thought I would be at a disadvantage. But the professor, he was so helpful. Even though I wrote my paper with an atheist point of view, he was open-minded and super supportive. He even gave me an A on my second paper.

Similarly, when Weiling spoke about her favorite professor at Columbus College, she noted that not only was he very intelligent but he “really liked to talk to students. He listens carefully when you speak, he tries so hard to respect your culture.” Interestingly, the only negative comments the Chinese students made about faculty members seemed unrelated to their status as international students, and were more general issues that would be applicable to all students, such as not taking enough time to meet with students.

Even though each of the students mentioned that they didn’t want to be treated differently by professors, they appreciated when faculty members acknowledged their international and Chinese background. It seems contradictory, but students did not want professors to dumb-down
material or give them different grades just because they were Chinese students. These students wanted to be treated like any of their peers academically. The area where they appreciated special acknowledgement had more to do with the cultural transition. Although all college students experience some challenges with transition, those that international students experience may be different. The Chinese students appreciated the awareness of that distinction. Hanqing recalls receiving an email from his psychology professor during the second week of class, asking him to talk with her in office hours. He was initially nervous at this invitation, but found that she just wanted to talk with him because she had not yet spoken with him. She also told Hanqing that she was aware that he was an international student and if he needed any support, he could go to her. Although Hanqing was initially nervous about this meeting, he left feeling grateful for a supportive and sensitive professor.

**Friends as Sources of Support**

After faculty, Chinese students believe that their friends, both American and Chinese, were the most helpful people in their college experience. One reason why friends were important to the Chinese students was because of the shared experience of attending a small liberal arts college. Although the students felt comfortable talking to faculty about academic issues, not all students felt so comfortable talking to faculty about their personal issues. Additionally, students did not always want to talk to their parents about their personal issues. Part of this was not wanting parents to worry, but part of it was also not wanting to have to explain every detail of the situation, when their peers would already understand more about
context. When asked to articulate why friends were an important part of his college experience, Renshu said:

I think it’s about the shared experience because we are all going through similar things and we usually don’t have to explain too much to them, like background and stuff. If I were to talk to my parents about a problem, I’d have to first tell them what it’s about, all the background, why it’s happening, why it’s an issue. Friends get it, because we’re in the same environment.

Jiahui agreed and added, “With professors, if you recently broke up with a boyfriend or if there is something else going on in your life, you wouldn’t talk to your professor about it. I did once, and it was weird. Never again. You can talk more with your peers.”

As discussed above, most of the Chinese students valued relationships with American peers. Even if it was initially challenging to create relationships with Americans, American peers often included the Chinese students in social life and helped them to feel more connected. Living with American students offered the Chinese students the ability to understand American culture more clearly. Qiaohui mentioned how living with three American students helped her to learn a lot about American culture. Huiliang commented on how her American friends included her in social events, helping her to feel more connected.

Similarly, roommates were important to many of the Chinese students. Six of the students referenced the importance of roommates. Roommates became friends and these positive relationships offered the Chinese students social, emotional, and cultural support. Roommates invited and encouraged Chinese students to attend campus events. They also introduced the Chinese students to their peers, helping the Chinese students to broaden their social connections. Cheung, who readily admits to being introverted, appreciated his roommate because, “He’s kind
of like me. We don’t really talk much and we don’t share many interests. But he’s quiet and both of us don’t like to go out to dinner with all our floor mates. Sometimes we go to the dining hall together, and he sometimes takes me to a restaurant or shopping. He’s a really nice person.” Cheung articulated a sense that roommates are valued for different reasons among the Chinese students. Though some appreciate the social inclusion and the ability to meet more students, other students just appreciate living with someone with whom they get along.

The Chinese students found solidarity both with other Chinese students and international students in general. The experience with Chinese students was a bit different at Lakeford and Columbus because Lakeford had a larger population of Chinese students in each academic year, whereas the seniors from Columbus College were members of the first large cohort of Chinese students. While the students at Columbus were able to find solace in other Chinese students in their grade level, the students at Lakeford College were also able to socialize with sophomore, junior, and senior international students. These upperclassmen were able to provide unique support to the Chinese students when they were freshman. As Renshu mentioned, the concept of a shared experience is important. The Chinese students found it particularly helpful to hear the perspectives of the students who had lived similar experiences in terms of the cultural and social transition into Lakeford.

The Chinese upperclassmen at Lakeford provided the freshman students with direction, academic guidance, and social support. When asked who she found to be most helpful, aside from faculty, Lixue responded:

Some of the upperclassmen because they have been through everything and they can actually give you some suggestions. Especially the Chinese upperclassmen that know what your problem is. And they are role models themselves; they have done well in their
studies, they have a good social life, and good social interactions with Chinese and non-Chinese students. Even if they don’t always give us the solutions, we just observe what they have done.

Chinese students tended to value the Chinese upperclassmen who were able to provide social and academic guidance, but agreed that the support mechanism was best left informal rather than being a formal mentorship program. The Chinese students at Lakeford believed that a more formal program would likely go underutilized and that the support from the Chinese upperclassmen may not be as open and genuine because they might consider it to be a job. Mingxia said she preferred that the mentorship between the Chinese upperclassmen and freshman remain informal because, “If it’s formal, then some students may feel like they are doing it for a job. They may feel like, ‘I just need to get information that is qualified by my salary.’ But if students ask informally, I am now answering because I’ve been through this stage and I want to help you and I want to give you all the information that I can.”

It is also important to note that the entire group of Chinese students, not just the upperclassmen, were helpful for the Chinese students. The students at Lakeford were able to utilize upperclassmen because enrollment of Chinese students had already been steady by the time they enrolled; however, the students at Columbus did not have this benefit because the increase in Chinese student enrollment began when they were freshman. Through both informal interactions and more formal engagements with Chinese student organizations, students appreciated the cultural and social link. The Chinese Student Association at Columbus College, for example, often provided students with alternative social opportunities for those students who did not want to engage in the party scene. Weiling said:
It offers a kind of mental support… I feel like sometimes we organize social events because people are not always comfortable with parties and the social events here. It allows us to still have human interaction and it’s a place where you can release your social pressures. You feel less depressed when there are these activities.

Support Staff

The other individuals named as being supportive to the Chinese international students were coordinators of the second-language writing program and the international programming coordinators at both institutions. Though these individuals were mentioned much less frequently than faculty or friends, some of the Chinese students did articulate the value of these on-campus professionals. Two students at Lakeford mentioned the importance of the international programming staff. Qiaohui mentioned that Maria, the Assistant Director of the IIO at Lakeford College, was helpful because of the practical support she could offer. Although faculty and friends could offer academic, cultural, and emotional support, international students also had to worry about very precise technical issues. International students have to comply with many regulations and consider certain issues that American students do not have to worry about, like taking fewer courses or pursuing off-campus internships. Qiaohui said:

I think Maria is very helpful because, as an international student, you have a lot of things to worry about, like visa status or immigration stuff. I would describe that as delicate because you never know if something is wrong and you might have a consequence. Maria was very helpful in trying to help me figure out, for example, if I wanted to do research because you need certain documentation to do that.
More students commented on the importance of the second-language writing specialists at both sites. Although students acknowledged that meeting with the second-language writing specialists required a lot of time because of the detail of support, students appreciated the time and patience of the writing specialist.

Section IV: Important Programs

Academic Programs

The Chinese students who participated in the study utilized various academic resources. Questionnaire data here is separated by site because the different sites publicized different academic support programs on their websites, so different programs were listed in the questionnaires.²

Questionnaire responses from Lakeford showed that the writing center and math skills center were the two resources most utilized by the Chinese students. Twenty-three (95.8%) of the Chinese students at Lakeford who completed the questionnaire had utilized the writing center. Fourteen (60.9%) of those students found the writing center to be either extremely helpful or very helpful. Only 1 student did not find the writing center to be a helpful resource. Seventeen (70.8%), of the students who completed the questionnaire had utilized the math skills center, and 12 (70.6%) of those students found it to be either extremely helpful or very helpful. None of the questionnaire respondents listed the math skills center as “Not Helpful.” Thirteen (54.2%) students utilized Lakeford’s Prefect Program, a program that trains students to facilitate optional study group sessions for courses that have high drop rates in biology, economics, chemistry,

² Charts that reveal the response rates for the academic programs at Columbus and Lakeford can both be found in the Appendix.
political science, computer science, and psychology. Eight (61.5%) of those students indicated that the program was either extremely helpful or very helpful. One student indicated that the prefect program was not helpful. Ten (41.7%) students indicated that they utilized the second-language writing support specialist, with 7 (70%) of those students saying that they found those services to be either extremely or very helpful. Academic skills coaching, academic tutoring, and speech coaching were utilized by few students, with most who did participate in those programs saying it was only somewhat helpful.

The website for Columbus College was not as clear in listing the academic support services frequented by international students, so the only two items listed in the questionnaire were *international student language support* and *academic tutoring*. Five students participated in both programs, with 2 (40%) students saying that the international student language support was either extremely or very helpful, and 1 student saying that the academic tutoring was very helpful. Three (60%) students noted that both programs were only somewhat helpful. The focus groups and interviews with students supported the questionnaire data, with students referencing second language writing support and general writing centers as being the resources most utilized, followed by more specific programs such as the Prefect Program or Math Skills Support Center.

While most students sought the support of the second-language writing specialist at some point, other students sought support with the general writing center once their basic issues with English language fluency had been resolved. Eleven (91.7%) of the students interviewed had visited the second-language writing specialist at least once, but not all of them sought her help regularly after their first year. The second-language writing specialist, Susan supported the Chinese students in a variety of ways. She helped them to brainstorm and organize ideas and then also helped with grammar and syntax. Weiling shared:
I went to the writing specialist’s office when one of my papers was due the day after, and then again when a ten page paper was due during finals week. I was thinking that I wasn’t going to finish, I had no idea what I was going to write about. But she was very kind. She didn’t leave after her office hours were over. She helped me to organize my ideas. I felt so much better when I came out of that room, and I was really grateful for her help.

Although students appreciated the second-language writing specialist, each of the 11 students who met with the specialist at some point only met with that individual a few times. None of the study participants sought the support of the second-language writing specialist beyond their freshman year. The reason why these Chinese students sought other writing resources beyond their freshman year is two-fold. First, the meeting with the second-language writing specialist took a lot of time. Because the meeting often involved a line-by-line analysis of grammar and syntax, some of the Chinese students found that appointments were just too long. Lixue said, “The writing specialist is really nice, but it takes such a long time. In a one-on-one session we just sit for such a long time discussing grammar and I just want to finish.” The other reason why the Chinese student sought other writing resources was because the nature of their needs shifted. Whereas in the beginning of their college career they needed that line-by-line grammar support, in their sophomore, junior, and senior years they needed help with idea development. Renshu said:

One key difference between Susan and the writing center is that Susan focuses on language. She goes through your paper and she picks up on language stuff, but I what I really want is not just the language stuff but more of the conceptual organization and ideas. Is my argument strong enough? Is it well-supported? In terms of ideas and how I
organize my ideas to make them strongest, I think the writing center has been more helpful.

After the freshman year, Chinese students appreciated services offered by a writing center, however the students were also clear in stating that not all writing advisors offered the same quality of support. Qiaohui had a very positive experience with the writing center and was able to work with writing tutors who she believed helped her with the writing process. She said, “I found the writing center to be super helpful. I had a good group of writing tutors that I signed up for. They were willing to crack all of my stuff, tear it apart, rip it down into very basic ideas, and then talk me through it.” Mingxia offered a more critical view of the writing center, saying:

The writing center helped me to get the grammar, but it really depends on who is correcting your paper. Well, 80% of the time they correct very minor grammar mistakes that I didn’t find in my own proofreading. That’s not helpful in terms of the structure of the paper, the ideas in the paper, and the thinking behind it. It just wasn’t helpful, so I stopped going.

Five of the students at Lakeford College referenced an appreciation for the math skills center; one of the students even worked there. The students found it to be helpful because the help was direct, practical, and quick. Mingxia explained, “With math there is an answer and if you think about the problem for an hour and you don’t understand, you can talk to someone and understand it in ten minutes.” Mingxia believed that the math skills center was the most helpful academic support program and thought it was a better resource than the writing center because it was efficient and always helpful.

Two of the students at Lakeford referenced the Prefect Program and liked it because it was peer-led and practical. Because the Prefect Program focused on specific courses that have
high drop rates, the material covered was specific and sessions were productive. The ability to work with peers rather than professors also created a more comfortable atmosphere for some students. When asked why she appreciated the Prefect Program, Qiaohui said, “I like the idea of collaborative learning at Lakeford. The students actually get to learn from their peers.” Qiaohui enjoyed it so much, that she became a student facilitator in the Program. This encouraged her to learn material more carefully so that she could teach her peers. She said, “The process forced me to rethink and think from another perspective, and it was really helpful. Talking to my peers was not as pressurizing as talking to faculty members.”

Social Programs

Similar to academic programs, both sites offered different social programs to their international students. There was only one program offered at both sites, an international orientation program. At both sites, the orientation program is a requirement so all of the participants in my study participated in the orientation programming. This section will thus begin with a presentation of student data in regards to orientation programming because it was the only shared program, and then will separate by site to discuss specific programs.

As mentioned, international orientation programming is a requirement for new international students at both sites, so each of the participants participated in orientation programming. Five students (16.5%) thought that international student orientation was extremely helpful, 9 (29%) thought that it was very helpful, 13 students (41.9%) thought it was only somewhat helpful, and 4 (12.9%) did not find it to be helpful. Questionnaire data indicates that most students (54.8%) did not consider the international student orientation to be helpful. Part of the lack of enthusiasm for the international orientation programs was how overwhelming it could
be for students. Particularly if the students did not arrive days prior to orientation, they felt exhausted from jetlag and they were constantly being fed new and important information.

Although most of the questionnaire respondents did not find international student orientation to be very helpful, many students were able to highlight positive aspects of the program. Questionnaire data indicates that students enjoyed both personal and practical aspects of the program because they appreciated the opportunity to meet other international students, but they also enjoyed learning about issues such as visa and immigration regulations. One respondent commented, “It helped me to settle in and adjust before the chaos.” Though the students referenced feeling exhausted and sometimes overwhelmed by the barrage of information during international student orientation, many were also positive when speaking about the program. Huiliang shared:

I really liked it, I loved it. I feel like it’s an important piece of college life for students here at Lakeford. We got used to the environment on campus and learned important things like how to open a bank account and file taxes, how to use a laundry machine, how to use the dining hall. It made all the international students close together.

Renshu described international student orientation as “intense,” but found some comfort in meeting other international students who were sharing his experience. He recalled, “It was intense, but at the same time I got the sense that everyone else was just as clueless as me. That made me feel better.”

Social Programs at Columbus College

Both institutions’ websites reference a Host Family Program, however, although the programs share a name, they do not share the same model. Columbus College’s website explains
that the Host Family Program connects new international students with families that live in the area. These host families volunteer to welcome new international students into their homes for no more than five days prior to the international student orientation. At Columbus College, 6 (85.7%) of the students who completed the questionnaire participated in the Host Family Program, with 1 (16.7%) student saying the program was extremely helpful, 3 (50%) students claiming it was very helpful, and 1 student each for somewhat and not helpful. Questionnaire data therefore suggests that the majority (66.7%) of students who participated in the Host Family Program found it to be either extremely or very helpful.

Columbus students appreciated many things about the Host Family Program. First, students referenced how friendly and inviting the host families were. One questionnaire respondent commented that this was his/her first exposure into an American environment, saying, “It was helpful for me to adjust to the culture here.” One student added that he/she had a place to go for Thanksgiving. Hanqing commented:

It was kind of psychologically helpful for me because I met them, they treated me really nicely. I don’t know how to describe that feeling, but they were really friendly and taught me that I’m really not that different than American people. It was really helpful... It was only a short period of time, four days, but it helped me get through that first week when I missed my home very much.

Questionnaire responses indicate that study participants from Columbus College did not actively participate in many of the formal activities planned by ISL.3 Those who did participate in ISL programs tended to find those programs only mildly helpful. For three of the eight programs listed on the questionnaire, no more than 2 (28.6%) students had participated in them.

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3 Charts that reveal the response rates for the social programs at Columbus and Lakeford can both be found in the Appendix.
The three programs that were the most popular were the International Festival, the International Banquet, and Sunday Suppers. The International Banquet, an annual feast that includes international cuisine as well as cultural entertainment from around the world, was the most popular, with 6 (85.7%) students indicating that they participated. The International Festival and Sunday Suppers both had 5 (71.4%) students indicate that they participated. The International Festival is one of the ISL’s biggest events of the year wherein the entire local community is invited to celebrate with live entertainment, food, arts and crafts, and booths that represent each country from where there is an enrolled Columbus student. The Sunday Suppers are not as culturally focused and are intended to be a general gathering at the beginning of the academic year where the Director of the ISL cooks a spaghetti dinner for the students.

Respondents didn’t seem to find the events to be very helpful, with no students saying they found any of those programs to be extremely helpful. Only 1 (16.7%) student who participated in the International Banquet found it to be very helpful, with 2 (33.3%) students finding it only somewhat helpful and 3 (50%) students finding it not helpful. Two (40%) students who participated in the International Festival found it to be very helpful, 2 (40%) found it to be somewhat helpful, and 1 (20%) student did not find it helpful. Respondents seemed least enthusiastic about the Sunday Suppers, with no students finding it either extremely or very helpful, but rather 3 (60%) students finding it only somewhat helpful and 2 (40%) students not finding it helpful at all. Three (42.5%) participants indicated that they participated in Day Trips planned by the International Programming Office, but each only said the program was somewhat helpful.

As mentioned above, three of the activities listed on the questionnaire had two or fewer participants. These underutilized activities included overnight trips sponsored by the ISL, the
Lunch and Conversation, and then the International Group. Overnight trips were organized by
the ISL and enabled students to explore nearby cities and attractions for a small fee. Though it
sounded like a fun way to learn more about their surroundings, only 2 (25.6%) Chinese students
participated in that program. There was a split, with 1 student finding the overnight trips to be
very helpful, and 1 student who found them to be just somewhat helpful.

Columbus’s Lunch and Conversation Program is an informal gathering at lunch where
community members, including faculty, staff, and students, gather to talk about international
events, paired with international food. Although events with food are often popular among
college students, only 2 (25.6%) students participated in this program, and both rated it as being
only somewhat helpful. Finally, the International Group, an informal social gathering with no
cultural or academic theme, only had 1 (14.3%) participant who found the activity to be
somewhat helpful.

Although the questionnaire responses did not indicate active engagement in programs
planned by ISL at Columbus College, the students with whom I spoke expressed some
appreciation for the events; they also mentioned other programs that were not listed in the
questionnaire, like practical workshops. Renshu said, “ISL is really supportive. They have a lot
of trips and workshops that tailor to what international students need, like an information session
about work authorization in the U.S.”

The students offered some different explanations as to why they did not spend more time
with the ISL. The Chinese students tended to appreciate that they could meet and engage with
other international students, but because the events were attended mostly by international
students, it could also be slightly isolating. The ISL offered inclusive programming and some of
the events are attended by Americans and international students alike; however, the Chinese
students indicated that the events are mostly attended by other international students. Huiliang commented that although she attended a few day trips during her freshman year because they allowed her to explore interesting cities near campus, she noticed that the students who attend these events were exclusively international students: “It was mostly in my comfort zone. I can still reach out to those international students because we have similar backgrounds, but I don’t feel that it helps us to understand American culture because it is still within the international student community.”

Although the Chinese students did not seem to participate actively in formally planned activities, Jiahui stated that the ISL provided outlets for the international students to share their culture with their American peers. She said, “I feel like it’s nice because it presents a lot of culture. They sponsor a lot of culture-related celebrations and programs on campus which is really nice. One thing I really like is the Holi festival; that’s really fun.”

One activity not restricted solely to international students is the Outdoor Weekend program when students go camping for a weekend prior to Freshman Orientation. Each of the Chinese students participated in this event and each of them spoke very positively about the program. Students appreciated the opportunity to get to know their peers in small groups. Even though the students had not been exposed to camping before, they were excited to make new friends and engage in a new activity. Hanqing said:

On the last night we had a campfire and we sat around and talked with each other… In that situation, you kind of develop a better feeling towards people and you share the same experience that’s kind of special. So that experience really helped me make good friends, I felt like I really knew people.
Three (42.9%) of the questionnaire respondents believed that Columbus provided programs and activities that enabled them to create meaningful relationships with Americans. Each of these students referenced the Outdoor Weekend and various student organizations as being helpful activities for this purpose.

Social Programs at Lakeford College

Similar to Columbus College, Lakeford College’s website notes that it too has a Host Family Program. However, whereas the Host Family Program at Columbus College is intended to provide housing accommodation for new international students prior to Orientation, Lakeford College’s website characterizes the Host Family Program as one that is perhaps longer lasting but does not provide housing accommodation upon arrival. Instead, Lakeford’s Host Family Program is designed to promote cross-cultural understanding among local residents and international students. Eight (33.3%) of the Lakeford students who completed the questionnaire participated in the Host Family Program, with even distribution of 2 (25%) students who found the program extremely helpful, 2 (25%) students who found it to be very helpful, 2 (25%) students who noted it as somewhat helpful, and 2 (25%) students who said the Host Family Program was not helpful.

Five (62.5%) of the students who participated in the Host Family Program mentioned that they enjoyed making connections with Americans beyond the school setting. One respondent said, “My host family helped familiarize me with the local culture.” Another student commented, “I had a chance to get in touch with an American family and see their lifestyle.” Two (25%) of the students specifically mentioned being invited to Thanksgiving dinner.
Students at Lakeford participated in various activities planned by IIO, but also indicated broader on-campus engagement. For two of the four programs planned by the IIO, at least half of the questionnaire respondents indicated that they participated. The International Festival, an annual event that includes cuisine from around the world, cultural song and dance, as well as other activities such as Japanese origami, Indian henna, or salsa dancing, was the most popular event, with 19 (79.2%) respondents indicating that they participated. Eight (42.1%) of those students found it to be extremely or very helpful, but 11 (57.9%) students said that it was either only somewhat or not helpful. The International Term Dinner, an event that brings the general international student population at Lakeford together for a meal at the end of the term, was a close second in popularity, with 18 (75%) students indicating that they participated. Similar to the International Festival, 8 (44.4%) of those students found it to be either extremely or very helpful, while 10 (55.6%) students found it to be somewhat or not helpful. Eleven (45.8%) students participated in International Education Week, with 4 (36.4%) students indicating that it was either extremely or very helpful, and 7 (63.6%) students indicating that the event was only somewhat or not helpful. International Education Week is a nationwide event, created by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Education. Lakeford’s goal in hosting International Education Week was to bring a greater awareness and celebration of the global, cultural, and political diversity on campus. Five (20.8%) students participated in Intercultural Affairs Programming (IAP), a group of students that works within the IIO to plan various on-campus events. Three (60%) of the students who participated in IAP found it to be either extremely or very helpful, and 2 (40%) thought that it was only somewhat helpful. Only 3 students participated in the Cultural Ambassador Program which was intended to create greater global awareness whereby international students from Lakeford visit local high schools to share
information about their home countries with the students. Two (66.6%) students who participated in the Cultural Ambassador Program found it extremely or very helpful, and 1 student found it to be somewhat helpful.

Focus group participants did not find that their peer leaders from IIO were that helpful. Although Diana and Maria expressed enthusiasm for these peer leaders and their ability to support the international students, the Chinese students did not see these peer leaders as important people in their lives at Lakeford. Lixue commented, “I had only one meeting with my peer leader and that was it. I think the peer leaders vary because my peer leader was not responsible. When I had questions about culture shock, I did not end up asking her for help.” Similarly, Cheung said that while he knew that his peer leader was a caring individual, he just did not want that kind of relationship. Cheung said, “Sometimes he was too caring. Like he tried to eat dinner with me too often, so I just tried to avoid him. He tried to be helpful, but I didn’t ask him for anything.” The students articulated that though they appreciated what their peer leaders tried to do, they did not find them to be helpful resources for them.

Outside of the activities planned by the IIO, students were active in cultural clubs, performing arts, and intramural athletics. Sixteen (66.7%) of the respondents indicated that they participated in a cultural club. Nine (56.3%) of those students found those cultural clubs to be either extremely or very helpful, and 7 (43.7%) students found it either only somewhat helpful or not helpful. Twelve (50%) of the students who completed the questionnaire participated in intramural athletics, and 6 (50%) of them said that it was either extremely or very helpful. Similarly, 12 (50%) of the questionnaire respondents participated in performing arts, with 7 (58.3%) students saying it was either extremely helpful or very helpful, and 5 (41.7%) saying that it was somewhat helpful. Lastly, 6 (25%) students participated in the International Relations
Council (IRC), an organization whose aim is to encourage awareness of important issues in global politics, science and health, economics, and culture through various on-campus events. Four (66.7%) of the students found participation in the IRC to be either extremely or very helpful, and only 2 (33.3%) students found it to be either somewhat or not helpful.

Twenty-two (92%) questionnaire respondents believed that Lakeford provided programs or activities that enabled them to meaningfully engage with American students. Participants indicated that they enjoyed participating in activities planned for the entire community, not just through the IIO. It is through these broader activities that students were able to engage with their American peers. Students listed different activities that helped them to engage with American students but the most popular responses were floor meetings in the residence halls, intramural athletics, and the general freshman orientation. Although Lixue expressed a frustration at the topic of discussion at some floor meetings, she still appreciated the opportunity to interact socially with their American peers in a comfortable atmosphere, saying, “When I met other Americans at my floor meeting, I found I had more in common with them and it was easy for me to hang out with them. We had a lot to talk about. Especially the students who are from big cities because we could talk about shopping, movies, or other activities in big cities.”

Conclusion

Differences that Emerged

This project was not intended to utilize comparative case studies, however it is still important to highlight the different experiences and voices that emerged as a result of data collection. Although there were some similarities in how students described their experiences on campus and how institutional staff spoke about the increased enrollment of Chinese international
students, there were some subtle differences that should be included so that the data is not only presented in an aggregate format.

One important item to note is the different contexts in which the students lived. Lakeford has a longer history of enrolling international students from China, so those students were fortunate to benefit from older Chinese students who were able to provide guidance and support. Columbus College had enrolled international students for years, however, the large influx of Chinese students in particular was relatively new. This means that while the Lakeford students benefited from upperclass students who had recently experienced acculturation, the students at Columbus did not have the ability to learn from such role models. Lakeford students looked to more senior students for guidance and support, but Columbus students looked to other Chinese students in their entering class. They found solace in and supported each other. This illustrates variety in the values of co-national relationships.

I found many similarities in the student voices at Lakeford and Columbus, but there were some differences in what faculty and staff stated at both sites. Although the people I interviewed at both sites were supportive of the increased enrollment of Chinese international students, these individuals made different comments about their colleagues’ reactions to this increased enrollment. At Lakeford College, faculty and staff tended to speak in a very positive tone when describing community reactions. Although there were some references to faculty who struggled to adjust, there was a broader theme of growth in cultural sensitivity. One faculty member did mention that some older faculty who were closer to retirement were not as willing to adjust their classroom practices, however the majority of people with whom I spoke described a very supportive place. Lakeford’s faculty and staff constantly referenced the caring community, suggesting that it was a culturally friendly place to live, and that cultural friendliness could be
seen in how everyone adjusted to the increase in Chinese students. It wasn’t necessarily the case that faculty and staff went out of their way to be kind to these students; rather, it was simply the way that things were.

At Columbus College, faculty and staff described a community that was mostly supportive, but they were also willing to discuss community members who were not as supportive of the Chinese students or the growth in the Chinese population. Though many faculty members noticed that some of these students had different needs than did previously enrolled students, some faculty occasionally exacerbated these challenges, particularly in regards to academic writing. Andrea at Columbus recalled a recent experience of the second language writing specialist:

Susan was at a faculty meeting last semester and she was giving a presentation in front of faculty about the kind of work that she does, just to educate faculty and to let them know about second language writing support. And a faculty member asked her, “What percentage of the students who you work with are hopeless?” I just thought, “That’s such a sad question, that’s such a horrible, terrible way of approaching this.”

The references to faculty and staff at Columbus who were hesitant and perhaps uncomfortable with the Chinese international students were not dominant, but these comments about faculty who were not as supportive as some of their colleagues created a more balanced perspective. The faculty and staff at Columbus were able to be critical but balanced in their reflection on their community’s reaction to the increased enrollment of Chinese international students. It seemed realistic and honest.
This is not meant to indicate that Lakeford’s faculty and staff were less than open in their reflections. Perhaps because Lakeford has a longer history of enrolling Chinese students, their community had more time to adjust and the critical perspectives were fewer as time progressed. As referenced earlier, the influx of Chinese students at Columbus College was still moderately recent, so faculty and staff were still adjusting to the shift in student demographic. I also note that my personal experiences visiting Lakeford College affirmed what a friendly place it is. When I was visited the campus, everyone who I encountered was very kind.

One other difference between Lakeford and Columbus was the discussion of the change in the Chinese student population over time. Once again, this different discussion was a result of Lakeford’s longer history enrolling Chinese students. As referenced earlier, Lakeford was previously the recipient of a grant that enabled them to offer scholarships to Asian international students. When that grant was exhausted ten years ago, Lakeford was less able to provide scholarships to international students. This created a shift in the composition of Chinese students from one that was socioeconomically balanced, to one that was comprised mostly of students from wealthy families. Faculty and staff who worked at Lakeford for more than ten years referenced the change they saw in the Chinese student demographic, but did not complain about this. They seemed to understand the reasoning behind the change.

Columbus College has not been the recipient of such a grant, and admission professionals admitted that tuition revenue was one piece of the motivation to increase the enrollment of all international students. Because of this, the majority of all international students at Columbus come from wealthy families that are able to pay the total cost of attendance annually. Though this was a comment made by those who work in the admission office, it was not a comment made by faculty.
Although similar voices, both student and staff, emerged during data collection, there were some differences that were important to note. As I have mentioned, this was not intended to be a comparative case study so the differences that I observed are not a focus of the study. However, because I recognize the role that organizational culture plays on college campuses (Clark, 1972; Tierney, 1988, 1997), it was important to reveal those differences in order to respect the fact that although there were some big-picture similarities, there were also areas of variance.

What I Found

Though community responses at both Lakeford and Columbus varied, for the most part both communities have been supportive of the increased enrollment of Chinese international students and both have made appropriate academic and social adjustments to promote student success. Faculty and administration tend to have limited perceptions of the acculturation experience for the Chinese students because their relationships with students, even those that may become more personal, tend to be mostly academic and confined to a classroom or office space. Therefore while all faculty members referenced the language barrier as a challenge that Chinese students encounter, very few mentioned homesickness as a serious issue for these students. Though the institutions have different programming philosophies and different office structures, both international programming offices believe that the way they effectively promoted meaningful engagement between American and Chinese students was through inclusive programming.

Most of the Chinese students were not very nervous prior to their arrival on campus and did not experience acute acculturative stress, but they did experience various challenges once
they arrived. The most common challenge the Chinese students experienced was homesickness. This occurred at different intervals, so while most students experienced homesickness early in their college lives, for a few students this did not happen until the second year in college. Most students were able to recover from homesickness quickly, but for some the struggle lingered and reappeared during times of personal or academic struggle.

Students described academic confidence prior to their enrollment but discovered that the academic program was sometimes more rigorous than anticipated. The high volume of nightly reading and expectation of classroom participation proved challenging for many students. Additionally, though the Chinese students expressed satisfaction with their social lives, they also admitted that it could be difficult to engage and create meaningful relationships with their American peers. Some students were disappointed in the perceived lack of depth in conversations with American peers, some found that their American peers had outdated perceptions of China which led to a lack of cultural understanding, and other students simply did not understand certain social habits such as the party scene and drinking culture.

Students utilized various academic resources and appreciated the services which offered them the most practical support without a major time commitment. Socially the Chinese students did not tend to utilize activities coordinated by their international programming offices unless they were required to do so. These students still led healthy social lives that included American and Chinese peers because they participated in more general programming open to the entire college community. The Chinese students believed that faculty were the most helpful people in their college experience, but also acknowledged the importance of their peers, both American and Chinese, and a few other community members.
Unanticipated Findings

I was surprised by what I found at both sites, especially in terms of low levels of pre-arrival nervousness and acculturative stress among the Chinese international students and their use of on-campus academic and social programming. After reading various studies that documented the different challenges that international students, and Asian international students in particular, face when they enroll at an American college/university, I expected to find students who endured acculturative stress in different ways. I anticipated high levels of nervousness prior to arrival and a reliance on social activities planned by the international programming offices and special academic support programs. I thought that I would hear stories of social isolation, cultural struggle, academic stress, and at least mild anxiety.

What I found at both sites were students who entered with more excitement than nervousness. I found students who were academically confident and who understood that though there may be some challenges, that they would be able to manage those challenges. I suspect that this may have something to do with the intensely competitive experiences Chinese students have in the Chinese educational system and the self-confidence brought by succeeding in such a stressful atmosphere. Although the students did endure some stressful components of acculturative stress, such as homesickness, linguistic barriers, and academic adjustment, for the most part they effectively managed the acculturation process. I found much less stress than I had expected, and students who very articulately and maturely reflected on their positive experiences acculturating to American and campus cultures.
CHAPTER FIVE:
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students attending liberal arts colleges in the United States. As this project employed a case study approach, the aim was to understand those experiences from both student and institutional perspectives. By generating a balanced understanding of the experiences associated with the increased enrollment of Chinese students, the purpose of this study was to help other liberal arts institutions understand how to proactively support this growing population.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the study’s findings, followed by a review of the implications for other liberal arts colleges in general and for educational leaders in particular. A consideration of the limitations of the study, as well as directions for future research, will conclude the analysis.

Section I: Major Findings

Finding #1: There was a range in community reactions, but most faculty and staff have been supportive of the increased enrollment of Chinese international students for a variety of reasons.

None of the faculty or administrators who participated in my study voiced any opposition or resistance to the increased enrollment of Chinese international students; to the contrary, they each supported it. Their reasons for supporting the increased enrollment of Chinese international students varied, depending on their institutional role.
Faculty emphasized the work ethic of the Chinese students and their determination to succeed academically. Even if students struggled initially, faculty felt that the students put in the requisite effort to improve. Faculty believed that although some of their colleagues did not have the patience to work with the Chinese students, such faculty tended to be a minority. Generally, faculty members were quick to think of examples of Chinese international students who were thriving, but often struggled to think of examples of students who experienced significant challenge.

Even though some of the Chinese students articulated occasional struggles participating in class discussion, faculty actually complimented the level of engagement of the Chinese students. A couple of faculty members cited examples of Chinese students who did not actively participate in class, however most faculty acknowledged the efforts of their Chinese students. Faculty understood that participation could be challenging for students, but could tell that the Chinese students tried to engage. Faculty were aware of the different model of education in China (Beykont & Daiute, 2002; Chen, 1999), but said that the stereotype did not necessarily hold true. This compliment was surprising because some of the Chinese students mentioned that class participation could be challenging. This suggests cultural sensitivity and a supportive attitude on behalf of faculty, and perhaps a self-critical attitude on behalf of the Chinese students. It also reinforces that Chinese students’ perceptions of their experience can be different from faculty perceptions of the experience, even when talking about similar situations.

Faculty and staff also highlighted the value of Chinese students’ perspectives. Similar to what previous literature has stated (Lord, 2013), the Chinese students provide their American peers with perspectives that they may not have considered before. Particularly because of the
unique liberal arts setting, there were many opportunities, academic and social, for students to engage with and learn from these diverse perspectives (Umbach & Kuh, 2006).

Administrators were careful to speak about the increased enrollment in balanced ways but were transparent in our conversations. Faculty and staff thus also recognized the financial incentives behind enrolling Chinese students. Very few Chinese students receive financial aid, so these full-paying students generate significant tuition revenue that enables both institutions to continue to offer generous financial aid to American students.

The discussion on the financial incentives of Chinese international students was not dominant, but both faculty and staff referenced it. A few faculty members noted in passing the change in the socioeconomic composition of the Chinese international population over time. These were only faculty who had been with Lakeford for ten or more years because of the loss of a major grant that changed Lakeford’s ability to offer financial aid to these students. This confirms what previous literature and studies (Blumenstyk & Thomason, 2013; Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004; Thomason, 2013) have suggested about tuition revenue and the financial benefits of increasing internationalization on campus.

**Finding #2: Both campuses adjusted by increasing the availability of supportive academic programming, but did not change their social models of programming.**

The most notable adjustments were academic, with the creation of a full-time position for a second language writing specialist at both sites and the development of a U.S. government support course at Columbus. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both institutions already had a second language writing specialist; however, those positions were both only part-time prior to the increased enrollment of Chinese international students. The creation of the full-time position
was not immediate, but as soon as the position was created, there was great support on campus among both students and faculty. Every faculty member was very positive about the second language writing specialist and mentioned the specialist many times throughout interviews. Although no faculty required that their struggling students seek the support of the writing specialist, they strongly recommended it.

Similarly, a government support course was created when faculty at Columbus realized that international students did not have the same curricular background as American students, particularly when considering courses in American history and government. As with the second language writing specialist, this was a course that was not required and for which students received no credit. However, this class is crowded because the international students need to gain an understanding of the fundamentals of American government in order to pass their rigorous introductory level course, which is an academic requirement.

The importance of both the second language writing specialists and the government course is the reconsideration of assumptions. Both institutions are considered highly-selective, meaning that applications are comprehensively reviewed with only the strongest students offered a space in the freshman class. This comprehensive process includes the review of high school transcripts, standardized test scores, essays, supplemental writing samples, extracurricular activities, and teacher recommendations. At both institutions, international applicants also need to display high levels of English language fluency, either through an interview, enrollment in a school where the primary language of instruction is English, or a minimum score of 100 on the TOEFL examination. The Chinese students’ applications were reviewed through this rigorous process, so faculty and staff assumed that the Chinese students would arrive with a certain set of academic skills that would allow them to integrate seamlessly.
Many people on both campuses assumed that admission into these highly-selective institutions suggested that students would come with the same level of preparation across the board. They believed that Chinese students should be able to adjust to the academic standards just as their American peers could. Some of the people interviewed hinted that some of the faculty who opposed enrolling such large numbers of Chinese students sometimes assumed that a heavy accent or a struggle with proper punctuation signaled a lack of intelligence and thus exposed a flaw in that review process. However, to the faculty who participated in this study, they were able to see that community members had to reconsider their assumptions regarding a selective admission process and the students who are admitted through that process.

Faculty learned that when required curriculum relies upon knowledge of topics that are exclusively American, it could not be expected that students educated outside that system would have that fundamental knowledge because it had not been a component of their high school experience. A struggle with English grammar and syntax did not signal a lack of intelligence or a lack of effort. Faculty expressed an understanding that that the Chinese students would not come to campus with all knowledge and skills, but this did not mean they could not or would not learn and develop. More importantly, it did not mean that those Chinese students were any less deserving of a space at that particular institution.

Although both institutions made some adjustments to academic programming, my discussions with faculty and staff suggested that models of social programming had not changed because of the increased enrollment of Chinese international students. None of the international programming professionals referenced social programs that were created to accommodate the Chinese students. Changes to the philosophy of programming happened not in response to the
Chinese students in particular, but rather to the habits of the general international population and a desire to enable students to take initiative in planning programming.

Finding #3: Although there is some disconnect between what academic and social programming campus leaders believe Chinese students want and the programs that the Chinese students utilize and find most helpful, there are some programs coordinated through international programming that the Chinese students appreciate.

Both Lakeford and Columbus reacted to the increase in Chinese students by creating a full-time position for the second language writing specialist. Although faculty were very enthusiastic about this position and believed that it was the most important and most utilized service offered to the Chinese students, the students did not share the same level of enthusiasm. Each of the Chinese students met with a second language writing specialist at least once during their freshman year, and each expressed appreciation for the careful examination of grammar and punctuation. However, these students also complained about the amount of time required to review assignments so carefully with the second language writing specialist.

The needs of the Chinese students shifted over time. In their first year, the critical language review was important as students adjusted to faculty expectations and wrote their first American academic papers. However, after their freshman year, the Chinese students preferred more general help with generating and organizing ideas, therefore they tended not to consult the second language writing specialist and sought the support of general writing specialists utilized by all students or peers tutors when they needed help.

In terms of academic programming, the students seemed to prefer programs that were both effective and efficient. One of the reasons why students liked the math skills center, for
example, was because they learned how to arrive at a certain answer and the path to that answer was explained in a quick and straightforward manner. Most of the students still sought writing support, but they tended to use general programs that were available to all students, not just the international audience, and where the focus was on idea development rather than a line-by-line examination of grammar. As a whole, supportive academic programming was aligned with the early needs of the Chinese students, but later in their academic careers, they sought out general academic support programs. However, the Chinese students’ comments suggest that they do not require specifically-targeted academic programming beyond their first year.

Socially there seemed to be a larger disconnect and this was particularly true at Lakeford, where international and multicultural programming were combined. The individuals who work in the international programming office at Lakeford expressed great enthusiasm about their peer mentoring program, but the Chinese students did not share this enthusiasm. None of the Lakeford students considered their peer mentors to actually serve mentorship roles, and none had enduring relationships with their peer mentor. For a couple of students this was because of their individual personality and they simply did not want a relationship with their peer mentor. For other students, though they initially respected their peer mentor, who seemed to be academically and socially established, after seeing these peer mentors acting irresponsibly or immurely at a party, the Chinese students lost respect for them. This runs contrary to Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed’s (1998) study on the efficacy of a peer mentoring program at a public university in the Midwest. In that study, ongoing and organized interactions between mentors and international students strengthened the international students’ interpersonal skills and assisted in social adjustment. The peer mentoring program at Lakeford is different because it is not as centrally organized or ongoing, with each pair of students determining the terms of that relationship. Most
relationships did not last beyond the orientation period, so it could not be described as ongoing. None of the Chinese students maintained relationships with their peer mentors, and none found it to be an effective program.

Another area of disconnect is with inclusive programming. Both Lakeford and Columbus believe that they encouraged interaction between Chinese and American students through inclusive programming. The people who worked in the international programming office at Lakeford believed that the integrated nature of their office created an easy way for American students to learn about international cultures, and for international students to learn about important American topics. However, not all students believed that a fair balance had been achieved.

After one of the focus groups at Lakeford was complete, a student stayed afterward to chat privately with me. She said that although the international programming office was supposed to be an inclusive operation, its programs didn’t necessarily reflect that. The student expressed that issues of relevance to Chinese students were not included in programming, and the Chinese students wanted their interests to be better represented. Per the office’s website and through speaking with that office’s professionals, it was clear that many of the planned programs focused on the interests of American students of color. On a campus that has a sizeable Chinese population, both international and American-born, there were no programs that reflected that important population. This was not a concern voiced by other students, but is still worth noting.

It is apparent that the Chinese international students did not confine themselves exclusively to social programming only intended for an international audience or planned by the international programming offices. Though they did attend some major events and festivals coordinated by the international programming offices, the Chinese students also wanted to make
American friends and learn more about American culture, so they did not restrict themselves to those activities. Because of the intimate residential nature of both institutions, there were many opportunities for the Chinese students to connect with their peers. The Chinese students participated in various cultural clubs, leadership organizations, intramural athletics, and the performing arts. They also attended gatherings in their residence halls and other informal events. In other words, the Chinese international students did not rely upon or heavily utilize activities coordinated by the international programming offices.

Even though there was some disconnect between what the institutions believed Chinese students needed and what the students actually utilized, there were a couple of programs that students enjoyed. The Host Family Programs, programs with the same name but different designs at Lakeford and Columbus, were well-received by the Chinese students. They believed the programs provided them with cultural contact and friendly families who even invited them to Thanksgiving dinner. Additionally, students appreciated workshops planned by their international programming office because such workshops offered practical guidance. For example, a few of the Columbus students participated in a workshop regarding U.S. job placement. The students appreciated that this workshop addressed their specific needs and limitations, as the process of finding and gaining employment could be complicated for them. The fact that students appreciated the workshops comes as no surprise given their comments regarding the academic programming they appreciated the most. It seems that efficiency and practicality were very important to the students.
Finding #4: Faculty have incomplete perceptions of the acculturation experience for Chinese students, but the people who work with the students outside of an academic context understand the different layers of the experience.

When I asked faculty what they thought Chinese students struggled with, they generally referenced English language fluency. Faculty did not believe it was a very pervasive issue or that it prevented students from academic success, but they did believe English fluency was a challenging issue for some of the Chinese students. Faculty were sympathetic and understanding, acknowledging that this was, for most of the Chinese students, their first fully immersive experience and that they came with different levels of preparation. Faculty understood that some students only spoke English for an hour or two each day in high school, and even that English instruction could have been flawed depending upon the instructor or the course material. It is important to note that faculty did not believe that language was a universal issue for the Chinese students as they also complimented many students’ ability to thoughtfully participate in class. Faculty simply believed that language was the issue with which Chinese students were most prone to struggle. This is similar to what Robertson, et al. (2000) found in their study wherein faculty and students referenced similar struggles that international students experience, but the two groups emphasized different elements of acculturation.

The fact that most faculty believed the language barrier was the issue the Chinese students struggled with the most suggests an incomplete understanding of the acculturation process. Although some of the Chinese students indicated that they struggled to fully comprehend colloquial terms and to participate in class, the most challenging component of acculturation articulated by students was homesickness. This lack of alignment is likely due to the limited scope of faculty-student interactions. Although most of the faculty claimed to have
personally engaging relationships with at least a couple of Chinese students, these relationships tended to stay on-campus. A few professors said they invited students over to their homes for special dinners or holidays, but the relationships were still limited. Some faculty mentioned food, both in jest and seriousness, as a struggle for the Chinese students, but those discussions of homesickness usually did not go beyond food.

Some faculty members were able to comment on some of the cultural challenges the Chinese students may have encountered, particularly with regard to the party culture. Some faculty commented that the Chinese students did not understand the drinking culture or habits of their American peers. This suggests that even if faculty members have more limited interactions with the Chinese students, they are able to understand potential cultural struggles. A few of the Chinese students did articulate the struggle of not understanding and/or wanting to engage in the party culture, so this shows some alignment between what faculty and staff think students may struggle with and what the students actually experience.

Although few faculty referenced student struggles with homesickness, the staff that work more closely with the students outside of the academic context were able to highlight the depths of homesickness. The people best able to articulate this were those who worked in international programming offices. These professionals were able to articulate an understanding of cultural distance (Shupe, 2007; Wan, et al., 1992; Yan & Berliner, 2013) and how it combined with homesickness to create a challenging experience for the Chinese international students. International programming professionals understood that the Chinese students were very far from home, their parents were in different time zones, and the distance was felt both physically and culturally. These professionals noted how it could be difficult to communicate with family,
even with modern technology that allows you to chat for free, because of significant time differences.

**Finding #5:** Students did not feel very nervous prior to enrollment and tended not to experience acute levels of acculturative stress. However, students experienced homesickness, challenges with the linguistic and academic adjustment, and some social challenges.

Although previous studies suggest that international students are prone to experience acculturative stress (Bektas, et al., 2009; Constantine, et al., 2004; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Wei, et al., 2007), the participants in this study did not seem to experience significant challenges associated with acculturation. Even though literature regarding cultural distance suggests that students from Asian cultures are more susceptible to enduring cultural struggles because of the vast differences between their home and host cultures (Shupe, 2007; Wan, et al., 1992; Yan & Berliner, 2013), the Chinese students did not express deep cultural struggles. The students felt more excitement than nervousness prior to their arrival on campus. However, there were a few issues that proved challenging for the Chinese students.

One challenge that almost all students experienced was homesickness. Students experienced homesickness at different intervals and for different time periods. Even the most confident students expressed missing their homes and families. This is similar to what previous research noted about students feeling a sense of loss upon arrival to the United States (Constantine, et al., 2004; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Lee, et al., Sales, 2004; Sherry, et al., 2010; Wei, et al., 2007). It was difficult for students to comprehend that their families’ lives continued without them. For most students, homesickness occurred early in their college careers as they
missed their families and comforts of their home, and only a couple of students experienced homesickness in the sophomore year once the excitement of freshman year had dissipated. Sometimes return visits could amplify these feelings, as being home recalled all of the aspects they loved about home. The fact that students experienced homesickness at different times in their college careers suggests that there is no defined period when students are either prone to or free from acculturative stress.

The Chinese students also experienced some challenges with the language barrier. The topic of the language barrier was interesting because while most of the students indicated that they did not feel nervous about linguistic challenges prior to their arrival, once they arrived on campus they found the language barrier to be more challenging than expected. This is because a fundamental understanding of the English language does not necessarily lead to fluid practical application of language, particularly in fast-paced and/or colloquial settings. So while the students believed that their English courses in high school may have adequately prepared them for the college experience, they may have underestimated the challenges that awaited them.

Previous literature suggests that language is one of the most pervasive components of acculturative stress (Constantine, et al., 2005; Mori, 2000; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Yan & Berliner, 2013). The language barrier can be particularly challenging for international students because of the ensuing consequences, including a struggle to understand professor lectures, not feeling comfortable articulating themselves in class discussions, and a lack of confidence in socializing with others, particularly Americans (Constantine, et al., 2005; Dao, et al., 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997, Mori, 2000; Yan & Berliner, 2013). My findings similarly found that students sometimes struggled with the consequences of the language barrier even if they believed they had sufficiently strong language skills. While the Chinese students did not express difficulty
understanding lectures or engaging in basic discussions, they did express challenges associated with understanding colloquial terms and participating in class.

Students had mixed feelings regarding colloquial terms and their American peers. Most students appreciated when their American peers would make sure they understood colloquial terms or cultural references. Only one student did not appreciate it when his peers asked if he understood something because he did not want people to assume that he would not comprehend a term or concept just because he is Chinese. Class participation was challenging, not necessarily because of a lack of confidence in language skills, but because of the quick pace of the conversation. Students commented that while they wanted to participate, their American peers were equally eager to contribute their thoughts. Often the Chinese students would think of something to say, but their thoughts were initially in Chinese so they needed to take a few moments to translate their thoughts into English. Once this process was complete, another student sometimes made the same remark or the class moved on.

Findings suggest that although Chinese students experienced some challenges rooted in a language barrier, those challenges were not pervasive or severe. The language barrier could be inconvenient but it did not lead to academic or social isolation. It could be difficult for the Chinese students to be actively engaged in class, but not to the extent that students felt the need to withdraw from their college. Additionally, it could be challenging to understand new colloquial terms or cultural references, but this did not lead to social isolation. Part of the reason why this is true is because of efforts on behalf of faculty and peers. Faculty called on Chinese students in class rather than allowing a couple of students to dominate discussion, and peers would pause and ask if their Chinese friends needed any clarification. This indicates that a slight language barrier can be managed effectively at small liberal arts colleges where faculty are able
to pay attention to the needs of specific students and where the residential nature of the experience encourages constant interaction among all students. My findings emphasize the positive role that faculty and peers can play in helping Chinese international students to manage their acculturative stress and adjustment.

Aside from participation, the volume of reading and elevated expectations could be difficult for the Chinese students to manage. Previous studies state that international students can be discouraged when the language barrier requires them to spend additional time on reading assignments because it can exacerbate feelings of academic struggle (Dao, et al., 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Mori, 2000). Something that comforted students was the fact that this was not a challenge unique to them. Their American peers also struggled to keep up with the high volume of reading, and when the Chinese discovered this, it was a relief. Understanding that the struggle with keeping up with weekly reading was an indication of the high level of rigor of the course and not an indication of a student’s inability to do the work was positive and encouraging.

Though many of the students referenced academic confidence, a few also mentioned the challenge of adjusting to elevated expectations in the classroom. In high school, the Chinese students sometimes did not have to push themselves very hard to succeed, but when they arrived on campus, they found themselves in a different situation. This is a function of the highly-selective nature of the admission process. Whereas before the students felt that they were the brightest students in their classes, now they were surrounded by other students who were also the brightest in their former classes. Because of this, some of the Chinese students felt they had to work harder to keep up with their peers. This was not a dominant theme and is not necessarily unique to Chinese international students. The Chinese students’ struggle to keep up with the high volume of reading and to adjust to elevated academic expectations suggests that, even though
there are unique struggles that the students endure, there are also shared challenges with American peers.

The Chinese students also experienced some social challenges. Though none of the participants expressed social isolation, many referenced challenges in engaging with American peers and understanding the party culture. Although each of the students was able to create meaningful relationships with Americans at some point, there were different reasons why students struggled to create these relationships. Some Chinese students felt initially intimidated by Americans, some students believed that they could not engage in deep discussions with their American peers, and some articulated feeling that their American peers were uninterested in Chinese culture or had outdated understandings of China. While many of the Chinese students still believed that some of their American peers were not interested in learning more about modern China, they were able to create meaningful relationships with Americans and did not isolate themselves socially.

Additionally, some of the Chinese students were puzzled by the party culture. Though many of the students appreciated when their American peers invited them to parties on the weekend, a few of the students found the drinking culture to be a bit weird. Some of the students felt the drinking culture was very different than what they experienced at home, with intentional and irresponsible binge drinking on weekdays. Their Chinese peers often offered social alternatives to these parties and would host social gatherings that gave students an opportunity for social engagement in an environment more comfortable culturally.
Finding #6: The people who were most important and helpful to the Chinese students were faculty, friends, and other supportive staff members.

Faculty

Each of the students said that faculty were the most important people in their college experience. Faculty provided support and guidance in the classroom, and some were able to offer personal support as well. Because both institutions are small, the Chinese students felt that faculty offered a lot of personal attention. Faculty were unafraid to sensitively communicate areas where the students needed to improve, but they were also willing to give the time to help the students grow in those areas of weakness. Their patience, dedication, and friendliness helped the Chinese students to feel well-supported and respected on campus. Faculty even recommended outside opportunities for the students or served as references for internships or jobs.

Each of the Chinese students had some kind of relationship with faculty members and took advantage of opportunities to engage with their professors outside of class time. Contrary to some studies that have suggested that international students may experience discrimination from their faculty (Lee, 2010; Wadsworth, et al., 2008), the Chinese international students felt respected by faculty and did not feel that they were singled out or made to feel less intelligent by their professors.

Friends

The Chinese students felt that there were some issues they could not talk with a professor about, but they also did not want to burden their families, therefore friends were the second-most
important people for Chinese international students. Friends shared the experience of attending college, helped students feel more connected to the community, and offered personal support in times of struggle.

Research supports the many benefits of having relationships with American students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Li & Gasser, 2005; Zhang & Goodson, 2011a). However, as mentioned above, it could be challenging for some of the Chinese students to build relationships with their American peers. Eventually each of the Chinese students was able to create relationships with American students and each spoke very positively about those relationships. American students helped the Chinese students understand colloquial terms and cultural references. Americans also included the Chinese students in social gatherings, enabling the Chinese students to feel more connected to the community and more socially-integrated.

Even though the students wanted to create broader relationships across campus, the Chinese students still very much valued their co-national relationships with their Chinese peers. Research illustrates that co-national relationships offer students emotional support and comfort (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Bektas, et al., 2009; Hendrickson, et al., 2011; Yan & Berliner, 2013). The Chinese students appreciated the Chinese upperclassmen who were able to offer them support and guidance when they first arrived on campus. These upperclassmen understood the unique experience of being a Chinese international student and offered the younger Chinese students vital advice. Chinese upperclassmen provided advice on classes to take and they also included the younger Chinese students in social gatherings. Additionally, Chinese student organizations offered students social alternatives when they did not want to participate in the party culture on campus. These activities and interactions comforted them and helped to diminish feelings of anxiety.
Support Staff

The Chinese students also appreciated the people who work in the international programming offices and the second language writing specialists. These individuals were referenced less frequently than faculty and friends, but a few students expressed gratitude for the services offered by these individuals. The reason why the students seemed to appreciate these professionals was because they offered specific and practical support. This is particularly true for the individuals who work in the international programming office. The Chinese students, on top of all of the other items that American students manage when enrolled in college, also have to consider specific items related to their international citizenship. It was important to the Chinese students to have someone who they could always go to who knew about visa regulations and similar items that only apply to international students. Immigration issues can be delicate and most faculty are unaware of how to manage those issues, so the international programming professionals provided good practical support for the students.

Section II: Recommendations for other Liberal Arts Colleges

There are a few recommendations for liberal arts colleges that emerged from my findings.

**Recommendation #1: Faculty may benefit from a cultural training session or workshop where they learn about the different components of acculturative stress beyond the language barrier.**

One area where there was a lack of alignment between Chinese students’ experiences and faculty perceptions of those experiences was in an understanding of acculturative stress beyond the language barrier. Whereas faculty believed that the language barrier was the biggest struggle
for the Chinese students, the students articulated more of a struggle with homesickness. As described above, because faculty interactions with Chinese students were limited in scope, many components of the acculturation experience were unfamiliar because faculty did not see or hear about them. It may be helpful for faculty to engage in a workshop or see a presentation by an international programming professional who works closely with the Chinese international population because it would offer information about the other aspects of campus life that may prove challenging for Chinese students. The exact contents of a session would be different at individual institutions based on what current students actually struggle with, but it would help faculty to understand the different challenges their students may quietly endure. It would help faculty to be more sensitive and supportive. Particularly because each of the Chinese students said that faculty are the most important people in their college experience, it is critical that faculty understand the depths of acculturation so that they could be most understanding and supportive.

**Recommendation #2:** If international programming offices are integrated with multicultural offices, they should consider offering programming that is specifically relevant to the Chinese population.

Though only 1 student shared that she didn’t feel the international programming office met her needs, it is still an issue to consider seriously. No students engaged with their international programming offices on a regular basis; most Chinese students only participated in major annual events. When integrated offices coordinate activities that address the needs or interests of limited groups, an inclusive experience is not created, even though the office philosophy is to engage all students. If a campus is building a large population of Chinese
international students, it should consider having guest speakers who can talk about relevant issues in China or screening Chinese films. Also, providing opportunities for the Chinese students to share their culture with the general campus would go far to achieve this goal of integration. The Chinese students loved sharing their culture with their peers and wanted other people on campus to learn more about Chinese culture. For example, the Lunar New Year celebration at Columbus was important to the Chinese students because they could share an important holiday with their American peers. The fact that the event was so well-attended is a testament to effectively inclusive programming.

**Recommendation #3: International programming offices should include a session with upperclassmen during orientation so that new students can learn the perspectives of students who recently endured a similar experience.**

Columbus students did not have a large group of Chinese upperclassmen from which they could benefit, but the Lakeford students all appreciated the support of the Chinese students who had already experienced the acculturation process. Though the students said that they didn’t want a formal mentoring program, some students did mention that they wished there was an orientation session that transparently explained what to expect socially, and in particular, what to expect from the party scene. The session would not have to be exclusively for Chinese students, but should include Chinese upperclassmen who could speak to the acculturation process and how they perceived the social scene. This would be informative for the new Chinese students and would also provide an introduction to older Chinese students who could serve as informal mentors.
Recommendation #4: International programming offices should consider making orientation a semester-long process with different activities throughout the first term.

Orientation was an exhausting week for students. While many were able to recover from jetlag earlier because they participated in a Host Family Program or because they participated in a pre-orientation trip, international students were bombarded with information that was condensed into just a few days. On top of adjusting to a new country, a new culture, a new home, and new people, these students were also fed a lot of information about academic expectations and cultural changes. There were a lot of practical items that were helpful to address during orientation, but not everything had to be addressed within the first few days. Acculturation is a process and so too can be orientation.

Section III: Recommendations for Academic and Administrative Leaders

Recommendation #1: Educational leaders must reconsider the ethics of their practice while still recognizing the different values Chinese international students bring to campus.

Interviews with faculty and staff elicited different perspectives regarding the benefits of increasing the enrollment of Chinese international students. The Chinese students bring a new global perspective that can enhance classroom and community activities; they work hard and display positive academic qualities and they generate tuition revenue because they do not receive financial aid. However, admission professionals in particular need to be mindful to not just enroll students because of their potential to contribute in these capacities.

I’ve heard the term “low-hanging fruit” sometimes used to describe the recruitment of Chinese international students because there is such a great volume of intelligent and eager
students seeking study in the United States, making China a country ripe for recruitment. Although it is tempting to recruit and enroll a large volume of these talented Chinese students, educational leaders need to think about the implications and potential consequences of enrollment. Just because a population has the potential to contribute financially does not mean that each student is prepared for academic and social success at a particular institution.

Many colleges want to increase their percentages of international students, sometimes for superficial purposes or to compete with peer institutions, without true consideration of their campus’ level of readiness to support the students. However, educational leaders first need to consider the consequences and needs before enrolling a large volume of Chinese international students. Educational leaders need to ask if they have the proper academic and social programs to support Chinese students, if faculty are onboard to teach and support the increased population of Chinese students, and if the international programming office is sufficiently equipped to support a larger population of Chinese students. It is not just the initial enrollment that matters, it is student persistence and success as well. Stronger levels of persistence will create higher retention rates, so both students and institutions will benefit from more careful consideration.

**Recommendation #2: Educational leaders need to re-think their assumptions about international students and create a committee to help others within the community understand the reality of the international student experience.**

When discussing the academic programming adjustments, it was mentioned that faculty members had to reconsider their assumptions about international students. Educational leaders similarly need to reconsider their assumptions about international students and the ethics of practice. This is particularly true for those who work in college admission. While these
professionals actively work to recruit and enroll students, by the time those students arrive on campus, admission professionals are already focusing on a new class. Though this is a natural function of the cycle of admission work, it means that sometimes admission professionals may not know what students actually experience when they come to campus. The ability to genuinely describe and market the college experience to international audiences depends on the ability to consider the experiences of currently-enrolled students. While campus professionals may assume that the Chinese students are doing well and integrating seamlessly, they need to actually ask people who work more closely with the students, as well as the students themselves, in order to best assess the situation.

Admission professionals who work with international populations should create a committee comprised of representatives from the admission office, international programming office, student life, and faculty who work with international students. Some international students, who will serve as representatives for their peers, should also participate actively in this committee. The committee should meet at regular intervals (perhaps twice a semester) to discuss relevant issues. The balanced committee would allow individuals from different sectors of campus to understand their perceptions of the international student experience, any challenges they are encountering as professionals, and/or the issues with which they believe the international students are struggling.

**Recommendation #3: Educational leaders need to actually talk to current students to see what the students need and if current programs are helpful.**

This is another reconsideration of assumptions. International programming and other offices are generally well-intentioned with their students. Professionals in these offices have
different programming philosophies and approaches, but they agree that they want to best serve the students and provide them with meaningful social opportunities. However, some of these decisions are made without actually asking students for their input. Even if an office plans abundant programming each term, if those programs are not helping students or if students are uninterested, the effort to coordinate those programs goes to waste. Sometimes professionals assume that programs are working because they have not heard complaints. However, not all students feel comfortable or know how to proactively voice their opinions if their perspectives have not been requested.

Educational leaders need to consider the needs of the people they want to support and give these individuals the opportunity to share their opinions. The student participants were eager to share their thoughts and a few were even thankful for the opportunity to contribute their perspectives. The students of this study were transparent but not overly critical. Not all students will want to participate in a focus group, but providing anonymous questionnaires or surveys for students and the option of participating a focus group, possibly facilitated by someone who does not work for the institution, would provide educational leaders with the real information they need in order to plan truly meaningful and supportive programming. Often it is the job of an educational leader to listen.

Section IV: Study Limitations

There are a few limitations to my study that should be considered. The first limitation is sample size. This study sought to understand the experiences of Chinese international students attending liberal arts colleges through case studies at two liberal arts colleges, where I spoke with 12 students, 9 faculty members, and 13 institutional staff members who work in various offices. Therefore, one of the study’s major limitations was sample size, both in terms of study
participants and site selection. I spoke with only a fraction of the Chinese students who are attending liberal arts colleges in the United States, and the ones that I was able to speak to attended only two colleges. This smaller size enabled me to engage students beyond a questionnaire and allowed them to articulate their perspectives in depth; however, the perspectives of 12 students cannot be generalizable for a much larger population.

In regards to my student sample, there was an uneven level of participation between the two sites. More individuals from Lakeford participated in various components of this study. A total of 24 students from Lakeford completed the questionnaire, but only 7 Columbus students did so. This means that of the 31 total questionnaire responses, 77.4% were submitted by Lakeford students. Although the participation in focus groups and interviews was closer, with 7 total students participating at Lakeford and 5 at Columbus, the difference in participation between the two sites makes it difficult to compare the two institutions.

Because of the difference in questionnaire participation between the two sites, I cannot compare the students’ reported nervousness or apprehension prior to arrival, the programming they have taken advantage of and found to be most useful, or the people who have been most supportive of them as they managed the acculturation process. Although the purpose of this study was not to create comparative case studies, it still would have been interesting, given the different experiences that I had with the sites, to compare student perceptions of their experiences, particularly as expressed in questionnaire responses. As referenced earlier, organizational culture can shape a student’s experience on-campus (Clark, 1972; Tierney, 1988, 1997), so a comparative analysis of the two sites would have added extra depth to this study.

Another limitation was that the case studies were conducted at two highly-selective institutions. The students who were admitted to both Lakeford and Columbus entered their
respective institutions with elevated levels of English proficiency and other strong academic skills. Both institutions require that all international students receive a score of at least 100 on the TOEFL examination, and although both offer second language writing support, neither has a remedial English language program designed to help students learn English. Because of this, the students in this study’s sample were already less susceptible to certain components of acculturative stress, namely the language barrier.

As referenced in Chapter Four, 9 of the questionnaire respondents attended high school outside of the United States. This means that these students were exposed to academic models, language, and culture outside of China. Because most of these students attended high school in countries where the primary language of instruction is English, these students were also less likely to endure acculturative stress. This therefore may have limited my findings relative to acculturative stress and undermined my original hypothesis to some extent.

Additionally, because no faculty, staff, or students were required to participate in my study, limitations relating to self-selection need to be considered. The faculty I interviewed were those willing to take the time to discuss Chinese international students. Because of this, I spoke with the faculty who were most interested and generally the most positive regarding the Chinese students. I was unable to secure interviews with faculty in some departments most frequented by the Chinese international students, such as economics, therefore the perspectives of faculty who may have experienced more challenges with the increased enrollment of Chinese students were absent in this study. In terms of the students who participated in my study, I spoke with students who were willing to take the time to not only complete a questionnaire, but also spend one hour in a focus group. I did not speak with students who were too stressed out or too busy to be able to
do either, or both. It is possible that students who may have struggled did not participate because they did not have the time to participate and/or did not want to admit that they struggled.

Finally, the study’s data is primarily the result of interviews and because of logistical and time constraints, I was unable to build participant observations into this study. In reality, interviews can sometimes be deceptive due to reliance upon the words and perceptions of individuals who may or may not be accurately describing the situation. My study’s findings would have been strengthened had participant observation been a component of the study.

**Section V: Directions for Future Research**

There are a few ways for future research to continue to explore the acculturation experiences for Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges and the people and programs that are most helpful. To expand on these research findings, future research should be conducted at liberal arts colleges which are not as highly-selective as those included in this study and allow lower TOEFL scores. Such institutions may have students who are more likely to experience challenges with the language barrier, which could then lead to other struggles with acculturative stress.

Future research could also be longitudinal and study the process of acculturation for Chinese students. As these findings suggest, students may experience some forms of acculturative stress during different times in their experiences so it would be interesting to follow a few students over the period of two or more years to see how their experiences shift, what contributed to those changes, and what helped them during those times.

Additionally, although this study focused on the experiences of Chinese international students, faculty and staff suggested that there are other populations of students who endure
academic and social struggles as well. The populations referenced most often were Indian and Saudi students. Although China is the leading sender of international students to the United States, India is second and Saudi Arabia is fourth (Institute for International Education, 2014). It would be interesting to similarly consider Indian and Saudi student experiences with acculturation and the people and programs that have been most helpful to them.

**Conclusion**

This study explored the acculturation experiences of Chinese international students attending liberal arts colleges in the United States. It was surprising to discover that the Chinese students did not feel nervous prior to their arrival and experienced low levels of acculturative stress. Although most of the students experienced homesickness at some point and endured some challenges adjusting to academic rigors, the Chinese students seemed able to positively reflect on their experiences and successfully adjust, academically and socially. Interestingly, comments from both students and faculty suggested that the academic struggles the Chinese students experienced were not totally unique to the Chinese students but rather American students also struggled to adjust to the rigorous academic standards. I expected to hear stories of social and academic isolation, students who consistently struggled to participate in class, and a population that was struggling to fit in. I found the opposite. The Chinese students were not known for their struggles, they were known for their successes and strengths. Faculty highlighted the Chinese students’ achievements rather than their defeats.

I was also heartened by the interest that the participants took in this study. This was particularly true for those students who wanted to know more about my research, and many offered thanks for conducting it. Though many students who completed the questionnaire did not
express an interest in participating in a focus group, each of the Chinese students who participated in a focus group came ready to share their thoughts.

However, because this study was limited to faculty and students from two highly-selective liberal arts colleges, there is still much room for future research to explore the acculturation experiences of Chinese students, as well as other emerging nationalities, at the many other liberal arts colleges located throughout the United States.
Appendix A
Recruitment Email: Students

Students,

My name is Laura Arenstein and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). This message has been sent to you by the international programming office at your school on my behalf.

I am conducting a study on the experiences of Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges. I aim to understand both the challenges experienced by these students, but also the people, programs, and institutional elements that have been supportive in helping them to manage these challenges. In order to understand the student perspective, I have created a brief questionnaire that asks students about various challenges (language, cultural, academic, and social) and programming that has been most helpful. Additionally, I will be leading focus groups on your campus that will include between six to eight students in each session. The one-hour focus group will facilitate an in-depth discussion on the themes presented in the questionnaire. Students who complete the questionnaire and also participate in a one-hour focus group will be compensated with $15.

The findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their enrollments of Chinese international students. This is an opportunity for you to candidly share your experiences in a way that will benefit future students.

I hope that you will take the time to complete this questionnaire. At the end of the questionnaire, there is a question that asks if you are willing to participate in a one-hour focus group. If you are interested, please provide me with an e-mail address where I can reach you, and I will contact you to schedule the focus group.

You can access the questionnaire here: (survey link removed)

Best wishes,

Laura Arenstein
LauraTarenstein@gmail.com
Appendix B
Recruitment Email: Faculty and Staff at Lakeford

Dear (insert name),

My name is Laura Arenstein and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am currently working on my dissertation entitled, “Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges.” I am also the Director of International Recruitment at Whittier College in Los Angeles, California.

As the title of my study suggests, I am conducting a study on the experiences of Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges. I aim to understand both the challenges that these students have experienced, but also the people, programs, and institutional elements that have been supportive in helping them to manage these challenges. I will be conducting two qualitative case studies at liberal arts colleges that have large populations of Chinese international students, and (site name) is one of my sites. To understand institutional perspective regarding the growth in the Chinese international student population, I will be conducting interviews with faculty, admission officers, international programming professionals, and student life professionals. These one-hour interviews will provide me with invaluable depth that will help me to understand institutional context.

The findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollment. Both the (site name)’s and individual participants’ identities will be confidential. No names, personal or institutional, will be used in the study.

I would very much appreciate your participation in my study. I will be visiting (site name)’s campus from January 20-22, 2015, and I would happily meet you at a convenient time and place. Please let me know if you are willing to participate in a one-hour interview with me on campus, and I will follow up so that we can schedule a convenient time.

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Best wishes,

Laura Arenstein
LauraTArenstein@gmail.com
Appendix C
Recruitment Email: Faculty and Staff at Columbus

Dear (insert name),

My name is Laura Arenstein and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am currently working on my dissertation entitled, “Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges.” I am also the Director of International Recruitment at Whittier College in Los Angeles, California.

As the title of my study suggests, I am conducting a study on the experiences of Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges. I aim to understand both the challenges that these students have experienced, but also the people, programs, and institutional elements that have been supportive in helping them to manage these challenges. I will be conducting two qualitative case studies at liberal arts colleges that have large populations of Chinese international students, and (site name) is one of my sites. To understand institutional perspective regarding the growth in the Chinese international student population, I will be conducting interviews with faculty, admission officers, international programming professionals, and Deans or Provosts. These one-hour interviews will provide me with invaluable depth that will help me to understand institutional context.

The findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollment. Both the (site name)’s and individual participants’ identities will be confidential. No names, personal or institutional, will be used in the study.

I would very much appreciate your participation in my study. I will happily come to campus to meet with you at a time that is convenient for you. Please let me know if you are willing to participate in a one-hour interview with me on campus, and I will follow up so that we can schedule a convenient time.

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Best wishes,

Laura Arenstein
LauraT Arenstein@gmail.com
Appendix D
Additional Faculty Recruitment Email: Columbus

Dear Professor (insert name),

My name is Laura Arenstein and I am a student in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). I am currently working on my dissertation entitled, “Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges.” I am also the Director of International Recruitment at Whittier College in Los Angeles, California.

As the title of my study suggests, I am conducting a study on the experiences of Chinese international students at liberal arts colleges. I aim to understand both the challenges that these students have experienced, but also the people, programs, and institutional elements that have been supportive in helping them to manage these challenges. I will be conducting two qualitative case studies at liberal arts colleges that have large populations of Chinese international students, and (site name) is one of my sites. To understand institutional perspective regarding the growth in the Chinese international student population, I will be conducting interviews with faculty, admission officers, international programming professionals, and Deans or Provosts. These one-hour interviews will provide me with invaluable depth that will help me to understand institutional context.

The findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollment. Both (site name)’s and individual participants’ identities will be confidential. No names, personal or institutional, will be used in the study. I have received approval from both (site name)’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and (Dean of Faculty) to speak with faculty.

As primary contact for the (insert department name) program, I am emailing you to ask for either your participation in my study, or for your recommendation for other faculty members in your department who could participate in my study. I will happily come to campus to meet with you at a time that is convenient for you (or your colleagues). Please let me know if you are willing to participate in a one-hour interview with me on campus, or if you have other faculty recommendations.

Thank you, and I hope to hear from you soon!

Best wishes,

Laura Arenstein
LauraT Arenstein@gmail.com
Appendix E
Consent Form: Students

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for

Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laura Arenstein from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a Chinese international student who is in your second, third, or fourth year at your liberal arts institution. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand the challenges that Chinese international students experience when they adjust to liberal arts colleges. More specifically, this project explores the people, programs, and campus elements that these Chinese international students found to be most helpful. Findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollments so that they can more effectively and comprehensively support their students.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

• Participate in a one-hour focus group discussion with a group of five to seven other students where you will discuss the challenges you experienced during your time in college, and the programs and people that you found to be most supportive.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no risks or discomforts that you can expect. Your responses will in no way be connected to you or to your academic records.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study.

The results of the research may help liberal arts colleges learn how to more effectively and comprehensively support their growing populations of Chinese international students.
**Will I be paid for participating?**
You will receive $15.00 in cash for participation in the focus group.

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding of data so that no individual names will be connected to any particular responses. All recordings of focus groups will be transcribed and then destroyed. Transcriptions of the focus group will be maintained on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcripts. All participants will be asked to keep what is said during the focus group between the participants only. However, complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

_Laura Arenstein, Principal Investigator_
LauraTArenstein@gmail.com

_Robert Rhoads, Faculty Sponsor_
Rhoads@Gseis.ucla.edu

**UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):**
If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program
11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

_You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records._
Appendix F
Consent Form: Faculty

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for

Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laura Arenstein from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you teach international students. Because this project employs a case study model, it is important to gain institutional perspective on Chinese international students, campus climate, and challenges faced by these students. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand the challenges that Chinese international students experience when they adjust to liberal arts colleges. More specifically, this project explores the people, programs, and campus elements that these Chinese international students found to be most helpful. Findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollments so that they can more effectively and comprehensively support their students.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

• Participate in a one hour, individual interview.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no risks or discomforts that you can expect.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study.

The results of the research may help liberal arts colleges learn how to more effectively and comprehensively support their growing populations of Chinese international students.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding of data so that no individual names will be connected to any particular responses. All recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed. Transcriptions of the interview will be maintained on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcripts.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Laura Arenstein, Principal Investigator
LauraTArenstein@gmail.com

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Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.
Appendix G
Consent Form: International Programming Office

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for

Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laura Arenstein from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your office is works directly with Chinese international students, including but not limited to providing supportive programming opportunities. Additionally, because your office serves international students, you are more aware of the challenges that these students face and what needs they may have. Because this project employs a case study model, it is important to gain institutional perspective on Chinese international students, campus climate, and challenges faced by these students. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand the challenges that Chinese international students experience when they adjust to liberal arts colleges. More specifically, this project explores the people, programs, and campus elements that these Chinese international students found to be most helpful. Findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollments so that they can more effectively and comprehensively support their students.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a one hour, individual interview.

How long will I be in the research study?
Participation will take a total of about one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?
There are no risks or discomforts that you can expect.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?
You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study.

The results of the research may help liberal arts colleges learn how to more effectively and comprehensively support their growing populations of Chinese international students.
Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding of data so that no individual names will be connected to any particular responses. All recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed. Transcriptions of the interview will be maintained on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcripts.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Laura Arenstein, Principal Investigator
LauraTArenstein@gmail.com

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):
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11000 Kinross Avenue, Suite 211, Box 951694
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for
Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laura Arenstein from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your office works directly with the recruitment and enrollment of Chinese international students. Because this project employs a case study model, it is important to gain institutional perspective on Chinese international students, campus climate, and challenges faced by these students. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand the challenges that Chinese international students experience when they adjust to liberal arts colleges. More specifically, this project explores the people, programs, and campus elements that these Chinese international students found to be most helpful. Findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollments so that they can more effectively and comprehensively support their students.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

• Participate in a one hour, individual interview.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no risks or discomforts that you can expect.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study.

The results of the research may help liberal arts colleges learn how to more effectively and comprehensively support their growing populations of Chinese international students.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding of data so that no individual names will be connected to any particular responses. All recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed. Transcriptions of the interview will be maintained on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcripts.

**What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?**

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

_Laura Arenstein, Principal Investigator_
_LauraTAreinstein@gmail.com_

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Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Acculturative Stress and Supportive Programming for

Chinese International Students at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laura Arenstein from the Educational Leadership Program at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your office works directly with campus leadership and strategic initiatives. Because this project employs a case study model, it is important to gain institutional perspective on Chinese international students, campus climate, and challenges faced by these students. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study aims to understand the challenges that Chinese international students experience when they adjust to liberal arts colleges. More specifically, this project explores the people, programs, and campus elements that these Chinese international students found to be most helpful. Findings from this study will serve as policy recommendations for other liberal arts colleges that are increasing their Chinese international student enrollments so that they can more effectively and comprehensively support their students.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

• Participate in a one hour, individual interview.

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about one hour.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

There are no risks or discomforts that you can expect.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You will not directly benefit from your participation in the study.

The results of the research may help liberal arts colleges learn how to more effectively and comprehensively support their growing populations of Chinese international students.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?
Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of coding of data so that no individual names will be connected to any particular responses. All recordings will be transcribed and then destroyed. Transcriptions of the interview will be maintained on a personal computer that is password protected. Only the principal investigator will have access to the transcripts.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, please contact:

Laura Arenstein, Principal Investigator
LauraTarenstein@gmail.com

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP): If you have questions about your rights while taking part in this study, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers about the study, please call the OHRPP at (310) 825-7122 or write to:

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Los Angeles, CA 90095-1694

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records
Appendix J
Questionnaire: Lakeford College

Background

What is your current academic standing?
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

What is your first language?
- English
- Mandarin Chinese
- Cantonese Chinese
- Other (Please specify)

Did you enter (site name) as a first-year student, or as a transfer student?
- First-year
- Transfer

In which country did you attend (the majority of) high school?
- China
- United States
- Other (Please specify)
Did you participate in any exchange programs during high school where you studied in another country for any period of time?
- Yes
- No

In which country did you participate in this exchange program?

For how long (one quarter/semester/year/summer) did you participate in this program?
- One semester
- One year
- Two years
- Other (Please specify)

Below are some items that can be challenging for international students. Prior to your arrival at (site name)'s campus, how nervous did each item make you feel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Extremely nervous</th>
<th>Very nervous</th>
<th>Slightly nervous</th>
<th>Not nervous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental/Emotional health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Did you participate in the International Student Orientation (ISO) program at the beginning of your first year at (site name)?
- Yes
- No

How helpful was ISO in helping you adjust to (site name)?
- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not very helpful
Which specific activities from ISO were most helpful to you for adjusting to life at (site name), and why?

Did you participate in the Host Family Program?

- Yes
- No

How helpful was the Host Family Program in helping you adjust?

- Extremely Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Somewhat Helpful
- Not Helpful

What did you appreciate and/or enjoy about the Host Family Program?

Please indicate which academic programs you have utilized, and how helpful each activity was for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Program</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Did not participate</th>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Center</td>
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Please list any academic programs or services that you utilized that are not included in the previous question that were helpful for you.
Please indicate which social/cultural programs you have utilized, and how helpful each activity was for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
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<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Did not participate</th>
</tr>
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<td>International Term Dinner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Ambassador Program</td>
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<td>Varsity or Intramural Sports</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Arts (Theater, Dance, or Music)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Clubs (AFRISA, Tim Viet, KISA, DESI, Chinese Club)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercultural Affair Programming</td>
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<td>International Relations Council</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please list the any social/cultural activities in which you participated that are not included in the previous question that were helpful to you.

Do you feel that [site name] provided you with programs or activities that helped you to engage with American students?
- Yes
- No

Please list any programs or activities that you feel helped you to engage with American students.
Do you wish that (site name) had provided programming or activities to help you interact with American students?  
- Yes  
- No

Are there any particular people at (site name) that you feel have been particularly helpful in helping you adjust to life at (site name)?  
- Yes  
- No

Please list these people and explain why they have been helpful to you.  


Are you willing to participate in a one-hour focus group on (site name)'s campus? There will be five or six students in each focus group. You will be compensated for your participation.  
- Yes  
- No

Please provide me with your e-mail address, and I will contact you to schedule the focus group.  


Appendix K
Questionnaire: Columbus College

Background

What is your current academic standing?
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Other

What is your gender?
- Male
- Female

What is your first language?
- English
- Mandarin Chinese
- Cantonese Chinese
- Other (Please specify)

Did you enter (site name) as a first-year student, or as a transfer student?
- First-year
- Transfer

In which country did you attend (the majority of) high school?
- China
- United States
- Other (Please specify)
Did you participate in any exchange programs during high school where you studied in another country for any period of time?
- Yes
- No

In which country did you participate in this exchange program?

For how long did you participate in this program?
- One semester
- One year
- Other (Please specify)

Below are some items that can be challenging for international students. Prior to your arrival at (site name)'s campus, how nervous did each item make you feel?

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Very nervous</th>
<th>Slightly nervous</th>
<th>Not nervous</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural differences</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social concerns</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic concerns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mental/Emotional health</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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</table>

Did you participate in orientation programming at the beginning of your first year at (site name)?
- Yes
- No

How helpful was Orientation in helping you adjust to (site name)?
- Extremely helpful
- Very helpful
- Somewhat helpful
- Not very helpful

Which specific activities from Orientation were most helpful to you for adjusting to life at (site name),
and why?

Did you participate in the Host Family Program?
- Yes
- No

How helpful was the Host Family Program?
- Extremely Helpful
- Very Helpful
- Somewhat Helpful
- Not Helpful

What did you appreciate/enjoy about the program?

Please indicate which academic programs you have utilized, and how helpful each activity was for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Not Very Helpful</th>
<th>Did Not Participate</th>
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</table>

Please list any academic programs or services that you utilized that are not included in the previous question that were helpful for you.
Please indicate which **social/cultural programs** you have utilized, and how helpful each activity was for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
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<th>Did Not Participate</th>
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<td>Overnight trips sponsored by International Programs</td>
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<td>Lunch and Conversations Program (L&amp;C)</td>
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<td>International Banquet</td>
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<td>International Festival</td>
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<td>Sunday Suppers</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please list the any **social/cultural activities** in which you participated that are not included in the previous question that were helpful to you.


Do you feel that (site name) provided you with programs or activities that helped you to engage with American students?
- Yes
- No

Please list any programs or activities that you feel helped you to engage with American students.


Do you wish that (site name) had provided programming or activities to help you interact with American students?
- Yes
- No
Are there any particular people at (site name) that you feel have been particularly helpful in helping you adjust to life at (site name)?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please list these people and explain why they have been helpful to you.


Are you willing to participate in a one-hour focus group on (site name)'s campus? There will be six or seven students in each focus group. You will be compensated for your participation.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Please provide me with your e-mail address, and I will contact you to schedule the focus group.


Appendix L
Admission Office Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been employed by your institution?
2. What is your role within this office?
3. What role do international students play in overall enrollment strategies?
   a. Why does your school recruit and enroll international students?
4. During your time here, how has the recruitment and enrollment of international students in general changed?
   a. In particular, how has the recruitment and enrollment of Chinese international students changed?
5. Why do you think Chinese international students choose to attend your school?
6. What do you think Chinese international students struggle with when they arrive?
   a. Is there an example or a story you can tell me about a Chinese student (or multiple students) who struggled (without telling me a student’s name)?
   b. How aware do you think other community members are to any potential struggles that Chinese students may experience?
7. What do you think are community expectations for Chinese international students as they adjust to college life?
8. From your perspective, how have different constituents within the campus community reacted to an increasing Chinese international student population?
   a. What concerns have been expressed by different community members?
   b. From your perspective, how effectively have these concerns been addressed and by whom?
9. Do you feel that the campus is united in its support of international student enrollment?
10. In what ways do you think the campus has adjusted to an increasingly international student population?
    a. Has the school expanded academic support programs?
    b. Has the school expanded social programming?
    c. What has been the reasoning for these changes?
11. What are the institution’s future goals with Chinese international students?
Appendix M
International Programming Office Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been employed by this institution?
2. What are your primary responsibilities within the International Programs Office?
3. How would you describe this office’s philosophy regarding international students?
   a. Has this always been the office’s philosophy?
      i. When/Why did this change?
4. Tell me specifically about your growth in international students from China?
   a. Why do you think Chinese international students choose to attend this school?
   b. How has the general campus community responded to this increase?
5. Before this college experienced an increase in the enrollment of Chinese international students, how involved was this office in the lives of international students?
   a. Has this changed since the increase in Chinese enrollment?
6. What do you think Chinese international students struggle with the most when they initially arrive on campus?
7. Can you share with me an anecdote, and you don’t have to share any specific names, but of a Chinese international student who struggled to adjust when he or she first arrived.
8. In your opinion, how aware are other campus community members (faculty, other administrators, students) of the acculturation struggles of these Chinese international students?
9. What do you perceive are the expectations of faculty and other administrators regarding how Chinese international students will adjust to college life?
10. What do you think international students need from faculty and administrators?
11. What kinds of programming does your office provide to all international students?
   a. What is the purpose of the different programs?
   b. Which programs are the best attended?
12. Does your programming connect international student with other international students or American students?
13. Has your office adjusted its programming over the past five years?
   a. Who/what has influenced that change?
14. What do you wish faculty and other administrators knew about international students?
Appendix N
Faculty Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been teaching at this institution?

2. During your time teaching here, how has the enrollment of Chinese international students in general changed?

3. Why do you think these students choose to attend this school?

4. On average, how many Chinese international students enroll in your classes each term?

5. In what ways do you interact with Chinese international students outside of the classroom (academic advising, advising student groups)?

6. From your perspective, how have different constituents within the campus community (faculty, administration, and students) reacted to an increasing Chinese international student population?
   a. What concerns have been expressed by different community members, especially faculty?
   b. How effectively have these concerns been addressed and by whom?
   c. Can you share any specific examples of how different constituents reacted to a certain student/situation?

7. What are your personal opinions regarding an increasing Chinese international student population?

8. What do you think Chinese international students struggle with when they arrive on campus?
   a. How aware do you think other community members are to any potential struggles that Chinese students may experience?
Appendix O
Dean or Provost Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been employed by your institution?
2. How would you characterize your role on this campus?
3. During your time here, how has the enrollment of Chinese international students in general changed?
4. Why do you think Chinese international students choose to attend your school?
5. What do you think Chinese international students struggle with when they arrive on campus?
   a. How aware do you think other community members are to any potential struggles that Chinese students may experience?
6. From your perspective, how have different constituents within the campus community (faculty, administration, and students) reacted to an increasing Chinese international student population?
7. In what ways do you think the campus has adjusted to an increasingly international student population?
   a. Has the school expanded academic support programs?
   b. Has the school expanded social programming?
8. What do you think Chinese international students need from faculty in administrators as they adjust to college life?
Appendix P
Focus Group Protocol

BACKGROUND:
1. How did you first learn about (site name), and why did you decide to attend?

ACCULTURATIVE STRESS:
2. Prior to your arrival on campus, what made you nervous when you thought about moving to the United States?
3. When you actually arrived on (site name)’s campus, which items associated with transition were challenging for you?

PRIOR TO ARRIVAL:
4. Prior to your arrival, how did you prepare for the personal and cultural challenges that you may encounter?
   a. Did (site name) provide you with information regarding how to manage these challenges?
   b. Did you speak with other students over the summer?

PROGRAMMING:
5. What programs helped you manage the academic transition into (site name)?
6. What programs helped you manage the social and cultural transition?
7. How often do you feel like you interact with American students?
   a. Was it ever challenging for you to interact with Americans?
      i. When was it most challenging?
      ii. Why was it challenging?

PEOPLE:
8. What people have been most helpful in helping you manage your transition into (site name) (roommates, classmates, tutors, administrators…)?

FUTURE ADVICE:
9. What advice would you offer to college administrators who will be supporting future Chinese international students?
   a. What do you wish they knew about your challenges and experiences in general?
### Table Q1: Academic Programming at Columbus College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Extremely Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
<th>Not Very Helpful</th>
<th>Did Not Participate</th>
<th>Total Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>International Student Language Support</td>
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### Table Q2: Academic Programming at Lakeford College

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## Appendix R

### Response Charts

Data from Questionnaire Responses

Social Programming

### Table R1: Social Programming at Columbus College

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### Table R2: Social Programming at Lakeford College

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<th>Somewhat Helpful</th>
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<th>Total Responses</th>
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<td>International Education Week</td>
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<td>Varsity/Intramural Sports</td>
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