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Lee, Michael W. ***How They Find Us: A Mixed Methods Study of International Student Journeys to Higher Education in the Midwest***

Abstract

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to investigate international student's pursuit of an associate or undergraduate degree at selected public higher education institutions (HEI's) in the upper Midwest. Through surveys distributed to 423 international students and interviews with 12 of them, the research sought to identify key expectations and experiences which influence a student's choice to attend one of the institutions featured in the study.

With nearly a 55% response rate, the results showed that a majority of the international students first heard of the institution through a friend or family member. Aligned with findings from other studies, a majority of these students were self-funded or funded with the help of relatives. Two-thirds of the students reported having recommended the institution to their friends and family, highlighting the satisfaction with these institutions once they arrive. International students in the study tended to persist through tremendous challenges both before and during their educational experience, but these adversities are what kept them motivated.

Findings from this study can be used to improve the student-institution match, helping teaching-focused HEI's in the Midwest provide the information and services needed to attract, recruit and retain the students that are most likely to enroll and persist at their college or university.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife, Catherine, for her incredible love and support throughout this and other journeys. She is a remarkable individual, incredible wife, and an amazing mother to our three-year-old daughter, Madeline. Her sacrifice, support, and confidence in me throughout this time has made it all possible.

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Special thanks to Dr. Carol Mooney for all of the encouragement and mentorship over the past many years. Thanks to her support, I have been able to develop a passion for international education, travel the world, and successfully pursue a Doctor of Education degree in Career and Technical Education. I have come to live by her saying "always prepare for the future, even though you don't know what the future holds" and this degree is evidence of that.

I am also extremely thankful for the time and commitment Dr. Haltinner, Dr. Mooney, and Dr. Aaron Aure have made to serving on my dissertation committee. Dr. Haltinner has been another amazing mentor of mine for many years and I am thankful for the perspective he has added to this research. As program director and committee chair, Dr. Haltinner has dedicated tremendous time and energy to helping me be successful in my studies and research. Dr. Mooney has continued to be a tremendous colleague, friend, and mentor and I thank her for serving on the committee and enhancing the research. Dr. Aure, coming from an enrollment and retention background, has brought a unique perspective and guidance to this study. I am honored and thankful to have each of you as part of this effort.

Additionally, to my fellow classmates in this program...each of you are absolutely incredible! You've taught me so much and continue to inspire me. I am so thankful for the opportunity to have shared this journey with you and am grateful for the lifelong friendships that have resulted!

I would also be remiss if I did not thank the four colleges and universities featured in this study. The staff and the international students at each of the institutions made this study possible. The staff went above and beyond what I could have asked for to help me, including guiding me through their specific institutional research protocols and data requests procedures, while helping me find workable alternatives when obstacles arose. The study had an absolutely incredible response rate thanks to the tremendous support of the international students, particularly those who took time out of their busy schedules to participate in the interviews. I learned so much for each of you and was amazed by your journeys!

Finally, this research and the doctorate degree is dedicated to my incredible daughter Madeline who was just a few months old when our family committed to this endeavor. Her birth was a major impetus for pursuing this degree. I knew it would only be harder to do as she got older. Although I have tried my best to devote as much time as I could to her, I know I have missed out on a lot during the first three years of her life. Although this time cannot be replaced, I hope I can be an inspiration to her as she grows up, showing her that she can achieve anything she puts her mind to.

Now, as Dr. Mooney says, "Onward"!

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Chapter I: Introduction

International students bring diversity in language, religion, culture, politics, and worldview that is consistent with the mission of most colleges and universities (Garcia & Villarreal, 2014; Lee, 2015). The more than one million international students currently in the United States (U.S.) contribute substantial economic benefit, and in some cases, even economic relief to higher education institutions (HEI) and their surrounding communities (Cantwell, 2015; Heck & Mu, 2016; Hegarty, 2014; Lee, 2010). According to NAFSA: Association of International Educators (NAFSA), international students contributed an estimated $36.9 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2016-2017 academic year (NAFSA, 2017), making education a leading U.S. export. This added revenue stream is used, in part, to maintain and develop academic and support programming for all students across university campuses (de Wit, Yemini & Martin, 2015; Ziguras, 2011).

Competition for these students is becoming fierce. Students looking to pursue a degree outside of their home country have a world of possibility, depending on their motives, interests, academic abilities and financial means, among many other complex factors (Angulo-Ruiz, Pergelova, & Rialp, 2010; Chen, 2017; Daily, Farewell, & Kumar, 2010; Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015; Lee, 2008). Other competitive factors include: academic competitiveness, cost difference, language ability, relations between sending and receiving countries, cultural similarities or differences, employment opportunities, and ease of visa procedures (Varghese, 2008).

To survive in a strong competitive market, institutions at all levels of higher education, in both rural and urban settings, are dedicating significant resources to recruiting international students (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Askehave, 2007; Mamiseishvili, 2012a). This competition

has led to what Kwong (2000) termed "marketization in education" which refers to the "adoption of free market practices in running schools" (p. 89). Marketization is different from pure marketing as it "implies a strategy of "creating" markets for products previously considered as public goods" (Findlay, McCollum & Packwood, 2017, p. 2). Numerous other studies have also recognized this trend in the education sector (Angulo-Ruiz, Pergelova, & Rialp, 2010; Askehave, 2007; Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Findlay et al., 2017; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010; Szekeres, 2010).

Despite the best efforts of institutions to market their university to international students using websites, brochures, emails, and other marketing materials (Askehave, 2007), word of mouth remains one of the most influential factors in a student's choice of university (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Lee, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010). Word of mouth creates an 'imaginative geography' (Said, 1978), which helps students envision and decide on the place to study (Beech, 2014). Multiple researchers (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Lee, 2008; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010) have highlighted the importance of keeping current students satisfied as one of, if not the most important, recruitment tools available (Elliott & Shin, 2002). Elliott and Healy (2001) summarize the connection between student satisfaction and recruitment by stating "in today's competitive environment, a university must identify what is important to students, inform students that they intend to deliver what is important to them, then deliver what they promise" (p. 2).

Theoretical Framework

A student's decision and the process to enroll in a university, particularly one in a foreign country, has been described as extremely complex in nature (Chen, 2017; Eder, Smith, & Pitts, 2010; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As a result, a variety of theories have been developed to

capture researchers' perspectives. The present study relied on an assortment of these literature supported theories for the basis of the research. This section summarizes each of these theories.

Capital theory. Capital theory refers to a family of theories that have historically been identified to include human capital (Schultz, 1961), mobility capital (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003), economic capital, cultural capital, academic capital and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986), among others. Human capital refers to the investment in activities "that influences future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people" (Becker, 1964, p. 1). Investments in education, training, and migration are most often made with the expectation they will improve knowledge, skills, and abilities and therefore, usually, come with the expectation it will increase monetary and/or psychological worth (Becker, 1964). According to Alfred Marshall (1920), "the most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings" (p. 324).

An aspect of human capital theory, one which is particularly relevant to student choice research, has been referred to as mobility capital (Findlay, King, Stam, & Ruiz-Gelices, 2006; Murphy-Lejeune, 2003). Murphy-Lejeune (2003) defines this as "enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad" (p. 51). Mobility capital, prior to the experience abroad, factors into consideration the personal and family history, any previous experience with mobility, language competence, the initial experiences with adaptation, and the individual's personality (Murphy-Lejeune, 2003).

Bourdieu (1984, 1986) identified four other types of capital: economic, cultural, academic and social. Economic capital is "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243). Cultural capital, while separate from, but related to economic capital, may be closely associated with educational qualifications. Bourdieu reminds us that economic capital may be easily converted

into other forms of capital while cultural capital may not. Closely aligned with cultural capital, academic capital is "the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 23).

Social capital has been affiliated with "title of nobility" by Bourdieu (1986, p. 243). Coleman (1988) described this form of capital as part of the "structure of relations between actors and among actors" (p. 98). Social capital is achieved "through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action" (p. 100). It is important to highlight this form of capital because of the identification of reference groups (Alfattal, 2017; Moogan, 2011), a form of social capital, were found to be a major source of information when deciding on an institution to study at in a foreign country (Coleman, 1988).

Push-pull theory. One frequently cited theory used to explain the factors in students' decisions to study away is the push-pull theory (Chen, 2017; Maringe & Carter, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) surveyed students in the countries of: Taiwan, India, China, and Indonesia to determine the factors that pushed them out of their home education system and pulled them into the Australian system, their host country. One push factor identified was that the overseas educational system was better than the one they came from. Two other factors identified were related to either not being able to gain entry to the program of their choice in their home country or the program they wanted to study simply was not available, as well as a desire to learn about a new culture and intention to immigrate to the host country upon graduation.

The ability for a country to pull a student in was heavily dependent on the awareness and knowledge of that country (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). In Mazzarol and Soutar's study, parents had a heavy influence on their children's choice to study abroad. Their study found that, most

often, where a parent studied abroad was also where their child studied. Those whose parents studied in Australia typically went to Australia, while those whose parents studied in the U.S. generally followed in their footsteps. Cost, environment, geographic location, reputation, credit for prior learning, and the number of international students had positive correlations in the study. Factors influencing the choice of a particular institution were found in this study to include: "an institutions reputation for quality," "an institutions links or alliances with other institutions familiar to the student," "an institution's reputation for having high-quality staff," "the number of students enrolled at the institution," and "whether an institution is willing to recognize students' qualifications" (p. 89).

A challenge with this theory is that students coming from different countries tend to have substantially different motivations for studying abroad and what is important to them (Maringe & Carter, 2007). For example, Maringe and Carter (2007) found that Taiwanese students study abroad because of the long-term benefits and recognition associated in their country with the experience. Students from the European Union study in the United Kingdom primarily for English and culture. Findings from Africa showed friends had a significant part in the decision as, did the prospect of working and being in a leadership role for a large international organization when they returned from their experience overseas.

Rational choice theory. This theory stems from sociology and is grounded in the belief that people will weigh the predicted costs and benefits of a decision before making it (Scott, 2000). According to Scott, this theory argues that, despite some conclusions which seem to have been irrationally made, all decisions "can be seen as rationally motivated" (p. 127). As DesJardins and Toutkoushian (2005) point out, "rationality does not require decision makers to

have perfect information, but rather that they try to make decisions given the information at their disposal" (p. 195).

Influence of theory on the study. A student's profile, as explained in part by the family of capital theories described in the previous section, relies on the past and current assets (monetary and otherwise) of the students and their families. It also references the future growth in those capitals that students and their families hope to gain from the experience abroad. Capital theories merge student's current skill sets, social networks, and economic status, among other attributes, with their expectations of improving and expanding each of these through their educational pursuits abroad.

Throughout the process of selecting an institution, the student experience is believed to also be based in part on the push-pull theory. This theory, as described above, is based on a series of factors, in-part, outside of the individuals control that influences, or pushes, the student's decision to even study outside of their home country in the first place and then those factors that attract, or pull, the student to the particular host country and specific institution. Factors in this category include, among other influences, home/host educational system, availability of desired discipline, and cost of tuition (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002).

The model used in this study proposes that a variety of capital theories combine with Mazzarol and Soutars (2002) push-pull theory to bring the student to a decision point on what specific institution to ultimately study at, a point which applies rational choice theory to the decision-making process. This model submits that the students, and presumably their families, use the attributes in the capital and push-pull theories to ultimately complete a cost-benefit analysis of whatever options are available to the student based on the information and resources

they have access to throughout the decision-making process. Figure 1 brings together each of these theories to illustrate the impact and relationship of each influencing the present study.

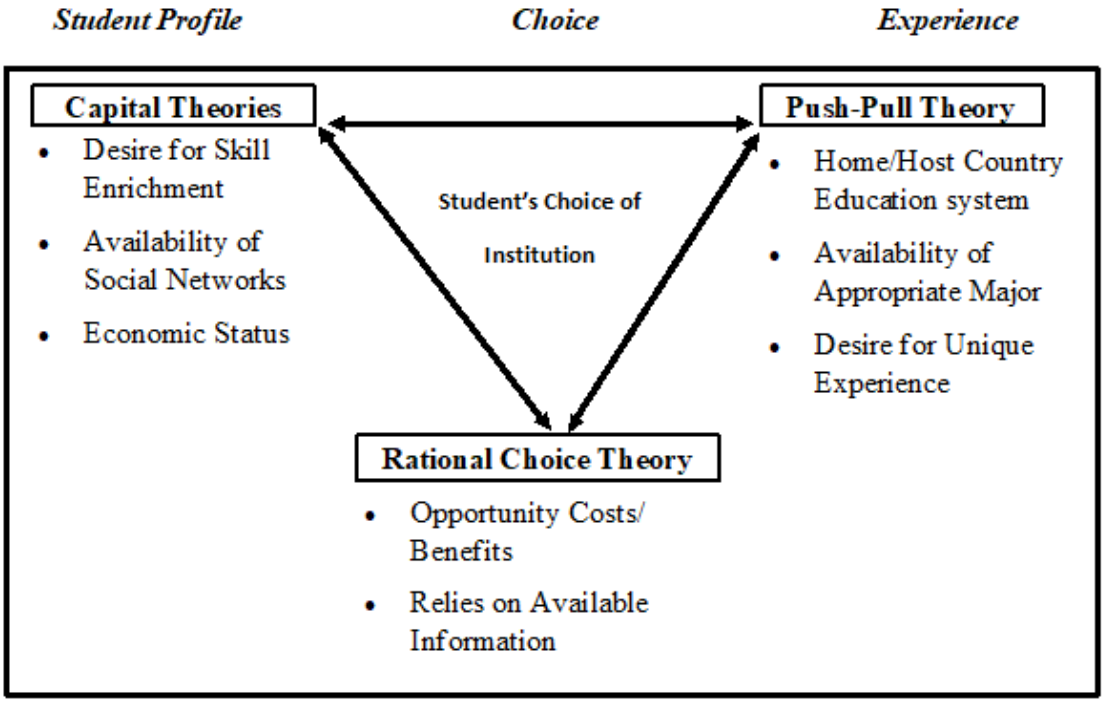

Figure 1. Influences on student-institutional match. (author)

Statement of the Problem

Every industry consists of diverse market or service segments (Kotler & Fox, 1985). This is particularly true for higher education, a sector described as "hyper-competitive" (Mogaji, 2016, p. 108). To be competitive, institutions of higher education must target specific information and services to individual segments based on the particular needs and interests of that segment (Mogaji, 2016). One category of students that educational institutions seek to attract and retain, and one that is underrepresented in research, is international students (Mamiseishvilli, 2012a; Mavondo, Tsarenko, & Gabbott; 2004; Prazeres et al., 2017).

While a majority of international students attend research universities in big, urban cities, data from Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017a) shows there is a portion of this

segment that is drawn to more rural, teaching-focused, institutions (Prazeres et al., 2017). Despite the emphasis on international students, research on this demographic's choice of a U.S. HEI, particularly the teaching-focused institutions, is scarce (de Wit, Yemini, & Martin, 2015; Hemsley-Brown & Oplaka, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to contribute to the limited body of existing research on international student decisions to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree internationally at selected public HEI's in the upper Midwest. The research sought to identify key expectations and experiences that influence a student's choice to attend one of the institutions featured in the study. Findings from this study can be used to improve the student-institution match, helping teaching-focused HEI's in the Midwest provide the information and services needed to attract and retain the students that are most likely to enroll and persist at their college or university.

Research Questions

The objective of this study was to determine what compels international students to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree at teaching-focused institutions in the Midwest. This objective was met through the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest?
2. How did international students choose to pursue their studies at the selected public higher education institutions?
3. What are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university?

Significance of the Study

Educational institutions at all levels, in all geographical areas of the U.S., are actively pursuing international students. Among other benefits, these students bring diversity and boost enrollment numbers, bringing in revenue to cash-strapped institutions (Cantwell, 2015). While international students have been pursuing education in the U.S. for over a hundred years (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Bulthuis, 1986), it's only within the last decade that the shift has been made from a foreign aid perspective to a revenue-generating perspective (Choudaha, 2017; Owens, Srivastava, & Feerasta, 2011). This shift has caused intense competition (Mogaji, 2016) and the need for institutions to maximize the effectiveness of their resources to attract the right student for that institution (Moogan, 2011). This study aimed to help a specific segment of institutions, that being public, teaching-focused two-year colleges and four-year universities in the Midwest, develop personas of international students who attend their programs. Information gathered by this research is expected to help these types of institutions focus their efforts on attracting and retaining international students that are most likely to enroll and persist in their programs.

Assumptions of the Study

Assumptions made for this study included:

1. Participants in this study understood the intent of the questions being asked and responded objectively and honestly to those questions.
2. The interpretation and analysis of the data collected correctly aligns with the intent of the participant's responses.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include:

1. Students at four public teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest participated in this study, therefore, the findings might not be generalizable to a broader population.
2. This study investigated influential factors among the international student population of the study in their choice of a higher education institution in the Midwest and was not intended to explore variances in influential factors based on individual, cultural, or geographical differences.

Definition of Terms

This section defines for key terminology used throughout the study.

Credit mobility. Only part of a student's educational program is obtained in the host country and the degree is only awarded by the home institution (Findlay, McCollum & Packwood, 2017; Larsen, 2016).

Degree mobility. Education that takes place in whole or in part in a host country resulting in the acquisition of a diploma or degree from that host country (Findlay et al., 2017; Larsen, 2016).

F visa.

An alien having a residence in a foreign country which he has no intention of abandoning, who is a bona fide student qualified to pursue a full course of study and who seeks to enter the United States temporarily and solely for the purpose of pursuing such a course of study consistent with section 214(l) at an established college, university, seminary, conservatory, academic high school, elementary school, or other academic

> institution or in a language training program in the United States, particularly designated by him and approved by the Attorney General after consultation with the Secretary of Education, which institution or place of study shall have agreed to report to the Attorney General the termination of attendance of each nonimmigrant student, and if any such institution of learning or place of study fails to make reports promptly the approval shall be withdrawn (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (n.d.), n.p.).

Four-year, large, primarily residential. Fall enrollment data indicated full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of at least 10,000 degree-seeking students. Between 25%-49% of the undergraduate students live on campus and at least 50% attend full-time (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017).

Four-year, medium, primarily residential. Fall enrollment data indicated full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 3,000-9,999 degree-seeking students. Between 25%-49% of the undergraduate students live on campus and at least 50% attend full-time (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017).

Internationalization. "The process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary institutions" (Knight, 2003, p. 2).

International student. A non-immigrant student on an F, J, or M visa who is enrolled in a U.S. educational institution.

J visa.

> An alien having a residence in a foreign country which he has no intention of abandoning who is a bona fide student, scholar, trainee, teacher, professor, research assistant, specialist, or leader in a field of specialized knowledge or skill, or other person of similar

> description, who is coming temporarily to the United States as a participant in a program designated by the Director of the United States Information Agency, for the purpose of teaching, instructing or lecturing, studying, observing, conducting research, consulting, demonstrating special skills, or receiving training (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (n.d.), n.p.).

Midwest. "The N central part of the US; the region consisting of the states from Ohio westwards that border on the Great Lakes, often extended to include the upper Mississippi and Missouri valleys" (Dictionary, 2017a).

M visa.

> (M)(i) an alien having a residence in a foreign country which he has no intention of abandoning who seeks to enter the United States temporarily and solely for the purpose of pursuing a full course of study at an established vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution (other than in a language training program) in the United States (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (n.d.), n.p.)

Sojourners. Individuals who temporarily relocate in a new place, typically for six months to five years (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Two-year, large. "Fall enrollment data indicate full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 5,000-9,999 students at associate degree granting institutions" (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017).

Two-year, medium. "Fall enrollment data indicate full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment of 2,000-4,999 students at associate degree granting institutions" (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017).

Undergraduate student. A student in a university or college who has not received a first, especially a bachelor's, degree (Dictionary, 2017b).

Word of mouth. "Informal communications between consumers concerning the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods, services and/or their sellers" (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261).

Chapter II: Literature Review

According to Green (2007) "an educational system that pretends the world ends at our national borders cannot be excellent; a quality education must equip students to live and work in a globalized and multicultural world" (p. 15). Higher education in the United States (U.S.) has increasingly embraced this mission of expanding the learner's worldview, leading it to be identified as one of the prolific nations in internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit & Merkx, 2012; Gordon, 2014; Knight, 2004; Tran, 2015).

Institutions of Higher Education

Within most national higher education systems, institutions fall into three main segments: elite research universities, aspirant research universities, and teaching-focused institutions (Marginson, 2006). It is within this third segment of institutions that the present study is focused and a category that de Wit, Yemini and Martin (2015) highlight as being underrepresented in the literature on internationalization. It also aligns with the research which finds that not all international students attend only highly ranked, elite institutions (Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes, & Skeldon, 2012). For many of these students, simply studying in a different country was enough to differentiate themselves from their peers in their employment search (Findlay et al., 2012; Szekeres, 2010).

A diversity of institutions, like any healthy market mix, helps assure a variety of students can find a program and institution that matches their individual abilities and educational aspirations (Altbach, 2010; Harris, 2013). Gardner (1961) also viewed this differentiation in a very positive light:

> We do not want all institutions to be the same. We want institutions to develop their individualities and to keep those individualities. None must be ashamed of its

> distinctiveness so long as it is doing something that contributes to the total pattern, and so long as it is striving for excellence in performance. The highly selective, small liberal arts college should not be afraid to remain small. The large urban institution should not be ashamed that it is large. The technical institute should not be apologetic. Each institution should pride itself on the role that it has chosen to play and on the special contribution it brings to the total pattern of higher education. (p. 83)

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017) is a frequently cited framework which organizes institutions by a series of different criteria, including degree level (de Wit, 2002). The classification reports that the U.S. higher education system consists of doctoral granting institutions (seven percent), masters colleges and universities (16%), associates colleges (24%), and other, including bachelors only, bachelors/associates, special focus, and tribal colleges (53%). Using the Carnegie classifications, the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017a), reports that doctoral universities hosted 69.3% of all international students enrolled in the U.S during the 2016-17 academic year, while Master's degree institutions enrolled 15.1% of international students and Associate degree institutions hosted 8.9%. The other types of institutions accounted for the remaining 6.7% of the U.S. based international students. See Table 1 for side-by-side comparison.

Table 1

International Students in the U.S. by Institutional Type in 2016/17

Institutional Type	Percent of Institutions	Percent of International Students
Doctoral	7%	69.3%
Masters	16%	15.1%
Associate	24%	8.9%
Other	53%	6.7%

Universities. Findlay, McCollum, and Packwood (2017) observe there are both vertical and horizontal differences among universities. Vertical differences account for the categories of universities such as elite and those lesser known, often teaching-focused universities (Findlay et al., 2017; Marginson, 2007). Horizontal differences account for the individual distinctions that make universities of similar caliber unique. Marginson (2006) defines elite universities as "combining historical reputation, research performance, and student quality/degree status" (p. 8). This segment of institutions is being "driven by status attraction/accumulation, not revenues per se" (p. 8). These are often "immensely wealthy world-class institutions renowned as ancient seats of learning and with global research reputations" (Findlay et al., 2017, p. 3).

Another type of university has been referred to as aspirant (Marginson, 2006). As defined by Marginson (2006), aspirant research universities are semi-open institutions who have some reliance on generated revenues, but not as reliant as the third category of institutions in this study, which is teaching-focused.

Teaching-focused universities are considered less selective of their students, they tend to be driven by market-forces, rely heavily on marketing while focusing on cost-saving measures,

and are typically scarce in resources (Marginson, 2006). Teaching-focused universities, lacking top rankings and the associated brand-name recognition, often have difficulty attracting international students who are also considering top-tier institutions around the world (Iverson, 2017). This type of institution typically emphasizes undergraduate offerings and has an applied focus in their curriculum (de Wit, Yemini, & Martin, 2015). They also highlight their high value and comparative affordability to prospective students (Marginson, 2006).

Two-year colleges. Two-year colleges are generally open-enrollment institutions which, when compared to four-year institutions, adapt relatively quickly to local needs while providing a comparatively cost-effective pathway (Cohen, 2009; Katsinas, McCormick & Cox, 2003; Raby, 2009). For domestic students, the cost of enrollment at two-year colleges has been found to be about a third to half the cost of public four-year institutions (Cohen, 2009), a difference potentially much greater for international students paying out-of-state tuition. Having an open-enrollment policy also allows these institutions to offer a "second-chance" to students seeking to improve their academic skills in preparation for a post-secondary degree (Hagedorn, Pei, & Yan, 2016; Raby, 2009, p. 3). Despite there being many commonalities shared by most two-year institutions, vast differences exist when it comes to geographical locations (rural, suburban, urban), governance, and size (Katsinas, McCormick & Cox, 2003).

While most two-year colleges have traditionally focused almost exclusively on their local communities, a growing number have started recruiting international students to their campuses (Jennings, 2017). Colleges in the U.S. are welcoming these students partially in response to the global forces at play and the reality that the overwhelming majority of their domestic students have significant life commitments that make studying abroad for any period of time almost impossible (Green, 2007; Tran & Dempsey, 2017).

Recruitment of international students has not come without its challenges though, as associates degrees are often "significantly less valued" than undergraduate degrees in many countries (Tran & Nyland, 2011, p. 27). Adding to the difficulty is the data from the push-pull theory (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), which shows that international students often consider institutional ranking in their selection criteria of foreign institutions. However, while there is still not a broad awareness of the option, a growing number of international students are starting to use two-year colleges as a starting point before transferring to four-year programs (Jennings, 2017; Tran & Dempsey, 2017). Jennings (2017) points out that "although American community colleges are not ranked, many of the institutions to which their graduates transfer are on the list" (p. 62).

Rationale for Internationalization

In the face of an ever-increasing number of international companies and the mobility of workers, internationalization has become a critical component of workforce and academic programs (Tran & Dempsey, 2017). Rationales for internationalization differ immensely among nations and institutions (Knight, 2004). On a larger scale, cited rationales often include student/faculty development, strategic alliances, economic trade, nation building and social development.

On a more local scale, Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, and Paleari (2016, p. 688) list the following rationales for internationalization of university campuses:

- Increased international awareness of/deeper engagement with global issues by students
- Enhanced internationalization of the curriculum
- Improved quality of teaching and learning

- Strengthened institutional research and knowledge production capacity
- Enhanced prestige/profile of the institution
- Opportunity to benchmark/compare institutional performance within the context of international good practice
- Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building
- Increased international networking by faculty and researchers
- Increased/diversified revenue generation

Rationales listed by Seeber et al. (2016) generally fall into one or more of the four categories of motivation identified by Knight (1999): political, economic, academic, and social. Political rationales include national identity, foreign relations, and national security. Economic rationales include revenue generation, labor market needs, and other financial incentives. Although rarely articulated publicly as a rationale, many institutions are ramping up their internationalization efforts for economic benefit (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Heck & Mu, 2016). Academic rationales include institution building, ranking, and profile, while social rationales include cultural identity, citizenship development, and community development (Knight, 1999). Knight (1999) clarifies that while these can be considered separate categories, they are increasingly becoming interconnected. An example of this is in Europe where the European Union has sought economic and political integration in part through internationalization of academics (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Approaches to Internationalization

Over the past few decades, the scale, variation, and complexity of internationalization efforts have been greatly amplified and has gone mainstream (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit, Yemini & Martin, 2015). Knight (1994) proposed a model of internationalization which higher

education institutions (HEI) might go through to internationalize the institution. This model is a continuous cycle of awareness, commitment, planning, operationalization, reviewing, and reinforcement. Approaches to internationalization can be categorized into four basic categories: at-home, competency, process, and activities (Knight, 1994, 1999, 2004).

At-home. Knight (1999, 2004) describes at-home, campus-based activities, as placing an emphasis on the culture and climate of the institution to support international and intercultural initiatives. Examples of these activities include globally-focused coursework, internationally themed lectures and performances, and transnational research (Soria & Troisi, 2014). In a survey of 1,336 institutions in 131 different countries, the International Association of Universities (IAU), identified a number of ways campuses could internationalize and found scholarships for outgoing mobility, requiring students to learn a foreign language, courses with an international theme, and activities to provide international perspectives to students as the main internationalization efforts worldwide (Egron-Polak, Hudson, & IAU, 2014). Other examples of campus-based internationalization activities identified in the study include intercultural events, mentor programs pairing international and domestic students, and housing international students with domestic students.

Specific to the U.S., the IAU survey found internationally themed courses and scholarships for outgoing students to be the primary internationalization activities (Egron-Polak, Hudson, & IAU, 2014). However, consistent with data collected over the past 15 years, the American Council on Education (Egron-Polak, Hudson, & IAU, 2014) reports there are significant differences in campus internationalization when comparing different categories of institutions. Doctoral level institutions have the most comprehensive programs, while associate

degree and special focus institutions generally have less robust internationalization efforts but appear to be making significant advancement.

Competency. The emphasis of this category, approaches to internationalization, is on new skill development and attitudes of individuals. This is specifically related to intercultural competency, one of the main goals of internationalization in education (Egron-Polak, Hudson, & IAU, 2014; Knight, 1994). One-way education, and even industry, are building intercultural competency is through the use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and associated trainings (Hammer, 2012). The IDI was developed in part around Bennett's (1986) model of intercultural sensitivity, also referred to as the developmental continuum (Hammer, 2012; Gregersen-Hermans, 2015).

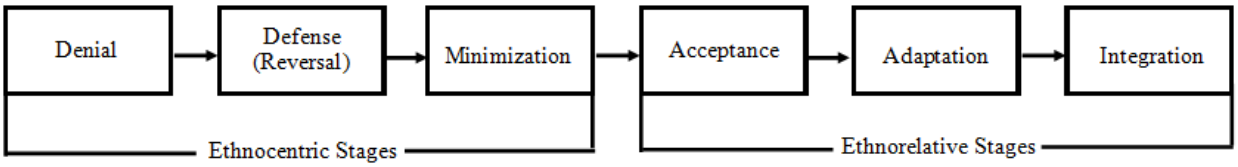

Figure 2. Bennett's (1986) model of intercultural sensitivity.

The purpose of the IDI is to help individuals understand where they are on the continuum and "achieve increased capability in shifting cultural perspective and adapting behavior across cultural differences" (Hammer, 2012, p. 116). According to the IDI LLC (2017), over 1,300 organizations have used the inventory since its inception to train over 500,000 people around the world.

Process. The process approach incorporates internationalization policy and procedures into the major functions of HEI's (de Wit, 2002). This often is driven by embedding components of internationalization in institutional mission statements, policies, and strategies as well as national policy frameworks (Knight, 2015).

To achieve this aspect of their mission statement, HEI's often have an internationalization plan, which Knight (2015) defined as being "a strategy to integrate an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the goals and teaching, research, and service function of a university" (n.p.). Childress (2009) identified three types of internationalization plans: institutional strategic plans, distinct documents, and unit plans.

Activities. Traditional internationalization activities include student and faculty exchange programs, international student recruitment, international branch campuses, and internationalization of the curriculum (Cabrera & Le Renard; 2015; Knight, 1999; Tran & Dempsey, 2017). The World Trade Organization outlined four categories of educational internationalization activities: cross-border supply, commercial presence, presence of natural persons, and consumption abroad (Banks & Bhandari, 2012).

Brandenburg and de Wit (2015) call on international educators to "rethink and redefine" the concept of international education (p. 17). Cross-border supply, or the virtual delivery of academic programs, may offer such an opportunity (Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Rumbley & Altbach, 2016). Activities that offer virtual mobility such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online programs are already changing the international education landscape (Rumbley & Altbach, 2016). This is an attractive option to international students as it dramatically reduces the costs of traveling and living in a new country (Green & Koch, 2010).

Knight (2002) explains commercial presence as being the establishment of facilities abroad to provide services. Examples of this include branch campuses and franchising to local universities. As of 2009, Altbach (2015) reports that 162 of these branch campuses existed. Students at these institutions generally receive a degree or certificate from the foreign institution while taking the classes in their own country (Becker, 2015). While there is a strong potential

for growth and revenue, this is quite a controversial mode as foreign investment rules can apply, and the investment does not always succeed (Altbach, 2015; Knight, 2002). Potential risks include financial loss, damage to an institution's academic reputation, and harm to the institution's overall service quality.

Presence of natural persons is generally associated with faculty, researchers, and other education professionals who go abroad for a temporary period to provide education-related services to or work alongside with host country nationals (Knight, 2002). This can be achieved through activities such as faculty exchanges, joint research projects, and presentations at international conferences (Qureshi, Janjua, Zaman, Lodhi, & Tariq, 2014). These initiatives build the international credentials of faculty and staff while helping the institution gain international name recognition.

Consumption abroad, most often associated with the presence of international students, is perhaps the most prominent and visible mode of internationalization activity on most campuses (Egron-Polak, Hudson, & IAU, 2014, 2017; Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Heck & Mu, 2015; Lee, 2015; Tran & Dempsey, 2017). To increase awareness of an institution among prospective students, there are a wide-range of activities within student recruitment that institutions undertake to attract international students to their campus (Lee, 2008; Özturgut, 2013). As the National Center for Research in Vocational Education reminded administrators in their 1981 Manage Student Recruitment and Admissions Module, "students do not automatically appear on opening day" (Harrington & CDPMVE, 1981, p. 9).

In a study on best practices for recruitment of international students, Özturgut (2013) found there to be several categories of recruitment activities for recruiting international bachelor's degree students. These activities include: participating in recruitment fairs; providing

academic support and utilizing campus resources (university scholarships, dedicated staffing, etc.); utilizing international alumni; passive marketing (online, brochures, etc.); utilizing university staff and faculty; partnering with other organizations; working with agents; and "snowballing" (p. 6) through word-of-mouth. Several of these categories ultimately rely heavily on aspects of reference groups (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). Reference groups consist of influential people such as parents, agents, teachers, peers, school counselors, and alumni (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017).

Once a student has applied and been admitted to an institution, relationship marketing continues to play a major part in retaining the student through matriculation with timely information to the newly admitted students (Felten, Gardner, Schroeder, Lambert, & Barefoot, 2016; Moogan, 2011).

International Student Market

HEI's compete with one another in the marketplace resulting in it being considered a marketable service (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009; Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010). Cantwell (2015) found that HEI's "have become increasingly entrepreneurial and seek revenue through market-like competition" (p. 512). Some have referred to these efforts as becoming "aggressive" (Petruzzellis & Romanazzi, 2010, p. 152) and even "hyper-competitive" (Mogaji, 2016, p. 108). Countries that have historically been major sources of international students are emerging as players in an expanded international education marketplace (Banks & Bhandari, 2012). Coinciding with this marketization trend, tuition and fees have increased throughout the U.S. (Cantwell, 2015). For public institutions, this can be attributed in part to decreasing levels of state support (Elliott & Healy, 2001; Owens, Srivastava, & Feerasta, 2011; Selingo, 2013).

Segments of international students. As with other marketplaces, education consists of very diverse consumer segments (Kotler & Fox, 1985). Market segmentation is essential, as each segment requires different information (Bonnema & Van Der Walds, 2008). In today's competitive market, HEI's must target information to specific segments based on their needs and interests (Mogaji, 2016). While certain students share similar characteristics (ex: age, gender, test scores, etc.) not all have the same needs, abilities, socio-economic status, expectations, or goals (Angulo-Ruiz, Pergelova, & Rialp, 2010; Hazelkorn, 2015).

Within the international student segment, eight distinct categories from a European perspective have been identified: undergraduate students, postgraduate students, credit mobility students, groups, youth, European and non-European students, international students enrolled in branch campuses, and international alumni (Abdullah, Abd Aziz, & Mohd Ibrahim, 2017). As previously stated, this study is focusing on undergraduate bachelorette and associate degree-seeking international students.

In a survey of over 1,500 prospective international students from around the world, the World Education Service (WES) (2012) found that international students coming to the U.S. can be grouped into four broad groups: strivers, strugglers, explorers, and highfliers. Strivers have been defined as having high academic preparedness, but low financial resources. Strugglers are identified to be those with low academic preparedness and low financial resources. Explores are considered those with low academic preparedness but high financial resources. Highfliers are defined as those with high academic preparedness as well as ranking high in financial resources.

Another view of segmentation can be from a geographic and immigration lens. In a study on cosmopolitan identities in Australia, Singh, Rizvi, and Shrestha (2007) found that international students are unique as they neither identify as tourists nor as immigrants.

International students stay too long to only be interested in tourist experiences (Ho, 2014), but not long enough to fully experience the "complexities of immigrants" (Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha, 2007, p. 209; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). While many of these sojourners are attracted to the big, urban cities, there is a segment interested in attending rural institutions and the quality of life that it offers (Prazeres et al., 2017).

Key Forces and Events Impacting International Students in the U.S.

In 1784, a student from Venezuela, Francisco de Miranda, became the first international student to study in the U.S. (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Bulthuis, 1986). He attended Yale University in pursuit of a better education than he could get in his home country. Deliberate attention to attracting and serving international students was not really made until 1911. At that time the Committee on Friendly Relations Among Foreign Students formed to guide international students and gather statistical data on the population (Hammer, 1992; de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Halpern (1969) states that at around this same time a few universities, including the University of Wisconsin, started establishing formal exchange agreements with universities in Germany and France (as cited in de Wit & Merkx, 2012).

Shortly after this period World War I occurred, having a lasting impact on education and the world. One result of the war was a political push for global peace and mutual understanding (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). This led to the creation of powerful non-governmental organizations to promote international education such as the IIE in 1919, the Deutscher Akadmischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) in 1925, and the British Council in 1934 (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Many universities across the U.S. and around the world host students through these programs, even today (British Council, 2017; DAAD, 2014; IIE, 2017b). They also continue to be leaders in policy development and advocacy revolving around international education.

A few decades later World War II caused a significant change in the motivation for international exchange, moving away from peace and mutual understanding objectives towards a national security and foreign policy focus (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Among the effects of this shift was the Fulbright Act of 1946, The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, and the Title XII overseas agriculture assistance program of the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development.

According to de Wit and Merkx (2012), the Fulbright Act of 1946, updated in 1961, "was conceived as a way of spending down lend-lease loans owed to the U.S. by World War II allies, whose weak currencies could not be converted into dollars" (p. 50). As a result of student and faculty bidirectional exchanges created by the act, international connections among faculty were developed and used to further promote foreign student enrollment. During the 1949/50 academic year, 26,433 international students were studying in the U.S. (Boyan, 1983). By the 1959/60 academic year, that number grew to 48,486. During the next ten years, the number nearly tripled to 134,959 international students in the U.S., with Taiwan as the leading sending country.

These international education associations created post World War II played a vital role in protecting international education programs from extreme budget cuts in the early 1980's, a lobbying effort de Wit (2002) called "defense through associations" (p. 20). Concurrently, universities started formalizing their efforts by inserting references to internationalization in their mission statements and strategic plans (de Wit & Merkx, 2012).

In the 1980's, some academic programs in the U.S., particularly those at the graduate level, found difficulties enrolling enough domestic students (Dunnett, 2017). Science and engineering programs were particularly challenged in maintaining enrollments, and some have come to rely on international students to sustain their programs. Additionally, this was a period

where a fundamental shift occurred, reducing the impact of the political and economic rationale for international education while focusing more on two-way exchange programs (de Wit & Merkx, 2012).

The late 1980's and early 1990's, a period which Dunnett (2017) labeled as "the growth years" (p. 5), was a phase when the number of self-paying students started coming to the U.S., creating the start of intense competition among universities. Although quite controversial, consultants and for-profit companies, both in the U.S. and abroad, intensified the market by beginning to promote their recruitment services to universities and students alike (Altbach, 2013). Many of these consultants, also referred to as agents, have become major sources of students for institutions around the world (Scoby, 2017). This was also the age of tremendous technological advancement in completely altering the way HEI's do business (Dunnett, 2017).

Starting in the late 1990's, there have been three distinct waves of international students coming to the U.S. (Choudaha, 2017). Choudaha described wave one (1999-2006) as being fueled by great demand for highly skilled labor and forever changed by the events of 9/11. Visa rules became more restricted and the Student Exchange and Visitors Information System (SEVIS) was created in accordance with the USA PATRIOT Act (Public Law 107-56, amended Section 641). While allowing for improved tracking and accountability of international students, this system created significant reporting and financial requirements, thereby burdening both universities and the students they seek to attract (Danley, 2010).

Wave two (2006-2013) saw a shift from students needing financial support to more students needing academic support (Choudaha, 2017). This coincided with a time that internationalization in the U.S. was driven by recruitment of international students to make up for government budget cuts and the economic recession of 2008 (Choudaha, 2017; Owens,

Srivastava, & Feerasta, 2011). It saw a significant boom of students from China, thanks in part to their improved economy (Choudaha, 2017). This was also the start of the massive King Abdullah Scholarship Program, developed in partnership between then U.S. President George W. Bush and King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud from Saudi Arabia to send students from the Kingdom to the U.S. (SACM, 2011).

Wave three (2013-2020) to date has seen economic downturns, particularly in China, and political turbulence in several parts of the world, including the U.S. (Choudaha, 2017). The middle of this wave has come with dramatic changes and cuts to the King Abdullah scholarship program (Paul, 2016). Pavan (2017) describes this shift in the scholarship program as "being reoriented to favour quality over quantity" (p. 34). This wave is projected to see an increased movement away from traditional models of international education and toward more online education. This is a result of a desire to educate more students in the global era who may not have the financial means to study abroad in the traditional model (Bank & Bhandari, 2012; Richardson, 2015). Choudaha (2017) projects this era to see international students increasingly focus on employment outcomes as they decide whether or not to study abroad and where.

Current Profile of International Students in the U.S.

International students generally come to the U.S. on one of four visa types: F (Student visa), J (exchange visitor), M (vocational student), and in some unique cases, such as to undertake recreational study, a B (visitor visa) will suffice (Department of State, 2017a). Most international students, including the vast majority of degree-seeking students, come to the U.S. on an F-1 visa (Phelps, 2010; Department of State, 2017a). The U.S. State Department (Department of State, 2017a) reported issuing 471,728 F-1 visas, 339,712 J-1 visas, and 10,305 M visas in 2016. These numbers only reflect visas issued and not all visa holders in the U.S.

Despite the desire of colleges and universities in the U.S. to attract students, along with the yearning of many international students to pursue a degree in the U.S., the U.S. State Department (Department of State, 2017b) reports that 246,614 F-1 visa applications, 49,558 applications for a J-1 visa, and 4,136 M-1 applications were denied for one reason or another.

As of May, 2017, there are 8,744 schools in the U.S., both K12 and HEI's, eligible to host international students (Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2017). While the very large institutions host most of the students, most schools certified to host international students enroll fewer than 50 students. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) reports that about a third of certified schools in the U.S. host between 1-10 international students.

According to IIE (2017c), publishers of the widely-cited Open Doors report, the number of international students in the higher education system has nearly doubled from the 2004/05 academic year to today. The report shows there were 565,039 international students in the U.S. studying in the higher education system in the 2004/05 academic year, compared to 1,078,822 in the 2016/17 year. Today, international students make up 5.2% of the total U.S. higher education population, contributing $36.9 billion to the U.S. economy and supporting an estimated 450,331 jobs (NAFSA, 2017). U.S. immigration reports that the U.S. hosted students from more than 231 countries and territories in the 2016/17 academic year (Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2017).

International students, despite often being categorized together by that simple label, have more differences among themselves than similarities (Lee, 2015). As one might expect, the motivations, abilities, personal and professional objectives, economic status, and past experiences of international students vary immensely (Hazelkorn, 2015; Lee, 2015). The following subsections will look at some of these differences by investigating the variety of

locales international students come from and go to, the variety of sources used to fund their education, and the various programs of study they enroll in, along with the sources of information typically used to determine their choice of U.S. institution.

Sub-regions of origin. According to the sub-region framework in the Open Doors report (IIE, 2017d), East Asia (194,715 students), was the highest sending sub-region to the U.S. during the 2016/17 academic year. This was followed by the Middle East (50,009 students). Europe (38,941) ranked third during the same academic year, followed by South and Central Asia (36,149 students). Rounding out the top ten sending countries were: Southeast Asia (34,364 students), South America (21,085 students), Mexico and Central America (14,945 students), North America (13,191 students), West Africa (9,785 students), Caribbean (7,528 students). The remaining five sub-regions included: East Africa (4,928 students), Oceania (3,826 students), North Africa (3,142 students), Central Africa (2,363 students) and Southern Africa (1,083 students).

Countries of origin. China (East Asia), India (South and Central Asia), South Korea (East Asia), and Saudi Arabia (Middle East) have long been major sources of international students coming to the U.S. (IIE, 2017d). For the 2016/17 academic year, IIE reports that there were 350,755 Chinese students studying in the U.S., an increase of 6.8%. Chinese students represented 32.5% of all international students in the U.S. during this time. Just at the undergraduate level alone, there were 142,851 Chinese students during the academic year, over a five percent increase from the prior year. In 2016 alone, the U.S. Department of State (2017a) reports issuing 188,742 F-1, J-1, and M-1 visas to applicants from mainland China.

India, the second leading sender of international students, reported having 186,267 students in the U.S., representing 17.3% of all international students in the U.S. during the

2016/17 academic year (IIE, 2017d). Of the top 10 places of origin, India had by far the greatest growth in student numbers from the 2015/16 year, up 12.3%. This increase followed a 24.9% increase from the 2013/14 year (IIE, 2015). Only 21,977 of these students were at the undergraduate level, while the majority, 104,899, were graduate students (IIE, 2017d).

Despite a small (3.8%) dip from 2015/16, South Korea moved up one spot from the previous year to number three in places of origin, sending 58,663 students in the 2016/17 academic year, a reported eight percent decline from the previous year (IIE, 2017d). Just over half of the students from South Korea were undergraduate students.

While significantly lower in number than China, India, and South Korea, Saudi Arabia has had tremendous growth in the numbers of students in the U.S. (IIE, 2017d). In July 2012, a Wall Street Journal headline proclaimed, "Saudi Students Flood In As U.S. Reopens Door," foreshadowing a major source of international students over the 5-10 years following the publication of the article (Knickmeyer, 2012). Thanks in part to the King Abdullah government scholarship program, the number of students from Saudi Arabia quickly rose from 15,810 students in 2009/10 to 52,611 during the 2016/17 academic year (IIE, 2010, 2017d). 32,538 of the students in the 2016/17 academic year were pursuing an undergraduate degree.

Sources of funding. Cost of attending college can vary greatly depending on the institution, transfer credits, geographic location (rural/urban, Midwest/coast), and cost of living in those locations. For international students, there are many other factors that must be considered when looking at school choice from an economic standpoint. International students who know they want to enroll in a U.S. institution of higher education must also consider currency exchange rates and do not have access to traditional financial aid, particularly at the undergraduate level (Falcone, 2017; OECD, 2017; Phelps, 2010). This is an important aspect of

international student recruitment as the U.S. immigration regulations require international students on an F, J, or M visa to show both the university and the visa granting consulate officer proof of finances covering at-least one year of study and related living expenses (Foreign Affairs Manual, 2015).

IIE (2017b) reports that 60.3% of students, including 82.0% of undergraduates, primarily rely on personal and family funds to finance their education. Parents and extended family members (uncles, aunts, etc.) are usually the main source of funding for self-funded students (IIE, 2017b; Özturgut, 2013). As a result, they usually play a significant role in the decision-making process and cannot be ignored (Larsen, 2016). Family, being the primary funding source for many international students, has been attributed to higher graduation rates among this group of students compared to domestic students (Pike, Hansen, & Childress, 2014). However, this group can be particularly impacted by changes in exchange rates (ICEF, 2015).

Funding from U.S. colleges and universities represents the primary finance source for 15% of students, while the report finds 5.7% of students rely primarily on foreign government/ university or current employment to fund their education while they are in the U.S. (IIE, 2017b). Despite representing a small percentage of international student funding, governments, multi-national organizations, and charitable foundations invest a considerable amount of money into scholarships for both credit and degree mobility opportunities (Mawer, 2017). Major recent examples of these programs to fund international students in the U.S. include the Brazil Scientific Mobility Program (Rivas & Mullet, 2016), the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (Saudi Arabia) (Bukhari & Denman, 2013; Taylor & Albasri, 2014), and Kazakhstan's Bolashak Scholars Program (Perna, Orosz, Jumakulov, Kishkentayeva, & Ashirbekov, 2015).

In a review of 183 such international scholarship programs offered by governments around the world (27% having more than one), researchers found 78 programs which provided scholarships for overseas degree mobility (Perna et al., 2014). Of the government scholarships reviewed, 78 offered full degree coverage and 19 covered undergraduate studies (partial or full). Just under half (45.9%) of the scholarships identified were related to the Fulbright program, while the others were considered to be non-Fulbright related.

Fields of study. Engineering and business/management fields dominate the U.S. international student market (IIE, 2017d; Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2017). The 2016/17 academic year saw a 18% growth in the math and computer science field over the previous academic year. According to the 2016/17 Open Doors report (IIE, 2017d), social sciences, physical and life sciences, intensive English, education, and humanity fields have a significantly low prominence among international students in the U.S. higher education system. General engineering and computer information science categories both reported over 100,000 international students enrolled in them. Despite the relatively lower total enrollment, social sciences and liberal arts/general education programs were reported as having the third and fourth highest program enrollments respectively.

Looking closer at the top sending countries, 23.1% of the 350,755 Chinese students who were studying in a HEI in the U.S. during the 2016/17 academic year were enrolled in business and management programs (IIE, 2017e). Engineering (18.7%) and math/computer science (15.5%) were the other highest enrolled programs for Chinese students. For students from India, the second highest source country of international students, 36.2% of the students enrolled in engineering programs. This was closely followed by math and computer science programs, which saw 35.4% of 186,267 students from India enrolled in. South Korea had 15.4% of their

58,663 students who studied in the U.S. enroll in business and management programs. The engineering cluster of programs accounted for 13.5% of all South Korean's enrolled in U.S. higher education during the 2016/17 academic year, while 13.1% of the students from South Korea were enrolled in social science.

Sources of information for decision-making. HEI's use a variety of marketing tools to reach prospective students (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). Comparing results of research conducted in Canada, France, and Sweden, Angulo-Ruiz, Pergelova, and Cheben (2016) investigated three categories of higher education marketing: traditional advertising, relational marketing, and internet marketing. Findings from their study indicated only relational marketing, such as in-person meetings and events, had a significant effect on student choice.

Relational marketing can also be extended to reference groups. Reference groups, also referred to as influencers, generally include family, educational agents, educators, friends or other peers, HEI recruiters, and counselors (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). Several studies have reported the importance of these groups and the impact of word-of-mouth communications in student choice (Alfattal, 2017; Moogan, 2011). Current international students often share their experiences with their friends and family back home, creating an "imaginative geography" (Beech, 2014). In her study of why place matters in international student mobility, Beech (2014) found that the desire to have similar experiences as their friends was common among her research participants. In another study of international students, one researcher found that 36% of the participants relied on their friends, 14% relied on their teachers and school counselors, and 13% reported relying on family who had previously studied abroad to help them select the U.S. institution featured in the study (Lee, 2008). However, more than half of the students in the case study reported that the internet, brochures, and/or other advertising influenced their choice in an

institution. In Lee's (2008) study, gender was generally not a significant factor in the findings regarding the sources relied upon in helping choose a foreign university. The only exception to this was that the results showed males to rely significantly more on friends for information than the females in the study did.

There have been several studies that have reported regional or cultural differences in the primary sources of information used when choosing a foreign university to study at (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017; Lee, 2008). One study, comparing Chinese students to other international students, found significant differences between the two groups when it came to the websites and direct communication from the institution (James-MacEachern & Yun, 2017). Chinese students were more likely to perceive "other internet sites" (n.p.) as having usefulness, while other international students were more in favor of the information directly from the institution and provincial government websites. No significant differences between the two groups were found for the other sources listed by the researchers. Other sources listed included social media, advertisements in various media, brochures, college fairs, institutional recruiters, recruitment agencies, alumni, friends, family, and school counselors. Overall, direct communication from the institution, the university's website, and alumni were rated most useful sources by all the participants in the study. In Lee's (2008) study discussed earlier, the researcher found students from East Asia and Canada relied on the internet, brochures, and advertisements significantly more than students from Latin America, Europe, and Africa.

Additionally, sources of information have been greatly impacted by advances in technology. In comparing two groups of students, one from 2008 and the other from 2011, Bohman (2014) identified significant changes in sources of information thanks to the proliferation of the internet. For example, no participant in the 2008 group had used the internet

to research universities abroad. However, in the 2011 group, students used it throughout their search process. Adriana, an example of this highlighted in the study, said it simply, "on my own I was just searching online" (Bohman, 2014, p. 715).

Choice by U.S. state. According to the latest Open Doors report, one out of three international students study in California, New York, or Texas (IIE, 2017f). This is not surprising as students tend to choose larger types of HEI's or those located in larger cities (Phelps, 2010). Each of these states had over 80,000 international students enrolled in them during the 2016/17 academic year. Despite not breaking into the top three destination states, the District of Columbia (13%) and Massachusetts (12%) reported having the highest percentage of their higher education student body consist of international students. Delaware (9%), New York (9%), and Washington (8%) rounded out the top five states with the highest proportion of international students in their higher education systems (IIE, 2017f).

U.S. immigration (Immigration & Customs Enforcement, 2017) estimates that 27.3% of the international students in the U.S. study in the Northeast, 26.4% of the student's study in the South, 25.5% study in the West, and 20.4% of all international students in the U.S. studied in the Midwest during the 2016/17 academic year. The remaining .5% of students studied outside of the continental U.S. or in a U.S. Territory. The Midwest region, the location of this study, only saw an average of about one percent growth from the 2015/16 academic year to the 2016/17 academic year.

This study investigates the international student's choice to attend one of four higher institutions in three Midwestern states (Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota). IIE (2017g) reported that in Minnesota, which as a state ranked 19th in the country for hosting international students, the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities reported hosting almost half of the state's students.

This was followed by Minnesota State University – St. Cloud which reported 1,569 on their campus. Due to their research focus and geographic location (large cities), neither of these institutions were chosen for the present study. China (28.5%), India (11.4%), and South Korea (8.2%) were the top three countries represented in this state. Combined, the 15,389 international students in the state had an estimated expenditure of $457,630,933 during the 2016/17 academic year. To put the state's total in perspective, the top hosting university in the country, New York University, reported having 17,326 international students enrolled at its institution alone during the same academic year.

Wisconsin, which ranked 21st in the IIE's (2017g) Open Doors report, reported enrolling 13,220 international students in their HEI's. China (39.3%), India (10.5%), and Saudi Arabia (7.9%) had the largest representation. Similar to Minnesota, the flagship university (University of Wisconsin – Madison) reported the largest enrollment of 6,769 students, while the public university in the state's largest city, Milwaukee, reported the state's second-highest enrollment with 1,747 students. This is not surprising given research findings that city factors and program array are important in the selection of an institution (Chen, 2017; Ho, 2014). As with the other states in the study, neither of these top two institutions were included in this study. IIE (2017g) estimated that international students contributed $396,334,085 to the state in the 2016/17 academic year.

Iowa ranked 23rd in the number of international students in the U.S., hosting 12,488 in the 2016/17 academic year (IIE, 2017g). This equated to an estimated economic contribution of $378,515,332 by international students in the academic year. Chinese students made up 42.6% of this population, with India coming in a distant second at 10.70%, and South Korea, 5.6%, was third in the number of students studying in Iowa. Iowa State University (4,749 international

students) and University of Iowa (4,300 international students) were reported as enrolling the most international students in the state. To follow the focus of this study, neither of these top two institutions were selected to be involved in this study.

Figure 3 illustrates the geographic area of the study, with the number representing the rank of the state based on the number of international students they hosted during the 2016/17 academic year.

Figure 3. Map of study area and rankings based on number of international students.

Motives for International Degree Mobility

There are many reasons why students seek to obtain their degree in a foreign country (Tran, 2015). "Transnational mobility is regarded as a resourceful vehicle to help them 'become' the kind of person, professional or citizen that they aspire to be" (Tran, 2015, p. 1269). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2017) states that an education in a different country provides an opportunity for quality education, to develop a skillset not taught in the home country, and a potential to enter a different workforce. The OECD also finds that the experience of an education abroad helps students expand cultural knowledge and improve language skills.

Using data gathered over a four-year period from 25 different vocational education institutions in Australia, Tran (2015) identified three perspectives on why students mobilize for their degree: transformative profession-based perspective, the instrumental-pragmatic perspective, and the migration-orientated perspective. The first perspective, profession-based, is to seek a career change or advancement. Instrumental-pragmatic perspectives involve a "quest for better material life" (Tran, 2015, p. 1269). Migration perspectives include those pursuing an education abroad with the hopes of later permanently migrating to that country. International students may fit into one or more of these categories. Non-academic rationale, such as migration or simply leisure travel, are further supported by other researchers as well (Baas, 2010; Birrell & Perry, 2009; Brooks & Waters, 2011).

Motivation to earn a degree abroad can be influenced and modified by family and friends, as well as the social and educational environment around them over time (Tran & Nyland, 2011). Several participants in Bohman's (2014) provided first-hand insight into this. A participant Bohman (2014) identified as "Gu Ling" was quoted as saying "mostly my mother pushed me. I think she pushed me because she wanted me to see wider world" (p. 714). Another participant, identified as Sadiq, implied that because his friends were going abroad, he wanted to go too. "It's more than 50%...When all my classmates were doing that, I wanted to do that too" (Bohman, 2014, p. 714). For other students, going abroad was an opportunity to "start over" (Bohman, 2014). Faye, a 2008 participant in Bohman's study, said she could not get into her choice of university in her home country, so she went abroad for a chance to raise her scores.

Choice of an Institution

Broadly speaking, the OECD (2017) list the following factors impacting a student's decision to study outside of their home country: mobility costs (both financial and

psychological), education costs (tuition and fees), historical ties between home and potential host country, political frameworks, quality of programs and institutional prestige, language of instruction, quality assurance (accreditation), and immigration policy. Every student, however, has unique reasons for studying outside of their home country and the rationale is particularly individualized when it comes to selecting a particular institution.

Examining data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, one researcher compared the profile of international students attending two-year colleges in the U.S. with those attending a four-year university (Mamiseishvili, 2012b). The study looked at data from 240 students, with half coming from two-year institutions and half coming from four-year institutions. For those attending the four-year institutions, program/coursework, reputation of institution, and location of institution were the top three reasons for enrolling at the institution. For those attending the two-year institutions, the location, cost of attendance, and program/coursework were the top three. 47.4% of the total considered campus safety in their decision-making. Nearly 70% of students attending a two-year institution, and 57.7% of those attending a four-year institution, indicated graduation rates were not a factor.

While a clear majority of students enroll in a university (IIE, 2017a), for some, two-year colleges can be a stepping stone (Bohman, 2014; Zhang & Serra Hagedorn, 2017), or a "rescue" (Hagedorn, Pei, & Yan, 2016, p. 63). In a study of university students who had taken classes at a nearby community college, the researchers found seven reasons why students pursuing a four-year degree at a university ended up enrolling for at least one class at a nearby two-year institution (Hagedorn, Pei, & Yan, 2016). Some of the reasons cited were categorized as "rescues" and included low grades and the threat of academic dismissal, as well as the "bad" course – meaning the student did poorly in one university course and retook it at the community

college. Other reasons were the fear of public speaking in English, so the students took the course online at the community college. Most students in the study said finances were among the reasons for enrolling in the community college. Of the respondents in the study, 53.7% selected "the course was less expensive than taking it at the university" as one of their reasons for choosing to enroll in the community college (Hagedorn, Pei, & Yan, 2016, p. 62).

College Choice Models

Relying heavily on human capital theory and the push-pull theory, among others, there have been several iterations of college choice models that have been developed over the last three decades. One of the earlier versions was from Chapman (1981) whose causal model of college choice combined student characteristics (aspirations, socioeconomic status, academic ability, and achievement) and external factors (friends, institutional characteristics, and institutional communication) with the student's expectations of their future college experience to determine enrollment decisions (Bergerson, 2009).

Early models also include those from Jackson (1982) and Paulsen (1990). Jackson (1982) combined views from sociology and economics to create the combined student choice model. This consists of three phases: preference, exclusion, and evaluation. Paulsen (1990) relied on "socioeconomic background, academic ability, and contextual (parental encouragement, peer's plans, neighborhood or high school status, self-esteem, college curriculum, teacher and counselor encouragement)" (p. 8) in his college choice model.

A widely cited model of college choice was developed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), based on a review of literature available at the time (Bergerson, 2009). The authors also categorized college choice as a three-phase process including 1) predisposition of students (student characteristics), 2) search (both the courting by the college and universities combined

with the search activities by the student), and 3) the choice phase, which concluded with enrollment in the chosen university. Hossler and Gallagher concluded their paper by hypothesizing that as students' progress through the phases of the model, their interactions with the universities increase. The university provides increasingly specific information, helping the student further narrow their search.

Kotler and Fox (1985) developed a six-stage model they called the "highly-complex student's decision-making process" (p. 251). The six main stages start at the point when a person determines the need to investigate their college choice options. This is followed by gathering information and evaluation of alternatives. Using a variety of inputs within this evaluation, a decision is made on the next steps and is eventually acted upon. Finally, after the experience is completed, a post-purchase evaluation is made. Figure 4 helps us visualize this model.

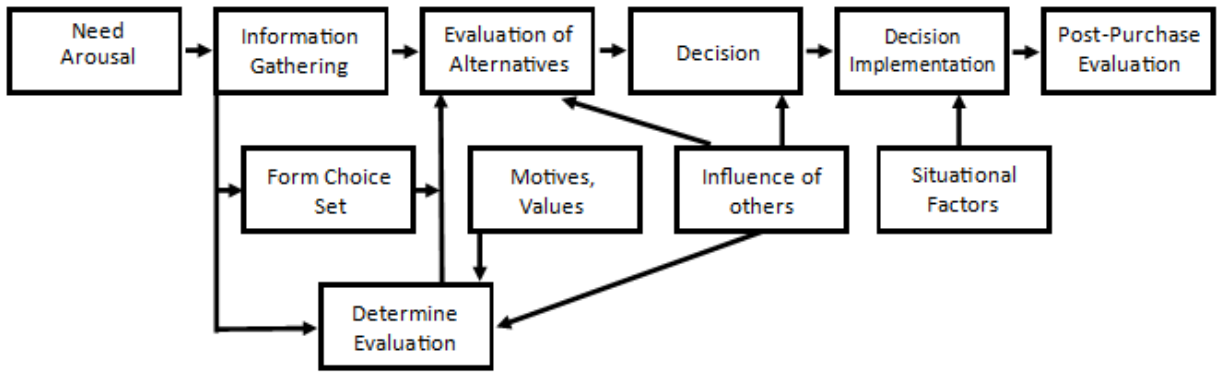

Figure 4. The highly-complex student's decision-making process. (Kotler & Fox, 1985)

Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001) developed the four C's model of choice and decision-making in education and training with context, choice influencers, choosers, and choice as the main groupings of the model. Context considers society, economy, policy and culture. This includes the home environment, lived environment, institutional environment, and social

environment. Choice influencers consider the impact of institutional factors (ex: teachers), lived (ex: media), home (ex: parents), and social (ex: friends). The choosers grouping considers protecting self-image, pathway perception, lifestyle ambitioning, estimation of net personal gain, choice announcement, and justification selection. These all intersect together, including the choice. This includes institution, career, pathway, and program. The authors highlight that the choice may change as any of the aspects of the groupings in the model change.

More recently, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2016) developed the "research model of higher education consumer choice of institution" (p. 125). Simply stated, this model has three major components: personal and group characteristics, attitude to institutional factors, and type of college/university chosen. Personal characteristics are attributes brought by the individual that are outside of anyone's control. The model then hypothesizes that these personal traits interact with the institutional attributes to ultimately lead to the type of institution chosen. See Figure 5 for a diagram of the model.

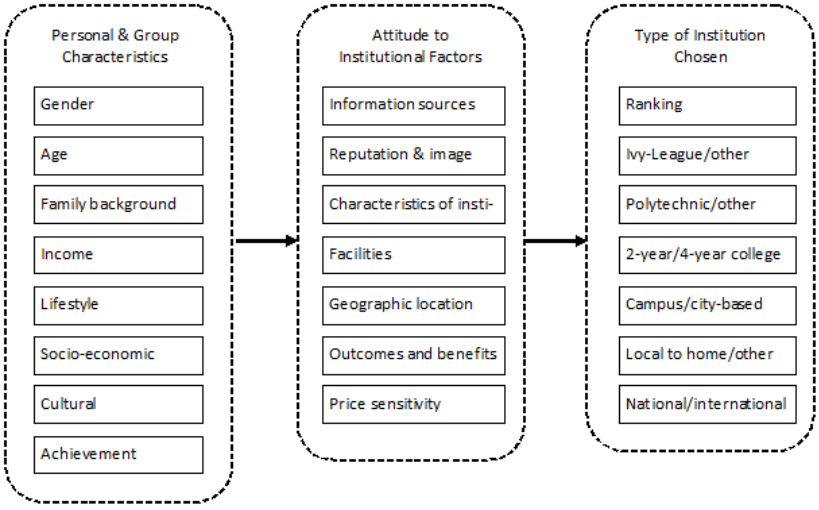

Figure 5. The research model of HE consumer choice of institution. (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2016, p. 125)

Retention of International Students

"Students enroll with hopes and expectations that their college will deliver every day on its promise to be a certain kind of institution" (Felten, Gardner, Schroeder, Lambert, & Barefoot, 2016, p. 76). From many perspectives, including financially, it is more beneficial for an institution to retain students at the institution than to attract new students (Harrison-Walker, 2010; Mamiseishvili, 2012a). Retention activities should focus on keeping students satisfied and persisting (Elliott & Healy, 2001).

Satisfied students offer institutions the competitive advantage of student retention and positive word of mouth (Arambewela & Hall, 2009). Despite the importance of student satisfaction, HEI's often forget about the importance of keeping admitted students engaged and supported (Lee, 2010, 2015). "Feeling prepared and having realistic expectations of the degree programme are important prerequisites" (p. 48) for success and satisfaction at an institution (Jansen, Suhre, & André, 2017).

Satisfaction can be considered a form of promotion (Anderson, 1973) and therefore an important consideration when evaluating student selection of a foreign university. Based on a survey completed by 501 international students, Lee (2010) found that students were most likely to recommend their university if they believed they were receiving fair and equal treatment. This was followed by satisfaction with the student services and overall reputation of the university. Students were less likely to recommend the university if they were from East Asia, it was not their first institutional choice, or if they had financial difficulties. In Lee's study, approximately 20% of the respondents indicated they would not recommend the large institution they were studying at.

Mavondo, Tsarenko, and Gabbott (2004) found that international students tended to value the learning environment more than the domestic students in their study. Interestingly, the study found that as long as the institution's technology was not outdated, it appeared to have little impact on student satisfaction for either group. The library, quality of learning, quality of teaching, and overall satisfaction was found to have a significant impact on the decision to recommend or not recommend the institution to others. Satisfaction was impacted by student services, the library, and the quality of learning. Student orientation did not impact student satisfaction nor a decision to recommend to others.

Studying in a foreign location can bring many unique physical and psychological changes to the student that the institution must pay attention to (Cushner & Karim, 2004; Heck & Mu, 2016). This aligns with findings by Arambewela and Hall (2009) who found that student services, in partnership with the academic areas of the institution, play a vital role in student satisfaction. Researchers identified seven categories which significantly impact student satisfaction: education, social, technology, economic, accommodation, safety, prestige, and image. Another example of this was in a study investigating the university role of supporting international students while they are in the U.S. and its impact on student's psychological well-being (Cho & Yu, 2015). The results of the study confirmed that university support increased school-life satisfaction, in part by lowering the psychological stress of the students.

In an investigation of student services, Tas (2013) found international students to be most satisfied with the library, health/wellness centers, academic advising, personal counseling services, and student employment. Comparatively though, they ranked (in order) computer support services, academic advising, the library, financial aid services, and parking facilities as

the most important. This shows a disparity between perceived importance of services and satisfaction with the services.

In one study, it was found that international students were simply not aware of all the various services available to them (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). This could be based on service differences between the U.S. institution and the higher education system the student came from (Lee, 2015). Staff participants in the study, probably not realizing the differences between educational systems, perceived students to know about the services, but simply lacked an understanding of how to access or when to use the services (Roberts & Dunworth, 2012). The study concluded that students were more concerned with their basic needs being met, while staff appeared to be more concerned with the higher levels of students esteem and self-actualization.

While there are often specific offices dedicated to serving international students (Bista, 2015; Hammer, 1992), the responsibility for retaining these students should be spread across faculty, advisors, and all student service personnel (Mamiseishvili, 2012a). Mamiseishvili's study found that peers in and outside of the classroom play a vital part of the student's experience as well. Study groups and interactions with peers outside of the classroom also played a significant role in the overall success of the international student.

Summary

An international student's decision to pursue an educational degree abroad has been shown to be extremely complex (Kotler & Fox, 1985). Adding to the complexity is the hyper-competitive market that has been formed by institutions around the world who are seeking to diversify their campuses and are becoming increasingly reliant on a revenue-stream gained through the recruitment of international students (Cantwell, 2015; Mogaji, 2016). Data on international students show that HEI's in the Midwest of the U.S. are at a disadvantage in this

marketplace as they struggle to attract large numbers of this population (Department of State, 2017a). This study aims to help better understand how the international students who do enroll in the Midwestern institutions find out about and decide to join these institutions.

Chapter III: Method and Procedures

The purpose of this mixed method study was to contribute to the limited body of existing research on an international student's decision to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree internationally at selected public higher education institutions (HEI's) in the upper Midwest of the United States (U.S.). More specifically, the research sought to identify key influencers and experiences that guide an international student's choice to attend one of the institutions featured in the study. The study's findings aimed to help Midwest teaching-focused HEI's recruit, enroll, and retain international students at their college or university.

The objective of this study was to determine what compels international students to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree at teaching-focused institutions in the Midwest. This objective was met through the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest?
2. How did international students choose to pursue their studies at the selected public higher education institutions?
3. What are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university?

Research Methodology

To achieve the objective and answer the research questions of this study, a two-phase, mixed methods approach was utilized. Creswell (2014) describes the approach as an "explanatory sequential mixed methods" (p. 15), implementing a quantitative phase prior to a qualitative technique. By embarking on this study design, it was expected that data from the quantitative phase would be further developed and explained through qualitative findings.

Small (2011) indicates there are two primary reasons for using mixed methods, including that this approach is confirming (also referenced as triangulation) as well as complementary, as it expands on the data through capta to compensate for the inherent weakness of any one method. In addition to the primary motives articulated by Small (2011), Bryman (2006) adds that this approach allows for different research questions, an explanation of findings generated by the other method, and increased credibility. Mixed methods, along with its counterpart, multimethod design, are common research tactics (Patton, 2015).

Mixed-methods aligns most closely with the pragmatic worldview (Creswell, 2014). As Creswell (2014) states "for the mixed methods researcher, pragmatism opens the door to multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis" (p. 11). Quantitative data proves a broad understanding of a problem, while qualitative data provides detailed insight (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The focus of research from the pragmatic worldview is on "the question asked rather than the methods" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 41). This process is focused on "what works and practice" (p. 41), allowing researchers to take both biased and unbiased perspectives in their research, "valuing both objective and subjective knowledge" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 43).

Phase one. To answer research questions one and two, the first phase of the study involved deploying a quantitative survey via the online survey tool Qualtrics. Research methods using surveys are considered nonexperimental, one of two quantitative research designs, with the other being experimental (Creswell, 2014). Surveys provide "quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population" (Creswell, 2014, p. 13), making nonexperimental design appropriate for this study.

Phase two. Seeking to answer research question three, phase two was taken from a phenomenological perspective. Lichtman (2013) explains phenomenology as an approach to examine lived experiences. This method allowed the researcher to examine an experience or occasion of the interviewee being studied. According to Lichtman, phenomenology allows researchers to explore the lived experiences deeper than other methods typically allow. This phase of the study employed qualitatively designed, semi-structured interviews to gather insight from twelve students spread over four institutions. Qualitative research investigates, documents, and interprets meaning (Patton, 2015). Patton outlines seven key contributions of qualitative inquiry, all of which apply directly to this study, and as such make qualitative study an appropriate methodology. These contributions include: "illuminating meaning, studying how things work, capturing stories to understand people's perspectives and experiences, elucidating how systems function and their consequences for people's lives, understanding context: how and why it matters, identifying unanticipated consequences, and making case comparisons to discover important patterns and themes across cases" (Patton, 2015, p. 12-13).

Subject Selection and Description

This two-phase, mixed methods study encompassed four HEI's spread over three upper Midwestern states. Utilizing the Open Doors report from the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017h), the initial list of institutions for possible inclusion in the study was developed using the most recent enrollment data on international students in four upper-Midwestern states, including Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Institutions with either relatively high or low numbers of international students were eliminated from consideration. The preliminary information on international student enrollment used to select the institutions did not differentiate between demographic data such as visa categories, countries of origin, or educational level.

Specific demographic information was determined through communication with the institutions immediately prior to the launch of phase one of the study.

The list of institutions was further narrowed using institutional and geographic characteristics from the 2015 Carnegie classification of institutions (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). The criteria used included the "basic" classification (Masters, Associates), the undergraduate instructional program, enrollment profile, and size and setting of the institution. Four institutions throughout the three Midwestern states used in the study were ultimately selected as the basis for the subject pool.

Subject pool. Institution one is a medium, exclusively associate degree-granting college (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). The institute is considered "mixed transfer/vocational & technical" college (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017, n.p.) with a mix of part-time and full-time, primarily nontraditional students. The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017h) reports the institution as having less than 200 international students during the 2016/17 academic year. Upon communication with staff at this institution, it was determined 115 students met the requirements for inclusion into the study.

Institution two is classified as a large, exclusively associates degree-granting college (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). Carnegie classifications indicate this institute is considered high vocational and technical, with a high nontraditional, part-time population. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having less than 200 international students during the 2016/17 academic year. Based on a list of eligible students provided by the institution, the study population at this site was 60 students.

Institution three has been identified as a large, four-year institution. Carnegie classification (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017) lists the institution as being a mix of

arts and sciences and professionally focused programs at the undergraduate level. While the campus also offers some master's degrees and a doctoral program, it primarily consists of residentially-based undergraduate students. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having more than 200 international students on the campus during the 2016/17 academic year. The total number of eligible students was 133.

Institution four is a medium-sized, four-year institution. This institution is categorized as a medium, master's level, and primarily residential (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). Carnegie classifications list the university as having professional-focused undergraduate programs, in which a very high percentage of students are enrolled, compared to graduate programs. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having more than 200 international students on the campus during the 2016/17 academic year. One hundred and fifteen students were eligible for inclusion into the study population at this site.

A combination of introductory emails, phone calls, and the researcher's professional connections were utilized to gain support from each of the institutions chosen for the study. The initial emails and phone calls were directed to the leadership of the international office at the respective institutions. Additional communication with the institution included connecting with other staff, where appropriate.

Phase one. To broaden perspective and strengthen the data gathered for research questions one and two, *what is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused HEI's in the Midwest* and *How did international students choose to pursue their studies at the selected public HEI's*, all undergraduate and associate degree-seeking F-1, J-1, and M-1 students at the participating institutions were invited to the first

phase of the study (see Appendix A and B). A total of 423 students were invited to participate in this phase.

Phase two. To answer research question three, *what are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university*, the investigator identified twelve participants, two to four from each of the four participating institutions, using contact information voluntarily provided in the final question answered in the online survey (see Appendix B). Efforts were made to maintain gender balance and vary country of origin in order to get a valid sampling representing a variety of perspectives. This smaller quantity, 12 total participants, was aligned with Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) recommendation that the qualitative phase comes from a significantly smaller sample size, just enough so certain themes may emerge. The authors used a previously published explanatory study by Thogersen-Ntoumani and Fox (as cited in Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), to demonstrate this. The cited study gathered quantitative data from 312 employees and followed up with interviews of 10 of the employees who participated in the first phase. Coincidently, that study used a similar sample size as the one originally anticipated for the present study.

Instrumentation

This study used a survey instrument to capture quantitative data as well as in-person interviews to capture capta for the study. The following sections describe each of these instruments in further detail by the phase of the study they were deployed.

Phase one. To answer research question one, a multi-question survey instrument was developed by the researcher. Surveys allow researchers to gather numeric data from a study population or sample of it (Creswell, 2014). This survey was electronically available and promoted to all degree-seeking, associate and undergraduate international students at the

participating institutions via Qualitrics. To inform question one, demographic questions including age (under 18, 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, 23-24, and 25+), country of citizenship and gender (male, female, transgender, other, wish not to identify) were asked of the respondents. In an effort to increase validity, separate links containing identical surveys were emailed based on the institution they attended. This assisted the researcher in correctly identifying students based on their institutional type, while increasing validity and reducing the number of questions participants were asked to complete.

Research question two relied on the same survey deployed for question one. To answer this research question, the instrument used several single response, multiple choice questions to identify primary sources of information used in their search and the decision-making process. Example questions included: how students first discovered the institution they are currently enrolled at (friend, family member, education agent, EducationUSA, recruitment fair, online search, other), and most important (first and second) factors in decision to enroll at their present institution (cost, academic reputation, size of institution, recommendation from friend/family, geographic location/setting, rankings, English proficiency requirements, other).

Phase two. Building from the Qualtrics survey, a one-time, in-person, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes was utilized to capture the lived experiences of international students to answer question three. Interviews are a fundamental part of most qualitative studies (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) define semi-structured interviews as "the researcher not only follows some preset questions but also includes additional questions in response to participant comments and reactions" (p. 359). The authors recommend this form of interviewing for projects that do not provide the opportunity for follow-up interviews. For this study, the researcher arranged to meet individually with the selected

participants at an agreed upon location on that student's campus. Creswell (2014) describes this as allowing research subjects to be in their "natural setting" (p. 185). The interview was conducted using the following prompts with added probes (tell me more, could you explain, etc.) as needed:

1. Describe your experience in wanting to study outside your own country.
2. Tell me about your experience in finding and enrolling here at {institution}.
3. What did you expect your experience to look and feel like?
4. How do your initial expectations compare with what you are actually experiencing?

Figure 6 illustrates the ties between the research questions and each phase of the study.

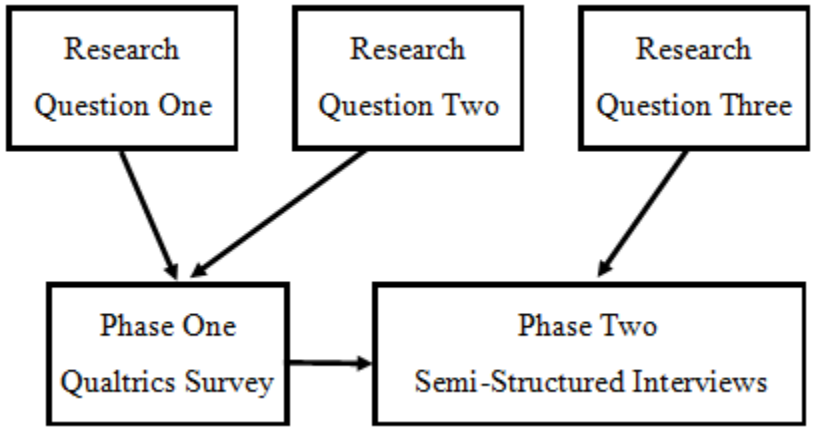

Figure 6. Diagram of the research design.

Validity and reliability. The instruments were originally designed in partnership with the research committee chair and further refined by the full committee. Content validity was established through the review of the literature previously mentioned. This included modeling several of the demographic questions on the survey off of the frequently cited Open Doors Report published by IIE (2017b, 2017d, 2017e). Internal reliability was established in the survey by issuing all subjects the same survey with identical questions. To increase reliability, the researcher met with a representative from the University of Wisconsin – Stout's Applied

Research Center (ARC) to review the research tools and survey design. Prior to the launch of the study, the survey instrument was piloted at one associate degree institution not featured in the main study. This allowed for further refinement of the questions, the readability and ease of responding to the survey, and investigative process.

Data Collection Procedures

The following two sections describe the data collection process for each of the two phases of the study.

Phase one. For the first phase of the study, all associate and undergraduate degree international students on an F-1, J-1, or M-1 visa at each of the four participating institutions were emailed a link to the appropriate Qualtrics survey in mid to late January. The contact information, including basic demographic information (first name, last name, program of study, country of citizenship, and email) was provided to the researcher by each institution. At three of the four institutions, the email was sent through the Qualtrics software system, allowing for follow-up emails to non-respondents. The fourth institution, a two-year institution, emailed all phase one related communication themselves to their students via the organizations email system. Despite the different methods used for contacting students, the two-year institutions had nearly identical response rates. Each institution in the study had different academic calendars, so the launch of the survey was staggered. The participants were given two weeks to complete the survey. To increase the response rate, a pre-invite email was sent by the international office at each institution two days before the actual invitation informing the students of the research and the institutions support for it. An email reminder was sent on the 4^{th}, 8^{th}, and 12^{th} day of the survey deployment to non-respondents.

The final question on the survey provided respondents an opportunity to participate in the second phase of the study by providing their name and contact information (email and/or U.S. phone number). A brief description of phase two was provided within the survey instrument to assist the respondents in their decision to step out of the research after phase one or continue to be considered for phase two (see Appendix B). To maintain confidentiality, the researcher kept the contact information secluded from the remaining parts of the survey during the analysis and distribution of the findings.

Phase two. Three students from each of the participating institutions were originally selected from the pool of students self-identified during phase one. Additional students were contacted as necessary based on the availability of the selected students. Accounting for communication overlap, class and work schedules, weather, and illness, two to four students at each institution participated in the interviews. Efforts were made to balance gender and vary country of origin to get a valid sampling representing a variety of perspectives. A total of twelve subjects participated in the one-time, semi-structured face-to-face interview, conducted in English. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. Selected students were sent an email with more information about the study and, when phone numbers were provided, follow-up text messages were placed to build rapport between the interviewer and interviewee and determine the most convenient time and location for the meeting. The interview took place on the student's campus in a space that maintained their comfort and anonymity. With the goal of reducing travel, time, and expense for the researcher, most interviews of students from the same institution were conducted independently but on the same day.

The interviewer maintained field notes in an effort to note observable aspects of the interview such as interviewee expressions, physical space nuances, etc., throughout the

interview. Each interview was also recorded with a digital audio recorder. Shortly after the conclusion of each interview, the audio file from the interview was uploaded to a reputable transcription service, rev.com, for processing. Resulting transcripts were analyzed, along with the hand-written notes, by the researcher.

A thank you letter to all participating institutions and their international students was emailed to each respondent shortly after they completed the survey (see Appendix C). Individual, personalized thank you emails were sent to the students who participated in phase two of the study within two days of their interview.

Data Analysis

The following two sections describe the data analysis process for each of the two phases of the study.

Phase one. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics "classify, organize, and summarize numerical data about a particular group of observations" (Ravid, 2011, p. 29). Qualtrics, an online survey tool, was used to calculate frequencies of each question. As the results of the research are not generalizable beyond the population, inferential statistics such as t-tests, ANOVA, and Chi-square tests are not appropriate (Ravid, 2011). This analysis was pre-vetted through consultation with a staff member in UW-Stout's ARC as an appropriate analytical method for this study. In addition, data was disaggregated to determine any similarities or differences that may exist between the data collected from subjects at the two-year colleges and those attending four-year universities.

Phase two. Phase two of the survey used an eidetic reduction process most aligned with Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological method (Appendix D). This method is designed to find the heart of a particular phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Successful application of this

process requires a minimum of three interviewees (Giorgi, 2008). Using bracketing and eidetic reduction, the researcher is able to extract the data from the transcripts gained through the responses to the research question (Gill, 2014). In this process, the researcher intentionally removes non-essential wording to make meaning of the evident themes that can have the context removed while still holding the eidos or essence of the meaning (Giorgi, 1997). Figure 7 helps visualize this process.

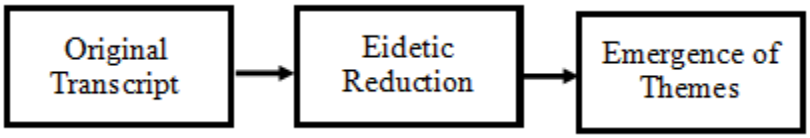

Figure 7. Thematic analysis process. Adapted from Giorgi, 1997.

Limitations

As one can imagine, working with international students at four different institutions spread over three states comes with a variety of limitations. International students at four public teaching-focused HEI's in the Midwest participated in this study, therefore, findings are not intended to be generalizable to a broader population. Student availability had a significant impact on who was able to participate in the second phase of the study. For example, the interviewer was notified by one student that the individual got sick that day and could not participate in the interview. Others were limited in time based on their school and work schedules. One student had symptoms of an allergic reaction during the interview from food consumed just prior to the discussion while being interviewed and ultimately had to cut the conversation a few minutes short. This study investigated influential factors among international students as a whole in their choice of a HEI in the Midwest and is not intended to explore variances in influential factors based on individual, cultural, or geographical differences.

Summary

Using a two-phased mixed methods approach, the study aimed to contribute to the limited body of existing research on an international student's decision to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree internationally at selected public HEI's in the upper Midwest. The study first deployed a Qualtrics survey to all international students currently attending one of four HEI's participating in the research. Phase two of the study consisted of twelve in-person interviews from subjects who self-identified in the first phase. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with two to four international students from each participating institution on their campus. Data from the survey was analyzed by using descriptive statistics, while the interviews were coded and analyzed using an eidetic reduction process most aligned with Giorgi's (1997) descriptive phenomenological method (Appendix D).

Chapter IV: Presentation of the Findings

The objective of this study sought to determine what compels international students to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree at teaching-focused institutions in the Midwest. The study encompassed four institutions across the Midwest in the United States (U.S.). This objective was met through the following research questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest?
2. How did international students choose to pursue their studies at the selected public higher education institutions?
3. What are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university?

Subject Pool

Institution one (i1) is a medium, exclusively associates degree-granting college (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). The institution is considered a *mixed transfer/vocational & technical college* (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017), with a mix of part-time and full-time, primarily nontraditional students. The Institute of International Education (IIE) (2017h) reports this institution as having less than 200 international students during the 2016-2017 academic year. Upon communication with staff at this institution, it was determined 115 students met the requirements for inclusion into the study.

Institution two (i2) is classified as a large, exclusively associates degree-granting college (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). Carnegie classifications indicate this institution is considered *high vocational and technical, with a high nontraditional, part-time population*. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having less than 200 international students during the 2016-

2017 academic year. Based on a list of eligible students provided by the institution, the study population at this site was 60 students.

Institution three (i3) has been identified as a large, four-year institution. Carnegie classification (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017) lists the institution as being *a mix of arts and sciences and professionally focused programs at the undergraduate level*. While the campus also offers some master's degrees and a doctoral program, it primarily consists of residentially-based undergraduate students. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having more than 200 international students on the campus during the 2016-2017 academic year. The total number of eligible students was 133.

Institution four (i4) is a medium-sized, four-year institution. This institution is categorized as a *medium, master's level, and primarily residential* (Center for Postsecondary Research, 2017). Carnegie classifications list the university as having professional-focused undergraduate programs, in which a very high percentage of students are enrolled, compared to graduate programs. IIE (2017h) reports the institution as having more than 200 international students on the campus during the 2016-2017 academic year. One hundred and fifteen students were eligible for inclusion in the study population at this site.

The eligible population at the two-year colleges (i1 and i2) was 175 students. The population from the four-year universities (i3 and i4) totaled 248 students. The combined total, or entire study population, was 423 students. The combined response rate ranged from 54.4% to 55.6%.

Item Analysis

A survey was deployed to all international associate and undergraduate degree-seeking students at each of the four institutions participating in the study. Upon completion of the

Institutional Review Board (IRB) process for three of the four institutions, and a public data request for the fourth institution, contact information was provided to the researcher by three of the four institutions. In one case, the institution did not provide the contact information. It did, however, provide a total number of eligible students and sent the pre-invite, initial invitation, and follow-up emails with a link to the survey to the research population.

The 14-question survey was deployed using a staggered approach based on the institutional term dates and availability of requested data. The purpose of the survey was two-fold, 1) answer research question one (RQ 1) and research question two (RQ 2) and 2) to provide an opportunity for respondents to self-select into phase 2 of this mixed methods study by providing their contact information. Phase 2 was initiated to answer the studies research question three (RQ 3). The findings are presented in the following sections by research question.

RQ1: Findings

The question asked: *What is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest*? This question was answered exclusively through phase one of the study, a quantitative survey distributed to the entire study population. A combined 423 international students at the four institutions featured in this study.

Respondents were asked to name the country their passport was from that they used to enter the U.S. This question was phrased to recognize that to qualify as an international student, one has to use a passport other than from the U.S. Secondly, the question recognizes that some students may hold dual citizenship with two different countries, but when traveling may only enter the U.S. on one passport. The phrasing of this question assisted with various nuances predicted. To maintain the confidentiality of both the participating institutions and their

students, the researcher combined the data from this question by institutional type (two-year and four-year). To further protect the identity of the respondents to this question, the researcher coded the written responses by sub-region as defined by the IIE Open Doors report (IIE, 2017d). At least one student from the research population comes from all 15 of the sub-regions (Table 2).

Table 2

Sub-Region of Origin

Sub-Region	Two-Year	Four-Year	Combined Total
East Asia	11	52	63
Middle East	1	51	52
Europe	11	5	16
North America	4	9	13
West Africa	7	5	12
South and Central Asia	6	5	11
South America	7	3	10
Mexico and Central America	9	1	10
South East Asia	1	8	9
East Africa	2	4	6
Caribbean	5	1	6
Oceania	3	0	3
Central Africa	2	0	2
North Africa	0	1	1
Southern Africa	0	1	1

When asked to identify their gender, 40 students (i1 = 27, i2 = 13) from the two-year institutions identified as male, 26 students (i1 = 17, i2 = 9) identified as female, two students (i1-0, i2-2) identified as transgender, and one student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) indicated they preferred not to answer this question. From the four-year institutions, 99 students (i3 = 36, i4 = 63) identified as male, 61 students (i3 = 42, i4 = 19) identified as female, no students identified as transgender, and one student (i3 = 0, i4 = 1) selected the prefer not to answer option. No student at any of the institutions selected *other* as an option. A combined 230 international students, or 54.4% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 3).

Table 3

Gender of Respondents

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Gender	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Male	27	13	40	36	63	99	139
Female	17	9	26	42	19	61	87
Transgender	0	2	2	0	0	0	2
Prefer not to Answer	1	0	1	0	1	1	2
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

Another question asked respondents to identify their age range. From the two-year institutions, 22 students (i1 = 18, i2 = 4) selected 18-19 years old, 19 students (i1 = 14, i2 = 5) indicated they were in the 20-21 age range, and seven students (i1 = 6, i2 = 1) responded they were in the 22-23 age range. For the 24-25 age range, seven students (i1 = 2, i2 = 5) responded

they were in this category, while 14 students (i1 = 5, i2 = 9) indicated they were 25+. A total of 69 (i1 = 45, i2 = 24) international students from the two-year population, or 39.4% (i1 = 39.1%, i2 = 40.0%) responded.

From the four-year institutions, 28 students (i3 = 23, i4 = 5) responded that they were 18-19 years old, 38 students (i3 = 26, i4 = 12) responded they were 20-21, while 49 (i3 = 21, i4 = 28) replied they were 22-23. In the 24-25 age group, 20 students (i3 = 7, i4 = 13) selected this category, and 26 students (i3 = 1, i4 = 25) selected 25+. In total, 161 students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83) from the four-year institutions responded, or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6, i4 = 72.2).

Combined, 230 total responses were received for this question, or 54.4% of the research population (see Table 4).

Table 4

Age of Respondents

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Age	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
18-19	18	4	22	23	5	28	50
20-21	14	5	19	26	12	38	57
22-23	6	1	7	21	28	49	56
24-25	2	5	7	7	13	20	27
25+	5	9	14	1	25	26	40
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

When asked how long they had been enrolled at their current institution, 31 students (i1 = 25, i2 = 6) at the two-year institutions responded they were currently in their first or second

semester. Thirty students (i1 = 19, i2 = 11) answered they were currently in their second year at the institution, while five students (i1 = 0, i2 = 5) indicated they were in their third year. Three students (i1 = 1, i2 = 2) responded they were in their fourth year at the institution, while none of the students at the two-year colleges indicated they were there five or more years. Sixty-nine (i1 = 45, i2 = 24) international students from the two-year population, or 39.4% (i1 = 39.1%, i2 = 40.0%), responded to this question.

From the four-year institutions, 47 students (i3 = 26, i4 = 21) responded they were currently in their first or second semester. Forty-nine students (i3 = 23, i4 = 26) replied they were currently in year two at the institution, 32 students (i3 = 15, i4 = 17) answered that they were presently in their third year at the institution, while 26 students (i3 = 12, i4 = 14) indicated they were currently in their fourth year. Seven students (i3 = 2, i4 = 5) responded they were currently in year five or longer at the institution. Of those international students at four-year institutions, 161 (i3 = 78, i4 = 83) responded, or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6, i4 = 72.2) of the qualified population.

Combined, 230 total international students responded to this question, or 54.4% of the research population (see Table 5).

Table 5

Year at Institution

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Year at institution	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Currently in 1st or 2nd semester	25	6	31	26	21	47	78
Currently in year 2	19	11	30	23	26	49	79
Currently in year 3	0	5	5	15	17	32	37
Currently in year 4	1	2	3	12	14	26	29
Currently in year 5 or longer	0	0	0	2	5	7	7
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

The survey asked respondents to identify the career cluster that most closely represents their major. At the two-year institutions, 20 students (i1 = 15, i2 = 5) identified business and management, 11 students (i1 = 7, i2 = 4) selected *other*, 10 students (i1 = 5, i2 = 5) responded they were in an engineering related program, and another 10 students (i1 = 4, i2 = 6) indicated they were enrolled in a health professions program. Although the option was provided, none of the respondents who selected *other* provided additional information. Six students (i1 = 3, i2 = 3) replied they were enrolled in math and computer science programs, while five students (i1 = 5, i2 = 0) identified their program aligned most closely with the physical and life science cluster.

Four students (i1 = 3, i2 = 1) responded they were in the social science areas, three students (i1 = 3, i2 = 0) selected fine and applied arts, and one student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) considered themselves in the communication and journalism area. Seventy (i1 = 46, i2 = 24) international students from the two-year colleges responded to this question or, 40% (i1 = 40%, i2 = 40%) of the study population.

Of the respondents from the four-year institutions, 60 students (i3 = 20, i4 = 40) identified their program as being in an engineering area, 37 students (i3 = 18, i4 = 19) indicated they were enrolled in a business and management area, 22 students (i3 = 17, i4 = 5) responded their program best aligned with the math and computer science cluster, 12 students (i3 = 10, i4 = 2) responded they were in the physical and life science cluster, and 11 students (i3 = 4, i4 = 7) considered themselves to be enrolled in one *other* area. Three of the 11 students, who responded with *other* on this question, wrote in that they were enrolled in an information technology area. The other eight respondents did not further elaborate on their choice. Seven students (i3 = 4, i4 = 3) said they were taking majors in the fine and applied arts category, five students (i3 = 4, i4 = 1) identified social science, and one student (i3 = 1, i4 = 0) indicated they were in a communication and journalism field. In total, from the four-year institutions, 161 (i3 = 79, i4 = 82) international students responded to this question, or 64.9% (i3 = 59.4%, i4 = 71.3%) of the population.

Overall, 231 respondents identified their career area, or 54.6% of the study population (see Table 6).

Table 6

Career Cluster of Respondents

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Career Area	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Engineering	5	5	10	20	40	60	70
Business & Management	15	5	20	18	19	37	61
Math & Computer Science	3	3	6	17	5	22	28
Other	7	4	11	4	7	11	22
Physical and Life Science	5	0	5	10	2	12	17
Health Professions	4	6	10	1	5	6	16
Fine & Applied Arts	3	0	3	4	3	7	10
Social Science	3	1	4	4	1	5	9
Communication & Journalism	1	0	1	1	0	1	2
N	46	24	70	79	82	161	231
% Responding	40.0	40.0	40.0	59.4	71.3	64.9	54.6

RQ2: Findings

The question asked: h*ow did international students choose to pursue their studies at the selected public higher education institutions?* In addition to demographic questions, students were asked more specific questions in the survey related to selecting the institution they were currently enrolled at. One question asked how many institutions they had applied to.

Findings from the two-year institutions highlight that 41 international students (i1 = 28, i2 = 13) applied to one institution. Fourteen students (i1 = 9, i2 = 5) indicated they applied to two institutions, and 10 students (i1 = 5, i2 = 5) replied they had applied to three institutions. Three students (i1 = 1, i2 = 2) answered they had submitted applications to four schools, while another five students (i1 = 4, i2 = 1) responded they had applied to five or more institutions. From the two-year colleges, 73 students (i1 = 47, i2 = 26) responded to this question, or 41.7% (i1 = 40.9%, i2 = 43.3%) of the research population.

Of those responding from the four-year institutions, 77 students (i3 = 42, i4 = 35) indicated applying to only one institution. Thirty-two students (i3 = 11, i4 = 21) responded that they had applied to two institutions, and 23 students (i3 = 10, i4 = 13) said they submitted applications to three institutions. Eleven students (i3 = 4, i4 = 7) responded that they had applied to four institutions, while 19 students (i3 = 12, i4 = 7) answered that they applied to five or more institutions. A total of 162 (i3 = 79, i4 = 83) international students, or 65.3% (i3 = 59.4, i4 = 72.2), from the four-year institutions responded to this question.

This survey question received responses from a total of 235 international students yielding slightly less than a 56% response rate (see Table 7).

Table 7

Number of Institutions Respondents Applied To

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
# of Institutions	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
One	28	13	41	42	35	77	118
Two	9	5	14	11	21	32	46
Three	5	5	10	10	13	23	33
Four	1	2	3	4	7	11	14
Five Plus	4	1	5	12	7	19	24
N	47	26	73	79	83	162	235
% Responding	40.9	43.3	41.7	59.4	72.2	65.3	55.6

Respondents were also asked to identify the initial source where they first learned of the institution. Thirteen students (i1 = 6, i2 = 7) at the two-year institutions identified friends as the initial source, while another 12 students (i1 = 11, i2 = 1) indicated, by selecting *other,* that their original source was not on the list of options provided by the researcher. Of those selecting this option, seven added that a sports coach was the initial source. Another student responded, "high school," but did not indicate if the high school was in the U.S. or abroad. One student added "scholarship agent" without further explanation. Another student wrote "seed program (scholarship)" and did not elaborate. Eleven students (i1 = 10, i2 = 1) indicated they first found the institution via an online search and 10 students (i1 = 4, i2 = 6) indicated they heard about the institution from a family member. Six students (i1 = 3, i2 = 3) responded that they first heard of their current institution via an education agent (paid). Five students (i1 = 3, i2 = 3) stated a

teacher/school counselor was the initial source, and four students (i1 = 1, i2 = 3) were placed at the institution by their primary sponsor. Three students (i1 = 3, i2 = 0) indicated they discovered their current institution through a recruitment fair, while another three students (i1 = 3, i2 = 0) indicated EducationUSA was their initial source. Two students (i1 = 1, i2 = 1) said they didn't remember their primary source, and one student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) was part of a 2+2 or degree completion program. None of the respondents credited an intensive English program or English as a Second Language (ESL) school as the original source of information on their current institution. In total, 70 students (i1 = 46, i2 = 24), or 40.0% (i1 = 40.0%, i2 = 40.0%), from the two-year institutions responded to this question.

Of respondents representing the four-year institutions, 49 students (i3 = 11, i4 = 38) credited a friend as being the initial source of information about the institution. Another 30 students (i3 = 12, i4 = 18) responded that it was a family member who was the original source. Twenty-one students (i3 = 14, i4 = 7) indicated that they were part of a 2+2 or degree completion program, and 18 students (i3 = 8, i4 = 10) responded that they found the institution via an online search. Ten students (i3 = 10, i4 = 0) answered that they first heard of the institution from a teacher/school counselor. Nine students (i3 = 6, i4 = 3) selected *other*, indicating their initial source wasn't listed by the researcher. When asked to further explain, two students wrote that the institution was the only one that offered their major, while another two students credited a sports program. The remaining respondents who selected *other* did not further define their initial source. Seven students (i3 = 6, i4 = 1) used paid recruitment agents. Five students (i3 = 3, i4 = 2) couldn't recall their first source, while four students (i3 = 3, i4 = 1) credited a recruitment fair. Another four students (i3 = 3, i4 = 4) answered it was an intensive English program (ESL school) which was the initial source. Three students (i3 = 2, i4 = 1) credited EducationUSA as

the initial source, while one student (i3 = 1, i4 = 0) indicated they were placed at the institution by their primary sponsor. In total, 161 students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83), or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6%, i4 = 72.2%), responded to this question.

Combined, 231 students responded, yielding slightly less than a 55% response rate (see Table 8).

Table 8

Initial Source of Awareness of Institution

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Source	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Friend	6	7	13	11	38	49	62
Family Member	4	6	10	12	18	30	40
Online Search	10	1	11	8	10	18	29
2+2 or degree completion	1	0	1	14	7	21	22
Other	11	1	12	6	3	9	21
Teacher/School Counselor	3	2	5	10	0	10	15
Education Agent (Paid)	3	3	6	6	1	7	13
Does Not remember	1	1	2	3	2	5	7
Recruitment Fair	3	0	3	3	1	4	7
EducationUSA	3	0	3	2	1	3	6
Placed at institution by sponsor	1	3	4	0	1	1	5
Intensive English Program (ESL School)	0	0	0	3	1	4	4
N	46	24	70	78	83	161	231
% Responding	40.0	40.0	40.0	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.6

When asked to identify the most important factor in deciding to enroll at their current institution, 27 students (i1 = 18, i2 = 9) from the two-year institutions identified cost as being the most important. Thirteen students (i1 = 13, i2 = 0) selected *other*. Of these respondents, eight said sports were the biggest reason for attending the institution. One student simply wrote "interests and aspirations." The others did not further elaborate. Eleven students indicated that the academic reputation was the most important factor, while four students (i1 = 4, i2 = 0) credited the fast admissions process. Another four students (i1 = 1, i2 = 3) answered that being placed at an institution by their sponsor was the most important factor, possibly indicating little to no choice in the matter. Three students (i1-0, i2 = 3) selected geographic location and another three students (i1 = 3, i2 = 0) selected their current institution primarily because of the English requirements, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Two students (i1 = 1, i2 = 1) responded that the recommendation from a friend or family member was the most important, while another two students (i1 = 2, i2 = 0) credited an agreement with the home institution as being the most important factor. One student (i1 = 0, i2 = 1) answered the size of the institution that was the biggest draw. In total, 70 students (i1 = 46, i2 = 24), or 40.0% (i1 = 40.0%, i2 = 40.0%), responded to this question.

From the four-year institutions, 40 students (i3 = 21, i4 = 19) credited the institution's academic reputation as being the most important factor, and another 29 students (i3 = 14, i4 = 15) found the cost of the program to be the most important factor. Twenty students (i3 = 8, i4 = 20) identified recommendations from friends and family as being the most important, while 18 students (i3 = 8, i4 = 10) selected *other* from the list of options provided. Of those who responded, four students explained that it was a sports program or coach that recruited them.

Other explanations included “exchange program,” “scholarship athletics,” “I didn’t get accepted anywhere else,” “convenience,” “my relative (sic) applied to (institution) so I did the same in order to be together,” “major in (state),” “lots of factors that made me choose (institution); i.e. money, size, hockey program, location,” “the rare major,” and “great ESL program.” Fifteen students (i3 = 5, i4 = 10) selected the TOEFL/IELTS requirements as being the most important, and another 15 students (i3 = 10, i4 = 5) responded that it was an agreement with their home institution which was the most important factor. Ten students (i3 = 4, i4 = 6) credited the fast admissions process as being the most important. Four students (i3 = 2, i4 = 2) answered that the most important factor was based on their online search process, three students (i3 = 2, i4 = 1) identified the geographic location as most important, and another three students (i3 = 2, i4 = 1) responded that the size of the institution was most important in their decision to enroll. In total, 161 students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83), or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6%, i4 = 72.2%), from the four-year institutions responded to this question on the survey.

In total, 231 students, or 54.6% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 9).

Table 9

Most Important Factor in Decision to Enroll at Current Institution

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Factor	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Cost	18	9	27	14	15	29	56
Academic Reputation	4	7	11	21	19	40	51
Other	13	0	13	8	10	18	31
Recommendation from Friends/Family	1	1	2	8	12	20	22
TOEFL/IELTS Requirements	3	0	3	5	10	15	18
Agreement with home institution	2	0	2	10	5	15	17
Fast Admissions Process	4	0	4	4	6	10	14
Placed at Institution by Sponsor	1	3	4	2	2	4	8
Geographic Location	0	3	3	2	1	3	6
Online Search	0	0	0	2	2	4	4
Size of Institution	0	1	1	2	1	3	4
N	46	24	70	78	83	161	231
% Responding	40.0	40.0	40.0	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.6

Using the non-selected carry-forward options from the previous question, respondents were asked to identify the second most important factor in their decision to enroll. From the two-year institutions, 20 students (i1 = 15, i2 = 5) identified cost, while seventeen students (i1 = 12, i2 = 5) selected the academic reputation of the institution as being the second most important factor. Ten students (i1 = 4, i2 = 6) answered that the second most important factor was the recommendations from friends and family, and seven students (i1 = 3, i2 = 4) credited the fast admissions process. Five students (i1 = 3, i2 = 2) responded that the geographic location was the second most important factor, while four students (i1 = 3, i2 = 1) selected *other*, indicating the second most important factor wasn't listed among the options originally provided. Of those who answered *other*, one credited a sports coach, while additional explanations included "opportunity" and "a face-to-face meeting with staff." Others who selected this option did not further elaborate. Two students (i1 = 2, i2 = 0) indicated that the results of their online search process were the second most important, while another two students (i1 = 2, i2 = 0) credited an agreement with their home institution. One student (i1 = 0, i2 = 1) was placed at the institution by a sponsor, one student selected (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) the TOEFL/IELTS requirements, and for another student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0), the size of the institution was the second most important factor. In total, 70 international students (i1 = 46, i2 = 24), or 40.0% (i1 = 40.0%, i2 = 40.0%), of the population from two-year colleges responded to this question.

From the four-year institutions, 43 respondents (i3 = 27, i4 = 16) identified cost as the second most important factor. Twenty-eight students (i3 = 17, i4 = 11) answered academic reputation, and for another 28 students (i3 = 8, i4 = 20) they found recommendations from friends and family to be the second most important factor in their decision to enroll at their current institution. Thirteen students (i3 = 5, i4 = 8) credited the fast admissions process. Ten

students (i3 = 4, i4 = 6) said the second most important factor in choosing their current institution was not listed and selected *other*. Five respondents clarified it was the major that attracted them. Others wrote "there wasn't a second (factor)" and one credited a sports coach. The remaining respondents did not further elaborate. Ten students (i3 = 6, i4 = 4) indicated it was the size of the institution, while nine students (i3 = 4, i4 = 5) responded the geographic location was the second biggest factor. Nine other students (i3 = 5, i4 = 4) said it was the TOEFL/IELTS requirements. Seven students (i3 = 3, i4 = 4) answered that the second factor was based on their online search, three students (i3 = 0, i4 = 3) indicated it was the placement at the institution by their sponsor, and one student (i3 = 0, i4 = 0) responded it was an agreement between their current institution and their home institution that was the second most important factor. In total, 161 international students (i3 = 79, i4 = 82), or 64.9% (i3 = 59.4%, i4 = 71.3%) from the four-year institutions responded to this question.

In total, 231 international students, or 54.6% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 10).

Table 10

Second Most Important Factor in Decision to Enroll at Current Institution

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Factor	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Cost	15	5	20	27	16	43	63
Academic Reputation	12	5	17	17	11	28	45
Recommendation from Friends/Family	4	6	10	8	20	28	38
Fast Admissions Process	3	4	7	5	8	13	20
Geographic Location	3	2	5	4	5	9	14
Other	3	1	4	4	6	10	14
Size of Institution	1	0	1	6	4	10	11
TOEFL/IELTS Requirements	1	0	1	5	4	9	10
Online Search	2	0	2	3	4	7	9
Placed at Institution by Sponsor	0	1	1	0	3	3	4
Agreement with home institution	2	0	2	0	1	1	3
N	46	24	70	79	82	161	231
% Responding	40.0	40.0	40.0	59.4	71.3	64.9	54.6

Note. These were carry-forward options from the previous question.

Students were also asked in the survey about how they were primarily funded. The overwhelming majority, 53 students (i1 = 32, i2 = 21) from the two-year institutions, answered that they were self-funded or supported by their family and friends. Five students (i1 = 5, i2 = 0) responded they were primarily funded by the U.S. institution, and four students (i1 = 1, i2 = 3) indicated they were funded by private U.S. sponsors. Two students (i1 = 2, i2 = 0) selected *other,* indicating their primary sponsor was not on the list provided. Neither student provided further explanation. One student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) responded they were funded through an international organization such as Institute for International Education (IIE), the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), Gates Foundation, etc. No students from the two-year institutions answered that they were funded by their home educational institution or employer/company in their home country. In total, 69 international students (i1 = 45, i2 = 24), or 39.4% (i1 = 39.1%, i2 = 40.0%) of the population at the two-year institutions, responded to this question.

From the four-year institutions, 104 students (i3 = 70, i4 = 34) answered that either they were self-funded, or their family or friends were paying for their education. This was followed by 47 students (i3 = 2, i4 = 45), who responded that their home government was paying their education. For six students (i3 = 6, i4 = 0), their U.S. College or University was primarily paying for their education, while three students (i3 = 0, i4 = 3) answered that funding was coming from their home educational institution, and one student (i3 = 0, i4 = 1) credited a private U.S. sponsor as the primary source of funding for their education. None of the students at the four-year institutions answered that international organizations (IIE, IREX, or Gates Foundation, etc.) were paying for their education, nor were any employers/companies in their home country. None of the respondents from the four-year institutions selected *other* as an option. In total, 161

international students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83), or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6%, I4 = 72.2%), responded to this question.

Combined, 230 international students, or 54.4% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 11).

Table 11

Primary Source of Funding

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Source	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Self/Family/Relatives	32	21	53	70	34	104	157
Home government	4	0	4	2	45	47	51
U.S. College or University	5	0	5	6	0	6	11
Private Sponsor in U.S.	1	3	4	0	1	1	5
Home educational institution	0	0	0	0	3	3	3
Other	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
International Organization (IIE, IREX, Gates Foundation, etc)	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Employer/Company in Home Country	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

The survey also asked students if they had transferred credits to their current institution. Fifty-six students (i1 = 38, i2 = 18) answered they had not transferred credits, while 13 students (i1 = 7, i2 = 6) had. Sixty-nine international students (i1 = 45, i2 = 24), or 39.4% (i1 = 39.1%, i2 = 40.0%) of the international students at the two-year institutions, responded to this question.

When asking the students at the four-year institutions the same question, 85 students (i3 = 31, i4 = 54) responded they had transferred credits to their current institution, while 76 students (i3 = 47, i4 = 29) had not transferred credits. Of the four-year population, 161 international students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83), or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6%, i4 = 72.2%), responded to this question.

In total, 230 international students, or 54.4% of the research population, answered this question (see Table 12).

Table 12

Transfer Credits to Current Institution

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Response	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
No	38	18	56	47	29	76	132
Yes	7	6	13	31	54	85	98
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

If students selected “yes” to the previous question on transfer credits, they were provided a list of sources, including *other,* to show where they transferred credits from. Respondents could select all that apply when responding to this question.

Four students (i1 = 3, i2 = 1) at the two-year institutions said they transferred credits from their home country university. Three students (i1 = 0, i2 = 3) selected the *other* option but did

not further explain, while two students (i1 = 1, i2 = 2) selected the US Community/Technical College option and two other students (i1 = 2, i2 = 0) responded that they transferred credits from their home country high school. One student (i1 = 1, i2 = 0) answered that they transferred credits from a U.S. based university and one student (i1 = 0, i2 = 1) responded that they transferred credits from a U.S. based high school. No student transferred credits from a home country community or technical college. This question received 13 responses from students at the two-year institutions.

Thirty-seven students (i3 = 18, i4 = 19) at the four-year institutions answered they had transferred credits from their home country university. Nineteen students (i3 = 5, i4 = 14) responded they transferred credits from a U.S. university and 19 students (i3 = 3, i4 = 16) indicated they transferred credits from a community or technical college in their home country. Fifteen students (i3 = 5, i4 = 10) replied that they transferred credits from a U.S. based community or technical college, while four (i3 = 2, i4 = 4) selected *other*. Of those who selected *other*, explanations included "American private school in home country," "boarding school outside of home country," and "US university (campus is located in home country)." Others did not further explain. Two students (i3 = 1, i4 = 1) answered that they transferred credits from a U.S. high school, while one student (i3 = 0, i4 = 1) indicated credits transferred from their home country high school. In total, this question received 97 responses from international students attending a four-year institution.

In total, 110 responses were received from international students who had indicated they had transferred credits to their current institution (see Table 13).

Table 13

Type of Institution Credit Transferred From (check all that apply)

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Choice	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Home Country University	3	1	4	18	19	37	41
US University	1	0	1	5	14	19	20
Home Country Community/Technical College	0	0	0	3	16	19	19
US Community/Technical College	1	1	2	5	10	15	17
Other	0	3	3	2	2	4	7
Home Country High School	2	0	2	0	1	1	3
US High School	0	1	1	1	1	2	3
N	7	6	13	34	63	97	110

Note. If they reported transferring credits into their current institution, respondents could check all that apply to the listed options.

Students were also asked if they had recommended their current institution to their friends or family. Fifty students (i1 = 28, i2 = 22) from the two-year institutions responded *yes,* they had recommended the institution, while 19 students (i1 = 17, i2 = 2) responded they had not. In total, 69 international students (i1 = 45, i2 = 24), or 39.4% (i1 = 39.1%, i2 = 40.0%), answered this question.

From the four-year institutions, 106 students (i3 = 42, i4 = 64) indicated they had recommended their current institution to their friends and family. Fifty-five students (i3 = 36, i4 = 19) responded they had not made that recommendation. One hundred sixty-one students (i3 = 78, i4 = 83), or 64.9% (i3 = 58.6, i4 = 72.2%) of those attending a four-year institution, responded to this question.

In total, 230 international students, or 54.4% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 14).

Table 14

Recommended Current Institution to Friends or Family

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Response	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Yes	28	22	50	42	64	106	156
No	17	2	19	36	19	55	74
N	45	24	69	78	83	161	230
% Responding	39.1	40.0	39.4	58.6	72.2	64.9	54.4

The final question on the survey asked students if they would be willing to be considered for phase two of the study, a one-time, in-person interview with the researcher. Twenty-six students (i1 = 14, i2 = 12) at the two-year colleges responded *yes*, while 42 students (i1 = 30, i2 = 12) responded *no.* In total, 69 international students (i1 = 44, I2 = 24), or 38.9% (i1 = 38.2%, i2 = 40.0%), responded to this question.

From the four-year institutions, 40 students (i3 = 21, i4 = 19) responded *yes,* while 119 students (i3 = 57, i4 = 62) responded *no.* In total, 159 international students (i3 = 78, i4 = 81), or 64.1% (i3 = 58.6%, i4 = 70.4%), responded to the question.

In total, 227 international students, or 53.7% of the research population, responded to this question (see Table 15).

Table 15

Willingness of Respondent to be Considered for Phase Two

	Two-Year Institutions			Four-Year Institutions			Combined
Response	i1	i2	Frequency	i3	i4	Frequency	Frequency
Yes	14	12	26	21	19	40	66
No	30	12	42	57	62	119	161
N	44	24	68	78	81	159	227
% Responding	38.2	40.0	38.9	58.6	70.4	64.1	53.7

RQ3: Findings

The question asked: *what are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university*? To answer this question, six males and six females participated in individual, in-person interviews with the researcher. With the goal of protecting the interviewee's identity, the researcher is using a prevalent name from that individual's country, identified by studentsoftheworld.info, as a pseudonym for each person. A brief background of each interviewee, including the sub-region they come from, as defined by the Institute of International Education (IIE), is provided below.

Interviewees from the two-year colleges. Two females and three males participated in individual, in-person interviews with the researcher.

Andrea is a female from South America. She participated in a high school placement program in the U.S. before enrolling in higher education and came to know her current institution through local connections developed during her high school program.

Esther is a female from West Africa. At the direction of her father, Esther participated in a high school placement program in Canada. To help save the family money, she moved to the U.S., lived with a family member, and then transferred to her current institution.

Kim is a male from East Asia. Kim attend two different high schools in two different states in the U.S. before graduating and pursuing his higher education in yet a different part of the country.

Farrukh is a male from the Southern and Central Asia sub-region. He comes from a small village, and his initial experience in the U.S. education system was through a U.S. government-sponsored exchange program for high school students. He was placed at a high school near the two-year institution he is currently enrolled in.

David, a male from Central Africa, first studied English in a different region of the U.S. before relocating to the Midwest to pursue his associates degree in engineering. He came to the institution through a friend of his brother.

Interviewees from the four-year institutions. Four female students and three male students from the four-year campuses participated in phase two of the study.

Ahmed is a male from the Middle East. He is married, and his wife and children are living with him in the U.S. He obtained his associates degree in his home country and worked for several years before deciding to move his family and pursue his bachelor's degree.

John is a male from Southeast Asia but lived a majority of his life in the Middle East. He has traveled to some of the traditional tourist spots in the U.S. but has only attend post-secondary school at his current institution.

William identifies as a male from Scandinavia. He came to the U.S. with the sole intention of playing his sport full-time and later had the opportunity to continue playing while pursuing a college education. His main focus continues to be his sport.

Wang, a female from East Asia, is in the U.S. via a degree completion partnership with her university at home and the university she is attending in the U.S.

Chen is a female from East Asia and is on a degree completion agreement program with her home institution and the U.S. university.

Aurelie, a female student from Southern Africa, went to a private high school in her home country before enrolling in a bordering school in South Asia, where her family heritage comes from.

Selena is a female student from the Caribbean. She attended a pair of associate level institutions before enrolling at her current institution. She found her current program through an online search.

IQ1: Themes. When asked to describe their experiences in wanting to study outside their home country, the following themes arose:

- Personal background and national circumstances
- Social networks
- Tenacity and risk-taking

Personal background and national circumstances. Many students, when discussing their desire to study outside of their home country, attributed their personal background as an impetus. For example, Farrukh proclaimed, "I'm from a small village with big dreams." He simply did not see a future back home on his family farm. Another student, Aurelie, explained that she "just wanted to study outside (of her country) because I was just not happy with the way

things were going for me." Despite having everything she needed, everything she wanted, and things otherwise going well, her situation back home "just didn't feel fulfilling." Similarly, Wang wasn't happy with her environment at the time and wanted to focus more on her studies. Back home, she found herself distracted by her friends and "having too much fun." She recalled thinking, "okay, how about I change another environment and to see another country's education?"

Others credited their love for travel and referenced the opportunity to see and experience new places. Andrea reminisced, "I felt like the American culture is really nice, so I wanted to come here to experience it all." Chen perceived the U.S. to be "really big and then I can travel to many other cities when I study abroad maybe." Selena said she has always loved adventure and traveling, a passion further developed while spending time studying in other countries before deciding on a bachelor's degree program in the U.S. "I just like new places, doing new things. I think it helps with being more diverse. You just learn how to communicate with people better." For William, it was simply the love of his sport that brought him abroad. He had no thoughts of studying in the U.S. or anywhere else until being recruited by a sports recruiter and then eventually college recruiters. He decided to take the opportunity to study as long as it would provide him the opportunity to continue playing in his sport.

In addition to the individualistic rationale for becoming sojourners, several students discussed the educational system or other country-level circumstances of where they came from as a significant or even primary reason for pursuing education abroad. For example, David said he wanted to study outside of his country because "we don't actually have enough technology. I always wanted to become an engineer in computer programming…but actually in (Central Africa), we don't have that much stuff, so I decided to apply for a visa and to come to the United

States to further my education." Several other students talked about the competition in their countries for limited spots at the universities. One student, who graduated from a community college in his country, couldn't find a university there to transfer his credits to. He said that the situation might have changed as the country expanded the university system in recent years, but at the time there were limited universities and only one that he could locate that would recognize his previous coursework, but he didn't get in. Additionally, two students credited, at least in part, the recent and historical geopolitics which have impacted the countries or regions they came from as a significant reason for traveling outside of their country for their education.

Social networks. The influence of others was a prominent theme across all interviews and interview questions in this research. For example, according to Andrea, her opportunity to pursue an education abroad came through a friend of her mother who was sending her daughter abroad to the U.S. for high school and encouraged her family to send Andrea abroad on the program.

For Wang, it was the influence of friends and their experiences that persuaded her to join her school's dual-degree program, allowing her to earn a degree in both the U.S. and her home country. She explained that her best friend studied in Canada, and when she returned, "she told me what she saw and what she heard. It made me do this decision eventually. I was thinking, okay, I also want to see this strange world."

For Farrukh, it was his English teacher that pushed him. He explained, "I call her my guardian angel because of her support. Because of her influence on me, I got to come here as a result." The English teacher worked at an English training center, funded by an American philanthropist. With help and encouragement from his teacher, Farrukh went on to be selected for the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) program, a highly competitive high school exchange

program funded by the U.S. State Department. This program changed his life, eventually creating connections and opportunities for him to stay in the U.S. for higher education, and he appears to be prospering in the success. He still stays in close contact with his English teacher, who inspired and prepared him for the journey.

A couple of students had little to no choice but to study abroad, as their parents told them that is what they would be doing. This was the case for Esther. She explained, "when you're 17 and your dad tells you, 'this is what's happening,' you really don't have a say in it. Yeah, you learn how to deal with it." This situation was similar for Kim, whose father sent him to the U.S. as a freshman in high school and then later encouraged him to stay for college and provided guidance throughout that process.

Tenacity and risk-taking. Essentially raised by his grandmother, Farrukh confided that when he was around seventh grade, he was "a pretty depressed kid" because his parents were working in Russia. He went on to say, "I have so much (sic) goals and dreams. I know how it feels like to be a poor kid and with broken dreams, with nothing left." Ahmed simply said, "I can't explain how (sic) difficult I've been through." After achieving his associates degree in his home country, he worked in the oil fields for several years before eventually deciding to pursue his education abroad. He went on to explain that he did find one university in his country that he could possibly attend, and they would have accepted his transfer credits. However, despite moving to the city after receiving a preliminary acceptance letter, he found his name was not on the final admissions roster. After learning of this decision, he left his family, including three kids, to come to the U.S. and learn English. After several months away from them, he was awarded a scholarship from his government and they were finally able to join him. He said, "… it's been hard and has been trying to chase this (dream) for a long time."

IQ2: Themes. When asked about their experience in finding and enrolling at their current institution, the following themes arose:

- Affordability and availability of academic program
- Ability to transfer
- Extensive vs. minimal research

Affordability and availability of academic program. Of all the themes that ascended from the interviews, this was by far the most predominant. Cost was even a factor for Aurelie, whose family appeared to have the financial resources to go anywhere. Recalling life back home, she reminisced, "Everything was being handed to me in a silver platter I guess. I didn't have to focus on anything like financial. I didn't have to focus on getting food on the table. So it was a breeze to everything." She had hopes and aspirations of attending an Ivy league school but had personal challenges with new found freedom away from her family while attending a boarding school. Her plans were derailed, at least temporarily. "Not doing well for the first time in my life, it was such a crucial time in my life was very, very detrimental to any plan I have." She looked at what she considered second-tier universities, but said they were "a lot of money, it was like $70,000 per year and it just didn't make sense to spend that much money for a degree that didn't come from a prestigious university."

Others, though, did not have access to significant resources to begin with and cost was a significant issue. John was initially considering schools in Canada but discovered "Canada was not an option because it was too expensive." He said the institution he ended up choosing was "far less expensive" than other U.S. institutions he considered. Farrukh had applied to at least 10 institutions but only ended up touring two, despite being in the U.S. and relatively close to the institutions he was considering. As he explained, "it did not even pay to go and visit them

because it was so much higher prices." Selena's parents were paying for her education and she said cost, in combination with the institution having her major, was the main factor. She applied to five institutions and was accepted to all five. She said her enrollment decision simply came down to cost. Esther's father is paying for her education. While she was studying in Canada, he became sick and the illness put significant pressure on the family finances. Along with the desire to be closer to relatives who were in the U.S., cost became a major factor. She recalled thinking "well, my stepmom, she was like 'we don't have a lot of money right now' and my cousin is telling me about this school that it's not expensive at all." She also had the opportunity to live with her cousin, creating additional savings, and decided it would be a good move. David, who first came to the U.S. to live with his brother in New York and improve his English, said that he chose his current two-year college because it was "really cheap the credit is $250 compared to New York where it's like $700. So I said 'oh why not try this school'…that's why I came here to (institution name)." As he later explained, "the thing I was worried about the most was about the money it cost, yes. That was my only preoccupation."

In addition to the cost of tuition, a couple of students, including David, identified the rent and cost of living as factors in their decision. Andrea is currently attending a two-year college but preparing to transfer to a four-year college. While recalling the recent process of finding an institution to transfer to, she said, "I was trying to get into (institution)….it was kind of more expensive to be living in California than in (Midwest), because my parents are paying for my education. I didn't want to push them to something that maybe they can't afford." Chen is in the U.S. as part of a dual-degree agreement, allowing her to concurrently earn a degree in the U.S. and her home country. As part of the program, she had three universities to choose from. She ended up selecting the one she did because both the tuition and cost of living were cheaper.

William, whose main goal was to play his sport, had several offers from institutions in a couple of different states. The deciding factor among them, though, was cost. He comes from a country that offers free in-country tuition for college and offers interest-free loans to those who decide to study outside of the country. So, as he and his family are borrowing money for the education, cost was a significant factor. He liked the other institutions that were recruiting him, but as he explained, they had "nice facilities, but it was too expensive." He even was offered a variety of high dollar scholarships, but still found the overall price to be too expensive.

The availability of the desired major, combined with cost, was another significant factor for many of the students interviewed. This included Chen, who is part of the dual-degree program, Selena, who said there were not a lot of institutions that offered her major, and Wang, who searched his major online and found the institution. John, an engineering major, who had applied to a couple more well-known institutions, recalled his dad telling him "there are other schools and (state name) is also good at engineering but they're not as expensive." He knew people from the state and was able to gather first-hand insight before making the decision. He applied to several schools in the system and received acceptance from his second choice, the one he ultimately enrolled in.

Ability to transfer. For students currently attending the two-year colleges, the cost savings from initially attending the two-year college and then transferring to the four-year was, as several of these students said, a "great idea." Many of these students were not aware of this option before coming to the U.S. Andrea disclosed, "I didn't know about community college. Actually, I didn't know you can study in a cheaper way here, and then transfer into the university already having done some of your classes. That was a great discovery for me." She went on to explain that she "thought it was going to be a lower education learning…but it's actually the

same. I learned that it's actually the same learning…it can be better, because they are teaching you the same for a lower price. That's good for me." She is currently in her last semester at her current institution and is enrolling in a nearby university. Her future institution is cheaper than the other options and was easy to transfer to from her current institution, thanks to existing agreements between the institutions. Kim summarized this theme nicely when he said, "if you go to a four-year college, then you pay more. But once you go to community college you're able to save a little bit more money and then, wherever you transfer with good grades, you might have a possibility to get a scholarship." A couple of students attending the four-year colleges have already experienced this. For example, when choosing between the three institutions Ahmed had considered, he chose his current institution because of the number of transfer credits they would take from his two-year institution back home. The difference of six additional credits transferring was the deciding factor.

Extensive vs. minimal research. A few of the students interviewed for this study did deep research into the institution. They looked at various statistics, including employment rates after graduation and safety of the community, and cited them as factors in their enrollment decision. This includes Chen and John, who were particularly impressed with their respective institutions' post-graduation employment rate. Some students, including Ahmed and Wang, used online group chats, websites like ratemyprofessor.com, WeChat, WhatsApp, and other websites to ask questions and read reviews about institutions from fellow students and alumni of those institutions.

Interestingly enough, at least two of the students interviewed did not end up going to the institution(s) they had heavily researched, but rather decided on one they hardly researched at all. Aurelie, for example, whose family is paying for her education, was one such student. Her father

was quite adamant that she study in the United Kingdom (U.K.). She explained that, due to the close historical ties between the U.K. and her home country, most parents wanted to send their children to the U.K. for higher education. However, Aurelie was not convinced that was the best option for her. She had attended a well-renowned boarding school in a country in South Asia which favors U.S. higher education. The school was funded by a U.S. billionaire philanthropist who also provided scholarships for many of the graduates from the school to attend prestigious four-year institutions in the U.S. According to Aurelie, "a lot of time and energy" was spent applying to these schools. She also applied to schools in the U.K. However, she wasn't sure what she was even looking for, questioning "did I want a big city or a small city, did I want a big campus or small campus? So there was just a lot of uncertainty." In mid-June, she flew back from South Asia where she had attended boarding school and the next day told her father she didn't want to go to the U.K. Her uncle, who happens to teach at the institution she is currently enrolled in, encouraged her to apply there and informed her the application was due the next day. She immediately applied and got accepted a few weeks later.

Another student, David, who was living with his brother in New York when he was considering educational institutions, did a campus visit to an institution he thought he would be attending. "I stayed there for one week to look at the area, how people live, but it's too quiet for me, so that's why I didn't go there." He went on to reference the complicated transfer process as being another reason for not choosing that school. However, his brother had a friend in a Midwestern state and encouraged David to go there. His brother trusted his friend as they used to live together in New York. So, without visiting, David enrolled at the institution he's currently attending. Using Google as the primary source, the only research he did was on the cost, rent, and the fact that the institution provided a "hands-on" educational experience. "When

I do my research, I want to look for how much hand on stuff this school provides to students, what kind of class they have, and how is the lab over there."

Others did minimal research themselves. Kim, despite already being in the U.S. attending high school, primarily relied on his father, still back in his home country, to find the institutions to consider. They talked about what Kim had wanted to do for a career. His father took that information and researched possibilities online. He informed his son of what institution he considered to be the best option. Kim applied and eventually enrolled in it. Selena used Google to search for top universities with her major, applied to five, got accepted at all five and then chose based on cost. "I just got my visa, booked my (airline) ticket, and came here. I didn't know anything about it, didn't really research it much. Just hoping that it was gonna (sic) be a good experience for me." She further explained "just what was sent in that (prearrival) email, (how we get to the university)…that's pretty much all I knew coming here."

Two students, Andrea and Farrukh, ended up attending two-year institutions in or near the city where they attended high school. Both students were placed at those high schools by the program they were participating in. Andrea's mother registered her for a high school placement program and she found out only a few days ahead of time where she would be going. Despite initially being scared and concerned about meeting new friends, she ended up integrating into the small community nicely, even finding a boyfriend. Through those community connections, she learned about the two-year college option for schooling. Being in the same town, she could easily tour the campus and meet with staff and faculty. Her boyfriend's dad also happened to work at the institution and helped explain how the system works. She enrolled in her current institution out of convenience and comfort, as she was already established in the community and could stay close to her host family and boyfriend. Similar to Andrea's story, Farrukh was also

placed at a high school by his sponsoring program, funded by the U.S. State Department, and had no say in where he would be placed. Despite being told a bit ahead of time where he would be going, he reports doing no research on the area. "I did not want to make beforehand search and know about things because I'm like 'no, I'm just going to surprise myself.' Just didn't search anything. Just let's go and see and explore with my own eyes." He happened to be placed with a family with whom he still lives today. In his final semester of high school, they helped him research post-secondary options in the area. He also applied to schools around the world, explaining "I was just trying to not get stuck back home, which I did not feel I belonged." In consultation with his host family and high school guidance counselor, he toured two institutions and chose one of those based on the cost and proximity to his host family's home. They offered to let him continue to stay with them while he was attending college and provided transportation to/from classes. Farrukh was the only student interviewed to say that he first chose the institution and then decided on a major based on their offerings.

IQ3 and IQ4: Themes. The researcher asked students what they expected their experience to look and feel like and how it compared to what they were actually experiencing. Despite the interviewer's attempt to parse out pre-arrival thoughts from post-arrival experiences, the interviewees naturally intertwined the two. In an attempt to accurately capture the insights of the interviewees, the researcher combined the capta from the two questions resulting in the following themes:

- U.S. media informs, inspires, and scares
- Tenacity
- Impact of locals
- Benefits and challenges exist

- Adversity fuels persistence
- Career-focused

U.S. media informs, inspires, and scares. Many of the interviewees had watched American movies, or their local media kept them up-to-date on major events in the U.S. As Chen explained, "I heard a lot about Americans and culture from drama or in movies, so I want to experience what the true America is." She also said, "we have a lot of news about what happens in the U.S., especially when big security problems comes out, they will know." William explained, "I didn't really have too much expectation besides, to be honest, college life. Like we only see that in movies so that was kind of like the first impression." When asked about his expectations coming to the U.S., Wang provided similar insight to William. She said, "I didn't think too much of that 'cause yea, I watch the TV show, the American TV show and I found it's not similar to the TV show 'cause in a TV show, student didn't put too much effort into their study." She went on to explain, "before I came to the U.S., all the information about the U.S. come from the internet and from the TV." She added, "This is the most challenging part in my life so far…I never think about it would be so hard."

For Farrukh, movies used in his English classes helped improve his English while developing an interest in American culture. He explained, "it was the first time I'd seen American movies. I saw the big cities…I see people dancing around, which I thought is pretty cool and I'm like 'I want to try that.' I was in seventh grade and my English was very low but I'm like 'I'm going to give everything that I have to make this dream come true because I did not see any future back home'."

Tenacity. Many of the students interviewed for this research reported missing the food from their culture and their families. For Wang, this was particularly true during the times his

country normally celebrates holidays. "It's the time that I feel lonely most." He went on to explain, "When we have some festival in (country), we always have special food for that special festival. Like when we spend our spring festival, we will eat dumplings." Farrukh provided insightful commentary by saying, "you guys have everything here but still something missing." Continuing on he said, "you guys might have all the sandwiches and all the Mexican, Italian food here, but you don't have Asian food much." While Andrea was discussing what she does when she travels back home, she mentioned enjoying her ethnic food with friends and family back home and simply stating "I miss it a lot" while in the U.S.

Through these challenges come big changes. As Andrea, who was initially worried about making new friends, said, "when I come here I just realized if I wanted new friends, I have to introduce myself, and try to be myself, and be more open minded, and more interactive so I can never be alone. I guess that helped me to get better in my exterior." Esther can also see the changes in herself, "If I go home, people will be surprised to know this me right now compared to the me that was timid and shy and just always want to be by myself in my room and not wanting to do anything to the one that like, 'oh, let's go have some fun. It's okay to enjoy life once in a while'."

For Wang, the experience drives her to think differently. "I think it's really important for me. Maybe I will not get a very high achievement in my major in my academic knowledge, but I have this style of thinking, just keep thinking. And it tell me, if you don't know something really well, don't judge anything." She has also learned new pedagogy, saying, "we have teams and we go outside, we do it with others. It's a really interesting forum that I never see (before)."

Selena also said this experience has broadened her perspective. "I've been around a lot of different people, so I think I'm more open-minded to a lot of situations a lot of different

groups of people, like LBGTQ. Back home, that's not a thing. It opened my mind to there are other people out there, and you have to know how to interact with them. That really changed me."

Not all has been easy though and students have had to adapt. For several of the interviewees, the experience has caused tremendous challenges and stress, with some seeking help from the counseling and psychological services. However, as Aurelie finishes up her second semester, she said the experience has given her confidence and has been "great for personal growth." "I feel like if I can adapt here, I can almost adapt anywhere." Wang said, "When I came here, I found I grew up really quickly. In mental. I can handle lots of things, and I felt in (country), if I met some really hard problem, I maybe just escape from that. But in the U.S., there's no way you can…you have to face it by yourself...you have to face the problem." She went on to explain that the experience taught her "how to survive," making the ups and downs of the experience "really worth it to me." Reflecting on her experience, Wang said, "I really appreciate this chance, and I really appreciate myself that I choose this…I choose to go to U.S. to study." She concluded by saying, "today I'm here and going to graduate after this semester. I made everything. I just did it. So I appreciate to everyone that helps me and I appreciate to myself. It's a really sweet memory in my life."

Impact of locals. Recalling a story one of his advisors told him, John said, "some people are coconuts and some people are peachy." He added, "here they are really peachy." He described his professors as "…very, very caring. They really want you to learn and they're very open to questions. Not necessarily inviting, but just very welcoming." Chen also said her professors were "really, really, really friendly and willing to help me out. Whether it's about the course or not, they will try to help you. Yeah, that help me a lot in the way I'm trying to

graduate." Selena agreed, saying, "I have really great professors, advisors. They help me a lot. I love the international office too." For Andrea, it was both domestic and international people who helped her. "I guess, I was wrong about being alone, because now I know a lot of people from different countries, from America, they help me keep going."

For some students, their journey might not be possible if it wasn't for the locals. Farrukh is still living with his host family he had in high school. Referring to his host family, he said, "we have been through so much in our family. Stuff happens, the ups and downs, so we are always here for each other." He continued "my (host) family was here for me to support me, to talk to me anytime I needed." He also credited his host mom and high school counselor for encouraging him to first attend a two-year institution and helping him find a good fit.

For Esther, as she puts it, "it was a miracle, you would call it, for me to be here." After transferring schools and with limited legal ability to work, she reached out for help at a local church she had been attending. At the invitation of her local pastor, Esther told her story to the congregation, and five people stepped up to fund her education and provide her housing. According to Esther, they said, "Hey! We want to help you. We want you to go to school. We want you get your (program) degree." The five congregation members paid everything school-related for two years, including on-campus housing. To supplement the support, she works in campus dining, saving money and earning free meals during her shift. She reflected by saying, "I don't know, but I feel like God had a way of doing things, and he really wanted me to be here for a reason."

Benefits and challenges exist. For William, the smaller town and institution was a natural fit. "My hometown in (country) is like 20,000ish…it felt like something the same." Andrea reflected "it's not that much stuff to do. But it's kind of good because it doesn't make a

distraction for me to do my studies." From her point of view, "you are closer to people" in a small town and "everybody was really kind with me, high school and also here (at her current institution), understanding that I come from another country." John, while comparing what he's heard about bigger institutions, saw the benefit of the teaching-focus of institutions like the one he's currently attending. "If you're teaching undergrad, you're not at the bottom of the pit, you're just, that's what your expected to do here. That's why the professors are more caring with undergrad." John said at his institution there are not many grants "to give to professors so no one's expect to do research…it's much more relaxed."

Attending a smaller institution in a relatively rural setting does come with challenges, though. One student, Aurelie, said at the end of the year, she wants to transfer to a place "where I wouldn't be praised for being different." She added, "I'm not important enough to be like representing a whole culture." She's hoping for a city with more diverse perspectives and people. She's also looking for "somewhere that has good transportation that doesn't require a car." Transportation is a struggle for her because, in her country, young people do not learn to drive until they are 18, at the age she was finishing up boarding school and then preparing to come to the U.S. for university. "So I am so reliant on my roommate or my friends, even the (public transportation) doesn't get you too far here." Selena added, "I don't drive, I have my license, but I don't drive right now so it's pretty hard to get around. That's my main issue with being in (city), just getting from place to place and not having to call a taxi that's very unreliable or call a friend who's not always up for driving me all over the place." She went on to say, "I just with (city) had more to it. I'm so excited to be here, as in like the program is good. I've met a lot of really great people. But there's really not much to do."

For Chen and David, the problem with transportation was apparent early on. Arriving late from the airport, Chen recalled that "there's not any supermarket or restaurant (near hotel) and we don't have a car and then we don't know where we can find something to eat, until my friend, she asked her friend to send us some food. So sad. That's a really bad experience." David was warned by his friends that transportation would be an issue. "When I was in New York, they said that in (state), the transportation is not that developed….as New York." So, with the support of his parents back home who sent money and David and his brother saving money while they were in New York, he bought a car as soon as he arrived at his new institutions." David lives five miles from his institution and said, "it's so cold here I cannot wait for a bus every time."

Adversity fuels persistence. The normal challenges of culture adjustment, being away from family, and learning or using a new language in a natural setting was itself a momentous task. For students, the challenge of English at the post-secondary level can begin before they even apply. As Wang explained, "before I went to the U.S., it's really hard to…all the website is English, and it make me crazy." This challenge has continued throughout her experience in the U.S., and she went on to say, "I never think language would be so hard…because you need to use English as a tool to study, to live, to do everything. Before I came here, English was just an exam." She expanded on this thought, adding, "When people communicate, they didn't use the language that you use in your exam." She's glad she's improving his English, though, because "English is the most common language…if you travel somewhere, you can communicate with others." For Ahmed, having his family join him in the U.S. made learning English even more complicated. "It was really hard to practice my English or to communicate, because after school, you have to go back to the family doing family stuff."

For a couple of the students interviewed, family illness back home impacted their studies abroad. Ahmed suffered a shocking loss while he was improving his English and enrolled in a U.S. community college. His father passed away. "That was a real bad experience. They (his family) did not have that much information about his illness. My family used to hide it from me so I didn't get affected by the...then when I get the news, I had to travel back to (country)." Esther's father becoming sick while she was in Canada had a significant emotional and financial impact on her journey. In an effort to save money, she moved to the U.S., lived with her cousin, and attended a community college in the area. Due to program availability, she eventually transferred to another institution a couple hours away and found herself desperately seeking financial assistance to help her achieve her academic and career aspirations.

Farrukh summed this theme up nicely when he said, "what make me keep going is where I am at this point. Because I did not come easily. I had to stay awake long night, study English, and think about my goals, my dreams, my life, what I want, what I don't want, and if I give up right now, I feel like I gave up my whole life."

Career-focused. For some students, such as Andrea, the perception of an improved job outlook prompted, at least in part, the desire to obtain her post-secondary degree abroad. Andrea's parents taught her "if you study in another country besides your country you're going to have an opportunity for jobs." For others, the prospect of getting an internship while in school was exciting. Despite his focus on his sport, William said, "I want to have an internship this summer in the States because I've never done that." At the time of the meeting with the researcher, he happened to be preparing for an upcoming interview with a potential employer for his internship and was excited about the prospect. He went on to say that if his goal of continuing, potentially professionally, to play his sport in his home country doesn't pan out, he

hopes to stay in the U.S. and get a decent job. Chen, who had just recently completed an internship, couldn't have dreamed of doing so just a couple of years ago. "I didn't even imagine I can find an internship here, but I did it. I can't imagine I can complete my internship successfully, but I did it." She went on to say, "I learned more than I thought."

David feels his institution has provided him the experience necessary to get a job after graduation. Reflecting on his experience at his institution so far, he said, "you actually learn something, you know? You experience stuff, they teach you hands-on stuff, like I said, and with the kinds of fields they have here, it's really easy to get a job." Andrea expressed similar feelings about her institution, saying, "I really like it (her institution), because I said it's going to be a cheaper process and is also going to help me looking for work for my major."

Alignment of themes with theory and findings. Upon completion of the thematic reduction process (Appendix D), there were a variety of themes which were identified. Table 16 outlines these themes, the theory they most closely align with, and provides an example of the alignment with the findings.

Table 16

Theme Alignment with Theory

Theme	Aligned Theory	Supportive Example of Finding
Personal background and national circumstances	Capital Theories Push-Pull Theory	"I always wanted to be an engineer…in (Central Africa), we don't have that..." – David
Social networks	Capital Theories	"Because of her influence on me, I got to come here" - Farrukh
Tenacity and risk taking	Rational Choice Theory	"trying to chase this (dream) for a long time" – Ahmed
Affordability and availability of academic program	Push-Pull Theory	"Canada was not an option because it was too expensive" – John
Ability to transfer	Rational Choice Theory	"they are teaching you the same for a lower price" – Andrea
Extensive vs. minimal research	Rational Choice Theory	"I didn't know anything about it, didn't really research it much" – Selena
U.S. media informs, inspires, scares	Push-Pull Theory	"I heard a lot about Americans and culture from drama or in movies" – Chen
Tenacity	Capital Theories	"I feel like if I can adapt here, I can almost adapt anywhere" – Aurelie
Impact of locals	Capital Theories	"I have really great professors" – Salena
Benefits and challenges	Rational Choice Theory	"…it's kind of good because it doesn't make a distraction for me to do my studies" – Andrea
Adversity fuels persistence	Rational Choice Theory	"What make me keep going is where I am at this point. Because I did not come easily" - Farrukh
Career-focused	Push-Pull Theory	"I want to have an internship this summer in the States because I've never done that" - William

Conclusion

The research consisted of two phases. Phase one involved the deployment of a 14-question survey sent to 423 international students currently attending one of four participating teaching-focused higher education institutions spread over three Midwestern states. In total, 235 students responded to the invitation and follow-up emails. The second phase of the research involved interviewing two to four students at each institution, chosen from a list of survey respondents who volunteered their information in the first phase. In total, twelve students, six females and six males, originating from eleven countries, participated in the interview portion of the research. This chapter presented the findings of both phases. Chapter 5 will further discuss the findings and relate them back to the theories and literature review presented in chapters one and two.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Higher education institutions (HEI's) in the United States (U.S.), and around the world have a variety of rationale for wanting to recruit international students to their campus and use an assortment of approaches to do so. Likewise, college-aged students have a plethora of reasons for wanting to pursue their higher education abroad. To capture the various motives into a feasible study, the researcher developed a student-institutional match model (see Figure 1) and conducted a literature review, to describe these motives and generalize the main pathways to HEI's in the Midwest. The model consisted of theories that primarily explain the personal circumstances of the student (capital theories), the broader forces that are generally out of the individual's control (push-pull theory), and the ultimate decision (rational choice theory).

Informed by the theory-based model described above, the purpose of the research was to identify key influencers and experiences that guide an international student's choice to attend one of the institutions featured in the study. The research questions were designed to develop a profile of international students who study at HEI's in the Midwest of the U.S., understand how they choose to pursue their studies at the institution, and capture their experiences of selecting and enrolling at their institution.

Summary

This study was conducted at two two-year colleges and two four-year universities located in one of three Midwestern states: Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Each of the four institutions featured in the study were chosen for a variety of reasons, including the geographic location, size, and the number of international students on their campus. The researcher purposefully excluded outlier institutions, and those with abnormally high or low numbers. The institutions had to be considered medium or large for their category. Their geographic settings were also

taken into consideration. All associate and undergraduate degree-seeking students across the four institutions were emailed a survey and provided the opportunity to participate in a second phase of the research, an in-person interview. Response rates to the online survey yielded 54%, a rate of return that is significantly above the average for survey response rates. Twelve students ultimately participated in the second phase. A summary and discussion of the findings are below.

RQ1. The first research question, *what is the demographic profile of international students who enroll at selected public, teaching-focused higher education institutions in the Midwest*, was aimed at developing a profile of international students who choose to pursue their education beyond the popular U.S. coastal areas. This question was answered through the quantitative survey (Appendix B) distributed to the entire research population. Findings support that the top three sub-regions of student origin in the study parallel the top three sending sub-regions in the 2017 Institute of International Education (IIE) Open Doors report (IIE, 2017d). In terms of demographics, the similarities between findings of the two studies were even more prevalent when looking at the students chosen career clusters. Five of the top six were identically ranked, with engineering, business and management, and math and computer science making the top three. Findings confirm Prazeres et al. (2017) study in that there is a population of international students drawn to more rural, teaching-focused institutions.

A literature review did not disclose the typical ages of international students, nor did it provide statistics regarding gender breakdown or timespan at current institution. This study reports a significantly greater number of males responding to the survey than females, transgender, or other categories. As one would expect, most students at the two-year institutions reported being in their first or second year. At four-year institutions, the breakdown showed that

most students were also early on in their academic career. Impressively, all 15 sub-regions of origin defined in the Open Doors report (IIE, 2017c) were represented in at least one of the institutions in the study.

RQ2. This question asked *how do international students choose to pursue their studies at selected public higher education institutions* and also used the quantitative survey (Appendix B) deployed for RQ1. Findings highlight that half of the international students reported applying to only the one institution where they were currently enrolled. This appears to be partly related to the number of students who first heard of the institution via their personal networks, including friends, family, institutional partnership, and sponsor. An apparent alignment between the two categories reaffirms the importance of capital theories and rational choice theory. Specifically, the results highlight the importance of social capital and the reference groups discussed by Alfattal (2017) and Moogan (2011). It also reiterates the findings of Coleman (1988) that these groups are a major source of information for prospective students.

Another major finding confirms the importance of internet and technology in the search and matriculation process. This concurs with the 2011 findings from Bohman (2014), who noted the increased impact of technology in the search process compared to his 2008 study. Conversely, it is imperative to highlight what were apparently not important sources of information, that being recruitment fairs, EducationUSA, placement by sponsor, and intensive English programs. Although mentioned, these sources also were not noticeably prevalent in the literature review. This insight alone can guide institutions on where to focus their limited budgets.

The study also investigated the important factors students use to determine what university to enroll in. Cost and academic reputation topped both the primary and secondary

reasons. Recommendations from friends and family was also a top factor cited. Although there appears to be a disparity between the source of initial awareness and the top reason for selecting the institution, it is plausible that what was referred to as (friend/family) that persuaded the prospective student. This most likely included factors separately listed in the list of options, including cost and academic reputation that sold the prospective student. The importance of online search was ranked towards the bottom as well, presumably for the same reason. Interestingly, with very few exceptions, the rankings of what was important and second most important was consistent irrespective of institutional type.

When asked about the primary source of funding, an overwhelming majority cited private finances as being their main source. It should be noted that institution four (i4) appeared to have an abnormally high number of sponsored students compared to the other institutions, affecting frequency. Despite the outlier institution, this finding was similar to the Open Doors findings that 60.3% of international students, including 82.0% of undergraduate students, were paying on their own (IIE, 2017b).

Although a majority of respondents did not report transferring credits from another institution to their current one, a high percentage, 42.6%, had. Many of those who transferred credits did so from a home country university. At the four-year institutions, 34.7% of respondents who reported transferring credits did so from a community or technical college either in the U.S. or their home country. Interestingly, another major source for transfer students for the four-year colleges was other U.S. universities. The two-year institutions did not see a high number of students transferring to them, no particular source stood out.

The final question in phase one of the study asked if they had recommended their current institution to their friends and family. Over two-thirds of respondents indicated they had made

such a recommendation. A slightly higher percentage of students at the two-year institutions, compared to those at the four-year institutions, reported having made this recommendation. All four institutions had dedicated international offices, serving both inbound international students and outbound study abroad students. This aligned with reporting from Jennings (2017) that two-year colleges are actively involved in international activities, including the recruitment of international students.

RQ3. The final research question asked *what are the lived experiences of international students who were asked about selecting and enrolling in their current college or university.* To answer this question, a one-time, in-person interview was conducted with a total of 12 international students, two to four from each institution. The following discussion further illuminates the themes presented in the previous chapter.

Each student interviewed had their own journey to tell. Their stories ranged from expressing extreme hardship such as "I can't explain how (sic) difficult I've been through…trying to chase this (dream) for a long time" to recalling their parents telling them "this is what's happening, you really don't have a say in it." As found in the literature review, Tran (2015) identified three primary reasons for student mobility. The profession-based perspective was quite prominent in the interviews. None of the interviewees expressly did it for the purposes of an improved "material life" (Tran, 2015, p. 1269). Only one interviewee mentioned immigration to the country as a possible option. For some, it was simply their own desire "to see this strange world" that was enough to travel outside of their country for education. This aligns with the researchers (Baas, 2010; Birrell & Perry, 2009; Brooks & Waters, 2011) who previously cited non-academic reasons for students to pursue an education abroad.

Irrespective of the motivation for going abroad, most interviewees matriculated to their current institution via one of two pathways: social networks or online searches. Aurelie, for instance, scrapped all of the research she had completed on other institutions and enrolled at a university where her uncle is a professor. David enrolled at an institution near where a friend of his brother lived. Alternatively, some of the interviewees declared having no connection to the area and relied on a basic search by program of interest and enrolled based on the lowest cost institution. "I just got my visa, booked my (airline) ticket, and came here. I didn't know anything about it, didn't really research it much." Others utilized the internet for more in-depth research, including employment statistics listed on the institution's website or ratings of professors on sites such as ratemyprofessor.com.

Regardless of the pathway to the U.S., the reality of living in a small community in rural America is quite different than the preconceived 'imaginative geographies' (Said, 1978), primarily through cinema and U.S. media. Referencing the movies he watched, Farrukh explained "I saw the big cities…I see people dancing around, which I thought is pretty cool and I'm like, I want to try that." It's not always easy though. As Wang stated, "I watch the TV show, the American TV show and I found it's not too similar…"

Some study participants embraced the small-town and teaching-focused environment, like John who appreciated the help his professors and others provided him. He has heard from friends that students at big institutions are numbers, but at places like the one he is at, the professors are very helpful and extremely caring. Others highlighted challenges of being in a rural place. One interviewee proclaimed, "I feel like if I can adapt here, I can almost adapt anywhere." Another interviewee summed up her experience in a small, rural, Midwestern town by saying, "I just wish (city) had more to it." She explained, "I'm so excited to be here, as in

like the program is good. I've met a lot of really great people. But there's really not much to do."

Discussion

Institutions of higher education appear to focus much of their efforts on introducing their campus to relatively disjointed audiences in the global marketplace via education fairs, EducationUSA, agents, etc. While each plays a role in helping students, it does not appear to be a major recruitment source for institutions. This research supported studies cited in the literature review, illustrating that the institution's ability to cultivate and leverage relationships with knowable networks (current students, alumni, local community, institutional partnerships) having the biggest impact on recruitment and retention of international students. This is further supported through the number of research participants who indicated they enrolled at institutions they were already connected to, either through personal contacts or campus partnerships. For those who did not have such a connection, it was what they found online that drew them to the institution, highlighting the importance of useful and informative websites easily found on popular search engines.

This research reaffirms that international students are a distinct category of students spanning from tourists to prospective immigrants (Singh, Rizvi, & Shrestha, 2007). International students appear to persevere through tremendous challenges, both the typical adversities that most college students experience as well as hardships unique to international students. Aligned with findings from (Mamiseishvili, 2012a) and Özturgut (2013), the study shows both integrated (university-wide) and dedicated services (international offices) are required to properly serve this unique population.

Conclusions

Despite not hosting a large number of international students on their campus, the institutions featured in this study are internationally diverse campuses, representing students across all 15 sub-regions identified in the Open Doors report (IIE, 2017c). Along with the geographic diversity, this study captured unique individual journeys of students and their shared stories on how they ended up at teaching-focused institutions in U.S. Midwestern states.

Field notes taken by the researcher noted campus internationalization efforts on each campus. This included observations that all had thriving international offices with multiple full-time staff actively recruiting international students. These institutions were also promoting a variety of study abroad opportunities and offered global languages to their students, as evidenced by their website and promotional posters in the hallways of their buildings. One can deduce, based on the literature discussed in chapter two, that these services and activities have positively impacted the recruitment and satisfaction of international students at each campus.

The study, although not designed to investigate international student satisfaction, their choice, or persistence rates, highlights the importance of serving the current student body. From a recruitment standpoint, the findings confirmed that friends and family contribute to their institution of choice decision. One can speculate that family is an important part of recruitment and persistence. Family support, and their perception of their son or daughters international academic experience, is a respected source of the student decision to select, enroll and persist. Understanding how to capture and nurture their goodwill can yield added opportunities to attract and retain international students.

On a more personal level, the interviews unveiled the hardships students encounter in their educational pursuits, yet their tenacity supports their persistence. While struggles have

caused some to seek professional mental health services, it hasn't deterred the students interviewed from finishing what they started. Based on the aforementioned findings, the institutions representing this study will benefit in their quest to serve by better understanding and proactively fine-tuning their international student experiences.

Finally, from a research design perspective, a mixed methods study was selected to answer the research questions. The use of an online survey and the development of personal contacts at participating institutions yielded an above average response rate. This tells the researcher that international students are eager to share their stories and the design of the data collection procedures provided them an opportunity to do so. It appears that the direct involvement of international student services staff informing students of their support of the research, as well as timely reminders to non-respondents in the research population were vital to obtaining the high response rate. Antidotally, students appeared to respond more favorably to text messages than personal email, indicating a variety of communication methods is important in this type of research.

Specific recommendations for recruiting, enrolling, and serving the international student population is below.

Recommendations for Institutions

The following are recommendations to institutions who are recruiting international students to their campus.

- Given that over 40% of international students reported transferring credits, two-year institutions should promote the transferability of their credits in their international student promotional messaging. Similarly, four-year institutions should promote their credit transfer-friendly policies to the prospective students.

- Through a deeper understanding of international students being sought, devote resources to increasing an institutional web presence which is customizable to a multitude of languages. Additionally, institutional marketing must employ online search experiences that are tuned to international students in an effort to be responsive to their inquiry.
- While most international students are satisfied enough with their institution to recommend their experienced institution to friends and family, these institutions should leverage this success by continuing to build on their strengths (cost, friendly staff, on-campus programs, small class sizes). The research clearly highlighted the importance of parents in the HEI selection process; institutions should be intentionally messaging and communicating with this segment.
- Develop and foster mutually beneficial relationships with local families, businesses, and educational institutions. These efforts can enrich those communities while enhancing the experience of international students. This research also highlights that outreach efforts can be a source of welcoming and retaining international students. This form of recruitment is particularly low-cost given that minimal travel is required.
- Expand partnerships with international HEI's. Partnerships can lead to a variety of internationalization activities discussed by Banks & Bhandari (2012), including the recruitment of international students as shown by the present study.
- Empower current international students to promote the institution by creating opportunities which intentionally empower and resource them to guide prospective and mentor newly admitted students.

The following are recommendations to communities in which higher education institutions reside that are recruiting international students.

- Collaboratively work across education and local communities to reduce challenges (primarily transportation and involvement opportunities) in an effort to further increase the international student's holistic satisfaction. This can be done through expanding on and off-campus employment opportunities, organization of formal and informal activities of interest, and increasing on and off-campus international student friendly housing availability.
- Employment, both on-campus work opportunities and off-campus internship programs, was a prevalent theme that surfaced in phase two of this study. This highlights the importance for institutions and communities to develop employment opportunities and services designed to help international students seek and obtain jobs and other professional experience.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study and the associated findings uncovered several opportunities for further research. A summary of those follows:

- Provided the high proportion of transfer students at the institutions, a deeper study into why international students transfer, the types of institutions they transfer to and from, and how they decide to transfer to the particular institution. This would potentially help institutions understand how to better attract and retain international students.
- While a few studies exist on the impact of reference groups (Alfattal, 2017; Beech, 2014; Moogan, 2011), additional research into the factors of recommendation is

needed. A better understanding of rationale and talking points for recommending, or not recommending, an institution would help these institutions better serve current international students while improving their marketing efforts to highlight what's important to prospective students.

- It is essential to learn how prospective international students search for higher education institutions, the pathways to the institution's website and what they look for when they get there. This can be achieved through a better understanding of search engines and social media around the world. This may require conducting usability studies in an effort to create international student friendly websites and browsing experiences. Having this information will allow institutions to be more visible and respondent to prospective students.
- This study focused only on students who were currently enrolled at the institution. Future studies should also consider those who expressed interest but did not enroll.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research

Dear ${m://FirstName},
With the support of your international office at {institution}, I am inviting you to participate in a brief survey exploring international student's decision to attend a public post-secondary teaching-focused institution in the Midwest. You are invited to participate because you are a currently enrolled degree-seeking international student at {institution}. As such, your input is an important part of my dissertation research for my Doctorate of Education in Career and Technical Education.

Please click on the survey link below to get started:
${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the Survey}
Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:
${l://SurveyURL}

I would greatly appreciate your participation on the survey by January 31st. The survey has 14 questions is estimated to take about 5-10 minutes to complete. You will also have the option at the end of the survey to be considered for the second phase of the study, an in-person interview to further discuss your journey selecting {institution} to pursue your degree at.

I know this is a busy time in your semester, so I really appreciate you taking a few moments to complete this survey. Your responses will remain anonymous. Please contact me, Michael Lee (leemi@uwstout.edu) with any questions you may have on this or to obtain a copy of the final dissertation report.

Thank you!

Michael Lee
Student – Doctorate of Education in Career and Technical Education
University of Wisconsin – Stout
leemi@uwstout.edu

[redacted]
${l://OptOutLink?d=opt%20out}

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

International Student Institutional Choice

Start of Block: Default Question Block

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Consent to Participate In UW-Stout Approved Research Title: How they find us: a mixed methods study of international students journey to higher education in the Midwest

Investigator:

Michael Lee, [redacted], ([redacted], leemi@uwstout.edu
Research Sponsor:
Dr. Urs Haltinner, haltinneru@uwstout.edu

Description:

The purpose of this mixed method study aims to contribute to the limited body of existing research on international student's decision to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree internationally at selected public higher education institutions (HEI's) in the upper Midwest of the United States (U.S.). More specifically, the research seeks to identify key influencers and experiences that guide international student's choice to attend one of the institutions featured in the study. The study's findings aim to help Midwest teaching-focused HEI's recruit, enroll, and retain international students at their college or university.

The objective of this study is to determine what compels international students to pursue an associate or undergraduate degree at teaching-focused institutions in the Midwest.

Risks and Benefits:

This study is anticipated to include minimal risk. The research participants may recall and/or express negative feelings or attitudes towards others who helped pressure or persuade them to study abroad or study at the particular institution. The participants will potentially benefit by providing a student voice that will help guide future recruitment and international student service decisions made by the college or institution. The recollection process may also bring fun, happy memories back to the participant that reminds them of the journey they have been on to get to this point.

Time Commitment and Payment:

It is estimated that the first phase of the study, an online Qualtrics survey, will take an estimated 10 minutes. Those who volunteer and are selected for the second phase of the study will be

asked to participate in one in-person interview expected to last approximately 60 minutes. No payment or other incentives will be provided for participation in the study.

Confidentiality: Any identifying information submitted will be maintained separately. The researcher does not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. You have the right to stop the survey at any time. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator. If you are participating in an anonymous online survey, once you submit your response, the data cannot be linked to you and cannot be withdrawn.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: *Michael Lee,* [redacted], leemi@uwstout.edu

Advisor: Dr. Urs Haltinner, Teaching, Learning, and Leadership 225A Communication Technologies, Menomonie, WI 54751 (715) 232-1493 haltinneru@uwstout.edu IRB Administrator Elizabeth Buchanan, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs 152 Vocational Rehabilitation Bldg. UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751 (715) 232-2477 Buchanane@uwstout.edu

Statement of Consent: By completing the following survey and follow-up interview you agree to participate in the project entitled, How they find us: a mixed methods study of international students journey to higher education in the Midwest

How many USA institutions did you actually apply to?

- O 1
- O 2
- O 3
- O 4
- O 5+

How did you first hear of your current institution?

- O Friend
- O Family member
- O Education Agent (paid)
- O EducationUSA
- O Placed at Institution by Sponsor
- O Recruitment Fair
- O Online Search
- O I'm part of a 2+2 or degree completion program with an institution back home
- O Teacher/School Counselor
- O Intensive English Program (ESL School)
- O Other _____
- O I don't remember

Page Break

What was the MOST IMPORTANT factor in your decision to enroll at your current institution?

- O Cost
- O Academic Reputation
- O Size of Institution
- O Recommendation from friends/family
- O Geographic Location
- O Online Search
- O Placed at Institution by Sponsor
- O TOEFL/IELTS requirements
- O Fast admissions process
- O Agreement with Home Institution
- O Other _____

Carry Forward Unselected Choices from "What was the MOST IMPORTANT factor in your decision to enroll at your current institution?"

What was the SECOND MOST IMPORTANT factor in your decision to enroll at your current institution?

- O Cost
- O Academic Reputation
- O Size of Institution
- O Recommendation from friends/family
- O Geographic Location
- O Online Search
- O Placed at Institution by Sponsor
- O TOEFL/IELTS requirements
- O Fast admissions process
- O Agreement with Home Institution
- O Other _____

Page Break

What category best describes your current major?

- O Business & Management
- O Engineering (Any engineer, construction, transportation, etc)
- O Math and Computer Science (Math, Computer Science, Statistics, Information Science, Etc)
- O Social Sciences (Public administration, social services, history, psychology, etc)
- O Physical and Life Sciences (Biology, Science, Agriculture, etc)
- O Fine and Applied Arts (Visual and Performing Arts)
- O Health Professions
- O Communications and Journalism
- O Other _____

Page Break

Who primarily funds (pays) for your education while in the U.S.?

- O Self/Family/Relatives
- O Home Government
- O Home Educational Institution
- O Employer/Company in Home Country
- O International Organization (IIE, IREX, Gates Foundation, etc)
- O U.S. College or University
- O Private sponsor in U.S.
- O Other _____

Page Break

How many years have you attended this institution?

- O Currently in 1st or 2nd semester
- O Currently in year 2
- O Currently in year 3
- O Currently in year 4
- O Currently in year 5 or longer

Page Break

Did you transfer credits to your current institution?

O Yes

O No

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Did you transfer credits to your current institution? = Yes

What type of institution did you transfer credits from? (check all that apply)

☐ US High School

☐ US University

☐ US Community/Technical College

☐ Home Country High School

☐ Home Country University

☐ Home Country Community/Technical College

☐ Other _____

Page Break

Have you recommended your current institution to friends/family/others?

- O Yes
- O No

Page Break

What country issued the passport you used to enter the United States?

_____

Page Break

Gender

- O Male
- O Female
- O Transgender
- O Other _____
- O Prefer not to answer

Page Break

Current Age (Age in USA)

- O Under 18
- O 18-19
- O 20-21
- O 22-23
- O 24-25
- O 25+

Page Break

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 1

Would you be willing to talk to the researcher for approximately one hour about your reasons for enrolling at your current university?

- O Yes
- O No

Display This Question:

If Would you be willing to talk to the researcher for approximately one hour about your reasons for... = Yes

Please provide your contact information below:

- O First Name: _____
- O Last Name: _____
- O Email Address: _____
- O USA Phone Number _____

End of Block: Block 1

Appendix C: Thank You Email

Dear ${m://FirstName},
Thank you for taking the time to complete the recent survey for my dissertation research titled "How they find us: a mixed methods study of international students journey to higher education in the Midwest". This survey went out to all international technical and associate degree-seeking students at your institution, so please encourage your friends who fit this criteria to check their email and complete this brief survey if they have not already done so. The survey ends on Wednesday, January 31st.

If you volunteered for the second phase of the study, an in-person interview, thank you! I will be contacting a couple of you on February 1st to schedule this discussion, with the hopes of me visiting your campus on Monday, February 5th to conduct the interview.

If you chose not to be considered for the second phase, I appreciate your participation in the survey and you will not receive additional communication from me. However, if you have anything to add, have questions on the research being conducted, or would like a digital copy of my dissertation when it is finalized, please feel free to email me at leemi@uwstout.edu.

Best of luck in your studies!

Michael Lee
Student – Doctorate of Education in Career and Technical Education
University of Wisconsin – Stout
leemi@uwstout.edu
[redacted]
${l://OptOutLink?d=Opt%20out}

Appendix D: Thematic Coding Example

Speaker	Describe your experience in wanting to study outside your own country?	Identifying Common Ideas	Declaring Theme
Andrea	I want to study outside of my country ~~because I feel like I have the idea, and my parents also teach me the idea, if you study in other country besides your country you're going to have~~ more opportunity of jobs, ~~because you have~~ a better background being in other country ~~and having other teaching than your own country. Also,~~ I felt like the American culture is really nice, so I wanted to come here to experience it all ~~of about.~~	Driven Opportunity Experience	Personal background & national circumstances
Andrea	~~I don't know. I think since I was little kid~~. I like traveling ~~so I always wanted to travel and see how to study in other country. The opportunity happens when I was 16 years old, I went to high school here, in [redacted] too~~, I was a foreign exchange student and I stay with a family. ~~I think~~ I get more used to the culture it got more easier for me to study here ~~in the college. I think it was a great experience.~~	Like traveling High School	Impact of locals
Andrea	My mom have a friend that her daughter was going to come here too~~, so she talk to her about~~ it would be a good idea if I try. I was kind of scared ~~because~~ I was coming alone~~, and just staying with strange people that I don't know for my house family. Then after that I feel like family with them. I go to visit them every time, so everything all right now.~~	Influence of others	Social networks Tenacity & Risk taking
Andrea	~~At that time also I kind of didn't like it in a way, because I was going to graduate in [redacted], because we graduate in 11th year, in the 11th grade. I was thinking~~ I didn't want to leave my friends ~~in the year that I'm going to graduate with them, but then I also realized it was going to be a~~ good opportunity for me and my future so I accept, I try, ~~because first was just a try, like let's see what happen. Then I got in so~~ I was still scared, ~~but I came. I feel~~ it really changed a lot of my life, because I feel more independent~~. I feel more, I yeah, I guess the most part is independent and more open minded.~~	Challenges Future Scared Changes	Benefits & Challenges Tenacity & risk taking Benefits & Challenges