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Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students within a Team Project Setting at an U.S. University

Ronald A. McKean

Western Michigan University, mckeanr@ferris.edu

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EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SAUDI ARABIAN
STUDENTS WITHIN A TEAM PROJECT SETTING AT AN U.S. UNIVERSITY

by

Ronald A. McKean

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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April 2016

Doctoral Committee:

Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D., Chair
Sue Poppink, Ph.D.
Ghada Mahdi, Ed.D.

EXPLORATION OF EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SAUDI ARABIAN STUDENTS WITHIN A TEAM PROJECT SETTING AT AN U.S. UNIVERSITY

Ronald A. McKean, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2016

Cultural differences between Saudi and American students produce immense challenges to a successful integrative acculturation. Positive experiences can not only enhance the education of international students, but also effect understandings and attitudes of local students, administrators, faculty, and staff. A greater implication of these experiences may be their influence on long term international relationships. Few qualitative studies have been conducted that examine the dynamics of the cultural integration of Saudi students with American students during the acculturation process.

The purpose of this qualitative research, therefore, is to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students as they integrated with American host students on project-based, team learning assignments. These semi-structured team environments required members to interact, resolve conflicts, contribute to problem solving, and exhibit leadership. Using a phenomenological approach, 10 Saudi students studying at a rural Midwestern U.S. university participated in a series of three semi-structured open ended interviews. These interviews capture the experiences and perceptions of the participants as they interacted with host students within and beyond their project team environment, and revealed experiences within the host community that influenced their team acculturation.

From the rich interview data, findings were derived that added clarity to Saudi acculturation. Prominent findings from this research reveal the encompassing effects of language deficiencies, lack of understanding of the local culture, difficulties adjusting to a mixed gender environment, neo-racism, and incompatibilities in the held values between the Saudis and the host. Most of the Saudi participants found that these barriers were surmountable and could be overcome through resilient thinking and by developing positive and meaningful relationships with their host team members. Findings also reveal the supportive role that the course instructor can play as well as campus interventions (including project based, team learning assignments) that can advantage the acculturation experience.

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Ronald A. McKean

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

International students bring diversity to a university that can enhance cultural understanding and improve relationships between nations. The benefits of international student exchanges, however, are often spoiled by fears, insensitivities, and bigotry (Lee & Rice, 2007). These students bear the burden of adapting to a new culture; often while coping with an unwelcoming administration, faculty, host student body, and society. Amid feelings of homesickness, isolation, academic stress, language anxieties, and discrimination, the richness afforded by the international experience can be sabotaged (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

The distinct cultural differences of the Middle East, intense political scrutiny by the U.S. media of that region, and fears associated with Islamic extremism, result in Saudi Arabian students being highly vulnerable to what Lee and Rice (2007) described as neo-racism; a form of racism rooted in cultural rather than in racial differences. Lin (2012) found that the cultural norms in education can also effect perceptions of these students. For example, active participation typical in the American classroom may conflict with accepted classroom etiquette of the visiting student. As a result, the Saudi students' lack of interaction within the classroom may be perceived by both instructors and classmates as being disinterested or being academically inferior to American students. These factors are exacerbated by language deficiencies and generate substantial barriers for Middle Eastern students to adjust socially and form meaningful relationships (Lin, 2012).

Barriers that impede a positive international experience for Saudi Arabian students include language, cultural norms, religion, neo-racism, and ethnocentricity. Studies indicate that these can result in homesickness (the greatest social concern of Saudi Arabian students), followed by the inability to establish friendships, and loneliness (Hofer, 2009). Jung, Hecht, and Wadsworth (2007) described how real and perceived prejudice can affect the psychological wellbeing of the visiting student and interfere with adaptation. While many institutions have introduced acculturation programs, such as the International Peer Program (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998), these do not provide wider insights into root issues.

This research explores how Saudi students understand their experiences as they engage with host students in project teams within the framework of a university course. Through an interviewing and journaling process, this study reveals insights into the experiences of Saudi students with their host peers in this semi-structured, social-educational environment. The knowledge acquired through this research can be used to help guide the development of proactive interventions that assist Middle Eastern students in building supportive relationships, reducing cultural barriers, supporting a mutual understanding of cultures between Middle Eastern and host students, and better prepare faculty to manage multicultural learning environments.

Problem Statement

The success that international students experience in the United States has wide implications. Not only can a positive visit enhance the education of the international students, it can also forever change the understanding and attitude of host students,

administrators, faculty, and staff who interact with them (Gopal, 2011; Kimmel & Volet, 2012). A greater implication of the effects that these experiences may have is in long term international relationships. The importance of this relationship for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia lies both in building improved perceptions of Arabic culture worldwide (Hilal & Denman, 2013), and in sustaining a long term initiative to build a knowledge based economy (Denman & Hilal, 2011). In support of this, Saudi Arabia, for economic, social, and political reasons, has invested heavily in providing international educational opportunities for its citizens (Denman & Hilal, 2011). Language, culture, racism, and even world events, however, impose substantial threats to a constructive international experience for Saudi Arabian students (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010).

Previous research findings help to guide the focus of this proposal study. Lin (2012) demonstrated that international students faced increased struggles in areas such as: academic, social interaction, acculturation, and finances. However, Hendrickson, Rosen and Aune (2011) found that international students who had greater interaction with the host culture had a more enriching and satisfying experience. Moreover, studies show those interactions between the international student and host student benefit both the international student (Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011) and the host students (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). In fact, failure to interact and begin an acculturation process can result in substantial psychological health issues, such as depression (Trice, 2007) and identity confusion (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007) in international students.

Much research has been done to address barriers that interfere with the international students' ability to interact with host students (e.g., Lemke-Wescott &

Johnson, 2013; Mamiseishvili, 2011; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011). Greater cultural and religious differences, as well as the volatility of reported Middle Eastern events, serve to magnify the difficulties in Saudi student's ability to interact with their American hosts. Research themes here tend to align with: (a) language and self-efficacy, (b) culture norms and religious differences, and (c) neo-racism.

Language is often noted in research as a substantial detriment to interaction, particularly when there is less cultural familiarity (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013). Cultural and religious differences also effect acculturation in the classroom (Lemke-Wescott & Johnson, 2013), the dormitory (Alhazmi & Nyland, 2013), and in social interactions (Razek & Coyner, 2013). Research studies indicate that these can result in: homesickness (the greatest social concern of Saudi Arabian students), the inability to establish friendships, and loneliness (Hofer, 2009).

Lee and Rice (2007) also uncovered several incidents of neo-racism against international students in their research. Similarly, Daraiseh's (2012) study found that when Arab students experience racism and discrimination, the result can be a hostile environment and decreased academic performance. Jung et al. (2007) described how real or perceived prejudice can affect the psychological wellbeing of the visiting student and interfere with adaptation.

The classroom environment can also present unfamiliar norms that challenge the learning and performance of Saudi international students in U.S. universities. Research has shown that Saudi students are more accustomed to relying on their instructors to provide information which they are expected to accept and memorize (Lemke-Wescott &

Johnson, 2013). Further, Alshare and Miller (2009) found that decision making in the Saudi culture is delegated to the authoritative figure. In contrast, western education expects students to be questioning, critical thinkers who have much greater ownership in their learning (Hilal & Denman, 2013; Lemke-Wescott & Johnson, 2013). Despite research on issues experienced by international students, few qualitative studies have been conducted that examine the process of cultural integration of Saudi Arabian students in the American classroom. In particular, research was lacking that reveals insights on how Saudi Arabian students interpret their experiences when they are assigned to a project group charged to successfully complete course related projects. Such semi-structured group environments require members to interact, resolve conflicts, contribute to problem solving, and exhibit leadership. Research was needed to determine how Saudi students experience acculturation in these group environments that may deviate in significant ways from the classroom norms in their home countries.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study is, therefore, to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students, enrolled at a Midwestern university, as they integrated with the host students on team-based engineering or technology focused projects. The experiences of these Saudi students as they blended into their project teams are generally defined as “cultural integration.” This integration process served as the context in which this study explored the experiences of the Saudi students.

The central focus of this study is: How Saudi students describe their cultural integration experiences as they engage with host peers in team-based learning projects.

Specific research questions that guide the study include:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?
2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?
3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?
4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?
5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

Theoretical Perspective

Central to the theoretical framework used to guide my study are three components: (1) acculturation orientations adopted by immigrant groups, (2) acculturation adaptations by the dominant culture towards specific groups of immigrants, and (3) cross-cultural change resulting from the interaction of the immigrants' and the dominant cultures during the acculturation process (Ngo, 2008).

Three theoretical models describing acculturation are described by Ngo (2008). First, the unidirectional model, which describes the absorption process of one culture into another. The model is considered unidirectional since the cultural change occurs only in

the immigrant and results in a total loss of cultural identity. Next is the “bidimensional” acculturation model, which includes a more insightful perspective of the assimilation process. Here the assimilation process is described as complete when (a) the immigrant culture has little interest in maintaining its cultural heritage and (b) when it gains preference to developing relationships in the dominant culture. The bidimensional model also assumes cultural adaptation to occur only on the part of the immigrant culture.

The third theoretical model described by Ngo (2008) is interactive acculturation. This model asserts that both the minority and dominant cultures will influence each other as the assimilation process occurs. Ngo points out that the interactive acculturation model states the assimilation process leads to: (a) the dominant culture becoming tolerant toward the immigrant minority maintaining their native culture, and (b) the immigrants identifying themselves with the dominant cultural group into which they will be assimilated. In this model, the immigrants are considered to be fully acculturated when the same criteria defined in the bidimensional acculturation model is attained. I will use the interactive acculturation model to assist in interpreting the themes that surface from my research data.

The evaluation of themes emerging from this study was done in the context of both the minority (Saudi) culture and the dominant (domestic) culture experiencing change during the assimilation process. Entering into this study, the thought was that if little transformation can be recognized, the value of international experience from student exchange should be challenged and its effectiveness questioned.

The theoretical framework of *interactive acculturation* is associated with those cultural changes that occur when different cultures are merged into the same space. Interactive acculturation asserts that the minority culture will affect the majority culture as it is being assimilated. This framework aligns with an analogy of an ice cube dropped into a pot of boiling water. The ice cube represents the minority culture (Saudi students) and the boiling water the majority culture (host students) merged together within the pot (academic course). When the ice cube is dropped into the pot, both the temperature of the ice cube and the water are affected. Neither is comfortable in the shared environment. The host student's cultural adjustment is reflected by a slight temperature drop. However, it is the Saudi students that must experience the greater change as they assimilate into the majority culture. Although the flame under the pot (external societal influence) will eventually bring the homogeneous mix back to a boil, I would hold that the influence of the interaction will make a lasting change in the perspectives of the host students, as well. This elevated understanding of the minority culture will serve to diminish communication barriers (Fageeh, 2011). Unlike the ice cube, regardless of time or environmental influences, a core essence of a minority culture may never be forfeited by the Saudi students

My study on the interaction between Saudi Arabian and host students was embedded into engineering or technology courses where team projects are required. Positioning the research in these semi-structured settings created an environment where interaction was not only emphasized but also necessary for the success of the entire team. The directed nature of the team focused students on a common outcome. A study by

Kimmel and Volet (2011) supports that project stress is experienced mutually between international and host students. Therefore, this study explored in part whether these project stresses may overshadow those stresses associated with cultural factors. Data collected through journaling and interviews with the Saudi students resulted in knowledge that will be useful for academic and international administrators, faculty, and students for understanding barriers and determining interventions that enhance cultural integration.

Studies, such as Lin (2012), have addressed the multiple barriers that may have emerged in this study on interactive acculturation. Of these, Fageeh (2011) would support that communication fears and deficiencies may be the most inhibiting barrier to socialization. His studies indicated that lack of confidence in English speaking may detour Saudi students from pursuing interaction with host students. As a result, both faculty and host students may be uncomfortable engaging the Saudi students due to the strain of understanding their speech and fear inadvertently making remarks that might be misinterpreted as offensive. Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010) suggested that formal interactions with host students would be advantageous to overcoming this barrier. However, efforts to overcome communication barriers may be further hindered in this study by the introduction of a team project environment where there is competition for leadership and influence.

A second substantial barrier that may be demonstrated in this study may result from reluctance by both the Saudi and host students to having their cultural and religious tenets challenged. These apprehensions, magnified by cultural ignorance and self-doubt,

may emerge as a major deterrent to socialization. Findings from past research indicate the Saudi students in this study may perceive that both they and the host students harbor what Neider (2011) refers to as “mythical” (p. 8) understandings of each other. His study supports a shared responsibility for this persisting barrier to acculturation.

Third, it is commonly reported that Middle Eastern cultures are collectivistic (Razek & Coyner, 2013). Students who have left their families, security, and culture to study in the United States have already demonstrated traits of individualism. However, three interviews within this study may surface collectivism as perceptions of interpersonal and project group interactions are conveyed. These may emerge as issues associated with ethical norms between the cultures. For example, Redden (2013) reported that collectivistic ideals lead Saudi students to justify academic dishonesty when committed to assist other Saudi students.

Finally, accounts of neo-racism and ethnocentricity (Cargile & Bolkan, 2013) are also expected to be revealed in the interviews that have seriously tainted the Saudi student’s experience in America. These experiences may be rooted in politics and violence linked to militant Middle Eastern and Islamic groups. While racism cannot be condoned, their origins cannot be ignored. It is hoped that evidence will emerge from this study that greater understanding and respect has resulted from direct interactions of the culturally mixed students. This finding would back one of the primary motivators of the Saudi-funded international education scholarships and political efforts that have made these exchanges a reality (Hilal & Denman, 2013). A visual representation of these issues is provided in Figure 1.

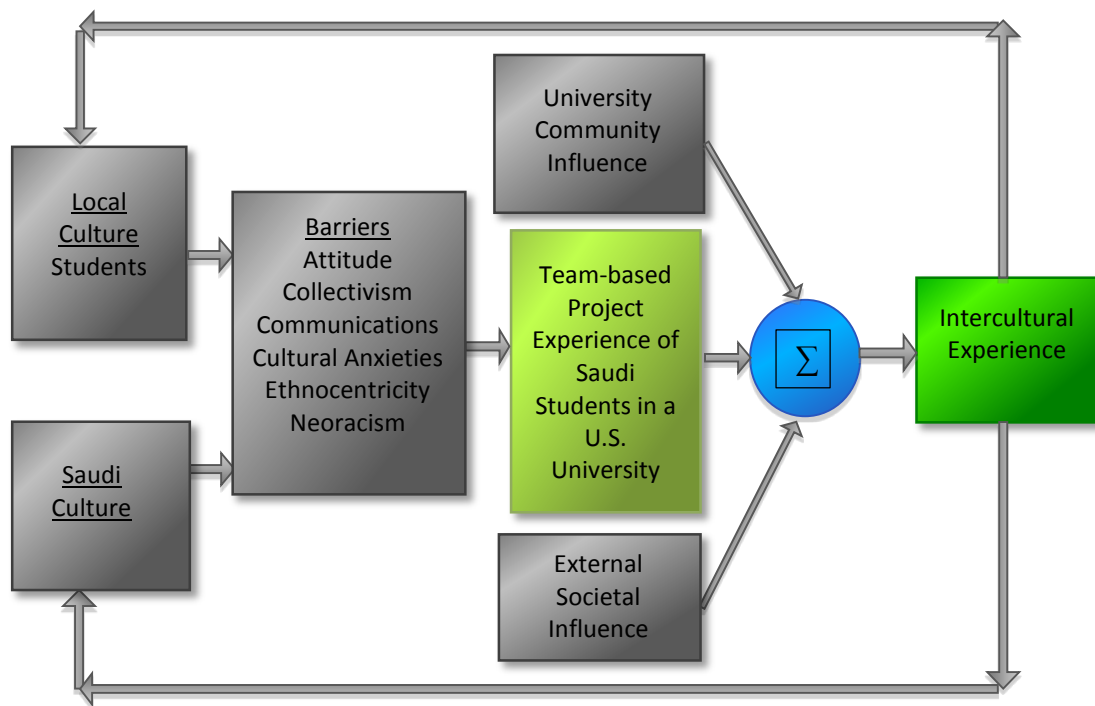


Figure 1. Interactive acculturation framework applied to a project setting.

Methods Overview

The qualitative research approach I chose for this study is phenomenology. This methodology is well suited to understanding the lived experiences of Saudi Arabian students attending a Midwestern U.S. higher education institute and who are participating in the project-based, team learning assignments required by courses in engineering or technology based programs. Each of the ten Saudi participants were studied as they worked alongside host students as a project team focused on fulfilling course requirements. Three in-depth interviews supplemented by journal submissions provided data that illuminated the perceptions and interpretations of these international students as they began this new phase in their acculturation process. From chronological insights on

attitude, events, experiences, and perceptions, themes emerged for interpretation and analysis.

Further elaboration on the research methods and procedures is provided in Chapter III of this document.

Summary

Saudi Arabian students bring a richly diverse culture to American university campuses. A constructive, international experience is essential for the Saudi student, as well as for their sponsors and the host institutions. However, immense challenges confront the Saudi students as they endeavor to integrate into the American culture. As the ice cube analogy also illustrates, a successful acculturation occurs when both the minority and the dominant cultures experience growth as a result of the process. Achieving a cultural interaction that results in a positive influence on the attitudes and mental models of both the Saudi and the host student requires overcoming multiple barriers. Barriers introduced include: language, cultural norms, religion, neo-racism, and ethnocentricity. Understanding how Saudi students perceive their lived experience as members of academic project teams will lead to a greater understanding of how to mitigate the effects of barriers as well as means to stimulate success.

This study reveals insights into the attitudes and perception of Saudi students as they experienced team relationships within a project centered environment. The knowledge gained here may be useful for developing proactive interventions that assist Middle Eastern students in developing supportive relationships, reducing cultural

barriers, and supporting a mutual understanding of cultures between Middle Eastern and host students.

Findings may also be used to assist faculty in gaining a greater understanding of classroom pedagogy and dynamics that are most effective in achieving academic success and positive intercultural experience for both the Saudi and the host student.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Successful international study can provide a rich, life-changing experience for the traveler as well as the host. Past research is examined in this chapter that explores factors influencing both success and failure. These studies create the foundation for this proposed research and its valuable contribution toward the success of the Saudi Arabian student's international study abroad experience. Previous studies on international student experience include: models for success, barriers and destructive obstacles, insights into the cultural behaviors and attitudes, and insightful research specific to the acculturation issues of Saudi students.

This dissertation endeavors to research perceptions of Saudi students as they experienced cultural integration within semi-structured project based courses. Research themes that emerged during my literature review include: the importance of international study to the stability of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the benefits of cultural integration for international students, barriers that inhibit integration, and how culture can affect academic performance. These themes guide the presentation of this review. Research themes here tend to align with: (a) language and self-efficacy, (b) culture norms and religious differences, and (c) neo-racism.

Issues of National Stability

Understanding the importance of the Saudi international study abroad program and its objectives are foundational to this research. Awareness into both the circumstances under which Saudi students are participating and the values they and the

Saudi Arabian government are attaching to their experience are important for interpreting the Saudi students' perceived experiences within the context of this study. Insights are also revealed into the root sources of barriers that confront Saudi students during their study abroad experience and how they affect their adaption to the American culture.

Despite wealth, envied resources, and a strong unified culture, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia understands the urgency of not only competing with the global community but also joining it. The IndexMundi (2014) reported that in 2012 this nation of over 29 million people had a budget surplus of 12.6% of their \$727 Billion GDP, of which 80% is derived from finite oil reserves. Even with a seemingly healthy economy, unemployment is surging at nearly 25% in young males (15-24). Interviews conducted by Hilal (2013) supported the importance for the Saudi government to create employment opportunities fitting its growing population of college educated graduates. Rifai (2014) reported that with 11.5% of adult males and 32.1% of females unable to find acceptable work, and national unrest was becoming evident. In describing the unrest of the millennial generation, Cole (2014) wrote of the effectiveness of tech savvy youths in launching the recent revolutions in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt. These uprisings were fueled by both social injustice and unemployment. Yet, over 80% of the jobs in Saudi Arabia were being performed by non-Saudis. Many of these jobs are shunned by Saudis since they represent service and manufacturing jobs that are considered undesirable and attached to a cultural stigma.

Recognizing the need to provide acceptable employment to reduce the country's dependence on its finite oil reserves and to position Saudi Arabia to compete in a

globalized world, the Saudi government is investing 25% of their budget in education (IndexMundi, 2014). The government's success hinges on educating its citizens and establishing a knowledge-based economy (Denman & Hilal, 2011).

With this in mind, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud established the King Abdullah Scholarship Program (KASP) promptly after becoming the king and absolute ruler over Saudi Arabia in 2005. According to the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education (2014), the KASP vision is "To prepare distinguished generations for a knowledge society built upon a knowledge-based economy" (King Abdullah Scholarships Program, Vision). The KASP goals include:

- Sponsor qualified Saudis for study in the best universities around the world,
- Work to bring about a high level of academic and professional standards through the foreign scholarship program,
- Exchange scientific, educational and cultural experience with countries worldwide,
- Build up qualified and professional Saudi staff in the work environment, and
- Raise and develop the level of professionalism among Saudis. (King Abdullah Scholarships Program, Goals, para. 1)

The ICEF Monitor reported that the KASP program represents an annual investment of about SAR 9 billion (\$2.4 billion U.S.) and sponsored about 130,000 students to attend universities in 23 countries in 2013 ("Enormous Saudi scholarship,"

2014). Further, in January 2014, there were over 65,000 Saudi international students in the U.S. (“Country Reports,” 2014). Recently it was announced that the scholarship will be extended until at least 2020 (“Enormous Saudi scholarship,” 2014).

Complicated by the extremist actions of militant groups, such as the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in 2001, and the persistent media coverage of middle-eastern turmoil, the Saudi government also understood the necessity of cultivating a more positive representation of the Arabic culture throughout the world (Hilal & Denman, 2013). Although not explicit in the program’s mission statement or goals, each of the 130,000 Saudi students acts as an ambassador for Saudi Arabia by their presence in the host countries. Hilal (2013) reported concerns that participating in international education would weaken the Saudi students’ cultural and religious identity, expose them to values incompatible with Islam, and create attitudes of change contrary to the Saudi Wahhabi tradition. Hilal’s research demonstrated that a large percentage of the Saudi students she interviewed believed that a primary purpose of their study abroad was to educate their host countries on the virtues of Islam.

Achieving a quality university degree is not the only determining factor of success for the Saudi nation. The less quantitatively defined perceptions and attitudes formed as a result of the study abroad experience can have even larger implications. Hilal and Denman (2013) concluded that these personal interactions break barriers of destructive mental models built through a barrage of biased media and become an effective tool for peace.

The Importance of Cultural Integration

International students benefit universities by adding campus diversity, academic talents, and economic gain (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Positive international experience also develops global citizenship, cosmopolitanism, and resilience in both the visitor and the host. Caruana (2014) explained that meaningful international experience goes beyond concepts of student mobility. The process of becoming a global citizen requires the traveler to move beyond the comfort of being an invisible presence that merely absorbs their new, foreign environment. Instead, the experience must be interactive and present challenges, hardships, and discomforts. Overcoming these is an important part of cultivating resilience and the ability to interact in a shared *cosmopolitanisation* process that can strengthen self-efficacy and intercultural understanding.

Caruana (2014) distinguished the experience and attitude of simple tourism from cosmopolitanism. The tourist experiences new places but lack a desire to engage at a deeper level where true intercultural understanding or a broadened sense of belonging can occur. Caruana stated that meaningful interaction is a requirement for mitigating prejudice. Cosmopolitanism describes this expanded perspective of being a member of a global community and is achieved through meaningful commitment to cultural immersion.

Cheung and Yue (2011) defined resilience as simply “the buffering of stress in sustaining adjustment” (p. 354). Their study on Chinese international students supports the importance of resilience for maintaining health and attitude during a study abroad

experience. According to Caruana (2014), resilience is an individual skill developed and reinforced through experiences of mobility and intercultural engagement. Caruana also provided several definitions of resilience including "...the ability to recover quickly from difficult situations" (p. 86). Caruana acknowledged that resilience is built upon an individual's inherent physical, mental, and psychological traits as well as their available support structures (i.e., family, friends, faith, etc.). Like muscle strength, resilience develops through challenge. In the context of cultural integration, diverse experiences associated with travel and acculturation, when not overwhelming, can build resilience.

These findings indicate that shaping positive perceptions of a study abroad experience that better develops global citizenship, cosmopolitanism, and resilience for the Saudi international student in the U.S. will also involve overcoming multiple challenges. The body of knowledge that addresses these challenges is presented here in the context of (a) language and communication, (b) culture norms and religious differences, and (c) academic success.

Communication and Language

There are a number of studies which looked at communication and language issues for international students. Lin (2012) emphasized that language is the greatest challenge for international students to overcome. Even students that have an understanding of English are hindered by accents, slang, and words that had special significance (Lin). Her case study, involving six international students, examined how international students interpreted their academic, cultural, and social experiences in the U.S. Lin found that language was a major barrier to academic success and social

interaction, which, in turn, affected student attitudes and satisfaction with their international experience. In another study, Lee and Rice (2007) conducted a survey at their research university in the Southwest U.S. of over 500 international students and conducted 24 in-depth interviews concerning experiences with discrimination and racism. Their study also affirmed the importance of language skills to student satisfaction and indirectly to the persistence of students in their study abroad experience. Lee and Rice also associated language to experiences of discrimination, isolation, and as a discouragement to receiving assistance. Similarly, Tananuraksakul and Hall (2011) conducted 28 in-depth interviews at their Australian university to better interpret the experiences of these international students, each from a non-English speaking country. Their studies emphasized that language was a major concern to students transitioning into an English speaking culture. Hardship with language was associated with a lack of dignity consequently leading to insecurity. These behaviors were destructive influences on their psychological health as well as their ability to achieve academic success.

As another example, Abukhattala (2013) performed a qualitative study involving ten Arab undergraduate students attending universities in Montreal that emphasized the fundamental importance of language as an expression of culture. He also found that communication was the most common difficulty experienced by these international students. As a result, language became a source of student stress that affected other aspects of their experience in the host country.

Finally, Sherry et al. (2010) conducted a survey of 121 international students attending his university in Toledo, Ohio to research challenges to cultural adaptation.

Suggestions provided by his participants included for the university to facilitate both formal and informal opportunities to improve language skills. At the conclusion of the research, it was suggested that less formal social interactions, outside of the classroom would serve to encourage social networking help in learning popular slang.

Communications and Cultural Understanding

Fageeh's (2011) research addressed the importance of cultural understanding to communications. He found that without an understanding of the speaker's and listener's cultures, there is more chance of misinterpretation of the meaning of the communications. Fageeh's review of existing literature emphasized that culture is a window into the interpretation, attitudes, and characteristics of communications. He pointed out that while English speakers, for example, tend to be objective and to use speech to communicate concise ideas, Arabic speakers, in general, differ in that they tend to communicate subjectively. Written communication is also different. For example, an American writer will, in general, write direct statements to communicate information; an Arabic writer will conversely write in a more fanciful and subjective style. Fageeh stated that: "...researchers believe that EFL students' cultural mistakes when learning English fall into four categories: social-linguistically inappropriate, culturally unacceptable, conflict of different value systems, and over simplification or over-generalization" (p. 66). Humor or intent can easily be lost as a result. Fageeh proposed that host country culture be integrated into English teaching courses. This would not only add to the effectiveness of communications, but also build cultural knowledge and sensitivity.

Kimmel and Volet (2012) provided insight that is especially relevant to my proposed dissertation regarding the importance of communication to cultural interaction. These researchers sought to better understand student attitudes toward working in culturally diverse, student led groups over the duration of course projects. Kimmel and Volet also wanted to better understand how the students interpreted this experience after the project concluded. This Australian study included 81 science and 88 business student participants who were required to complete course projects in self-managed and self-selected groups. The selection process resulted in groups that were culturally mixed and others that were not. Data collection was performed using a questionnaire to examine attitudes towards participating in culturally diverse groups. These were followed up with in-depth interviews.

Kimmel and Volet (2012) discovered that students expressed less stress and reported experiencing more fun when they could communicate with members who came from similar cultural backgrounds. Negative attitudes towards working in a diverse group focused on deficient language skills. Interview responses frequently linked poor communication skills to assumptions of academic inferiority and lower ethical standards. Interestingly, this study found that the post project attitudes toward mixed groups remained constant in members of the mixed groups but declined among the monoculture groups. This was largely attributed to the experiences communicated from their mixed group peers.

Another insight provided by Kimmel and Volet (2012) was the importance of introducing culturally mixed learning experiences during the first year of university

experience. After this period, students had already formed mono-cultural cohorts and attitudes that served to dampen cultural interactions. Similar to my proposed research, this study also incorporated research on intercultural experiences occurring within a career relevant context.

Acculturation and Health

Several studies have researched various aspects of acculturation and those stresses associated with this process. One of these was performed by Norwegian researchers, Kunst and Sam (2013), who studied the influence that societal acculturation expectations and peer ethnic group acculturation expectations have on the individual's desire to acculturate. The researchers described four levels of acculturation: (a) no acculturation and rather a complete and conscious separation from the majority culture, (b) full acculturation and complete assimilation into the majority culture while consciously separating from their own ethnic culture, (c) becoming marginalized by rejecting both their ethnic and the majority cultures, and (d) integration by adapting to the majority culture while retaining their own ethnic heritage. Note: this integration by adapting closely corresponds to the *bidimensional* acculturation model but falls short of interactive acculturation as described by Ngo (2008).

Kunst and Sam (2013) identified marginalization as creating the greatest acculturation stress while integration created the least. To determine the influence of ethnic peers and majority society expectations on acculturation they surveyed 865 participants, 262 Pakistani immigrants to England, 301 Turkish immigrants to Germany, and 302 Meghrebis (Maghreb countries are Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, and

Mauritania) to France. Their surveys revealed that the acculturation expectations of their ethnic peers were a significant influence on their acculturation decisions. Societal expectations, however, were not significant. Although this study did not target Muslim students or Saudis, its results may be indicative of the Saudi student's motivation to integrate into the culture of the host university.

Another possible predictor of acculturation stress, personal growth initiative, was studied by Yakunina, Weigold, and Weigold (2013). Using the Personal Growth Initiative (PSI) instrument, the individual's motivation and ability for planned, intentional self-improvement and growth can be gaged. The researchers noted past research that demonstrated that the PSI is related to emotional health and ability to make life adjustments. The PSI measures: (a) planfulness, (b) readiness for change, (c) intentional behavior toward growth, and (d) use of available resources. The authors cited past research that provided evidence that those students who possess these traits were better able to acculturate and thereby experience less stress. The authors cited research that suggested that individualistic cultures might be more likely than collectivistic cultures to possess personal growth initiative. However, they also recognized disagreement amongst researchers as to the validity of the PSI for collectivistic cultures. In a similar study, Yakunina et al. surveyed 386 international students (about 42 from the Middle East) studying in the U.S. Demographics, individualism-collectivism, PGI, acculturative stress, and psychological adjustment were all measured. Results associated the positive traits of personal growth initiative with reduced stresses and reduced likelihood of psychological health issues. Their findings, however, did not find a difference between

the student's culture and possession of personal growth initiative. These researchers speculated that both individualistic and collectivistic cultures were equally likely to possess the traits but perhaps driven by different motivators.

Jung et al. (2007) contributed research on the effects of identity gaps, perceived discrimination, and acculturation on student mental health. Questionnaires were returned from 218 international students (96 undergraduates) that addressed their study abroad in the U.S. Identity gaps formed as international student's own perception was confronted with a) how they expressed a non-authentic identity to others, and b) how they believed their host's perceived them. Perceived discrimination was particularly damaging since it portrayed negative identity images and a stifling effect on the student's self-expression. Jung et al. referred to international students as a vulnerable population since they experience multiple stressors including culture shock, a loss of their support networks, difficulty communicating with the host culture, and were targets of perceived discrimination. Students that possess support and skills to acculturate were better able to communicate authentically in their host relationships and retain a cohesive identity. However, those who struggled were more prone to depression (Jung et al., 2007). This was also supported by Tananuraksakul and Hall (2011) who linked difficulty in communication to detrimental psychological health issues.

Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) performed a "connectedness" test on 84 international students. Their results supported the positive value of developing a network of friendships from their host country. While the authors cited studies on the values of co-national friendship to relieve stress, build self-esteem, and to help each other

contextualize their new culture, they also pointed to studies showing less academic success than their better acculturated peers. They concluded that international students with more host friendships were better able to adapt, had less stress symptoms, and were more satisfied with their international experience.

Acculturation and Socialization

Research performed by Trice in 2004 and in 2007 recognized the negative consequences of social isolation on the psychological health of international students. Her research targeted a better understanding of why isolation occurs and then made recommendations to encourage cross-cultural interactions. Trice (2004) surveyed 497 international graduate students to better understand their social patterns. Results indicated that campus engagement was a predictor of social interaction. Campus engagement afforded international students with social capital leading to greater opportunity for socialization. An observation by Trice as she conducted her research on international students from around the globe was that the 27 Middle-Eastern and 11 African students had the least interactions and least interest in interacting with host students.

Trice's (2007) research involved interviewing 27 faculty from four different departments to better understand faculty perceptions on why meaningful cultural interaction was not occurring. Her results showed that: (a) foreign students preferred to socialize with other students who spoke the same language and had similar cultural backgrounds; (b) it was easier to communicate with others in their native languages; (c) foreign students lack the time to pursue socialization with host students; (d) host students

did not pursue interaction with foreign students. Trice also related her findings to cultural foundations in individualism and collectivism. She suggested that in collectivistic cultures (i.e., Saudi Arabian) family and society structure provided the social boundaries, so there was less effort required to create social ties. Individualistic cultures require greater effort to create friendships since they are not as defined by cultural norms.

Trice's research (2004, 2007) concluded by offering suggestions that might encourage more meaningful social interactions between the international and host students. These included faculty intervention through team based activities. This method was also supported by Kimmel and Volet (2012), who found that interactions could be increased when such interventions are introduced. They reported that this could be accomplished by helping host and international students feel a sense of belonging to a mutual group.

Ngo's (2008) study discussed the interactive model of acculturation that states the majority culture of the host will also be affected by the presence of an acculturating minority. Luo and Drake (2013) conducted research to better understand this interaction. Their research data was collected through surveying alumni from four different universities who graduated in 1985, 1995, and 2000. Each of these universities reported increased campus diversity over these periods. Results from this research suggested that intercultural engagement benefits the student's development of academic and practical competence and promotes greater willingness to challenge their beliefs. To achieve greater rewards from a culturally diverse campus, Luo and Drake recommended: (a)

faculty to interact with undergraduate students outside of the classroom, (b) intercultural engagement, both formally (e.g., project groups) and informally (e.g., social activities), (c) students take coursework outside of their majors that contribute intercultural knowledge, and (d) students take advantage of study abroad and then share those experiences with their peers.

Attitude, Faith, and Cultural Integration

Alreshoud and Koeske (1997) discussed the importance of students having a positive and willing attitude toward acculturation as an important component for success. In their study, they applied the well accepted *contact hypotheses* to Saudi Arabian students. The hypothesis proposed that social contact with a different culture will result in the development of more positive attitudes toward that culture. According to the hypothesis, visiting Saudi students that possess a positive attitude toward developing meaningful relationships with Americans will seek out and experience more social contact which then reinforces their positive attitude. The objective of Alreshoud and Koeske's research was to test this causal relationship using a questionnaire approach on a sample of 74 culturally dissimilar Saudi Arabian university students. Results demonstrated that the contact hypothesis cannot be accepted unequivocally and is dependent on factors such the student's beginning attitude as well as their contact experiences.

Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) provided insight into the experiences of Saudi students (one female and one male) as they integrated into the campus dormitory. Unlike many aspects of acculturation that can be controlled by the Saudi student, the dormitory

environment presents a particularly complex challenge. Alhazmi and Nyland's Australian study described the intrinsic relationship between the Islam and Saudi identity. Within a mixed gender dormitory, where Saudi students are often paired with non-Muslim roommates, maintaining Islamic law and tradition may be threatening and a major inhibitor to socialization. The researcher's ongoing phenomenological research provided insights into the fear and adjustment of the male and female Saudi students as they adjusted from a culture that practices extreme gender segregation to a dormitory inhabited by both male and female students. Alhazmi and Nyland's participants were gradually able to resolve their fears and challenges to build greater comfort in socializing in the mixed gender environment.

Calkins et al. (2012) also studied the implications of being Muslim within a mixed dormitory environment. The four Muslim student participants (three female and one male) came from African and Asian countries. Results supported that pre-campus outreach to students to assist assuring roommate compatibility and the creation of campus living environments that better facilitate religion and culture. Despite discomforts experienced by each of these students, they were able to share their beliefs and culture while growing from experiences with their host culture. This study also highlighted the importance of intercultural engagement in order to promote greater understanding.

Racism as a Barrier

A powerful barrier to a positive international experience and the ability to achieve effective cross-cultural interactions is neo-racism. Neo-racism was defined by Lee and Rice (2007) as a form of discrimination that is founded on the basis of culture rather than

race. They also stated: “Neo-racism does not replace biological racism but rather masks it by encouraging exclusion based on the cultural attributes or national origin of the oppressed” (p. 389). Their survey of over 500 international students and interviews of 24 international students of mixed cultures, revealed stereotyping and threatening confrontations resulting in feelings of discomfort. Racism can take the form of violent hate crimes or subtle acts of discrimination including, as Lee (2010) pointed out, university insensitivities to the foreign students’ burden of adaptation. Lee and Rice described the importance of changing the context of campus internationalization to that of international exchange where there is a joint effort between the visitor and host to achieve better cultural understanding. They also recognized struggles associated with adapting to the host culture that can impact psychological health.

Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, and Ulleberg (2012) found that in both Germany and Norway strong anti-Muslim sentiment persists and has continued to increase since the 9/11 terrorists attacks on the World Trade Center. Their survey study of 210 Norwegian-Pakistanis and 216 German Turks found that nearly all had experienced forms of discrimination, negative portrayal in the media, and Islamophobia (described as the fear of Muslims as a social group). As a result, many Muslims take on behaviors, attitudes, and associations that can compromise their identity. Brown and Jones (2013) performed a study of English international students that also revealed an increasing tide of racism against international students and Islamophobia. The authors attributed this in-part to media that depicted Muslims as a danger and undesirable presence in their society. Of the 150 international students visiting from several countries participating in a

questionnaire, 49 experienced discrimination and, of these, 15 were described as physically abusive. The subsequent interview of 33 of the students revealed that some students responded by withdrawal and denial of their national identities.

Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013) performed similar research on 15 Muslim graduate students at a U.S. university. Themes emerging from their research produced both positive and negative experiences. However, instances of discrimination were also prevalent. Although the study could not clearly discern the cause as racial, religious, or both, the discrimination contributed to greater social isolation, identity gaps, and difficulties in acculturating. Some students that adapted to American culture felt more isolated from fellow Muslims. These raised concerns from the researchers over the detrimental effect on the student's psychological health.

Another form of racism occurs in the form of ethnocentricity. Ethnocentricity is described by Cargile and Bolkan (2013) as the belief of the superiority of one's own group and the prejudgment of other groups as inferior. Ethnocentricity produces racist attitudes and behaviors. Cargile and Bolkan cited literature supporting the normality of this categorical behavior and provided a more granular definition of neo-racism as both intragroup and intergroup in character. Intragroup ethnocentricity differs from intergroup in that it is rooted in values and norms it idealizes in itself. The authors discussed means to mitigate ethnocentricity based on the knowledge of these components. The first two pedagogical methods are didactic and experiential. Didactic methods are based on providing cultural familiarity through information while experiential provides intercultural exposure. Cargile and Bolkan attested to evidence that both increased

cultural tolerance and decreased intergroup ethnocentricity. However neither didactic nor experiential approaches were effective in mitigating intragroup ethnocentricity.

Cargile and Bolkan (2013) performed research to better understand if Uncertainty – Identity Theory (UIT) could be applied as an effective reducer of intragroup ethnocentricity. They proposed that intragroup ethnocentricity is based upon the identity and importance one gains from a certainty of their group's norms. A behavioral response would be to avoid interaction with foreign cultures that might challenge the surety of these values and norms. This intolerance is described by Cargile and Bolkan as rooted in a form of uncertainty anxiety or from life stresses. In my dissertation study intragroup ethnocentricity might explain the host students' avoidance of and hesitation to socialize with the Saudi students. UIT strategy is based on building a tolerance for uncertainty.

Their study gains credibility in the mirrored findings by Caruana (2014) and Cheung and Yue (2012) who both found resilience to be a trait formed through adapting to the uncertainties and hardship of international travel and acculturation. Resilience is purported to enable international students to better reduce stress associated with anxiety and detrimental mental health effects.

UIT strategy may also find support through a study performed by Harrison (2012) that sought to understand the root causes of ethnocentricity in young undergraduate students. Harrison recognized that intercultural interactions between host and international students could be framed around two themes: ethnocentricity and cultural intelligence. He also realized a dichotomy in student behavior. Aligned with the intentions of international exchange, some students were eager to embrace cultural

interaction. Others were inhibited through such barriers as communications, perceived threats to cultural norms, neo-racism, and out-group negativity. Questionnaire responses that Harrison received from 718 undergraduate students under the age of 21 revealed that demographics, student personality traits, and early life experiences were factors. He concluded that intervention earlier in the students' university experience reduced their fear of new experiences. This aligns well with the UIT strategy for intervention provided by Cargile and Bolkan (2012). One means for implementing this would be through group work exercises in the classroom that promote cultural interaction (Harrison, 2012).

Culture and Academic Success

Lemke-Westcott and Johnson (2013) stated: "Culture underlies and affects values within education and the workplace, as well as learning and teaching styles within the classroom" (p. 67). While little research has been directed at maximizing the academic success of Saudi Arabian students, it is clear that culture and acculturation cannot be separated from classroom experience. Redden (2013) pointed out some of the effects of culture seen in the Saudi international student including: opting to place family obligations over academics, justifying academic dishonesty in order to assist their peers, and tendencies to resort to negotiation with faculty. These cultural traits further disadvantage Saudis when university faculty and staff are unaccustomed with these behaviors and lack understanding of their roots (Redden, 2013). Since the King Abdullah scholarship has provided international opportunities beyond the most academically prepared Saudi student, the struggles of the less prepared students will be amplified by

cultural differences. This section explores Saudi culture and where it applies to academic success.

Collectivistic Cultures and Academic Success

The U.S. was characterized as an individualistic culture that is defined by Razek and Coyner (2013) as a culture that emphasizes: “personal autonomy, independence, self-realization, individual initiative, privacy, and individual decision making” (p. 106). An alternate description from Hofstede, as quoted by Taras et al. (2013) is: “A loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and of their immediate families only” (IND-COL Conceptualization section, para. 1)

In contrast, Razek and Conyners (2013) defined collectivism as: “a group of conceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values tied to one’s own specific group of people linking one’s bonds to a range of social concerns” (p. 106). Again, an alternate and perhaps more descriptive definition from Hofstede, as quoted from Taras et al. (2013):

...a tight social framework in which people distinguish between ingroups and outgroups, [and] expect their ingroups to look after them, and in exchange for that they feel they owe absolute loyalty to it. (IND-COL Conceptualization section, para. 1)

Razek and Coyner (2013) sited the rising enrollment of the Saudi Arabian student in the U.S. and the importance of researching culture to better understand the adaptation of these students. While there is controversy over the one dimensional description of an individualistic-collectivistic continuum, it is widely accepted that Saudi culture is highly collectivistic. Razek and Coyner asserted that the collectivistic character of the Saudi

culture plays a major role in their response to their environment, social interaction, and academic experience. One example of how this affects the Saudi academic experience lies in the contrasting classroom environment. In a collectivistic culture, students learn from a teacher whose knowledge is beyond challenge. This environment deemphasizes creative, critical, or individual thought (Razek & Coyner, 2013). Learning in the U.S., however, has evolved to meet the needs of an individualistic culture.

Lemke-Wescott and Johnson (2013) also linked learning styles and educational values with the students' cultural background. Their research demonstrated that Middle-Eastern student culture is more collectivistic (higher importance on family and less independence) than their Canadian peers. The Middle-Eastern students placed significantly less value on performance. Other notable differences reported by Lemke-Wescott and Johnson included the Middle-Eastern student's greater tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. These differences in values conflict with Canadian (and Western) style education that emphasizes independent thinking, assessment based on performance, and time management. Lemke-Wescott and Johnson used learning style assessment instruments (Kolb and the Vermunt inventories of learning styles) and interviews to evaluate the learning style of their Qatar students compared to the students on their Canadian campus. Results supported their hypothesis that teaching and learning styles may be culturally mismatched. For example, the Middle Eastern students' learning style favored concrete experience while faculty utilized pedagogy that was based on abstract conceptualization.

Research provided by Abukhattala (2013) reported Arab students being more accustomed to memorization and rote learning rather than critical thinking and being taught as opposed to being encouraged to learn. This was supported by Lee and Rice (2007) whose study revealed faculty criticisms regarding the Middle-Eastern student's lack of appreciation for critical thinking. Their acceptance of ambiguity and expectation to be taught was also criticized in that study by faculty who were annoyed by students' unwillingness to assume responsibility. Hilal and Denman (2013) also found that young people in Saudi Arabia were highly dependent on authoritative figures and lacked responsibility. This was attributed to Saudi upbringing where they are typically sheltered from responsibility and expectations.

To help achieve success for these students, Razek and Coyner (2013) recommended cooperative and group strategies be incorporated into classes in order to assist Saudi students in adapting to learning in the U.S. classroom and to build social interaction and bonding. Research done by Mamiseishvili (2012) also supported concepts of group interaction. His non-experimental analysis of student success data concluded that persistence in higher education for international students is positively associated with interactions within both their academic and social environments. Mamiseishvili's study recommended that, in addition to frequent faculty and advisor engagement, faculty use group learning techniques to encourage social interactions. Luo and Jamieson-Drake's (2013) quantitative study of graduates from multiple universities highlighted benefits to group interactions and international experience. This study also

recommended lengthy group or cooperative course projects to assist both U.S. and international students in the development of intercultural skills and perspectives.

Collectivism and Ethics

A study performed by Williams, Tanner, Beard, and Chacko (2014) demonstrated a strong relationship between collectivistic culture and academic dishonesty. Their survey based research collected data from 345 business students in the U.S. universities and 164 business students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Results showed that both U.S. and UAE students participated in some form of academic misconduct. The major difference was the attitude toward the cheating. UAE students did not view cheating behaviors with the same seriousness as U.S. students. The authors' study also demonstrated findings that collectivistic cultures, in contrast to individualistic cultures, are more tolerant of cheating in order to assist other societal members. In this respect, they are also more collaborative in their cheating. Another explanation for the less condemning attitude is that the concept of an owned idea is foreign to a collectivistic society and also a recognition of their co-dependency. Razek (2013) found similar results through student interviews. Saudi students did not attach the same level of severity to cheating as did faculty. Although the Saudis believed that cheating was wrong, their definition of cheating was much more conservative and restricted to stealing from another. For the Saudi students interviewed, achieving a passing grade was a more important concern than academic honesty.

One suggestion offered by Razek (2013) was to incorporate Saudi students into peer groups in order to reinforce values and reduce stress associated with course failure.

Peer Dynamics in Project Teams

Multiple researchers whose work has been discussed in this review have recommended group projects in order to catalyze interaction between the international and host students. A study performed in Hong Kong provided a well-focused argument for these recommendations. English style universities in Hong Kong are concerned with developing meaningful intercultural experiences between host students and the recent surge of culturally dissimilar mainland Chinese students. Similar to the Saudi students in an American university, these Asian groups have widely differing cultures and also experience significant communication difficulties. Sit (2012) conducted research at a Hong Kong university to study the interaction between host and mainland Chinese students. By immersing herself in 11 classes taught by seven different instructors over a five week period she was able to observe level of peer engagement. Her finding mirrored other researchers who noted difficulties in generating interaction between host and international students. Sit observed behaviors characterized by the preference of like background students to interact with each other while social interactions with those of different cultures were avoided. She also noted that while there was a healthy interaction between faculty and both mainland and host students, interaction was both limited and tenuous between the groups of students. Sit's findings revealed the need to create mechanisms for interaction within courses and encouraged group learning experiences, such as project teams, to foster acculturation. She cited multiple benefits to assigning diverse students groups to achieving a common purpose. These included: building teamwork skills, developing a sense of common identity, interactive peer to peer

learning, exposure to mixed learning styles, and developing a more comfortable rapport. According to Sit, these forms of intercultural engagement support healthy cultural integration.

Group learning in the form of project teams have, in fact, been commonly employed in engineering and technology programs. Learning outcomes sought by these programs and required for accreditation have been strong motivators for embedding team projects onto curriculum where these outcomes can be both developed and assessed. The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET, 2014), for example, includes 11 required learning outcomes for engineering programs to gain accreditation. Among these, five criteria are especially well suited to team project experience:

- ... (d) an ability to function on multidisciplinary teams
- (e) an ability to identify, formulate, and solve engineering problems
- (f) an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility
- (g) an ability to communicate effectively
- (h) the broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global, economic, environmental, and societal context. (ABET, 2014, p. 3)

While team projects can support student growth in each of these outcomes, they can also become forums for conflict due to the emergence of negative member behaviors. Borrego, Karlin, McNair, and Beddoes (2013) conducted research that included the review of 104 papers, published between 2007 and 2013, on team based projects. These

were used to analyze both desired outcomes as well as negative team and team member behaviors.

Desired outcomes fell into ten general categories: teamwork, design, communication skills, industry like learning, self-directed learning, study of team behaviors, ethics, and motivation and retention. Several of these align with Sit's (2012) recommendations for building an interactive experience that supports acculturation.

Borrego et al. (2013) went on to point out issues that emerged from their research that presented challenges that could strengthen or erode the project teams' success. The five major issues included: social loafing, interdependence, conflict, trust, and shared mental models. The contrasting cultures of the Saudi and host students involved within this research dissertation may result in these issues surfacing. For example, if the Saudi students characterize a strong collectivistic character and the host a strong individualistic character, social loafing (waiting for others in the group to do the work), interdependence (where team members become overly dependent on a leader) will likely create inner team conflicts. If the ethical norms of the students are not aligned then trust issues are likely to challenge group functionality. However, as these researchers point out, learning to self-manage through these issues is an important educational experience that the project team environment not only affords but, to some extent, forces.

Summary

Previous research has demonstrated that the international experience of the Saudi students has significance beyond the individual student and reaches into issues of political, social, and economic stability, as well as building bridges of understanding

across disparate and conflicting cultures. Studies in this review highlighted the vital role that socialization and acculturation have for international students to mental health and academic success, as well as satisfaction in their experience abroad. However, multiple inhibitors also emerged through the literature search. Chief among these were: lack of communication skills, socialization, attitude, and racism. Pronounced cultural and religious differences between Saudi students and their host American societies serve to fortify these barriers and their negative consequences.

Several researchers reinforced the role that multicultural experiences had toward forming a positive international understanding for visiting students. A central message from some of these studies was that acculturation and socialization were important to the international students' mental health as well as their overall satisfaction and impact of the international experience. Some examples included: Kunst and Sam (2013), who found it least stressful for the minority group to integrate into the majority culture without letting go of their cultural identity; Jung et al. (2007) who documented that a practical means for reducing international student depression was through increased acculturation; and Hendrickson et al. (2011) who connected acculturation with a healthier and more meaningful international experience. Other researchers also linked acculturation to academic success. For example, Kimmel and Volet (2012) linked acculturation with healthier stress levels. They supported incorporating mixed learning experiences early in the university experience while student attitudes toward culturally mixed associations could be more effectively influenced. This would already be too late according to Alreshoud and Koeske (1997) who found that attitudes entering the university played an

important role in willingness to pursue meaningful engagement with dissimilar cultures. Similarly, Trice (2007) linked academic success to cultural integrations and included recommendations that courses incorporate group projects as a means of encouraging interaction.

While these studies supported acculturation and incorporating formal interventions to encourage multicultural engagement, they did not explore how the international student would understand their lived experiences as they interrelate with American students in semi-structured project groups. Insights gained from my study produced knowledge that can result in more effective preparations for faculty, international students, and host students for intercultural engagement. The substantial cultural divide between the Saudi student and their less travelled American hosts increases the significance of this study as a contributor to the Saudi student's academic success, and achieving positive and meaningful cultural interaction in America.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The literature review revealed that previous research on international students lacked qualitative studies that examined the experiences of cultural integration of Saudi Arabian students in the American classroom. In particular, previous research did not provide insights on how Saudi Arabian students interpret their experiences when assigned to project groups in a semi-structured environment where interaction, group responsibility, and leadership are all required. Further, research had not been identified on the relationship of these experiences to researched barriers in acculturation.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students, enrolled at a Midwestern university, as they integrated with the host students on team-based learning projects. Such students were placed within semi-structured settings that may have affected cultural integration.

Research Design

In order to study the shared acculturation experiences of individual Saudi Arabian students, I used a phenomenological approach to inquiry since it best applies to deriving meanings of the shared experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Phenomenology applies to an ontological philosophy where multiple understandings of reality are held by each of the Saudi participants (Creswell, 2013). The interpretive framework of this study aligns with social constructivism where these students hold subjective understandings of their individual experiences (Creswell, 2009). A form of social constructivism that Lin (2012) applied in her study of cultural adaptation

was the “ecological framework.” This framework associates human behavior in context with the individual’s environment. Similarly, this study explored cultural integration as Saudi Arabian students sought to acculturate within a new project oriented, team-based learning environment. Ngo (2008) described the interactive acculturation model where both the majority and minority cultures may realize change during the assimilation process. If interactive acculturation was occurring between the Saudi students and the host students it was expected to emerge through the personal experiences and meaning making of those experiences conveyed by the participants in this study.

In this research, the subjective perspectives of the Saudi students were collected using in-depth interview methods that facilitated the exploration of deeper insights and meanings not achievable through quantitative methods. The interview data was supplemented through student journaling, composed and processed in order to construct a comprehensive description of the participant’s experiences. Through analyses, themes emerged from which meanings were derived.

Population, Sample, Site

The study participants were purposefully selected Saudi Arabian students enrolled in an engineering or technology based programs at a Midwestern university. For this study, these included any program within the College of Engineering Technology, computer or IT programs within the College of Business, or programs within the College of Health Professions requiring laboratory courses that incorporated project groups. These students shared similar cultural and educational experiences from their home country and were all enrolled in career oriented bachelor degree programs. These Saudi

students were among the 71,026 Saudis studying in the United States (figures from academic year 2012-2013) through a King Abdullah scholarship (Rentz, 2013). In the academic year 2013-2014, there were 169 Saudi Arabian students enrolled in various programs at the Midwestern University where this study occurred. Many of the Saudi students are required to take one year of intensive English courses prior to beginning coursework in their engineering or technology focused program.

An important attribute of the university that these students were attending was its lack of diversity. Data provided through the university's official documents show that in fall 2013 the total enrollment consisted of about 91% in-state and only 4% international students. Approximately 1% of the enrollment was made up of Saudis (2% on the main campus). Most of the host students were from rural counties and likely had limited direct exposure to international cultures. Another feature of the university was its relatively small amount of faculty diversity (about 7% non-white). The limited exposure of faculty and students to outside cultures was expected to highlight the influences of cultural differences in the Saudi acculturation experience and emphasize shortcomings in cultural awareness.

The selected study sites at the university were the College of Engineering Technology, the College of Business, and the College of Health Professions in courses that met the following criteria: (a) are included in the students' major field of study, (b) have an enrollment that includes both host and Saudi students, and (c) include team based learning projects as a significant part of the course assessment. Access to these students required joint approvals from the institutional review boards of the university from which

I am pursuing my degree and the university these students are attending. Additionally, approval was obtained from the host university's academic provost. The Office of International Education at the host institution was an important resource for gathering student statistics, and arranging initial introductions with Saudi student leaders. These students provided access to the Saudi Student Organization which, consequently, gave access to the Saudi students as well as a measure of credibility and support for this study. Finally, Saudi students were provided an explanation of the purpose of the study, how data would be collected, and how results would be reported. Those students volunteering to participate in the study were also provided consent forms, written in both Arabic and English.

The participants were purposefully selected based on their Saudi Arabian citizenship and their acceptance into an engineering or a technology focused program and their enrollment in a course meeting group project criteria. The goal of the study was to collect data from a minimum of six students. To assure that sufficient data would be collected, the sample size was set at eight to ten Saudi student volunteers who were recruited to maximize the variety of course and project experiences. Ultimately, 10 students were recruited who agreed to participate. Eight persisted through the entire study.

In a phenomenology, such as this study, it is important that all of the participants share the common experience and not necessarily the same setting (Creswell, 2013). In this study, all participants must have shared the common experience of being a Saudi Arabian student enrolled in a program meeting study criteria and engaged as a member of

a project team. Marshall and Rossman (2011) also pointed out that not all research questions require a specific site to investigate, however, the participants in this study were recruited from eligible programs and were engaged in courses where team-based projects were integrated. Interviews were conducted in reserved rooms within the University's main library. This site provided a familiar and a natural setting for the Saudi students that enabled them to comfortably convey their experiences. The site selection also supported confidentiality and validation of the research since it encouraged prolonged interaction with the participant in a familiar setting.

Recruitment Process

Prior to recruitment, approvals from the Human Subject Institutional Research Boards from the university performing this study and from the university that hosting the study were obtained. Additional approval was obtained from the academic provost of the hosting institution.

As a first step in the recruitment process, an information packet was submitted to the university's international student office to both inform them of the study and to request their cooperation in carrying out the study. The packet included: (a) the recruitment brochure, (b) the letter of invitation, (c) the incentive propositions, and (d) the consent form (written in both Arabic and English). The international student office was asked to have the study posted and recognized within the office's sphere of activities and communications. They were also requested to assist in identifying Arabic translators in the event that participants needed assistance interpreting questions or better articulating responses. Ultimately, no translators were required.

The next step in the recruitment process was to meet with the Saudi Student Organization's leadership to present the information packet and explain the purpose and processes involved in the study. After providing organizational leaders a clear understanding of the study and its potential for enriching the experiences of future Saudi international students, an invitation was extended to present the study and opportunity to participate to a large gathering of Saudi students following group prayer.

Students present at this meeting were given an overview of the study including its purpose and need for volunteer participants who met the study's criteria. Interested students who had declared a major in a program that met criteria were provided the letter of invitation and asked to email notification of their interest to me.

In order to further inform and recruit student participants who may not have attended this Saudi student organization meeting, brochures were posted within departments, classrooms, and laboratories where qualifying participants might frequent.

As part of the recruitment effort, I met with students who expressed interest individually or in groups, as desired by the students. An Arabic speaking staff member from the international office was also available to attend these meetings. Since all of the interested students had sufficient English language skills, the interpreter was never required. The letter of invitation and its explicit written information on the study, required study participation activities, criteria for participation, and incentives were reviewed. Those students who wished to participate were provided a letter of consent (English and Arabic) that articulated both benefits and potential risks for participation.

The letter also reminded the participants that they have the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

Once the consent was received, each candidate participant's academic program and schedule were verified to assure the required criteria are met: (a) the student is Saudi Arabian and in the first year of courses within their major in the U.S., and (b) the student is enrolled in an engineering, technology, or science focused course associated with their major (required or elective) that utilizes team-based project learning with groupings of two or more students.

The participant qualification plan was to accept eligible students in order of receipt of completed consent forms until 10 qualified participants were identified. Others would be notified that the participant capacity for this study has been attained and thanked for their willingness to volunteer.

The goal of this study was to conduct the first interview of all participants by the end of the fourth week of the semester and to begin the journaling process by the following week. The minimum participants required for this study was six while the recruitment goal was set to 10 students to allow for attrition. As 10 qualified participants did not emerge from the initial recruiting efforts, qualified participants were requested to recruit from peers who also meet the above criteria. Also, since less than 10 students had committed to the project by the end of the first week of the semester, the pool of participating Saudi students was broadened to include students who were beyond their first year of study.

Ethical Matters

After receiving acceptance from my dissertation committee, consent was obtained from the Institutional Research Boards of both universities. The Office of International Operations was consulted and asked for both approval and assistance in the facilitation of this study. The Saudi student body was informed of the study and its importance. Interested students were asked to make a direct contact with me as the researcher.

Qualifying students were then presented a full disclosure of this research including its purpose its process, its risks, and its benefits, They were told of the difficulties that some faculty, host students, and visiting Saudi students have experienced because of culture, communications, and leaning styles. Further, they were told that this study was intended to build greater understandings that will help future Saudi students to experience improved study abroad experience. They were reminded that most courses in engineering or technology require them to participate in group projects consisting of two or more, and that his study would explore their experiences associated with their team partner(s) as it relates to cultural differences, that the process and requirements for research participant would include participating in three audio recorded interviews, and they would be asked to participate in a form of directed journaling by responding to weekly emails soliciting their reflections on a recent experience associated with the course or project experience.

The participant candidates were informed that their inputs in this research would be kept confidential as they would only be identified within documents and records by code (number or alias), that inputs provided by the participants would not be attributed to

them by name nor would other names or identifiers be included without use of an alias or general course titles, and that results would not be disclosed until after grades have been submitted for that semester. They were also told that, due to the limited number of participants, courses involved, and faculty awareness of the study, complete anonymity could not be assured, but that students would have the opportunity to read the report for accuracy and final comment before it was released. As an incentive for participating, beyond benefitting future Saudi students, the Saudi Student Organization would be awarded a small amount of cash (or equivalent in purchased goods) per fully participating member.

Data Collection Procedures and Instrumentation

Data collection instruments in this study included in-depth student interviews and regular, student journaling assignments. Creswell (2013) provided a procedure for developing and conducting interviews that included: (a) determine interview questions that are aligned to the focus of the study, (b) identify who will be interviewed, (c) determine the type of interviews that will be conducted, (d) determine how the interview will be recorded, (e) develop the interview protocol, (f) determine where the interviews will be conducted, (g) obtain consents prior to access or interviews, and (h) during the interview be respectful and sensitive to cultural and social issues. These inquiry processes were adhered to in this study.

Interview Type and Questions

In order to enable the Saudi student participants to fully express their experiences, the interview questions were open-ended and presented in a semi structured format.

While enabling a standard format to the interviews, a semi-structured interview using open ended questions can achieve the desired depth of response (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). As the interviewer, I also asked probing questions in order to elicit greater depth in how participants perceive their experiences as first year students. Each interview was expected to take about one hour to complete, however, the participants were free to share as long as necessary in order to best ensure a complete sharing of pertinent experiences. The interviews were audio recorded and in some cases supplemented with periodic notes containing useful observations not preserved by the recordings (see Appendices A, B, and C for interview protocols).

First interview. Marshall and Rossman (2011) stated that phenomenological inquiry is performed with interviews that examine past experience, the present experience, and a third to discern the experience with the phenomenon. In this research, each Saudi participant was interviewed individually in a face-to-face format early in the course using a semi-structured interview. (One exception to this occurred as two females requested the first interview be combined.) The first interview focused on anticipations, expectations, and trepidations as they enter into this course. The interview was useful in discerning changes in attitudes and perceptions throughout the study experience. Key questions were:

- Before we start, please tell me how long you have been in this country and if you have had prior international travel experiences.
- Tell me a little bit about your background and what led you to study at this university.

- Describe your experiences thus far in adapting to American culture and how they have influenced your thoughts, your attitudes, and your behaviors?
- Describe your expectations and emotions toward working with American students as you begin this engineering/technology based course.

Second interview. The second semi-structured interview of these students during the course was designed to enable students to convey their experiences and perceptions as they related to their cultural difference with host team members. Key questions were:

- Describe your most meaningful experiences thus far in working with American students on your course project(s) and how you perceive these experiences reflect cultural differences?
- Describe how your experiences from this course may have influenced your thoughts, your attitudes, and your behaviors?
- What are your expectations as you continue to work with American students in project teams?
- Please reflect on how your culture might affect your performance in this course.

Third interview. The third and final interview was also semi-structured and administered following the course completion. It was designed to encourage students to provide an introspective reflection on their experiences and how it may have influenced their cultural integration. Key questions were:

- Please tell me about your overall experiences in working with American students on course project(s) and how you perceived these experiences to reflect on cultural differences?

- How have your experiences from this course influenced your thoughts, your attitudes, and your behaviors?
- What are your expectations as you continue to work with American students in project teams?
- Please reflect on how culture might have affected your course performance.
- Please add any final reflections on this course in regard to cultural differences.

Each interview will be recorded in a time stamped audio format.

Journal Data

Each week following the initial interview, the participants were asked to provide a reflection on their interactions with their project teams (see Appendix D). These were aimed at discerning their lived experiences and resulting influences on their cultural interactions and integration. Journaling was prompted through a brief weekly email to each participant, sent each Monday morning. Their journal entries were requested to be submitted by following Monday morning.

- 1) Please reflect upon experiences (good or bad) that you believe were influenced by cultural differences as you engage with your project team this week.
- 2) Record these and how each of these experiences might influence your thoughts, your attitude, and your behavior?

The journal responses supplemented data collection and guided probing during the subsequent interview. Although journal responses were often missing or lacked regularity from most participants, they were helpful for capturing otherwise lost or forgotten experiences and filled in gaps in the participant's acculturation process.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected was analyzed both within the perspectives of the research setting and the research questions. Cultural integration, the primary topic of the study, is inherently chronological. Therefore data was explored both chronologically and thematically to enable an analysis of the progression of attitudes, events, experiences, and perceptions. The methods followed for the analysis process closely followed those provided by Foss and Waters (2007).

Each interview was recorded in a time stamped audio format. The interviews were then transcribed where the data collected from each source could be analyzed. The purpose of the study was directed toward answering my research questions. Using the definition from Foss and Waters (2007), "... your unit of analysis comes from your research question ... [and] should be a concept, idea, or action that illuminates the significant features of the data so that the question ... can be answered" (p. 187). In this context, the unit of analysis for this study consisted of the individual's characterizations of their experiences and their perceptions associated with cultural integration.

The inductive approach applied to analyze the research data is described below. The transcribed data was scanned along with emailed journal data to isolate experiences associated with cultural integration. These experiences were extracted, coded along with the participant's code, and chronological information (interview one, two, or three). The coded data was reviewed multiple times to assure the desired alignment of data segments to codes. Using software based, data tables, codes were sorted and grouped into categories. From the sorted categories, themes were extracted. Next, the themes were

studied in broader context in order to interpret the findings. This interpretation was utilized to provide a textual description of the Saudi student's experiences and perceptions in the context of cultural integration within the study's settings.

Reflexivity: The Researcher

My international experience spans many years and traverses three distinctive career identities. Starting out as an engineer, the norm of my educational and work environments included culturally diverse peers, clients, vendors, faculty and supervisors. Working alongside others who practiced dissimilar faiths, lifestyles, professional perspectives, and relationships has helped me to both develop respect, sensitivity, as well as agility and resilience in my own practices. After 14 rewarding years, I transitioned into a career in higher education as a faculty member in programs that focused on engineering and technology. Gradually, the higher education path evolved into one of higher education administration which I have persisted in over the past nine years. This new career has immersed me into a special and rewarding role of helping to assure educational integrity, and improving the success of our related operations. In my current role as Associate Dean of a large College of Engineering Technology, I have occasionally had to deal with issues involving international students and issues dealing with faculty or peer relationships.

My relationships to individuals from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries have been associated with primarily these professional or educational environments. Within these settings I have experienced a mix of personality traits, abilities, and situations. A common attribute that I have observed is a very strong

adherence to their home cultures. In particular, each possessed unwavering values deeply anchored within their Islamic cultures. I have also been impressed by how their own cultural backgrounds and experiences have resulted in a caste and uncompromising judgment of other cultures. In a stark contrast, I have also observed that, while cultural judgments may be unwavering, relationships at a personal level can exhibit much more flexibility and warmth. Exposure to Western media's exhaustive coverage over violence and turmoil rooted within the Middle East has also biased my expectations from this research.

These experiences caused me to anticipate themes to emerge that reflected extreme cultural sensitivity. This sensitivity combined with communication barriers prevalent in the literature review lead me to expect that unintended interpretations (e.g., communications, actions, situations) would emerge as issues within the acculturation experience. I also anticipated that strong loyalties to cultural unity and associated anxieties would emerge as barriers to intercultural socialization. Finally, both the literature review findings and my own experiences caused me to expect neo-racism to emerge as events that have had a damaging effect on the Saudi student's internal experience and would influence perceptions within the classroom environments.

Delimitations

The deficiencies I have identified concerning this researchable problem are (a) the small number of Saudi students participating in this study and (b) the narrow demographic of the American, host students that are participating in the project.

Saudis that participated in this study represent a narrow selection of engineering, technology, or health students. Although their educational experiences prior to this research varied somewhat, most had a common background of technology education within Saudi Arabia and possessed a common interest in pursuing a career that emphasizes applied technology. This impacts the generalizability of the findings. The demographics of host students participating as members of the project teams were also narrow and lacked background in cultural diversity. Expanding this study to interview host students and faculty and also incorporating laboratory observations would add greater richness to a future study.

Trustworthiness

In the context of a qualitative study, Creswell's (2013) descriptions of trustworthiness include terms such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and conformability. However, Creswell prefers using the term *validation* for trustworthiness since it implies accuracy. Marshall and Rossman (2011) also fall back to forms of validity to describe the qualitative researcher's view of trustworthiness.

In this research, I adopted some of Creswell's (2013) strategies to better establish trustworthiness. The first strategy was to maximize engagement and trust with the participants through full disclosure of the research goals and processes. By insuring that interviews provided ample time for students to fully share their experiences, participants were better able to express their thoughts. In analyzing the data, I allowed opportunity for peer review (both administrative and faculty) in order to challenge the processes and analytical interpretations for bias and reliability. When reporting the findings and

experiences of this research, I will provide a “rich, thick, description” (p. 252) of data. Another means for establishing trustworthiness was to clearly state what biases, experiences, preconceptions that I had brought into this study. Bracketing experiences will be important within this epoché phase of the inquiry. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) cited the historic concerns that the interpretation of qualitative data is easily skewed by the researcher’s bias. They emphasized the importance of the researcher being aware of his own bias and attitudes; a researcher may disclose these and use them to help shape the study, yet be open to the interpretation of the data. Marshall and Rossman (2011) provided an excellent guide to working through reflexive questions that helped me to identify and bracket biases. Disclosure of biases better enabled me to separate preconceived ideas when analyzing collected data.

The research conducted included students from within the college that I have served in both faculty and administrative roles. Hence, I brought to this study several years of experience working with international students. Although my experience with Saudi students was limited, it was necessary to separate my own personal experiences from this research.

In this study trustworthiness was addressed from those strategies presented by Creswell (2013, pp. 250-253). The first was to assure a prolonged engagement with the participants in the study. Three in-depth interviews with each participant provided greater assurance that the answers were understood with their intended meanings. Recording the interviews also allowed for responses to be transcribed and analyzed using a methodical and documented processes.

Providing a “rich, thick” description in this study will assist other researchers to better assess its validity and its application to other settings. Establishing close relationships through prolonged interviews added a greater richness of background knowledge to this study.

Trustworthiness can be supported through the triangulation of results across multiple forms of data. In this phenomenology, both face-to-face interviews and student journal submissions will be used for data collection. Cross verifying themes chronologically and thematically provided a similar form of triangulation. Substantiating themes with other research findings also enhanced the validity of this study.

Another means of establishing trustworthiness was to clearly state what biases, experiences, and preconceptions that I, as the researcher, brought into the study. Bracketing my own experiences was an important within this *epoché* phase of the inquiry. Marshall and Rossman (2011) illustrated the use of “triangulated inquiry” to help assure that the researchers do not interject their own bias. Applying this reflexive analysis to this study helped to assure its integrity.

Finally, trustworthiness was also established by being clear in presenting what findings represent. My results will strive to achieve clarity by including individual interview responses to support each theme, providing illustrations of data and results through tables and figures, and aligning the conclusion to the research questions.

Summary

The research design described in this chapter seeks to collect and analyze qualitative data that was collected to describe and interpret the experiences and

perceptions of Saudi Arabian students as they integrated with the host students on team-based engineering or technology projects. Data was collected using the open-ended, semi-structured interviews and journaling processes described in this chapter. The next chapter presents the participant data collected from these participants.

CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students, enrolled at a Midwestern university, as they integrated with the host students on team-based engineering or technology focused projects. This phenomenological study used open-ended, semi-structured interviews supplemented through journaling to explore how Saudi students describe their cultural integration experiences as they engage with host peers in team-based learning projects.

The specific research questions included:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?
2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?
3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?
4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?
5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

This chapter presents and analyzes those experiences as acquired during the data collection phase of this study. While the study focuses on the above questions, the

deeper insights into the research lie within the students' cultural upbringing their host surroundings, as well as their own individual personalities.

Before plunging into the data, the participants are first introduced. A richer and more appreciative insight on how each of these students interpreted their experiences is better grasped after gaining insight into their backgrounds and values. In conducting an analysis of Saudi Arabian students, an initial tendency may be to place a categorical mold around these participants. As will soon be portrayed, despite a common religious faith, Saudi Arabians are not uniform in culture, values, or experiences. When their human traits are exposed, each participant becomes individual and real. Their perceptions and behaviors revealed in this study are, in part, a product of what these individuals carried into their common experience explored in this study.

It is also interesting to note the increased comfort level these students showed over their three interview sequence. This was demonstrated in the increasing length of the interviews and the casual conversations that occurred before or after the interview itself. While the average length of the first interviews was just under an hour, it was not unusual to spend one and a half hours with students by their third interviews. This time provided students opportunity to convey the broader aspects of their experiences beyond their project groups.

Participant Overview

Ten Saudi Arabian students agreed to participate in this study. These represent a range of backgrounds and experiences (See Table 1). Seven of these students were from the College of Engineering Technology, representing five different programs. One

participant was enrolled in the Computer Information Technology program in the College of Business and, as a result of broadening my participant criteria to include the College of Health Professions, two female participants joined the study. The prior educational backgrounds of our participants included:

- Four, who had prior experience as international students before enrolling in this university.
- Five students who required intensive English courses before beginning their major at this university.
- Seven, who had between zero and one year of courses in their major at this university.
- Two students were female.

In order to better convey the struggles of these Saudi students to express their experiences and to help render their deeper thought process, the interview quotes provided in this section mostly left verbatim. Only some redundant or distracting components are removed. While in many excerpts clearly reveal language deficiencies, the messages context holds a greater sense of meaning.

Table 1

Participant Summary Information

ID	Program Enrolled	Years in Program Courses	Initial English Proficiency	Prior International Experience	Saudi Demographic
1	Construction Management	1 year	No	None (TVTC in KSA)	Ta'if City, Makkah Region (Western Mecca Region)
2	Electrical/Electronic Engineering Technology	0	Yes	41 credits - U.S.	Ha'il City, Ha'il Province (North Central Region) and Riyadh, Ar Riyadh Province (Central Region)
3	Manufacturing Engineering Technology	0.5	Yes	21 credits - Canada	Jeddah, Makkah Province (Western Mecca Region)
4	Manufacturing Engineering Technology	1.5 years	No	None	Large Urban city in Western S.A. and Ad Dammam, Ash Sharqiyah Province (Eastern Region)
5	Health Care Administration	1 year	No	None	Al-Hasa, Ash Sharqiyah Province (Eastern Region)
6	Automotive Engineering Technology	0.5 years	No	None (TVTC in KSA)	AlHufuf, Ash Sharqiyah Province (Eastern Region)
7	Mechanical Engineering Technology	1 year	Yes	None	Jeddah – Makkah Province (Western Region)
8	Pre-Nuclear Medicine	0	Yes	3 credits - Texas	Qatif - Ash Sharqiyah Province (Eastern Region)
9	Computer Information Technology	2 years	Yes	30 credits - Texas Jubai, KSA	Ad Dammam - Ash Sharqiyah (Eastern Region)
10	Electrical Electronic Engineering Technology	1 st Sem. EET	No	None King Fahd University	

In order to better appreciate the value of each participant in this research, I have assigned each an Arabic alias (see Table 2).

Table 2

List of Alias Names Used for Participants

ID	Alias	Meaning
1	Adel	Equitable, Just
2	Butrus	Rock
3	Dharah	Excellent
4	Emin	Faithful
5	Janan	Heart
6	Fadil	Learned, Virtuous
7	Giakfar	Splendid
8	Karima	Noble
9	Hikmat	Wisdom
10	Ihab	A Gift

Note: Descriptive note. Names selected from 20,000 Names from around the world, *Jaguar.PC.com*. Retrieved from www.20000-names.com

Participant 1- Adel

Adel was raised in Ta'if, nestled in a mountainous terrain in Western Saudi Arabia. His father supports the family of nine as a manufacturer of construction materials. Adel came directly to the university as a transfer student from the Saudi government owned Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC). Coming from a tribal centered culture that adhered to a common set of beliefs and values, life in the United States has been a very different experience. In his early interviews, he

expresses concern for the host students he has come to know. Their diversity in faith or their non-faith is unsettling to him and unfamiliar from his past experiences.

Adel required a year and a half of English studies, before beginning classes in his major. Also relevant to his experience is that he, like many other Saudis sent as an engineering or technology student, arrived as a transfer student. As a result, he began the program with mostly third year courses.

Eager to experience the host culture, Adel moved out from the sheltered dorm environment after his first semester and now lives in a house with two Americans – one of whom is a student. He feels that the relationship with his roommates is strong and has been most helpful for understanding and experiencing the host culture. Adel primarily socializes with non-Saudi friends who are not students and has travelled with them to Colorado and Florida. Being from a desert environment, he is amazed at the variety of wildlife he regularly views in the rural habitat of the mid-western university.

Project Group Experience

Adel's Construction Management lab group consisted of himself and two American students, both with rural upbringings. His interviews reveal both frustration and resilience regarding academic difficulties in the classroom and in the project activities. Much of these he attributes to the gap in time between his technical courses in Saudi Arabia and his enrolment at this university. Another ongoing struggle he experiences both with his project group and all of his other social interactions with American students stems from lack of confidence in his communications skills. Adel believes this negatively affects his relationships with his lab group and inhibits

meaningful contributions to the teams work. Adel explains that of the three lab members, one took the lead in the projects and performed most of the work associated with both the semester project and its final presentation. He described the second lab group member as also contributing little to the project and himself as left out almost entirely from active participation. Conversations with Adel illuminates his perceptions that his lab partners are disinterested in his learning. He describes the manifestation through outright indifference to him both in lab and in the groups meeting outside of the lab:

Because I'm foreign, they, I didn't speak like that good of English, so they would do all the work quickly and just get it done, instead of like, talking to me and find out stuff together you know. It's faster for them to just do it. (Interview 1)

Adel notes that although his contributions to his lab project were almost non-existent, as part of the group, he received a good grade for the project. It was also apparent that beyond the technical aspects of the project, his group failed to develop any cohesion as a team.

Key Insights of the Participant

Adel adds some very excellent insights to the study. One example of Adel's insights was recognition that his difficulty in developing relationships with other students surpasses language and highlights the chasm between his Saudi Arabian culture and the rural culture of the host student. Since many of the host students shared a rural culture that included outdoor activities such as hunting, Adel experienced hardship even to participate in casual conversations.

I tried, like I went hunting last season and I was struggling, I was like looking for some information. I would try to talk to him and they would, like to my classmate. And they would end the conversation so fast, you cannot keep up with that. But I learned, I would just listen to them when they would talk like definitely they were into bow hunting they would talk about different animals, trucks everyday so I would just listen to them and learn like that. (Interview 2)

While struggling to establish any meaningful interactions with his group academically, Adel made an important observation late into the semester that may help illuminate the importance of bridging cultures. After purchasing a pair of outdoor boots and an off-road Jeep, Adel is suddenly included in class conversations and begins to establish a social relationship with one of his lab partners. He conveys the experience:

“I bought like this boots and they liked it a lot, and they started to talk to me a little bit more. ...This is true, this is very true. And then I got the jeep like recently, the shorter jeep and they decided to talk to me even more. Isn't that funny? ...And then, yeah, they are asking me about a truck and how is everything and stuff like that. And then I went to Silver Lake and I forgot to, you know the flag, like the one you need to go onto the dune?...Yeah, I put it on, and then I couldn't take it off because I didn't have the tool in Big Rapids. And then I went to school and then they started to talk to me a lot, like how was your like trip there....So yeah, they started to have more conversation with me and that was funny to me. (Interview 3)

Adel recognized the irony of how these items created a magical cultural bridge between him and his classmates. Adel also makes a statement that reflected the depth of his perceptions. "...they like you more when you are just like them. When you act like them, talk like them, do the stuff they like" (Interview 3).

A third insight provided by the interview convey an experience of neoracism and cultural stereotyping:

...like here's the thing, [if] like they get to know one of us, the idea will change. Like the people who never got to know Saudis or any other like Muslim, yeah they are kind of rough...Like when they talk to you and treat you especially if they [are] like are college students.

Adel provided an example of how he experienced racism because of what he perceived as being stereotyped as anti-American and associated with media stories regarding conflicts in the Middle-East.

I went with my other friend to the bar, like we just got [here] from Europe and then I got harassed like three times from different people in the same night. ... Like they just yell. I mean and then I would say what did you say and they said just start talking. They were drunk and I just didn't deal with that. (Interview 3)

Participant 2 - Butrus

Butrus comes from a family of nine and was raised in Ha'il City, in North Central Saudi Arabia. He travelled directly to the U.S. to complete a Bachelor's degree after receiving his Associates degree in Electronics from the University of Ha'il. He has been here for three years and lives in married housing with his wife, six year old daughter and

18 month old son. After arriving in the U.S. Butrus spent six months improving his English before entering an Electrical Engineering program at another Midwest university. His discouraging academic performance and lab group experiences there contributed to his decision to transfer to this university. Butrus believes his initial experiences at an American University failed because of cultural differences, deficiencies in his English language skill, and his natural inclination to be introverted and non-assertive.

[In Saudi Arabia] we used to communicate as a group, and study together. Ah, but when I came here the first semester at [first U.S. university], it was very difficult for me because I tried to communicate with the students there, but, but, the major thing I think of the language cause they misunderstand me or sometimes I am not a good speaker so..... the second reason, I'm quiet so, They, they like to be, ah, an extroverted person not an introverted person. (Interview 1)

Although Butrus' Saudi university courses were often taught in English by foreign instructors (Australian, British, Indian, etc.), he was unable to gain an acceptable mastery of English and required additional time to meet requirements for university studies in the U.S. He also found that he had difficulty adapting to the interactive classroom environments which he was unaccustomed to. Finally, his lack of prior experience with equipment and laboratory techniques set him at a disadvantage with his fellow classmates and added to his inability to build rapport with his classmates or project team members and left him feeling outcast. These lead Butrus to transfer and essentially restart his education at the current university.

Project Group Experience

Butrus, in his first semester in the Electrical Electronics Engineering Technology program, had two courses in which his interviews focused. His technical course, from which a true project experience never materialized, did provide insight into his relationships with other technology students. As a result, the interviews centered mainly on his experiences with his project group and technical project within his public speaking course. The project group consisted of three male students, including Butrus, and one female student. The significance of interfacing with females to Butrus' cultural experience will become more apparent throughout this dissertation. The team's major project was to research and present the operation of desalination plants. Butrus' interviews relate how his familiarity of desalination, an extensively used technology in Saudi Arabia, enabled him to establish credibility and leadership in the group.

A positive experience in this study was hearing Butrus convey the evolving relationship he had with his group. At the beginning of the semester, he believed they had no real expectations from him. His quiet mannerisms and ultra conservative views clashed with those of his team members. Butrus was able to provide valued contributions to his team projects as he earned their respect, friendship, and confidence. By the end of the semester they even did some casual socialization apart from their projects – a vast change from their interaction at the time of the first interview.

Key Insights of the Participant

Through the interviews, Butrus provides several insights into the significance of intercultural understanding U.S. to the international experience. His first describes how

cultural anxiety might impede casual communications with host students. For example, he refers to how casual conversation often involved joking. Being unfamiliar with host culture, he often has difficulty understanding these jokes. More so, he is inhibited from trying to tell a joke since he fears inadvertently offending his hosts. He explains his discomfort: “Ah, I think cause when I try to, especially if they try to say some jokes, I, sometimes I don’t understand what they mean. And....if they don’t see me laugh....” (Interview 1).

A second important insight from Butrus revolves around cultural and religious differences. This example concerns his daughter who is attending kindergarten at a local elementary school:

I think in during the school they don’t know anything about my culture. Because not everything we celebrate. Yeah, especially for the holidays, not every holiday, we have different holidays we have lot of different things. I think they asked her, they asked my daughter about the costume during Halloween. To bring it to during her school but instead of that I don’t let her go and take her to the, we have a mosque in Grand Rapids. ...So all of our children ah who are Muslims...they went there and they [the school] give me a note about that why she is not participating. ... it was a religious reason. ...when I explained it to them, they accept it. But first, they asked me why she is absent and there was a reason about that...I don’t understand because also if in our country the presence of the children in schools, that is the parent’s responsibility. Here it is different, that is

really all different. It's I think about the communication responsibility, because the school is responsible to their presence. (Interview 2)

Another example Butrus conveys illustrates cultural misunderstanding at a sporting event where his friend did not remove his hat during the national anthem. After an emotional confrontation with a soldier in the stands near him, he was still not aware of what he did that created the issue. Not only were the concepts of a national anthem unfamiliar to him, but also such practices as placing the hand over the heart and removing his hat had never been explained. :

...my friend...he went to the cirque, ah and what do you call it, ah it's something like a song for United States. ...And everyone stand up because they respected the anthem. He stand up but he wear hat. He didn't know about...taking off the hat and then after the anthem is finished...there is, I think, a soldier or something like that, that like came to him and ask him if you must respect, you must respect your country that you are in and he went off. And he [Butrus' friend] didn't know what he did wrong... and he explained, and he said to us right now, 'I don't know what I did wrong. One of our friends say you wear a hat and he said, 'yes' he said, 'that is why.'

Butrus also brings forward a deeper issue that touches on his Sunni religious belief regarding music, which, he explains, is an offense to strict Sunni's (although lyrics without music is acceptable):

Actually, we have something like that [national anthem] but the [music], we don't do, not most of Saudi do that because it is about the religion is everything. Ah, the

music, especially the music. So if you ask any Saudis about it, he won't respect it because the country doesn't respect the religion. So if it doesn't have music in it it's ok, but because it has the music then they only forbid the music. ...

We have music [in Saudi Arabia] but it's not, it's forbidden in our religion not in country, in our country. ... in Islam they, the music is forbidden not the song. The song is ok, but the music is forbidden. I mean the words is ok. ... There is a reason but I don't know why. I don't know about the Shia Muslims because I am Sunni Muslim so but Sunnis it is the music that must be forbidden for them because this is ah what the prophet says to us. So you don't expect it to be something that would be um something that would be offensive to Sunnis. It's especially if you, if you went to the mosque.

You, it's very offensive to them especially in the mosques. (Interview 2)

His strict adherence to Sunni doctrine and practices also highlighted issues such as his need to maintain a strict obedience to prayer times and the practice ritual washings (wud'u) prior to prayer.

Butrus also lacked any prior social interactions with females and likewise his wife with other males. Their experiences in the U.S. helped them to experience and build some level of comfort in this contrasting societal behavior. This is one of several areas where exposure to cultural values and customs in the U.S. have caused Butrus to reexamine the traditions of his own country and realize that differences can not only be tolerated but can also expose new and better ways.

Participant 3 - Dharah

Dharah was raised in the large metropolitan region of Jeddah. He explains that Jeddah, the second largest city in Saudi Arabia with a population of 2.8 million, is culturally diverse and a primary stop for international visitors on their pilgrimage journey to Mecca. Soon after high school, Dharah was awarded a scholarship to attend an international university. He selected a university in Canada where he spent his first two years learning English. Dharah describes his experience at the Canadian university as one where he had little interaction with non-Saudi students. Since his skills in English were very limited he required two years of language classes before being allowed to enroll in other courses. After attending one year of general courses, he had not yet established any Canadian friendships and the university closed the manufacturing program-- his intended major. A Saudi friend convinced him to attend this Midwestern school in the U.S. and now he has been here for one year.

Project Group Experience

Dharah's courses in the Manufacturing Engineering Technology program involved multiple projects and groups. Because of the close interaction within his machining lab, this was the group upon which the interview was focused. Although each student produced their own outcome in the lab, they operated together as a unit to help assure all members were successful.

Throughout this study, Dharah conveys a great deal of satisfaction with his studies as well as his lab group. It was in the lab that he realized that he, as an international student, needed to be assertive to begin conversations with host students.

Although he expresses a lack of confidence in his speaking skills and ability to understand conversational topics, this strategy helped him to build camaraderie of sorts with his lab group:

... before I came here I was in Saudi for four months. So, for four months I didn't have anywhere to speak English with you know. So actually, I felt like I've lost some of my English words, you know. Like I had to practice, I had to interact with people and talk more with people so I can catch up with the class at least. So this is also one of the reasons why I wasn't able or wasn't feeling confident you know to get involved with the classmates and the instructors. ...I was able to understand but speaking, speaking. (Interview 3)

Dahara also explains how he had to rely on his lab group to help overcome shortcomings in his hands-on skills. Having entered this machining course with no prior lab experience, he expresses gratitude to his lab group for their readiness to assist him:

At first, actually, when I first started it was very hard because I didn't have any experience with the machine. And because you know like I didn't have anyone that I know in the class. But time like time it was much easier after I discovered like I have to initiate you know. Like I have to start asking and talk you know. I found, I found that people were very helpful to me. ... after I started to like no one would come to you and ask you oh what do you need to, if you need any help you know. Where you have to go and ask and talk. (Interview 1)

Dharah conveyed that while the group was inside the lab they shared a common experience that directed all of their conversations. Developing friendships outside of the

classroom was much more difficult. He attributed this to both language and cultural hindrances. Since he did not share in the same local culture, interests, or activities interaction outside of that course environment was difficult. He explains:

In the shop, in the manufacturing shop it is very easy to interact you know because all of us are working on the same thing. There is always something to talk about. In the shop you know, but outside, well, I think that language will solve maybe half the problem. So you, I speak the language, the language I can get along. But the thing is ah with the topics ah are different...It is very different for me from what we talk about. We talk about the same thing but I don't listen to the same music I don't watch the same movies you know. So this is where it get kind of complicated to interact.... I think that culture is the main problem. As I said, maybe language would solve 50% of the problem but the cultural background of the conversations you know. Like I do have that guy actually we got, we got, we got along this semester and we started to study together for every test we talk you know all the time. I can consider him as a friend. (Interview 1)

By the second interview Dharah had established one good American friend outside of the lab environment. Both he and that friend shared a love for discussing history, politics, and religion together. By his third interview, Dharah had also become very good friends with one member of his lab team and enjoyed learning of each other's cultures through their interactions outside of course activities.

I would like to know about his culture and he likes to know about mine. So we always talk about it but we started to study together then we eventually became friends. (Interview 3)

Key Insights of the Participant

Dharah provides some excellent observations regarding classroom norm, the cultural barriers that hold back open interactions between the host and international students, and cultural stereotyping. His interviews provide insights that are well thought and impactful.

Classroom culture at this university was quite different from Dharah's previous experiences. He commented on his surprise at the level of interaction that was expected and considered acceptable with the faculty and within the classroom.

When a teacher came in [in Saudi Arabia] everyone stops talking you know until he says what we have to do. Ok, yes, in Canada it was almost the same thing, when the professor came into the classroom everyone stopped talking and he start to explain what we are going to have on that day. Here it's very different. I was shocked. ... and that's why I told my roommate that I had a culture shock from the school. ...It's very different, the atmosphere and the environment in the classroom is very different from what I have had before. ... there is respect but there is ah I don't want to say too much joking but like the level of joking, ok, is not what I have experienced before. ...Almost like a friend as opposed to an instructor. (Interview 2)

During Dharah's final interview he conveyed an experience that gave him insights into why host students are not more proactive in discussing culture with Saudis. He describes this enlightening realization:

... I think they are kind of afraid to ask me about where I came from, about my culture. And, I am saying this why and actually you came to my mind as soon as that situation happened. ...I was at the farms trying to look for some goats and sheep, so there was, there was I think that you guys call them Amish right? So, there was an Amish and he was really nice though, so he was like trying to pick a goat for us. So, I was having some conversation with them and stuff. And then I felt like there were some spots where I had to stop because I don't know, I feel, I can obviously see that their culture is very different from like from I don't know, from my classmates at least. ...So there were some points where I had to stop, like I was ok, it might be offensive or maybe I can't ask him this question. ...So after that situation happened to me, I feel and I think that my classmates might want to know about my culture but ... I am the only one, the only international student in the class, so I think they want to know but they are afraid to ask.

...Well you know I started to have the same ... prospective [as classmates], if I can say. So when I want to know something I don't ask anyone. ... And the guy you are talking about [referring to a lab group member who had been very aloof most of the semester] he said, like he asked me I was surprised actually he told me, "how long you haven't seen your family?" And, I was like, "I haven't seen them in a year." And, he was like, "Ok I don't like my family, but I don't think I

can stay away from them for like a year.” So ... this was new. Like he, I don't know, maybe but as you said like after the experience with the Amish, I have excused every one of them. ... You know because what I feel, ... like if I am in Saudi and there is a bunch of Saudis and one American, we Saudis have to make him feel comfortable you know. So I feel like it is their job, my classmates job to make me feel more comfortable being in the culture, but after that experience I have excused every one of them. (Interview 3)

My interviews have constructed an image of Dharah as a friendly, gregarious, yet mature individual who does not hesitate to interact with those who he perceives to be receptive. Yet, experiences have taught him to be judicious in conversation with those who show racial undertones or not open for discussion. For example in the second interview Dharah shared how he sometimes feels the need to either better explain or correct host student's interpretations of media stories.

...as I told you I always talk when I have to. So I remember once a guy was saying something about 9-11. And of course everyone think it was bad. But he was like, 'Muslims who did it, this is how Muslims think', something like this. I can't remember what exactly he said but this was the idea. So at that time I was like, 'No, you know trying to explain the opposite'. As I told you I don't talk a lot but when I have to I do. You know, so this is a situation where I had to explain, had to do some explanation. ...Ok, but here in [small town] I think it's different because ah, because the way people from small towns think is not the same as people who live in big cities and more, more like contacted with other people in

other cultures... here in [small town] I think ah that people still influenced by what media says. Sometimes I go into classes and I hear and I hear some people talking about news you know that happening these days and some of the news involve some stuff about the Middle Eastern countries.

Ah but I don't comment, I don't get involved because I don't talk unless there is something that I really know, really know about. I know that it is wrong and the opposite is something that I know. (Interview 2)

Participant 4 - Emin

Emin's father was in the Saudi Arabian Air Force and stationed in the U.S. for five years. His mother is a teacher. Emin was born in Saudi Arabia just months after their return from the U.S. He grew up in a large city in Western Saudi Arabia with a population that includes other African Arabians as well as Asians and Indian Arabians. After graduation from high school in the KSA, Emin worked in Saudi Arabia with a large petroleum producer for seven years. The culture at his company was highly diverse, employing workers from around the world. Since the international workers lived in a compound that was highly Americanized, he was able to experience multicultural living. English was the required business language and used in all official documents and transmittals at his company. Perhaps this is the reason that Emin expresses reading and writing English as strong skills of his. His hope is to return to work at the petroleum company following his education in America.

Emin gained some international experience as he travelled for a year to various locations primarily in the U.S. and is now in his second year at this University. Contrary

to his preferences, he selected this rural university because it offered a program in manufacturing and it was in proximity to a Midwest friend. He currently resides with three other students; two American and one Saudi.

Emin is an African Arabian who describes himself as social, but not outgoing. From interviews, it appears that he has no problem initiating conversation or developing rapport with American students. It is clear that Emin values friendship and enjoys interaction with others. He is very enthusiastic toward his studies in the U.S. and projects a positive attitude toward the challenges that he expects during the experience.

I'm actually enjoying, now I'm trying to do that. Seriously, I'm actually here to learn, I'm here to enjoy my time studying, so I didn't leave my work. I didn't leave my work ah, ah, just to come here and be stressed or ah, ah have, I know I will have difficulties here. Before I came here I know I have, I have difficult ah learning. And learning I would have difficulties in home studying, in learning different classes. I haven't been to a university in Saudi Arabia so I know this will be a big challenge to me and I'm ready for it. I'm here to learn so ah, so I don't mind, ah facing new experiences to me. (Interview 1)

Project Group Experience

The research for Emin focused on a Mechanical Engineering Technology course where his project group consists of four persons and required completion of multiple projects over the semester.

He expresses pleasure over how well his group works together and the socialization that they do both inside and outside of class. He especially appreciates

opportunities where the group extends their conversations beyond the technical realm of the lab or course study. These interactions have enabled him to share culture; an activity that he enjoys.

Yeah, yeah it's happening actually [cultural sharing] from both sides and I remember in the last lab ah we were writing, I was ah taking notes in my language, in Arabic. And my classmates he asked me what are you writing and I told him I am taking notes in Arabic. And he was you know excited about it and he saw the number and this is another thing ah he asked me about the time. And I was using my laptop, my I-Pad at that time and when he saw the time and it was in Arabic numbers. So he was asking me is that your numbers so there was a good communication between us. And I got the chance just to ah to show him the Arabic numbers from one to ten and he was excited about you know, knowing those new things. Yeah, so I think it's, it's very, very good, and very interesting, and very nice also to, to communicate ah about things outside our class during our class you know. Ah like the time and the numbers and you know share experiences to them so...I think when somebody asks you a question or, or you know there are times that lend themselves well to teaching somebody about something. (Interview 1)

He is very appreciative of help others have offered assistance to him as he adapts to American life and experiences challenges of understanding English terms peculiar to his chosen discipline of study.

Um, I expect it, it's going to be ah, I would say very good. Ah because, you know, ah for me I actually make sure that I understand everything so I keep asking questions which sometimes helps the other people to administrate the ideas or the answers. So I think it's working for me, ah working with groups, ah and sometimes when I ask my friend about a part or something I didn't understand or a definition of a word I don't understand ah he keep explaining to me the definition or the ah of that word or explaining to me the way to answer this question or stuff you know. Ah it helps me to understand it, it helps him to also understand the idea so we are going ah we are doing well. I would say we are doing well in our groups. (Interview 1)

Emin has gained credibility from his prior work experience which helps him to explain the application of classroom concepts to real technical problems.

I had an experience of seven years in the petroleum field. So I worked with ah, piping systems, I work with oil and gas, also I work with pressure. So in this class, ah we're teaching some of that, while some of my friends in the group, ah when they get a little bit confused, ah I share my experience with them. Ah, you know, something, something I had to work with. Ah, and I told them, the answer will be something like that or this is something I explain for them, ah, so we are sharing ideas. Ah, the way to be effective in working with group I think is sharing past ideas. ... especially with the pressure [as in the physical measurement]. Most of them ah, find just ah, little bit difficulty while reading the gauges. I used to read gauges every single day. So I, I was able to explain this is how it's read and

this is the measurement in my manufacturing class. I used to use the, those instruments. Before I came here, and I helped some of them, just understanding the idea and it's working. ...Ah, I think the big thing; ah the big part is to be effective with them. You know working in a group. I mean everyone should respect the other one and also we have to be effective, we have to work together whether we, I mean, if some people have problems with each other or not, you have to get the work done because it's something for the group. I mean we have to share our teamwork together to present good work, to get high grades.

(Interview 1)

While not describing himself the group's leader, Emin's social nature appears to be the glue that brings them closer together.

Ah I don't, ah it's hard to say a leader you know casue ah, ah we are sharing information's and we are helping each other but ah I would say that um I am the most active who can ask questions and maybe ah relate with them because some people ah just prefer to, to look at us, and they don't want to ah talk and ask you know. (Interview 2)

Key Insights of the Participant

Emin contributes a great deal of insight to this study, particularly into the cultural aspects of friendship and group function. One of these, is the huge importance within his Saudi culture to acknowledge acquaintances publicly. Although this was expressed by as an essential courtesy by multiple participants, Emin elaborated on this great detail. In order to illuminate this significance a portion of this conversation is quoted below:

... in our culture ah it's so common and so popular to, to greet ... people from ... that you know from one year ago or two year ago. And actually it happening with me here. I have friends, our classmates from the previous semester and most of them, they just, if I saw them, they just ah look at me. I mean we know each other, we had conversations before, we helped each other before but there is something I don't know here in the culture. I will not say they are not social but they prefer to just wave sometimes or even not wave they just smile and go. ... I am sure that every single Saudi student here have the same problem because in our culture if I did that even to our neighbor and I passed without saying hi he will get pissed and then he going to talk to my father. 'Your son didn't respect me and he passed without even saying 'hi', which is you know a very, a very disrespectful thing to happen in Saudi Arabia.' So, sometimes you should be worried, you should be, you know, focused because if you miss somebody you ah it happens sometimes you miss somebody and then, 'He tell you, 'man I was here and you didn't see me. You just go ahead.' 'Oh, I'm sorry I didn't see you.' 'Oh it's alright, it's alright, it happens.' But basically, you have to say hi to your friend, you never ignore your friend, and back home in our culture, you know never. ... Yeah, yeah, trust me, and if you ask anybody of my friends about this I'm sure they are going to tell you yes, it happening a lot with us. (Interview 2)

Emin also shared his success and enthusiasm for discussing Saudi and American culture with his friends:

... trust me when people just start to listen to you and your culture they find it interesting and I appreciate that. Most of the people that I talked with about, you know, our culture and they asked me questions, you know, with excitement. "So when you guys go there, so ah about the weather?" especially about. So I have many, many good conversations with my projects group people whether it's, if it is in this semester or the previous semesters. And I would say all of it was, were great to me you know. Because I realized that people get new ideas and new information about the culture that I am from you know. ...I would say just I got very good friends to me you know because just we just, when we just started talking about the cultures and some of them just compare it and find it interesting. Ah I get very good friends because of you know ah talking about the cultures and stuff. They were excited to know about it and also when I came here I didn't know everything about the American Culture. I know a lot when I lived here and also so I got the chance to ask them about, you know, attractions here or, you know, points of attractions I might go to you know to see or enjoy my time ...

(Interview 2)

A peculiar cultural endeavor occurred in my interviews with Emin as he explored the concepts and rituals associated with marriage in Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Beyond the topic itself, it brought out not only genuine curiosity but also an eagerness to inquire about topics not easily broach among peers. This phenomenon was experienced with several of the Saudi students throughout the interview process and will be revisited in this dissertation as findings are discussed.

Participant 5 - Janan

Prior to coming to the U.S. Janan had little interaction with non-Arabic people. Although she describes the normal hiring of maids in her city, who were mostly Indian, the expectation of physicians to be Egyptian, and other foreign workers of diverse nationalities, these were not people she would have communicated with. Janan was married in January 2013 and travelled with her new husband to the U.S. in order for him to pursue education financed through a King Abdullah scholarship. At first, she was not taking classes and was exposed to American culture primarily through two women that she had been introduced to through her husband. Over time, she stopped socializing with one of the ladies, possibly because the meetings, as she described were focused on religion and often Christianity. Meetings with the second lady focused more on learning English. After she enrolled in to the university and began the English course, her socialization with the second woman ended.

Project Group Experience

Janan was able to enroll in her Health Care program after two semesters of English courses. At the time of this study, she had completed two semesters of courses that could be applied to her major. The course targeted in this study was Chemistry; here she had weekly lab projects in a group of two. While she spoke of many rewarding engagements with Americans, at the time of our interview she had been unsuccessful in engaging any meaningful conversation with her lab partner. Janan conveyed that her efforts thus far had been stifled due largely to indifference of her partner in both the

course and their relationship. It was also surprising to learn that after the third week of class, she had not yet learned her African American partner's name.

Key Insights of the Participant

Although Janan expresses a lack of confidence in her communications skills, she finds it fulfilling to speak to others regarding her culture and religion. She conveys experiences where host faculty and students had little understanding of her culture and appeared hesitant to even to communicate. Janan believed that much of the reasons were because of their fear of approaching her as a female and as a Muslim. When given opportunity she expressed that she would try to show a friendliness that might encourage further communications.

Janan's insights into gender relations added a great deal to this study. She articulated difficulties that both she and her husband experienced coming from a culture where males and females had very little interaction and touching members of the opposite sex was not acceptable. She describes that while Muslim women can be identified by their scarves, males are not identifiable. She elaborates on how this may create some uncomfortable experiences for them:

...maybe men will be more, more careful with ladies because we are wearing scarfs, but on the men's side there is no sign that said they are Muslims so ladies didn't know so...my husband was in English class and his relationship with his ah instructor was very good because she seemed, seems interested in international people. And she always ask him and make conversation with him at the end of class with him. She is a lady and at the end of the semester she did something that

was naturally calm but it was awkward. She hugged, me, my husband. And she said I will miss you and he was, he was shocked because her hug had been suddenly she didn't give any introduction for something like that but yeah, this, I mean we are expect these positions so we hope we act nicely. (Interview 1)

Janan also spoke regarding how men may be uncomfortable working with women since they may have had very little interaction with them in the past. In her interview Janan convey an example of how this could be easily overlooked:

I think men are some, you ask if men have problem with getting into groups with ladies. I think some of them but not all of them because all Muslims everybody have touch with, with women even in Saudi Arabia. Even if it just a short conversation but there must be some touch with women. But there is some grey areas in Saudi Arabia. They don't have them the image of communicate with women. So some of them have a culture shock whenever they came to America but then they start, to handle that issue. But I think that there is some of them that have that problem in the first time. And my husband was working on the international orientation for I think ah three semesters and ah the international office when the students came they used to have a trip to somewhere near to [University Campus] and some, and when orientation the trip was to [resort town on lake] I think do you know where....Yeah, and it has beach...And there was a lot of Saudi students that came over and they, you know in our country there is a beach but there is no women that go, you know, the beach with beach clothes or like that so this is the first time they came to United States and this is the first

thing that they will see they will see. I mean. women with beach clothing... so this will be so much stress for them. So my husband talk with the some manager of the international office and suggest that they, maybe in the future, do not use the same thing because it will influence badly on the Saudi students. Especially these who never get from their cities get out from their cities....And he is, he [Janan's husband] was talking to the Saudi student's and they said no, this is fine. And he said maybe you will now from this point be fine but in the soon future you will be not because this is your first time and you will be excited but after 2, 4 weeks, you will be so tired from this difference in culture and so on. So yeah,...I think that this thing is what she said that work with women and men as something new for our culture and it doesn't reach every city in Saudi Arabia. There are some cities in Saudi Arabia still not that open mind so there are some students that came from these cities. (Interview 1)

Unfortunately Janan was one of two students who failed to complete the study. Shortly following our first interview (conducted jointly with Karima, a second Saudi female participant) she had to return to Saudi Arabia.

Participant 6 - Fadil

Fadil is a Shiite from an urban city in Eastern Saudi Arabia and transferred from the Saudi controlled TVTC institution. As a high performing graduate he was offered a King Abdullah scholarship to attend a university in the United States. Fadil explained that the selection of the school was determined by the scholarship program. When he was very young, Fadil came to the U.S. while his father attended an American college in

Illinois. While he was here he was too young to attend school, yet he remembered enough of American culture to ease his transition. Since his courses in Saudi Arabia were all delivered in Arabic, Fadil required four semesters of English before gaining the skills for admission into other university courses. While he has attained satisfactory communications abilities, he describes how he often relies on others to explain terminology used within his discipline of study. At the time he participated in this study, he was taking a second semester of courses for his program major. Since his scholarship requires him to complete his degree in two years, he will need to pursue an aggressive timetable to meet that deadline.

Fadil is an outgoing student who maintains a very active schedule. He describes his lifestyle as busy and his time in his apartment only for eating and sleeping. Fadil describes his perceptions of Americans being hesitant to communicate with international students. He, like other Saudi students participating in this study has developed a strategy of initiating friendship through conversation and invitations to meet outside of the classroom and laboratory environment. Fadil has also been working as a part-time campus photographer that has enabled him to gain social contacts and peer recognition.

Project Group Experience

This study draws first upon Fadil's current project centered courses. His Automotive course required a significant course project that included another American student as his partner. Not having the option to select a partner, he will relate to being initially doubtful regarding that student's abilities or dependability. By the second interview, most of these concerns have evaporated and they find themselves working

effectively together. His interviews and journal submissions also convey experiences from his Physics lab group that consists of another Saudi male and two American females and himself. His input regarding this mixed gender group is generally positive and insightful. Fadil also refers to learning about American culture through projects assigned in his statistical course last semester. Working with his statistical project he also explains how he became knowledgeable of card games and of baseball:

I got involved with ah two Americans to finish one of the projects like do a paper. Or we have to search about a topic and I remember we used a baseball topic so we have to. For me I had no idea about the baseball because we don't have this game back home. So um these Americans they were helping me to understand like how the game is going on. And we do some statistical like this ah, one of the teams.

(Interview 1)

Fadil described how his lab group understood his desire to honor his Muslim prayer obligations:

...like for my religion, Islam, so sometimes in the day we can't work, like we have to go pray. So in that time, we have like I can respect like have my own time for praying. But American, maybe they have, I don't know, like different times. So I respect that. So we can meet in like prayer time, in the lab. ...

So after I finish the lab or the class, I go pray like in my apartment or different room in the building....No we [project team] didn't, talk except like just the times like sometimes we try to grab the best time for all of us like for airflow just me and one of the students, we are two. So I talk to him and tell him like what's the

time for both of us. So we see some of the times work for both of us and sometimes no, but like one of the times, it doesn't work for me, prayer time like 1:30 or 1:45 it's like that is prayer time. (Interview 2)

Key Insights of the Participant

Fadil provided some unexpected insights on the cultural differences that he has experienced at the university amongst Saudi students from other geographic regions of Saudi Arabia. The lengthy excerpt below, conveys some of the cultural differences across Saudi Arabia including (a) vocabulary, (b) tribal significance, (c) customs, and religion.

... I don't know if I told you that or not but each part of Saudi Arabia, it's different. I think it is same here; like East different then West and South. So one of the, my friends, Saudis he is from South. So we get sometimes like argument like between ah, how to say it, um, ah sometimes like even like we are same language but my word is different from his word. Like I am from East, he is from South. So sometimes I get hard time to understand him....same thing for him, he get hard time to understand me. But we are both same, Arabic. Like talk Arabic, same language but [we use] different word. For example, like here and south, one of them call like coke-a-cola like pop and one of them coke like same thing but different, like same language but different word. Same thing in like my Arabic, in Saudi Arabia...I haven't met people from the North I don't know. Ah but what I see from the West and ah South ah I felt like they are culture way different than my culture. For example...where I am from my family, it is one

family, like big family. But if you go to West or South the split the family to like I don't know what it's called in like English but it's like this group it is called something and this group is called something else. Ah it's like tribe, when I like my last name, [name], so all [name], its one family but if you go to ah West Saudi Arabia you will see it's like different. There is like when I said [name] I said ok, which type of [name], it's like different groups and same thing for south. ...But if you go South or West, it is different. It's like they will say, ok, which type of [name]...what I see it's like if you go to like, if you go to like South, it's, you feel like it's a different country I mean like their culture. I mean like, for example, the wedding. I don't know if you saw that in the news or something people didn't like even think of Saudi Arabia. They dance with the sword. Have you seen that? ...Yeah, so they do like in South they do it a lot in weddings. They dance with swords ah it's called, the type of dance it's called ah in Arabic ah Harrabah...where I am from we don't do that....we have different type of Islam. So, in my tribe [Shiite] we pray three times and in their tribe [Sunni] five times...We have also like not just all my type but where I am from we have also like the other types like Sunni but most of them I would say like 75% my type and 25% are like in my home town is the other type. (Interview 2)

Fadil will also contribute many insights into intercultural relations with Americans. These encompass the integration of his culture within his project team as well as their social behaviors.

Participant 7 - Giakfar

Giakfar is from Jeddah, a well populated city in Western Saudi Arabia. His family is well educated and includes his father who was employed in a management position for an airline company, his mother who taught middle grade students and two sisters who both earned master's degrees in Islamic studies. After high school graduation Giakfar went to Canada, first to learn English and then enroll into a Mechanical Engineering program. His experience at the Canadian university was painted during the interviews as culturally challenging. He experienced this environment as impersonal and difficult for establishing relationships with non-Saudi students. After struggling academically and personally, he took the suggestion of an acquaintance to enroll in the mechanical engineering technology program at this university. Since moving, he has found it easier to communicate with other students and student support services that have been very helpful. This semester completed Giakfar's his second year at this university. Last semester, he transitioned from a pre-program status to admitted last semester.

Project Group Experience

Although the student experienced a previous technology based lab course, this study focuses on his Physics lab. In this lab, he was paired with an American male who leads the group and an American female. By the second interview they have gained a second American female in their group. Initially, the participant had expressed a great deal of difficulty working with his group for reasons which he felt were lack of confidence with his English and his inherent shyness. An example of this was conveyed by Giakfar following his first interview. At the time it occurred in the laboratory it was

very awkward and frustrating. Later, as he shared the story, the humor of the situation was clearly evident to him. The event unfolded, when in the course of the lab procedures, the female lab partner asked him for his protractor. Giakfar could only interpret the request as asking for his “protector.” After several attempts by her to communicate her the request, he remained visibly confused and the other team members simply moved forward leaving him puzzled. Only afterward did he realize what they had intended. During the interview Giakfar and the researcher were both able to share a good laugh regarding the experience. While this lab group had a very awkward and somewhat dismal beginning, as conveyed throughout the first interview, by the second interview the four students were communicating much more comfortably. Each of the members were beginning to find their contributions to the team as a whole. Likewise, the third interview showed continued progress in the team’s relationships and equality of expectations. Giakfar expressed that he had not verbally shared his culture with his lab partners through the length of the semester.

Key Insights of the Participant

Giakfar is admittedly a somewhat shy and quiet student who struggles somewhat in focusing on his courses. His interviews reflect struggles in establishing friendships with non-international students. Giakfar explained that a concern he harbors over the image of Saudi Arabians, formed through world events, which may be affecting his comfort in communicating with host students. Participating in sports with host students has provided a positive venue for him to build confidence with host students.

I feel alright, ah I don't know about my confidence ah sometimes I feel like I am not confident. Some stuff, some things like takes me back like holds me back like talking about it. I don't know....Well you know sometimes like when you want to open up like a conversation especially when it's something simple like a general topic about the war not like something specific and you say like your opinion about it and the other side doesn't get it or doesn't understand it the way you want them to get it. Perceive them, to perceive the information and you are still like they are like, I don't know like they will be judging or something....Sometimes it happens sometimes not so I don't know I try not to have that like I will just keep it to myself so I feel better....It's a cultural and a background thing, it's not a language thing....It's alright, ah I don't know to be honest I just like my experience with like the people I interact with. I find myself like, I could interact with and have a conversation with international students more than the locals here. I don't know why that, I feel more comfortable. Probably because they are not from here, I don't know....Yeah, something like, me having a conversation with black people, I don't know why....I can make like it [conversation with black people] happens you know. (Interview 1)

Giakfar's contributions to this study were very important as he was able to present a story of a shy student with several pronounced barriers that prevent him from enjoying an international experience. He also brings out, not only the difference in classroom culture, but also the important difference and instructor can make through subtle but well directed words. For example, Giafar gained confidence in his math

abilities as well as enthusiasm for this subject stemming from some encouragement and flexibility of his instructor:

Like in one of the classes and I used to like show up like some of the time in the beginning and like in the middle. By the end, he would like, the professor probably would say, like, “I see you and I don’t see you sometimes and you just show up sometimes barely like, you know, like really confusing most of the time.” And you know, I had to go back. Ah, things got better and like I told you before like the good experience I had that teacher change my thinking like appeal to me with different things. He helped me a lot like I had a class, I had two classes with him like previous classes and I got like A+. And during that classes I was just attending class and doing like the tests and I was doing very well. But I haven’t like, I did not submit like any homework since the beginning of last semester. So by the end of the semester he was just came to me and talked to me and asked me like: “why you aren’t like doing this. Because you got like a C- now and if you got all the homework done you would be getting like an A or B+ or so.” And I had to explain to him what had happened and he told me like I can get like an incomplete course so he cans give me like an opportunity to complete the work....I didn’t know about the incompletes thing for the course. I didn’t know like even about it at all. And he mentioned actually for me and I took it. I am actually still like working on it this semester and it was pretty like a good thing to do for me.

Still, Giakfar finds that it is difficult to become friends with students in his academic courses including his lab group. Instead he explains that meaningful interactions he has with Americans are those that have transpired outside of the university.

Participant 8 - Karima

Prior to coming to the U.S. to study, Karima had a brief 10 month international experience with her parents in Great Britain. As a teen (13 years old), she described that time as very unpleasant. She felt that her lack of language skills and her age were the primary faults. Karima and her family are from Qatif. The city has a population of about 500,000 and is located just north of Ad Dammam. Karima describes Qatif as one of the few cities in Saudi Arabia that is primarily Shiite in this Sunni dominated nation. More recently, Karima's father's work assignment brought their family to Houston. She found the Houston area to be quite diverse and included a large Arab population. During the interviews she quickly indicated that, while in Houston, her brother passed away. She avoided providing details of the loss. During her two years in Texas, she attended community college and later she transferred into this university. Karima expressed her desire to experience living in America on her own and being independent.

Project Group Experience

This was Karima's first semester at this university and she was enrolled in her first semester in a Health Care program. Her relationship with her lab partner in her Chemistry course is the focus of this study. Karima and her lab partner (Chinese, born in the U.S.) seem to mutually respect each other's abilities and appear to get along well as a

group. Unfortunately, the interviews show a very constrained relationship that is bounded primarily to those interactions necessary to complete their projects.

We like we say hello to each other I ask her what did you do spring break ... and she knows that I know that we will help each other anytime but we don't talk about other things, just about the chemistry and that it, yeah so I don't have must to tell about my lab partner (Interview 2)

Key Insights of the Participant

Karima is very soft spoken and conscious of her limitations in English. This make her more hesitant to communicate with others and somewhat concerned about her ability to follow conversations that might revolve around cultural topics that she may not be familiar with. She is also conscious that as a Muslim female others may be cautious to speak with her.

Well in my opinion I don't know if this is true or not, but in my opinion ah I think um, also because I am female and they are scared of myself maybe they are I don't know what is their idea about us so I always say to myself maybe they think I don't want to or something so I don't feel like I want to communicate with you. And ah, I don't have any problem so then I think that they feel comfortable and they start talking to me. What I, so American students they can make communication with the Saudi boy Saudi boys, easier than with the Saudi girls. (Interview 1)

Karima also recognizes that they may be fearful of unfamiliar cultural boundaries that might cause offence. Karima does recognize some responsibility on her behalf to

open paths for communication through her showing openness to others by initiating conversation.

Karima's most potent insights shared throughout the interviews are: (a) the importance of separating what is culture and what is religion, (b) the cultural and religious differences that exists amongst the Saudis themselves, (c) the Saudi students exercise a practical leniency in how strictly they follow doctrine or culture, and (d) as the only female to complete the study, she provides insights into the unique barriers faced by Saudi women.

Throughout her interviews, Karima was adamant regarding the separation of what is culture and what is religion. She frequently seized opportunity during the interviews to emphasize their distinctions.

I mean we cannot drive in my country, women cannot drive in my country, that is not because of my religion that is because of our culture. Ok so yeah he knows that we cannot drive because of our culture not because of our religion. (Interview 1)

I'll just say this, the biggest problem I think is they are misunderstanding between culture and religion because the problem actually that we face is because our culture not because of our religion, that what makes people misunderstand us. (Interview 3)

Karima's relationship with her American roommate and her roommate's family shows a wonderful exchange of intercultural experiences. She tells of how her

roommate's family respects her Muslim practices while she enjoys learning from them American family behaviors as well as popular culture.

The most important thing that I think I did is I made it clear for her [roommate] that not everything we do is because of our religion. That's the most thing I told her. So we listen to music, but we are not allowed in my religion to listen to music, but we do listen to music it is not because of my religion it is because of yeah know. And I told her yeah know some people supposed to because they are a Saudi student don't wear a Hijab they are supposed to how, they are Muslims and ok, its ok yeah know. We do not have to do everything. I mean we have to do everything, but not every person does what he or she has to do.

Yeah, I think all American students need to know more about my well the difference between culture and my religion. I think this is the most confusing thing for people here. (Interview 2)

Karima also articulated her insights into the difference in Sunni (majority religion on the KSA) beliefs and practices and her own as a Shiite (minority religion in the KSA). In her interviews, she describes how the campus environment allows safe discussion of the difference amongst the Saudis.

We do have very good relationship here [university campus]. No difference between us like Sunni and Shiite. We don't care about this because in the end we are all Muslims. So, but yeah know I call them stupid people when they make difference between us because it doesn't matter. We all pray to one God, we all believe in the same prophet. It's just the small things. We don't have to fight

because of it, but the truth is that Shiite in my country has many many, many difficulties. This is the truth, but when I came here I was actually surprised because they treat each other very well. We talk about the difference between us and we accept each other and the differences between each other but and we know we have conversation about this stuff and it is very good conversations. We never fight we never we yeah know accept each other, but in my country usually you don't feel comfortable to have this kind of conversations with other people like she respects me, but nothing more than that. We don't talk about the differences between us we don't have discussions yeah know. We don't do that. So, I was surprised because we can do that here....Especially Sunni people and students because in school [Saudi Arabia] they don't teach us about Shiite aspects, everything about Sunni, everything so they don't know anything about the difference between us and them. So, we know because we learn that at school but they don't know because they know what they know and they learn what they also know in school. (Interview 2)

Karima provides several insights in the practicality of strict adherence to Islam and Saudi culture while they are in the U.S. Examples included food and socialization. One of the most unavoidable is music, which is *haram* for Muslims. She elaborates on this in her interviews:

Yeah, that's right in our religion; we are all Muslims in the end. What is haram in Sunni people it is haram for Shiite too. So, yeah....Not culturally it's religiously, were not allowed to listen to music. Like songs, not just

music.... Well let me tell you something, not everything we're not allowed to do, so we don't do it. Ok, so, we're not allowed to cheat, we're not allowed to lie to people, we not allowed to do lots of stuff ok, not just in my religion, but that doesn't mean we do everything. Ok, so sometimes unfortunately I do listen to music and songs and I know I'm not allowed. I mean it is because of my religion ok, but I sometimes do it and I know I should not do that ok. So, there is lots of Saudi and Muslims listen to music and you may find some people say this is not true, but don't believe them because it is not. We have tons of singers and they are Muslims... I mean it is not good thing, but this is true.

Karima provides insights into her perception of those communications barriers unique to Muslim women. Many of these she explains result from the obvious attire that identify them as Muslim. This, she also pointed out, is aggravated by Muslim females who also wear a face covering.

I have a friend ..., she covers her face so, it is very difficult for her to communicate and do her presentations and this stuff. It is much more difficult than what men face in here; they will wear whatever, trousers and t-shirts. So we have problems when it comes to our clothes. So, yeah, it is more difficult for girls to adapt, the differences between here and Saudi Arabia, even the very small specific stuff like the clothes.... I'll ask a question: 'If you see a girl, one of them cover her face and one of them just like me, just cover her head, one and just doesn't wear anything, when you have question do you want to ask any one of us, who will you go to?' ...Ok are you going to ask the girl who wears the headscarf

or the other girl who doesn't wear anything like not a headscarf and she doesn't cover her face nothing?...Ok, well this is the main problem between Saudi men and Saudi women because I think it does matter, even if we don't cover our face, people will have no problem to talk to Saudi men because they are like Chinese or Japanese or Russian it doesn't matter because they are men, what's the difference nothing, but they will feel there are some obstacles to talk to communicate with Saudi girls because this is what I believe, because of what we wear.

I notice that, I cover my face and I have friends from Saudi Arabia and they don't wear headscarves and they don't wear anything like they don't cover their face and they don't cover their hair, and I can tell the difference how they communicate with other American students....(Interview 3)

In addition to the visual identification of being a Muslim female, and the inhibiting uncertainty of boundaries to be respected with Muslim females, Karima also brings out another communication barrier for females to overcome. She explains that Saudi females often have experienced very little previous interaction with males. Females need to adapt to speaking and participating with males. Although this issue is expressed by male participants

Yes, at the beginning. I remember when I had to do my first presentation I as super nervous, like that was my first standing in front of men and talk yeah know, so I was pretty nervous especially since I had never go to University in my country, like in Universities we do have male instructors, but I never went to a Saudi University so, in Houston was my first time so I was very nervous to stand

in front of males and talk out loud and yeah know do my presentation and I was very shy to volunteer or say something, like if I didn't understand something, yeah it takes a long time to adapt this thing....in other things like gym and this stuff, most of my friends we do want to go to the recreation center, but we don't want to because there are men so, we don't feel like we will feel comfortable.

(Interview 3)

Participant 9 - Hikmat

Hikmat was born and raised in the Eastern Province capital city of Dammam. Dammam ranks as the fifth largest city in Saudi Arabia, with a population of about 750,000, and together with its neighboring cities is the third largest metropolitan region in the country with approximately 4.1 million people. This region is known for its oil production and abundance of industry. After leaving Saudi Arabia with an associate's degree from the province's Al Jubail Technical Institute, Hikmat attended the University in Houston, Texas. Hikmat relocated to this Midwestern university in 2013 after he decided to change his major to computer technology within a business context. Considering Hikmat's cosmopolitan background, his observation of the lack of cultural knowledge or desire for cultural experience in this rural campus community was very impactful. He does recall his own past where his cultural knowledge, like those he experiences with most of his student peer, was based upon movies and news media.

Upon arrival in the U.S., Hikmat studied English for five months before enrolling in an engineering program at a Texas university. Deciding that engineering was not his path, he arranged to attend this university. He is now completing his second year and

anticipating to graduate following this semester. During his time at this university Hikmat has become a leader in the Saudi Student Organization and has often represented the group to upper university administration as well as internal and external parties. He is an older student that has developed a measure of maturity and demonstrates articulate communications, social intelligence, and has welcoming character traits that blend humor, tact, and reason.

Project Group Experience

In his interviews, Hikmat recounted his earlier times in the U.S. when he participated on project teams. He speaks of how he was discounted as a valued participant because he was international and the obvious deficiencies in his English speaking skills. He also expressed that he often appreciated his teammate's sensitivities as they assigned him the easier portions of their projects. Hikmat describes how he has since grown much more confident, as have his project team members, in his competence.

Hikmat describes in the interviews the intentional choices that he made to pursue personal development and to get the most he could from his opportunity as an international student:

Yes, in my freshman year I was like afraid to go with the Americans to be like especially in a group project. I end up just sit with my Saudis or with like Arabs like anyone who can speak my like language....Will like be easier for us to like communicate and just like, get the job done. But after that, I was like come on and get the job done but it would be much better if I didn't come to America and just like sit with the same people I am just going to sit with like if I was back

home and that is not fair. I'm not going to be learning. ... I'm not going to be more ah in like ah practice my English and I will be like losing it a little bit. That is why it happened to me actually. I was like doing fine with everything but after that I was surrounded with like too many people speaking ...Arabic a lot and ah just my English being a little bit down....That is why after that, ok I will be like more involved with everyone and ah that was why I was like ah just involved with a lot of organizations and a lot of ah fraternities actually. (Interview 1)

Hikmat describes his journey from being dependent and insecure to a determined student who pushed himself to take risks, develop friendships, and build his own confidence and abilities. Along the way he describes how host students in his project groups were sensitive to his abilities and assigned him portions of projects according to his abilities.

... just like make new friends every day and make a like special like on my team project....In the beginning, it was like, ok, just give me what you want me they didn't trust as an international student. Because they said like look he couldn't do that much and they actually they assign us like really like short things. It's good for me. I was like happy with that. But ... like sometimes some people they do not understand they thought like you speaking English and you are good but they give you the hard part and that is not fair. Sometimes they like just, "Ok you can like do it." ... they give you the hard part and you will get confused because your language Especially, where ... when you are done with this project you have to make a presentation for it.... some of them ..., because of the language barrier

and they will like say ah ok, you will have like a second language and we will give you a list of the work less than us because it will be easier for you to find the information and do the job. And actually that is good and it is good, good for us sometimes....But now I don't care where they put me because ah as a freshman I was having like a fear for what I am going to do.... Then the second year I was like having the same I was like more and more confident in work with any project or any group worker. But right now in like in my final semester I can be like I am the leader of the group sometimes.... And that is why in the beginning they didn't know me and they were scared for what I provide for but right now I am fine and they sometimes they come ask me what I had to do and I lead them sometimes.

(Interview 1)

Still, Hikmat conveys how he experiences the same initial impressions as an international student not expected to be a valuable contributor to his project teams. He expresses how he has learned to set his team at ease by taking the lead in communications and demonstrating his natural ability for leadership.

Yes so in the beginning ah I can see like from their faces, like they yeah, like ok yeah, like we have an international student. Like yeah ok let's work on this and when I talk to them and cause I am goofy sometimes and like I always make like stupid jokes and stuff. Like, I make like the, I joke with the guys since the beginning when I meet the group and all that stuff. So they get comfortable with me as the international student. Even like when they heard my language it is much better than some people and something like this. When they hear me

speaking they get like confidence more than to work with me more as an international student. (Interview 3)

This semester Hikmat is participating in three group projects. In each he describes his confidence and leadership role as he encourages his team and pushes them to move forward to keep projects on schedule and on task.

... also that is the problem too sometimes, I always don't want to be leader but people push me to be the leader. (Interview 3)

Key Insights from the Participant.

Hikmat's contribution to this study adds a great deal of insight from very frank and honest discussions. His perceptions as he describes his progression in cultural adaptation and his experiences with host student is enriched by his maturity and positive attitude toward people and life in general. Some insight provided by Hikmat include: (a) the influence of media on cultural perceptions, (b) the importance of giving in his Saudi culture,

Hikmat's initial experiences in the U.S. were colored by perceptions from television media:

... from the first day I came to America I was in D.C. and all I see in the movies and D.C. was happening and ah gangsters and crime and all that stuff. And since the time, since the sunset that time the first time I came I run to my hotel and locked the door and I sat over there. Because I didn't want to go outside I thought because they are gonna see me, I'm an Arabic guy they gonna steal my money or something like that. It was like stupid, it was from the media because I didn't not

want I did not know.... it's like in the media I was like all American because that's what I saw in the movies on the t.v. shows like Prison Break. Or all the crazy shows and movies I used to watch and that is what people get, the first vision from but after that, after two weeks actually I was able to even spend the night outside....Yeah, starting to understand better and better and it's still like, even still now I am living in different because for the, like for the period of time I have been here....And now, I am confusing for what my culture is. Like what my culture is I am mixed culture is my life. I have good things from Saudi Arabia; I have good things from America and I mix it together that's why I'm living right now. Yeah, taking the best of both and yeah getting rid of the bad things of both of them ...(Interview 1)

In addition to overcoming his perceptions of America formed through the media, Hikmat is also very conscious of images of Arabs, portrayed through the media and how these might affect the perception that American have of Arabs.

That's what actually everyone blame and actually that is the truth because media is ... everywhere. Like when you sit in the house and have nothing to do, you watch TV and when you watch TV you cannot watch Die Hard and they going to let you go to oh yeah they having problem in like Abu Dhabi or anywhere in that area. ... or like Taken 2 where they have like that guy he came from like the Arab area like the gulf area. And he came just like to get the slave girl like the prostitutions? Yeah, to get like slave girls and sell and buy girls to sell them over there and just like put them over there to just like to do prostitution. (Interview 1)

Hikmat summarizes the takeaway images from these movies as Arabs having money and being terrorists:

Yeah, for me when like Americans came to me and they thought like what they learned from the media about like Saudis is like bad people and all the stuff they know that media. But when I explained to them: you cannot judge me because everyone in this earth there is none there is no two people like each other. Even ... you are different from your brother and you are different from your sister and even different from your father and the father is raising you. With the person who is raising you and you are different from them. That is why no one can be judging from anyone. (Interview 1)

Hikmat, also describes both the importance of giving within his Saudi culture and his insights as to how this is perceived as a means to manipulate or gain influence with others. Although other participants share the importance of generosity in their culture and religious practice, Hikmat adds some of the more descriptive insights. Below are a few gift giving examples as conveyed by Hikmat:

It would be ah Saudis sometimes ah have like different sense of humor. I mean like they, usually like they came to a meeting, like a group meeting or something. They don't like to come with their hands empty like always like have coffee and bring stuff. And sometimes some people think like why do you do this to us did you like try to ah like bring us this stuff so we can be happy and you don't want to do the work?...Yeah but it is like, that is why ah some of them they don't understand ah where we came from. We always give we don't like to get you

know. I mean like ah we humble sometimes, we really humble. I'm not have to say this but yeah even sometimes like ok we will go, you go to like a coffee like Starbucks, you you have friends and usually we have friends and are like ok I'm going to buy your coffee it doesn't matter....My roommate was a football player....and you know he was like one of the best players on the team. This means a lot of parties at my house. That is why I always like people come to my house. They were like where are you from? From Saudi Arabia. Where is that at or like how that happened or... I had been home [to Saudi Arabia] and I bring ah like ah sandals for my roommates. It was good shoe sandals and he was like, "Oh my god like how did you like get them" and he is still friends with me. It is like but that reaction at that time was like people like why he buy you this. It doesn't matter its ok....Yeah, they think like if we, especially if I live give them sandals it is like back home sandals like ah Saudi sandals. But they are not 100% good shoe but like it look like a Gucci thing. Yeah, but it was, I just give him like a memory from me and just know keep it as a reminder you know you have it for you know what I mean like ah if you do a good job for me you are a really close friend and you are not from my area. And I have to bring you something from my area where I am from. Like yesterday I give ah the president a small camel ah with a guy on it. (Interview 1)

Participant 10 - Ihab

Ihab was the final participant to join this study. He describes his home town as a surrounded by desert sands and very hot, and having a population similar to the city

where this Midwestern U.S. university is situated. His father passed away while he was very young and was raised by his mother with six siblings. Prior to leaving Saudi Arabia, he was employed as an electrical/mechanical technician for a large international company. There he gained experience working on an off-shore rig alongside employees from different countries and cultures. This experience, he believes helped him to better adapt to the U.S. culture. Ihab attended the King Fahd University whose main campus is located in Ad Dammam, capital city of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. His courses were offered near his home town. He left his company in order to transfer to the U.S. to continue his education. At the U.S. host university Ihab was required to take only one semester of English before being ready to enter general coursework at the host university. He has completed one year of studies and this semester has begun coursework specific to his major. As he was allowed to transfer many of his King Fahd courses, Ihab began this semester to take junior level courses in his major.

Ihab is very soft spoken and requires some effort to hear his responses. He does exhibit a very positive attitude and, as an ambassador with the Saudi RSO, is open and encouraging for cultural sharing

Project Group Experience

Ihab's lab group consisted of four students: Ihab, a second Saudi student, and two American students. All group members are male. Working as a group was a new experience for Ihab, which, although it was initially awkward, he soon came to appreciate. Ihab describes the first week together as very uncomfortable and like a "courtroom." By the second or third week, he conveys how they began to unify as a

group. Ihab also recognized that it was the host students that reached out to build the relationship. This excerpt from the interviews help to describe the transition of the group from an awkward foursome to a group with common purpose and equitable responsibilities:

...It's going really good like ah like the first week I was afraid to ask like some of the reading I did not take because they feel like that I am not that smart or I am not that good. But now it's ok I can like work on something else while he is working on the reading or the calculation. And we can exchange our work to save some time....Ah, I expect that I will I cannot like work because I will waste his time because he knows everything so that when I go back home I will ask my Saudi friend maybe he knows how the reading is and will take the reading every week and it's going to be like boring and it will not be useful for me because I will not gain any information or any new education. But then I found out that I can ah I can interact with him, build a relationship with him and be a good student. (Interview 1)

An important accomplishment of Ihab was to overcome his lack of confidence in his academic abilities. The interview reveals that Ihab's expectations for his host partners to do the work was really the same expectation that his partner has for him. Moving past his point, the group seemed to actually begin to work on a level of equal expectation.

I expect from him to do like you know everything and I think he expect the same from me. So that's why in the first we did not work and then we went to the professor to distribute the work on each one. So we just waited for our teacher to

help us. And then after that we did everything by our own. Ah when, it was like some kind of fun because some of the things we like experience ah nobody knows about it so it was like a little bit challenging. I'm looking for information on the internet and he's looking for some information in his books and then we exchange information and we found like good answers and it was a good experience.

(Interview 1)

Ihab better described his relationship with the group and some of the initial barriers in his second interview. One of the most gratifying signs of how well the group worked was in their willingness to meet outside of the lab to continue group collaborations. The Saudi students learned to comfortably work together as a team with the American students. Equally important was his realization of how the Americans were willing and proactive to work with their Saudi partners.

Ok, ... the difference between ah the groups studying here and the groups studying in Saudi Arabia especially my college. But back in my college, we did not used to stick to one group and do lots of experiments together and lots of studies and lots of calculations together. But, when we come here to like to study in America we get we got into new groups to do like a calculation and to do some experiments. And, at first, it was some kind of hard to communicate with the American because they know that as a group, I remember like, everyone has to do his work and finally they come together and everyone will get some stuff form the other students. But for us, as international students, we did not get used to studying as a group. And in the first weeks, my American friends, they sit with

me and they told me how we can like deal with each other, how we can communicate with each other. Like if we, if you wanna do extra calculation, we can meet in the library and we can meet outside. And they bring their like information and they bring my information and we explain to each other. ...Back in my college in Saudi Arabia we did not like get used to meet like outside of the college. ... here, I experience like to work with the American students outside of the college like in the regular life. We go to like coffee shop and we have drink together and we like ah get their information and they explain for me what I am missing and I explain for them what they missing and it was like complicated the first weeks. But then, it was just like it like was just easy. Like ah when we reached to the middle of the semester like we formed like a perfect team together. Like every experience, experiment we have everyone has to do his work. Otherwise we cannot work like by our own because sometimes it took away the experiments we had required a perfect team. Working together and communicating with each other. As perfect and we can get like great result in the end... (Interview 2)

Key Insights of the Participant

Ihab contributed several insights from his experiences in America. Below, three very insightful observation are presented from Ihab: (a) Ihab recognized the importance for the Saudi students to overcome their fears of speaking with Americans initiate conversation and friendships with American students. (b) He sees the cultural difference

in how the American student is perhaps stubbornly independent. (c) Ihab, provides some very insightful responses to the source and response of neoracism.

In the quote extracted from the first interview, Ihab speaks of encouraging his fellow Saudi students to take initiative to start a conversation with American students. His experiences with his lab group have shown him that once this barrier is broken valuable friendships can begin to form. Also, this can enable groups to function more successfully in both an academic and social sense.

Yeah with [name] it was not like challenging but most of my friends like they came over and they talked to me because they know I was experienced with American. It was challenging for them like because some of them, Saudi, they are afraid to ask some of their partners if they need anything. Or they are afraid that they cannot speak the language it's no good. And they are afraid that maybe the American will understand them different and something like that. So, first it was so hard for them and I told them you just have to go and talk with them. You just have to go and make new friends they are like very welcome they are very nice. And they did that and they noticed the difference after one semester. I found that many of my Saudi friends, they have like American friends.

Yeah [it was because they took the initiative to talk to the American students], it's the same when I like met [name] who is not from Saudi Arabia and they came to Saudi Arabia. They are like a little bit afraid and the culture thing and you just have to begin it you just have to initiate it and talk about it. (Interview 1)

Ihab presents an insight during his second interview that describes the independent nature of the American student. He observes how the American will work very arduously on his own in order to understand an experiment. On the contrary, Ihab, once he has determined that he does not understand, will seek assistance from the professor.

... also like when we [Saudi students] deal with things, like sometimes, like we give up. But I see many of my American friends, they like do lots of hard work. Like if they don't understand like one experiment, they do lots of hard work to get it understood. But someone, especially like me, sometimes when I do it like one or two times, I always go and ask for help. But for the Americans, I see that they, they always try to do it by themselves. And sometimes I tell them that we have to go and ask the professor or ask the other students, it's ok because we are here to help each other. (Interview 2)

Another insight provided by Ihab that reveals his reaction to neo-racism that he is occasionally confronted with. His realization is that often people's attitudes and thoughts are shaped through media rather than actual experience. The interview excerpt that follows demonstrates his understandings and how it helps him to cope and forgive.

One of the experiences that I faced it was in Washington, my flight from Saudi Arabia to Washington, Washington to Big Rapids. ... I was going with the American airline and there was a woman there. I spent some a long time with her because my flight was cancelled so I stayed there and I speak up with her. So she was telling me the media was telling bad stuff about us. So she was very honest

with me to speak up. I told her like we cannot, we cannot kill a fly how we can kill someone. So it was really different and I told her that we are all human and the media play a very bad role to make a difference between each other so....When I found someone who is like for example is racist to me I don't blame, I don't blame him. So I did not. I cannot say that he is the bad one. I always blame the media. So once I get offended by anyone, when my friends are trying to be there for me, I told them that: "You cannot blame him guys. Maybe he heard something bad about us and we can we have to like speak with him and explain to him more about the things that he knows about us." (Interview 1)

Summary

These profiles will serve to better contextualize interview data collected from each of these ten Saudi international students. Their willingness to openly share their beliefs, culture, faith, and values as well as their broader life and international experiences have enabled a deeper understanding of those perceptions and attitudes derived over the course of this study. The following chapter will present these larger through the words of the Saudi students.

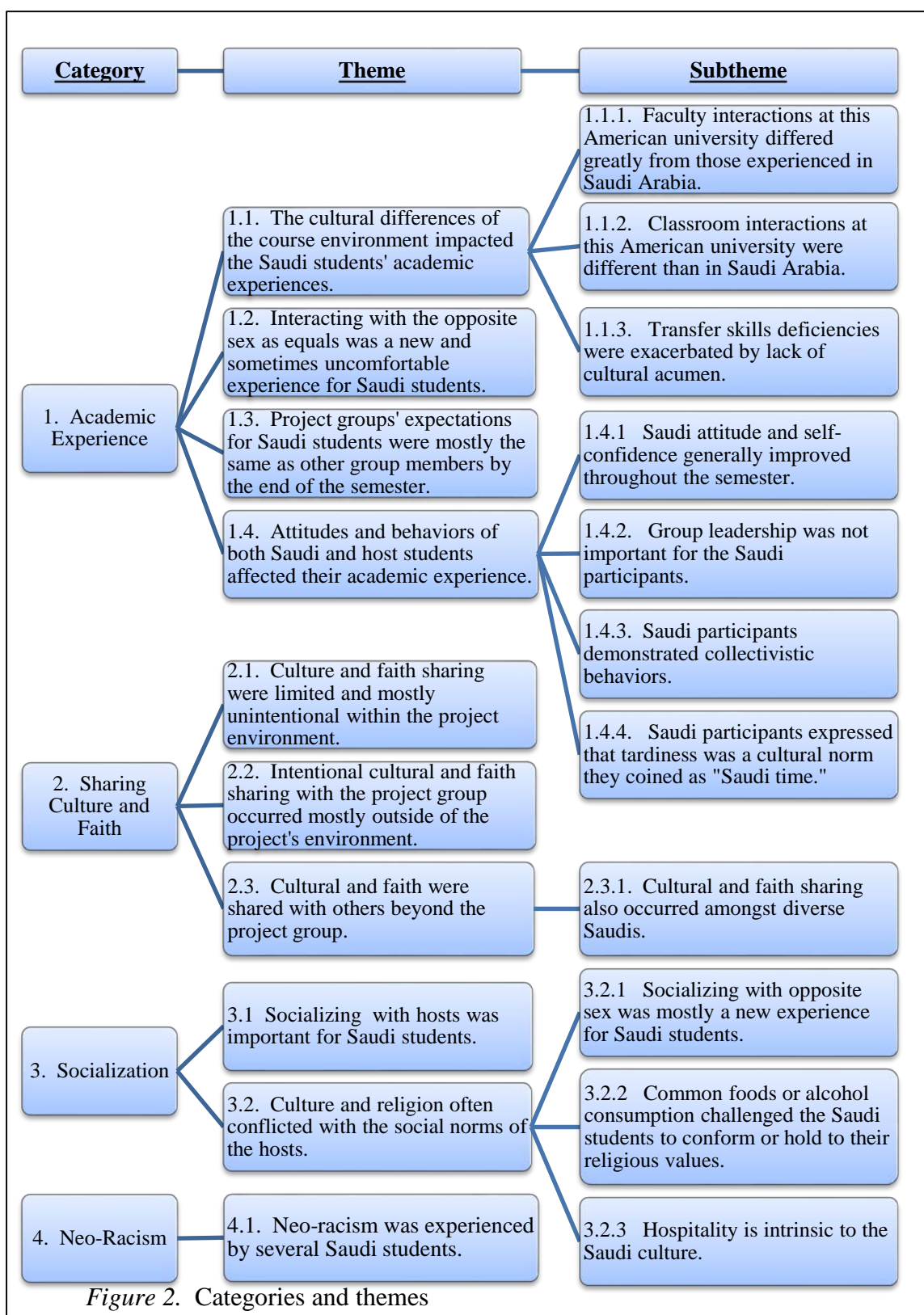
CHAPTER V

THEMES

This section presents the data collected from each of the ten Saudi student participants as they experienced acculturation with their respective project groups. Cultural integration, the primary topic of this study, is inherently chronological, therefore, the perceptions and understandings acquired from interview data demonstrated an evolving relationship between the Saudis and their host peers. To better analyze the progression of attitudes, events, experiences, and perceptions, these recounted experiences were explored both chronologically and thematically. Although this study is focused on participant experiences within their project teams, the breadth of their recounted experiences contributed a full landscape of their acculturation and added additional meaning to the project group interactions and their resulting perceptions and behaviors.

Four categories and associated themes were identified: (a) academic experience, (b) cultural sharing, (c) socialization, and (d) neo-racism. Tightly woven into each category and resulting themes were issues associated with deficiencies in English speaking skills.

Each category will be presented via exploration of its accompanying themes. Each theme will be richly depicted through interview quotations that convey meaning much deeper than a simple communication of fact. Despite awkwardly chosen words and disjointed sentence structures, the Saudi students effectively communicated their experiences, and the deeper impact these had on their attitudes and behaviors.



Category 1: Academic Experience

The interviews exposed many essential ingredients of the Saudi students' academic experiences and ultimate successes. The importance of each of these was, as hoped, magnified when these students were challenged to perform in a group environment made up of one or more host students. The *Academic Experience* category is inclusive of grouped topics gleaned from data collected from each participant and encapsulated the heart of this study. As students grappled with understanding course content, they simultaneously were working to understand and adapt to an unfamiliar classroom culture that challenged them to move away from the comfort of remaining a silent and unnoticed observer into an active participant who was expected to contribute to classroom discussion and problem solving. The concepts of the classroom were then expected to be applied to projects requiring the Saudi students to work side-by-side with American students.

The interviews exposed the struggles faced by both the Saudi and American students as, under pressure to complete their work successfully, they developed a team structure that was sufficiently functional to complete project objectives. Whether the group consisted of one or several host students, the social dynamics were often the most perplexing for the students. The interviews brought out both very positive experiences, and some that resulted in completed project expectations, but were disastrous as intercultural experiences. The interviews also provided a valuable illustration of how faculty can help to set the stage for the success or failure of the Saudi student through the

environments they create, their sensitivity to student needs, their willingness to communicate with students, and their availability to assist students as required.

Interviews also delivered an intimate observation into the attitudes and thoughts of the Saudi students. The Saudi students exposed how they blended their cultural backgrounds with their relational experiences to arrive at interpretations which influenced both their attitudes and resulting behaviors.

Four themes encapsulated the impactful messages conveyed by students within this academic experience category:

- 1.1. The cultural differences of the course environment impacted the Saudi students' academic experiences.
- 1.2. Interacting with the opposite sex as equals was a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience for Saudi students.
- 1.3. Project groups' expectations for Saudi students were mostly the same as other group members by the end of the semester.
- 1.4. Attitudes and behaviors of both Saudi and host students affected their academic experience.

Course Environment

Theme 1.1: The cultural differences of the course environment impacted the Saudi students' academic experiences.

Participant interviews brought forward the importance of culture in with the course environment. Several notable subjects stood out in the interviews including: (a) faculty interactions, (b) classroom interactions, and (c) transfer skills (see Table 3.).

Table 3*Cultural Differences of the Course Environment that Impacted the Academic Experience*

ID	Participant	Classroom and/or Instructor Interactions	Transfer Skill Issues	Mixed Gender Interactions
1	Adel	No	Technical Terminology, Processes, Tools, etc.	No
2	Butrus	Yes	Technical Terminology	Yes (mixed lab group)
3	Dharah	Yes	Units of Measure	No
4	Emin	Yes	Terminology	Yes
5	Janan	Yes		Yes
6	Fadil	No	Cultural Terminology	Yes (mixed lab group)
7	Giafar	Yes		Yes (mixed lab group)
8	Karima	Yes		Yes
9	Hikmat	Yes		Yes
10	Ihab	Yes		Yes

Subtheme 1.1.1: Faculty interactions at this American university differed greatly from those experienced in Saudi Arabia. One of the most notable topics which emerged was how different the relationship was between the instructor and the students in the U.S. The friendlier and approachable faculty in this U.S. university represented an unfamiliar contrast compared to the formal and hierarchical relationships that most of the Saudis

were accustomed to. Table 3 illustrates eight out of the ten participants described their faculty-student interactions as being impactful to their experiences.

Dharah spoke of instructor approachability at this university as being quite different from his previous experiences. He also commented on his surprise at the level of interaction that was both expected and considered acceptable to the faculty and within the classroom.

... back in Saudi actually there is a saying we say toward teachers, like it's a very, very popular poem about teachers. ... I will just translate this I don't know if it makes sense or not. It says, "Stand up for a teacher and give them all the respect he deserves, because a teacher is almost a messenger from God; a prophet."

So what I am referring to is the relationship or the atmosphere in the classrooms.

In Saudi, ... When a teacher came in everyone stops talking you know until he says what we have to do. ... Here it's very different. I was shocked. ...And that's why I told my roommate that I had a culture shock from the school....It's very different, the atmosphere and the environment in the classroom is very different from what I have had before. ... There is respect but there is, ah I don't want to say too much joking but like the level of joking, ok, is not what I have experienced before. ...Almost like a friend as opposed to an instructor.

(Interview 2)

When speaking about the positive relationship that Dharah's project had developed, he was quick to credit faculty interaction:

... honestly another thing is the professor actually ... I can say he is a very good reason for like for the relationship we have right now as students. ... Because he knows, he knows how good this student is and how bad. I wouldn't say *bad* but how good this student is you know. So he sometimes: "Go ok, you go watch this guy" you know. Yeah, he tell this guy: "Ok, now go show him how to do this." So this is also a very good reason, very helpful reason that we have right now in the relationship. (Interview 1)

Karima also contrasted her instructor experience at this university to those in Saudi Arabia:

I think here in the United States students with their instructors are more casual and you know there is no ... lines, too much lines or walls they have to break to communicate with each other. But in my country you know we have to ... respect the instructor very much. And in here I think, like we can discuss some issues about the instructors with the instructors, but in Saudi Arabia it is pretty hard to do that. (Interview 3)

A third student, Giafar, also supported the difference in faculty approachability between their Saudi experience and that of the U.S.

Ah here like it [classroom environment] is more open like for the prof to talk to like the students and like for the students to express their like ideas, and with any word in like English I mean. And but back home it is not possible to like to say something like about the teacher or even if it like was for a joke like anything. We

would be banned or like you know like this is how it works... back home like.

(Interview 3)

Subtheme 1.1.2: Classroom interactions at this American university were different than in Saudi Arabia. The expectation of many faculty to actively participate in classroom discussion represented both a different cultural norm as well as an intimidation factor for Saudi students. This was especially acute with those Saudi students who were insecure in their ability to speak English. Karima was one of those students. Although her English was very good, she expressed a lack of confidence in speaking to a group.

Ok, I think I have a problem, ah I am very shy to speak out loud in class. And, because everyone thinks my English is not that good, so yeah, that bothers me so much. And, ah I always think that the American students understand more than me. I mean understand more than me because you know it is their language. Ok, so yeah but I try to be... yeah. And, I also think that if I don't speak first to other people and maybe they won't speak to me. So I have to show them that I understand and I want to communicate with you and then they, you know, seem to be fine and ok (Karima, Interview 1).

Subtheme 1.1.3: Transfer skills deficiencies were exacerbated by lack of cultural acumen. Although all of the Saudis spoke about difficulty in English communication, a subtheme focused on other academic deficiencies that Saudi students confront in the classroom due to differences in either learning or unfamiliarity with culture. Transfer skills that affected the academic experiences of Saudi students included: (a) differences in building materials, regulations or processes, (b) differences in tools or software, (c)

differences in terminology used in the discipline that may not have found its way into dictionaries, or (d) differences in measurement units or techniques.

For example, Adel made an important observation as he compared the advantages of entering into the program as a freshman as opposed to having to jump into the courses as a transfer student with an assumed knowledge base.

Yeah so another thing that is hard for us, ok so there is two kinds of Saudi students. Some of them are going from like zero to freshman, some of them have diploma already... So I'm not worried about the people with who are freshman that start from the bottom and learn everything from on up, because they will go step by step, but for us who had diploma, it's very different and difficult, because we learn, ok do you know the static[s]? ... I had statics in my country and its completely different here...So.....when I took the full work class....they expect me to know all this stuff, all the static, but I didn't know this. So I had to go back and study static and study four more at the same time. Which is difficult. And it was difficult for most of my classes, especially when its programs and network...(Adel, Interview 1)

Adel, a construction major, also spoke about how unfamiliar he was with building materials and processes in the U.S. One reason for this was that the climate and weather conditions that buildings must accommodate in Saudi Arabia are very different than those required for the U.S.

... they like know all the stuff like before the technology like I told you, like the process. Cause like our buildings are like different, the buildings here. So I didn't

just like know the process in building like I speak English is like hard to kinda know the process to like the materials and everything. (Adel, Interview 3)

Dharah brought out the difficulty adapting from his previous engineering studies that used metric units to his courses in the U.S. that most often employed English units. In engineering or physics problems working between units is common and English, not being a decimal based system, created some academic difficulty for Dharah.

Another area that Dharah experienced difficulties was in hand-on skills. As a transfer student into a technical program that emphasizes the application of theory, this was a substantial issue. This becomes an even greater importance when there are expectations assumed regarding the use of expensive or dangerous equipment. Dharah explained how he had to rely on his lab group to help overcome shortcomings in his hands-on skills. Having entered this machining course with no prior lab experience, he expresses gratitude to his lab group for their readiness to assist him:

At first, actually, when I first started it was very hard because I didn't have any experience with the machine. And because you know like I didn't have anyone that I know in the class. But time like time it was much easier after I discovered like I have to initiate you know. Like I have to start asking and talk you know. I found, I found that people were very helpful to me. ... after I started to like no one would come to you and ask you oh what do you need to, if you need any help you know. Where you have to go and ask and talk. (Interview 1)

A third issue associated with transfer skills was provided by Fadil who struggled with terminology in assignments or examples that referenced unfamiliar American

culture. For example, when a statistics instructor gives an assignment that requires knowledge of baseball. Since baseball is not played in the Middle-East, Saudis may have never been exposed to its rules, statistics, or associated terminology.

In my mind now it's like when you said about the English ah sometimes that is what I learned from them. For example when sometimes I read questions for let's say for statistics professor Mr. [name]. Sometimes he give you an example that, like the question, I don't understand it. Maybe, like some of the words new for me so my partner ask him, the American like he explain it to me. Maybe something culture, maybe something ah I don't know about it. (Fadil, Interview 2)

A final issue that surfaced as a hardship for transfer student was technical terminology. Fadil explained how technical reading assignments were particularly difficult. The difficulty was exacerbated since technical terminology is often not readily found in dictionaries.

Sometimes I have like hard time because you know it's not my first language, it is my second. So especially, like summer classes for instance, air flow class we have a lot of reading and we have to like as internationals we have to do a lot of research to understand what the books are saying. ...And, we have a lot of hard time to understand these words; especially like major words. It is really hard for us as a second language... We have a lot of Saudis taking automotive engineering. ...Sometimes, I know words they don't know and sometimes they know words I don't know so we help each other in that. (Fadil, Interview 1)

Emin, provided a second example that supported academic difficulties related with understanding technical terminology and added a great example using a milling machine. Milling machines remove metal from the surface to form the desired contour of a part. Milling in Saudi Arabia refers to processing grain and has no references to metal processing. Machining, as with other disciplines often create their own unique terminologies. His discussion on this topic conveys both the difficulty in finding definitions to technical terminology and how this frustrates course related conversations.

It's something new to our industry. So when I define the definition for the CNC or terminologies or something, I try to explain. I try to translate it to our language, in Arabic. I can't find the definition for it. So I spent long time just to find, to translate my language and other to get the idea. Because some words, for example, we are using the milling machine. When I tried to find the definition of milling and in a different language, I find the translation totally different.

... So a lot of problem, had just happen to me during translation, but I've tried to work and ... this is the most part I like. It's just working to get the idea. And instead of just getting, you know, getting in the class just writing and you have to find the definition, I prefer to work in order to get the idea or the definition.

...when I face a difficult word or new words. I had to, I have to translate it but it's not happening to me just to translate every single word while someone is talking to me. Or it's happening sometimes when people just talk to you very quick. Sometimes I spend like ten seconds, to, to translate it and to answer. Ah

but by the time I get used to it, I can talk to people very easily you know and without translating anything. (Emin, Interview 1)

Interaction With Opposite Sex

Theme 1.2: Interacting with the opposite sex as equals was a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience for Saudi students.

Although Saudi culture varies across the Kingdom's demographics, its societies are unified in their separation of males and females. Several participants in this study explained that males and females are not allowed to interact unless they have close family association. Only those participants who had previous workplace experiences would have had other interactions with the opposite sex prior to leaving Saudi Arabia. While most have since become more adapted to the interacting, the quotes below illustrate the significance of this issue. It is also interesting to note that three of the male students currently had labs with one or more female partners (Butrus, Fadil, and Giafar).

Butrus (male) noted his unfamiliarity in communicating with females:

... And it's a huge difference. ...Sometimes I'm shy to talk to the females, so that's also maybe because of cultural background. [In Saudi Arabia] we talk with females....but, they have a scarf that cover their hair, and that's something you don't have here. ... I came from larger city, I came from Riyadh, I from Riyadh, but my tribe is from Heil, from the North region, but little cities didn't communicate, we don't involve with communication with females. (Butrus, Interview 1)

Fadil (male) voiced the new experience he had with not only mixed gender classes but also be taught by a female professor:

Like in TVTC [Saudi institutes for technical studies], they have different classes, like some of them big, some of them small. I feel like it's same here, similar. Just the only thing different the student, like here we can see mix; like girls and guys. But back home, it's only guys, even the professor's a man, not like a woman, maybe that's the only thing different about the environment. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Fadil continued on to describe a support program, provided by the university, that helped him to better transition into the mixed environment.

No, it's like first time working with females when I come to [this college], when I was in IEP English-- Intensive English Program. In the beginning, to be honest, I didn't know how to deal like with girls. Like, I was a little bit shy because I had never worked with girls. But with the days, I change a lot because I used to work with them. Like, the first time was, if you heard about, at *MyPLACE* in the intensive English program. Maybe some people, probably with conversation partner, you know it? Yeah this *MyPLACE* or conversation partner, we meet like maybe five or four, depends on how many international students in the group, with like one or two maybe three American people so, I spend like one year and three months in English program and all these years I was dealing in *MyPLACE* with American girls so, that's how it's like I got used to it. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Emin (male) comments indicate how attitudes regarding mixed gender environments may contribute to the Saudis acceptance of this new cultural norm.

...Yeah, yeah this is a big difference. But as I told you, I don't mind just studying with females or because starting from the first primary year in our school which is the first six syllables in education girls are separated from the boys. We don't study together. So just studying here with females is just something different. But I don't mind it. Because, before I came here I know, I knew that people here just studying together, don't mind the idea of sharing in the class, stuff like getting friends from both genders. So I was expecting that so I was not surprised but respect it also. (Emin, Interview 1)

Hikmat (male), who has a more outgoing character, joked about his experience as his professor attempted to be sensitive to place him into a group with a female student. Although his comment was given humorously, it also showed the difference between Saudi males and their comfort in working with females.

Some of them [faculty], because of like the media, they thought that I can't work with girls or like be with girls and like work with them or especially talk with them. Because of like bad, or like the media of some people is like why. I remember last year. I had English class and my professor said ah ok we have to do like a lab things and every Friday and you have to work in a group. You are writing a report and making, it's making a advertising for something. It's like comparing two companies or something like this. And, you have to do it with a group. And, the first time I came in and, oh yeah, "There is no one here and

would you like to work with this lady and do you mind to work with her?"

Because, I know you Saudis don't work with women. It is like, oh come on, it is so much better than to work with guys actually [Laughter]. (Interview 1)

In contrast to Hikmat's apparent comfort in working with females, Ihab (male) expresses the stark difference in his cultural experience in the U.S. and those of his upbringing in Saudi Arabia.

[In Saudi Arabia]... we do not date girls. Like we cannot talk to any strange girls; like to strange girl or women outside. We can only talk to like our family like my sister, or my nanna, or my niece or, like I cannot go talk to strange women outside. Yeah, in the street, so it's really different from here. (Interview 2)

Janan (female), one of two females to participate in the study, provided insights that conveyed the experiences of her husband also attending this university. She expressed sensitivity for how uncomfortable males may feel with female interactions that would otherwise be considered casual in a non-Muslim culture. The interviews also conveyed an unspoken concern for her husband interacting with other women.

My husband was in English class and his relationship with his instructor was very good because she seemed, seems interested in international people. And she always ask him and make conversation with him at the end of class with him. She is a lady and at the end of the semester she did something that was naturally calm but it was awkward. She hugged, me, my husband. And she said, "I will miss you." And he was, he was shocked because her hug had been suddenly. She didn't give any introduction for something like that. But, yeah, this, I mean, we

are expect these positions so we hope we act nicely, yeah. ... I think men are some, you ask if men have problem with getting into groups with ladies. Yeah, I think some of them, but not all of them, because all Muslims everybody have touch with, with women even in Saudi Arabia. Even if it just a short conversation, but there must be some touch with women. But there is some grey areas in Saudi Arabia. They don't have them the image of communicate with women. So, some of them have a culture shock whenever they came to America; but then they start, to, to handle that issue. But, I think that there is some of them that have that problem in the first time. (Janan, Interview 1)

Karima (female) speaks from a female perspective on the difficulty she experienced when required to present in front of male students. Her discomfort not only affected her presentation but as she describes, also disadvantage her in classrooms where interaction is expected.

I remember when I had to do my first presentation. I was super nervous. Like that was my first standing in front of men and talk you know. So, I was pretty nervous, especially since I had never go to University in my country. Like in Universities, we do have male instructors, but I never went to a Saudi University so, in Houston was my first time. So, I was very nervous to stand in front of males and talk out loud and, you know, do my presentation. And, I was very shy to volunteer or say something. Like if I didn't understand something. Yeah, it takes a long time to adapt this thing. (Karima, Interview 3)

Project Group Expectations

Theme 1.3: Project group expectations for Saudi students were mostly the same as other group members by the end of the semester.

Each of the ten participants provided valuable perceptions of how their group viewed them as contributing members. As illustrated in Table 4, most of the Saudi students initially expressed concerns that reflected their perceptions of inferiority. Some of these were founded on their lesser communications skills that hindered their ability to read instructions, understand technical terminology, or produce reports and presentations. In other cases, there was lesser familiarity with laboratory equipment or culturally unique project associations.

Table 4

Project Group Expectations

ID	Participant	Initial Expectations	Final Expectations
1	Adel	Low	Low
2	Butrus	Low	Equal
3	Dharah	Equal	Equal
4	Emin	High	High
5	Janan	Equal	N/A
6	Fadil	Equal	Equal
7	Giafar	Low	Equal
8	Karima	Equal	Equal
9	Hikmat	Low	Equal
10	Ihab	Equal	Equal

Of the nine participants from which a trend in group confidence could be observed (Janan could only be observed through one interview), six conveyed that their group expected equal contribution from them by their first interview. Four participants expressed how their groups initially had low expectations from them and minimized their role in their projects. By their last interviews, all but Adel believed they had achieved an equality of expectation with other members of their groups.

Adel attributed much of his plight to a dominant team member, who preferred not to delegate, but instead to do the work by himself. Through the interviews, Adel spoke of his struggle to understand course materials and communicate with his group, due to limited language skills.

Because I'm foreign, they, I didn't speak like that good of English, so they would do all the work quickly and just get it done, instead of like, talking to me and ah, find, out stuff together you know. It's faster for them to just do it. (Adel, Interview 1)

Adel also attributed his unsuccessful project experience to his prior education and experience that reflected a different culture and environment and was not readily adaptable to those of the host culture. As a transfer student in the Construction Management program, he was challenged by the difference in building technologies, terminologies, materials, and processes between Saudi Arabia and the U.S.

... they like know all the stuff like before the technology like I told you, like the process. Cause like our buildings are like different, the buildings here. So I

didn't just like know the process in building like I speak English is like hard to kinda know the process to like the materials and everything. (Interview 3)

Butrus, Giafar, and Hikmat were the participants whose groups initially had little confidence in their abilities to make a positive contribution. By their final interviews, each of them expressed a more positive perception of their group's attitudes toward their abilities.

Butrus expressed that working in a group with host students was initially uncomfortable. Over the course of the semester, he described that the group was able to establish a more confident and comfortable relationship with each other.

... it [the project team] has worked well, and at the beginning they, there was concern about how I would interact with them. Ah, that is what they told me ah. ... But because our professor forced us in each group, so, so that is a good thing that the professor did. And also, as he said it is a good experience for me to meet you and to work with you. Yeah it is easier, very easy to interact with them [since the beginning of the semester].... Yeah, it is a good experience. (Butrus, Interview 3)

The first interview demonstrated both Giafar's low self-confidence and the low level of confidence that his team had for him as a valued member. Despite much improved interactions within the lab group, during the second interview, Giafar still understood that his project team did not expect much beneficial contribution from him. (Although, in other places in the interview he describes that his group did recognize his math skills and had begun to rely on him to perform calculations.) By the third interview,

he expressed that his group was functioning much better as equal contributors. “I always expect from them ah, they wouldn’t expect something that was very good [from me].

That is what I expect from them.” (Giafar, Interview 1)

Yeah, still like not good in physics; you know they are. I still expect from them not to expect from me to something very good you know. Cause I know myself like I’m not very good, like, in Physics, you know. So that’s why so... (Giafar, Interview 2)

That was kind of like a surprising thing again because we are working as a team and they were like doing good, we would all be doing good like I will try my best to do like good. (Giafar, Interview 3)

Multiple times throughout the course of the interviews Hikmat also spoke of the low expectations that his group initially held for him. He contributed this to the group’s general image of international students. Hikmat’s strategy to gain acceptance as an equal with his team was by (a) intentionally demonstrating his proficient English skills, (b) introducing humor within the group’s interactions, and (c) showing his own self-confidence through his communications and actions.

Yes, so in the beginning, I can see like from their faces. Like they yeah, like ok yeah, like we have an international student. Like yeah, ok, let’s work on this. And when I talk to them and cause I am goofy sometimes and like I always make like stupid jokes and stuff. ... I joke with the guys since the beginning when I meet the group and all that stuff. So they get comfortable with me as the international student. Even like when they heard my language, it is much better than some

people and something like this. When they hear me speaking they get like confidence more than to work with me more as an international student. (Hikmat, Interview 3)

Several of the Saudi participants perceived their teams had confidence in them throughout the semester. Dharah, Emin, Fadil, and Ihab all expressed that their groups expected their contributions to be at least equal to the each of the other member(s). For example, Dharah conveyed that he had great interaction with his lab group from the beginning. He perceived early on that his outgoing character would be needed as a catalyst for bringing his group together as an effective team. A sample of Dharah's interviews conveys his team's expectations as well as how pleased with the group experience. Note in his first interview he justifies his equal contribution to the success of his team members while the second demonstrates Dharah's pride after the instructor outwardly acknowledges his achievements.

I think I expecting from them. So, I think that they expect I offer help when I can. ... if there is something I know they expect that I will go tell them, "Oh you are doing this wrong do it this way. ... it happened actually last week, last lab it happened. I was using a special tool and the other guy was using a different one. So I told him that this one would be more appropriate and showed him how to use it. So I did it to him and some people have been doing it to me. (Dharah, Interview 1)

I will as I told you the project experience, the project I finished was a lovely experience. I can, I can tell you that I can obviously tell that I do have better

relationship, better with some of the students in the workshop. But mostly the picture experience it was lovely, I felt, I felt so good about it. I was like telling everyone like what happened. (Dharah, Interview 2)

While Emin's group held him to equal expectation, it is interesting to note that his host teammates were interested and helpful for his academic success and in building his abilities as a group member.

I expect it, it's going to be, ah, I would say very good. Because, you know for me, I actually make sure that I understand everything so I keep asking questions which sometimes helps the other people to administrate the ideas or the answers. So, I think it's working for me, working with groups, and sometimes when I ask my friend about a part or something I didn't understand or a definition of a word I don't understand, he keep explaining to me the definition or the [meaning] of that word or explaining to me the way to answer this question or stuff, you know. It helps me to understand it. It helps him to also understand the idea. So we are going, we are doing well. I would say we are doing well in our groups. (Interview 1)

Several of the participants expressed the stress of completing their projects successfully. Fadil and his group member, under stress of completing their project, also found they needed to rely on equally on each other. Here Fadil describes how both he and his partner must rely upon each other to accomplish the project.

Hmm, what he expect from me? To like, share my idea with him. It's like, it's like I'm thinking what, I didn't ask myself like what he going to think about like

for me. But in our work the last two days, we split the work. For instance, we flowed the head twice [refers to a step in their engine project]. The first time, he flowed the head and I was writing the numbers down on the Excel. But, the second time, we like switched. I flowed and he write it down. So it's like that is how. ... we are [doing equal amounts of work]. It's like for this project we are, the maximum is like two so everyone is like do something. (Interview 2)

Likewise Karima expressed that she and her partner worked well together as a function team throughout the semester.

...Well, I know she [lab partner] will help me anytime if I need something or if I skip one of the classes and I think she also knows that I will help her anytime she needs help. (Interview 2)

Ihab, as the final participant to volunteer in this research, had already spent eight weeks with his lab group by the time he had his first interview. By the time of his second and final interview, he had spent 11 weeks with him project team. He presented his experiences within his lab group as very positive. Although initially apprehensive, Ihab soon found that he could work very well with the American students as a contributing group member. His first interview already demonstrated his belief that his group expected him to contribute equally to their success.

Yeah first like when I went to the lab I thought that maybe my friend, he's, my friend is like smarter than me and he will do all the work instead of me. And I'm not going to waste his time, maybe he will understand this later on. But then after one lab and two labs I found out that we are, we are making like a perfect team.

He's helping me I'm very weak in the calculation, he's very weak in the material work so we kind of exchanged to each other and explained to each other like the strength points that we know, each one know. So it was really good to exchange like the things that we know better...Ah, for now like ah for every lab we have like a new challenging so I expect for him to do like to help me with some of the calculation and In [return, I] will help him with some of the material or so we expect from each other like the same thing. Like, I expect from him, like good work, organized work and on one side of the experiment and he will expect the same from me. So, we actually make a perfect team like anyone who work on his own he cannot do the work by himself ... (Ihab, Interview 1)

Since Janan was only able to participate in the first interview, a trend of expectations from her lab partner could not be established. Her interview, however, expressed concern for her abilities to work as an equal in a group environment. Janan's experiences had left her feeling very uncomfortable to work as a valued member of any group that included American students. As with several of the other participants, she attributed this difficulty entirely to her deficiency in English.

So in some groups, in some project I had I think that person that I work with, some of them show me that I am, I am same as her and or him and I can understand what he can understand or she. But some of them, some of them think that I cannot understand or I am less than them. ...And some, some of project they, the instructor, give us a sheet to read and then answer questions, or make a summary or so on. I need, I need more time to read and understand what

the sheets have because this is not my first language and not my own language. Some American people don't understand their things. So I need more time to understand. I mean if it is in my own language, I will understand it faster than English. So I was have some, some problem with that because some of them acting like there was nobody else other than them.

... But yeah, in general I am fine with them and chatting with American peoples but I hate, not hate, but uncomfortable to be in a group with American people. I feel more comfortable if they are international or one on one more than group.

(Janan, Interview 1)

Despite her difficulties with communication, Janan found that her group partner considered her an equal contributor to the success of their projects. Also, since her partner was less reliable in attending class and preparing for the projects. Janan was counted on by her to be informed and prepared for their assignments.

... I think she, she was I was her [lab] partner because ah she didn't seem so ah so what's, so attention to what the instructor said. And she asked me what I have to do and I was, I was answering her directly so I think she is, she is ah finding me good partner in some ways. That I have the correct answers. (Janan, Interview 1)

Attitudes and Behaviors

Theme 1.4: Attitudes and behaviors of both Saudi and host students affected their academic experience.

Attitudes and behaviors of the different participants described not only how they perceived themselves as part of their group but also how they began to adapt as a result of

their experiences in the host environment. First, data is provided that helps to summarize each of the participants' attitudes as members of their project group(s) (see Table 5).

Next data is extracted from other attitudes and behaviors to examine their perceptions of themselves as leaders, collectivistic/individualistic behaviors, and finally their attitudes with respect to punctuality.

Table 5

Saudi Student Attitude and Self-Confidence

ID	Participant	Initial	Middle	Final	Observed Trends
1	Adel	Low	More Aggressive	Low	Never able to achieve equality with lab team. Ultimately improved relationship with classmates by establishing cultural commonality.
2	Butrus	Low	Low	Good	Team became more cohesive in the final weeks of the semester.
3	Dharah	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Built a very strong relationship with lab group
4	Emin	Very Good	Very Good	Excellent	Developed a strong relationship with lab group. Became the team leader.
5	Janan	Low	N/A	N/A	In her first interview, Janan very self-conscious regarding her English skills.
6	Fadil	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Outgoing personality and developed a strong sharing relationship with his lab groups.
7	Giafar	Low	Good	Good	More comfortable with group. Little sharing or socializing.
8	Karima	Good	Good	Good	Sparse non-project communications with classmates or Lab partner. Strong relationship with American roommate and her family.
9	Hikmat	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Attitude to meet and share with others
10	Ihab	Good	Very Good	N/A	Excited by success working as a team.

Subtheme 1.4.1: Saudi attitude and self-confidence generally improved

throughout the semester. Participants provided rich insights regarding their attitudes as

the interacted with their project groups. Their attitudes towards working with their American team members often reflected a resolve to achieve recognition for their ability to contribute to their team's success.

Adel stood out among the Saudi students as not being able to achieve a positive project experience. His deflated and frustrated attitude toward the team was apparent throughout each of his interviews. Unfamiliarity with how his discipline is applied in the U.S., ongoing communications weaknesses, and finally frustration that teammates were not working to help him better understand and contribute are illustrated in this interview extract.

And most of the time I talk to them they aren't used to my accent, so they don't understand me most like most, they do understand me most of the time but sometime they don't. (Adel, Interview 1)

I was calm at the beginning, but then I start to ask questions and I you could say aggressively, like ask questions like I want to know this. (Adel, Interview 2)

... they like know all the stuff like before the technology like I told you, like the process. Cause like our buildings are like different, the buildings here. So I didn't just like know the process in building like I speak English is like hard to kinda know the process to like the materials and everything. ... I think, yeah, it would make a difference [if I were from this area] but what and why because I think I would speak better English maybe. And I would like know what they like and be just kind of similar to them so they would not notice that I am different. (Adel, Interview 3)

The evolution of attitudes was also evident in many of the participants as they began to become more comfortable with their American team mates. Next, I note the evolving attitudes of the three participants who struggled initially before gaining the confidence with their lab groups – Butrus, Giafar, and Hikmat.

Butrus first expressed his insecurities over both his language and his ability to comprehend local culture sufficiently to respond appropriately during informal conversations. By the second interview, his situation within his group had experienced little change. As seen in the final quote, Butrus' attitude has markedly improved as a reflection of his acceptance as a contributing team member.

... when I try to [interact], especially if they try to say some jokes, I, sometimes I don't understand what they mean...and....if they don't see me laugh....so they are gonna.... (Butrus, Interview 1)

Likewise, during his second interview, Butrus was still concerned that he does not yet know much about his project team members. "I don't know anyone there because we focus on the drawing and ask the professor because he spends a lot of time with us." (Butrus, Interview 2)

By his third interview, Butrus' attitude has shifted. He was much more positive and even expressed appreciation to his instructor for forcing the group to work together. Another interesting point from his comments was that Butrus' group changed or interpreted terminology so that he could better understand the materials.

... it [the project team] has worked well, and at the beginning they, there was concern about how I would interact with them. Ah, that is what they told me.

And then with the speech [the team's final presentation]. Ah, he thought I want to do my part very well but we got a good job, we got good grades. For each part so we do it very well. ...And that's changes, he changed his code words, how to deal with an international student. ...Ah, I think it has changed [since the beginning of the semester]. We are different because if the professor gives us a chance to make a group, I think he [group member] wouldn't accept me. But because our professor forced us in each group so, so that is a good thing that the professor did. And also, as he said, it is a good experience for me to meet you and to work with you. ...Yeah it is easier, very easy to interact with them. ... I saw them last week for after the speech and we get together and sit down and we talked about that. ... Yeah, yeah it is a good experience. (Butrus, Interview 3)

Giafar was a fairly shy student whose interview excerpts tell of his preference to having conversation with non-host students. By the second interview, his more positive attitude reflected both greater self-confidence and better interactions with his team. These attitudes persisted through his final interview.

It's alright, ah I don't know to be honest I just like my experience with like the people I interact with. I find myself like, I could interact with and have a conversation with international students more than the locals here. I don't know why that, I feel more comfortable. Probably because they are not from here, I don't know. ...Yeah, something like, me having a conversation with black people, I don't know why. (Giafar, Interview 1)

I don't know. Like, things have change in like a better way. It took time to get to this point. They now, they like talk to me freely. Like [before] just asking about one question and that's it. Like [now] they're now like more talkative with me and interacting like with me. Uh, that's what I found like different between those days and now. Yeah and I guess it's just time, like it takes time. (Giafar, Interview 2)

Although his communication and participation with his team became a positive experience, Giafar regretted that his team had never achieved a relationship where they would socialize outside of the coursework. By his third interview, Giafar expressed improved comfort and communications with lab members, however, they had not interacted outside of the project environment.

Hikmat demonstrated a perpetually positive and self-confident attitude. His interviews indicated that he is a leader who wishes to inspire and motivate those he associates with. Although initially his team had low expectation of him, he proved they were no match for his spirit.

How to describe it ... it's my attitude and um, I'm um talkative a lot and talk a lot with everyone and I make conversation sometimes. Like if with like I always am what people call like the talkative sometimes and...Sometimes they call me old man and ah because I am always like, " ah yeah let's do it!" ... you know what it is called like spiritual, spiritual people I think. Spiritual like give them more and more ah confidence for their work sometimes. (Hikmat, Interview 1)

Even my co-worker is like, some of them in the beginning like when the first days of like training or you know the soft day, they say like ok that is like weird to have an international student work with us. Even because I, like I am confident more than like any of them, because I know a little bit more than all of them. I get like confidence with like talking to everyone. (Hikmat, Interview 3)

Dharah also adapted an outgoing attitude with his team as he realized that, although not fully confident in English, he could “break the ice” to help other students be more comfortable in interacting with him as a foreign student. This has been very successful for this student with his lab group. Recall that Dharah had transferred to the university and was initially unfamiliar with the machines used for course projects. He relied a great deal on his lab group to assist him and expressed gratitude through his interviews.

The following interview excerpts illustrate the growth in Dharah's confidence and performance. By his first interview, he was already helping his team become more comfortable in working with him with him. Then, two events occurred that contributed a huge boost in confidence that seemed to propel Dharah through the semester. First, during the Dharah's first interview, the interviewer commented on how well he spoke English. Then, prior to his second interview, Dharah's instructor celebrated his lab work to the class. His second and third interviews demonstrated, not only a very positive attitude toward the group, but also reflected how this experience has affected his attitude toward others as a whole. Note that his ending comments do not celebrate his team technical accomplishments, but instead their friendship.

At first, actually, when I first started it was very hard because I didn't have any experience with the machine. And because you know like I didn't have anyone that I know in the class. But time like time it was much easier after I discovered like I have to initiate you know. Like I have to start asking and talk you know. I found, I found that people were very helpful to me. (Dharah, Interview 1)

... the relationship I have with Americans during school and during the shop is, is, is almost perfect; it's good. Like I haven't had any bad experience. ...As I told you the project experience, the picture I finished was a lovely experience. ... I can tell you that I can obviously tell that do have better relationship, better with some of the students in the workshop. But mostly, the picture experience it was lovely, I felt, I felt so good about it. I was like telling everyone like what happened.

(Dharah, Interview 2)

Ok, and honestly like the experiment [refers to participating in this study] has some impact on me, treating my classmates. Like actually after our first interview I feel like I am more confident because I haven't in a long time, I haven't heard from anyone that I am a good talker. I can talk, I can talk, everyone kind of understands what I am saying you know. ...Right, it's beautiful and I remember once ... we went for an 8am class and the instructor didn't come. So all of us, we just standing outside. We went, all of us went to the rock for breakfast and I noticed that I was the last one to arrive. Like when I came in I noticed that everyone was sitting close to each other you know. They were not sitting very

apart so I liked it you know. ...I really liked it you know, it was very I don't know, I noticed it and I liked it. (Dharah, Interview 3)

Emin was another example of a very positive attitude that reflected his resilience and determination to make the most of this international experience and achieve success. By the final interview, Emin realized that his determination to learn helped his group to overcome their inhibitions and begin to work effectively as a group. Note that, like Dharah, Emin did not celebrate project achievement, but instead the closer interactions and relationship within his team.

I'm actually enjoying, now I'm trying to do that. Seriously, I'm actually here to learn, I'm here to enjoy my time studying... I didn't leave my work [in Saudi Arabia], just to come here and be stressed or, have, I know I will have difficulties here. Before I came here I know I have, I have difficult ah learning. And learning I would have difficulties in home studying, in learning different classes. I haven't been to a university in Saudi Arabia so I know this will be a big challenge to me and I'm ready for it. I'm here to learn so, so I don't mind, facing new experiences to me. (Emin, Interview 1)

... I hope this will help ... my group members in the future because when we started this semester I realized that I was the only one who keep asking questions and trying to keep the whole group to answer one question ... So by the end of the semester I realized that most of them started asking each other, I mean, which is good. At the beginning of the semester I was, you know, I wasn't sure if I'm

doing the right thing or not. But by the end of this semester I realized that they are keep asking each other questions. I like it. (Emin, Interview 3)

Fadil's interviews described how experiences with his host project group transitioned early in the semester. In the beginning, Fadil demonstrated a self-conscious attitude as an international student. This attitude was reinforced through his group members' behaviors outside of the projects environment. The omission of a public recognition, by way of greeting, was in Fadil's mind a sign of disrespect. The importance of a public acknowledgement of friendship in the Saudi culture was reinforced by other Saudi study participants. By the first interview, this situation had already changed as group members became more comfortable. The turnaround in Fadil's attitude was apparent from his third interview where Fadil expressed his confidence and explains how well his groups were working together. Again, the interviews express similarity with Dharah and Emin in that success was measured by team interaction; beginning with external acknowledgement of their relationship and ending with how well they worked together as a team.

... I felt it's like ah they don't want to talk to me in the beginning. But later on they were very nice. Even like sometimes I see them around like in games or at the university center and before like the first time I met them when they see me they don't even say hi. It's like they feel like I am strange. But now it's like when they see me they say, "Hey how are you doing Fadil? How is it going? How are your classes?" they ask. But ah, so basically just in the beginning.

... what I'm thinking it's like because I am a foreign student so they don't want to get involved with me, I don't know. But I think the big reasons because I am international. (Fadil, Interview 1)

...My group project was about the brake rotors for cars. Me, and another Saudi, and one American student so, for the measurement, all of us each one had measure one at least so we measure like 10 pieces of rotors, brake rotors, so 3 times 10 for each of us. After that, the American was doing the report and the other Saudi was doing the ... presentation and I was doing the calculation. So it was like we were sharing, then we all met together in the presentation and we each one of us present some parts. (Fidel, Interview 3)

Ihab also demonstrated a positive attitude in working with his group. His views transformed early in the semester and were reflected during his first interview. Ihab's initial low self-esteem soon gave way to a realization that he could contribute positively to the success of his American team. By second interview (his final), he was excited about the success he was experiencing with his group by working together. Ihab, like, Fadil, Emin, Dharah, and Butrus, all expressed their pleasure on team-based project teams through their group interactions.

I expect that I will I cannot like work because I will waste his time because he knows everything so that when I go back home I will ask my Saudi friend maybe he knows how the reading is and will take the reading every week and it's going to be like boring and it will not be useful for me because I will not gain any

information or any new education. But then I found out that I can ah I can interact with him, build a relationship with him and be a good student. (Ihab, Interview 1)

...When I found out that we can do like we can get a great result by working as a groups it some kind of influenced me like when I talk to my friends back in Saudi Arabia they studied college over there, I told them the importance of teamwork and the importance of like getting the work done by, by a group. (Ihab, Interview 2)

Finally, Karima was unusual in that her project experience was unchanged across the semester. She expressed that both her and her partner worked well together but that she did not have conversation or interaction outside of the course with her or her other classmates. Further, their conversations within the projects were restricted to those pertaining to their work. While impersonal, this relationship was desirable to her and she made no additional efforts to engage in other communications. Karima held a good attitude toward her academics and was satisfied with her group experience.

No, I don't, I don't talk to any of my classmates because I don't know in the universities or college people have certain friends so they don't make friends in their class you know? So, they just went to their class and when their class finish they go out and meet their friends that's what happens so yeah I think it's different from school. In high school or middle school you make friends in class, but in universities it's not necessary to have friends in the class. (Karima, Interview 2)

Subtheme 1.4.2: Group leadership was not desired by Saudi participants. The interviews also help to explore how the Saudi participants perceived themselves leaders over their period of acculturation into their group environments (see Table 6). This differs from how they perceived expectations of the team as a contributor to the tasks and execution of the projects themselves.

Table 6

Perceptions of Team Leadership Role

ID	Participant	Perceived Team Follower	Perceived Group Leader	Perceived Neutral	Notes
1	Adel	X			Expressed he did not want to be a leader.
2	Butrus			X	
3	Dharah			X	Perceived as equally shared.
4	Emin		X		Evolved naturally to help build camaraderie in the group.
5	Janan			X	
6	Fadil			X	
7	Giafar			X	“All working together equally”
8	Karima			X	
9	Hikmat		X		Also shows leadership in building team culture.
10	Ihab			X	

As described throughout his interviews, Adel and a second lab partner were both held to a follower role within the group while the third member moved the project forward at a level where the others could not compete. While Adel looks for someone to

take the leadership role, he does not want to be that leader. “I’d rather, for my team to have a leader... Yeah leader is good all the time... Ah, I’d rather not to be that leader because I just don’t like to tell everyone what to do” (Adel, Interview 1)

While Emin refrained from calling himself the group’s leader he does talk about how he brought the team together as a cohesive unit. Emin’s interviews helped to reveal the importance of building a team that worked together in a friendly and cooperative manner. Emin’s social nature brought the team the necessary leadership to succeed in this regard.

... everybody is equal and our professor is, you know, very strict about making us about allowing every person in that team and other teams also to work and to participate ... we as a group and why we stand together and you know. I don’t, it’s hard to say a leader you know cause, we are sharing information’s and we are helping each other but I would say that I am the most active who can ask questions and maybe ah relate with them because some people ah just prefer to, to look at us, and they don’t want to talk and ask you know. ... Well I hope this will help ... my group members in the future because when we started this semester I realized that I was the only one who keep asking questions and trying to keep the whole group to answer one question together.... I realized that they are keep asking each other questions. I like it. (Emin, Interview 2)

Yeah, yeah [acknowledging that he brought the group together as a team]. And I hope this will, I mean, stay with them for the future I told you about that at the

beginning of the semester, just, people started just, looking at each other waiting for somebody to break the ice. (Emin, Interview 3).

This semester Hikmat is participating in three group projects. In each he describes his confidence and leadership role as he encourages his team and pushes them to move forward to keep projects on schedule and on task. "... also that is the problem too sometimes, I always don't want to be leader but people push me to be the leader" (Hikmat, Interview 3).

Subtheme 1.4.3: Saudi participants demonstrated collectivistic behaviors. Ihab presented an insightful observation during his second interview that describes the often more independent nature of the American student. He perceived how the American will work very arduously on his own in order to understand an experiment. On the contrary, Ihab, once he has determined that he does not understand, will seek assistance from the professor.

... Also, like when we [Saudi students] deal with things, like sometimes, like we give up. But I see many of my American friends, they like do lots of hard work. Like if they don't understand like one experiment, they do lots of hard work to get it understood. But someone, especially like me, sometimes when I do it like one or two times, I always go and ask for help. But for the Americans, I see that they, they always try to do it by themselves. And sometimes I tell them that we have to go and ask the professor or ask the other students, it's ok because we are here to help each other. (Ihab, Interview 2)

It was that independent behavior that brought the greatest frustration to Adel in his effort to become a contributing member of his project group.

... the only person who like worked on it like the most, is the guy that he didn't talk to us that much. Even the other guy, he didn't do much. [Adel had a three person group]. Like they got together and he told me like yeah they didn't do anything and he went home and did it. ... I tried to participate, but we are still going to have to do this part, and I think this guy knows how to do it and he says ok, ok, like if you have anything to do you can leave I'll do it. And then, after like we try to do it and figure it out, he came late. And we are like trying to do it now and we have to go. Like we have other stuff to do, like homework. And then he said, "Ok" like "I'll do it." And then we came and the next meeting and he has done it and everything. ... I tried to ask him and it's like what I told you before he was like said "Oh, I forgot how to do this. I just did it at like that time." (Adel, Interview 3)

Subtheme 1.4.4: Saudi participants expressed that tardiness was a cultural norm they coined as "Saudi time." A somewhat unexpected topic re-appeared across several of the participants when discussing culture – *Saudi Time*. Four of the ten participants made a point in mentioning tardiness of Saudi's as a cultural trait. While these students did not condone being late, some did make the point that being on time was important in American culture and to their academic experience.

Adel was accustomed to being tardy, but only learned the merits of being on time through negative consequences he experienced in his American classes and with meeting times set with his project group and positive experience of others being punctual.

Having to be on time is like really important here. Like, I went to the park with my friends and then we like want to start a fire and then a guy came and said oh you can't do that today, like we are in the park too early. And I said, "like when" and he said, "like eleven." And then, by eleven o'clock about 15 cars like back to back, enter into the park together like on time, I thought that was cool. ... If you were in Saudi Arabia and you had that picnic starting at eleven o'clock people might show up at eleven thirty. (Adel, Interview 3)

Similarly, Giafar spoke of the norm for tardiness in Saudi Arabia, and how he is still in a process of changing this habit.

Yeah, it's not like not respecting the time but they're [Saudis] late most of the time. Yeah, to be honest, like with everyone like if you're telling like cousin or uncle, like we're having like a dinner at 10, they'll like be there at 10:30, it's just like that way, like if you really want to put it at 10:30, you have to tell them like we're gonna put it at 10. It's just like I don't know, I try to make it better, you know, like every time, I try to make it on time, you know. (Giafar, Interview 2)

Hikmat was the most descriptive of in his interviews regarding Saudi time. The excerpt below provided his description of the contrasting concepts of punctuality between here and Saudi Arabia. He also conveyed how he came to realize the importance of being on time at the American university.

Yeah, ok I forgot, yeah it's always like they, it is not culturally, but we make it culturally. I'm always late sometimes and they also tell me like it's a Saudi thing like we late we came late and after that they understand like ok [name] is going to be late. When I came on time they say oh [name] are you being American right now. ...Because I was late one day and just like yeah in Saudi we always late, if you come late you will be more respectful for people. And it's happened.

Actually. I've found actually all Saudi's they come late, because over there sometimes, especially in if [name] wants you to be on time, especially in college if you get late 5 minutes for your class you will get an absent, if you come late one minute actually 2 seconds you will be marked as a late person. I know one, this is a funny story actually. One of my friends he let the teacher, he was like at the door of the class and he let the teacher get in, because as respectful for an old person. You know what the teacher did? Closed the door. So like, you're absent. ... I told you like when I met my American friend like that's the best thing that I learned from them, respect the time. (Hikmat, Interview 2)

Fadil stood out from others since he did not have to learn punctuality since, as he explained, that is his nature. In his interview he acknowledged the acceptance of tardiness in his culture as well as his disdain for this Saudi trait.

...even when I was in Saudi Arabia I hated, I hate this culture in Saudi Arabia. I prefer to be hour early than late 1 minute. But I don't know why this culture going on in Saudi Arabia, even here they always like be late for the international

office they call it Saudi time. They always late, I don't know why. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Category 2: Cultural Sharing

During the interview sessions, each of the participants shared freely about their cultures and their perceived contrast with those they experienced in America. The interviews produced a wealth of experiences and perceptions associated with cultural interchanges. As discussed earlier, an important criterion for a positive international experience is to bring about a deeper intercultural understanding between the international student and the host. This section presents collected interview data referring to cultural sharing, first, that which took place within the groups through normal interaction and observation and then through intentional discussions that mostly occurred outside of the project's environment (see Table 7 for a summary).

Table 7

Shared Culture through Intentional Discussions

ID	Participant	With Team Within the Project Environment	With Team External to Project Environment	With Non-Team Members (Friends, Faculty)	Notes
1	Adel	None	No	Some	Able to share with his n Political Science class.
2	Butrus	Little	Little with tech. project team. Yes with non-tech project team.	Some	Unsuccessful with technical project group. In public speaking he was able to build a much better relationship with his project team.
3	Dharah	Little	Yes	Some	Built a strong relationship with one member of his group. They shared freely and often outside of the course.
4	Emin	Some	Little	Yes	Very good interaction with team but not to intentionally share culture. Most discussions are outside of the project with non-team members and also within his Politics course.
5	Janan	None	None	Yes	Janan learned much from non-student friends that she was more comfortable communicating with.
6	Fadil	Some	Some	None	Group understood and accommodated prayer time. Outgoing personality and developed strong relationships with his lab groups.
7	Giafar	No	No	Some	More comfortable with group. Little sharing or socializing.
8	Karima	No	No	Yes	Sparse non-project communications with classmates. Strong relationship with American roommate and her family.
9	Hikmat	Little	No	Yes	Did not reveal intentional discussions beyond his Islamic practice for prayer time.
10	Ihab	Good	Very Good	N/A	Excited by success working as a team.

Unintentional Cultural Sharing

Theme 2.1: Cultural sharing was limited and mostly unintentional within the project environment.

As illustrated in Table 7, there was little or no intentional conversations within the project environment that focused on sharing culture. Despite this, several of the students noted how valuable that experience was in helping to bring about a more comfortable relationship between Saudis and the host students. One important reason for this may be that both, the Saudis and host students, were forced to confront their stereotyped images of each other through those relationships necessitated by the projects' requirements.

The interviews revealed that Saudi participants recognized and felt deep concerns over media induced images that Saudis and Americans may hold of each other based on movies and news reports. The Saudis believed that many of the host students typecast them as rich, militants, tent dwellers, or terrorists. Similarly, some of the Saudis confessed their images of Americans were formed from John Wayne or other violence saturated movies.

Hikmat, for example, provided a good example of media influenced cultural stereotyping during his initial interview. First, he discussed how his image of Americans was formed by watching movies. Realizing his own preconceptions, he related fears of how Americans might view Saudis, also as a result of popular movies. Hikmat spoke most extensively and often regarding this topic.

... from the first day I came to America I was in D.C. and all I see in the movies and D.C. was happening and ah gangstas and crime and all that stuff. And since the time, since the sunset that time the first time I came I run to my hotel and locked the door and I sat over there. Because I didn't want to go outside I thought because they are gonna see me, I'm an Arabic guy they gonna steal my money or something like that. It was like stupid, ... it's like in the media. I was like all American because that's what I saw in the movies on the TV shows, like Prison Break. ... Yeah, for me, when like Americans came to me and they thought like what they learned from the media about like Saudis is like bad people ... But when I explained to them you cannot judge me because everyone in this earth there is none there is no two people like each other. ... That is why no one can be judging from anyone. That is what I get in the end of it, the conclusion I have and that is why I was like Americans sometimes some people they don't know actually about Saudi Arabia... That's what actually everyone blame and actually that is the truth because media is what is like the everywhere. ... when you watch TV you cannot watch "Die Hard" and ... they having problem in like Abu Dhabi ... or like "Taken 2" where they have like that guy he came from like the Arab area like the gulf area. ... That is what divisions more right now ... you are like terrorist or something. (Hikmat, Interview 1)

In his third interview, Hikmat confessed how he imagined the American college experience from what was portrayed in popular American movies.

... for me oh, I think I mentioned this before when I came here in the beginning I was, yeah I am going to school over there it's like, like the movies and...John Wayne and the all the like American Pie movies. That was what I was imagining like was like just like you are going to works to do and you are going to have fun and then you study. But I noticed, no ...unfortunately..... [Laughter]. (Hikmat, Interview 3)

While few meaningful cultural exchanges were able to sprout within the project environment, Emin described one of the few experiences he enjoyed sharing his culture. Yeah, yeah it's happening actually [cultural sharing] from both sides and I remember in the last lab we were writing, I was taking notes in my language, in Arabic. And my classmates he asked me what are you writing and I told him I am taking notes in Arabic. And he was you know excited about it and he saw the number and this is another thing ah he asked me about the time. And I was using my laptop, my I-Pad at that time and when he saw the time and it was in Arabic numbers. So he was asking me, "Is that your numbers?" So there was a good communication between us. And I got the chance just to show him the Arabic numbers from one to ten and he was excited about you know, knowing those new things. Yeah, so I think it's, it's very, very good, and very interesting, and very nice also to, to communicate about things outside our class during our class you know. ... I think when somebody asks you a question or, or you know there are times that lend themselves well to teaching somebody about something. (Emin, Interview 2)

Despite those experiences, Emin admitted that he was not very successful with purposeful conversation regarding culture with his group. He believed that he best shared his culture and created a positive image of his Saudi culture through building friendships and encouraging conversation within the group.

I'm actually, let me focus about the, about being social, I mean, I consider myself as a normal person, and socializing with people because back in our country it's normal what I do, I'm not doing any extra effort or any extra things. So, what I'm really doing is something normal in our culture. So I think when you make the people just communicate with each other and contact with each other, I think this is something they got from my culture because I didn't do anything, myself or something extra for me, or even making an effort to be social with them. So I think, just being social is something they got from my culture. ... They got information and, it's really hard to talk about what they gained from my culture but I think as I see the most important thing is communication. By the end of this semester I realize that most of them communicate more than the beginning of that class or that lab so other things I'm not really sure about, but this is what I realized. (Emin, Interview 3)

Emin also spoke about how much he was learning from American culture just from his classroom and project experiences. Most importantly, these occurred through simply forming friendships that served to break down barriers and allowed students to recognize them as individuals.

I've learned so many things. I mean, the cultures are different as you know. ... at the beginning I haven't, I mean, American friends because the first American friends of mine, we're from classes besides our suitemates. So, when I used to go to class I used to learn new things which lead me to more friends because the first source for me to get friends is my class. So at the beginning I started, I mean, communicating with my friends and learning about them and sometimes realize their actions about stuff when asking questions; many things happened to me the first year... it's easier right now to communicate with people outside the class because I've learned how to communicate with the people in the class so right now it's easier for me to make friends, I mean, from anywhere. The sports, at the gym; I have friends at the gym right now. I have friends even here in the library, I mean, it's very good thing because class was the first source for me to make friends. ...

An important event that Emin experienced when he was still very new to the host culture was a simple act of sharing one of his classes. This is significance of that action conveyed a much greater message regarding the host cultural than any lengthy conversation.

I remember one day in my first year, a friend of mine he told me, we needed a flash drive. ...And he has two or three I guess so he has extra ones and he got me one. And he insisted. I told him no, thank you I bring mine, I can bring mine after the class and he insisted that you're gonna get this one, you know, that's something I really appreciated, ...Yeah, somebody is caring, ... and when I came

here in the beginning I knew everything is different but I didn't expect to see somebody, honestly, to do this. This is common in Saudi Arabia; when you ask somebody, even the first day ok just give me this flash drive from yours: oh I'll get you one after the class, he will not mind, I mean but here it's hard because I don't know at that time, I don't know anything about the culture. And I see this guy is asking me to take this and insisting to let me take it. ... I don't know how to describe it but every time you go to class, for me I learn new things. I see how people are helpful, that's it. (Emin, Interview 3)

Fadil gave an account of the difficulties he experienced when he began his courses. His interviews conveyed his perceptions that American students were uncomfortable interacting with international students. His persistence in establishing friendships with his host helped to overcome some of these barriers.

In the beginning ah first like, for this last semester last spring, first time I start my academic was one of the classes called material science. And in lab, every four students in one group to do ah lab report. So ... what I see in every class, first weeks when I like met the American, they, it feels like I am strange for them. They don't want to talk to me or ah it's like ah, they act like I am really strange. So they don't talk to me. But I try to do it in a nice way. I ask them can we meet there, like at the library, and discuss that and do the report. Or until they know me better and they get like nicer. ... I felt it's like ah they don't want to talk to me in the beginning. But later on, they were very nice. Even like, sometimes I see them around like in games or at the university center and before like the first

time I met them when they see me they don't even say hi. It's like they feel like I am strange. But now, it's like when they see me they say hey how are you doing [name]? How is it going, how are your classes they ask. (Fadil, Interview 1)

By his third interview, Fadil was able to describe some casual exchanges with the project team regarding culture.

They [the project team] had some questions, like sometimes while we were in the lab, like while we were waiting for a professor to come, because we come early like 15 minutes before the class starts, so we talk so sometimes they ask like questions about Saudi Arabia like the culture the weather in Saudi Arabia. So I'm sure they learned like some new stuff for them. Like last time, they were asking how was the weather because you know the change now, sometimes it's cold sometimes warm these day so, they were asking like how is the weather back in Saudi Arabia. Then we were me and [name] the other student we were talking about the weather, we told them it's really hot most of the year like 100, 30's or 40's most of the year. And they were like that's really hot. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Butrus, who had little direct cultural discussion with his team, expressed similar perceptions as Fadil: "... they don't like to communicate with us. Ah I don't know if it's true or not but I think they are afraid to communicate with us" (Interview 1). By his third interview, Butrus was able to describe sharing that occurred in his Technical Communications course. There, his class was also split into project groups to research and presentation on technical topics. Butrus led the team in developing their presentation on desalination plants; a topic that his Saudi background prepared him for. In this course,

he found success sharing both Saudi technology and interchanging cultural knowledge. Examples he provided included: discussing with his team their questions regarding the Bedouin culture prevalent in Saudi Arabia, explaining that Saudi Arabia has modern cities and is not all desert, and discussing Saudi crime and punishment. He also learned from them about “special days” (holidays) celebrated in America.

Dharah shared his observations of his group and described an unfortunate truth regarding many of the host students. While discussing worries regarding his group forming attitudes of Arabic people from news media, Dharah stated: “I know the people I work with, I know most of them don’t watch the news because all they talk about is party and stuff” (Dharah, Interview 2).

While few group relationships matured to open discussions intended to purposefully share culture, most of the Saudi participants described less intentional cultural sharing. Beginning simply with strained communications and progressing on through the development of a functioning working relationship. In this process, most learned about the practice of prayer times. Each of the students below described how this religious practice helped them to share with their host group.

In Butrus’ case, he expressed some frustrations over those Saudis who neglected the obligation for prayer. His comments underlie his disagreement with those who elected to ignore prayer requirements rather than having to explain to their instructor or friends. He also complained of how this created a greater burden for those who wish to honor that practice. Butrus, for example, needed to explain to his instructor that he was late for lab because of his obligations to pray.

Because we have five times a day we must pray during those times.

... Sometimes I am late for my class 10 minutes because I must pray before I go to school before I go to the class. My professor she understands she understand it. ... because we have a specific time for each prayer, if it is past the specific time ah it is our belief that you don't pray it's not accepted its only ok if you have a good reason for that. ...It's not an issue [to leave lab to pray] but sometimes I need to explain it because not everyone, not every Saudi actually do it as what I did. (Butrus, Interview 2)

Fadil, Hikmat, and Ihab each were pleased to find that the American members of their project group respected the prayer requirements of the Saudi students. Each group accommodated that brief absence of their Saudi members from their project work for prayer. This compelled sharing of culture was most reported across the study participants.

No we [project team] didn't, talk except like just the times like sometimes we try to grab the best time for all of us like for airflow [lab project] just me and one of the students, we are two. So I talk to him and tell him like what's the time for both of us. So we see some of the times work for both of us and sometimes no, but like one of the times, it doesn't work for me, prayer time like 1:30 or 1:45 it's like that is prayer time. (Fadil, Interview 2)

Ihab also spoke about how his team became more aware of the requirement for Muslim prayer times.

In the first, before I explained them that what I have to or like for example our prayer. You know we pray five times a day. So whenever we [project group] meet, sometimes like in the first meetings, they didn't [know] that we pray five times a day and they [Sunni Muslims] have to pray in a specific time. So when the pray time come, I have to tell them that I need to go for five minutes and come back. It was, they did not get the idea why I let them go and do something else. But after that, they explained to them that I have to go and pray and come back to you guys. It was not that hard, but at first it was hard. ...Yeah, the Saudis [are private with their lives] because they are afraid from other people judging them. (Ihab, Interview 2)

Similarly, Hikmat used the opportunity to explain Islamic prayer requirements to his team.

... I am like ok guys, can I go just for like 10 minutes. I will go to pray and then get back. Ah actually it has happened this week, last Friday. They wanted me till like one, I told them like guys I have to leave at 1:30 because ah Friday prayers are from like 1:30 till like 1:45. I told them like ok guys I have to leave in like 15 minutes. They said ok and one of them actually he text me privately and said yeah I am sorry ah we, I forgot about you guys have a prayer and all this. And like you know it is ok man, just it happened. (Hikmat, Interview 3)

Intentional Cultural Sharing

Theme 2.2: Intentional cultural sharing with the project team occurred mostly outside of the project environment.

While several of the Saudi students built good rapport with their project groups, only two (Dharah and Ihab) conveyed that they met frequently outside of their project environments with team members. Interviews from other Saudi students exposed frustrations from being unable to achieve that level of relationship with their project group members. Conversations, in these cases were typically limited to the scope of the project. Several reasons were provided, the most common included deficient language skills and understanding of the local cultural. Examples were provided from several participants describing how they were unable to participate in casual conversations with the host students because they did not understand the local culture. Contributing to the cultural barrier, was a fear of saying inappropriate or offensive things.

Janan expressed her frustration over her difficulty with the language and that students did not seem friendly or eager to associate with international students.

So I have had a problem when it comes to speech. I think, though even though I like old people more than youth, I think youth more interesting to know about our culture and what is ok and what is not. ... So, even though I think youth are not friendly with international student but when they have the chance to, to be contact with them and know more about them they are seem to be so excited and want to know more and more. (Janan, Interview 1)

Dharah, who otherwise demonstrated a very positive and outgoing character also spoke about his difficulty speaking in casual conversation with his lab group outside of that environment. He observed that in the lab they all have commonality making it easier for conversation. Outside of the lab they struggled with finding common ground.

Dharah was successful in forming one host friendship from his group that he regularly discussed a variety of cultural issues.

Ok in the shop, in the manufacturing shop it is very easy to interact you know because all of us are working on the same thing. Ok and there is always something to talk about. ... but outside ... It is very different for me from what we talk about. We talk about the same thing but I don't listen to the same music I don't watch the same movies you know. So this is where it get kind of complicated to interact. ... Well as I told you I think that culture is the main problem. As I said maybe language would solve 50% of the problem but the cultural background of the conversations you know. Like I do have that guy actually we got, we got, we got along this semester and we started to study together for every test we talk you know all the time. I can consider him as a friend. (Dharah, Interview 1)

Dharah recognized how uncomfortable other classmates were in asking him cultural questions. He also had the same experience with his course instructor. Although the interviews demonstrated that Dharah and his instructor related well, he observed that his instructor was uncomfortable speaking to him about his culture.

He always asks me, like my classmates ask me, like culturally they ask me about manufacturing back home. And how well they will get paid if they ever work in Saudi, and ah they ask me about the weather and that is it. But as like other questions I get them from like my instructor. And every time, I think I have said that before, every time he ask me a cultural question, I think because he is not

sure if it ok for him to ask or not, he ask and I answer and he goes like you know I am just kidding. You know I am just kidding every time. Every time. So I have told him that it is ok, you can ask whatever you want to know. Actually I was like, I was like I told him that I feel, like I like answering questions about my culture. (Dharah, Interview 3)

Looking back over the semester Dharah pondered his own experiences with his group and as he recalled his own hesitations in meeting with the Amish. The Amish experience (see Chapter IV) had an impactful effect on his attitude toward hosts avoiding intentional cultural interaction.

I think it is very, ya I think it is very important, and you just asked me how I would feel if that Amish guy has shared some stuff about his culture and I told you I would feel great. So now I am thinking it is kind of my job to share about my culture. Like I don't know I feel like I had to do some more explanation and see how people will react to it and how so I can know if like so I can have an idea about how interesting or how they are not interested about it you know. (Dharah, Interview 3)

Adel also expressed frustration over his inability to participate in discussions with host students because of his unfamiliarity with the host culture. He emphasized that the rural environment of this university and the strong attachment of the local culture to outdoors activities such as fishing and hunting resulted in greater difficulties. Adel's interviews piece together barriers that include: his own shyness, his deficiency in English,

and unfamiliarity of the local culture. Although he does not say it, the lack of hospitality of the host students served to further isolate Adel from the group.

And most of the time I talk to them they aren't used to my accent, so they don't understand me most like most, they do understand me most of the time but sometime they don't. (Adel, Interview 1).

In his second interview Adel expanded on his difficulties in participating in casual conversation with his rural hosts. Both, the speed and context created barriers that were hard for him to surmount.

But I learned, I would just listen to them when they would talk like definitely they were into bow hunting they would talk about different animals, trucks everyday so I would just listen to them and learn like that. (Adel, Interview 2)

Although Adel was unable to achieve the level of communications he desired with his technical project group, he conveyed much greater success in discussing culture with fellow students in his Political Science course.

...Not, not in my construction management classes but in my politics class. Yeah, we talked about that and they understood like all of the Americans in my other classes I mean in Politics classes. Yeah, they understood our culture like really good by the end of the semester. (Adel, Interview 3)

In the quote extracted from his first interview, Ihab speaks of encouraging his fellow Saudi students to take initiative to start a conversation with American students. His experiences with his lab group have shown him that once this barrier is broken

valuable friendships can begin to form. Also, this can enable groups to function more successfully in both an academic and social sense.

Yeah with [name] it was not like challenging but most of my friends like they came over and they talked to me because they know I was experienced with American. It was challenging for them like because some of them, Saudi, they are afraid to ask some of their partners if they need anything. Or they are afraid that they cannot speak the language it's no good. And they are afraid that maybe the American will understand them different and something like that. So, first it was so hard for them and I told them you just have to go and talk with them. You just have to go and make new friends they are like very welcome they are very nice. And they did that and they noticed the difference after one semester. I found that many of my Saudi friends, they have like American friends. ... Yeah [it was because they took the initiative to talk to the American students], it's the same when I like met [name] who is not from Saudi Arabia and they came to Saudi Arabia. They are like a little bit afraid and the culture thing and you just have to begin it you just have to initiate it and talk about it. (Ihab, Interview 1)

Karima expressed trepidation in sharing her culture or religion with others.

Although Karima had strong views toward the misunderstanding that many Americans held toward culture, religion, and especially the separation between men and women, she was not able to communicate this beyond her most endeared relationships. One reason she offers is her fear of being fully understood. She also describes here her close host relationship with her roommate.

I don't know because as I said I don't talk to any of my classmates. I don't have conversations with any of my classmates ... No, I mean even if I did, we never talk about culture and this stuff we just talk about general stuff, about education about yeah nothing we don't talk about cultural stuff. ... Yeah, just my roommate because I know she doesn't have a problem and she will not miss understand me so that's why I talk with her about anything, but I am not sure people here on campus will understand me and because it isn't that I don't like to talk about culture because yeah know we don't talk to each other that much so if we talk we don't talk about cultural stuff and the second reason is I know maybe we will never talk again and I don't have that much time to explain everything and I know they don't have any idea about anything, about my culture and religion so I don't want to strike the conversation and they don't have the clear idea. I don't want to, the reason if I want to talk to someone about my religion and my culture I want to clear the idea about my religion and my culture because they just listen from media and not everything from media is true. If I'm not going to reach my goal so, I'm not going to do that, I don't want to make it worse. (Karima, Interview 2)

Ihab's group became most successful in forming camaraderie outside of the project environment. The experience provided the friendship and socialization valued so greatly by Ihab. In this more casual space Ihab felt freer to converse about various topics of culture.

Yeah so we only meet like before the class [in Saudi Arabia]. But here I experience like to work with the American students outside of the college like in

the regular life. We go to like coffee shop and we have drink together and we like ah get their information and they explain for me what I am missing and I explain for them what they missing and it ah was like complicated the first weeks but then it was just like it like was just easy. Like ah when we reached to the middle of the semester like we formed like a perfect team together. Like every ... experiment we have, everyone has to do his work. Otherwise we cannot work like by our own because sometimes it took away the experiments we had required a perfect team. Working together and communicating with each other. As perfect and we can get like great result in the end... (Ihab, Interview 2)

Ihab also discussed how he was learning about American culture and holidays from discussions with his group.

Yeah, I always ask them what they do with their holiday or like the Christmas, the Christmas or the Easter or any other holiday. I always ask them what do you guys do in these, in like these holidays. And they always explain me that they go and they sit at a big table and they meet with their parents. ... So it's a good thing to know about their culture. They always like, whenever I found anything that I didn't know about like the Christmas or the Easter, I always go and ask them and they are always welcome to tell me. They are happy to tell me about it. (Ihab, Interview 2)

Dharah was also able to forge a close friendship early in the semester with one member from his group. Throughout the interviews he expressed his enjoyment in

discussing culture, politics, religion, and other topics. Since his friend shared similar curiosities and dialogue they spent much time together in comfortable exchange.

You know I do have like this guy who, I do have this guy who is my classmate, I do have a guy from Puerto Rico, interesting, interesting guy. And I always ask him he, because he is like he is originally from Puerto Rico and he has lived in New York. ... New York is a good example of the American Culture right? So, I think like, I always talk to him about culture but not everyone because I was put in their shoes [referring to the experience with Amish] so I know how they feel. ...All the time we talk about projects, how do you do this, how do I do that. We help each other with cultural stuff, ... he talks, he knows some Arabic words and sometimes he says them to me ... I remember when he had some Arabian food he was talking to me about it and how much he liked it you know. (Dharah, Interview 3)

Although Dharah was not able to achieve intentional cultural conversations with his group, they had formed friendships that were important to Dharah. During his third interview he realized that his group was beginning to bond as they neared the end of the semester. His words conveyed the deep meaning this had for him.

Right, it's beautiful and I remember once the, ah, we went for an 8am class and the instructor didn't come so all of us we just standing outside. We went, all of us went to the rock for breakfast and I noticed that I was the last one to arrive. Like when I came in I noticed that everyone was sitting close to each other you know.

They were not sitting very apart so I liked it you know. ...I really liked it you know, it was very I don't know, I noticed it and I liked it. (Dharah, Interview 3)

Finally, Hikmat also referred to meeting outside of his project environment. The intention of those meetings appeared to focus more on socialization rather than intentional cultural interaction. "Yeah, actually yeah, and we end up like every, every Friday we go to like some places here in town. It's [Bar/Restaurant] we go every Friday" (Hikmat, Interview 1).

Sharing Culture and Religion Beyond the Project Team

Theme 2.3: Cultural and faith were shared with others beyond the project group.

The interactive acculturation framework, embraced by this study, suggests that experiences from interactions within the university community also contributed to the overall attitudes and perceptions of Saudi students as they interacted within their project teams. Knowledge of culture sharing beyond the project group added greater insight into group acculturation. The importance of collecting this data as a source of cultural exchange is elevated since the Saudis had experienced little intentional cultural exchange with their project groups.

The data presented in this section also highlights that not all Saudi Arabian students can be homogenized as having a single language, religious practice, social norms, or culture. The interview brought out several of the differences and how they might add barriers to acculturation with the host student. The interviews also expressed how being in America affords the Saudis opportunities to share culture between differing Saudi groups.

Emin expressed his ongoing enjoyment in making friends and talking about his culture. Here he conveys a general overview of his experiences with his friends in this regard.

... trust me when people just start to listen to you and your culture they find it interesting and I appreciate that. Most of the people that I talked with about ...our culture, and they asked me questions ... with excitement. ... So I have many, many good conversations with my projects group people whether it's, if it is in this semester or the previous semesters. And I would say all of it was, were great to me ... Because I, I realized that people get new ideas and new information about the culture that I am from ...I would say just I got very good friends to me ... we just started talking about the cultures and some of them just compare it and find it interesting. (Emin, Interview 2)

Ihab found that although he was soft spoken, his outgoing personality could be used to share his culture. Within his student organization, he was able to serve as an ambassador.

I used this position to be in the ambassador of International Student Organization now I'm working as ambassador for them. I went to them and tell them that I have a really good experience between the Americans and the international so they just give me the job. And my job is to bring some of the American and some of the international to interact with each other. ...Interacting with the Americans and the international they we're like really fun that's why I want the others to have fun doing that. (Ihab, Interview 1)

The Saudis also found a venue for cultural exchange through sports. Emin, Ihab, and Giafar related that soccer was a game they enjoyed as well as a vehicle for cultural sharing and interaction.

It's totally different because people here are into American football and, you know, baseball, hockey, we don't play baseball at home at all, and we don't play hockey at all in, even the weather is not helpful, and we don't play American football at all. So when I came here at the beginning I started asking if [this University] has a soccer team for men, and they told me "no, we don't have that" because [this University], they only have a team for women, and I found it, I mean something weird because the first sport in the world is soccer, but not here in the States. ... I'm gonna see him the next class and I'll be more conversable because I saw this guy outside and we've been talking for more than an hour; and trust me the next class will be exciting for me to talk with this guy. He likes soccer also, I like soccer so we gonna talk about soccer. I'm gonna show him my favorite team, he's gonna show me his favorite team and I'm expecting all that.

(Emin, Interview 3)

Similarly, Ihab was able to use his knowledge of soccer to speak with American students. He used this opportunity to promote soccer, a sport ingrained in modern Saudi culture, to host students.

Yesterday I did a presentation for like the Americans to teach them about soccer, to teach them about why I love soccer and why soccer is like the easiest sport for

everybody. Because everybody can afford the ball, it is all about the ball and you can play. (Ihab, Interview 3)

Giafar was especially impressed that the fields could be accessed without the fees required in Saudi Arabia. "...Ah a few examples, like being able to play like I mean like soccer like outside like for free in this like good field" (Giafar, Interview 3).

Although Karima did not enjoy any friendships in her project work, she was able to develop a close relationship with her American roommate. Through her roommate and her roommate's family, she was able to learn about rural culture in an intimate environment. She was also able to comfortably share her culture and religion with them.

Indeed, Karima's relationship with her American roommate and her roommate's family shows a wonderful exchange of intercultural experiences. In the interview she noted her roommate's family respected her Muslim practices and that she also enjoyed learning about American family behaviors as well as popular culture.

The most important thing that I think I did is I made it clear for her [roommate] that not everything we do is because of our religion. That's the most thing I told her. So we listen to music, but we are not allowed in my religion to listen to music, but we do listen to music it is not because of my religion it is because of ya know. And I told her, 'ya know some people supposed to because they are a Saudi student don't wear a Hijab they are supposed to how, they are Muslims and ok, its ok ya know.' We do not have to do everything. I mean we have to do everything, but not every person does what he or she has to do. ... Yeah, I think all American students need to know more about my well the difference between culture and my

religion. I think this is the most confusing thing for people here. (Karima, Interview 2)

Karima's adamant views regarding the separation of what is culture and what is religion and frequently made a point to emphasize their distinctions. She was also concerned that Americans gain a greater understanding of both. Excerpts from her first and third interviews resonate the prominence she gave to this issue.

I mean we cannot drive in my country, women cannot drive in my country. That is not because of my religion that is because of our culture. Ok, so yeah, he knows that we cannot drive because of our culture not because of our religion. (Karima, Interview 1)

I'll just say this, the biggest problem I think is they are misunderstanding between culture and religion because the problem actually that we face is because our culture not because of our religion, that what makes people misunderstand us. (Karima, Interview 3)

Adel, was bothered as he realized the stark contrast between Saudi Arabia and America with regard to faith. The complacent and faithless attitudes that he observed in many of the American students appeared inconceivable to him.

I just wanna put the light on in between different cultures. It's very different. And it make it a little bit difficult for us, to understand stuff that people do here and stuff like that, this is what...Ah, like in my country we mostly believe in God...when I came here, like most people don't and some of them, like, they didn't know if there's a God, if there's no God, and that's kinda like, it would

bother you no matter what. Not bother you like you were offended by them not believing in a god, but worrying about them and that kind of stuff. (Adel, Interview 1)

Subtheme 2.3.1: Cultural and faith sharing also occurred amongst diverse Saudis.

One of the realizations important in the collection and analysis of data from this study is that Saudi Arabians, despite a common religious base, cannot be stereotyped. Coming to an American university has provided Saudi students an opportunity to share culture with other Saudis who have different heritages, dialects, and customs. Some of these are recounted in the following interview excerpts.

Karima's interview brought out how coming to the U.S. helped to enable cultural sharing between Sunni and Shiites beyond what she experienced in Saudi Arabia. Karima pointed out how the campus' environment allows safe discussion of the difference amongst the Saudis. These excerpts demonstrate her thoughts and perceptions.

We do have very good relationship here [university campus]. No difference between us like Sunni and Shiite. We don't care about this because in the end we are all Muslims. So, but ya know I call them stupid people when they make difference between us because it doesn't matter. We all pray to one God, we all believe in the same prophet. It's just the small things. We don't have to fight because of it, but the truth is that Shiite in my country has many many, many difficulties. This is the truth, but when I came here I was actually surprised because they treat each other very well. We talk about the difference between us and we accept each other and the differences between each other but and we know

we have conversation about this stuff and it is very good conversations. We never fight we never we yeah know accept each other, but in my country usually you don't feel comfortable to have this kind of conversations with other people like she respects me, but nothing more than that. We don't talk about the differences between us we don't have discussions ya know. We don't do that. So, I was surprised because we can do that here....Especially Sunni people and students because in school [Saudi Arabia] they don't teach us about Shiite aspects, everything about Sunni, everything so they don't know anything about the difference between us and them. (Karima, Interview 2)

Karima also added several insights in the practicality of strict adherence to Islam and Saudi culture while they are in the U.S. Examples included food, and socialization. One of the most unavoidable is music, which is *haram* [forbidden by Allah] for Muslims. These may support some of the variations in behaviors amongst the Saudi students both in the course environment and socially. The first insight was the differences between Sunni and Shiite attitudes toward halal.

...Because I know when I talk to my roommate she doesn't understand everything quickly because I have to explain yeah know certain aspects about my culture and my religion the differences and it is just not that simple because sometimes when I talk to her I put in my mind the differences between Shiite and Sunni because she might meet another people who are Sunni so she will be confused because and then these people are saying something different. For example I don't eat chicken most Shiite don't eat chicken or meat, they should be Halal meat, but like we

don't buy meat or chicken from Wal-Mart or Meijer, but Sunni I mean my friends who are Sunni they do buy chicken and meat from Wal-Mart and Meijer because they believe that the most important thing is that you have religion so, people don't have religion when they kill cow or chicken they don't eat it from them, but since people here are Christian they believe it is ok, but in Shiite we do not believe that it is ok. It has to be Halal and killed in certain way. (Karima, Interview 2)

Next Karima provided her thoughts regarding the differences between Sunni and Shiite prayer practices.

Yeah, but in general we are all Muslims we all do the same thing. There is little difference between us, between Sunni and Shiite. When we pray, Shiite people has to pray without shoes, ok we take off our shoes when we pray. ...Ok, Sunni do that when they pray, but we don't we just don't do that. When you put your head to the ground, I don't know what you call it in English we have to have something made of sand, or leaves or anything, but not chemical stuff. ... Sunni don't believe in this.

We have something this is the most difference between us. It is Ashura I don't know if you know that. Ok, uh the difference between us when Prophet Muhammad dead. We believe that Imam Ali has the right to take care of the city and take of the religion and to take care of everything. Ya know many, many centuries ago. But Sunni believes in another person and this is the main

difference between us so that's why. ...we are all Muslims in the end. What is haram in Sunni people it is haram for Shiite too. (Karima, Interview 2)

Butrus, who throughout the interviews demonstrated a very strict adherence to his Sunni religion practices, described how music is forbidden. His interview excerpt brought out the depth of this religious clash using the national anthem.

Music (not word) is forbidden for Sunni Muslims. ... If it [the anthem] doesn't have music in it it's ok. But because it has the music then they only forbid the music. ... I mean the words is ok. ... I don't know about the Shia Muslims; because I am Sunni Muslim. So but ah Sunnis it is the music that must be forbidden for them...Because this is what the prophet says to us. (Butrus, Interview 2)

Karima also spoke about her religion forbidding music. Her attitude, however, permitted her to make allowances as an international student. Karima explained:

Yeah, that's right in our religion; we are all Muslims in the end. What is haram in Sunni people it is haram for Shiite too. So, yeah. ...Not culturally it's religiously, we're not allowed to listen to music. ...Well let me tell you something, not everything we're not allowed to do, so we don't do it. Ok, so, we're not allowed to cheat, we're not allowed to lie to people, we not allowed to do lots of stuff ok, not just in my religion, but that doesn't mean we do everything. Ok, so sometimes unfortunately I do listen to music and songs and I know I'm not allowed. I mean it is because of my religion ok, but I sometimes do it and I know I should not do that ok. So, there is lots of Saudi and Muslims listen to music and

you may find some people say this is not true, but don't believe them because it is not. We have tons of singers and they are Muslims... I mean it is not good thing, but this is true. (Karima, Interview 2)

Not only did the Saudi participants express differences in their religious beliefs, they also demonstrated cultural uniqueness based on a variety of demographics. Fadil provided a great deal of information regarding the diversity of Saudi Arabians. The deeper value of his interview was that it reflected that he had taken advantage of opportunities to interact with Saudi cultures that he may not have experienced within his own land.

I don't know if I told you that or not but each part of Saudi Arabia it's different. I think it is same here like east different then west and south. So one of the, my friends, Saudis he is from south. So we get sometimes like argument like between ah, how to say it, um, ah sometimes like even like we are same language but my work is different from his work. Like I am from east, he is from south. ...So sometimes I get hard time to understand him. And he same thing for him, he get hard time to understand me. But we are both same Arabic like talk Arabic, same language but different word. Ah for example like here and south, one of them call like coke-a-cola like pop and one of them coke like same thing but different, like same language but different word. Same thing in like my Arabic, in Saudi Arabia. (Fadil, Interview 2)

Fadil went on to speak of the importance of the family's tribal heritage across regions of Saudi Arabia.

Yeah, ah I met like a lot of them ah the only one I haven't met people from the north I don't know. Ah but what I see from the West and south ah I felt like they are culture way different than my culture. For example um I am trying to think about something, ah yeah, ah like in where I am from my family, it is one family, like big family. But if you go to west or south the split the family to like I don't know what it's called in like English but it's like this group it is called something and this group is called something else. It's like tribe, when I like my last name, [name], so all awhile it's one family. But if you go to West Saudi Arabia you will see it's like different. There is like when I said [name] I said ok, which type of [name], it's like different groups and same thing for south. (Fadil, Interview 2)

As a final example, Fadil related an example of another student he knows at the university who comes from a Bedouin family.

... like here, in the United States, you have Amish, we have something else in Saudi Arabia, we call them Bedouin? If you heard, they live like in desert, they don't use much from technology, like close to Amish, same idea. Like that student, we're in the same group in Physics, he's one of those guys. He's not getting involved with technology or computer, ...so he's having hard time using Excel because he's not used to technology... I think his thinking still like a Bedouin. ... Even their talk like, the pronunciation for the words, it's different than like what do you call, like for here: Amish and not Amish, they have different accent. Like my accent and his accent is way different. We are the same from Saudi Arabia, but we have different accent in, even in English we learned

like different language, English both of us, but if you look at his pronunciation it's like he having hard time with the English. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Category 3: Socialization

The Saudi participants all pursued some form of socialization. The interviews accentuated the value of establishing a network of friendships. The network appeared to add both a means for socializing and security. The expectation that the friendships be acknowledged publicly also provide them a measure of self-assurance and status among their peers. Socializing with American friends was an aspiration that presented both cultural and religious challenges. These difficulties centered primarily on interacting with the opposite sex and their religious restrictions on drinking and diet. These issues presented awkward opportunities for the Saudis to experience deeper relationships, share their culture, and in some cases, test their friendships

Importance of Socializing

Theme 3.1: Socializing with hosts was important for the Saudi students. Most of the Saudi participants expressed socialization with host students as a desired activity. They also found friendships that allowed them to participate in social activities. In some cases, their American friends helped to support the Saudi participants as they strove to cope in a difficult social environment. Emin provided a great overview of the importance of having friends and socializing.

... I mean, every one of my Saudi friends, every one of my Saudi friends has more than one American good friends. So, and I can see that during the weekends; just most of us, when we go out we found, I mean I find my other

Saudi friends with their American friends. So, they hang, they hang out together, they go out together. ... Definitely, and this happening so much. Especially you can realize that during the weekends, when people go out, you can see the people, I mean my friends, all over with their American friends. (Emin , Interview 3)

Likewise Dharah, spoke of how he loves to be where he can be around and talk with others. Although his behaviors and values conflicted with others he observed at parties he attends, he was able to adjust and enjoy the socialization.

... I love going to parties especially when I talk to people. But I don't go wild the way they go. ... I don't do any alcohol so I just go have, I smoke cigarettes...So I go hang out, smoke some cigarettes, have some tea, that's it you know, this is good times for me. (Dharah, Interview 2)

The Saudi participants frequently demonstrated the importance of developing and enjoying relationships through socialization. The participants described how they often invite other students to their apartments, usually for dinner, to help built friendship. Fadil explained the strategy of this form of socialization.

... what I'm thinking it's like because I am a foreign student so they don't want to get involved with me, I don't know. ...I like invite them to my apartment or meeting at the library or try to make friends with them. Then they know me better then they became like nice. (Fadil, Interview 1)

Another example was provided by Ihab who also invited new acquaintances to socialize and build friendships over dinner at his apartment.

... I invited my friends that I just met there are two of them from Japan and one of them from Brazil and one of them are from America. And I invited them to like have dinner with me in my apartment. And I already did all of the cooking and when they come, when we finished the dinner they came and helped with washing the dishes. I told them back in Saudi Arabia the guest has, they cannot like ah help us. He can just relax and he can ask about anything and we will provide for him. (Ihab, Interview 1)

Finally, Adel, who struggled to build friendships with his project group invited members multiple times to his apartment. By the third interview, sadly, they had not yet accepted. "... we start talking more then ... I want to invite him over but he was busy last Friday.... Not yet [meaningful cultural interactions] but he's, I think he's up to it" (Adel, Interview 3).

In the sections to follow, socialization outside of the project environment is explored in the context of those challenges that they often presented.

Conflicts with Social Norms

Theme 3.2: Culture and religion often conflicted with the social norms of the hosts. The interviews conveyed how Saudi students had to overcome barriers in order to participate in social activities with their hosts. Most often these challenges stemmed from (a) a lack of awareness of the local, popular, cultural (b) unfamiliarity in communicating with opposite sex, and (c) drinking and dietary norms forbidden to Muslims (see Table 8).

Table 8

Issues Raised by Saudi Participant when Socializing

ID	Participant	Communicating with the Opposite Gender	Food and/or Alcohol
1	Adel		
2	Butrus	X	
3	Dharah		X
4	Emin	X	
5	Janan	X	
6	Fadil	X	X
7	Giafar	X	X
8	Karima	X	X
9	Hikmat	X	X
10	Ihab	X	X

Subtheme 3.2.1: Socializing with opposite sex was mostly a new experience for the Saudi students. The segregation of genders in Saudi Arabia, although not uniformly enforced, was a commonality with each of the Saudi participants. Some of the students, through work experience or living in somewhat more liberal areas, had a greater comfort level communicating with females. To some extent this was an issue raised by all participants.

[Socializing with opposite sex] it depends actually but it's not as much as here. We have limits like ah during the work it's alright. But outside of work it's little bit complicated I mean you cannot go out with ah, your friend if she is a girl. You cannot go out you know, ah, ah because of the culture, um, this is not happening. Especially in Saudi Arabia they are very strict about it. ... Here it's very normal when you find your friend and she's a girl and you hug each other, this is normal.

I understand in this culture it's ok it's normal but it's not happening in our country so some people just when they try in the time they are expecting you to hug them I don't do that. Some people just find it's not social. Maybe you are meaning something, or you are sending a message that you don't like them while it's not true because I am not used to do that in my country. Some people just find it hard here you know... Yeah, yeah this is a big difference. But as I told you I don't mind just studying with females or because starting from the first primary year in our school which is the first six syllables in education ah girls are separated from the boys, we don't study together. So ah just studying here with females is just something different; but I don't mind it. Because before I came here I know, I knew that people here just ah studying together, don't mind the idea of sharing in the class, stuff like getting friends from both genders. So I was expecting that so I was not surprised but respect it also. (Emin, Interview 1)

Fadil expressed less confidence than Emin in communicating with females. His interview expressed value for formal services offered through the University's International Center. The service provided a safe environment to learn local culture and adjust to speaking with the opposite gender.

No, it's like first time working with females when I come to [university name], when I was in IEP English, Intensive English Program. In the beginning, to be honest, I didn't know how to deal like with girls, like I was a little bit shy because I had never worked with girls, but with the days, I change a lot because I used to work with them, like the first time was if you heard about at *MyPLACE* in the

intensive English program. Maybe some people, probably with conversation partner, you know it? Yeah this *MyPLACE* or conversation partner, we meet like maybe 5 or 4, depends on how many international students in the group, with like 1 or 2 maybe 3 American people so, I spend like 1 year and 3 months in English program and all these years I was dealing in *MyPLACE* with American girls so, that's how it's like I got used to it. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Butrus, a married Saudi student, expressed even greater discomfort when working with females. This was discussed by him in the first interview.

That's also true.....especially with the gender. Because in our country the males have, ah they have class.....ah not only class but they have different school and the female have another school. ... And it's a huge difference...sometimes I'm shy to talk to the females, so that's also maybe because of cultural background. [In Saudi Arabia] we talk with females....but, they have a scarf that cover their hair, and that's something you don't have here. ... I think between guys, it's ok to be around, but the females I think it's a shock for us. ...Yes, it makes me uncomfortable. (Butrus, Interview 1)

When interviewed for the third time, Butrus was still very uncomfortable working with a female in his project group. When asked if he was comfortable interacting with her in his project group, he replied, "Ah not really but I tried to. I try to but it is going well" (Butrus, Interview 3). When prompted further he disclosed:

She didn't ask anything and also I, if she don't say anything I don't like to ask something, maybe it offends her. ...Ah because ah we have a different culture and

maybe if it's the (garble) itself in our country or actually in our culture especially in my city. It is wrong to interact with a female so. And that is why I...I don't think it is religion, I think it is culture. Because they don't, in my religion it doesn't mention to interact with females. ... Yes [differs across regions of the country] it is about for example like in East, in East coast it is ok to interact with females. ...But in my city it is wrong. So I think it is cultural and not religion. (Butrus, Interview 3)

Hikmat supports the difficulty for some Saudi students as he described how regions of Saudi Arabia vary in the extremes of gender separation.

Yeah, concerts or anything like that like they have the right for the men and the left for the women and children's for example. ...Yeah tribes, different tribes, different regions places, actually the culture is separated like you, women work here and even if you go to the government ah like if you wanna go to like the passport like an I.D. for yourself ah there is like a woman department and a men department. Yeah that's why everything is separate over there but if you want to work in the companies it's ok they like but it's like even if they the departments they are leaded by one person it is a man usually just usually a man like ah educations. Ah, for educations like there is ah, there is like educations girl's educations departments and boys' education departments. Like where I can get my certification like my high school diploma. I go to my girls, I mean I'm sorry my boys ah diploma departments and they get it for me. Ya that's why there, it

make a difference because ah I didn't usually work with girls before. (Hikmat, Interview 1)

Janan, a married female participant, expressed concern for men when facing mixed gender situations.

I think men are some, you ask if men have problem with getting into groups with ladies. I think some of them but not all of them because all Muslims everybody have touch with, with women even in Saudi Arabia. Even if it just a short conversation but there must be some touch with women. But there is some grey areas in Saudi Arabia. They don't have them the image of communicate with women. So some of them have a culture shock whenever they came to America but then they start, to handle that issue. But I think that there is some of them that have that problem in the first time. (Janan, Interview 1)

Karima provided insights into her perception of those communication barriers unique to Muslim women. Many of these, she explained, result from the obvious attire that identified them as Muslim. This, she stated, is aggravated by Muslim females who also wear a face covering.

I have a friend ... she covers her face so, it is very difficult for her to communicate and do her presentations and this stuff. It is much more difficult then what men face in here; they will wear whatever, trousers and t-shirts. So we have problems when it comes to our clothes. So, yeah, it is more difficult for girls to adapt, the differences between here and Saudi Arabia, even the very small specific stuff like the clothesI'll ask a question, if you see a girl, one of them

cover her face and one of them just like me, just cover her head, one and just doesn't wear anything, when you have question do you want to ask any one of us, who will you go to? ... Ok are you going to ask the girl who wears the headscarf or the other girl who doesn't wear anything like not a headscarf and she doesn't cover her face nothing? ... People will have no problem to talk to Saudi men because they are like Chinese or Japanese or Russian it doesn't matter because they are men, what's the difference? Nothing, but they will feel there are some obstacles to talk to communicate with Saudi girls because this is what I believe, because of what we wear. ...I notice that, I cover my face and I have friends from Saudi Arabia and they don't wear headscarves and they don't wear anything like they don't cover their face and they don't cover their hair, and I can tell the difference how they communicate with other American students...(Karima, Interview 3)

In addition to the visual identification of being a Muslim female, and the inhibiting uncertainty of boundaries to be respected with Muslim females, Karima also brought out another communication barrier for females to overcome. She explained that Saudi females often have experienced very little previous interaction with males and need to adapt to speaking and participating with males.

Yes, at the beginning. I remember when I had to do my first presentation I as super nervous, like that was my first standing in front of men and talk ya know, so I was pretty nervous especially since I had never go to University in my country, like in Universities we do have male instructors, but I never went to a Saudi

University so, in Houston was my first time so I was very nervous to stand in front of males and talk out loud and ya know do my presentation and I was very shy to volunteer or say something, like if I didn't understand something, yeah it takes a long time to adapt this thing ... in other things like gym and this stuff, most of my friends we do want to go to the recreation center, but we don't want to because there are men so, we don't feel like we will feel comfortable. (Interview 3)

Subtheme 3.2.2: Issues also arose regarding common foods or alcohol consumption that challenged the Saudi students to conform or hold to their religious values. Most interviews that identified these issues also communicated that their friends respected and accommodated for their Muslim doctrine. Within these excerpts, the Saudis express an unhappy fascination with the party and drinking culture of the host students.

Dharah reflected on the immaturity of most of his project group and their obsession with partying and drinking. This also formed somewhat of an obstacle to their communications since he did not drink.

Ok, because there is some cultural, some cultural differences, some so ah most of the students know that ok he is from Saudi, he is Muslim, so he, they are assuming that I don't drink and I don't drink you know. So when they talk because there are some cultural differences and I think like being a freshman ah for them, they are just experiencing the college life so they party every weekend you know. ...They want to explore new stuff they want to try everything. So I

don't, I don't interact with them talking out this stuff. I always hear them you know talking about it. But I don't interact with them talking about it. Because they know, they know there is a cultural difference. (Dharah, Interview 2)

Hikmat also found that social drinking expectations made it more difficult for him to go out with his friends. While his closest friends seemed to accept and respect his religious convictions, socializing continually brought pressure to conform. The significance of this interview excerpt from Hikmat is (a) it illustrates the relentless value conflict confronting Saudis as they exercise their cultural norm of relationship building, (b) it illuminates Hickmat's beliefs, and lastly (c) it speaks to the understanding and respect that his close friends have acquired for both him and his faith.

Yeah, when they ask me to go to the bar with them, and I go to the bar with them and they just like order coke or sprite or any root beer, beer or nonalcoholic beer it's like "Why you don't drink?" ... That's the only thing they asking me about sometimes. Actually the bar and the drinking. ... I'm not drinker. I can't drink because drink is bad it makes you a bad person; like acting not in the right way...Some of them, yeah they understand, some of them like, "Why man just have one drink, it's good," yeah I know but. Sometimes it feels like people say, "If don't drink we're not going to hang out with you, you're boring or something." This is just a little bit people, some people. I know like my close friends they don't care about me, drink. Doesn't drink doesn't matter. You're a good person we can hang out with you. No matter what happened. (Hikmat, Interview 2)

Fadil also observed the obsession with drinking as a foundation for social activity. It is significant to observe that his friends respected that he was not permitted to drink and valued his friendship enough to accommodate his tenets.

... what I see what I learned is like from them and that during the weekend they just drinking. That is what like I see in the culture here. Most of them, I don't want to say all of them, most of them. But they can understand, like respect, in my religion I can't drink. ... they respect that like I don't have to like drink if I want to hang out with them. ... Yeah [they accept that he cannot drink] and for example ah they play sometimes game for instance card game or whatever, it's like any type of game. So in that game, if you wanna play like the loser have to drink. ... You know these games. So I don't drink so how can I like play that game if I am not doing so. I can't drink not just alcohol or beer or whatever ah in that games. I drink like ah soda like coke or any type of, like anything but not like alcohol. (Fadil, Interview 2)

Ihab's interview further demonstrated the strong association between socializing and alcohol as he too felt pressured to drink. Of all of the participants, Ihab's friends seem to provide him the greatest support. It was noteworthy for Ihab that his friends respected his stance on alcohol enough to intercede for him by explaining his refusal to drink to others.

Yeah and sometimes after the lab if we run out of time like in also public speaking class we had them at first we had the a group we had to present like in front of many students so when our teacher put us in a group we didn't know what

we had to do. So we sit together, introduce each other and we like did a great, we did a great job like now I feel like they I know like they are good students from a long time. We sit together we talk about our private life and what we do in like our when we go out of college. And like when I told them like ah when we hung out outside and when they offer me a drink I tell them, well I told them I don't drink alcohol. They fully respect that and I was like I was happy about that. And I was like I was happy about that. ...They fully respect that and one time, one of my, I found someone he didn't know we didn't drink alcohol and one of my American friends stood there and explained, explained why I don't drink. So it was like, like a great experience for me, that they respect what I believe in and respect what they believe. ...It's looks like he is like, ah he is like some brother for me like brother from another mother. (Ihab, Interview 2)

While both Fadil and Ihab remained strong in their refusal of alcohol, diet was an area where they chose to compromise rather than stand out differently from friends. Although his religion mandated Halal foods, he found this to be incompatible with socialization. "Meat must be halal. But exceptions are made since I don't want to be odd between like my friends..." (Fadil, Interview 2).

Ihab discussed how difficult it is for Muslim students to maintain their halal diet as an American student at this university. In his case, Ihab, even after explaining the importance for him to eat foods that were Halal, became reconciled to the fact that this was not practical.

And also the food like it's some kind of hard for the Saudis when they come here because it's different here the American culture. They like lots of junk food like McDonalds and....So it's somehow difficult for the Saudis so they, they have to, if they become roommate with American they have to explain to them that we have to cook every day or sometimes to get over these problems. ...It is ok not eat Halal food but if there is halal food it is ok. But in our religion if you, if the other, if we live with a Christian...or with a Jewish we don't have to ask about the halal food or not, it's ok to eat with them and to marry with them or it's ok. (Ihab, Interview 2)

Efforts by host students to help the Saudi participants adhere to their faith were also demonstrated by Hikmat's friends.

I think it's happened with me actually one day, it's not culturally it's religious too in the same thing because they usually look like how America they eat meat, especially like students they buy pizza's to everyone and one day they had a pepperoni pizza and expect me to eat, but I said no I can't eat that it has pork on it and since that time they always bring pizza without pepperoni or any pork on it. (Hikmat, Interview 1)

Subtheme 3.2.2: Hospitality is intrinsic to the Saudi culture. Another precept of the Saudi culture that appeared frequently within the interviews was showing hospitality to both friends and strangers. Data demonstrated hospitality through opening your home to strangers (e.g., Adel, Interview 3), open doors for others as a sign of respect (e.g., Emin, Interview 3), serving food to guests (e.g., Ihab, Interview 2). Two acts of

hospitality that stood out, not by frequency of occurrence, but instead, by the significance attached by the Saudi students. These were the requirement to greet acquaintances when in public (presented earlier) and the giving of gifts. Both of these affected the relationships of the Saudi participants with their lab groups. Some examples and perceptions associated with gift giving were provided by Ihab and Hikmat.

Ah also ah there is something that I want to tell you. When I lived in my apartment, I moved to another apartment when my brother has a new baby, I bought it chocolate and I went to my neighbors and they gave them, it was our first meetings. They said why did you come and give us the chocolate and I explained to them that my brother just had a baby and that I am happy for him so I am giving like each other, everybody like chocolate and they loved it. They said like we never meet you guys but you came and give us like the chocolate, we appreciate that and we get to know each other and it was a good experience.

(Ihab, Interview 2)

Hikmat's interview also related the importance of generosity in the Saudi culture and religious practice. His description goes beyond his own actions to describe the reactions of his friends and suspicions of his project group.

... Saudis sometimes ah have like different sense of humor. I mean like they, usually like they came to a meeting, like a group meeting or something. They don't like to come with their hands empty like always like have coffee and bring stuff. And sometimes some people think like why do you do this to us did you like try to ah like bring us this stuff so we can be happy and you don't want to do

the work?Yeah but it is like, that is why ah some of them they don't understand ah where we came from. We always give we don't like to get you know. I mean like ah we humble sometimes, we really humble. ... I had been home [to Saudi Arabia] and I bring ah like ah sandals for my roommates. It was good shoe sandals and he was like, "Oh my god like how did you like get them" and he is still friends with me. It is like but that reaction at that time was like people like why he buy you this. ... I just give him like a memory from me ...Like yesterday I give ah the president a small camel ah with a guy on it.

(Hikmat, Interview 1)

Some of them they have like problem with it. Like why do you give me a gift? Because ah the way I understand it here in America if I give you something I owe you a favor and you have to give me a favor back. We don't have this in Saudi Arabia. Ah if I give you something it doesn't matter. Some people they have it in Saudi Arabia too, but like in general the culture we do have it. (Hikmat, Interview 3)

Category 4: Neo-Racism

Theme 4.1: Neo-racism was experienced by several Saudi participants.

Although most of the Saudi students experienced few experiences of neo-racist behaviors these occurrences surfaced in various forms, across the interviews. The examples that follow present disparate forms of neo-racism. Perhaps of greater importance are the attitudes and perceptions of these Saudi students.

Ihab provided insight into how he reacted to the neo-racism that he is occasionally confronted with. He conveyed his realization that people's attitudes and thoughts are often shaped through media rather than actual experience. His interview excerpt demonstrated his understanding and how it helped him to cope and forgive.

One of the experiences that I faced it was in Washington, my flight from Saudi Arabia to Washington, ... I was going with the American airline and there was a woman there. I spent some a long time with her because my flight was cancelled so I stayed there and I speak up with her. So she was telling me the media was telling bad stuff about us. So she was very honest with me to speak up. I told her like we cannot, we cannot kill a fly how we can kill someone. So it was really different and I told her that we are all human and the media play a very bad role to make a difference between each other so. When I found someone who is like for example is racist to me I don't blame, I don't blame him. So I did not. I cannot say that he is the bad one. I always blame the media. So once I get offended by anyone, when my friends are trying to be there for me, I told them that: 'You cannot blame him guys. Maybe he heard something bad about us and we can we have to like speak with him and explain to him more about the things that he knows about us.' (Ihab, Interview 1)

Adel also believed that the media was responsible for creating fear and stereotyping all Arabs. He provided a sad and somewhat humorous account of one of his experiences.

It's kind of, the media is playing kinda the biggest role, like people don't like Muslim because ah, once we get rid of that like eventually they are going to go back and be friendly again. But as far as the media is doing what it is doing right now I don't think that is like a possibility to persuade all the people that they like they see like fine and comfortable back to us. If I go like up the street and ask someone like hey, hey, hey, he is going to be scared. ... Yeah, he is really scared. I have like funny story, I went to the airport and I was carrying a painting with like an Arabic guy with a, you know, what they call like a capan [turban]? And with like a falcon and a Arabian horse... And he asked what is that and I said an Arabian horse, an Arabian guy, and a Falcon. And he said are you from Saudi Arabia and I said yes. And he cancelled [his ticket on] the flight, he thought I was going to blow the plane up. He said I'm going to cancel, I'm going to cancel it he said where are you going and I answered it I am going to Chicago. And he looked at his ticket and Chicago too so he went and cancelled it and confirmed it with me and he went home. That was very surprising to me like really are you that scared? I mean I am not going to do something like that. ... I'm pretty sure because I was Muslim, Arabic and he was scared that I was going to do something bad like kill them or blow up the flight, the airplane this is what I understood. (Adel, Interview 3)

Adel also described other neo-racist occurrences that he and Saudi friends experienced that demonstrate a constant threat of public confrontation.

... like my friend go to the like bar and like 90% of the time they end up with like a fight. So with me they say like ah what is going on about ISIS. They were like not going to talk to us... because of the media, I understand that... (Adel, Interview 3)

Dharah was able to describe an incident where he believed he experienced neo-racism but was not aware of it during the actual episode. These subtle actions, nevertheless he believed were deprecating toward his culture.

Ok, that day I was at my friends place and we were all eating, talking having a good time. So, after some people left, and they were American, there was an American guy who was a good friend of my other friend. Ok, he was talking about just his point. He was saying that those people [the Americans that had left] are not from big cities so they don't do much, they don't know much, they haven't seen. Ah, like most of them haven't seen anyone who is different from them. So for him as an American, he was explaining to us how, how racist they were. I didn't notice it, my friend didn't but he was like: "I am American I know better I know what they did." I don't know. I don't know. I didn't really notice anything. So for me, as I told you, I haven't really experienced any bad situation. Maybe because it is hard for me to notice it and as an international student with the difference in culture. Maybe if there was an American, maybe he could say "Oh this is bad you know." But for me, I don't know. I feel it is normal.

(Dharah, Interview 1)

Butrus provided another account where he felt treated unfairly and revealed the vulnerability of Saudi students to neo-racism. After being arrested by local authorities he described his confusion as he was shuffled through the courts. His unfamiliarity with the American legal system and his limited communication skills left him helpless.

I had this issue with the police department they accuse me of something that I didn't do and my friend didn't do. And I went to court and the judge start giving me like telling me what my rights are. Like to speak ah to ask questions, to understand everything. And then I signed the paper and they started to defend myself. And he not give me time to do this he said we are done. Like so fast. ...I didn't practice any of my rights at all like question and that I don't know what they call it it's just like informal like hearing... And he ah he ended it so fast, I did not get to say anything about the issue... they found me guilty. (Butrus, Interview 2)

Hikmat described his experiences of neo-racism and how it affected him and his ability to socialize with females. Yet, he added to this account the importance of representing his family, culture, and faith, in a positive and moral manner.

Especially from the stereotype, some people think Arab in bad way, especially with the females. Some people think we never saw a females before and all the females are covered from head to toe and that's why they think if they go to a beach with a Saudi especially they think it's universal anything like this. Yeah and I always tell them it's hard to understand this, not everyone came to America from Saudi Arabia they come from a traveler family, people have a open mind

family. I always give them example for, if you took one of a country guy and send him to Saudi Arabia what he going to think about it? What people going to think about Americans? They always love hunting and they like ...big beard and chew tobacco and all that stuff. That's what I told them, if this people that never say any women or entrapped with women they are from really, really small tiny village in Saudi Arabia. That's why especially with my female friends right now, they said like they think I'm going to be creepy and they told me that some of the Saudis are creepy and I told them it depends on where they come from, everyone is not the same over there. Some people they have open-minded, some people they have closed-minded. ...Yeah some people don't understand, when they came here they said ..., I'm in a place, not my place. I'm going to do whatever I want no one's here. And that's like a bad attitude because no one is going to think when you walk on the street you represent your parents and where you come from... Like if a Saudi student go to shooters here and do bad stuff to, do bad attitude to anyone the person is not going to accept it as a single person, like a person from Traverse City or a person from Detroit he's going to say all the Saudis they do the same thing. All the Arabians they do the same thing. ...Yeah you really represent not just your parents, your culture, your religion, everything in your life. (Hikmat, Interview 2)

Emin, did not express any overt neo-racist experiences, however, he noted the confusion of others when he, being African, claimed his Saudi heritage.

Yeah it's a [home town] big city, it has a lot of nationalities, so many people from different origins, live there as Saudis. So for example, I'm ah, originally I'm from Africa. But I live ah, in that, in that city. And in that city there are also Asians origins, I mean people from the Asians Arabians, African Arabians, and a lot of Indian Arabians, and all of them just live in Saudi Arabia because ah some people were surprised when I told them I was from Saudi Arabia. Ah they were surprised because ah they didn't know that there were African Arabian people in Saudi Arabia. (Emin, Interview 1)

It is important to realize that as a result of receiving an education in America, the Saudi students may also be confronted with a form of neo-racism when they return to Saudi Arabia. First, Butrus explained the rift in attitudes between generations of Saudis as some of them fear outside values penetrating their societies and corrupting their culture and faith.

Ah even the culture is, I think it has been changed between 5 years from now. I think because one Saudi country did follow the education thing. They think every Saudi it doesn't apply in our university in Saudi Arabia. Ah so they send them overseas to get, to receive his or her education and I think that it change even people. So the last five years has been changed even the interaction in the group, males and females. ... Ah, they [the conservative population] said it's, it's the sending of Saudis overseas itself is wrong to receive an education. Because they bring ah new thoughts. So and there is a lot of problem between the older

generation and us. And some of them we explain it to them and they accept it.

But still there is a problem. (Butrus, Interview 3)

Giafar also supported concerns about how they will be treated once they return back to Saudi Arabia.

It makes a difference, yeah cause I'm Saudi. ... Ah that's why I was like cynical with the people I meet what they think of us like what are we and I try to make it better. That's my point you know. ... back home some of the locals won't talk to international students. I don't know why. But they won't like try even and I see some of my friends that way. And I don't know why, it's like culture I think probably. ... Ya, they won't understand what I was saying they probably take it the wrong way or something. That's why I try to avoid like having those conversations. (Giafar, Interview 1)

Summary

This chapter has presented the rich interview content collected from ten Saudi Arabian international students participating in this study. The data was organized to support the four categories and associated themes and subthemes were identified. The themes support the interactive acculturation framework that formed the basis of this study. The next Chapter will connect these themes and supporting literature to the research questions of this study.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This chapter addresses the research questions of this qualitative study by using themes constructed from a rich collection of interview data supported through past research reviewed in Chapter III. Implications are presented that suggest proactive interventions enhance the acculturation experience of Middle Eastern students and better prepare the host campus, its faculty, and students to support and benefit from these international student experiences. Finally, recommendations are offered for further research.

Interactive acculturation, the theoretical framework on which this study is based, asserts that both the international and domestic cultures will be influenced through the acculturation experience (Ngo, 2008). The research questions posed in this study sought to explore the integrity of that interactive acculturation through the analyzed and interpreted experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students, enrolled at a Midwestern university, as they integrated with the host students on team-based projects.

The use of project groups consisting of mixed cultural groups in order to enhance cultural integration has been introduced by multiple studies. For example, Sit (2012) suggested the use of project groups as a means to enhance acculturation through the rich interactive experiences they can provide. Rezak and Coyner (2013) discussed how project teams can be a desired medium to negotiate cultural values. Borrego et al. (2013) examined team based learning as a forum for developing skills such as resolving conflict, managing team responsibilities, using respectful behaviors, and leadership.

My study captured the perceptions of Saudi students as they blended with American students into groups within project based courses. The level of recognizable transformation in group members may also be an indicator of the effectiveness of mixed-culture project groups in catalyzing a successful interactive acculturation and international experience as assessed through increased cultural understanding, respect, and tolerance.

This study involved 10 Saudi Arabian students, each enrolled in a course requiring technical or scientific lab projects. Through the period of one semester, 27 semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted. Of the ten students, eight completed the three interview sequence, one (Ihab) could not be reached for the third interview, and one (Janan) left the country prior to the second interview. The participant interviews provided a rich description of their acculturation experiences with their project groups, both inside and outside of their course and project environments. Interviews also yielded valuable insights on their broader acculturation experiences that likely influenced their attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions within their project groups. Data collected through these interviews identified four categories of themes: (a) academic experience, (b) sharing culture and faith, (c) socialization, and (d) neo-racism (see Figure 2 in Chapter V).

Key Findings and Connections to Previous Research

This section explores each research question in the context of the collected data and supported through previously published literature. The central focus of this study

was: How do Saudi students describe their cultural integration experiences as they engage with host peers in team-based learning projects? Specific research questions included:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?
2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?
3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?
4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?
5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

Research Question 1 Findings

How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects? The Saudi participants shared several similar experiences as they engaged with host students in their project environments. Summary findings include:

- Finding 1. Communication deficiencies, real or perceived by all Saudi participants were an inhibiting factor to engaging their team members.
- Finding 2. Early in the semester several of the Saudi participants perceived that their project team had low expectations for them to contribute to the projects overall success.

- Finding 3. By the final interview, most of the Saudi participants described their teams' expectations of them as equivalent to or greater than others in the group.
- Finding 4. The participants described little or no meaningful conversation within the project settings (lab or other workspace) that focused on exchanging cultural information.
- Finding 5. Most participants described unintentional group interactions that improved member comfort level, reduced cultural stereotyped images, and conveyed culture and faith related knowledge between the host and Saudi participant.

A common thread among the participants that spanned all of the themes was the challenge of communication. Lin (2012) supported this finding as being one of the greatest difficulties for international students to overcome. Even the most proficient communicators expressed doubt in their ability to be understood and to convey thoughts in a manner that were not offensive. The importance of communications has also been voiced by Lee and Rice (2007) and Sherry et al. (2010) as a factor of success or failure academically and socially. Kimmel and Volet (2012) linked communication skills to student attitudes toward working in a culturally mixed group. They also found that students with poor English communication skills were assumed academically inferior to those better skilled. That study aligns to the experience that most of my Saudi participants found with their project groups. Some of the students noted the value of

mixed group conversational activities organized through the University's International Office to building confidence in their communications skills.

Other participant experiences associated with this research question aligned to several themes and subthemes within the *academic experience* category. One dominant experience was reflected by Theme 1.3: *Project groups' expectations for Saudi students were mostly the same as other group members by the end of the semester*. The data that comprised this theme described the growth of group confidence in the participants' abilities. Most of the participants perceived this group project experience as resulting from improved group relationships. Overall, the Saudis expressed their group interactions as more relaxed as the semester progressed. By the completion of their final interviews, most perceived that they had achieved greater confidence from their group as well as equal expectations for contributing to the group's success. This may have resulted from overcoming the initial attitude of host members who had become more accustomed to their communications and perhaps had begun to perceive them more as individuals and less as a media induced stereotype.

Finally, Saudi participants commonly described communications with host members within their project's environment (i.e., laboratory or other workspace) as mostly project oriented and not conducive to other substantial dialogue. This limited scope of interaction within the project environment aligned to Theme 2.1: *Culture and faith sharing were limited and mostly unintentional within the project environment*. Despite this, interviews from several participants confirmed that normal interactions and observations affected attitudes and understanding of culture, perhaps more effectively

than mere conversation. Some of the participants achieved a strong enough relationship with their group to extend engagement beyond the project environment. The two participants most successful with external engagement demonstrated social leadership roles within their groups. These will be discussed in greater depth under research questions four and five.

Research Question 2 Findings

How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting? Interview data was rich in cultural related issues relevant to the academic and social aspects of their project setting. Summary findings pertaining to research question two included:

- Finding 1. The participants' cultural backgrounds did not prepare them for the host classrooms which were less formal and expected interactive participation.
- Finding 2. The participants' cultural backgrounds did not prepare them for the more approachable and friendly faculty in their host courses.
- Finding 3. The participants' lack of understanding of local, discipline related terminology, processes, or equipment disadvantaged them on their project team.
- Finding 4. The participants' lack of understanding of local, popular culture inhibited them from casual communication with other members.
- Finding 5. Participants were initially uncomfortable interacting with female members.

Finding 6. The participants were content to have host students assume technical leadership.

Finding 7. Some of the participants assumed leadership roles in building the group interrelationships.

Several aspects of Saudi culture emerged as relevant within the project based settings. First, the Saudi classroom culture conditioned the participants to learn through listening to an instructor delivered lecture. As conveyed by the first finding, that culture left them unprepared for the host classroom environment which was less formal and expected interactive participation. Similarly, Finding 2: *The participants' cultural backgrounds did not prepare them for the more approachable and friendly faculty in their host courses*. These findings agree with those in previous literature from Lee (2014) and Razek and Coyner (2013). The importance of these differences in higher education norms were exposed by subtheme 1.1.1: *Faculty interactions at this American university differed greatly from those experienced in Saudi Arabia* and subtheme 1.1.2: *Classroom interactions at this American university were different than in Saudi Arabia*. Therefore, the project course environment challenged both of these norms. One participant expressed a cultural shock as they were exposed to such informal interaction in the classroom between the students and the faculty. Others reported some trepidation to contributing with the class due to their perceptions of deficiency in their ability to communicate in English. Lin (2012) addressed how the cultural norms of education in America might contrast with other cultures. Lin also considered conclusions that may erroneously be constructed about the student's interest or intelligence.

In this study there was evidence that demonstrated the instructors' power to either exacerbate or mitigated classroom acculturation issues. Demonstrating the former: "In personal, he is one of the problems of the project this teacher. He doesn't have time, if you talk to him asking him about stuff he would refuse to help he would make us feel like stupid for asking that question" (Adel, Interview 2). The latter is also presented: "Ah here like it [classroom environment] is more open like for the prof to talk to like the students and like for the students to express their like ideas, and with any word in like English" (Giafar, Interview 3). At the beginning of the semester, both of these students began the semester with low expectations or confidence from their project groups. Adel felt as though he was hopelessly behind and bypassed by his project group throughout the semester. Giafar progressed well and was very happy with his course experience. By the end of the semester he believed he was an equal contributor to the success of his group.

Finding 3: The participants' lack of understanding of local, discipline related terminology, processes, or equipment disadvantaged them on their project team resulted from evidence that demonstrated, first, a cultural gap in discipline specific terminology, processes, or equipment that a transferring Saudi student had no previous exposure to. This emerged as subtheme 1.1.3: *Transfer skills deficiencies were exacerbated by lack of cultural acumen*. Data supported that some participants had an especially difficult time learning these as their definitions, interpretations or other description that might have local significance.

For Finding 4: *The participants' lack of understanding of local, popular culture inhibited casual communication with other members*, my data revealed that, while discipline specific culture posed a challenge academically, lack of familiarity with local popular culture inhibited Saudi students from participating in casual conversations with other group members. The persistence of these issues can result in both academic failure as well as social isolation. Data that evidence this finding was also represented in subtheme 1.1.3. Fageeh's (2011) study supported both the issues of slang and terms that had locally significant meaning as well as the importance of cultural understanding. He also recognized that understanding culture was an important asset for communications.

The relevance of culture within the mixed gender project groups led to Finding 5: *Participants were initially uncomfortable interacting with female members*. Data that supported this finding also emerged as Theme 1.2: *Interacting with the opposite sex as equals was a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience for the Saudi students*. Most of the male participants expressed difficulty interacting with females initially, as this was mostly prohibited throughout Saudi Arabia. For some students' discomfort continued throughout the semester that data was collected for this study. Some students also conveyed awkward situations as these forms of communications in American culture can include casual physical contact (e.g., hand shaking, and hugging).

This university's international support offers a program, MyPLACE, similar to that discussed in Redden (2013) that pairs international students with English speaking conversational partners. This provided at least one of the participants the opportunity to

practice English, overcome awkwardness of speaking with females, and a comfortable venue to learn more of the popular culture.

Finding 6: *Participants were content to have host students assume technical leadership* and Finding 7: *Some of the participants assumed leadership roles in building the group interrelationships*, together, illustrate that, while none of the Saudi desired to be considered a technical leader within their groups, several took initiative to build closer relationships across their groups. Two of the participants, Emin and Hikmat, hesitantly confessed their perceived leadership in a context of building team camaraderie. This topic also emerged in my study as subtheme 1.4.2: *Group leadership was not important for the Saudi participants*. The Saudi participants' desire for stronger group bonding and external interaction also supports the characteristics of collectivistic values. Further, the interview data both include recognition from the Saudi students of the contrasting individualistic nature of the host students. This and similar supporting data formed the subtheme 1.4.3: *Students demonstrated collectivistic behaviors*.

These findings are supported by research performed by Razek and Coyner (2013) who also asserted that the collectivistic character of the Saudi culture is also illustrated by the contrasting classroom environment. They noted that in a collectivistic culture, students learn from a teacher whose knowledge is beyond challenge. This is contrasted with the interactive American classroom. Further, these findings are also aligned with those of Lemke-Wescott and Johnson (2013) whose study noted that Middle-Eastern student culture is more collectivistic (higher importance on family and less independence) and puts less value on performance.

Research Question 3 Findings

How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members? The Saudi participants in this study demonstrated adaptive behaviors that were targeted to help them better integrate with their project team members. A summary of these adaptive behaviors include:

- Finding 1. Saudi students proposed meeting outside of the project environment.
- Finding 2. Saudi students attempted to better conform to the local culture.
- Finding 3. Saudi students became intentionally more socially interactive within the group.
- Finding 4. Saudi students learning the importance of punctuality.

Results in this context of behavioral adaptation are summarized within Theme 1.4: *Attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and host students affected their academic experience*. An example of this is demonstrated within the project groups. Initially, four of the Saudi participants perceived that they were not considered valued participants within their project groups, Adel, Butrus, Giafar, and Hikmat. Adel, Butrus and Giafar, all initially struggled with their attitude and self-confidence. They expressed frustrations with their projects and group relationships. For example, Fadil expressed his early frustration: "... when they see me they don't even say hi. It's like they feel like I am strange" (Fadil, Interview 1). This perception is exacerbated since Saudi culture attaches respect to public acknowledgement of acquaintances through greetings. Adel likewise struggled with deficient transfer skills that technically prevented him from contributing as an equivalent within his group. Lack of knowledge of the local culture also was a barrier

for him to socialize with his group. Giafar voiced similar communication concerns. These experiences aligned to findings and considerations in previous studies. For example, Kimmel and Volet (2012) discussed studies that demonstrated a similar lack of desire for interaction between international and local students. While both language and culture may discourage communication, other perceptions may be related to the difference of how relationships are valued within an individualistic society. Similarly, it was suggested by Trice (2007) that since students from collectivistic countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia) had been raised in a culture where making friends outside of their societal network was not necessary. In an individualistic country where more effort is required to build friendship, behavior may seem unfriendly. Finally Ting-Toomey (1994) recognized the importance of in-group acceptance and approval to self-respect in collectivistic cultures.

Butrus' attitude turned positive when he experienced his group's helpfulness and desire for him to succeed. Likewise, Giafar's attitude became more positive as his group established better synergies. By the final interview, both conveyed their projects as a positive experience. Despite Adel's efforts to adapt through increased efforts to arrange for outside of class group work and social meetings (Finding 1.), he remained unsuccessful in achieving equality as a group contributor and remained frustrated through the semester in this course. Although Adel passed the course, he ended with little satisfaction of team contribution. It was interesting to observe that, in his technical communications course, where his group assignment aligned to his more familiar Saudi experiences, Adel engaged other members with much greater success. This supports

Theme 1.4: *Attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and host students affected their academic experience.*

Another revealing observation of how the Saudi participants adapted their behaviors as demonstrated from Finding 2: *Saudi students attempted to better conform to the local culture.* Early in the semester, Adel expressed that beyond his lacking English skills, he could not connect with the local rural hunting and outdoors culture that generally dominated conversation surrounding his group. Later in the semester he purchased a Jeep and some outdoor apparel. He was struck by how these things attracted interest and stimulated conversation with both his group and others in his technical course. The implication, that did not escape Adel, was the importance of creating a commonality as a foundation for successful relationship. "... I mean they just, they like you more when you are just like them. When you act like them, talk like them, do the stuff they like" (Adel, Interview 3).

Hickmat was a good example of finding 3: *Saudi students became intentionally more social within the group.* Hikmat demonstrated his resilience through an intentional decision to adapt his behavior to develop a more positive working relationship with their peers. In his case, he initiated conversation within his group through his humorous and gregarious manner. This technique agrees with Cheung and Yue (2012) study reinforcing the use of humor. Hikmat was the most successful of the Saudi participants in achieving enjoyment in the project group experience.

Another adaptation was identified in finding 4: *Learning to be more punctual.* The prominence of this issue was recognized by subtheme 1.4.4: *Saudi participants*

expressed that tardiness was a cultural norm they coined as "Saudi time." Several of the Saudis described tardiness as an expected cultural behavior. This finding aligns with Ting-Toomey's (1994) relationship between of collectivistic cultures and *Polychronic Time Schedules* (P-Time). P-Time emphasizes time in terms of resolving social relationships whereas *Monochronic Time Schedules* (M-Time) emphasizes the clock based punctuality expected in individualistic cultures (Ting-Toomey). The expectations of faculty and the project groups resulted in adaptation in the form of punctuality.

Research Question 4 Findings

How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members? The Saudi participant in this study conveyed perceived adaptive attitude and behavioral changes in the host team members as the semester progressed. The changes indicated greater understanding and acceptance of the Saudi student within the group. A summary of these include:

- Finding 1. Host member interaction helped to reduce stereotyped image of Saudis and Muslims.
- Finding 2. Host members became more accepting, communicative, inclusive, and friendly.
- Finding 3. Host members became more open to social interaction.
- Finding 4. Host members became accommodating and respectful of religious practices such as "prayer time."

For Finding 1: *Host member interaction helped to reduce stereotyped imaged of Saudis and Muslims*, interviews disclosed confessions of stereotyping by Saudi

participants as well as fears that their American hosts possessed mental models of the Saudis as well. The expression of these fears substantiated through external experiences of neo-racism, were included in Theme 4.1: *Neo-racism was experienced by several Saudi students*. Initial Saudi perceptions being thought of as inferior may be explained through host stereotyping or from association with language deficiencies. This would align with findings from Kimmel and Volet (2012) as reasons that host students may perceive the international student as lowering the academic standards of the group. Hilal and Denman (2013) also found personal interactions to be a means of overcoming destructive mental models, often constructed through media.

Finding 2: *Host members became more accepting, communicative, inclusive, and friendly*, contrasts with those of the Alreshoud and Koeske study (1997). Their study questioned the validity of *contact hypothesis* between Saudi Arabian and American students. My research documents that increased contact within a project environment did produce positive attitudes and behavioral changes in the host project members as well as the Saudi members. Over the semester, the interviews provided evidence that the host group members were recognizing the Saudi students as individuals and becoming more comfortable in communicating with them. This would also agree with Kimmel and Volet (2012) as they discussed the avoidance of risks in associating with unlike cultures and that peer familiarity established in group projects can increase cultural interactions. Statements that expressed how host group members attitudes changed with respect to their attitudes towards Saudi members were reflected in Theme 1.3: *Project groups' expectations for Saudi students were mostly the same as other group members by the end*

of the semester and Theme 1.4: *Attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and host students affected their academic experience.*

Finding 3: *Host members became more open to social interaction*, revealed that attitude changes were also understood by the Saudi participants in those groups that began to interact outside of their project environments. These were illustrated through various actions. For example, simple actions such as greeting their Saudi members publicly were very powerful as indicators of friendship. Another was in groups becoming more willing to meet outside of the project environment to group study or socialization. The most satisfying attitude change resulted in host members that began to not only socialize but discuss culture outside of the project environment. These interactions were represented in Theme 2.2: *Intentional cultural and faith sharing with the project group occurred mostly outside of the project's environment.* Ihab's group, in particular, was a good example of this level of interaction as they developed not only respect but friendship. A second example was the special friendship Dharah established with a group member and their frequent comfortable cultural, political, and religious conversations.

The interviews demonstrated that the project environments were not conducive to intentional cultural sharing. Despite the lack of intentional sharing of culture, data illustrated that the project group environments still offered rich opportunities for observations and interactions that afforded better understanding of culture and faith. The effectiveness of the project environment is articulated by Finding 4: *Host members became accommodating and respectful of religious practices such as "prayer time."* The

interview data reflecting this resulted in Theme 2.1: *Culture and faith sharing were limited and mostly unintentional within the project environment*. The Saudi participants recognized that these observations also resulted in attitude changes in the host group members as well as in themselves. One example of the changing attitudes and behaviors of the host members was demonstrated by respect and accommodation given to the Saudis enabling them to adhere to their prayer times, even when it interfered with group project activities. As Lin (2012) stated, international students offer a convenient opportunity for host students and faculty to gain intercultural experience within their home campus.

Research Question 5 Findings

How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship? The Saudi participants in this study demonstrated an evolution in their attitudes and perceptions as a result of their cross cultural team relationships. Summary findings pertaining to research question five included:

- Finding 1. The Saudi participants perceived that host students initially avoided relationships with them but grew more comfortable and friendly over the semester. Resulting Saudi attitudes were to assume responsibility for relationship building.
- Finding 2. The Saudi participants perceived that socialization with host students was synonymous with drinking and partying. Resulting attitude changes were to become more accepting of this culture and seek accommodation while participating in these social environments.

- Finding 3. The Saudi participants perceived that most host students focused on their own local culture and had little experience with other cultures. Resulting attitude changes included an increased desire to understand the local culture and to share their own.
- Finding 4. The Saudi participants perceived that females and males can work and socialize respectfully. Resulting attitude changes included greater appreciation for mixed gender societies.
- Finding 5. The Saudi participants perceived greater acceptance as equal contributors as their groups became more comfortable working together. Resulting attitude changes included greater self-confidence and satisfaction in the developing group relationships.

Finding 1 notes that *the Saudi participants perceived that host students initially avoided relationships with them, but grew more comfortable and friendly over the semester*. Further the finding illustrates that the *resulting Saudi attitudes were to assume responsibility for relationship building*. As discussed in previous findings, group relationships were important to most of the Saudi participants (see research question 2, finding 7 and research question 3 findings 1-3). These participants found that host students in their groups focused on the project task. In contrast, the Saudis maintained greater focus on their group's relationships. This finding aligned with descriptions of individualist and collectivistic behaviors provided by Ting-Toomey (1994). Evidence that resulted in this finding included Theme 3.1: *Socializing with hosts was important for*

the Saudi students and subtheme 1.4.3 *Saudi participants demonstrated collectivistic behaviors.*

The importance of forming cohesive relationships within their groups appeared unique to the Saudi male participants in my study. Also, in contrast to the research of Razek and Coyner (2013), who expressed that Saudi students needed to be encouraged to meet outside of their project groups, several of the Saudi participants in this study promoted external meetings and socialization with their group members. While the importance of group relationships did not change over time, the project experience may have been a motivating factor for their assertiveness in seeking group social interaction. Most of the Saudi students maintained this attitude toward strengthening relationships to the extent they were able.

Finding 2 notes that *the Saudi participants perceived that socialization with host students was synonymous with drinking and partying. Resulting attitude changes were to become more accepting of this culture and seek accommodation for their values while participating in these social environments.* This finding is supported by Theme 3.2: *Culture and religion often conflicted with the social norms of the hosts* and more specifically by subtheme 3.2.2: *Issues arose regarding common foods or alcohol consumption that challenged the Saudi students to conform or hold to their religious values.* Razek and Coyner (2013) believed that group interactions were not only important to Saudis because of their roots in collectivistic societies, but also because it provided an environment for them to better learn social expectations and norms of the host culture. However, several of the Saudis in my study voiced they were challenged

when socializing with the host students since it required them to repeatedly defend reasons for not drinking or eating certain foods. One example was provided by Hikmat: “It’s like I don’t drink. And they have like why and the speech keep going until like end of the day ...” (Hikmat, Interview 2).

Finding 3 notes that *the Saudi participants perceived that most host students focused on their own local culture and had little experience with other cultures. Resulting attitude changes included an increased desire to understand the local culture and to share their own.* Some of the Saudis found difficulty in interacting in normal student discussions due to their unfamiliarity with the local culture. This also emerged as a subtheme 1.1.3: *Transfer skills deficiencies were exacerbated by lack of cultural acumen.* Lee and Rice (2007) described how cultural differences and lack of intercultural competence can negatively affect the experiences of international students. Likewise, Trice (2004) discussed the difficulties experienced by participants in my study because of their lack of familiarity with the local culture. Finally, some of the participants expressed their frustrations when they did try to participate in casual discussions that revolved about local culture. They conveyed their inability to catch on to the conversations due to their deficient English skills. This finding was supported by Trice as she recognized that language difficulties further aggravated the international student’s ability to catch on to insights into local culture as they communicate with locals. Despite these challenges, most of the Saudi participants continued throughout this study in their efforts to further understand and share cultures.

Finding 4 found that *the Saudi participants perceived that females and males can work and socialize respectfully. Resulting attitude changes included greater appreciation for mixed gender societies.* Data from this research show that Saudi participants expressed improved attitudes and behaviors toward gender interactions within society. Data supporting this resulted in Theme 1.2: *Interacting with the opposite sex as equals was a new and sometimes uncomfortable experience for the Saudi students* and subtheme 3.2.1: *Socializing with the opposite sex was mostly a new experience for the Saudi students.* A study began by Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) on Saudi international students transitioning to a mixed gender society confirmed the impact the experience had on Saudi participants in this study. Most Saudi participants believed that the increased interaction with females and mixed gender societies were good. While one of the female Saudi participants also agreed, the other expressed trepidation for the males as they adapted to this new experience. “They don’t have them the image of communicate with women. So some of them have a culture shock whenever they came to America” (Janan, Interview 1). Participant input on cross gender interactions include those from within and beyond the project groups.

Finding 5 revealed that *the Saudi participants perceived greater acceptance as equal contributors as their groups became more comfortable working together. Resulting attitude changes for the Saudi participants included greater self-confidence and satisfaction in the developing group relationships.* The finding indicated that many of the participants’ confidence and group interactions had increased over the semester. Data also supported that most of the project groups afforded environments where students

were mutually supportive and where cultural learning could take place progressively in a safe environment. This data resulted in Theme 1.4: *Attitudes and behaviors of both the Saudi and host students affected their cultural experience* and in subtheme 1.4.1: *Saudi attitude and self-confidence generally improved throughout the semester*. Despite this, the project environment placed the Saudi participants into challenging and initially uncomfortable situations where they had to rely on resilient thinking (Caruana, 2014) to adapt successfully. Becoming accepted as an equal contributor required these participants to show academic competence and ethics that met the standards of the group. Like other aspects of the acculturation experience, language deficiencies hampered progress.

Major Findings Summary Table

Table 9 offers a summary of my key finding and their connections to previous research as presented in the previous sections.

Table 9

Major Findings and Connections to Previous Research

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
RQ1 - Experiences Engaging with Host Students		
1.1. Communication deficiencies, real or perceived by all Saudi participants were an inhibiting factor to engaging their team members.	Aligns with Lin (2012), Lee and Rice (2007) and Sherry, Thomas, and Chui (2010), Kimmel and Volet (2012) in the importance of communication skills for engagement.	Finding deepens the understanding of the impact of communications deficiencies on Saudi students.
1.2. Early in the semester several of the Saudi participants perceived that their project team had low expectations for them to contribute to the projects overall success.	Aligns with Kimmel and Volet (2012) in their link of lower communications skills to assumptions of lower academic abilities and stereotype of international students having lower academic standards.	Finding goes beyond Kimmel and Volet (2012) and focuses the study to Saudi students.
1.3. By the final interview, most of the Saudi participants described their teams' expectations of them as equivalent to, or greater than, others in the group.	Aligns with Holmes and O'Neill (2012); Kimmel and Volet (2012); Lemke-Westcott and Johnson (2013); Razek (2013) for using team projects to help encourage intercultural engagement. Hilal and Denman (2013) finding that personal interaction can overcome destructive mental models.	Finding adds knowledge as it is focused on Saudi student experience. The finding supports the recommendations made by other researchers for intercultural team-based learning to encourage positive interaction.
1.4. The participants described little or no meaningful conversation within the project settings (lab or other workspace) that focused on exchanging cultural information.	Supported by Harrison (2012) regarding fear of communication with other cultures.	Demonstrates findings from prior research regarding inhibited communications between Saudis and their American hosts. This finding also reinforces the team's focus on project completions rather than conversation.

Table 9--Continued

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
<p>1.5. Most participants described unintentional group interactions that improved member comfort level, reduced cultural stereotyped images, and conveyed culture and faith related knowledge between the host and Saudi participant.</p>	<p>Aligns with Borrego, Karlin, McNair, and Beddoes (2013) regarding use of team based learning as a forum for developing skills such as resolving conflict, managing team responsibilities, using respectful behaviors, and leadership.</p>	<p>The finding adds important knowledge on the Saudi/ host intercultural engagement based on the intimate explorations within the team-based project learning environment. This finding brings valuable insight for future interventions and research.</p>
<p>RQ2 - Relevance of Culture in Team-based Project Setting</p>		
<p>2.1. The participants' cultural backgrounds did not prepare them for the host classrooms which were less formal and their expectation for interactive participation.</p>	<p>Aligns with Lee (2014), Razek and Coyner (2013) and Lin (2012). Each of these addressed language and culture issues affecting classroom and faculty interaction.</p>	<p>Data supporting this finding provides an in-depth examination of Saudi experiences. Also provides rich examples involving faculty and classroom issues.</p>
<p>2.2. The participants' cultural backgrounds did not prepare them for the more approachable and friendly faculty in their host courses.</p>	<p>Aligns with Lee (2014), Razek and Coyner (2013), Lin (2012)</p>	<p>Interaction provides rich examples from Saudi students not previously explored. Both findings 2.1 and 2.2 add knowledge that will help guide the development of interventions and future research.</p>
<p>2.3. The participants' lack of understanding of local, discipline related terminology, processes, or equipment disadvantaged them on their project team.</p>	<p>Aligns with Trice (2004) regarding difficulties experienced by internationals because of their unfamiliarity with the local culture</p>	<p>This is a new finding within the context of the team-based projects environment. Its supporting data adds unique insights into not only the effects on socialization but also specific examples applicable to technical majors. Additionally, this data reveals both positive and negative outcomes from this initial deficiency occurring within the team-based project environment.</p>

Table 9--Continued

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
2.4. The participants' lack of understanding of local, popular culture inhibited them from casual communication with other members.	Aligns with Fageeh's (2011) regarding importance of language skills and knowledge of the local culture.	This finding is supported by interview data that provides rich descriptions of this deficiency as it applied to Saudi students and how it affected their abilities to build relationships within their project teams.
2.5. Participants were initially uncomfortable interacting with female members.	Aligns with Alhazmi (2013) regarding his findings on the impact on cultural identity and improved ability to relate.	Experiences and perspectives are conveyed by Saudi male as it applied to several scenarios including the team-based project environment. This finding adds new knowledge on how Saudi males adapt to mixed gender groups.
2.6. Participants were content to have host students assume technical leadership.	Aligns with Lemke-Wescotte and Johnson (2014) in collectivistic traits not being as results focused.	This finding affords unique insights into the contrasting behaviors of collectivistic and individualist members in the context of a project team.
2.7. Some of the participants assumed leadership roles in building the group interrelationships.	Aligns with Razek and Coyner (2013), Lemke-Wescott and Johnson (2013) and Ting-Toomey (1994) regarding collectivistic culture	This finding is unique as it applies to project teams and illustrates the emphasis that Saudi team members place on building relationships and forming strong in-group bonds within the teams.
RQ3 - Saudi Adaptive Behaviors to Better Integrate with Host.		

Table 9--Continued

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
3.1. Saudi students proposed meeting outside of the project environment.	Aligns with Kimmel and Volet (2012) in lack of desire for host and internationals to engage; Razek and Coyner's (2013) interviews revealing Saudi in-group support; and with Trice (2007) regarding the experienced difficulties for those raised in collectivistic countries to build relations in an individualistic country	The finding results from new evidence that demonstrates concepts of collectivistic behaviors related to the desire to belong through in-group bonding that are described in previous research. This research is unique in documenting these behaviors in an intercultural project team
3.2. Saudi students attempted to better conform to the local culture.	Aligns with Ting-Toomey (1994) regarding importance of acceptance for self-respect.	This findings provides a vivid demonstration of this behavior within a mixed-culture project team.
3.3. Saudi students became intentionally more socially interactive within the group.	Aligns with Cheung and Yue (2012) in incorporation of humor	This behavior highlighting the effort of Saudi students to build team relationship as an important step to achieve team success. This finding adds new understandings into the interaction between collectivistic and individualistic cultures in a project team environment.
3.4. Saudi students learned the importance of punctuality.	Aligns with Ting-Toomey's (1994) in description of collectivistic perceptions of time.	This finding uniquely demonstrates an adaptive behavior only discussed elsewhere. This collectivistic adaptation to comply with individualistic values supports the desire for in-group (team) acceptance.
RQ4 – Perceived Adaptive Changes in the Host		
4.1. Host member interaction helped to reduce stereotyped image of Saudis and Muslims.	Aligns with Kimmel and Volet (2012) as reasons that host students may perceive the international student as lowering the academic standards of the group.	This finding supports the ability to achieve effective and positive intercultural engagement in a non-deliberate manner.

Table 9--Continued

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
4.2. Host members became more accepting, communicative, inclusive, and friendly.	Aligns with Hilal and Denman’s (2013) findings that personal interactions were a means of overcoming destructive mental models and with Rezak and Coyner (2013) regarding how project teams can be a medium to negotiate cultural values.	This finding supports the ability to achieve effective and positive intercultural engagement in a non-deliberate manner over time.
4.3. Host members became more open to social interaction.	Contrasts with findings of Alreshoud and Koeske (1997) who questions the validity of contact theory. Aligns with Kimmel and Volet (2012) regarding peer familiarity established in group projects.	This finding demonstrates that, over time, team-based project assignments can build inter-cultural relationships.
4.4. Host members became accommodating and respectful of religious practices such as “prayer time.”	Aligns with Lin (2012) regarding international students as an opportunity for host students and faculty to gain intercultural experience.	This finding represents unique insight into how diverse cultures working within project groups can build respect and understanding without intentional dialogue.
RQ5 – Saudi Changes in Attitude and Perceptions		
5.1. The Saudi participants perceived that host students initially avoided relationships with them but grew more comfortable and friendly over the semester. Resulting Saudi attitudes were to assume responsibility for relationship building.	Aligns with individualist and collectivistic behaviors provided by Ting-Toomey (1994). Conflicts with Razek and Coyner (2013) that Saudi students may need to be encouraged to socialize.	This finding is important in that it demonstrates an adaptation by Saudi’s in order to build friendships and camaraderie within the team.

Table 9--Continued

McKean (2016) Key Findings	Previous Research	Significance of McKean (2016) Findings
<p>5.2. The Saudi participants perceived that socialization with host students was synonymous with drinking and partying. Resulting attitude changes were to become more accepting of this culture and seek accommodation while participating in these social environments.</p>	<p>Aligns with Tummala-Narra and Claudius (2013) regarding conflicts in socialization and cultural and religious values.</p>	<p>This finding is important in that it not only demonstrates the chasm between the cultures but also an adaptation by the Saudi's in order to build friendships and camaraderie. i.e., They valued socialization enough expose themselves to environments that threatened their values.</p>
<p>5.3. The Saudi participants perceived that most host students focused on their own local culture and had little experience with other cultures. Resulting attitude changes included an increased desire to understand the local culture and to share their own.</p>	<p>Aligns with Lee and Rice (2007) on how cultural differences and lack of intercultural competence can negatively affect the experiences of international students; with Trice (2004) regarding difficulties experienced by internationals because of their unfamiliarity with the local culture.</p>	<p>This finding is important in that it demonstrates an adaptation in order to gain in-group acceptance. While discussed in other research, the rich experiences as seen through Saudi eyes adds depth and contributes knowledge valuable for development of interventions.</p>
<p>5.4. The Saudi participants perceived that females and males can work and socialize respectfully. Resulting attitude changes included greater appreciation for mixed gender societies.</p>	<p>Aligns with Alhazmi and Nyland (2013) regarding the impact of mixed gender society on Saudi international students identity and outlook.</p>	<p>The finding adds a great deal more insight into the paucity of studies addressing Saudi acculturation into a mixed gender environment. Data supporting this finding conveys the unique perceptions of Saudi male acculturation as told from a Saudi female's perspectives.</p>
<p>5.5 The Saudi participants perceived greater acceptance as equal contributors as their groups became more comfortable working together. Resulting attitude changes included greater self-confidence and satisfaction in the developing group relationships.</p>	<p>Aligns with Caruana (2014) regarding use of resilient thinking; with Hendrickson, Rosen, and Aune (2011) in socialization and acculturation as important in their satisfaction with experience; and with Kimmel and Volet (2012) regarding the benefits for developing a sense of cohort.</p>	<p>This finding is unique in that it results from intercultural experience within the project group and represents the overcoming of multiple barriers over the length of this experience. The intensity of the experience magnified the dynamics of these interactions.</p>

Practical Implications for Campus Internationalization

Findings from this study revealed important insights into the experiences of Saudi students as they experienced team relationships within a project centered environment. A goal of this research is to apply the knowledge gained toward developing proactive interventions that assist Middle Eastern students in developing supportive relationships, reducing cultural barriers, and supporting a mutual understanding of cultures between Middle Eastern and host students. More specifically, these findings would be applied to: (a) advising the university's international offices regarding support services, (b) developing strategies to better prepare host students to benefit from the presence of their international peers, and (c) assisting faculty in gaining a greater understanding of classroom pedagogy and dynamics that are most effective in achieving academic success and positive intercultural experiences for both the Saudi and host students. The substantial cultural divide between the Saudi student and their less travelled American hosts increases the significance of this study as a contributor to the Saudi student's academic success, and achieving positive and meaningful cultural interaction in America.

This section presents suggestions that were attained directly from the Saudi participants. This will be followed by a discussion of the implications of the research findings and how they might find practical application in the development of effective preparations for the campus, faculty, international students, and host students for Saudi intercultural engagement.

Recommendations from the Saudi Participants

Before reviewing practical implications derived from my research, this section will explore suggestions offered by the Saudi research participants. As a final opportunity in the interview process, each of the Saudi participants was asked if they would like to pass on suggestions that would improve their acculturation experiences at this university. These are offered below as additional insight. Although Adel did not provide suggestions, he set the stage for the need to better assist these students. “If they get to know the different problems that we are facing and would try to help that would like, that would do us good” (Adel, Interview 3).

Dharah was also brief as he supported providing opportunity for groups to meet outside of the normal course environments for socialization. It was interesting that he stressed that the meeting were not to talk about course activities but to socialize. He wrapped up his comments simply saying: “So I think meeting out of the shop would make a better relationship and I think it will also lead to a better understanding” (Dharah, Interview 3).

Butrus used the opportunity to suggest creating opportunities, such as project groups, where Saudis are compelled to work alongside host students.

I think the best thing to interact with the culture is to force the students with interacting with the groups. The difference, different than Saudis because if they chose their groups, we always like to work together so I think the best thing is to force the Saudi students working with another person. (Butrus, Interview 3)

Emin was generous in his suggestions which have evolved from his own interactions with the host culture. The first excerpt illustrates how he believes that faculty could begin a positive process for Saudi students to build relationships with their classmates.

I think that if there was a, you know, if on the first day of every lab or every class, you get to work with new people and those new people will work with you for the whole semester, which is you know, a long time. I think it will be a great idea if we got the chance to talk with those people; the first day will be as introduction to each other, so what do you guys know about each other? To talk about them or even make it as a part or, as an assignment to know five guys from that class and get their emails, and this is happened only at one class.... Yeah, it's that breaking the ice because, after that first day, trust me the second day everyone know each other and they're gonna start well. (Emin, Interview 3)

His next suggestion supported the suggestions of Dharah and Butrus to create opportunities for the Saudis to interact with the host culture in conversations that strive for deeper cultural understandings and to better their language skills.

So it's gonna be a good thing to ask that person in person about his religion, about his background, about his country. And trust me, he will be happy, over he is to answer the question.... (Emin, Interview 3)

Fadil also suggested opportunities to interact with the host culture either as conversation groups or as project groups.

I feel it will be really good to understand the language, and the culture. More language than the cultures. ...That's the main idea of conversation partner. It's like 4 or 5 international student with 3 or 2 American so they like practicing talking, maybe sometimes they ask them for project... paragraph or essay so they practice. (Fadil, Interview 3)

Giafar (Interview 3) suggested that having a greater diversity of cultures within the intensive English courses. Also, early in the interview processes, both Adel (Interview 1), in the construction discipline, and Dharah (Interview 1), in the manufacturing discipline, suggested making available special tutoring service for technical courses. They both found that their transfer skills did not prepare them for the technical terminology and processes required in the host culture.

Implications for International Services

The first sets of implications presented are interventions that could be pursued by the university's international services to mitigate barriers to acculturation identified during this research. Five interventions are suggested that address these research findings: (a) the need to improve language skills, (b) provide deeper knowledge of the local *popular* culture, (c) help student understand how cultural differences will be evident in host student behaviors, and (d) better assist the Saudi students to acculturate through socialization that does not conflict with their values.

Safe multi-cultural conversational environments are valuable for Saudi students.

Data from this study has illustrated how these conversational groups have better prepared Saudi students by building their communication skills, improving their knowledge of

local and popular culture, and develop a comfort level in interacting with the opposite gender. This implication has been suggested by Trice (2007) and also Fageeh (2011) who emphasized the value of understanding the host culture.

Educating Saudi students regarding fundamental cultural behavior differences they can expect at an American university may prepare them for a more successful acculturation. Findings from this research have illustrated that Saudi students struggle with regard to understanding both of the general behavioral differences that might be expected (individualistic and collectivistic). Understanding how this affects academic and social relationship might assist the Saudi students in better interpreting the behaviors of local students. These services should also address coping with cultural issues associated with socialization. The more specific and practical this service is, the more helpful it might be for the Saudi student. Other topics to include might address diet, and public and academic behavioral expectations that have emerged in these research findings. Some impactful differences were discussed in detail by Ting-Toomey (1994).

Providing ample non-alcoholic spaces and services intended for socialization may help provide healthier options for both the Saudi and host student socialization. Findings from this research illustrate local socialization centers on drinking and parties. These represent not only a conflict for Saudi culture and religious doctrine but also a generally unhealthy campus culture. Providing opportunities for recreation and socialization spaces that are available late into evening might serve to mitigate socialization issues and build a more attractive culture for Saudi international students.

Faculty need to gain a deeper understanding of Saudi cultural and how it affects behaviors. My research has demonstrated how cultural differences can influence the behavior of Saudi students in ways that may frustrate or be misinterpreted by faculty. These may include tendencies such as reliance on group collaboration to perform course assignments, emphasis on social relationships, ethics founded on unfamiliar values, and habitual tardiness. These behavioral issues are compounded by deficient communication skills, fears of communicating offensively, and unfamiliarity with cultural and religious doctrine. International services can respond to faculty need by offering practical and convenient education and counseling to assist faculty to effectively work with Saudi students and help enable their success.

Host students can gain greater benefit from an internationalized campus when they interact with international students. This research has repeatedly demonstrated that students are uncomfortable in interacting with cultures different from their own. Several reasons for this have been suggested by the Saudi research participants as well as researchers, whereby, Hendrickson et al. (2011), Lin (2012), and others have supported increased interactions between host and international students as a means to reduce these stresses. Further, this research supports desire from Saudis to have more opportunities to socialize with host students in order to increase cross-cultural understandings. International services activities that can bring Saudi and host student together would benefit this cause.

International services could explore faculty collaborations to enhance the internationalization of courses materials.

Implications for Faculty

The next set of implications focus on how the faculty may help to create an environment conducive for the Saudi student to realize academic success and supportive peer relationships. These focus on helping the Saudi student better understand classroom and faculty norms they may not have previously experienced. The final implication addresses the need for Saudi students to develop supportive social networks that facilitate their acculturation.

Faculty can mitigate the discomfort of Saudis whose culture has trained them never to challenge or even converse freely with a professor. Findings of this research illustrate that in the Saudi culture, the faculty represents an authority figure that was not to be questioned. This finding was also supported by research such as Lemke-Wescott and Johnson (2013). An example of how faculty can help the Saudi student better understand and adjust to appropriate faculty interaction could to, first, simply invite the student for a conversation in a non-threatening space where frank discussion can occur. The first objective of this conversation might be to assist the student in understanding boundaries and expectations on how to communicate with the faculty member. Second, the faculty should learn enough about the student to evaluate their confidence and competence in English. Third, learn how culturally prepared the student is in aspects of the course that may be assumed common knowledge but may be unfamiliar in another demographic. Fourth, advise the student on how they might obtain academic assistance as necessary. Fifth, advise the student what to expect inside the classroom or other environment utilized in the course. Finally, if possible establish a working level of

comfort in communicating with the student. Being uncomfortable could inhibit the faculty from communicating appropriately with the student.

Faculty can be effective in assisting Saudi students in adapting to American classroom cultures. An example of how this might be applied would be to first clearly inform the class of the expected level of interactions and any associated protocol. Be sensitive but encouraging to international students who may be uncomfortable speaking in public.

Faculty can be influential in helping the class as a whole become more comfortable in communicating with international students. The finding of this research support the use of team project learning activities. In addition to their benefit to all students, these activities afford international students opportunities to learn cultural norms, develop their language skills, gain confidence in their academic abilities, develop relationships skills, etc. The team project learning can afford an environment rich in interactive experiences. Team project learning activities have also been advocated by several researchers for value in acculturating international students. Some examples include Razek and Coyner (2013), who discussed how project teams can be a medium to negotiate cultural values; Sit (2012), who described project teams as an environment that can foster interaction and acculturation; Borrego et al. (2013), who examined team based learning as a forum for developing skills such as resolving conflict, managing team responsibilities, using respectful behaviors, and leadership; and finally, Trice (2007) who advocated team projects as a means to build camaraderie.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of my research was to describe and interpret the experiences and perceptions of Saudi Arabian students, enrolled at a Midwestern university, as they integrated with the host students on team-based learning projects. My project was able to explore these experiences through ten Saudi participants. While these students provided a great deal of insight into their cultural integration processes, they also demonstrated the need for additional research. Although the research recommendations cited below are Saudi specific, they may easily be applied to international students from other cultural groups that differ significantly from American culture.

First, research that analyzes the various interventions for their effectiveness would help guide the university strategies regarding programming and staffing. Examples of possible interventions were presented in this research and included enhanced use to multicultural and multi-gendered conversation groups, faculty training for effective teaching and acculturation of Saudi students, and effective means to broaden cultural experience and knowledge in host students.

Another opportunity for future research would be to study the cultural differences between male and female Saudi students. The collectivistic emphasis on developing social networks and relationship building that were described by the male participants seemed to be lacking in the females. This may be a consequence to limited female participation in this research or it may indicate that this trait is only emphasized by Saudi males.

Next, the participants in this research were studied as they experienced cultural integration. Follow-up research that examines how acculturation into American universities has affected their attitudes, ideas, behaviors, or values after they have re-immersed into the Saudi Arabian culture would provide rich insight for international education strategies. This research can also be applied from a professional perspective. For example, has the American international experience affected professional ethics, problem solving strategies, abilities to interact with professionals who are culturally diverse, their ability or desire to lead, etc? A third direction for researching these students could be to study how they may experience discriminatory treatment after they return to Saudi Arabia. Two students, in my study, spoke of the objections held by many in Saudi Arabia concerning their exposure to Western values. Research into how these values may be absorbed into Saudi culture or be rejected by that culture would add insights.

Most studies have focused on the acculturation of international students. Research into the effect of hosting the Saudi international student on the attitudes and behaviors of host students and the host community would yield insight into the integrity of the internationalization strategies being used by the university.

Conclusion

This dissertation resulted in a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of Saudi students as they integrated into the host culture. Knowledge gained from this research can be applied toward developing effective interventions that alleviate barriers to a successful intercultural experience for both the Saudis and their hosts. The

team-based project learning environments created ideal laboratories to focus this study on intercultural engagement. These project environments necessitated the interaction and contribution of each member in order for the teams to successfully complete their assignments. Findings from this research aligned with the interactive acculturation framework on which this research was based.

This qualitative research has resulted in an intimate exploration into the acculturation experiences of Saudi Arabian students within the context of team-based learning projects. Through in-depth and semi-structured interviews, data was collected that describes and interprets their experiences and perceptions as they integrated with the host student members of their project teams. This data conveyed rich and emotional stories of their struggles, resilience, frustrations, achievements, newly found friendships, discovered insights, shared culture, and many other experiences.

Findings addressed the central focus of this research: How do Saudi students describe their cultural integration experiences as they engage with host peers in team-based learning projects? These confirmed the encompassing effects that deficient language skills imposed on all aspects of the Saudi acculturation experience. They also exposed shortcomings in the cultural preparations that inhibited Saudi success both academically and socially.

The cultural contrasts between American and Saudi educational norms were clearly demonstrated. Chief among these were the expectations for student interaction within the course environments as well as with their faculty. Next, Saudis were challenged by their lack of understanding of local, popular culture. Data reflected the

important repercussions that inhibited both academic achievement and, most importantly to the Saudis, the inability to establish relationships with host students.

The collectivistic traits of the Saudi students motivated much of their behaviors. These were evidenced by the importance they attached to developing social networks and friendships. Their relationships held precedence over academic performance and were relied upon for both social identity and overall academic success. Efforts to establish these relationships within their project groups were mostly shunned by the host students. The lack of value attached to such relationships by the host students resulted in ongoing frustration for some of the Saudi participants. Collectivistic traits also drew the Saudis to socialize with American students in ways that subjected them to often awkward situations where their religious doctrines and cultural morals were jeopardized. This research did not recognize these same traits in female participants.

The cultural interactions that, at the onset of this research, were expected to occur within the project groups, transpired mostly through unintentional means, such as frequent project related interactions and observations. While groups did not have significant cultural conversations within their project environments, members' attitudes and mental models were impacted simply through working together. Effects included: mitigation of the cultural stereotypes that the Saudis believed resulted from media influence; greater understanding of local cultures, particularly with regards to common outdoor recreational and socialization habits, and the host members respecting Saudi prayer time. Some behavioral contrasts between collectivistic and individualistic cultures were noted by the Saudis, such as punctuality and preference to solve problems

individually. Finally, most of the Saudis also discovered that project interactions resulted in more comfortable communication, stronger relationships, and improved attitudes with the groups' host members.

The interviews expressed discomfort as Saudis first interacted with the opposite gender. Most participants largely overcame this and began to appreciate the blended culture. One female participant however pointed out that wearing a hajib, abayah or burka increased difficulty for Saudi females to interact with Americans.

Overall these findings provided valuable insights that add understanding to how Saudis seek to acculturate at American universities. They reveal important cultural differences and how, if these are not better understood by both the host and Saudi, can inhibit a successful acculturation experience. Knowledge of these potential inhibitors better enable universities to implement proactive steps for positive intercultural experiences.

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Appendix A

Western Michigan University Letter of Approval

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: January 12, 2015

To: Louann Bierlein Palmer, Principal Investigator
Ron McKean, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 14-12-33

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting" 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: This research may **only** be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., ***you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under "Number of subjects you want to complete the study."*** Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. 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.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

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

Approval Termination: January 11, 2016

1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5456

PHONE: (269) 387-8293 FAX: (269) 387-8276

CAMPUS SITE: 251 W. Walwood Hall

Appendix B

Ferris State University Letter of Approval – Extension

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY**Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research**

Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, 220 Ferris Drive, PHR 308 · Big Rapids, MI 49307

Date: January 8, 2016

To: Louann Bierlein and Ron McKean

From: Dr. Gregory Wellman, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application #141207 (*Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting*)

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for an extension to continue using human subjects in the study, "*Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting*" (#141207). This approval has an expiration date of one year from the date of this letter. As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined until January 8, 2017.

Your project will continue to be subject to the research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. It is your obligation to inform the IRB of any changes in your research protocol that would substantially alter the methods and procedures reviewed and approved by the IRB in your application. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

Appendix C

Ferris State University Letter of Approval

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY**Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects in Research**

Office of Academic Research, 220 Ferris Drive, PHR 308 · Big Rapids, MI 49307

Date: January 19, 2015

To: Dr. Louann Bierlein-Palmer and Mr. Ron McKean
From: Dr. Stephanie Thomson, IRB Chair
Re: IRB Application #141207 (*Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting*)

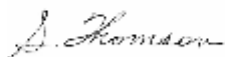
The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, "*Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting*" (#141207) and has determined that it meets Federal Regulation category, Expedited—category 2F/2G. This approval has an expiration date of one year from the date of this letter. As such, you may collect data according to procedures in your application until January 19, 2016. Your application has been assigned a project number (#141207), which you should refer to in future correspondence involving the same research procedure.

This approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission and does not apply should changes be made. Might any revisions need to be made, all materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events in addition to complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that Informed Consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and assurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

We also wish to inform researchers that the IRB requires follow-up reports and/or annual reviews for all research protocols as mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) for using human subjects in research. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



Ferris State University Institutional Review Board
Office of Academic Research, Academic Affairs

Appendix D
Letter of Invitation

**Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology**

Saudi students you are invited to participate in a dissertation study titled:
Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a
Team Project Setting

Dear Student,

My name is Ron McKean. I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education at Western Michigan University. I am conducting this research both as a requirement for this degree and to better the educational experiences for both Saudi international students and their host faculty and students.

I invite you to participate in this exciting study!

The purpose of this study is to better understand your experiences as you interact with American students during team-learning projects. The information learned from this study will be used to help future Saudi students to have better international study experience and improved academic success. The project results are also intended to help American students and faculty to better understand and interact with Saudi students.

As a participant, you will be asked to meet with me for three interview sessions over spring semester. Each interview will last about 1 hour and be scheduled at a time and place on campus that is convenient for you. The interview questions will focus on your experiences working with other students on course projects or labs. I will audio record and later transcribe the interviews removing any references that refer directly to any person (including yourself) or to specific courses. After the interview is transcribed the recording will be destroyed. Between interviews, I will also send you a weekly email to ask you about any experiences with your project group that you would like to share. The only persons who have access to the original interview or the emails will be myself, a paid transcriber, and possibly a translator approved by the Office of International Education.

You will not be required to answer any question or disclose any information that you are uncomfortable with. Your participation is strictly voluntary. While it is important that participants complete this spring study, you are free quit at any time.

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential, so please do not reveal your participation to others. If you learn of other students participating in the study please treat that knowledge as confidential. Although disclosure presents little personal risk, it could affect the interactions that would normally occur within your project groups.

About six to ten Saudi students will be asked to participate in this study. As a token of appreciation, I will donate \$50 to the Saudi Student Organization for each participant who completes the study. The greater benefit is the possibility of improving the international study experience for future Saudi students and maybe even for yourself.

The participants I need for this study are Saudi students:

1. In any College of Engineering Technology (CET) program or a technology focused (computer, networking, etc.) program in the College of Business (COB), or any technology (computer, networking lab practical, etc.) program in the College of Health Professions;
2. Who are enrolled in a spring course that has a technology focus and includes groups of two or more for projects or labs (I will check all eligible courses and can let you know if yours will work); and
3. Who in their first year in taking program related courses in the U.S. (Time used to gain English proficiency does not count as part of that year.)

I will be very happy to answer any questions related to your eligibility or other questions you might have regarding this study.

You can reach me by phone or email provided below. The study will need to begin soon after the start of spring semester so I appreciate you responding as soon as you can!

Kind regards,

Ron McKean,
Office: (231) 591-3983 (Secretary will answer.)
Direct: (231) 591-5828
Email: mckeanr@ferriis.edu (place the word "Study" in the subject line)

Appendix E
Recruitment Flyer

Saudi Students – Make a Difference!

How: This Spring Semester, a study will be conducted to learn about your experiences in course projects.

Benefits: Your input can improve the success and satisfaction of future Saudi students attending U.S. Universities.

Who can participate:

- o Saudi international students Enrolled in a program in either the College of Technology, the College of Business, or the College of Health Professions.
- o This is the your first year taking technical courses in the United States, and
- o You are enrolled in a technical course for this Spring

What participants will do:

- o You will be asked to participate in three interviews regarding your experiences working on team projects assigned as part of your coursework (about one hour each). You will also be asked to reply to a brief weekly email question over the semester (about 15 minutes each to answer).
- o If you begin as a participant and decide to drop out of the study, you may drop out without any penalty to your academic standing.

Find out more:

Email: mckeanr@ferris.edu

Call: 231-591-3983 – secretary pick-up

231-591-5828 - direct

Ron McKean,

College of Engineering Technology

1009 Campus Drive

JHN 200

Appendix F
English Consent Form

**Western Michigan University
Educational Leadership, Research and Technology**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, Ed.D

Student Investigator: Ron McKean

Title of Study: Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled "Exploration of Experiences and Perceptions of Saudi Arabian Students in a Team Project Setting". This project will serve as Ron McKean's dissertation, research project for the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Leadership. 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 to better understand the experiences of Saudi international students as you interact with American students during team-learning projects. The information learned from this study will be used to help future Saudi students to have better international study experiences and improved academic success. The project results are also intended to help American students and faculty to better understand and interact with Saudi students.

Who can participate in this study?

Participants eligible for this study are Saudi Arabian international students who are enrolled in engineering or technology based majors. These majors include any program in the College of Engineering Technology and certain programs in the College of Business including computer or networking related programs. Participants will also need to be enrolled this Spring semester in either a required or elective technical course associated with their major and includes team-based project learning. Finally, the participants needs to be in their first full year of coursework within their major in the U.S. (This does not include time spent taking English language courses.)

Where will this study take place?

The study will take place on the campus of Ferris State University. Interviews will be held at a convenient campus location.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?

This study consists of three interview sessions. The first will occur near the start of the semester, the second will occur near the midpoint, and the third near the end of the semester. Each of these will be conducted at a site convenient to the participant and is expected to take about one hour. Following the first interview, participants will also be prompted each week to email notable experiences associated with their project group. Each of these, should only require about 15

minutes, however, participants are encouraged to provide more elaborate descriptions of their experiences.

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

There are no other activities that participants will be asked to perform over the Spring semester beyond the three interviews and approximately 10 emailed responses.

What information is being measured during the study?

The information collected from this study will be your experiences as you interact with you project team(s) or lab partner(s) over the course of the semester.

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

Risks associated with the study are minimal. Identifiable references to you or others (including other persons, your instructor and course) will be removed from any information you share in this study. The primary risk would be loss of anonymity through self-disclosure or possible compromise in the data collection or archival process.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

Your input can improve the success and satisfaction of future Saudi students attending U.S. Universities.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

There are no costs associated with participation in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

As a token of appreciation the researcher will donate \$50 to the Saudi Student Organization for each participant who completes at a minimum the three interviews.

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

During this study, access to all data will be restricted to the Investigators, a paid transcriptionists, and possibly an interpreter, if required. The data will be used without names or identifiable references

What if you want to stop participating in this study?

You can decide to stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. Also, you will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you should choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the investigator, Ron McKean at 231-591-5828 or email: mckean@ferris.edu. If questions arise during the course of the study, you may also contact the Western Michigan University Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293, the WMU Vice President for Research at 269-387-

8298, or the Ferris State University Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (231) 591-2553.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the WMU 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.

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 G
Arabic Consent Form

الملحق

استمارة الموافقة للاشتراك في مشروع بحث علمي

جامعة ميشيغان الغربية

الإدارة التربوية , البحث و التكنولوجيا

الباحث الرئيسي: د لوند بيرلين بالمر

الطالب الباحث: رون مكين

عنوان البحث: بحث لتجارب و ملاحظت الطلاب السعوديين اثناء العمل في مشروع مشترك

بود طالب الدكتوراه رون مكين ان يدعوكم للمشاركة في مشروع دراسة حول موضوع "بحث لتجارب و ملاحظت الطلاب السعوديين اثناء العمل في مشروع مشترك". ان هذه الدراسة تخدم الاطروحة الدراسية للطلاب رون مكين والتي هي جزء من متطلبات الحصول على شهادة الدكتوراه في الادارة التربوية. ان الهدف من قراءة استمارة الموافقة هو لشرح الغرض من اجراء هذا البحث العلمي , الالتزامات الزمنية و الاجراءات المنتجة في هذه الدراسة مع شرح ايضا للتأثيرات السلبية و فوائد هذا المشروع البحثي. يرجى التفضل بقراءة المعلومات الواردة في استمارة الموافقة بدقة كاملة و بإمكان الطلاب طرح اسئلة لغرض الاستفسار.

ملهدف من هذه الدراسة؟

ان الغرض من هذه الدراسة هو للحصول على فهم افضل لتجارب التي يمر بها الطلاب السعوديين عندما يشاركون مع الطلبة الامريكان في مشاريع تعليمية مشتركة. ان المعلومات التي يتم جمعها من خلال هذا البحث الدراسي سوف تعيد الطلبة السعوديين لاكتساب خبره دراسية و تحقق نجاح اكليمي افضل. بالاضافة الى ذلك تعيد هذه المعلومات الطلبة الامريكان و أعضاء الهيئة التدريسية من اجل تحقق فهم و تحلون افضل مع الطلبة السعوديين.

من يشارك في هذه الدراسة؟

ان الطلبة المؤهلين او الذين بحق لهم المشاركة في البحث العلمي هم الطلاب الدوليين من المملكة العربية السعودية الذين لديهم تخصص في مجال الهندسة او التكنولوجيا. تشمل هذه التخصصات كل البرامج الموجودة في كلية الهندسة التكنولوجية وبعض من التخصصات في كلية الاعمال مثل برامج برمجة الكمبيوتر او برامج شبكة الاتصالات. يتحين على المشتركين ان يكونوا مسجلين في فصل الربيع الدراسي اما في درس تقني اختياري او مطلوب ذات علاقة بتخصصه العلمي وعلى ان تكون احدى متطلبات هذا الدرس هو المشاركة مع الطلاب الامريكان في مشروع تعليمي. واخيرا يتحين على المشتركين أن يكونوا في

السنة الدراسية الأولى ضمن اختصاصهم في الولايت المتحدة الأمريكية. (ملاحظه : لاشتمل السنة الدراسية الأولى الوقت الزمني الذي قضاه الطالب في فترة دورات تعليم اللغة الانكليزية).

اين تحدث هذه الدراسة؟

سوف تجري الدراسة في حرم جامعة ولاية فريسنو. سيتم عقد المقابلات في واحد من المواقع المناسبة في الحرم الجامعي.

ما السقف الزمني المتضمن للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة؟

تتكون الدراسة من ثلاث مقابلات. سوف تجري المقابلة الأولى في بداية الفصل الدراسي , والثانية في منتصفه والثالثة في نهايته. سيتم إجراء كل من هذه المقابلات في موقع مناسب للمشاركة, ومن المتوقع أن تستغرق المقابلة حوالي ساعة واحدة. وبعد المقابلة الأولى, يتجن على المشاركين كل أسبوع ارسال بريد إلكتروني الى الباحث الطالب لعرض تزويده بالمعلومات المتعلقة حول خبراتهم المرتبطة بعملهم في المشروع المشترك مع الطلبة الأمريكيين. على الرغم من ان الوقت المطلوب لكتابة البريد الإلكتروني سيستغرق حوالي 15 دقيقة , الا انه بإمكان المشاركين تقديم او تزويد وصف أكثر تفصيلاً عن تجاربهم.

ما الذي يتوجب عليك فعله اذا اخترت المشاركة في هذه الدراسة؟

يتوجب على المشاركين في هذه الدراسة اجراء ثلاث مقابلات وارسل عشرة رسائل إلكترونية .

ما هي المعلومات التي يتم تقييمها خلال هذه الدراسة؟

ان المعلومات التي يتم جمعها خلال هذه الدراسة هي التجارب الخاصة التي حصل عليها المشاركون خلال مساهمتهم مع مجموعة من الطلاب الأمريكيين على مدار الفصل الدراسي اما خلال المشاركة في مشروع بحثي او خلال عملهم المشترك في المختبر مع طلاب امريكي.

ماهي التأثيرات السلبية او الاضرار التي يمكن ان يسببها الإشتراك في هذا البحث و كيف يتم تخفيفها؟

ان الاضرار المتعلقة بهذه الدراسة قليلة . سيتم إزالة كل ما يشار لك أو يُعبرك (بما في ذلك الأشخاص الآخرين, اسئلتك والدرس الذي تلخده في هذا الفصل) من كافة المعلومات التي تذكرها في هذه الدراسة. إن الخطر الأساسي يكمن في فقدان الاسم المسجل اثناء التجبير الذاتي للمشاركة خلال جمع البيانات أو عملية الحفظ.

ماهي فوائد الإشتراك في هذه الدراسة؟

ان المعلومات التي تزودها من خلال مشاركتك في هذا البحث ستساعد في انجاح وارضاء الطلاب السعوديين في المستقل الذين يرغبون القبول في الجامعات الامريكيه.

هل هناك تكاليف من خلال المشاركة في هذه الدراسة؟

ليس هنالك أي تكاليف مالية مرتبطة بالمشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

هل هناك اي تعويضات من خلال المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية ؟

نعميرا للمشاركة في هذا البحث سيتبرع الباحث بمبلغ قدره ٥٠ دولار الى المنظمة الطلابية السعودية مقدما لكل طالب يكمل على الأقل ثلاث مقبلات.

من يستطيع الحصول على المعلومات التي يتم جمعها من خلال هذه الدراسة البحثية ؟

ان الاشخاص الذين يمكنهم الحصول على المعلومات التي يتم جمعها خلال هذه الدراسة هم الطلاب الباحث ومشرفه الاكاديمي ، الشخص المسؤول عن تدوين او كتلة المعلومات، و المترجم(ة) ان تم الاحتياج له (لها) و سيتم استخدام المعلومات بدون الاشارة الى اسماء المشاركين اوالى اي إشارات تحريفية.

ماذا لو قررت التوقف عن المشاركة في هذه الدراسة البحثية؟

بإمكان الطالب المشارك بالبحث ان يقرر التوقف عن المشاركة في هذه الدراسة في اي وقت ولاي سبب. سوف لن يلقى الطالب اي جزاء جراء اخذ هذا القرار بالتوقف عن المشاركة . وأيضاً ليس هناك أي نتائج سلبية سواء أكاديمية أو شخصية إذا أختار الطلاب الانسحاب من هذه الدراسة.

بإمكان الباحث ان يوقف الطالب من المشاركة في البحث الدراسي بدون موافقة المشارك.

Appendix H
Interview #1 Protocol

Interview #1 Protocol: Introductory Interview

This is an interview protocol for these research questions:

Central question: How do Saudi students describe and interpret their cultural interaction experiences as they engage with host peers in project teams?

Sub-questions:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?
2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?
3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?
4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?
5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

Phenomenological Interview – Transcendental Approach (Creswell, 2013, p. 80)
with an Open-Ended, In-Depth Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about your experiences as you integrate culturally with host students in this project based course. Through interviews with Saudi students enrolled in this course, I am seeking to better understand your perceptions and experiences as you work together with host students on team based engineering or technology focused projects. This study will be used to help improve the international experience for future Saudi students.

For purposes of this study, I am defining cultural integration as the process of forming relationships with host students within the context of your team based activities.

Please be reminded that you will not be named or otherwise identified with any comments you provide in this interview. Likewise any direct references to others will also be purged from any resulting documentation.

Today I am interested in learning a little about your background, experiences thus far in the United States, and your expectation in your engineering or technology focused course. In particular, I would like to hear how these experiences have influenced your thoughts and attitudes thus far.

Begin

Again, thanks for participating in this study and allowing me to learn about your experiences in this course.

1. Before we start, please tell me how long you have been in this country and if you have had prior international travel experiences. (Background)

2. Tell me a little bit about your background and what led you to study at this university. (Background)
3. Describe your progress thus far adapting to American culture.
4. Describe the type of project team you are in and the type of project(s) you will be working on. (Background)
5. Describe your attitude and confidence regarding closely interacting with American students. (RQ5)
6. Please describe your attitude, expectations, and emotions as you begin your experience on a project team. (RQ5)
7. How do you expect the project team will interact with each other? (RQ5)
8. How will you being a Saudi student make a difference, if at all, in team interactions? (RQ 2)
9. How do you understand the project team's expectations from you? (RQ 5)

Thank you for sharing your thoughts experiences with me. I am looking forward to hearing your experiences as you work alongside American students this semester. Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to share?

Interviewer Reference Probe Items

Academic, Anxieties, Attitude/behavior, Collectivistic, individualistic behaviors, Communications/Language, Conflict, Cultural, Health, Interactive acculturation, Racism (neo-racism, ethnocentricity, etc.), Religion, Resilience, Socialization with the project-team

Appendix I
Interview #2 Protocol

Interview #2 Protocol: Mid-Semester Interview

This is an interview protocol for these research questions:

Central question: How do Saudi students describe and interpret their cultural interaction experiences as they engage with host peers in project teams?

Sub-questions:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?

2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?

3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?

4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?

5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

Phenomenological Interview – Transcendental Approach (Creswell, 2013, p. 80)
with an Open-Ended, In-Depth Interview Protocol

Questions in this interview may be modified based on findings from the first interview.

Begin

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about your experiences as you integrate culturally with American students in this project based course. Through interviews with Saudi students enrolled in this course, I am seeking to better understand your perceptions and experiences as you work together with American students on team based engineering or technology focused projects. This study will be used to help provide a greater international experience for future Saudi students.

For purposes of this study, I am defining cultural integration as the process of forming relationships with American students within the context of your team based activities.

Please be reminded that you will not be named or otherwise identified with any comments you provide in this interview. Likewise any direct references to others will also be purged from any resulting documentation. These interviews will be held private. No faculty or students will ever have access to the interview. When the study is published, there will be no identifying references to you.

Today I would like to learn more about your experiences in this course and in particular working alongside American students. I am very interested in hearing your perceptions of these experiences and how they have influenced your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors thus far.

Again, thanks for participating in this study and allowing me to learn about your experiences in this course.

1. Please tell me about meaningful experiences have you had so far with your team member(s) that you believe occurred as a result of cultural differences. (RQ 1,2)
 - a. Describe how these experiences may be influencing your thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors. (RQ 3)
 - b. Now describe how these experiences may be influencing your project team members. (RQ 4)
2. Please describe what you perceive are your team member's expectations of you..
 - a. Reflect on how your cultural background might affect your performance on this team. (RQ 2)
3. How do you perceive your culture as an influence on your relationships and level of interaction with other project team members? (RQ 2)
4. Describe your experienced with conflict (if any) within your project team. (RQ 1)
 - a. How did you respond?
 - b. How might this influence your future attitude or behaviors? (RQ 3)
5. Please reflect on experiences with your project team members that demonstrated the need to better understanding of each other's cultures. (RQ 2)
6. Describe your experiences with your project team that may have effected intercultural understanding.
 - a. How have you experienced the sharing of your culture with others on your project team? (RQ 4)
 - b. Please reflect on your experiences leaning about the host culture from your team members. (RQ 5)

7. Please describe any differences in your interactions with your team members since our first interview. (RQ 4)

Thank you for sharing your thoughts experiences with me. I am looking forward to your final interview at the completion of this course. Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to share?

Interviewer Reference Probe Items

Academic, Anxieties, Attitude/behavior, Collectivistic, individualistic behaviors, Communications/Language, Conflict, Cultural, Health, Interactive acculturation, Racism (neo-racism, ethnocentricity, etc.), Religion, Resilience, Socialization with the project-team

Appendix J
Interview #3 Protocol

Interview #3 Protocol: End of the Semester Interview

This is an interview protocol for these research questions:

Central question: How do Saudi students describe and interpret their cultural interaction experiences as they engage with host peers in project teams?

Sub-questions:

1. How do the Saudi students describe their experiences while engaging with host students in team-based learning projects?
2. How do the Saudi students perceive the relevance of culture within that team-based project setting?
3. How do the Saudi students adapt their behaviors to better integrate with their team members?
4. How do the Saudi students describe any perceived adaptive changes in attitude or behaviors in their host team members?
5. How do the Saudi attitudes and perceptions evolve over the semester as a result of their cross-cultural team relationship?

Phenomenological Interview – Transcendental Approach (Creswell, 2013, p. 80)
with an Open-Ended, In-Depth Interview Protocol

Questions in this interview may be modified based on prior interviews.

Begin

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about your experiences as you integrate culturally with American students in this project based course. Through interviews with Saudi students enrolled in this course, I am seeking to better understand your perceptions and experiences as you work together with American students on team based engineering or technology focused projects. This study will be used to help provide a greater international experience for future Saudi students.

For purposes of this study, I am defining cultural integration as the process of forming relationships with American students within the context of your team based activities.

Please be reminded that you will not be named or otherwise identified with any comments you provide in this interview. Likewise any direct references to others will also be purged from any resulting documentation. These interviews will be held private. No faculty or students will ever have access to the interview. When the study is published, there will be no identifying references to you.

Today I would like to learn more about your experiences in this course and in particular working alongside American students. I am very interested in hearing your perceptions of these experiences and how they have influenced your thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors thus far.

Again, thanks for participating in this study and allowing me to learn about your experiences in this course.

1. Please tell me about the most meaningful experiences you have had over this semester with your team member(s) that you believe occurred as a result of cultural differences. (RQ 2)
 - a. Describe how these experiences may have influenced your thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors. (RQ 3)
 - b. Now describe how these experiences may have influenced your project team members. (RQ 4)
2. Please talk about how culture might have affected the outcome of the project? (RQ 2)
3. In what ways do you believe culture influenced team member's contribution and role in the project? (RQ2)
4. Describe your experience with conflict (if any) within your project team since our last interview.
 - a. How did you respond?
 - b. How might this influence your future attitude or behaviors? (RQ 3)
5. Please describe interactions where you were able to share aspects of Saudi culture with project team members? (RQ 2,4)
6. Please describe interactions that helped you better understand aspects of the host culture from with project team members. (RQ 2,5)
7. Please describe any differences in your relationships and interactions with your team members since our first interview. (RQ 3,4)

8. Reflect on the interaction that occurred between you and your project team members over this past semester.
 - a. How has this experience influenced your attitude or behaviors with respect to cross-cultural interactions? (RQ 5)
 - b. How do you perceive this experience may have influenced your project team member's attitude or behaviors with regard to cross-cultural interaction? (RQ 4)
9. Please add any final reflections on this course in regard to cultural differences.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts experiences with me. I greatly appreciate your participation in this study. Are there any final thoughts that you would to share?

Interviewer Reference Probe Items

Academic, Anxieties, Attitude/behavior, Collectivistic, individualistic behaviors, Communications/Language, Conflict, Cultural, Health, Interactive acculturation, Racism (neo-racism, ethnocentricity, etc.), Religion, Resilience, Socialization with the project-team

Appendix K
Journal Prompt Format

Journal Prompt Format

Good Morning. Each Monday you will be receiving this email to remind you to submit one or more reflections of your experiences with your project team over the next week. These may be positive or negative experiences that you believe resulted from cultural differences. Your response is a valuable part of this study and is much appreciated. Please submitted your reflections back to me by email by Saturday at 5pm.

For each experience:

Please reflect upon and describe the experience (good or bad) that you believe was influenced by cultural differences as you engaged with your project team this week.

How did this experiences influence your thoughts, your attitude, and your behavior?