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Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian International Students in the United States

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EXPERIENCES OF MALE SAUDI ARABIAN
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
IN THE UNITED STATES

by

Molly E. Heyn

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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EXPERIENCES OF MALE SAUDI ARABIAN INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Molly E. Heyn, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2013

Despite the increasing presence of Saudi Arabian international college students in American higher education, the literature regarding the experience of Saudi students in the United States is limited. This qualitative study explored and described the lived experiences of 9 male Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States. All the participants had studied in the United States for at least 2 years and were regularly admitted international students at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological data analysis approach guided the data collection and analysis. The participants shared their lived experiences and the meaning of those experiences through in-depth, semistructured interviews. Each participant had an initial face-to-face interview and a follow-up phone interview. The researcher audio taped all interviews, with permission of the participants, and transcribed each interview verbatim. The main objective of the study was to describe the lived experiences of the nine participants without making assumptions about the objective reality of those experiences.

This process resulted in an understanding of the meanings of being a male Saudi Arabian international college student as lived and described by the participants

themselves. Five broad areas were identified from the phenomenological data analysis in relation to the Saudi students' lived experiences as international students in the United States: (a) participants' perceptions of the United States prior to and after studying in the United States; (b) participants' experiences living and studying in the United States; (c) participants' success strategies and strengths employed while studying in the United States; (d) participants' experiences seeking and receiving support along with what, if any, barriers were experienced in terms of receiving support while studying in the United States; and (e) the possible impact that cross-cultural study experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States had on these students' cultural values and belief systems. These findings may have implications for higher education professionals and may contribute to the literature on cross-cultural education and international students' adjustment issues.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of post-World War II, higher education opportunities have opened for international students (e.g., those who are not citizens of the United States) in the United States and other countries. Noteworthy, in 1946 the United States Congress passed The Fulbright Act, which made studying in the United States more viable for international students (Schwietz, 2006). Since the inception of this Act, the United States has drawn a large portion of international students who come to the country to take advantage of many of the established and respected higher education programs. In fact, as of the 2011-2012 academic year, the United States attracted 66% of all international students, making it the number one country for such students (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2012). Equally important, in the past two decades, there has been a steady increase of Saudi Arabian international college students seeking opportunities for higher education in the United States.

The academic and personal issues that international students experience while studying in the United States have been examined extensively by a number of researchers (e.g., Leong & Sedlacek, 1989; Olivas & Lee, 2006; Pedersen, 1995; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2008). A careful review of the literature, however, indicates that the majority of the research on international students has focused on international students from Asia (Shaw, 2010). Given this, little is known about the experiences of students from the

Middle East (Altbach & Wang, 1989) and even less is known about the unique experiences of students from Saudi Arabia, a specific country located in the Middle East.

History of the Problem

Research on the experience of international students in the United States was spurred in the 1950s when an increasing number of international students traveled to the United States to pursue education (Araujo, 2011). As indicated above, a large research base exists concerning international students' experiences studying in the United States. Early research, however, primarily focused on the reasons international students pursue studies in the United States and the difficulties these students have adjusting to life in the United States. For instance, Spaulding and Flack (1976) studied hundreds of international students and found that many of them study in the United States to pursue educational training not available in their home countries. They also found that international students seek education in the United States to learn more about the United States and to take advantage of scholarship opportunities from their home countries for their educational endeavors. Spaulding and Flack reported that most of the international students in their study desired to further their careers in their home country with a degree from the United States, which is often seen as more prestigious than a degree from their own country or another country. However, research shows international students have had more difficulties transitioning to university life in comparison to their American counterparts (Yeh & Inose, 2003). For example, Stafford, Marion, and Salter's (1980) research found that two thirds of the 278 international students they studied reported

problems with homesickness as their most major issue. Pedersen (1994) described international students' experiences as follows:

International students are expected to learn a new language, new rules for interpersonal behavior, and a new set of rules that all the other students on campus have spent their whole life learning . . . they [international students] are expected to “adjust” to a relatively narrowly defined set of behaviors in order for them to succeed. (p. 157)

As is evidenced by these studies, much of the early research focused on the reasons why international students came to study in the United States and the practicality of the difficulties that they experienced once they entered the education system. In the last decade, the prominent research issues in the literature on international students included English language proficiency (Kwon, 2009; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006); social support (Johnson, Batia, & Haun, 2008; Ye, 2006); discrimination and prejudice (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007); relationships with Americans (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Trice, 2004); anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Sümer, Poyrazli, & Grahame, 2008); physiological problems (Lin & Yi, 1997); and homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010). Although a comprehensive body of literature exists on the issues for all international students (Poyrazli, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004), very few studies have addressed culturally different subgroups of international students (Lee, 2008). Finally, scant research focuses on international students from Saudi Arabia.

Background Information for This Study

This study examines the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students enrolled at a major university in the Midwest region of the United States. The motivation for conducting this study arose from the recognition that there is a lack of literature surrounding Saudi Arabian international students. Specifically, there is a dearth of literature that addresses male Saudi Arabian international college students' experience across three primary areas: (a) their academic and personal challenges, (b) their experiences seeking and receiving support, and (c) the impact of their cross-cultural experiences while studying in the United States on their perceptions, cultural values, and belief systems. Thus, utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study investigates the male Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences of studying and living in the United States around these specific ideas.

Statement of the Problem

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2011), in the past two decades the number of Saudi Arabian people who have sought education in the United States has waxed and waned. To explain, in 1999 there was a steady increase of Saudi Arabian international students flocking to United States schools (i.e., 4,571). The destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the attack on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, however, led to a 25% decrease of Saudi Arabian international students attending United States schools, and this trend continued until 2005 (IIE, 2011). Beginning in 2006, however, the

numbers of international students dramatically rose 129% (i.e., 7,886), and in the 2011-2012 academic year, the number of Saudi Arabian international students rose to 34,139, a 50.4% increase from the previous year (IIE, 2012).

Although there are benefits of studying in the United States, male Saudi Arabian international college students, upon arriving in the United States, immediately encounter a world that is immensely culturally different from their home country. Beyond the culture shock they experience, they also face language challenges, as nearly all of these arriving students speak Arabic as their first language. The consequential language barrier leads to difficulty navigating the educational system and everyday living experiences. Cultural differences are expected to present challenges for the adjustment of male Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States. However, to date, little research has been undertaken to understand the challenges, needs, and lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States.

The Need for the Dissertation Study

This study was conducted to add to the small body of literature on Saudi Arabian international college students. Lin and Yi (1997) noted the need for this subject more than 10 years ago when they stated, “As the number of international students entering American colleges and universities increase [*sic*], the need to understand and to address their cultural and psychological adjustment to this country [the United States] becomes important” (p. 473). Most studies that have been conducted on Saudi Arabian international college students have been quantitative in nature. The real need for more

descriptive research on this population led the researcher to choose to use qualitative methodology. As Corbin and Strauss (1990) have indicated, qualitative methodology “can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known” (p. 19). The researcher attempted to uncover and understand Saudi Arabian international college students’ lived experiences in the United States using phenomenological qualitative methodology.

Significance of the Study

Given the rise in the number of Saudi Arabian international college students who choose to study in the United States, it seems relevant to gain an understanding of what these students experience as they transition from their home country. Moreover, because there are complicating cultural factors that arise for this population as they undertake their education (e.g., being exposed to new academic styles, values, attitudes, and behaviors), it is important to know more about their educational sojourns in the United States. Another compelling factor behind this study is the fact that most Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States are male. This factor is an essential piece of this research, because although research on international students is plentiful and available, scant research attends to the issues that specifically arise for male Saudi Arabian international college students. Thus, in order to begin bridging the gap that exists in the literature, this study seeks to understand the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students. Understanding the lived experiences is

relevant to gain knowledge about the strengths and challenges this group faces while attending school and living in the United States.

Because there is little research on Saudi Arabian international college students, this study focuses on their lived experiences while studying in the United States. Understanding their experiences may be useful to those serving this population in an academic setting and in helping prepare Saudi Arabian students coming to the United States. An increased understanding of male Saudi Arabian international college students may also help college student personnel more effectively educate their campus communities about Saudi Arabian culture and the challenges students from that country may experience as they navigate the United States' system of education. Finally, empirical exploration of this topic may help in the identification of further questions to ask about male Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences for future investigations.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in specific ways in this dissertation and so are defined to ensure clarity of meaning.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment. This term has been conceptualized as the degree of comfort, familiarity, and ease that an individual feels toward a new cultural environment (Takeuchi, Seokhwa, & Russell, 2002).

Culture. Culture represents the vast structure of attitudes, behaviors, beliefs, customs, habits, ideas, language, practices, rituals, and values unique to a particular group of individuals (Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991).

Kingdom. A country, government, population, or state ruled by a king or queen.

Middle East. A land area also called West Asia and the Persian Gulf, which connects the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe. This area is made up of Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen (Gunderson, 2004).

Saudi Arabian International College Student. An individual who has come to the United States from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for the purpose of obtaining a college degree. English is a second language for these Saudi Arabian international college students.

Research Questions

This study investigated eight research questions related to meanings that a sample of male Saudi Arabian international college students made of their lived experiences in the United States. Phenomenological interviews sought to explore the following research questions:

1. What perceptions do male Saudi Arabian international college students report having about the United States before entering studies in the United States?
2. What are male Saudi Arabian international college students' experiences studying and living in the United States?

3. What academic challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
4. What personal challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
5. What strengths and success strategies do male Saudi Arabian international college students experience and bring to their studies in the United States?
6. What support services do male Saudi Arabian international college students seek for help and how do they experience these support services?
7. How have male Saudi Arabian international college students' perceptions about the United States changed during their stay in the United States?
8. What has been the impact of male Saudi Arabian international college students' cross-cultural study experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs?

Overview of the Study

This qualitative research study was designed to investigate the lived experiences of a sample of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States. A phenomenological method of qualitative inquiry was used in order to conduct in-depth interviews with the participants in person and by phone. The literature relevant to this study is examined and reviewed in Chapter II. The research methodology used is

presented in Chapter III. The results of the study and a case composite are presented in Chapter IV. Findings are discussed in Chapter V, and study strengths and limitations, possible implications for counseling professionals, and directions for future research on Saudi Arabian international college students are considered.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review as a way to frame an understanding of the pressures male Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States face. The first section draws on research conducted on international students, in general, to provide a theoretical background on Saudi Arabian students. In the second section, given that an awareness of international students' native country is essential in understanding their experiences in the United States, a historical background of the country and culture of Saudi Arabia is provided. The third section focuses on world events that have influenced the process for Saudi Arabian international college students to study in the United States. The fourth section highlights the literature on Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States, with an emphasis on the benefits and challenges the students face while studying in the United States.

Theoretical Conceptualization of International Students

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (2011) defines international students as “individuals coming temporarily to the United States to pursue a full course of study in an approved program in either an academic or vocational institution, or a recognized nonacademic institution.” These students are often referred to as *foreign students*, *sojourners*, and *visiting students*. Consistent with contemporary

research, in this dissertation, students from another country who are attending an institute of higher education in the United States will be referred to as *international students*.

Historical Context of International Students

Students began traveling abroad to obtain an education nearly 300 years before Christ, starting with the Greeks traveling to Egypt to advance their understanding of math, science, and art (Good & Teller, 1969); however, the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2011) suggests it was not until after World War I that international students began pursuing education in the United States. At the conclusion of World War II, in the mid 1940s, there was a major influx of international students studying in the United States (IIE, 2011). Corresponding with this major influx, United States Congress passed The Fulbright Act in 1946, making it easier for international students to study in the United States (Schwietz, 2006). Since the inception of this Act, there has been a steady increase of Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States.

Based on the earliest documented figures that could be found, the number of international students has increased from nearly 30,000 in the 1950-1951 academic year to 764,495 in the 2011-2012 academic year (IIE, 2012). As a result of this increase of students from all over the world, the United States is the largest host country for international students (IIE, 2012). Based on the 2009-2010 academic year statistics, the United States hosts international students from over 186 nations. The majority of international students come from non-Western countries (see Table 1); out of the top 10 countries, 6 are located in Asia (China, India, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Vietnam),

2 are located in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia and Turkey), and 2 are located in North America (Canada and Mexico).

Table 1

International Student Origin (2011/2012)

Rank Order	Country of Origin	Number of Students
1	China	194,029
2	India	100,270
3	South Korea	72,295
4	Saudi Arabia	34,139
5	Canada	26,821
6	Taiwan	23,250
7	Japan	19,966
8	Vietnam	15,572
9	Mexico	13,893
10	Turkey	11,973

Note. Data taken from IIE (2012).

Over the past century, researchers have empirically examined many areas of international students' lives, including general mental health (Farnsworth, 1957), academic and social needs (Hagey & Hagey, 1974), problems in junior colleges (Willard, 1973), adjustment problems (Perkins, Perkins, Gulielmino, & Reiff, 1977), perceptions of higher education in the United States (Akpakpan, 1983), advising concerns (Hammer, 1992), counseling expectations (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, & Gould, 1995), cultural barriers (Fiscella & Frankel, 2000), psychological and physical health risks (Mugan, 2006), career decision-making self-efficacy (Liu, 2009), and acculturation processes (Dow, 2011). Despite the growing body of literature on international students, there is a dearth of research concerning Saudi Arabian international college students. Given that

the current dissertation addresses male Saudi Arabian international college students' challenges and that little research has been conducted in this area, the challenges of international students, in general, is reviewed first to allow discussion of that research as it may relate to Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States.

Research on the Challenges Faced by International Students

Nearly three decades ago, academic difficulties, personal concerns, and health issues were identified as the three primary challenges among international students (Leong, 1984). A few years later, researchers identified a fourth area of challenge—culture shock (Adler, 1986).

Academic Difficulties

International students' academic issues have been discussed by scholars in five predominant categories: negotiating English language proficiency, performing in class, failing to meet academic advisors' expectations, lacking access to support services, and understanding the American educational system (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Gong & Fan, 2006; Hofer, 2009; Sato & Hodge, 2009; Shaw, 2010). The adjustment of Taiwanese students in the United States was significantly correlated with their self-perceived language ability (Ying & Liese, 1994). Mori (2000) stated that a “[l]ack of English language skills is likely to affect international students' academic and social performances, which, in turn, may affect their psychological adjustment to the new culture” (p. 138). In addition to international students experiencing difficulties with the

English language, Ying (2005) found, in a longitudinal two-year study conducted on 216 Taiwanese graduate students, that academic challenges such as performance in classes and studying in English surfaced as the most difficult aspect the students faced while studying in the United States. Sato and Hodge (2009) found that Asian international students faced academic challenges such as failing to meet academic advisors' research expectations and experiencing English language difficulties. Choi (2006) concluded that Asian international students experienced various difficulties adjusting to graduate school life in the United States related to lack of access to support from United States institutions. Lastly, Lin and Yi (1997) reported that Asian international graduate teaching assistants experienced alienation from their students because they did not understand the undergraduate culture of an American college.

Personal Concerns

Personal challenges related to such concerns as homesickness, loneliness, social support networks, racial discrimination, interpersonal relationships, living arrangements, immigration regulations, and financial issues also cause international students stress (Liang & Fassinger, 2008; Poyrazli et al., 2004; Rai, 2002; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002; Wan, 2001; Ying & Liese, 1994). According to Ying and Liese, the strongest predictor of poor adjustment for international students was their level of homesickness. Rajapaksa and Dundes studied 182 international students and 100 American students and found that the international students were less content and lonelier than their American counterparts. Poyrazli and colleagues found that social support was significantly negatively correlated

with acculturative stress. Asian international students felt that White American students were often unfriendly, marginalizing, or discriminating toward them (Wan, 2001).

Health Issues

A third challenge international students face while studying in the United States involves health issues such as depression, headaches, sleep problems, sicknesses, physical well-being, and psychological distress (Ghaffarian, 1987; Rahman & Rollock, 2004; Thomas & Althen, 1989; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). In a study with 199 international students from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan who were studying in the United States, Rahman and Rollock found that higher level of depressive symptoms was predicted by higher perceived prejudice experienced in the United States. Ghaffarian investigated 107 Iranian college students studying in the United States and found that individuals less acculturated to Western ways were more likely to endorse depressive symptoms. Thomas and Althen reported that international students may experience headaches, ulcers, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, and gastrointestinal problems. Wang and Mallinckrodt's findings suggested that high attachment anxiety and high avoidance were strong predictors for psychological distress and sociocultural adjustment difficulty in Asian international students.

Culture Shock

International students not only experience challenges associated with being students, but they also encounter problems associated with culture shock. The

anthropologist Kalervo Oberg (1960) coined the term *culture shock*, describing it as “the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (p. 177). Citing the Center for Research and Education, Stewart (2003) defines culture shock in the following way:

The state of being cut off from the cultural cues and known patterns with which you are familiar . . . [and] living/or working over an extended period of time in a situation that is ambiguous, having your own values (which you had heretofore considered absolutes) brought into question . . . [and] being continually put into positions in which you are expected to function with maximum skill and speed but where the rules have not been adequately explained. (p. 105)

International students experience culture shock through differences in language, communication style, food, and lifestyle (Berry, 2003). Culture shock can manifest psychologically or physiologically due to stress (Winkelman, 2002). Pedersen (1994) emphasized that international students must acculturate in order to adapt to studying in the United States. Although Pedersen reported that the acculturation process Adler (1986) put forth was oversimplified, he referenced the following four stages that Adler suggested international students go through: (a) the *Honeymoon Stage*, when the student feels like a tourist; (b) *Depression*, when the student is overwhelmed by personal inadequacy in the new culture; (c) *Autonomy*, when the student sees both good and bad aspects in the host culture; and (d) *Biculturalism*, when the student is as comfortable in the host culture as back home (Adler, 1986, as quoted in Pedersen, 1994, p. 159). Studies have found that cultural adjustment is related to the degree to which the host and home country cultures differ from each other (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995; Ward & Searle, 1991). These studies suggest that international students who come from cultures very different from that in the United States (e.g., Saudi Arabia) may have a harder time

adjusting to the traditions, lifestyle, and customs of the United States than international students from cultures closer to the United States (e.g., Canada).

As the research in the above review indicates, scholars have documented the challenges international students, in general, have faced. Because many international students maintain the collective values from their native countries, it is important to place personal and academic goals in the context of their families and countries of origin. The cultural aspects of Saudi Arabia that can influence individuals from that country who are studying as international students in the United States will now be considered to provide cultural context for Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States.

The Culture of Saudi Arabia

Over the past century, Saudi Arabia has experienced a collision between tradition and modernization to a great degree. Saudi Arabia has managed to maintain a balance between conservative Islamic values, cultural norms, and rapid modern advances (Long & Maisel, 2010). The population of Saudi Arabia is approximately 27 million and is growing at about 3.7% a year (Blanchard, 2009; Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2011; Long & Maisel, 2010). Long and Maisel described the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as “a country of startling contrasts—a huge landmass and a small population; a barren desert terrain situated over great oil wealth; a traditional Islamic society undergoing rapid modernization; a closed society that is often in the news” (p. 1). While an awareness of the Kingdom’s contrasts is valuable, the roles of religion, family, language, gender,

economics, education, government, and land and people will be discussed in the next section to provide a background for understanding the personal and academic experiences Saudi Arabian international college students may experience in United States institutions of higher education.

Religion

It is almost impossible to overemphasize the impact of the religion of Islam on the overall culture of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabian culture is collectivistic and cannot be understood without an adequate grasp of Islam (Long, 2005). All Saudi Arabian people are Arab Muslims (Keating, 2004). Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam, which was introduced in the early seventh century (Long, 2005). The word *Islam* means *submission* or *peace* in Arabic and is considered to be a divine law revealed by God through the Prophet Muhammad (Long, 2005). The Prophet Muhammad, born in the sixth century in Mecca, brought Islam to Saudi Arabia in 610 A.D. (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). The Prophet Muhammad lived in the northwestern part of Saudi Arabia from about A.D. 570 to 632 (Harper, 2007; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). In 622 A.D., the Prophet Muhammad journeyed to the holy city of Medina, the fourth largest city in the country, and established the first Islamic state (Blanchard, 2009; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993).

Muslim is the name given to those who follow Islam, and there are more than 1.3 billion Muslims in the world (Harper, 2007). Islam, the second largest and fastest growing religion in the world behind Christian faiths (Ali et al., 2004; Harper, 2007), can

be divided into two major sects, Sunni and Shia (Blanchard, 2009). Both Sunnis and Shiites believe in the omnipotent position of Allah, the *Qur'an* as the divine message of Allah, and the Prophet Muhammad as the messenger of Allah (Armstrong, 2002). Sunnis and Shiites differ when it comes to their beliefs about who should have succeeded the Prophet Muhammad (Armstrong, 2002). Because the Prophet Muhammad did not have any sons and died without leaving any instructions as to who would succeed him, there was disagreement about whether Abu Bakr, the father of Muhammad's second wife, or Ali, Muhammad's cousin and the husband of Muhammad's daughter, should be given power (Ahmed, 2002). Sunnis believed that any worthy man could succeed Muhammad, regardless of lineage, and favored Abu Bakr, who married into Muhammad's family (Mahmud, 1988). In contrast, Shiites favored the succession of Muhammad to be Ali, because he was a direct descendant of Muhammad (Ahmed, 2002). It was decided that Abu Bakr would be transferred power and all those who agreed with this decision became known as Sunnis, derived from the Arab word for "followers" (Zepp, 2000, p. 208). Those who believed Ali should have taken power became first known as Shiat-Ali or "partisans of Ali" and then simply as Shiites (Zepp, 2000, p. 105). The difference in opinion regarding the succession of Muhammad continues to this day. In Saudi Arabia, the Sunni are in the majority (85-95%), while the Shia constitute the minority (approximately 5-15%) of the population (Blanchard, 2009).

Five pillars of Islam. The five pillars of Islam will be discussed in this section because they are the core beliefs of the Islamic faith. The first pillar of Islam is proclaimed on the Saudi Arabian flag in green with white Arabic script: "There is no God

but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God” (Keating, 2004, p. 49; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). This testimony of faith is called the *Shahada*, a simple formula that those wishing to convert should proclaim with conviction; it is also the most important pillar of Islam (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). The Arabic word *Allah*, a name for God, is used by both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). The Arabic word *Allah* occurs in the *Qur'an* about 2,700 times and cannot be used to designate anything other than God (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993).

The second pillar of Islam, the *Salah*, is the name for the obligatory prayers that a devout Muslim performs five times a day; *Salah* are a direct link between the worshipper and *Allah* (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Prayers, typically lasting only a few minutes, are performed at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and night (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). A Muslim may pray almost anywhere, such as in fields, offices, factories, homes, mosques, or schools, by kneeling on the ground and facing the holy city of Mecca (Yackley-Franken, 2007). Prayer is required by law in Saudi Arabia, and anyone who does not pray can suffer punishment (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

The third pillar of Islam, the *Zakat*, is the belief that all things belong to God, and wealth is held by human beings in trust (Blanchard, 2009; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). The original meaning of the word *Zakat* is both “purification” and “growth” (Fazley, 2005). Giving *Zakat* means giving a specified percentage (2.5%) on certain properties to certain classes of people who are in need (Senturk, 2007). Muslims

believe their possessions can be purified if they set aside a small portion of their possessions for those in need or to encourage new growth and to fix social inequities (Esposito, 1998). A person may also give as much as he or she pleases as voluntary alms or charity (Blanchard, 2009; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993).

The fourth pillar of Islam is fasting during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). During the month of Ramadan, all devout Muslims who are physically able must fast from dawn until sundown, abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations. Although the fast is beneficial for health reasons, it is regarded largely as a method of spiritual self-purification (Keating, 2004). By cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, even for a short time, a fasting person grows spiritually and gains true sympathy with those who go hungry (Esposito, 1998; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993).

The fifth pillar of Islam is the Hajj, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). In Islamic faith, every Muslim female and male who is physically and financially able to complete the Hajj must travel to Mecca at least once in a lifetime (Ali et al., 2004). About two million people from every corner of the globe go to Saudi Arabia's third-largest city, Mecca, each year for the largest annual Islamic gathering (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Saudi Arabia is home to the two holiest cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina (Keating, 2004). The King of Saudi Arabia is known as the "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques" in Mecca and Medina (Bowen, 2008, p. 14; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993, p. 34). Special checkpoints are stationed along roads leading to these cities so that special authorities can inspect

travelers' credentials, given that these holy cities are closed to non-Muslim individuals (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Although Mecca is always filled with Muslim visitors, the annual Hajj is performed in the 12th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (Yackley-Franken, 2007). Male pilgrims wear special simple clothes that strip away class and culture distinctions so that all pilgrims stand equal before *Allah* (Keating, 2004).

There are two major festivals celebrated in Islam: the Eid Al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. The Eid Al-Adha marks the end of the Hajj and is celebrated with prayers. Most families sacrifice an animal (e.g., goat, lamb, or pigeon) on this holiday and donate some of the meat to the poor (Yackley-Franken, 2007). The Eid al-Fitr, a feast-day commemorating the end of Ramadan, is the second annual festival of the Muslim calendar (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993) and is a time that Muslims are to consider forgiveness and to settle their disagreements with one another (Yackley-Franken, 2007). During religious holidays, the *Qur'an* is recited by trained speakers. Readings from the *Qur'an* are also broadcast over the radio and television (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Families visit friends, play games, exchange gifts, and eat together in celebration of these two major festivals (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

Family

The most important social institution in Saudi Arabia is the extended family (Long & Maisel, 2010). Saudi Arabian individuals are known by their family (Long & Maisel, 2010). Saudi Arabian culture is collectivist and great importance is placed on the

needs, attitudes, and objectives of the family rather than on the individual, which is in contrast to individualistic societies like the United States, where personal goals are emphasized more than family goals. El-Banyan (1974) emphasized the importance of family in the Arab society: “The family in Saudi Arabia is the basic social unit. It is the center of all loyalty, obligations and status of its members” (p. 46). Another scholar, Abu-Hilal (1986), explained the role of family in this way: “For the sake of the family everything must be sacrificed” (p. 76).

Traditionally, the father in the Saudi Arabian family is the main source of income and the mother is the homemaker (Pharaon, 2004). The grandparents are highly respected and play a great role in the decision-making of family issues. The nucleus of a traditional Saudi Arabian family is made up of not just the father, mother, and children, but also grandparents, all brothers of one generation and their wives and children, and possibly some aunts, uncles, and cousins (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). In traditional families, women are not expected to work outside the house. They are expected to take care of the children and to manage the household chores (Harper, 2007).

In Saudi Arabia, marriage is a civil contract, and the actual contract has to be signed by witnesses and must indicate the specified amount of money (*mahr*) that will be paid to the wife by her husband (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Saudi Arabia in Pictures, 1989). A woman does not take her husband’s name; she keeps the name of her father because women are legally considered to belong to the family of their birth throughout their lives (Long & Maisel, 2010). Men are legally allowed to have up to four wives; however, technically a wife must agree to her husband’s subsequent marriages, and all wives must

be treated equally (e.g., economically; Saudi Arabia in Pictures, 1989; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). In Saudi culture it is much easier for a man to divorce his wife than for a woman to obtain a divorce (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Although divorce is highly discouraged in Saudi Arabian culture, a man can divorce his wife by saying on three occasions “you are divorced from me” (Ali et al., 2004; Saudi Arabia in Pictures, 1989, p. 49). The divorce rate is increasing in Saudi Arabia and is lower among educated than uneducated persons (Al-Khateeb, 1998).

The Saudi Arabian family structure can be described as patriarchal in that the father or grandfather holds the legal power and authority (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Long & Maisel, 2010). Families are also characterized as patrilineal because the boundaries of family membership are formed around lines of descent through males (Haneef, 1996; Long & Maisel, 2010; Nydell, 2006). Relations with maternal relatives are important, but family identity is primarily tied to the father; children belong to the father rather than to the mother (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Long & Maisel, 2010).

Family is a key source of support in Saudi Arabian culture (Abu-Hilal, 1986). The family of the Saudi Arabian student provides support beginning in the student’s childhood and continuing into the student’s adulthood. In most circumstances, when students experience social, economic, or health-related issues, they can expect their family to provide them with necessary help (Dwairy, 1997). It is not uncommon for Saudi Arabian people to seek help or advice from family members (Ali et al., 2004), even in cases of conflicts between parents and offspring about Islam (e.g., views of marriage; Ali et al., 2004; Lang, 1996). Family members discuss personal and common issues and

socialize in their houses, coffee houses, places of worship, or work environments (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

Professional helping services (e.g., counseling and therapy) are far less accepted in the East than in the West in general. In the Middle East, there is an expectation that individuals should turn to their family, friends, and social resources (e.g., relatives, neighbors) whenever help is needed (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Qasem, 1987; Ali et al., 2004). To ask for help outside the family, including financial assistance, is often taken as an offense by many families and may stigmatize the family and the individual (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Issa, 2000; Al-Qasem; Ali et al., 2004). In one study of help-seeking and Muslims, Lowenthal, Cinnirella, Evdoka, and Murphy (2001) found that Muslims believed in using Islam and social support to cope with depression rather than mental health services, and they believed in using the religious networks for help more than those in other religious groups. If the people of Saudi Arabia are to realize the potential benefits that helping professional services have to offer, then understanding what services and sources of support they seek while studying in the United States is important.

Language

The language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic. It is not known how long the Arabic language has been spoken, but the Arabian Peninsula is its native soil (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Before Prophet Muhammad's time, written Arabic was not common (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Arabic became the language of the

Qur'an, which both inspired and provided a model for Arabic literature (Ali et al., 2004; Long, 2005; Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993).

The language of Saudi Arabia differs greatly from English, which means Saudi Arabian international college students have to learn an entirely different system of language if they are to matriculate in the United States. Some key differences between English and Arabic are that the two are written and read in opposite directions (i.e., English is read from left to right while Arabic is read from right to left), Arabic has three vowels while English traditionally has five, and Arabic has a 28-letter alphabet (all representing consonants) while the English alphabet numbers 26 (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). In addition, English language learners from Saudi Arabia must study phonological and grammatical rules while being aware that their own Arabic linguistic rules may interfere with understanding the rules (Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, 1993). Also, Arabic letters take on different shapes depending on whether they are the first letter of a word, appear in the middle of a word, or appear at the end (Auty, Holes, & Harris, 1993). In fact, research suggests Saudi Arabian students have specific concerns learning English because Arabic has such a different system of letters; organization of such sentence parts as subjects, verbs, and objects (Auty et al., 1993); and usage of nouns (e.g., Arabic has few irregular verbs and “is” and “are” are not used) (Mousa, 1994).

Consequently, English is a greater challenge to these students than it is to other international students, such as those who speak Romance or Germanic languages, because the differences in Arabic and English are so stark, thus leading to a set of secondary challenges as well. Saudi Arabian international college students not only need

to be able to read and write in academic English for schoolwork, but they must also understand colloquialisms, slang, humor, dialects, and jokes in daily interactions in order to function in everyday life in the United States (Al-Shehry, 1989). A Saudi Arabian student's accent can also cause the student to be discriminated against in overt or covert ways (Hofer, 2009; Mustafa, 1985). Experiencing discrimination when trying to learn English can be a barrier for Saudi Arabian students trying to earn a degree in the United States. Giving oral presentations, understanding lectures, taking notes, participating in discussions, writing essays and papers, and speaking to fellow students and professors are also challenging aspects for most Saudi Arabian students (Al-Shehry, 1989; Mustafa, 1985). It may be confusing for Saudi Arabian students to think in English in some areas, but then to think in Arabic for other purposes. On the other hand, being immersed in the English language in everyday life in the United States and improving their English is a benefit of studying in the United States for Saudi Arabian international college students.

Gender

As part of their religious beliefs, devout Islamic women are protected and heavily veiled in public. Women are expected to be fully covered when in the presence of men outside of their family (Yackley-Franken, 2007); thus, when they leave their homes, they don flowing robes over their clothing so that they cannot attract attention from men outside of their families (Harper, 2007). The Abaya, the long black cloak common for Saudi women to wear, covers a woman's entire body except for her face, although many women also cover their face in public with a black veil called a Niqab (Yackley-Franken,

2007). Most men in Saudi Arabia wear a loose-fitting, ankle-length shirt called a Thobe, which is usually white, and a headdress called a Ghutra, which is usually white or red-and-white checkered (Yackley-Franken, 2007). In theory, the point of all men and women dressing alike is so that no one is judged based on economic or social status (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

In public, women are not allowed to drive automobiles or use any form of public transportation without a male escort (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Long & Maisel, 2010). Males and females have separate ordering lines in many fast food restaurants. Many shopping malls hold separate hours for women and families to shop; young men are not allowed to be in the mall during these hours (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

All public schooling is separated by sex except for pre-school and kindergarten (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission maintains that education is equal for all Saudi Arabian male and female students. When Saudi Arabian male students arrive in the United States to study, it is a new experience for them to be in the same classrooms as females, to be taught by professors of a different gender, to eat with females in the cafeteria, to live in the same dormitory buildings as females, to work out at the same gymnasiums, and to engage in many other activities with women. Because Saudi Arabian females are not allowed to study or travel abroad without a male guardian who is an immediate family relative (father, brother, husband, or uncle), it is much more difficult for them to be able to study in the United States (Harper, 2007). The number of Saudi Arabian female students studying in the United States is much lower than the number of Saudi Arabian male students.

Economics

Saudi Arabia has developed economically at a rapid rate since it was founded in 1932 (Keating, 2004), largely because oil was discovered just after the establishment of the country in 1938 (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Yackley-Franken, 2007). Oil currently makes up 90% of Saudi Arabia's exports (Yackley-Franken, 2007). As Al-Khateeb remarked regarding the role of oil in Saudi Arabia's recent history, "[Oil] laid the foundation for the transformation of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia from a poor isolated country to a cash economy based on the oil industry" (p. 170).

The history of the United States' involvement and development of the Saudi Arabian oil industry is complex, contested, and part of the Cold War narrative (Blanchard, 2009; Long & Maisel, 2010; Wynbrandt, 2004). Dating back to a year after Saudi Arabia's birth, the first American oil concession was granted to California Arabian Standard Oil Company (CASOC), an affiliate of Standard Oil of California (today's Chevron). In 1943, President Franklin Roosevelt emphasized that protecting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its oil was of critical economic importance to the United States. Over the next year, CASOC developed into a company named the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco), owned by four large United States oil companies. In 1980, the Saudi Arabian government was able to buy 100% of Aramco and, eight years later, changed the name to Saudi Arabian Oil Company (Saudi Aramco). According to Saudi Aramco's website (2011),

[The company] ranks first among oil companies worldwide in terms of crude oil production and exports, and natural gas liquids (NGL) exports, and is among the

leading producers of natural gas . . . and has stewardship over the world's largest oil reserves—roughly one fifth of the global total—at nearly 260.1 billion barrels.

Today, the United States buys oil from Saudi Arabia, while Saudi Arabia buys technology (e.g., planes) from the United States (Blanchard, 2009). The United States has been Saudi Arabia's primary arms supplier (e.g., weapons) for many years (Blanchard, 2009), and major imports include motor vehicles, machinery, equipment, food, chemicals, and textiles (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

During the oil boom in the 1970s and 1980s, Saudi Arabia grew enormously by expanding its businesses, investments, and other industries (Bowen, 2008; Long, 2005). Through the oil boom years, many expatriate workers from nearby Middle Eastern countries, South Asia, and the Philippines came to Saudi Arabia for employment in unskilled jobs that many Saudi Arabian nationals did not want (Long & Maisel, 2010). Today approximately six million workers from other countries are employed primarily in oil and service sectors in the Saudi Arabian economy (CIA, 2011). That fact, coupled with the high unemployment rates in Saudi Arabia, has led the Saudi Arabian government to focus on the "Saudization" of the country's labor pool as a way to replace imported laborers with Saudi Arabian workers (Blanchard, 2009; Ménoret, 2005, p. 167; Shatkin & Atiyeh, 2002). In addition to the large non-native population in Saudi Arabia, approximately 60% of Saudi Arabia's 27 million people are under the age of 20 (Yackley-Franken, 2007). While the country has a young population, many youth who are old enough to work are unemployed (Bosbait & Wilson, 2005; Bowen, 2008), and the employment of its large youth population has become a crucial agenda for Saudi Arabian officials.

In an attempt to reduce unemployment among Saudi Arabian nationals and to help its youth become employable, Saudi Arabia has boosted its spending on job training and education (Reisberg, 2011; Yackley-Franken, 2007). Most recently, the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) was opened in Riyadh (KAUST, 2009). KAUST is very unique because it is the first mixed-sex university campus in Saudi Arabia and is not patrolled by religious police (e.g., enforcing dress codes; Reisberg, 2011). While KAUST is allowing more Saudis to receive training for the current job market in their home country, government policies and a long-standing respect for those educated in the United States, Canada, England, and other countries continue to cause young Saudis to seek educational opportunities in other settings.

On May 15, 2011, Princess Noura Bint Abdul Rahman University, the largest women-only university in the world, located north of Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, opened its new campus (Reisberg, 2011). Princess Noura University takes up eight million square meters and is projected to become Saudi Arabia's first green campus (Reisberg, 2011). Enrollment is expected to exceed 50,000 students, and medicine, pharmacy, management, computer sciences, and various languages are some areas of study that will be available to women (Reisberg, 2011). The full meaning of this Saudi Arabian government effort to offer higher education to females cannot be yet measured. However, the opening of Princess Noura University may lead to more educated females wanting to pursue graduate work in the United States, which could increase the number of Saudi Arabian females in higher education institutes across the United States.

Education

The educational perceptions of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States are shaped by the previous education they received in Saudi Arabia (Akhtarkhavari, 1994). When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formed in 1932 by King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud (also known as Ibn Saud), he acknowledged the importance of education for the Saudi people (Long & Maisel, 2010). The Saudi Arabian educational system is influenced by the principles of Islam, and, from an early age, students are taught about Islam in their classrooms (Ramady & Al-Sahlawi, 2005; Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). In addition, males and females attend separate classes and are taught by instructors of the same gender (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993; Yackley-Franken, 2007). In Saudi Arabian classrooms, teachers are highly respected, and students must raise their hands to ask or answer questions (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). Having spent years in Islam-based and teacher-centered classrooms, Saudi Arabian students may find the loose discussion-style format of many classrooms in the United States somewhat shocking.

Saudi Arabia's financial resources have played a large role in improvements made to the educational system in the past two generations; the literacy rate is now more than 75%, up from a 25% literacy rate about 60 years ago (Wynbrandt, 2004). Thus, due to educational reforms by the Saudi Arabian government, many students may be experiencing an education their parents or grandparents did not experience. Students may feel tension as they recognize that their parents or grandparents, the traditional source of wisdom in Saudi families, lack what they have.

In Saudi Arabia, students attend kindergarten, followed by six years of primary school, three years of intermediate school, and then three years of high school, during which students attend either an academic school to study arts and sciences or a vocational school to learn a trade (Keating, 2004). The curriculum is the same for males and females with the exception of home economics for females and physical education for males (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993).

The Ministry of Education was founded in 1953 by King Fahd, making education free to all Saudi Arabian citizens and thousands of scholarships available for Saudi Arabian students to study abroad (Krieger, 2007). King Saud University, founded in 1957, was the first institution of higher learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Bowen, 2008). It is the largest university in Saudi Arabia with approximately 60,000 students and offers a variety of programs (e.g., arts, dentistry, and medicine) for undergraduate and graduate students (Ministry of Higher Education, 1997). In 1961, Saudi Arabian women were first allowed to attend universities (El-Banyan, 1974). In 1970, approximately 2,500 students graduated from Saudi Arabian universities, and today about 200,000 students graduate annually (Wynbrandt, 2004). A domestic demand in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s for university education led the Saudi Arabian government to spend large sums of money sending students abroad to earn degrees, especially to the United States (Bowen, 2008).

More recently, the number of universities in Saudi Arabia increased from 7 in 1998 to 20 in 2009 (Alanazy, 2011). In 2010, the government allocated 25% of the national budget (\$36.7 billion) for education (Ministry of Finance, 2009). Today, higher

education degrees from overseas institutions are considered more distinguished than those from Saudi Arabian universities, especially for government employers (Bowen, 2008). In the last five years, the Saudi Arabian government has awarded more than 70,000 scholarships to Saudi Arabian students to attend universities in the United States and other countries (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

Government

Before the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was formally created on September 23, 1932 by Abdul-Aziz bin Saud, the country was essentially a tribal society (Blanchard, 2009; Long & Maisel, 2010). Saudi Arabia became a very modern technological society with advanced infrastructure in the years following the creation of the Kingdom (Bowen, 2008). Abdul al-Aziz bin Saud declared that all future rulers would descend from his family, the House of Saud, and this family has ruled Saudi Arabia ever since (Blanchard, 2009; Keating, 2004). Saudi Arabia's current ruler, King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz, is also the country's prime minister, commander-in-chief of the armed forces, and final court of appeal (Blanchard, 2009; Keating, 2004). The King is assisted by the crown prince, Sultan bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, who is heir to the throne (Blanchard, 2009). The royal family is estimated at 20,000 people and about 200 male heirs of Abdul Aziz have been key players in Saudi Arabian affairs (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993).

The Basic Law of Government, adopted by royal decree in 1992, dictates that the King must comply with Islamic Shari'a law (the country's legal system) and the *Qur'an* (Bowen, 2008). Shari'a literally means "the pathway to the source" and is respected by

all Muslims (Long & Maisel, 2010, p. 61). Essentially, the government's function is to enforce the Shari'a, which is Islamic legislation and the official constitution of Saudi Arabia (Bowen, 2008). The *Qur'an*, the sacred religious text, also functions as the country's basic political document (Bowen, 2008). The people of Saudi Arabia do not vote, and political parties or national elections are not permitted (Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). To make legal decisions, the King, with assistance from religious scholars, consults the *Qur'an* and Shari'a (Bowen, 2008). The views of a large system of traditional, religious, and government leaders are reflected in royal decisions.

Land and People

Saudi Arabia occupies about 865,000 square miles, approximately 80% of the Arabian Peninsula (Long & Maisel, 2010). Saudi Arabia is almost one-third the size of the United States and is the world's 12th largest country (Long & Maisel, 2010). The Red Sea is to the west of the country, which is bordered by Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen (Long & Maisel, 2010; Wynbrandt, 2004). Saudi Arabia consists of mostly deserts in the north and south, where temperatures can rise to 130 degrees Fahrenheit on a summer day (Saudi Arabia in Pictures, 1989). As one of the driest places in the world, Saudi Arabia receives less than five inches of rainfall each year (Keating, 2004). Unlike the United States, Saudi Arabia's deserts are not sprinkled with fresh water sources; water is sparse and precious (Bowen, 2008; Keating, 2004; Saudi Arabia in Pictures, 1989).

Roughly 260 billion barrels of oil are located under Saudi Arabia's surface (Blanchard, 2009; Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). Most of this oil is available for export and represents approximately 25% of the world's proved oil reserves (Pharaon, 2004; Saudi Arabia Cultural Mission, 1993). With its oil revenues, Saudi Arabia has built modern cities with many contemporary features. Even in holy cities like Mecca, a person will find Western influences such as fast food restaurants (e.g., McDonald's), coffee shops (e.g., Starbucks), and brand-name clothing stores (e.g., Nike) (Yackley-Franken, 2007).

A large proportion of Saudi Arabia once was Bedouin, which in Arabic means "nomad" (Bowen, 2008, p. 3), but today the numbers of Bedouins have greatly decreased, and the nomadic lifestyle has been replaced with such lifestyle habits as driving automobiles, using air conditioning, and being educated at universities. Still, it is estimated that Bedouins today make up about 10% of the population in Saudi Arabia (Yackley-Franken, 2007). Bedouins are legally allowed to set up camps wherever they can find land to raise and herd livestock; they continue to use camels for transportation and to sleep in tents, and they have no fixed home because they do not want to have a settled lifestyle (Bowen, 2008; Long & Maisel, 2010). In this country that still supports the Bedouin lifestyle, four of the five largest cities, as Table 2 shows, each include more than a million people (CIA, 2011). Riyadh, located in the center of Saudi Arabia, is the capital and home to political and religious power authorities (CIA, 2011).

Table 2

Saudi Arabia's Five Largest Cities

City	Population
Riyadh	4.725 million
Jiddah	3.234 million
Mecca	1.484 million
Medina	1.104 million
Dammam	902,000

Note. Data taken from CIA (2011).

General Information on Saudi Arabian International Students in the United States

In the 1950-51 academic school year, Saudi Arabia, for the first time, sent some of its young citizens to the United States to study and obtain advanced degrees to improve their professional opportunities. Sixty years ago, Saudi Arabia sent 13 students; today, approximately 34,139 Saudi Arabian students are enrolled in universities across the United States (IIE, 2012). However, since Saudi students started coming to the United States for advanced degrees, their country, the United States, and the world have radically changed, as has the need for helping professionals from the United States to better understand the complexities faced by Saudi Arabian international students who are pursuing degrees in the United States and the family members many of those students bring with them during that experience.

World Events

Likely the most significant event coloring the experience of current Saudi Arabian international students in the United States occurred on September 11, 2001 (9/11), when the United States was attacked by 19 terrorists who had hijacked four commercial airplanes and intentionally crashed two of them into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and one into the Pentagon building in Washington D.C. (Matthieu, 2004). Another hijacked plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania when passengers and flight crew members fought against the hijackers onboard to take that plane down (Matthieu, 2004). Fifteen of the 19 hijackers involved in the suicide attacks were from Saudi Arabia, and that figure has greatly heightened tensions between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Blanchard, 2009; Matthieu, 2004). Before 9/11, the United States and Saudi Arabia enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship, and Saudi Arabian international students had a much easier time obtaining visas and traveling to the United States (Blanchard, 2009). As a result of the 9/11 tragedy, stricter visa and immigration policies have been imposed by United States' agencies on people from the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia (Matthieu, 2004). After the events of 9/11, Saudi Arabian international students have also experienced discrimination, social anxiety, verbal and physical assault, and a wide range of emotions in response to negative media representations (Batterjee, 2009). They may also come to the United States with preconceived ideas about the American people or American culture based on biased media representations.

While Saudi Arabian and other Arab students reacted in various ways to the 9/11 events and their aftermath, some of the most personally disruptive reactions included the abandonment of education in the United States by many Saudi Arabian students, who returned home out of fear of the negative attitudes toward Muslims (McMurtrie et al., 2001). Brutal hate crimes against Muslims rose after 9/11. Ghaffari (2009) found other disturbing common themes in her qualitative study analyzing post-9/11 Muslim social and educational experiences in the United States. These themes included: (a) perceived/experienced discrimination, (b) isolation, (c) fear for personal safety in light of potential retaliation against Muslims after 9/11 and concern about other terrorist attacks involving Muslims, (d) concern about mainstream media coverage of and representations of Muslims and Islam, and (e) isolation/alienation from the dominant society and peers (Ghaffari, 2009).

Nearly four years after the world was shocked by the terrorism on 9/11, President George W. Bush and (then) Crown Prince Abdullah (who became King Abdullah in 2005) met to discuss ways to foster more peaceful relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States (Hofer, 2009). Among other strategies, Bush and Abdullah discussed an international student exchange between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Soon after the meeting, a scholarship program, the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP), was launched by the Saudi Arabian government (Hofer, 2009). Since its inception, KASP has allowed thousands of Saudi Arabian students to enroll in universities in the United States in order to offer them Western perspective and to impart a positive impression of Saudi Arabia to Americans (Bollang, 2006; Shaw, 2010).

Many Saudi Arabian international students receive their funding from KASP to study in the United States. The Saudi Arabian government's 25% increase for KASP funding in the 2009-10 academic year reflects that country's substantial investment in study-abroad scholarships (IIE, 2011). The consequential influx of Saudi Arabian international students and family members studying in the United States also results in contributions to the economy of the United States.

King Abdullah Scholarship Program

Despite the inception of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) in 2005, the Ministry of Higher Education of Saudi Arabia, which oversees the scholarship program, limits KASP recipients to certain programs of study. The Ministry of Higher Education Portal states that Saudi Arabian students are encouraged to choose from the following areas of study: "medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, nursing, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, medical sciences, engineering, computer specializations, accounting, finance, insurance, and marketing" (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010, para. 1). Thus, to study under KASP funding in the United States, Saudi Arabian students must meet United States institutional admission requirements, immigration requirements, and Saudi Arabia's KASP requirements. In addition, should KASP students attempt to change their program of study, they must also obtain permission from the Saudi Cultural Mission in the United States (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010).

Benefits and Challenges of Saudi Arabian International Students in the United States

Saudi Arabia is the seventh leading place of origin for United States' international students and ranks first among Middle Eastern countries in the number of international students in the United States; however, there is little information related to the needs of Saudi Arabian international students that might aid in the success of their academics, health, and well-being while they matriculate in the United States (IIE, 2011; Shaw, 2010). Although the numbers of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States indicate that the United States and Saudi Arabian international students benefit greatly from Saudi Arabian student contributions, research also indicates that Saudi Arabian students struggle while studying in the United States. To elaborate on the above, I will first document the benefits of having Saudi Arabian students in the United States to the United States. Then I will discuss the benefits of studying in the United States to Saudi Arabian students. Next, I will explore the challenges Saudi Arabian students can face. The challenges are divided into four areas of current research, including (a) perceptions of achievement, (b) adjustment problems, (c) values conflicts, and (d) general problems.

Benefits of Saudi Arabian International Students Studying in the United States

The educational exchange between Saudi Arabia and the United States benefits the United States in several ways. First, Saudi Arabian international students help to broaden the outlook of Americans by enhancing the global perspectives of the students

and faculty who encounter them. The multicultural exchange of ideas and knowledge between Saudi Arabian students and American students helps to counter misperceptions and stereotypes in both groups. Second, Saudi Arabian international students contribute to the United States' economy through the money the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the students themselves pay to live and attend school in the United States (IIE, 2011). Saudi Arabian international students, for example, provide revenue to the United States' economy through their tuition, room and board, food, books and supplies, transportation, health insurance, support for accompanying family members, and other miscellaneous items (IIE, 2011). A final benefit for the United States is that these students may develop a friendly attitude toward the United States, thereby potentially improving foreign relations in the future and returning to Saudi Arabia with accurate and positive views of the United States.

Saudi Arabian international students themselves also benefit from their educational experiences in the United States in multiple ways. For example, the students' attitudes toward their homeland and other cultures may be enriched (Hofer, 2009) and, as Carlson and Widaman (1988) noted, students who studied abroad have more concern for political issues than students who do not study abroad. However, it may be important to know more about the attitudes and perceptions about the United States and its people that Saudi Arabian international students bring when they come to study in the United States. Saudi Arabian international students may expand their thinking, worldwide perspective, and respect for different cultures by studying in the United States. For example, Saudi Arabian international students take in knowledge within and outside of their classrooms

by interacting with American and other international students, and they bring this knowledge back to Saudi Arabia. In addition, perhaps one of the clearest benefits to Saudi Arabian international students who study in the United States is that the experience may also positively impact their career choices and opportunities in Saudi Arabia (Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2004).

Challenges Faced by Saudi Arabian International Students in the United States

While benefits to Saudi Arabian international students and the host institutions exist, Saudi Arabian students also face challenges when studying in the United States, often because they come from an educational system that has distinct differences from the educational system in the United States. Al-Sallom (1994), for example, noted that the Saudi Arabia education system is unique in the following three ways: (a) emphasis on Islam: “Islam is the very soul of its—the Saudi education system—curriculum and may best be illustrated by the number of periods per week devoted to the study of [the] Qur’an, Islamic tradition, jurisprudence, and theology from the first level of kindergarten to the last level of higher education” (p. 19); (b) segregated female and male education; and (c) free education in schools at all levels to all Saudi citizens and residents.

Al-Sallom (1994) is not alone in acknowledging educational system differences that impact the personal and academic experiences of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States. In fact, over the past 50 years, researchers have been interested in areas of Saudi Arabian international students’ lives that could challenge their academic success, such as perceptions of achievement (Al-nusair, 2000; Rasheed, 1972;

Shaw, 2010), adjustment problems (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Fallon & Bycroft, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b; Mustafa, 1985; Shabeeb, 1996), values conflicts (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005; El-Banyan, 1974; Oweidat, 1981), and general problems (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Hofer, 2009).

Perceptions of achievement. Prior to coming to the United States, Saudi Arabian international students are often the most academically successful among their peers in their home country (Leong & Chou, 1996); thus, they usually have high expectations about achievement in the United States as well. Not only do these students have high personal expectations, but their families and government also place high expectations upon them, increasing the potential for a perceived failure and disappointment (Al-nusair, 2000; Spencer-Rodgers, 2000).

Rasheed (1972) considered the perceptions of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States in regard to university goals and functions. In response to a survey Rasheed provided to Saudi Arabian international students in the United States to determine how much emphasis the students felt should be placed on each of 50 university goals (e.g., what a university hopes students will gain from their university educational experience in terms of academic and social development), he discovered students' perceptions of university goals differed by major of study and that participants placed less emphasis on university goals the longer they stayed in the United States.

Al-nusair (2000) explored the relationship among Saudi Arabian international students' perceptions of the college experience, satisfaction with college and educational

gains, and college environment and educational gains at American colleges and universities. She used the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) to measure the amount, scope, and quality of effort Saudi Arabian students devote to the use of facilities and opportunities for learning and development that secondary education offers them. Analysis of the 171 CSEQs returned by Saudi Arabian students in the United States show these students tend to be less involved in the following activities than students in the national comparison group: “writing experiences; art, music, and theater; personal experiences; student acquaintances; clubs and organizations; and campus facilities” (p. 71). Alternatively, the results of the study indicate that Saudi Arabian students in the United States tended to be more involved in the following activities than the national comparison group: “library experience, experiences with faculty, course learning, science and qualitative experiences, topics in conversations, and information in conversations” (p. 71). Analysis of the survey data also suggests that satisfaction with their college experiences was significantly correlated with Saudi Arabian students’ self-reported educational gains. Additionally, a significant relationship was found between the quality of effort put toward college activities and the self-reported educational gains of the Saudi Arabian international students in this study. Finally, Al-nusair recommended that international student offices sponsor social activities to increase the interactions of American and Saudi Arabian students, as social activities can help alleviate feelings of alienation, homesickness, and hostility that Saudi Arabian students may experience.

Shaw (2010) also examined perceptions of Saudi Arabian international students, but in a different sense. In a qualitative study to examine the educational experiences of Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the state of Oregon and how their perceptions of the learning environment in the United States differed from their perceptions of the learning environment in Saudi Arabia, Shaw focused on uncovering the success strategies of 25 Saudi Arabian participants. In addition to case study research methods, she employed a fairly new technique of photo-elicitation research methods. Also known as photo ethnography, this methodology involves questioning subjects about photographs taken by a researcher or the subject. The method can help the subject recall information and helps the researcher better understand the subject's experiences. Shaw found that the success strategies her participants developed incorporated goal setting, time management, study skills, study groups, taking advantage of campus resources, hard work, and persistence. In addition, the natural environment (i.e., natural beauty of Oregon), which the participants found relaxing and stress-relieving, and feeling a part of the campus community contributed to the participants' success in the United States. Shaw also found personal adaptation resilience and intercultural competence to be the most fundamental characteristics for Saudi Arabian students to have a successful international experience. Shaw recommended supporting resilience and intercultural competence by helping Saudi Arabian students advance their coping skills and by providing assistance that increases intercultural competence.

Adjustment problems. Despite having the opportunity to attend an orientation program by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission in Washington, D.C., and being assigned

an advisor to help and support them during their time in the United States, Saudi Arabian students face many adjustment problems. Research suggests that Saudi Arabian students in the United States experience adjustment problems due to having to adapt to the new host culture, being in a different educational system, not seeing people that look like them, and feeling other aspects of culture shock (Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Jammaz, 1972; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b; Mustafa, 1985; Shabeeb, 1996).

Jammaz (1972), as the first to study adjustment problems of Saudi Arabian students in the United States, surveyed 345 Saudi Arabian students. He found that

1. Younger students were less well-adjusted than older students.
2. Unmarried students were better adjusted than married students.
3. Those students majoring in the humanities and social science were less well-adjusted than students majoring in science and engineering.
4. Students who had not been employed before arriving in the United States were more adjusted than students who had been employed.
5. The length of time Saudi Arabian students stayed in the United States seemed to have a low association with their level of adjustment.
6. Many students had problems writing and reading English, taking notes, and participating in class.

Saudi Arabian students with the greatest socialization among and association with people from the United States had the highest degrees of adjustment, and this positive adjustment resulted in a positive effect on the Saudi Arabian students' academic

achievement. Jammaz's study clearly underscores the fact that Saudi Arabian students do struggle with academic problems, especially in their use of the English language.

Mustafa (1985) also talked about Saudi Arabian international students' academic problems in a study conducted with 47 Saudi Arabian students, 22 faculty, and 24 administrators at Western Michigan University, as well as 8 academic advisors from the Saudi Arabian Educational Mission in Chicago. He found that Saudi Arabian students were prone to experience adjustment difficulties pertaining to the English language, such as struggling with a requirement to contribute to classroom discussions and with writing assignments. Other findings of Mustafa's study seem to contradict Jammaz's suggestion that the amount of time spent in the United States did not really impact students' adjustment. Mustafa's study connected the amount of time a Saudi Arabian student spends in the United States to increased language fluency; thus, he noted that Saudi Arabian students who spent less time in the United States had more problems "writing essay type exams, taking and organizing notes, keeping appointments and punctuality with instructors, understanding the American educational system, and having too many credit hours in one semester" than students who stayed longer in the United States (p. 76).

Similarly, Al-Jasir (1993) conducted a study to identify the social, cultural, and academic factors related to the adjustment of Saudi Arabian students in the United States. A total of 218 questionnaires were analyzed and results indicated that self-perceived language ability significantly predicted satisfaction and personal growth. Again, this

study emphasizes that language barriers are major obstacles to Saudi Arabian students' adjustment to studying in the United States.

Shabeeb (1996) employed questionnaires to study adjustment problems and concerns that Saudi and Arabian Gulf international students encountered while attending colleges in eastern Washington. Shabeeb mailed 150 Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) questionnaires to male and female students attending six colleges and universities in eastern Washington. Of the 150 questionnaires mailed out, 103 usable questionnaires were returned for analysis. Only 4 of the 103 students who responded were female. Shabeeb found that the students viewed the adjustment problems and difficulties in the following order, from most difficult to least difficult: (a) English language, (b) social-personal, (c) living-dining, (d) academic records, (e) orientation service, (f) admission, (g) placement service, (h) student activity, (i) religious service, (j) health service, and (k) financial aid. Regarding problems Saudi and Arabian Gulf students have related to the English language, Shabeeb concluded that Saudi Arabian students have more difficulty giving oral presentations in class than performing any other task (e.g., taking exams in English), a point previously noted by Farquharson (1989), whom Shabeeb cited. Specifically, Farquharson found that in their schooling, Middle Eastern students are not exposed to speaking in front of the class as is more common among students in the United States.

While Shabeeb (1996) also found that difficulties related to the English language cause Saudi and Arabian Gulf students many problems, she noted homesickness and loneliness as examples of social-personal difficulties these students can face. For

Shabeeb, Saudi students experience social-personal problems similar to those of other international students except that the Saudis, as Arab Muslims, also face discrimination due to differing appearance and culture, which many non-Arab international students do not have to face. For example, in terms of living-dining concerns for these students, the use of bathroom facilities (e.g., showering with other people), was noted as an issue in Shabeeb's study because, in the Islamic faith, Muslims are not allowed to show nudity to anyone besides a spouse, except in emergency situations, such as when they need a doctor. Thus, communal residence hall bathrooms can expose these students to stressors that students from other cultures may not find problematic.

Another living-dining concern Shabeeb noted involved the taste and differences of the food in the United States. In the Middle East, fresh food (e.g., produce) and rice is preferred and canned goods are rarely used. Given that many economically conscious United States diets include limited fresh produce, Saudi students can have difficulty adjusting to the food culture. A last example of a living-dining concern listed in Shabeeb's study is the weather conditions in the United States, especially the harsh and cold winters that occur in many states. Because Saudi students come from a much warmer climate in the Middle East, they can also experience adjustment difficulties related to vastly different weather and seasonal changes.

Shabeeb's (1996) study also indicated how academic records concern Saudi and Arabian Gulf students. "Writing term papers" and "concerned about grades" were listed as examples of academic records problems. These two examples are likely connected to the prime concern of the students in Shabeeb's study—the English language. In the areas

of admission, academic records, and health services, Shabeeb found that those Saudi and Arabian Gulf students who were in the United States for a longer period of time had more problems and concerns than those who were in the United States for a shorter period of time. However, Shabeeb found no statistically significant differences in the areas of orientation services, social-personal, living, dining, religious service, English language, student activity, and placement service among these two groups. Additional findings from Shabeeb's study included:

1. Students who majored in fields related to the arts and humanities encountered more problems in the area of health service than those who majored in science-related fields.
2. Two-thirds of the 103 respondents stated that their culture was very different from the American culture, and no respondents stated that their culture seemed to be very similar to that of the United States.
3. Some students had an advisor, faculty member, or American family member who helped them with their transition to living in the United States.

This study indicated that language barriers and discrimination based on ethnicity and culture were major obstacles to Saudi Arabian students' adjustment to studying in the United States and that other concerns also exist.

Nearly two decades before Shabeeb's work, Al-Khedaire (1978) conducted a study of 258 Saudi Arabian undergraduate and graduate students to determine Saudi students' level of cultural perception and attitudes about Americans and American culture. Al-Khedaire grouped participants in three categories including initial entry in the

United States, after three years in the United States, and five or more years in the United States. He found that students attending smaller institutions had more favorable attitudes toward the United States than those who were attending larger institutions and suggested that perhaps Saudi Arabian students have more chances to interact with American students on smaller institution campuses than on larger campuses.

Al-Khedaire (1978) also uncovered a significant difference in cultural perception between undergraduate and graduate students and recognized that these differences were due to the fact that the graduate students held a more sophisticated perception of American culture than the undergraduate students. This study is useful because it suggests that Saudi Arabian students attending smaller institutions have different cultural perceptions and attitudes from those attending larger institutions. Also, those at the graduate student level differ from those at the undergraduate level.

Although conducted in a country other than the United States, Midgley's (2009a, 2009b) and Fallon and Bycroft's (2009) work is noted here because the researchers employed qualitative methodologies. Using a narrative discussion group, Midgley (2009a) examined the adjustment experiences of two Saudi Arabian male nursing students at an Australian university. Noting the differences between the responses of the two participants to such topics such as going out in the evening, Midgley suggested the need to not universalize the experiences students from the same country will experience as they study abroad. Midgley (2009b) looked at Saudi Arabian students' experiences studying in Australia, focusing on those students' worries about their wives back in Saudi Arabia. Relying, again, on narrative discussion methods, Midgley (2009b) deconstructed

the behaviors of the married Saudi Arabian male students, such as their tendency to answer cell phone calls during classes, showing that the motivating factors behind what appears to be disrespectful behavior is often connected to the Saudi students' culturally reinforced attitudes about the need to care for their wives. Fallon and Bycroft conducted four focus groups on the experiences of Saudi Arabian students participating in cultural exchange homestay experiences in Australia. Their findings, which were presented at an international education conference in Australia, led them to conclude that the following materials should be given to Saudi Arabian students who participate in homestays in Australia: (a) information about Australian food, (b) information about peer pressure in a new country, (c) encouragement about speaking English with friends, (d) airport arrival information, and (e) information about acceptable Internet usage.

Values conflicts. Five major researchers studied the values of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005; El-Banyan, 1974; Oweidat, 1981). Oweidat (1981), who examined the changes in value orientation of Saudi and other Arab students from their experiences in the United States, found that those students who had resided in the United States for at least three years demonstrated values similar to those held by Americans. However, the views of Saudi and other Arab students who had recently arrived in the United States were more in keeping with the conservative views prominent in Saudi Arabia. Alfauzan (1992) researched how Saudi Arabian international students in the United States observed women's participation in Saudi Arabia's workforce. He concluded that Saudi Arabian

students studying in the United States held more liberal viewpoints than Saudi Arabian students studying in Saudi Arabia.

El-Banyan (1974) studied the relationship between Saudi Arabian international students' experiences in the United States and the changes that occurred in their attitudes toward Saudi Arabian cultural values. He noted that when Saudi Arabian students in the United States were dealing with cross-cultural adjustment problems, they were far from their usual support systems and may have felt isolated and lonely. He found that adjustment and exposure did not have a large effect on Saudi Arabian students' attitudes toward their traditional cultural values. However, he found that students exposed to the culture of the United States developed more favorable attitudes toward the emancipation of women. In addition, El-Banyan noted that students who had been in the United States for more than two years expressed disagreement with traditional values governing family relations in Saudi Arabia more often than those students who had been in the United States for less than two years. He cautiously concluded that traditional values governing family relations in Saudi Arabia tend to lose their significance among students and give way to American values the longer the Saudi Arabian student stays in the United States.

Akhtarkhavari (1994) developed an original questionnaire to compare the educational perceptions of 123 Saudi Arabian males who had graduated from United States universities to those who had graduated from Saudi Arabian universities. Their views of staff teaching students from the opposite sex in classrooms were of particular interest. Results indicated that the perceptions of sex role identity of Saudi Arabian students in the United States shifted to views similar to those of Americans.

Akhtarkhavari also found that the Saudi Arabian graduates from American universities indicated that their education had a very positive effect on their conception of education and values by helping them acquire new skills and become more understanding of other cultures.

Alshaya (2005) researched the attitudes of Saudi Arabian students living in the United States toward women's rights in Saudi Arabia, especially the right of Saudi women to drive. Of the 242 respondents to Alshaya's survey, only 9% were Saudi female students. Survey results indicated length of residence, level of education, marital status, and age had no significant difference on the Saudi participants' attitudes toward women's driving rights in Saudi Arabia. Results also indicated that more than 80% of the participants were in support of the following four factors regarding women's roles in the family:

- 1) A husband should help his wife with household responsibilities; 2) Women are as capable of making important decisions as the men in the family; 3) It is acceptable for the wife to have a higher position (i.e., education or job) than her husband, and 4) Women, like men have the ability to be good professional workers outside the house. (p. 91)

More than 80% of the participants also agreed that women should be able to drive in Saudi Arabia under certain circumstances. Alshaya concluded that participants saw few negative effects on the family as the result of women driving, but participants believed that there would be a negative effect on Saudi society if women were allowed to drive. This study highlights the fact that Saudi Arabian students in the United States are inclined to support women's rights in Saudi families and society.

General problems. In addition to the research that can be grouped into the areas of concern discussed above, a number of studies (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Hofer, 2009) focus on particular concerns, such as how often Saudi Arabian students change their majors or their perceptions about interacting with the opposite sex or with Americans (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Shedokhi, 1986). All except two of the studies that dealt with what I call *General Problems* used the Michigan International Student Problem Inventory (MISPI) (Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987). Al-Harthi explored the reasons Saudi Arabian undergraduate students change their majors when studying in the United States and how Saudi Arabian students overcome hurdles in order to achieve their educational goals in the United States. A total of 200 Saudi Arabian students, 30 academic advisors, and 50 scholarship sponsoring agencies were sampled. The survey results indicated a series of problems, including that (a) many students lacked an adequate math and science background, (b) sufficient academic advising was not provided in many students' American institutions or by sponsoring agencies, (c) students' academic requests were not usually regarded when the students enrolled in American institutions, and (d) supervision and monitoring procedures were not sufficient in assisting the Saudi Arabian scholarship student enrolled in institutions in the United States. This study suggested that support services were important in Saudi Arabian students' adjustment, but they were most often not adequate for the specific needs of these students.

Similarly, Al-Ghamdi (1985) examined selected factors that may contribute to Saudi Arabian students changing their majors after they begin graduate programs;

however, he studied master's students whereas Al-Harthi (1987) studied undergraduate students. Al-Ghamdi found that cumulative grade point average (GPA) and the compatibility of Saudi Arabian students' graduate major with their undergraduate major were related to Saudi Arabian students changing their major during graduate school. Interestingly, a slightly higher GPA was found in those students who changed their graduate majors. Al-Ghamdi recommended that the Saudi Arabian Educational Mission to the United States (SAEM) be given more authority to approve Saudi Arabian students' change of majors and that SAEM improve office procedures and policies to better serve the needs of Saudi Arabian students. Additionally, Al-Ghamdi recommended that more emphasis should be placed on the content of programs of study than on the name of the program when placing Saudi students in specific majors.

Al-Shedokhi (1986) reported that interacting with the opposite sex was of least concern to Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States. His research employed a modified version of the MISPI to study the adjustment problems experienced by 430 Saudi Arabian male and female students in the United States. Al-Shedokhi also revealed that the students who attended a pre-departure (from Saudi Arabia) orientation (to the United States) had fewer adjustment problems than those who did not attend, except when it came to experiencing problems with English. In fact, Al-Shedokhi found Saudi Arabian students experienced problems with English whether or not they attended a pre-departure orientation.

Al-Shehry (1989) surveyed 354 graduate students using the MISPI and found that the areas of the greatest concern to Saudi Arabian students were English use, academic

records (grades, writing essays, and academic advising), and financial aid. Admission selection and health services were areas of the least concern for the Saudi Arabian graduate students surveyed. Additionally, Al-Shehry found that students who lived in college housing (e.g., dormitory buildings) had more problems with English than those who lived in apartments or houses.

Similarly, Hofer (2009) used the MISPI to survey the adjustment problems and issues serving as barriers to positive educational achievements for Saudi Arabian international students studying in the state of Missouri. She distributed the MISPI survey to 419 Saudi students and received 81 responses. The results from the responses revealed that Saudi Arabian students studying in Missouri were relatively satisfied. Out of 11 MISPI categories, the 3 categories of “living-dining, English language, and financial aid presented minor problems for students with the living-dining category being found to be most problematic” (p. 119).

Hofer’s (2009) study showed that, compared to other Saudi Arabian students, the students surveyed in her study perceived their adjustment challenges as being less problematic. The following statistically significant results were obtained when Hofer compared Saudi Arabian students’ demographic information with the MISPI survey results:

1. Younger students experienced more adjustment problems than older students in the social-personal category.
2. Male students experienced more adjustment problems than female students in the area of admission-selection.

3. Single Saudi Arabian students experienced more difficulties in the categories of English language, social-personal, and admission-selection than married Saudi Arabian students.
4. Students residing in the United States two years or less experienced more difficulties in the English language and living-dining categories than students residing in the United States for a longer period of time.
5. Students pursuing technical majors experienced more problems within the living-dining category, while those enrolled in non-technical majors experienced more problems in the financial aid category.
6. Students attending smaller-sized institutions experienced fewer problems in the English language category than those attending larger institutions.

Hofer gathered qualitative research in the form of five open-ended questions asked at the end of the MISPI survey. The qualitative narrative comments suggested that Saudi Arabian international students in this study felt positive and optimistic about their educational experience in the state of Missouri. In addition, comments suggested that the students had concerns about immigration and visa issues and about American airports, and they desired friendships with domestic students.

Overview of Four Research Areas

A point that was clearly expressed in all studies just detailed was that the greatest challenge Saudi Arabian international students faced when studying in the United States was learning and using the English language (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Alfauzan, 1992;

Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Al-nusair, 2000; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Alshaya, 2005; El-Banyan, 1974; Fallon & Bycroft, 2009; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b; Mustafa, 1985; Oweidat, 1981; Rasheed, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996; Shaw, 2010). Among all the research, Mustafa (1985) nicely summarized this point by suggesting English language difficulty was a common denominator in all the past studies on Saudi Arabian students he reviewed, and included difficulties with writing research papers, participating in classroom discussions, giving oral presentations, taking notes, and studying.

While English surfaced as a common theme in all the studies, other common themes were also discerned in the studies. These themes included the value of Saudi Arabian students feeling a part of campus community activities in order to positively affect their satisfaction with their educational achievement and success perceptions (Al-nusair, 2000; Shaw, 2010); the importance of interactions of Saudi Arabian students with American students to help the Saudi Arabian students feel less lonely and less alienated (Al-nusair, 2000; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Shaw, 2010); the recommendation that Saudi Arabian students attend a pre-departure orientation, which may better prepare them for the many differences they may encounter in the United States relating to the culture, educational system, and language (Al-Shehry, 1989; Shabeeb, 1996); and findings about how age may relate to the adjustment of Saudi Arabian students in the United States (Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972).

Limitations of Research on Saudi Arabian International Students Studying in the United States

Most studies about international students' stressors and the strategies they used to achieve success focused on issues that international students, in general, encountered when they attended institutions of higher education in the United States (Hofer, 2009; Shaw, 2010). A review of the relevant literature indicates that most studies about Saudi Arabian international students in the United States were conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, despite the fact that Saudi Arabian students began studying in the United States in 1950. It is possible that research being done in this area prior to 1972 simply did not get shared through traditional scholarly means; however, if such research exists, it does not appear to be readily accessible to scholars today.

Most studies that have examined Saudi Arabian international students' experiences in the United States have used quantitative approaches (Akhtarkhavari, 1994; Al-Ghamdi, 1985; Al-Harthi, 1987; Al-Jasir, 1993; Al-Khedaire, 1978; Al-nusair, 2000; Al-Shedokhi, 1986; Al-Shehry, 1989; Alfauzan, 1992; Alshaya, 2005; El-Banyan, 1974; Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Mustafa, 1985; Oweidat, 1981; Rasheed, 1972; Shabeeb, 1996). Such traditional, scientific, and objective methods attempt to quantitatively describe and compare participants studied and usually offer limited focus on the experiences of individuals, and thus may be less effective at capturing the lived experiences in specific contexts. This is still a major need to help understand the Saudi Arabian students' experience in studying in the United States. While the majority of studies about Saudi Arabian international students are quantitative in nature, five

qualitative studies, detailed previously in this chapter, were found relating to Saudi Arabian students' experiences (Fallon & Bycroft, 2009; Hofer, 2009; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b; Shaw, 2010). These consisted of two published dissertations on Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States (Hofer, 2009; Shaw, 2010) and three published research papers on Saudi Arabian students studying in Australia (Fallon & Bycroft, 2009; Midgley, 2009a, 2009b). The research papers by Midgley and Fallon and Bycroft offer useful insights; however, since they deal with Saudi Arabian students in Australia, they may be only somewhat related to this study because they focus on Saudi Arabian students in an English-speaking country other than the United States. In contrast, the dissertations focus directly on Saudis studying in the United States—specifically in Missouri and Oregon—and offer substantial information related to this project.

The first dissertation, by Shaw (2010), investigated the educational experiences of 25 Saudi Arabian international students studying in the state of Oregon. Using qualitative case study and photo-elicitation research methods, Shaw examined Saudi Arabian students' perceptions of their learning environment in the United States, how it differed from Saudi Arabia, and the strategies the students developed to achieve their academic goals. Shaw's dissertation was especially helpful in highlighting strategies of successful Saudi Arabian students in the United States, including setting goals, participating in study groups, seeking out campus resources, being persistent, and managing time effectively. Shaw found that two major contributors to her participants' success included the natural environment of Oregon, which they indicated was relaxing and stress relieving, and feeling that they were a member of the campus community.

Shaw greatly expanded the knowledge base on how Saudi Arabian students reach their academic aspirations in institutes of higher education in the United States. She underscored the importance of enhancing the characteristics of resilience and intercultural competence in Saudi Arabian students in order for those students to have successful study experiences in the United States.

The second dissertation, by Hofer (2009), added to the literature on Saudi Arabian international students by offering more information about the adjustment problems and issues serving as barriers to positive educational achievements for Saudi Arabian students studying in the state of Missouri. Results from the Michigan International Students Problem Inventory (MISPI) indicated that Saudi Arabian students pursuing higher education in Missouri are generally pleased with their study abroad experience, a finding that she noted contrasts with the findings of previous studies that focused on Saudi Arabian students in the United States in general.

Conclusion

This chapter is a review of the literature related to the challenges that Saudi Arabian international students face when studying at higher education institutions in the United States. The review has been organized into four areas, including (a) research conducted on the problems and concerns of international students in the United States, (b) background of the country and culture of Saudi Arabia, (c) world events that have influenced the process for Saudi Arabian international students to study in the United States, and (d) literature on Saudi Arabian international students who are studying in the

United States, with an emphasis on the benefits and challenges the students face while doing so.

Based on the literature reviewed, it seems clear Saudi Arabian international students in the United States face many challenges. These challenges include simply being an international student in the United States, academic difficulties (specifically learning the English language), personal concerns (e.g., homesickness and loneliness), health issues (e.g., depression and headaches), and culture shock. In addition, Saudi Arabian international students experience specific challenges because of negative perceptions held by some individuals in the United States about the Middle East or Saudi Arabia in general, and because many differences exist between the culture of Saudi Arabia and culture of the United States. Additionally, world events such as the 9/11 destruction of the World Trade Center Towers and the implementation of the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) have affected the study-abroad experiences of Saudi Arabian international students.

Current political agreements between the United States and Saudi Arabia provide strong evidence that a steady flow of Saudi Arabian international students to United States colleges and universities will continue. While studies on the experiences and challenges of Saudi Arabian international students in the United States exist, there is a need for more work related to the specific experiences and needs of Saudi Arabian students in the United States. This additional research may be helpful in enhancing the multicultural sensitivity of those who work with Saudi Arabian students. Also, additional research may potentially contribute to the development of effective support services for

these students and may ultimately help Saudi Arabian students studying in the United States, as well as counselors and other professionals charged with helping Saudi Arabian students find success in their studies in the United States.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The researcher's purpose in conducting this study was threefold. The first purpose involved the desire to acquire meaningful information to help understand what academic and personal challenges male Saudi Arabian international college students face and how they experienced these challenges while studying in the United States. The second purpose concerned the intent to acquire a meaningful understanding of how male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States seek support, how they experience seeking and receiving support in the United States, and what, if any, barriers they experience in terms of receiving support while studying in the United States. The third purpose concerned the goal of acquiring meaningful information to help understand the possible impact of the cross-cultural study experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States on their perceptions, cultural values, and belief systems. This information may better help inform universities in the United States about this population's challenges and support services. This researcher ultimately hopes that this study will be a small component of a larger body of research that will enhance the lives of Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States.

Research Question

The phenomenological research question for this study was: "What are the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States?"

To address this question, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews, guided by the following primary questions:

1. What perceptions do male Saudi Arabian international college students report having about the United States before entering studies in the United States?
2. What are male Saudi Arabian international college students' experiences studying and living in the United States?
3. What academic challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
4. What personal challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
5. What strengths and success strategies do male Saudi Arabian international college students experience and bring to their studies in the United States?
6. What support services do male Saudi Arabian international college students seek for help and how do they experience these support services?
7. How have male Saudi Arabian international college students' perceptions about the United States changed during their stay in the United States?
8. What has been the impact of male Saudi Arabian international college students' cross-cultural study experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs?

Phenomenological Framework

For the purposes of the current qualitative investigation, the researcher employed a phenomenological methodology. A phenomenological framework provides a foundation to describe the meaning of a particular experience that is based on the common perspective of several individuals (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological methodology is a way of understanding a phenomenon through a scientific approach that is methodical, orderly, and critical (Wertz, 2005). A phenomenological investigation is rooted in two primary philosophical assumptions: (a) particular human experiences can be studied and are based on the conscious (rather than unconscious) descriptions of individuals' perspectives (van Manen, 1990), and (b) the descriptions are essential to understanding the meaning of the particular experience rather than analyses or interpretations of the descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

For the current study, the phenomenon of interest was operationalized as the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States. Specifically, this researcher was interested in the academic and personal challenges of these particular college students. Consistent with a phenomenological design, the researcher was interested in understanding *what* challenges male Saudi Arabian international college students experienced and *how* they experienced those challenges (Moustakas, 1994). In regard to these challenges, an accompanying phenomenon of interest concerned how male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States sought support, how they experienced seeking and receiving support in the United States, and what, if any, barriers they experienced in the United States in

terms of seeking and receiving support during their higher education experience. This researcher was also interested in studying the possible impact of male Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs.

To research male Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences, the present study consisted of a specific type of phenomenology called empirical *transcendental phenomenology* (Creswell, 2007). This type of phenomenology was chosen for this dissertation because it attempts to capture participants' descriptions from a fresh perspective (i.e., without any preconceived assumptions) and without interpretation (Creswell, 2007), both conditions that were consistent with the goals of this research project. Transcendental phenomenology consists of four research design procedures (Moustakas, 1994) that were used in the current dissertation: (a) identify a phenomenon to study, (b) bracket out any preconceived notions by having the researcher write about her views and experiences with the identified phenomenon prior to proceeding with participant recruitment and data collection, (c) collect data by interviewing multiple individuals who have experienced the identified phenomenon, and (d) analyze the data in order to illuminate themes of the participants' experiences. Thus, consistent with transcendental phenomenology, this methodology discussion contains the following sections: (a) research question, (b) phenomenological framework, (c) research methodology, and (d) data analysis.

Researcher Narrative and Assumptions

Although the current researcher understands that it is nearly impossible to completely remove any preconceived notions when conducting research on a certain phenomenon, the process of bracketing out the researcher's experiences that were related to the phenomenon mitigated the influence of preconceived notions and distinguished transcendental phenomenology from other types of phenomenology (e.g., hermeneutic phenomenology; van Manen, 1990). Because bracketing out the researcher's experiences and preconceived ideas was vital to this type of phenomenology, the current researcher's prior experiences with male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States are described in the next section. The bracketing process has been referred to as the *epoché* of the natural sciences (Colaizzi, 1978; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; Wertz, 2005), a Greek word meaning "to stay away or abstain" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), indicating researchers need to "set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). In a qualitative investigation, the researcher's involvement and interpersonal interactions with the participants are crucial to the overall methodology (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, given that the researcher represented the instrument for the study, it was essential to highlight the history and overall connections that shaped the researcher's interest in learning more about what male Saudi Arabian international college students experience when studying at a Midwestern university in the United States. This researcher has interacted with Saudi Arabian international students in two primary roles—as a language partner volunteer and as a counselor.

Experiences with Saudi Arabian International Students

The researcher in this study is a 29-year-old Caucasian Christian female who grew up in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan that was within 30 miles of Dearborn, Michigan, home to one of the largest communities of *Arabic* Americans in the United States (United States Department of State, 2001). Although I grew up in a city close to Dearborn, I rarely interacted with the Arabic American community. Once I became exposed to the dominant religious practices of the Arabic culture (i.e., by both visiting family that lived in the Arabic community and working at a camp for Arabic children) and observed the differences between the dominant religious practices in the area (i.e., Christianity) and the dominant Arabic religious practices (i.e., Islamic), I became eager to learn more about individuals from the Arabic culture to better understand their experiences. Despite this eagerness, I had little opportunity to increase my exposure to Arabic culture until beginning my doctoral studies. Since starting my doctoral studies, I gained exposure and awareness through volunteering as a language partner and working in clinical settings.

Volunteer. Upon beginning my doctoral studies in counseling psychology, my brother (who had been studying the Arabic language at the undergraduate level for two years) and I found an apartment together. During the first few months of living with my brother, I began interacting with several of his Arabic friends, who were mostly Egyptian, Lebanese, and Saudi Arabian. After interacting with several Arabic students, I decided to volunteer as an English language partner at a Midwestern university and was matched with two international students from Saudi Arabia. Given the fact that my language

partners were non-native speakers of English, my role as a language partner was to assist my partners in meeting the following two primary goals: (a) polish their English skills in order to gain entry into degree programs of United States' universities and colleges, and (b) work on their English skills for use in their future careers. Typically, I met with my language partners for one hour per week for two years. As a result of our discussions, I learned a great deal about my language partners' backgrounds and general information about the Saudi Arabian culture.

Clinical work. My training experiences in university counseling centers helped me understand the importance of addressing the issues that male Saudi Arabian international college students experience. I had several employment experiences working in these clinical settings, where I interacted with a number of male Saudi Arabian international college students. Most of the interactions were informal and unplanned; however, in one instance, the experience was in a group therapy format where I was a co-facilitator. The group was a men's group for college students and included several international students. Upon reflecting on my experiences in the group, I realized the group was very influential in educating me about some of the issues of international male collegiates. For example, some of the topics of the group involved relationships, academics, career goals, and finances. Having the opportunity to volunteer and work in clinical settings was an invaluable experience. Accompanying these experiences were assumptions about Saudi Arabian international college students; these assumptions are described in the next section.

Assumptions

This section describes this researcher's assumptions in order to promote transparency regarding preconceived notions concerning this research study. Prior to collecting data for the current study, this researcher expected that participants would be eager to share their experiences through in-depth interviews in an effort to help other Saudi Arabian international college students as well as to assist this researcher with her dissertation. This researcher expected participants would describe their academic and personal challenges in the United States as anxiety-producing and stressful experiences. Some of the personal and academic challenges this researcher expected Saudi Arabian international college students would share involved language barriers, culture shock, housing/living issues, and discrimination/prejudice. This researcher anticipated participants would describe a sense of loneliness and homesickness when experiencing academic and personal challenges. This researcher expected the participants would describe how they isolated themselves from others, prayed, and contacted their family members in Saudi Arabia for support when attempting to cope with their personal and academic challenges.

This researcher also had assumptions that Saudi Arabian international college students would be hesitant to seek support services when encountering academic and personal challenges. The assumption was that Saudi Arabian international college students do not readily seek academic or personal support services such as counseling, advising, and tutoring. This assumption stemmed from conversations with counseling, advising, and tutorial staff at university campuses. That is, during a number of

conversations, professional providers in these areas consistently reported that Saudi Arabian international college students did not seek support services.

Research Methodology

Before recruiting participants for the current study, the researcher submitted a proposal to the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB). The HSIRB proposal was approved and a copy of the HSIRB Approval Letter is presented in Appendix K. The researcher recruited potential participants who shared the common experience of studying in the United States as male Saudi Arabian international college students. In the following sections, the sampling approach for the current study is described, including number of desired participants, recruitment processes, and setting from which participants were recruited.

Sampling and Participants

A phenomenological approach follows a purposive sampling strategy in that it “can purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). One type of purposive sampling is the criterion sampling strategy, an approach that was used in the current study. In the criterion sampling strategy, the researcher is responsible for recruiting participants who meet specific criteria for the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To meet criteria for the current study, participants needed to: (a) be male Saudi Arabian international college students who were currently studying at a Midwestern university in the United States;

(b) have met the English language proficiency requirements of the university and been regularly admitted to the university; and (c) have been studying in the United States for at least two years, as they may have had more experiences than students who had been studying in the United States for less than two years. Creswell (1998) suggested that about 10 participants was an appropriate number for conducting participant interviews to elicit detailed descriptions of the phenomenon under study. For the current study, rich and detailed data were collected from nine participants who met the aforementioned criteria. In the next subsection, the setting and recruitment processes are described.

Recruitment and Setting

Participants were recruited from a large Midwestern university. The university had a wide variety of undergraduate and graduate programs. Of the approximately 25,000 students who attended the university, nearly 1,250 students were considered international students (i.e., from a country outside of the United States). Of the 1,250 students, about 200 students were from Saudi Arabia, and about 90% of Saudi Arabian international students were male (Haenicke Institute for Global Education, 2011).

To recruit potential participants for the study and to begin the process of identifying eligible candidates for inclusion in this study, this researcher consulted with the Operations Manager of the Institute for Global Education at the large Midwestern university in the United States and provided the Operations Manager with information about the study and asked her to email a recruitment script (see Appendix A) to all regularly admitted male Saudi Arabian international college students. The researcher's

contact information was included in the recruitment script email and interested potential participants emailed this researcher to receive more information about participating in the study.

The researcher telephoned potential participants who emailed her after receiving the recruitment email from the Operations Manager of the Institute for Global Education at the university and answered any preliminary questions they had (see Appendix B). After questions were answered by telephone, if a potential participant was still interested in participating, he was mailed a research packet with the informed consent document and background questionnaire, as noted below. Students were informed that the researcher was recruiting 8-10 students and that signing up to participate would not guarantee that they would be asked to participate in the study. Priority was given to students who met the research criteria and who were willing and able to discuss their experiences related to the research questions.

After the researcher made the preliminary telephone contact noted above, she mailed the potential participants a packet of materials containing a stamped envelope, the informed consent form (see Appendix C), and a background information form that asked about age, gender, home country, program of study, year in program of study, length of time studying in the United States, marital status, religious affiliation, country of birth, and how they successfully completed the English language proficiency requirements at their university to be regularly admitted (e.g., Test of English as a Foreign Language; see Appendix D). The researcher asked the potential participants to complete the two forms and return them to her in the stamped envelope provided in the packet of materials.

After reviewing the background information form and selecting the potential participants who were appropriate for the current study (i.e., male Saudi Arabian international college students who studied for at least two years in the United States), the researcher telephoned (see Appendix B) the potential participants to schedule a time and setting for the initial interview. During this phone call, the researcher confirmed that the student was interested in participating in the study and was willing to meet to be interviewed for the study as was described in the informed consent document. Once an initial interview was scheduled, the researcher met with potential participants for the initial interview in a reserved university classroom or conference room that had minimal distractions (Creswell, 2007).

The researcher reviewed the informed consent with potential participants and informed them about concerns relevant to the well-being of participants (e.g., how participants had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time), expectations of participants (e.g., the time required of them), and the electronic mailing address and phone number of the researcher. All forms with participant information were stored in a secure, locked file cabinet.

Data Collection

After confirming the informed consent form was properly signed, this researcher started the digital recorder and began the initial interview. The researcher followed an interview protocol (see Appendix E) that outlined the interview procedures. The interview protocol included reminders about how to begin the interview, a list of the

research questions, and information concerning the conclusion of the interview (e.g., thanking the participants for their time; Creswell, 2007).

Consistent with Creswell's (1998) suggestion concerning interviews, the initial interview, lasting about 1 to 1½ hours, was a face-to-face interview that consisted of open-ended questions. During this time, the researcher followed the interview protocol as closely as possible, did not give advice, followed the research questions of the study, and focused on being a good listener rather than frequent speaker (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, the researcher completed the interview within the allotted time block, was respectful and courteous, and used minimal encouragers to promote participants' elaboration (Creswell, 2007). After each initial interview, this researcher recorded her field notes that included impressions, reactions, affective and behavioral observations, and any salient information from the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Before the researcher exited the interviewing room, she stopped the digital recorder. Participants were reminded that they would receive an electronic mail containing the summary of their story to read and provide feedback concerning its accuracy.

Following the completion of the initial interview, the researcher transcribed the full dialogue and was diligent in capturing accounts of the participants' stories verbatim (Creswell, 2007). Shortly thereafter, this researcher listened to each digitally recorded interview and read through the transcripts a few times to become familiar with participants' narratives in order to "acquire a feeling for them" and to understand them (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). To protect the privacy of participants, pseudonyms and code words were used in the research documents rather than direct quotes (Creswell, 2007;

Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Therefore, identifying information was removed from each transcript and each participant's pseudonym was inserted into the transcript when the transcriptions were typed.

Data Analysis

After familiarizing herself with the participants' narratives, the researcher began the data analysis process. The data analysis process was guided by Moustakas' (1994) approach as discussed by Creswell (2007). After reviewing several phenomenological data analysis approaches, the researcher selected Moustakas' approach as the optimal one for this study.

To begin the Moustakas approach, the researcher attempted to create distance between her personal experiences with the phenomenon and the experiences of the participants. As mentioned above in the researcher narrative section, the researcher recorded her own experiences in full, regarding working or spending time with Saudi Arabian international college students. This researcher then began to extract significant statements across the transcripts that spoke to how the participants experienced studying and living in the United States in regard to their lived experiences. Data from the full transcripts were grouped into significant statements and sentences that gave individual voice to the identified phenomenon or concept (Creswell, 2007). This process, known as *horizontalization*, resulted in the generation of a list that the researcher used to cluster more general themes from the significant statements, sentences, or quotes of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Thus, the statements, sentences, or quotes were then

grouped into larger units of information, and the researcher set in motion the development of a textural description of the *what* participants actually experienced while studying and living in the United States as male Saudi Arabian international college students (Creswell, 2007). This textural description contained verbatim examples that more fully illustrated the experiences of the participants.

Structural Description

After the *what* was addressed, the structural description described *how* participants experienced studying and living in the United States and overcame challenges as a result of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). It is within this stage that the researcher explored all possible meanings and differing perspectives that ultimately funneled into the structural description. Using reflection and analysis, a combination of the textural and structural descriptions was generated to form a basic description that spoke to the overall essence of how male Saudi Arabian international college students experienced studying and living in the United States. The overall essence described the “single, unifying meaning” of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and, as Polkinghorne (1989) stated, led the reader to feel that “I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that” (p. 46).

The initial descriptions were then given to the researcher’s auditor. The auditor, who was familiar with qualitative methods, reviewed the general descriptions to identify cohesiveness, check for clarity, and examine usefulness to the reader. This researcher provided the auditor access to the research method, the de-identified participant interview

transcripts, the researcher's analysis notes, and the final analysis descriptions. The auditor examined the research process and paid special attention to data collection and analysis.

After completing the data analysis for the first interviews, the researcher scheduled follow-up interviews with the participants by electronically mailing participants to set a time for the follow-up interview (see Appendix F). The follow-up interviews were conducted by telephone and lasted approximately 30-45 minutes. At least one week prior to the follow-up interview, the researcher mailed each participant a packet of information that contained a reminder letter of the follow-up interview date and time (see Appendix G) and his individual summary of his initial interview. This process is called *member checking* and involves submitting to the participants the summary of their individual stories to ensure that the researcher's interpretations fully encapsulate a complete and accurate account of the participants' experiences. By allowing participants to provide feedback on the summary of their individual stories prepared by this researcher, validity of the participants' accounts was established (Creswell, 1998). Participants were asked to review these documents in preparation for the follow-up interview.

The chief function of the follow-up interview was to focus on accuracy and deepen the meaning from participants' summaries. During the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to provide clarification and feedback regarding their reactions to the data analysis and results. The follow-up interviews were digitally recorded and structured using a guide (see Appendix H). Upon conclusion of the second interview, the

participants were invited to anonymously evaluate their interview experience (Appendix I) with an online survey (see Appendix J).

After any necessary changes were made to the original analysis stemming from the follow-up interviews, the revised general descriptions were given to this researcher's auditor again for review. The auditor's feedback was incorporated into the final descriptions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to examine, understand, and describe the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students who study in a large Midwestern university in the United States. To accomplish this task, the researcher conducted an initial 1–1½-hour in-person interview and a 30–45-minute follow-up phone interview. To analyze the data, the researcher used a phenomenological approach. The male Saudi Arabian international college students' personal stories helped the researcher gain a basic understanding of the academic and personal lived experiences of the participants, while studying in the United States. This chapter outlines the demographic make-up of the sample and the themes that emerged from the data. The quotations and examples chosen best depict and clarify the emerging themes. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

The first section in this chapter outlines the demographic make-up of the sample. The second section focuses on the participants' perceptions about traveling to the United States to study. The third section focuses on the participants' experience of studying in the United States. The fourth section concentrates on the participants' experience of living in the United States. The fifth section addresses the success strategies and strengths of the participants. The sixth section describes the support services of the participants. The seventh section focuses on the way the participants' perceptions about the United States changed after studying in the United States. The eighth section

addresses the cross-cultural impact on the participants' personal beliefs after having lived and studied in the United States. The final section provides a composite case narrative of the participants' lived experiences.

Description of Sample

The nine participants were male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States from a variety of fields of study, including engineering, human resource development, finance, and education leadership. The participants ranged in age from 20 to 38 years, lived in the United States from 2 to 6 years, and met English language proficiency of the university they were attending by successfully completing the Center for English Language and Culture for International Students (CELCIS) program. Two participants self-identified as married, while seven indicated that they were single. Seven of the participants were undergraduate students and two were graduate students. Finally, eight participants self-identified as Sunni Muslim and one self-identified as Shiite Muslim.

Participants' Perceptions of the United States

As the researcher examined the transcripts, it became evident that the perceptions the participants shared were influenced either by media viewed in Saudi Arabia, parents' prior exposure to the United States, and/or friends' exposure to the United States. Overall, three overarching themes emerged from the transcripts: (a) positive, (b) negative, or (c) neutral perceptions about the United States. The emerging positive perceptions

included such ideas as perceiving Americans as having a strong educational system, good professors, and advanced technology. The emerging negative perceptions included such things as the participants' fearing for their safety, experiencing unfriendliness from Americans, worrying about racism, and having no place to pray and worship. The neutral perception that emerged included the primary idea of having no notion of what to expect from coming to the United States. In the sections that follow, the specific perceptions experienced are expressed in more detail.

Positive Perceptions

Six of the participants had positive perceptions of studying in the United States. The other three participants did not explicitly state whether or not they had positive perceptions. The positive perceptions reported included such ideas as attaining a strong education, having good professors, experiencing advanced technology, perceiving educational systems in the United States as "good," and believing that Americans are "open-minded and offer the best educational model in the world." Ali indicated that his perception prior to coming to the United States was about a "dream to come here and study" and his "perspective here is [he] thought everybody is well educated and looking for a high degree." Ahmed's thoughts included "going to a strong university that had good professors and more technology, a modern life, and [learning] something different or stronger than what [he had] in Saudi Arabia in [his] United States classes." He also reported believing that he "will make friends from the United States and . . . have a different life and start working on [himself]." Mohammad stated that he "was excited to

come here to a strong university with more technology than Saudi Arabia and with good professors.” Hussein “heard a lot of the public universities were really good.” Finally, Kadar reported that he believed that

America is the country that has technology, an open-mind, and the education system is considered the best model in the world . . . the education system here in the United States is one of the best education systems especially for kids for elementary, for middle school and high school, also for the graduate students.

Negative Perceptions

Five of the participants reported having negative perceptions about the United States and their potential experience of studying and living in the United States. The other four participants did not explicitly state whether or not they had negative perceptions. The negative perceptions reported included such themes as fear, racism, religious discrimination, and unfriendliness. For instance, Abdullah recounted his experience of watching a speech by George Bush before coming. He stated, “[the speech] was so offensive . . . Bush apologized, but I wondered about the way the world is going.”

Hussein indicated that he “thought someone would hurt [him] like after 9/11” and Jamel reported that he “was expecting [the United States] to be more dangerous” and he thought “maybe the American people hate Muslims and Arab people.” He went on to indicate that he believed Americans would “hate” him because of “what they saw about [his] country in the media.” He also stated that he “was thinking American people they just like to drink, get laid, love to party, and stuff like that . . . in college they just like to be crazy.” Interestingly, he reported that perhaps he thought these ideas because he “was

taking all of [his] information from the media.” Ali believed American “people are big and white and . . . Americans don’t help if you ask them or if they see you are different they won’t communicate with you and they think who is this stranger guy or what’s he like doing here.” Mohammad captured the essence of all of the participants’ negative perceptions:

Before I came to the United States, I was thinking that United States populations are not friendly as well as they will like never help us . . . I mean will never help me and my friends with any issues that may happen for us. I thought that I will see people drinking in the street and the bars will never close until the sun rises. It will be dangerous to get out in midnight because the [drunken] people will do something bad for us or something. Um I believe that if they know we are Saudis and Muslims they will hate us and um harass as well. And we will never find a place to pray. I mean in the United States I will not find a place to pray at all. By and large I thought that living in the United States will be hard and I will face a lot of problems.

Neutral Perceptions

One participant reported having neither negative nor positive perceptions about what to expect before entering his studies in the United States. Fahed stated that he “had no idea what it was going to look like before [he came] here . . . [he] just knew that [he] was going to face a different life, culture and people.” He also indicated that he “was not sure how, but just knew there would be some kind of a difference from back home in Saudi.”

Experiences of Studying in the United States

After reviewing the transcripts, the salient theme about studying in the United States that emerged for the participants revolved around the difficulties experienced

academically because of the language barrier that the majority of the participants faced. They addressed such things as difficulties with reading, writing assignments, understanding lecture material, understanding faculty, and communicating in class. Another central theme that emerged was the experience of feeling embarrassed and inadequate. Both of these themes are depicted in more detail below.

Language Barrier

The first theme that emerged with respect to challenges was with English language proficiency. All nine male Saudi Arabian international college students reported they experienced struggles with the English language. For instance, Hussein indicated that the most challenging thing he experienced was “the language difference . . . and until [he understood he] could not communicate well.” Abdullah acknowledged that “learning a new language is not an easy thing to do . . . in Arabic, we use totally different letters and we write from right to left, but here we [must] write left to right in English so that was one of the challenges I had.” Fahed asserted that he had to “study like twice what [he] should study back home because . . . here it is in a different language. So [he] faced hard things like [translating] from his native language to English.” Jamel shared a similar experience with translation because he had a “real problem because of the language . . . [he had] to go to the dictionary then get back to [his] book, then back to the dictionary . . . so going back and forth was like killing [his] study time.” Mansoor described how his language barrier shaped his experience in an exam:

My first academic challenge is the language. It’s like the biggest thing ever you know. Sometimes I studied too hard for a test and when I go there, I read the

whole question and I understand everything except one word on it. This one word makes me pick the like wrong answer sometimes. I went to so many lectures without knowing what the teacher was talking about exactly and missing some of the words.

Ali described his experience as follows:

The big challenge was how to learn English and to communicate. It was hard for me to go outside because I don't know how to communicate with people even like the pronunciation sometimes when I go to the store or to the restaurant and I told them something I want and they just say what do you mean? So that is just disappointing sometimes when they can't understand me. Without English I just feel like I am lost or like left behind. It was really hard to do it seriously I spent so many days so many nights to like memorize words and writing them down and trying to repeat them.

Mohammad captured the essence of the classroom experience that each of the participants described:

Studying here is really hard because the professor will keep talking very very fast and it's hard to ask him to speak slowly you know and it's like hard also to ask him about everything he said. I need to ask maybe twenty questions or something, it's hard to raise my hand every one minute or every ten minutes. It is really hard. I need to ask sometimes really to explain what he is saying. I don't want to ask because I feel like I'm a foreign student in the class. My accent is really different than the American students and sometimes when I start to speak I notice that some students start to like look at me and I don't like when they look at me like this.

Feeling Embarrassed and Inadequate

The second theme that emerged in this section revolved around feeling embarrassed and inadequate, primarily because of the difficulty the participants had communicating in English. Two participants specifically addressed their experiences.

Ahmed reported that “standing for a presentation in front of the whole class is a challenge . . . sometimes [he] gets embarrassed if [he] doesn't talk properly.” He

reported feeling “scared and trying to avoid questions at the end of the presentation.” He also stated that just “participating in class was a challenge.” For Mohammad the experience of studying in another language left him feeling as though he were

back in elementary school . . . [in the] beginning whenever [he] needed something [he would] have to ask someone to help [him] speak . . . someone who [spoke English] better than [him] . . . like [he would] ask [his] brother to go with [him] to school . . . it’s really hard [he] felt like a child or a handicapped [person].

Experiences of Living in the United States

Many of the participants reported experiencing personal challenges living in the United States, such as missing their culture and family life. In addition, there was an apparent disconnect for the participants between the United States’ individualistic culture and their home collectivistic culture. Another theme the participants expressed was feeling oppressed and wondering how best to survive discrimination and prejudice. Two personal challenges expressed by a number of participants included becoming independent of their parents and the difficulty they experienced acclimating to the weather in the Midwestern region of the United States. In the sections below, each theme that emerged will be discussed and quotations that depict the theme will be shared.

Missing Their Culture and Family Life

Most participants addressed missing their family and their culture back home. For example, Jamel, Mansoor, and Mohammad all indicated that they felt homesick. Jamel stated that he calls his family “maybe once every three weeks.” Jamel expressed that if he calls them too often, he “will feel down.” For Mansoor, “being away from

home . . . and thinking about [his family] and wondering about them was a challenge being in America.” Mohammad expressed that he specifically missed certain things about his home country such as “going to the hookah lounge [and his] mom’s food.”

Kadar addressed a cultural difference between the United States and his home country:

The other thing that I don’t like is the social life [here] is not that strong as ours. Here, for example, you have to make an appointment to go see people . . . and arrange appointments here. . . . In our country, you can come and knock on the door and hang out as you want. We go frequently to see each other. The total system, I mean, we feel comfortable going to [see] each other without any appointment to hang out.

Mansoor indicated that the fast pace of American culture left him feeling somewhat lonely during mealtime with his statement that “. . . one of the negative things [that] affected me is [eating alone]. I used to eat with others but since I came here I had to be alone because everyone is busy and this made me feel like I don't feel [like] eating anything. . . .”

Ahmed captured much of the sentiments expressed by all of the participants in the study. He indicated:

For the first year feeling homesick was the biggest challenge . . . [he] worried about [his] family all the time and thought about them. [He] was okay unless [he] heard about something back home. . . [like] these days [his] brother is having problems with his kidney. . . . [He] can tell through [his] mom’s voice if she is happy or not. [He] can just tell. If she’s not, [he] will think things and worry. . . [he also] sometimes feel guilty and [he is not] able to do stuff [his family] expects of [him] . . . like traveling with them.

Experiencing Racism and Prejudice

Another salient theme expressed specifically by five of the participants was their experiences of racism and prejudice. The other four participants may have experienced

racism and prejudice, however, they did not mention it in their interviews. This theme emerged in the participants' academic and personal day-to-day lives. For instance, Ahmed captured the way in which he and his Saudi friends experienced racism in the classroom with

Well sometimes in the classroom when the professor divides us into groups and stuff like that and sometimes some students don't want to be in the [Saudi students'] group. . . . Or even if they are in [my friends and my] group the [American students] try to work alone and avoid talking to [me and my friends].

Jamel reported an interesting experience because African Americans "assumed he was black." Thus, when Jamel needed anything "from a black person like right away they give it to [him] more than a white person . . . like in the street or something. Black people . . . talk to me more than white people." Abdullah captured the essence of how he experienced racism and prejudice in his personal everyday life:

You see sometimes like in the public places. Racism you see here sometimes while we are at the mall or doing a grocery at Walmart or Meijer especially from old people. They start giving you a weird look like what is this foreign guy doing here. They look nervous and they look uncomfortable for you being around them. They don't want you to be around since you are not white like them. They don't like it. Mostly older people and sometimes at any store when you want to buy something they will like if you give them the money they will throw back the change to you. Just throw it like that. You see from their eyes how they are thinking about you. It's kind of humiliating. Sometimes you have to let it go. Just take your money and leave because you don't want to get into any trouble. I sometimes feel bad. I feel like why am I here now? If I knew it would be like this, I would just stay home.

Jamel recounts a specific instance in which he experienced racism in Connecticut when he asked a hotel worker for a charger for his computer and was told "oh we don't have a charger here." But the next day, when he asked another agent for a charger, he was given one. He concluded that "some people in [the United States] are racist." Jamel also

indicated that another personal challenge he faced, because of his “skin color,” is that of making friends. He stated:

I look like a bad person. So the good American people they do not try to come and stop me because I’m a bad person and the bad American people like some of them come ask me for weed. They think I’m dealer because of the way I look. Seriously. But like then they realize I don’t drink, I don’t smoke and stuff like that and they just run away.

Ali expressed similar experience with people he met in public:

Once I meet people when I walk to the bar, people look at me like I’m weird . . . just I’m a different color maybe or different style or something like that . . . so they just look at me like just wondering who is this guy and what’s he doing here.

Kadar expressed his feelings about how Americans engage in racism as follows:

There is sometimes . . . real . . . or hidden racism . . . it is there . . . I cannot give examples . . . but there is racism. . . . You cannot see it but you know it . . . [professors] and others do not pay attention to [me and my Saudi friends] when we say [our] ideas . . .”

Independent Living

Another theme that emerged for many of the participants was the idea of learning how to be independent and take care of themselves while living in the United States. For instance, Mansoor and Ahmed expressed that they had to learn how to balance their lives and do things for themselves that their mother used to do for them. Ali recounted that he had to learn how to be independent with “cooking and being responsible for [himself] . . . [he] just had to do everything by [himself].” Fahed captures the essence of the theme when he expressed, “It is difficult because back home I have my family to help me. Here I have to do everything on my own . . . like doing the laundry, cooking and paying [his own] bills.” He went on to state that he is “far away from my family so I have to depend

on myself because my family cannot do some of the things to help me.” Mansoor

extended the ideas presented by Fahed with his thoughts:

Living alone is a drama. Living alone made me depend on myself . . . take care of everything alone and do stuff I don’t remember doing . . . a lot back home-like making food, washing dishes and clothes. I even had to put limits and control on money spending . . . I had a student salary from my Cultural Mission, [which] started like two months since I arrived to the United States; yet, I was always careful to not spend everything I had in case of emergencies. . . . I never thought of asking anyone here for support. Even my family. . . I don’t remember taking a penny from them just to show them that I [do not] need it . . . which I don’t. So it made me manage myself in many ways.

Weather Challenges

Another theme that emerged for a number of participants revolved around disliking the weather in the Midwestern region of the United States while simultaneously missing the weather back in Saudi Arabia. For instance, Hussein stated that he “didn’t want to come to the cold,” while Ali’s father’s friends told him he was going to “Michigan so it must be cold most of the time . . . [he] was wondering about snowing because once [he] came here [he] didn’t know how to walk [in the snow] and fell down many times.” Abdullah reported that he had to go to an orientation in Washington D.C. when he first arrived to the United States and discovered that “it was hot in places in the United States, too, but not like in Saudi Arabia.”

Mohammad specifically reported missing the “hot weather in [his] country.” When he was in his country he did not like the hot weather but when he moved to Michigan he came to “miss [the weather] in [his] country . . . because it is too cold here.” Mansoor captured the essence of the participants’ sentiments about the weather with:

Sometimes the weather is a challenge for me. I kept asking myself for many times during a couple of winters like why I am still here? Why can't I just transfer somewhere like warm? Because it gets like up to 100 degrees at night back home in Saudi and it gets here to what you know. So it was kind of different, but later I thought like okay at the end I'm going to go and spend the rest of my life in that hot weather so why don't I just enjoy this different weather for a couple years.

Success Strategies and Strengths

Many of the participants experienced and described their success strategies as those things that primarily motivated them and helped them to succeed. To illustrate, eight out of the nine participants specifically indicated that they were “motivated” to do their best while in the United States. Most participants also felt that they were motivated to succeed because they did not want to “disappoint family members” or “let the Saudi Arabian government down.” The participants also identified a number of personal strengths that helped them to be successful in their studies. The most salient personal strengths that emerged were (a) drive, (b) structure and organization, (c) resiliency, and (d) discipline. In the sections below, each theme that emerged will be discussed and quotations that depict the theme will be shared.

Primary Motivators to Succeed

Within the theme of primary motivators, two salient ideas emerged: (a) fear of disappointing family, and (b) fear of letting down the Saudi Arabian government. Jamel, Mansoor, Ahmed, Abdullah, Hussein, and Mohammad all stated that they “do not want to disappoint” their families and they want to “make [their families] proud.” Specifically,

Hussein stated, “It’s a huge thing for my family. I can’t disappoint them . . . it would be kind of shameful.” Ahmed frankly stated that he does not want to “let the government down . . . they are paying for [his education].” Mohammad indicated, “I want to make my family proud of me and don’t want to let them down. This pushes me to do better and work hard in school.” Ali reported, “I can’t wait to finish up and make them proud. I just feel it’s kind of a pressure. I have to do it even if I can’t do it no matter what and not just for myself but for my family.” Abdullah poignantly captured the external struggle that propels him to succeed with:

I feel like a heavy weight. You have responsibility. I don’t want to disappoint my father. . . . It is a big responsibility to finish school here because you are abroad from your family and the financial support was from the government paying for my tuition and paying the salary for me like the monthly salary that was included with the scholarship. I receive a scholarship from the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to study in America.

Mansoor also captured this external struggle with his thoughts:

I have a big family back home. I am the second born, my dad got married to two women so we are all like yeah my brothers and sisters are ten and I am the second one. So after getting older I realize my dad is like 60 something and my mom is 48 or maybe 49 years old. I realize that I am the second oldest brother and I am responsible for the whole rest of the family so this is why I am finishing up as fast as I can and doing my best here so I can take care of my family the rest of the family when I go home.

Personal Strengths

Within the theme of personal strengths, four salient aspects emerged: (a) drive, (b) structure and organization, (c) resiliency, and (d) discipline. A good example of the participants feeling driven and motivated to succeed can be seen with Kadar’s statement about his primary success factor: “The motivation [to succeed] came from myself, inner,

it was in my blood.” Mansoor pragmatically asserted the essence of one who is internally driven to attain his goals: “The reason I am here is for school. Do here what I came here to do. College changed me. I feel like adult person. I see the world. I must be something so I did it.” Mohammad captured the essence of the importance of structure and organization with, “Maybe two things I brought from my country and use. These are organizing and planning,” while Ali captured the idea of resiliency with, “You have to deal with challenges. You just have to be patient.” Other good examples of the ways in which the participants were personally driven to succeed can be seen in the following quotations from the participants Jamel, Mansoor, and Mohammad:

(Jamel) Being positive that’s it. Being positive yeah. Like even in some classes I was and yeah . . . last semester a professor told me that even if I got a 100 on the final, I will never pass the class. He said it to me yeah. So I was like what if I get 100? He said I don’t believe in what about, I believe in reality, so show me. I was like ok, I’ll show you. I got 100. I worked really hard in that class and I got 100. I got 100 and passed. And my grade was like D/C and he was ok because you got 100, I will put you to C so I passed the class with a C, but I stayed positive, I studied really really hard, and I got what I wanted. That’s one of the strength, the things that make me successful in my life . . . being positive . . . and working hard yeah.

(Mansoor) The first strategy is to be serious and so serious about studying. When it is time to study that means it is time to study. I know a lot of American friends, international friends they don’t take their studies seriously. Some of my friends, unfortunately, I love them so much, but they are still sophomore now because they have switched their programs many times, tried this major and it did not work, tried another one, they weren’t so serious at the beginning so the main thing and the most important thing, and what our parents tell us, our Cultural Mission tell us and what we tell each other that to be serious and to do the goal that you came for. You came here to study and graduate, do it, do that first . . . I did not want to fail.

(Mohammad) First, I always read the class syllabus very carefully, depending on the due dates for the requirements. I determine when I have to start to do the assignments. . . . In class, I try to listen and take notice . . . just write key words. After class, I use my notes to guide me in what is important . . . I try to read the

related topics to the lecture either from a book or an article. There are many things help me to pass, understand the goal of the course, before I submit an assignment I make sure I match the requirements, go to the Writing Center, if there [is] a subject that is hard to understand, I try to ask [a] friend [to] help me understand it or I try to find about the same topic in Arabic. I would tell other Saudi students to start to study early, try to read more and more, try to speak in class from the beginning, do not be shy, try to like determine your goals and then work in them very hard to achieve them, nothing is easy like everything needs hard work to be done. So do not just follow your friend's major just to have him/her help, choosing a major depending in two things. What is your abilities and what do you like doing? You should organize your time, try to sleep early and wake up early, try to pick up a good friend because friends always have an effect on you so, and enroll on a gym.

According to Fahed, his success strategies included “disciplining” himself by recognizing that “planning is important. Sleep early, wake up early, and manage my time . . . see my schedule everyday like what I am going to do . . . see when my classes begin and when I have a break . . . like studying is better than watching TV.” Mansoor addressed this idea more broadly with:

Party when it's weekend, don't make it like there is always a party going on. Enjoy your time, but be like an adult person, think correctly, you are not a child and you will be fine. There is enough time to do everything and don't be too much studying so like spending 24/7 studying on your books is um like because you are going to like explode, you are going to get bored. So organize yourself, enjoy it, enjoy your studies and enjoy it in the right times. When you get vacation, travel and hang out with friends, whatever, you know what you love. But, be serious.

Support

Given that the participants in this study encountered challenges and new experiences in their studies in the United States, it was important to understand the participants' perceptions of their support systems. What emerged in the data was the participants' recognition that having sources of support was crucial to their success in

their cross-cultural experiences. Participants reported that they received support from their professors, religion, other Saudi Arabian students, and their family. In the sections below, each theme that emerged will be discussed and quotations that depict the theme will be shared.

Professors

The most frequently acknowledged support addressed by the participants was the support they received from the professors in their academic programs. The level of support received varied; however, all of the participants indicated that their professors were instrumental in helping them navigate their studies and minor personal issues. For instance, Fahed, Ali, Ahmed, and Hussein all reported that they “go to [their] professors when they have questions about homework, exams, and class.” Mohammad recounted a story about his professor helping him drop a class:

One of my professors at the beginning of the semester helped me to drop his class because yeah it was not [an] appropriate class for me right now. And he went to the department and asked them just please drop this class for him because it happened in the last week now where I can't drop any class or add any class. He helped me to drop his class.

Ahmed discussed a story about his professor helping him during office hours:

My professor saw that I didn't do well on a quiz so he wrote on my paper to come to office hours and I did. He helped me a lot in the office hours so I did better next time.

Jamel indicated that his professors “support” him in a variety of ways. For instance, according to Jamel, a professor opened up a study room for him. He told the story as follows:

Ok so last week I was studying like in the study area and it was cold. Some professor came from nowhere to me. He was like okay it is cold here. I will open this room for you to study. I was surprised that he opened the room for me because the room was warmer and that was nice. So yeah some professors give me keys for the labs and it is okay to go study there. Go ask that professor and he can help you with that and they give me like guidance or something. That helped me a lot. Professors yeah like I don't know how to say, but yeah they support me a lot here.

Mansoor captured the essence of what most participants indicated about the importance of having their professors' support:

I used to ask my teachers on the first day of semester about things like type of questions I should expect, the level of difficulty of this class. I remember in my second year I told the teacher that I had Math, Econ, Accounting, and Business class. I asked him if he thought that I would do fine in his business class and he told me yes don't worry it won't be hard for you. So by asking teachers [early in course] I think it helps us students like get an idea about how things are and just go for them.

Religion

Another important form of support that the participants addressed was the relevance of their religion to their lives. For instance, Mansoor reported that his religion helps him in his daily struggles and teaches him "how to be a human being." He also indicates that his religion has taught him "what [he] should and should not do . . . why to do and not do things." Other good examples of the participants relying on their religion came from Ali and Jamel. Ali simply stated:

I was raised in this religion and I learned to pray . . . this is what we believe . . . so sometimes when you are stuck with something or frustrated with something then you just pray . . . and God will be there for you and make it better.

Jamel reported, “Religious things [help him] because [he] does not spend time drinking and stuff ... or trying to change [himself] into somebody else ... [he] does what he knows is right in life . . . [his] beliefs help [him]” to be successful. Jamel went on to state:

I am a believer and I have to practice my religion even though I am not a good Muslim, but I am trying to be. I pray before I do everything and I ask God to guide me to the right choice, even before I came to the United States, I did that and somehow the other day I feel like I want to do this. Sometimes it doesn't work though, but still I believe even if didn't work it is still the right choice for me so it is pretty much the prayers. I never missed a one single prayer in my life even when I was traveling. I thought it might be difficult to pray since we pray five times a day, but I found out people are cool in the United States. For example, sometimes I ask the gas station guy if I can park my car and pray next to the car. Most people say yes and most let me pray in the same store. I am a believer and I am confessed about what I believe in and I believe God will give me the right things and I either will use it right or not. Just like the internet, people might use it right and raise their knowledge or wrong and watch porn. I'm sorry for my language.

Mohammad captured the essence of the message about the importance of religion as a support system during all times with:

My religion is a big support and important to me because I believe that after death there is nothing that can help me, the only thing [that] does is my religion. I do use my religion to help me. I always ask Allah to help me with something that I need, whenever I get depressed or have a problem, I always pray to Allah asking for help. Also I use it to protect myself from bad things. For example, the Islam says, drugs are taboo so I never use it, here I use my religion to help me.

Other Saudi Arabian International Students

Another clear support that emerged in the data was about how participants' supported each other in their academic endeavors. For instance, Ahmed, Ali, Fahed, and Hussein stated that they receive support from their “Saudi friends here.” Abdullah shared two specific incidents, including one about his cousin whom he “took to the doctor

because he was having some health problems” and the other about how he “allows Saudis to stay with [him] when they first arrive in the United States.” Mohammad stated that he always advises arriving Saudi students that they should “try to pick up a good friend because friends always have an effect on you and can help you.” Fahed, Mansoor, and Ali captured the essence of the depth of support the Saudi students receive from their Saudi friends with:

(Mansoor) We support each other here strongly and we take care of each other. Like one of my friends today was tired and we took him to the clinic. We are two with him. Even the lady laughed and she said when he left “here are your supporters.” When I came here some of the guys like did teach me about the country, culture, where to live, the best things to pick, how to buy a car online and whatever it is. I may not be able to return this good thing to them, but my philosophy, my thinking is to help new students.

(Fahed) My friends tell me how to be successful and they give me advice how to do it. Like they tell me to go to the gym and you work out, you go cook, and I know it’s always about time and following a schedule. My friends helped me when I fell from a balcony once.

(Ali) There was a guy who was here before like maybe he was here two years once I came. So I came and I was like nervous and I don’t know what to do. I ask him where I can live, what I should do, how I can get a bank account because they ask for a bank account and address and there are so many things I have to do before I start school. I have to do them even if I don’t know English so I really needed help you know. So he took me there to the bank and he helped me to have an account and we went to the complex to have an apartment with the American people.

Family

Another primary support for the participants was family. For instance, Jamel advised, “Be good to your parents because they pray for you all the time.” He went on to state that “my family comes first, then my teachers, then my classmates, and then my

friends . . . my family is waiting for me and they are everything I have.” Kadar expressed this theme well with his statement that “my family is the biggest strength . . . because I have a wife and children and I feel that I have more responsibility . . . and this pushes me to work hard.” Ali stated, “My family supports me by praying for me in my studies.”

Mohammad reported that he has support from his wife:

It’s good having my wife here. She supports me and whenever she notices me very sad or something she just comes to me and says “don’t think what you think right now. Don’t feel bad, don’t be like nervous, just think about me. We will have a good time, don’t think about something bad. Don’t worry you are good, we will do it.”

Hussein described the support he has from his family back in Saudi Arabia and the support he gives his brother:

My parents like encourage me, but if I need something they will give it to me no matter what it is, you know. They call me like three times a week and they ask me about the classes. They support me by talking. I have a younger brother who is studying here as well so I am here for my brother to tell him things about the school and show him where things are or give him advice. There are other brothers and sisters from the same family who come here both to study so they sometimes live together and help each other.

Ahmed captured the essence of the family support the participants received:

Whenever I do well in school my family calls me and congratulates me. They encourage me and support me. Whenever I do bad and mess up on some quizzes or tests or something, my family tries to tell me to relax yeah and they tell me that it’s ok. Just thinking about them gives me like a power to study you know and I want to do well for them and they motivate me to work hard. It helps me a lot you know to think of them and to talk to them.

Understanding of the United States and Its People

All of the participants in the study expressed that they came to understand the United States and its people better as a result of coming here to study. The primary

themes that emerged included the idea that (a) the United States is safe, (b) Americans enjoy freedom, and (c) Americans are friendly and kind. All of the participants expressed that it took a substantial amount of time for them to formulate an understanding of what they believe about the United States and Americans. A good example of this idea can be seen with Kadar's statement:

When I came here in 2005 I believed that [Americans] will take [Saudi people] to jail and everyone who goes to United States is jeopardizing himself . . . with time [Americans] got used to [Middle Eastern people] and it was fine . . . [Americans] are actually friendly.

In the sections below, each theme that emerged will be discussed and quotations that depict the theme will be shared.

The United States Is Safe

A number of participants expressed the idea that the United States is safer than they first believed it would be. Ahmed, Mohammad, Abdullah, Kadar, Ali, and Hussein all specifically asserted, "America is safer than [we] thought it would be." Jamel asserted that he was expecting the United States "to be more dangerous because of the media" he observed in his country prior to coming to the United States. He went on to state: "I love living here in America." Abdullah shared a similar thought with "I thought everyone is bad here because of the media," while Mohammad believes "getting out in the midnight is more safe right now . . . you can go wherever you want to go no matter what time. [Americans] are not dangerous like I thought because [Americans] respect and follow the laws so yeah they follow the laws." Ahmed stated, "I thought Chicago and Detroit and some other cities were going to be more dangerous and because of what people said, but I

went there and it's not as dangerous as people said it was." Hussein captured the underlying fears that participants had about living in America in his statement:

It is safer than I thought. Maybe they won't like me here, but they won't hurt me. I feel safe living here and walking the campus and I thought the United States and the people were going to be like more dangerous before I came. The media makes the people afraid of anything because it is a business.

Americans Enjoy Freedom

Participants articulated the theme of freedom in a few ways. First, they discussed the abundance of freedoms they observed in the United States as a whole. For instance, Fahed assessed that

freedom is a big thing because if [Americans] see something wrong in the government or anything [they] can talk . . . the news is here for [Americans] . . . [Americans] can go on television and speak . . . [they] can change something . . . it doesn't matter what it is they can change it.

Jamel asserted that "a good thing in America is equality . . . no man is better than a woman." Ahmed captured the abundance of freedoms experienced in the United States with:

Here people can do whatever they want. If you want to do something you can do it. You have the full control of your life. If you want to go drink alcohol you can and if you want to go to a club every day you can. If you don't want to go to school, you don't have to. In Saudi there are traditions and family relations that will stop you from doing things.

Second, they addressed the way in which Americans have freedoms in the United States that Saudi Arabian people do not share. For instance, Hussein indicated that "Americans can say whatever they want about American politics . . . there is freedom for them as Americans but not for me." Third, some of the participants addressed the specifics of

religious freedoms. Jamel's understanding of religious freedom in the United States is expressed with:

I believe in freedom. Ok like the United States can do whatever they want. Because back home everything we take is Islam, Islam, Islam, Islam but here it's freedom. You can be Muslim, you can be Christian, you can be Jewish, you can be nothing. People have to be more flexible.

Fourth, some of the participants indicated that there was a recognition of how much easier it is for everyone to travel from state to state in the United States. Mohammad captured this idea best with his statement:

Traveling in the United States is easy. I don't need to carry my passport everywhere. I can only use my ID card. Booking online and getting information about cities is easy, too. This is a good thing about the United States you know. It is easy to get around and you are free to get into another state without a customs inspection.

Friendlier and Kinder

Eight of the nine participants reported that Americans are not as unfriendly or unkind as they initially believed them to be. For instance, Ahmed asserted, "The American people are friendly." Mohammad stated that "I find that people are more friendly and most of them smile all of the time . . . right now I change my mind . . . the people [here] are good." Abdullah indicated that "I see what my dad was talking about now . . . there are good people here . . . friendly people . . . and it is not hard to live here and make friendships." Ali stated that "at least I now know the people in the Midwest part of the United States are friendly from living here and being around them." Hussein captured this message with a story about an experience he had:

I do know and really think the people here are good people. Like one time an American girl who I had just met from school on the campus. She is a really sweet girl took me with her on spring break to her family's house. She took me to her house with her family and I met them and she did not have to do that. She said I could come with her because I did not have anywhere to go at that time. She took me to her house and her family was really friendly and nice. She was very nice to do that. It was a really good experience and I will always remember it that week.

Cross-Cultural Impact on Personal Beliefs and Values

Most of the participants expressed that studying in the United States broadened their awareness about other cultures and that this awareness has served as a mechanism for reshaping some of their personal beliefs and values. The overarching idea that surfaced was the participants' recognition that they had gained a respect for and had become more open to other cultures. The specifics of how their personal beliefs and values have shifted surround four primary subthemes: (a) ideas about women, (b) responsibility for providing a positive view of Saudi Arabia, (c) respect for other worldviews, and (d) the obstacles of rejoining their own culture. In the sections that follow, each of the subthemes that emerged will be discussed and quotations that depict each theme will be shared.

Ideas about Women

Most of the participants reported having a shift in their ideas about women. For instance, Abdullah reported that because he was allowed only to speak to women in his family in Saudi Arabia, it was initially hard for him to talk to women in the United States that were not family members. He stated, "It was hard for me to have conversations with

[women] when I first arrived to the United States, but now it's easy to talk to them."

Abdullah also indicated that he "doesn't have a problem" with women being allowed to drive "back in Saudi Arabia." Ahmed reported that he now believes that "women [in Saudi] should have more opportunities for jobs and they should be able to drive. . . . In my country the majority of jobs for women [right now] are in teaching . . . but women should be able to work in other jobs." Ali shared a similar belief to Ahmed with his statement, "I think women have the right to work everywhere just like men have this right." Hussein captured the essence of the shift participants had in their personal beliefs about women when he explained:

You know let me say it. I don't want to hide it or something. A lot of people here they think in my culture like women are like under men always or something. Now I feel like I want to change this thing. I want to show the world like we are equal. We are men and women in Arab cultures are equal. I want to because that thing affects my culture or something. Absolutely I think women should be able to drive. I would like to see that changed.

Responsible to Proffer a Positive View of Saudi Arabian Culture

Almost all of the participants stated that living in the United States has helped them realize how important it is that they portray and provide a positive view of Saudi Arabian culture to Americans. For instance, Abdullah explained that he found himself explaining the positive characteristics of the Saudi Arabian culture to a classmate because she had a "lot of misconceptions about [Saudi people] and [their] culture and wanted to know more." Similarly, Ali reported that he has told classmates about the "good things in Saudi Arabia" in his classes. Mansoor asserted that "[he] is like a messenger for his country . . . [he] has to leave a positive view of Saudi to Americans." He also indicated

that he believes he is responsible to “correct the negative picture here . . . and [responsible] to correct the negative picture of [Americans] in Saudi Arabia. Ahmed, specifically, addressed how he feels “responsible being a Muslim, to give a positive idea about [Saudi people] to [help] change the ideas that some Americans still have about [Saudi people].” Hussein captured the essence of the participants’ beliefs about providing a positive view of Saudi Arabian people stating that, “I am from Saudi Arabia and this makes me a Saudi Ambassador in [America] . . . when I go back to Saudi I will be a United States Ambassador . . . both are important.”

Respecting Other Cultures

Six of the nine participants reported having a greater understanding about respecting other worldviews. The other three participants may have gained a greater understanding about respecting other worldviews, but did not report this to the researcher. Kadar indicated, “I can say the main thing for me is to be open to others, more open, and to accept any other ideas, opinions, without fighting, without working hard to convince people about my culture and beliefs.” Ahmed shared similar ideas with “I’ve gained some experience about other cultures. I know more about different cultures like Korean people and other Asian cultures and I know more about the Western way like in the United States.” Hussein also shared a similar idea when he talked about the importance of “respecting people and their values.” He stated that when “I came to the United States I interacted a lot with people from Japan, China, American, Russian, Italy, around the world . . . I look at people as equal and learn about different ways of doing things. . . I

want others to look at Saudis as equal.” Ali took a broader perspective with his understanding that “we think as human beings. We get benefit from all types of cultures. We learn from them and like gain experience of how to work with all people and get a more open mind and open being in this world.”

Although Abdullah reported that living in the United States did not alter his “personal values,” he has come to understand that he has gained “a respect for other people’s beliefs. . . . It is all about respecting other cultures . . . not judging people about their country or about their beliefs . . . it is about sharing ideas with people and learning about their ideas and society.” Mansoor captured the essence of the participants’ ideas with his thoughts:

After spending all this time here, I met people from all different countries. I learned about American people and learned about others. I met international students and I learned about Saudis. I spoke with Saudis from different parts of Saudi and from different families. It made me realize different cultures and like styles of life. I think more about things and think from others’ perspectives. It makes me more aware of the differences and there are people from different cultures and that some people did not get a chance to see a different culture, to see a different people.

Fear of Fitting into Their Culture

Although only two of the nine participants endorsed that they have a fear of fitting into their culture when they return to Saudi Arabia, this subtheme warrants mention.

Abdullah expressed this fear with “here it is more flexible to live. I will have to adjust to things back home.” Hussein elaborated on his fears of what it will be like to return to Saudi Arabia after having experienced the American culture:

I don't know how to live the rest of my life back home. It is going to be hard because I have made a lot of friends here. I came when I am young. I came like before technology, before Facebook. I mean we have technology back home, but it was not like that big deal, but now it's big deal and I don't know who is my friends. You know when I go back like I went back last year and I just saw my family. I get a lot bored and I just want to come back here because all of my friends are here.

To illustrate and endeavor to integrate key findings, what follows is a composite case narrative of the participants' lived experiences.

Composite Case Narrative

Case of Joffer

The composite student, Joffer, is a male Saudi Arabian international college student in his mid-20s, who came to the United States to study electrical engineering. He indicated that he was excited to have the opportunity to study in the United States. He liked the reputation of the American educational system and was thrilled by the advanced technology he had heard was available in the United States. Joffer stated, however, that while he was excited about the opportunity to study in the United States, he was also very nervous. He worried about experiencing racism and he feared for his safety because of what he had heard from others and what he saw on television about the United States in his country. He expressed concern about being lonely and friendless because he was venturing to a new land away from his family and support system. According to Joffer, he was unsure about what he would find when he arrived in the United States; he just knew that his culture was very different than the culture of the United States.

One of the biggest challenges Joffer faced when he arrived and began studying in the United States was his lack of English proficiency. He felt like this made communicating and studying difficult because, although he knew some English, he was not confident in speaking the language. He went on to explain that even though he took English classes while he was in school in Saudi Arabia, he experienced many difficulties in his American classrooms. Joffer had difficulty understanding his instructors, writing papers, taking notes, and communicating as a whole. He felt embarrassed and inadequate at times speaking in front of the class during required presentations, as well as speaking with classmates one on one.

Another big challenge for Joffer was relying totally on himself. While in his country, his family was very supportive and did a lot of things to make his life simpler. In the United States, he has to do everything by himself, including grocery shopping, washing laundry, managing money, cleaning, and cooking. At first this was really hard and it made him miss his family a lot. He indicated that he missed the familial experiences that were central to his cultural background. For instance, he missed family dinners, holiday traditions, and the time to discuss his day with his parents. Over time, however, he became accustomed to some of the cultural differences and recognized that in the United States there were more freedoms than he had in his own country. For example, Joffer stated that in the United States if an American has a problem with something the government is doing, he can protest without fear of repercussions.

Joffer also stated that he adjusted to taking care of himself and now he feels confident that he can care for himself. In adjusting to being away from his family and the

freedoms he saw Americans enjoy in the United States, he also came to understand that these freedoms were not always available to him. He came to understand that he was experiencing prejudice and racism during his time in the United States. For example, he remembers receiving dirty looks from people in the mall, having to stand in longer lines at the airport to be checked through security, and being ignored by the students in the classroom when they were divided into groups.

Joffer indicated that the personal trait that really helped him succeed was his drive. He was very motivated and he realized that he was very resilient. He structured his time, disciplined himself, and prioritized his responsibilities. A big reason for his motivation to succeed came from not wanting to disappoint his family or the Saudi Arabian government. Joffer spoke of receiving support in his academic and personal life from his professors, family, other Saudi Arabian students, and religion. His family supported him by calling, telling him that they were proud of his hard work, and praying for him. He recalls instances where his professors recognized he was struggling with the work because of language barriers and they offered to help him. He also felt like having other Saudi Arabian friends was helpful, for they would talk to each other when they were feeling lonely or down about something. Finally, Joffer turned to his religion for help with the daily struggles he experienced by praying and he felt as though his religion helped him learn what was right and wrong. Thus, when people tried to encourage him to do things he knew were not right to do, he turned to prayer, other Saudi Arabian friends, and his family.

After studying in the United States, Joffer changed his mind about some things he thought before coming to the United States. He said that he learned that it is safer than he thought in the United States and that Americans are friendlier than he first believed. He remembers experiencing apprehension about coming to the United States to study because the media shown in his country portrayed how unsafe the United States is. He was surprised that he could actually go out at midnight and feel safe. He also believes that he has changed his mind about the rights that women should have in the world. He thinks women should have the same opportunities as men and that it is okay to talk to women that are not family members. He also sees now that people in the United States are kinder than he thought they would be. Although he did experience prejudice and racism, he also experienced kindness and compassion. People often smile at Joffer, and once an American friend took him to her family's house for a holiday so that he would not have to be alone.

Joffer explained that now it is his responsibility while he is in the United States to provide a positive view of Saudi Arabia to the American people. He wants to fix Americans' misconceptions about Saudi Arabian people and the Saudi Arabian culture. He actually feels as if this is his responsibility. He talks to his classmates, for instance, about the positive characteristics of the Saudi Arabian culture.

Joffer believes that because of his experiences of studying and living in the United States, he respects other cultures more and has more of an open mind. By being exposed to other international students, he has learned that different worldviews are not bad, just different. He sees cultural differences more broadly and positively than he did

prior to coming to the United States, and he wants to take that knowledge back to his home country to help his family see cultural differences as okay. Overall, he sees his experiences of living and studying in the United States, while challenging at first, to be very beneficial. He learned a lot about other people, himself, and the United States.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Using a phenomenological approach to analyze the data for this study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students. Note that the researcher defined an international student as one who was born outside of the United States and traveled to the United States to attend school. As the researcher discusses the results from this study and possible similarities and differences to past research findings, it is important to note that the literature surrounding Saudi Arabian international students is minimal, with only a couple of researchers attending specifically to the Saudi experience (e.g., Hofer, 2009; Shaw, 2010). Thus, this study adds to the literature by offering the voice of a group of Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences of studying and living in the United States.

Given that the overall purpose of this chapter is to synthesize, analyze, and interpret some of the key findings from the participants' lived experiences, this chapter begins with an analysis and discussion of the findings. It is important to keep in mind the original eight research questions of the study:

1. What perceptions do male Saudi Arabian international college students report having about the United States before entering studies in the United States?
2. What are male Saudi Arabian international college students' experiences studying and living in the United States?

3. What academic challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
4. What personal challenges do male Saudi Arabian international college students face studying in the United States and how do they experience these challenges?
5. What strengths and success strategies do male Saudi Arabian international college students experience and bring to their studies in the United States?
6. What support services do male Saudi Arabian international college students seek for help and how do they experience these support services?
7. How have male Saudi Arabian international college students' perceptions about the United States changed during their stay in the United States?
8. What has been the impact of male Saudi Arabian international college students' cross-cultural study experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs?

In order to address and discuss the salient information learned from the participants' experiences, this chapter will first discuss the findings organized into five broad areas: (a) perceptions of the United States prior to and after studying in the United States; (b) participants' experiences living and studying in the United States; (c) participants' success strategies and strengths employed while studying in the United States; (d) participants' experiences seeking and receiving support along with what, if any, barriers were experienced in terms of receiving support while studying in the United

States; and (e) the possible impact that cross-cultural study experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States had on these students' cultural values and belief systems. The first broad area discussed relates to research questions 1 and 7; the second area corresponds with research questions 2, 3, and 4; the third area links with research question 5; the fourth area with research question 6; and the fifth area with research question 8. The next section of the chapter is a critique of the study and discusses both the strengths and limitations. This section is followed by a discussion of possible implications for counseling professionals. The final section of this chapter considers possible future directions for research on Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States.

Summary and Discussion of Five Broad Areas

Perceptions of the United States

The perceptual ideas that male Saudi Arabian international college students held about the United States before entering studies in the United States were mixed and included positive, negative, or neutral perceptions. After studying in the United States, participants reported a primarily positive viewpoint about the United States. What follows is a discussion about the salient findings from this first broad area.

Perceptions prior to entering studies. The male Saudi Arabian international college students reported a number of positive, negative, and neutral ideas about coming to the United States. The emerging positive perceptions included such ideas as perceiving the United States as having a strong educational system and offering advanced

technology. The positive perceptions reported by the participants of this study appear consistent and closely related to the findings in the international student literature (National Association for Foreign Student Affairs [NAFSA], 2007), as many countries regard higher education in the United States as the top system in the world with high quality (Altbach, Gumport, & Johnstone, 2001). Constantine et al.'s (2005) study found that participants believed the United States would offer many academic and personal opportunities for African international students. Similarly, Bornsstein (1987) found in his study of 632 international students that one of the top reasons students applied to United States higher education institutions was due to educational resources and advanced technology. Bevis and Lucas (2007) analyzed international students' experiences at colleges and universities in the United States and how their experiences shaped their perceptions. They found that international students mostly reported positive experiences and perceptions interacting with the culture of the United States. In addition, in several studies, although experiencing cultural, academic, and personal adjustment issues, international students still reported positive experiences (Robertson, Line, Jones, & Thomas, 2000; Terkla, Roscoe, & Etish-Andres, 2007; Trice & Yoo, 2007).

In this study, the male Saudi Arabian international college student participants' negative perceptions of the United States prior to studying in the United States included such things as seeing the United States as unsafe for Saudi Arabians and perceiving that Americans would be unwelcoming to them. Minimal research was found about this issue in the international student literature. In one study in a 2007 NAFSA publication, four negative pre-entrance perceptions of international students of the United States and its

people were found. These four negative pre-entrance perceptions included: Americans are not welcoming to international students, higher education is too expensive in the United States, the higher education system is too complex and problematic to navigate, and Americans do not accept international students into their communities. Consistent with NAFSA's findings, the Saudi Arabian participants in this study also worried Americans would not be welcoming and accepting of them. Participants in the current study did not report that higher education is too expensive in the United States or the higher education system in the United States is too complex and problematic to navigate.

In another NAFSA study in 2006, many prospective international students had preconceived perceptions that they were unwelcome in the United States due to the fact that federal student visa requirements in the United States became more stringent post-9/11. Participants in the current study did not report feeling unwelcome. No research was found that specifically addressed Saudi Arabian international college students' negative perceptions prior to entering the United States.

Perceptual changes about the United States. The participants in this study reported a few changes in their perceptions after having lived and studied in the United States. One of the changes in perception for participants was that Americans were indeed friendlier than perceived prior to studying in the United States. This finding is consistent with Jammaz's (1972) study that the majority of his Saudi Arabian participants thought Americans, in general, were friendly. On a similar note, Pinkerton's (2006) study of the perceptions of international students from predominantly Muslim nations found Americans as friendly, open, accepting, honest, and respectful of others' religion. Her

participants also reported that Americans had respect for ethnic differences and differing opinions.

Another change in perceptions for the participants of the current study was that the United States was safer than they thought it was going to be prior to coming to the United States. The finding in the current study is similar to Anson's (2011) study that analyzed international students' perceptions before and after a short-term English as a Second Language (ESL) experience in the United States and explored the influence of varying campus cultural attributes (diversity of the student body, breadth of support for international students, and setting) on these perceptions. Anson's findings revealed that her participants' perceptions of the culture of the United States were changed as a result of their short-term ESL program in the United States in the areas of friendliness, safety, and wealth. In the area of the quality of higher education in the United States, perceptions changed the least because international students already believed the American higher education system was of high quality, similar to the participants in this study.

Experiences of Studying and Living in the United States

During the interviews, the participants gave in-depth responses about their lived experiences when asked about studying and living in the United States. The next subsections focus on academic challenges and personal challenges.

Academic challenges. The findings of this study revealed that one of the most significant academic challenges for male Saudi Arabian international students related to

the ability to use the English language proficiently. This finding is similar to other studies that addressed Middle Eastern populations (e.g., Hofer, 2009; Jammaz, 1972; Motarassed, 1979; Mustafa, 1985; Shabeeb, 1996; Shahmirzadi, 1989; Shaw, 2010). It is interesting to note that the results of these studies span from the 1970s to 2010. Moreover, the findings from the current study also support these prior findings, an idea that is clearly relevant to understanding the needs of entering male Saudi Arabian international college students. It seems logical that this issue emerges as one that is salient across these studies and time span because the Arabic language is significantly different than the English language. The difficulty in acquiring competence in the English language as a primary barrier to academic success is also evident in the international student literature (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Trice, 2000, 2004; Wan, 2001). As a matter of fact, as Terkla, Roscoe, and Etish-Andrews (2007) indicated:

It appears that international students' experiences are fairly similar across the continents and that many of the differences can be attributed to the regions of the world from which the students hail. Thus, it seems that it might be beneficial for institutions to consider developing targeted strategies to address the needs of specific sub-groups of international students. (p. 27)

Personal challenges. One of the personal challenges that male Saudi Arabian international college students experienced living in the United States was feeling homesick. Several participants reported the difficulty of being away from their home and family members where they were surrounded by support. On a similar note, Shabeeb (1996) found that her Saudi and Arabian Gulf international students had difficulties related to homesickness and loneliness. Several studies in the international student

literature were also consistent with the current study's finding regarding homesickness (Al-Banyan, 1980; Al-nusair, 2000; Haneef, 1996; Hull, 1978; King-Irani, 2004; Lin & Yi, 1997; Luzio-Lockett, 1998; Maundeni, 1999; Nydell, 2006; Shaw, 2010; Stafford et al., 1980). The presence of homesickness may be a psychological factor experienced by many international students. Notably, Ying and Liese (1994) found that poor adjustment in international students was strongly predicted by their level of homesickness. Ying and Liese observed that for international students choosing to remain in the United States after graduation, social affiliation with Americans may gain significance for their long-term adjustment.

Poyrazli and colleagues (2004) concluded that social support was significantly negatively correlated with acculturative stress. Similar to international students, the male Saudi Arabian international college students in this study were found to be disadvantaged by the separation from the social support systems that typically affirmed their sense of self-concept and self-esteem (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Pederson, 1991; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2002). This makes sense because Saudi Arabian students come from a collectivist culture where family is the primary basis of identity and status for individuals and a key source of support (Long & Maisel, 2010).

Another personal challenge that the participants from this study experienced related to prejudice and racism. Shabeeb (1996) found that her Saudi and Arabian Gulf student participants experienced social-personal problems similar to those of other international students, except that the Saudis, as Arab Muslims, also face discrimination due to differing appearance and culture, which many non-Arab international students do

not have to face. In addition, Jammaz's (1972) study of Saudi Arabian international students found that 53% of his Saudi participants reported encountering some form of discrimination (e.g., harsh remarks concerning cultural background). Al-Shehry (1989) studied Saudi Arabian graduate students and found that they experienced being discriminated against, particularly with respect to the grades they received in comparison to American students.

Findings from the current study were also consistent with findings from the international student literature. For instance, Poyrazli and Lopez's (2007) study of over 400 students found that the more culturally different an international student was, the more likely he or she was to experience higher levels of discrimination in the United States. In a qualitative study of 24 international college students, Lee and Rice (2007) found that racial discrimination difficulties "run from students being ignored to verbal insults and confrontation" (p. 405).

Success Strategies and Strengths

The third broad area addressed is the success strategies and strengths that male Saudi Arabian international college students experienced and brought to their studies in the United States. Within this broad area, two main ideas emerged: primary motivators and personal strengths. It is important to note, when the participants were discussing motivators and personal strengths, at times it was hard for them to differentiate success strategies from the personal strengths they brought to the process. What follows is a discussion about the salient findings from this third broad area.

Primary motivators and personal strengths. The participants from this study expressed concern for letting family members and their government down as a primary motivator to succeed. This finding makes a great deal of sense when one considers that embedded in the Saudi Arabian culture is the value placed on honoring and not disgracing family (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2000). The participants shared that the personal strengths needed to ensure success included being driven, structured and organized, resilient, and disciplined. While Al-Krenawi and Graham addressed the need to be mindful about the importance the role the family plays in the Saudi Arabian international students' motivation to succeed, Shaw (2010) addressed Saudi Arabian international students' motivation to succeed more broadly. Shaw found that Saudi Arabian international college students in Oregon were a highly motivated and determined group of students. This strength seems understandable when one considers that to study in the United States the participants had to leave their support systems, travel to an unfamiliar place, and experience an alien environment. Moreover, in Shaw's study participants were described as goal-oriented and resilient. Both of these factors emerged in the current study as well; the current study's participants were driven to succeed and described themselves in a way that depicted self-discipline and organization.

An overarching personal strength of the participants in the current study was resiliency. According to Wang (2004), resilience is a person's competency to successfully navigate high levels of change without high levels of dysfunctional behavior. The Harvard Mental Health Letter (2006) defined resilience as one's "capacity to endure stress and bounce back" (para. 2). When some of the other strengths of the participants

are considered together (i.e., disciplined, structured, and determined), they may be broadly interpreted as resiliency. In addition, resilience is noticeable in that these participants overcame a number of personal and academic challenges in order to be successful in their studies. The findings in the current study appear consistent with the findings of Shaw's (2010) study on Saudi Arabian international students. She found her participants to be resilient and asserted that resilience and intercultural competence are foundational qualities that enabled her participants to better adjust to the United States and reach their academic goals. Most closely related to the findings about resilience in the current study and Shaw's study is Wang's (2004, 2009) research on international students. In her research on international students, there was a negative correlation between resilience characteristics and adjustment problem areas, which indicated that a student with high levels of resilience tended to have fewer adjustment problems.

Seeking and Receiving Support

The fourth broad area to be discussed concerned the support services that male Saudi Arabian international college students seek and receive during their time in the United States. What follows is a discussion about the salient findings from this fourth broad area.

Support services. The support services that male Saudi Arabian international college students sought and received during their time in the United States included help from professors, reliance on their religion, and support from their families and other Saudi Arabian students. None of the participants in the current study reported pursuing

professional counseling services to discuss personal and/or academic issues. This is consistent with the international student literature. Professional helping services (e.g., counseling and therapy) are far less accepted in the East than in the West, in general. In the Middle East, there is an expectation that individuals should turn to their family, friends, and social resources (e.g., relatives, neighbors) whenever help is needed (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Qasem, 1987; Ali et al., 2004) instead of turning to professional helping services. To ask for help outside the family is often taken as an offense by many families and may stigmatize the family and the individual (Adeyemi, 1985; Al-Issa, 2000; Al-Qasem, 1987; Ali et al., 2004).

In Shaw's (2010) study on Saudi Arabian international students' success strategies, participants reported using support services such as writing tutors, professors, and teaching assistants. The findings from this study and Shaw's study appear understandable in the context that one of the primary challenges participants reported having while studying in the United States was difficulty with the English language. Also, similar to the current study, Shaw found that one of the major resiliency characteristics of her participants was relying on a support system. An interesting addition to the body of the literature that currently addresses Saudi Arabian international student experiences, however, is the finding in this study that relying on their religion to help them through difficult times was important for the participants.

The results from the current study also appear consistent with a number of studies in the international student literature in which international students reported using campus resources for support (Abel, 2002; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Stoyloff, 1996,

1997; Tseng & Newton, 2002). Tomkovich and Al-Khatib (1996) found that many international students place a high value on understanding their American professors and developing warm interpersonal relationships with them. In a similar study of a group of international students in a business administration program, participants also placed a major emphasis on establishing warm personal relationships with their instructors (Ladd & Ruby, 1999). Although the participants in the current study did not specifically report that they developed warm interpersonal relationships with their professors, they did report feeling as though their professors cared about them and offered them additional support. It is important to note, however, that there were two studies whose results did not support the notion that international students needed to develop strong, caring relationships with their professors in order to be successful. In studies by Omar (1985) and Trice (2000), the participants were successful, but felt that faculty members were not concerned about serving their needs. In Spaulding and Flack's (1976), Schmitt, Spears, and Branscombe's (2003), and Lee and Rice's (2007) studies, international students felt as though they were marginalized in the classroom by professors. Although international students do not need to experience a strong, caring relationship with their professors to be successful, when they do experience one, it is highly valued and experienced as being very supportive.

Similar to the current study, Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) found that the development of strong ties with other people in the campus community helped international students adjust to studying in the United States. They reported that these external relationships provided comfort, security, and help with coping. Al-Sharideh and

Goe's study also found that support communities were the most helpful when international students participated in ethnic groups. Finally, Eid and Jordan-Domschot (1989) studied international students' support needs across seven categories by surveying 85 international students. The researchers found that international students felt that information, academic help, community involvement, interpersonal relationships, English skills, student support, food, and housing were the most central needs. Similar to the findings of this study, international students were generally satisfied with interacting and receiving support from their professors.

Abel (2002) observed the importance of international students relying on support communities because this aids the students in reaching their academic goals. Interestingly, Abel recommended that international students should prepare well for their American experience by understanding that they will be expected to be independent, not overly dependent on professors for direction, that their professors may be less formal than in their home countries, and that universities in the United States have a competitive atmosphere. The male Saudi Arabian international students in the current study did not report having considered these issues prior to entering their studies in the United States. Abel recommended that it may be helpful for international students to prepare for the culture shock of a different academic environment by talking to American students about what to expect, visiting campus organizations, and auditing classes before they begin their programs of study. Experiences of participants in the current study also seem to suggest that student preparation prior to beginning their studies in the United States may be helpful.

Cross-Cultural Impact

The last broad area of this discussion concerns the possible impact of male Saudi Arabian international college students' cross-cultural study experiences in the United States on their personal values and beliefs. What follows is a discussion about the salient findings from this last broad area relating to current literature.

Impact of cross-cultural study in the United States. The participants in the current study felt they had some shift in a few of their personal beliefs and values. They indicated that they wanted to take their knowledge back to Saudi Arabia to help their families see cultural differences as acceptable to have. This is similar to Shaw's (2010) study in which she found that her Saudi Arabian participants wanted to complete their studies and return home in order to contribute to making Saudi Arabia a better place.

Similarly, in a few studies in the international student literature, participants reported how difficult it was to convince family members that Americans are not as bad as they have been portrayed to be in the media in their homeland (Burrell & Kim, n.d; Walters, 2005; Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). For instance, Pinkerton (2006) found that her participants reported experiencing difficulty convincing older families back home that Americans are not as they are portrayed in the media. They indicated that this was a frustration but they were dedicated to presenting Americans in a positive light to their families.

Another impact of cross-cultural study in the United States was the shift participants experienced in their personal beliefs about women. Participants reported that their perceptions about traditional values they held about women in Saudi Arabia were

not ones they would have when they returned to their homeland. They specifically asserted that women should have the same career opportunities as men. Moreover, they reported that they now believed that it is acceptable for men to talk to women who are not family members. Consistent with the findings from the current study, Alshaya (2005) found that more than 80% of his 245 participants believed that

women are as capable of making important decisions as the men in the family, it is acceptable for wives to have higher positions (i.e., education or job) than their husbands, and women, like men have the ability to be good professional workers outside the house. (p. 91)

More than 80% of Alshaya's participants also agreed that women should be able to drive in Saudi Arabia under certain circumstances.

Also consistent with the findings from the current study, El-Banyan (1974) found there was a shift in perception about traditional values concerning women in his Saudi Arabian participants. El-Banyan's participants had more favorable attitudes about women's emancipation after studying in the United States. Al-sawad's (1991) study of male United Arab Emirates students' adjustment and attitude changes after studying in the United States found that the more time spent in the United States, the more talks with Americans, and the more reading of American newspapers, the less agreement the participants had with the traditional values toward women observed in their homeland (e.g., women veiling and driving). Also, Alfauzan's (1992) study indicated how Saudi Arabian international students in the United States observed women's participation in Saudi Arabia's workforce and found that Saudi Arabian international students studying in the United States held more liberal viewpoints than Saudi Arabian students studying in Saudi Arabia.

Another impact of cross-cultural study in the United States was the recognition by the participants that many people in the United States have faulty perceptions of Saudi Arabia. Thus, the participants felt it was their responsibility to provide a positive view of Saudi Arabia to the American people. They also felt as though they were responsible for fixing Americans' misconceptions about Saudi Arabian people and the Saudi Arabian culture. Because of their desire to be perceived in a positive light and fulfill what might be described as an ambassador role, participants may have minimized their negative experiences in the United States.

Overall, the participants from the current study reported that their experiences of living and studying in the United States, while challenging at first, were very beneficial. They felt as though the experiences they had in the United States helped them learn a lot about other people, themselves, and the United States. An important finding in the current study worth noting is that the participants also believed their experiences of studying and living in the United States led them to have a deeper respect for other cultures and a more open mind. Similar to the current study, Akhtarkhavari's (1994) Saudi Arabian student participants indicated that studying in the United States positively affected their conception of education and values by helping them acquire new skills and becoming more understanding of other cultures. Jammaz (1972) and Al-Jasir (1993) found that Saudi Arabian international students' experiences of studying in the United States were generally positive and generally satisfying, and thus they would recommend it to a friend.

Hull (1978) concluded from his study of international students' adjustment that his participants were generally satisfied with their sojourns, similar to the participants in the current study. This finding is specifically addressed in a few studies within the international student body of literature (e.g., Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Hull, 1978; Pinkerton, 2006). For instance, Hull (1978) denoted that, while initially difficult for them, the participants came to value the presence of women in their classes. They reported respect for cultures that incorporate co-ed educational environments, for they felt that the women brought a different point of view to the educational process. In Pinkerton's (2006) study, the participants reported that they came to respect how open-minded and friendly Americans were.

Strengths and Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study involved in-depth interviews that allowed the researcher to capture descriptions of the male Saudi Arabian international college students' lived experiences in their own words. Thus, the study adds to the limited information available about the lived experiences of Saudi Arabian international college students while studying in the United States. The in-person interviews and the amount of time the researcher spent with the participants allowed the researcher to build a trusting working alliance, which appeared to create an atmosphere in which participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences with the interviewer. The in-depth qualitative interviewing method was a particular strength of the study. The researcher conducted initial and follow-up interviews with participants who had been living in the United

States for at least two years. This approach allowed the researcher to obtain some rich data from the participants' stories. In addition, the follow-up interviews provided participants the opportunity to read over and reflect upon their individual narrative summaries that the researcher wrote and sent to them. The participants were then able to discuss their experiences again and to make any additions or changes.

While qualitative methods are a strength of this study, the nature of qualitative research is such that findings may not be generalizable. Thus, the results of this study of a small sample of nine Saudi Arabian male international students studying in the United States may be descriptive of the experiences of this group of students; however, they are not necessarily descriptive of other Saudi Arabian international students studying in the United States or of the entire population. The small sample size is a limitation. In addition, the study may have been limited by the fact that interviews were conducted in English, as opposed to in Arabic, the primary language of Saudi Arabian students. Although the criteria to participate in the current study was that a student must have studied in the United States for at least two years and completed prerequisite English language proficiency requirements, it is possible that some of the participants still experienced challenges understanding some of the nuances of the English language. For example, there were a few times during the interviews when participants asked if they were correct about the definition of a word. The study recruited volunteers to participate and those Saudi Arabian students who volunteered may have differed in ways that are not known from students who chose not to volunteer. Also, all interviews were conducted in the United States, prior to participants' return to their home country, and this may have

also affected study findings; interviews conducted subsequent to students' return to Saudi Arabia by an interviewer from Saudi Arabia may have yielded somewhat different findings. Given participants' desire to be perceived in a positive light and to have Saudi Arabia seen in a positive light, participants may have tended to minimize some negative experiences in the United States. Also important to note is that all participants in the current study were males. Inclusion and the study of female Saudi Arabian international college students may indicate very different lived experiences while studying in the United States.

Implications for Higher Education Professionals

To provide effective services for Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States, professionals may find it helpful to be aware of the lived experiences shared by the male Saudi students in this study. To understand their experiences, it is advisable to understand the cultural context from which Saudi Arabian students come to the United States. It is also important to understand the range of perceptions students experience prior to actually studying in the United States. Gender role expectations within Saudi Arabian culture are particularly salient. Furthermore, the concerns and experiences prior to and while actually studying in the United States related to issues of safety, racism, self-esteem, English language challenges, independent living challenges, and missing their culture and family life are significant as well. These issues may be important to include as part of orientation sessions for new Saudi Arabian students entering studies in the United States. Important to keep in mind, however, is the

broader context that many of the challenges participants reported experiencing while studying in the United States, i.e., concerns about safety, racism, homesickness, self-esteem, English language challenges, independent living challenges, may apply to many international students from different countries around the world. In addition, many domestic students entering higher education institutions may also experience similar challenges related to navigating university life and studies, living on their own for the first time and missing their families. The universality of some of these experiences seems apparent in college students' experience of adjustment to attending institutions of higher education. The universality of some of these experiences may also be important for higher educational professionals to appreciate.

The sources of support identified by participants in this study included peer relationships, family relationships, and religion. Saudi Arabian students bring personal strengths in terms of their resilience and strong motivation to succeed. These personal strengths, in addition to the honor and loyalty these students give to their families, are very important to appreciate. The possible impact studying in the United States may have on the students is also necessary for higher education professionals to understand. In addition, the importance of the Saudi Arabian government and culture to Saudi students seems critical to be aware of, since they view themselves as student ambassadors in the United States.

It is vital to have an understanding and appreciation of the significance of cultural expectations, peer and family relationships, and the impact of separation from traditional cultural sources of support while studying in the United States. These experiences of

Saudi Arabian students shared in the current study may provide higher education professionals with insights into some of the challenges experienced by Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States. In addition, these findings provide possible directions for outreach educational efforts and support services for Saudi Arabian international students in the United States.

Possible Directions for Future Research

This dissertation highlighted the lack of research on Saudi Arabian international students in general, and thus the importance of continued research on this group of international students. Exploration of the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students is still in its early stages, which leaves the possibilities for future research rich and vast. Additional research on Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States is needed. Future research, inclusive of research with female Saudi Arabian international college students, seems important in fully understanding the lived experiences of Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States. This research may be enhanced by also including the perspectives of the participants' family members, spouses, advisors, and professors. Research that includes interviews in Arabic and in-depth interviews after studies in the United States have been completed and students have returned home to Saudi Arabia may be helpful. In addition, mixed methods research using both qualitative and quantitative approaches with larger samples of Saudi Arabian international college students may yield important information. This researcher hopes that this study will be a small component

of a larger body of research that eventually will enhance the lives and educational and cross-cultural experiences of Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States.

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Appendix A
Email Recruitment Script

Email Recruitment Script

Hello, my name is Molly Heyn and I am a doctoral student in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University (WMU). I would like to invite you to participate in a research study designed to explore the experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States. The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States, and to learn about the experiences of these students as they study at institutions of higher education in the United States. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Patrick H. Munley in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at WMU. This study may be an opportunity for you to help add to our knowledge and understanding about Saudi Arabian international students' experiences studying in the United States and provide information that may be helpful to other Saudi Arabian international students.

I am looking for potential male participants who meet the following criteria:

- Saudi Arabian international college students currently studying at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan
- Have successfully completed the English language proficiency requirements at WMU and have been regularly admitted to WMU
- Have been studying in the United States for at least two years

Participation will involve completing a demographic questionnaire, and participating in two tape-recorded interviews that I will conduct at a time convenient for you, involving approximately two to three hours total. The results of the study may enhance the knowledge and understanding of the experience of male Saudi Arabian international college students who study in the United States.

All data collected through demographic questionnaires and interviews will be kept confidential.

If you are interested in learning more about participating, please contact me, Molly Heyn, by email at molly.e.heyn@wmich.edu and provide your name and phone number; or telephone me at (248) 804-8066 to receive additional information. I will contact you by phone to review the details of the study and the criteria for participation.

During the initial phone conversation you will not be asked for any specific information and no information will be recorded. Individuals, who, after learning about the study, express continued interest in participating in the research, will be scheduled for their initial interview and be sent an informed consent document that explains the project. The informed consent will be reviewed, and any questions answered, at the beginning of the initial appointment before participation in the study actually begins.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Molly Heyn, M.A.
Western Michigan University
(248) 804-8066

Appendix B

Telephone Script for Preliminary Telephone Contact to Provide Information About the Study

Telephone Script for Preliminary Telephone Contact to Provide Information about the Study

"Hello, my name is Molly Heyn and I am from Western Michigan University. May I speak with (participant's name)?"

"Hello (participant's name). I am contacting you with regard to your interest in the study on male Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States. Are you interested in hearing more about the study? Is this a good time to talk?"

First, I would like to give you a general idea about the nature of the study. Then I will go over the experiences and characteristics we are looking for among volunteers for the study. This will help you decide if it would be appropriate for me to send you additional information about possibly participating in this study.

The purposes of this study are to describe the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students who are studying in the United States, and to learn about the experiences of these students as they study at institutions of higher education in the United States. In particular one purpose of the study is to help understand *what* academic and personal challenges male Saudi Arabian international college students face and *how* they experience these challenges while studying in the United States. A second purpose concerns understanding how support is sought by male Saudi Arabian international college students in the U.S., how they experience seeking and receiving support in the U.S. and what, if any, barriers are experienced in terms of receiving support while studying in the U.S. A third purpose concerns understanding the possible impact of their cross cultural study experiences in the U.S. on their perceptions, cultural values and belief systems. The results from this study are intended to enhance the knowledge and understanding of the experience of male Saudi Arabian international college students who study in the United States. It is hoped that this will contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the U.S. It is hoped that the findings may be useful and of value to counselors, health professionals, higher education professionals, and instructors in providing support to male Saudi Arabian international college students who study in the United States. This study involves signing an informed consent document, completing a demographic questionnaire, and participating in two interviews. Both interviews will be tape-recorded. Your total time commitment will be between two and three hours.

You will be asked to respond to open-ended questions during the interview. This study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your own thoughts, feelings, and experience as a male Saudi Arabian international student studying at a higher education institution in the United States. All data collected through demographic questionnaires and interviews will be kept confidential.

In terms of volunteers for this study, I am looking for men who meet all of the following criteria:

- Are currently studying at Western Michigan University in the United States
- Have successfully completed the English language proficiency requirements at WMU and have been regularly admitted to WMU
- Have studied in the United States for at least two years

In addition, I am looking for participants who are able and willing to discuss their perceptions about the U.S. before beginning studies here, their personal experiences including any academic or personal challenges experienced, their strengths and success strategies, their experience with support services, and the possible impact and influence of their cross cultural U.S. study experiences on their perceptions, values and belief systems.

If you believe you meet these criteria for participating in this study, and if you are interested in participating and willing to discuss your experiences as part of this study, would you like me to send you additional information concerning the study and to consider you as a possible participant?

If no, "I very much appreciate your time."

If yes, "thank you for considering participating in this study. I would now like to send you additional information on the study and schedule an appointment for your initial interview. The additional information will include an informed consent form that explains the project. [After scheduling the appointment state] I will send you the information about the project and a copy of the informed consent document. We will discuss the study and the informed consent document at the start of your initial appointment. I will also answer any questions you may have about the study at that time. Once the informed consent is completed your participation in the study may begin at that time."

Obtain preferred mailing information and send packet with informed consent. Potential participants will also be given the investigator's contact information in case any questions arise.

Appendix C
Informed Consent

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology**

Principal Investigator: Patrick Munley, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Molly Heyn, MA
Title of Study: The Lived Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian
International College Students in the United States

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled, *The Lived Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian International College Students in the United States*. This project will serve as Molly Heyn's dissertation for the requirements of the doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology, under the supervision of her doctoral program chair, Dr. Patrick Munley. This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?

The purpose of this study is threefold. The first purpose involves the desire to acquire meaningful information to help understand *what* academic and personal challenges male Saudi Arabian international college students face and *how* they experience these challenges while studying in the United States. The second purpose concerns the intent to acquire a meaningful understanding of how support is sought by male Saudi Arabian international college students in the U.S., how they experience seeking and receiving support in the U.S. and what, if any, barriers are experienced in terms of receiving support while studying in the U.S. The third purpose concerns the goal of acquiring meaningful information to help understand the possible impact of their cross cultural study experiences in the U.S. on their perceptions, cultural values and belief systems. Additional knowledge about male Saudi Arabian international college students' academic and personal challenges while studying in the U.S., along with information about the possible impact on this international study experience on male Saudi Arabian international college students' cultural values and belief system appears important. This information may help better inform universities in the U.S. about this population's challenges and support services. This researcher ultimately hopes that this study may be a small component of a larger body of research that helps to enhance the lives of male Saudi Arabian international college students while studying in the U.S.

Who can participate in this study?

To participate in the study, you need to meet the following criteria: (a) be a male Saudi Arabian international college student studying at Western Michigan University (WMU) in the United States, (b) have successfully completed the English language proficiency requirements at WMU and have been regularly admitted to WMU, and (c) have studied in the United States for at least two years. I am inviting you to participate based on

meeting these criteria. Please consider if your relationship with the Principal Investigator or me gives you any reason to think that participating in this study would not be in your best interest.

Where will this study take place?

The study will take place at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Interviews will take place in a private classroom, conference room or office. Data transcription and analysis will take place in the student investigator's home.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

If you volunteer to be a participant, I will ask you to take part in two individual interviews. Before interviewing, I will ask you to sign the informed consent document and then fill out a background questionnaire form. The first interview will last between 1 to 1 ½ hours. The second interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes. Several weeks following the final interview, I will email you an individual interview summary. I will ask you to read this summary and respond to the email with feedback about the summary. If you take part in both interviews and respond to the email, you will have a total time commitment ranging from two to three hours.

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?

Participation in the study involves two phases. The first phase involves completing one form before the initial interview begins. This form is a background information form. The background information form includes personal demographic and academic information. All identifying information will be kept confidential throughout the entirety of the study.

The second phase involves participating in two interviews, an initial in person interview and a follow-up phone interview. The goal will be to complete the initial interview in person at a private location (e.g., classroom). The initial interviews will last between 1 to 1 ½ hours and you will be asked questions about your academic and personal experiences as a Saudi Arabian international college student in the United States. I will digitally voice record both interviews to ensure accuracy of the data.

The follow-up interview will occur after the initial interview and will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The follow-up interview will be scheduled individually, at a time convenient for you, and will take place about three months after your initial interview. The follow-up interview will be conducted via phone. Prior to the follow-up interview you will receive the interview summary for review. During the follow-up interview, you will be asked to clarify any inaccurate information and to describe any additional information that may have emerged since our initial interview. These interviews will also be transcribed by the student researcher and kept in a locked file cabinet in a secure location. Following completion of your follow-up interview you will be able to evaluate your interview experience anonymously via an online survey.

What information is being measured during the study?

As a Saudi Arabian international college student in the United States, you will be asked to discuss your perceptions about the United States before beginning studies here, your personal experience studying here, including any academic and personal challenges experienced, your strengths and success strategies, and your experience with support services. You will also be asked about how your experience studying here may have influenced your perceptions and the possible impact and influence of your cross cultural study experiences in the United States on your personal values and belief systems.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?

I anticipate minimal risk to you while participating in this research. Expected risks include feelings of sadness, anger, stress, or discomfort in recalling or revealing information during our interviews. You have the option to end the interview process at any time if you are uncomfortable and choose not to continue. In the event that you experience strong emotional responses during the interview, I will make a referral to appropriate professionals in your area, at your request. You will be responsible for the cost of counseling if you choose to seek it.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

One of the ways that you may benefit from the study is by having the opportunity to reflect on and share your academic and personal challenges studying in the United States. The information provided by you will be used to contribute to the research literature on cross cultural education and international student adjustment, as well as increase the understanding of helping professionals concerning the experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States. Your participation will also hopefully benefit other Saudi Arabian students in similar situations.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

The time commitment required for participation in this study is a cost to you. Your total time commitment will range from two to three hours.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?

The research materials will all be coded, and the Student Investigator, Molly Heyn will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding pseudonym. The Student Investigator and Principal Investigator will have access to the transcripts labeled with the pseudonym. Any background information you provide will be used for selection purposes, and to describe the interview participants as a group. Once the data is collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. A digital voice recorder will be used during our interviews. The use of a digital voice recorder is to ensure the correct transcription and analysis of the interview data, and in no way will

your confidentiality be jeopardized. After the interviews are transcribed the tapes will then be destroyed. All of the information on tapes, notes, and forms will be placed in a locked and secure location at all times. All of the information collected from you will be confidential. No information specific to you will be reported. The research auditor will help with the data analysis after all transcripts have been de-identified. Upon completion of this project, the principal investigator, Dr. Patrick H. Munley, will store a hard copy of the confidential transcripts, the informed consent paperwork, the researcher's journal, the audit trail, and the computer copy of analysis for 7 years in University Archives at Western Michigan University. The student researcher will present all data in aggregate form only and will not identify specific participants during her dissertation defense and/or if the researchers use the data for a professional presentation or publication.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time during the study without any consequences. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact the student researcher, Molly Heyn at (248) 804-8066 or molly.e.heyne@wmich.edu, the principal investigator, Dr. Patrick H. Munley, at (269)387-5120, or the vice president for research for Western Michigan University at (269) 387-8298.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

By providing your signature below, you are indicating that you agree to respond to the background demographic questionnaire and participate in two interviews. I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant's signature

Date

Appendix D
Background Demographic Questionnaire

Background Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete this background demographic questionnaire by filling in the requested information below.

PLEASE PRINT

Pseudonym: _____

Demographic Information

Current Age: _____ years old

Gender: _____

Home Country: _____

Program of Study: _____

Year in Program of Study: _____

Length of time studying in the United States: _____

Marital Status: _____

Religious Affiliation: _____

Country of Birth: _____

Are you currently enrolled in English 3600/3610? Yes or No

In what way have you met the English language proficiency of Western Michigan University to be regularly admitted? (Please circle one or more of the options below)

Successfully completing the Center for English Language & Culture for International Students (CELCIS) program

Successfully passing the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

Successfully completing the International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Successfully completing the English Language Services (ELS) Level 112

Successfully passing the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB)

Successfully completing the English Language Services (ELS)

Other: _____

Do you feel that you are able and willing to discuss your perceptions about the U.S. before beginning studies here, your personal experiences including any academic or personal challenges experienced, your strengths and success strategies, your experience with support services, and the possible impact and influence of your cross cultural U.S. study experiences on your perceptions, values and belief systems? (*check appropriate box*)

☐ Yes

☐ No

Appendix E
Interview Protocol

Project: The Lived Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian International College Students in the United States

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Location: _____

Interviewer: _____

Pseudonym: _____

Years Lived in the United States: _____

Hello, _____, this is Molly Heyn. As arranged, we are meeting today to discuss your experience as a Saudi Arabian international college student who is studying in the United States. The purpose of this study is to help describe the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students studying in the United States.

Thank you for consenting to participate in this research study. During this interview I will be asking a series of open-ended questions about your experiences in the United States and how those experiences have impacted your life. The interview will be recorded so the study can be as accurate as possible.

Before we begin, do you have any questions that need to be clarified? [If yes, then clarify questions, if no, "Then shall we begin?"]

- Please tell me about the perceptions you had about the United States before entering studies in the United States?
- After arriving, please share your experiences of studying and living in the United States?
- Please tell me about any academic challenges you have encountered while studying in the United States...please describe what the experience of these academic challenges has been like for you.

- Please tell me about any personal challenges you have faced while studying in the United States...please describe what the experience of these personal challenges has been like for you.
- Please tell me about your success strategies and strengths you have brought to the United States that have helped you to be successful in your studies?
- Please tell me about any support services you sought and/or received for help while studying in the United States... (if they have sought/received support services) please describe what the experience has been like seeking and receiving support services.
- Please share how your perceptions about the United States may have changed during your stay in the United States?
- Please describe how your cross cultural study experiences in the United States may have impacted your personal values and beliefs?

General Probes:

At various times during the interviews, the following probes will be used when deemed appropriate and necessary to elicit a more detailed and rich description of the Saudi student's experiences:

Tell me more about that experience.

What was it like for you to experience that?

Explain how that impacted you.

What happened exactly?

Can you give me an example of that?

Can you say more about that?

What does that mean for you?

Anything else you would like to add?

How did that affect you?

Appendix F

Contact Guideline for Scheduling Follow-up Interviews

Contact Guideline for Scheduling Follow-Up Interviews

{The following script is intended to provide a standard guideline for use in scheduling and arranging the follow-up interview.}

Hello, (name of respondent), this is Molly Heyn. I am contacting you because the summary of your first interview is now completed and I am now scheduling follow-up interviews. The next step is for us to schedule 30-45 minutes to complete the follow-up interview by phone. These interviews are important so that we have the opportunity to talk about how accurately your own experiences are reflected in your individual summary. When are you available for the interview? [Ask for phone number if needed] I will be sending you a reminder of our scheduled time and your individual summary for your review. Would you like me to email or mail you your individual summary prior to our meeting?

Thank you again and I look forward to speaking with you on (date and time of meeting) by phone. Please contact me in the meantime should any questions or concerns arise (give contact information).

Appendix G

Letter to Participant Prior to Follow-up Interview

Letter to Participant Prior to Follow-up Interview

Dear (fill in name of participant),

I am looking forward to talking with you on (date and time of interview) for our follow-up interview about your experiences as a male Saudi Arabian international college student studying in the United States. Enclosed is a copy of a summary of your story you shared with me in the first interview. It is important to me that we have the opportunity to talk about how accurately your own experiences are reflected in your individual summary. I am also interested in your reactions to your summary and whether they spark further thoughts about your own experience. I appreciate your taking the time to read this summary, and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Molly Heyn

Appendix H
Follow-up Interview Guide

Follow-up Interview Guide

The following guide will help focus the follow-up interview process. This is not intended to be a script, but a document to provide the researcher with guidance in asking questions that will deepen the understanding of the data collected. The researcher will also facilitate the process and ensure collection of a detailed participant description by using interviewing skills such as active listening, reflection, clarification, and probes.

Participant Check of Individual Narrative

- Discuss participant's reactions to his individual summary (including check for clarity).
- Ask for specific feedback and changes that could clarify or alter the individual summary to better reflect the participant's experience.

Follow up with interview probes as appropriate.

Invite participants to complete an anonymous survey about their interview experience. Tell them they will be receiving an email with the link to the online anonymous survey. Inform the participants that the anonymous survey provides them with an opportunity to share additional anonymous comments they may wish to make about any of the questions asked during the research interviews; and to provide them with an opportunity to share comments or feedback about their participation in this study.

Appendix I

Thank You Email for Participation and Anonymous Survey Link

Thank You Email for Participation and Anonymous Survey Link

Thank you for your participation in the study on the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States. Below is a link to the anonymous survey that you may complete online. The anonymous survey provides you with an opportunity to share additional anonymous comments you may wish to make about any of the questions asked during the research interviews; and to provide you with an opportunity to share comments or feedback about your participation in this study.

Please click on this link to access Anonymous Survey:

Appendix J
Anonymous Student Survey

Anonymous Student Survey

Thank you for participating in the study on the lived experiences of male Saudi Arabian international college students in the United States. This is an anonymous survey that provides you with an opportunity to share any additional anonymous comments you may wish to make about any of the questions asked during the research interviews; and to provide you with an opportunity to share comments or feedback about your participation in this study.

1. Please write any additional anonymous comments you may wish to make about any of the questions asked about during the research interviews in the research project (Lived Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian International College Students in the United States).

2. Please share any comments or feedback you wish to provide about your participation in this research project.

Thank you

Appendix K

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 12, 2012

To: Patrick Munley, Principal Investigator
Molly Heyn, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Amy Naugle".

Re: HSIRB Project Number 12-01-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "The Lived Experiences of Male Saudi Arabian International College Students in the United States" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: January 11, 2013

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