

The Transition Experiences of Middle Eastern Graduate Students in the U.S.

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ABSTRACT

The number of international graduate students coming to the U.S. to attend American colleges and universities is growing. In 2010 alone, over 20,000 Middle Eastern Graduate students (MEGS) were studying in U.S. universities (Bhandari & Chow, 2010). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of how MEGS experienced the transition from their home to the host culture and recommend how to help them with it. The conceptual framework used in this study was a comprehensive transition model incorporating Schlossberg et al.'s 4S Transition Model (1995) with the main ideas from Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), and Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994).

The following questions guided the research:

1. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe the academic and social environment* in which they find themselves? (situation)
2. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *experience the academic and social transition* to graduate school in the U.S.? (self)
3. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe adapting to* graduate school in the U.S.? (strategy and support)

Answering these questions was accomplished through Seidman's (2006) three in-depth interview approach. The sample consisted of eight MEGS who were enrolled in a U.S. university. The study's findings showed how MEGS described their environments by focusing on the differences, challenges, role changes, and what caused them stress. Specifically, (a) male participants in this study were not educated in a co-ed education system; (b) most participants had been living with their families until moving to the host country; and (c) they were not aware of the importance of social support systems and the social environment. MEGS also experienced feeling proud, overwhelmed, conflicted, homesick, lonely, and finally, changed as a result of this transition. Finally, they described adapting to graduate school by using strategies such as (a) consulting others when faced with challenges, (b) observing then acting when they could not consult; (c) being self-reliant when faced with academic challenges; (d) getting involved socially to experience the host culture; and (e) receiving different support from others.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

American graduate education continues to be a successful endeavor for students all over the world. As Duderstadt (2005) stated, “[American] research universities have created a research and training system that is one of the nation’s greatest strengths – and the envy of the rest of the world” (p. 5). This is one reason international graduate students have been enrolling in American graduate institutions.

International graduate students are an important part of U.S. higher education for several reasons. First, they are a major revenue source for the institutions and the U.S. economy as their tuition is generally more than their American counterparts and according to the *Economic Impact Statement by the Association of International Educators* (NAFSA) foreign students and their dependents contributed more than \$20.2 billion to the U.S. economy during the 2010 – 2011 academic year (2011).

Second, attracting the best and the brightest international graduate students to U.S. higher education institutions is an important way that the U.S. develops and maintains its knowledge economy. Having these students on campus contributes to diversity that fosters innovation and creativity. Being able to create an open and welcoming environment that attracts international graduate students enables the

U.S. to attract the world's most talented scientists to higher education. Having such a talented international graduate student body enables the U.S. to enhance its scientific leadership (NAFSA, 2006).

Third, education exchange benefits U.S. post-secondary education. International graduate students enrich their institutions and enable their American counterparts to have contact with students from different cultures (Bevis, 2002). They also contribute greatly to the science education and research activities on their respective campuses (NAFSA, 2006).

Fourth, they promote U.S. foreign policy and international leadership. Having international students in U.S. higher education institutions provides opportunities for direct interactions between Americans and international students. Face-to-face communication of people from various parts of the world contributes to the public diplomacy, which should increase the number of potential friends for the U.S.

Recent data from *Open Doors 2011* (Bhandari & Chow, 2011), a survey conducted by the Institute of International Education (IIE), shows an increase in the number of international graduate students attending U.S. universities and colleges since the 9/11 tragedy. According to *Open Doors 2011* (Bhandari & Chow, 2011), "the number of international students pursuing graduate and professional degrees [was around] 296,574" (p. 6). This increase is promising since

the figures had dropped drastically after 9/11. As of 2008, an increase in the number of international graduate students coming to the U.S. to pursue their graduate degrees had been seen. However, in 2004, IIE reported the first absolute decline in international student enrollments since 1971. There is no single reason for the reduction in the number of international graduate students at U.S. higher education institutions. Some reasons for the decline could be that international graduate students face a number of issues when they enter a foreign environment: culture shock (Asmar, 2005; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Chapdalaine & Alexitch, 2004), prejudice and discrimination (Cabrera & Nora, 1994; Lacina, 2002), problems adjusting to the new environment (Lacina, 2002; Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006), loneliness and difficulty in being assertive (Poyrazli et al, 2002), and unfamiliarity with U.S. customs and values (Lacina, 2002).

International Applicants

In 2004, a report published by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) “found a 28% decrease in international applications and an 18% decline in initial admissions offers” (CGS, 2004, p. 1). However, a report by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP, 2007) determined from 2005 and 2006 that “first-time enrollment of international students in U.S. graduate institutions increased 12% ...and total enrollment rose by 1 % after three consecutive years of decline” (Maloney & Neithardt, 2007, p. 1). The 2008 CGS’s

survey data also suggest “the rate of increase in both applications and offers of admission to prospective international graduate students slowed considerably between 2007 and 2008” (CGS, 2008, p. 1), and seemed to be picking up, but are not at the levels they were before 9/11. On November 8, 2011, the CGS reported an increase of 8% in first-time enrollment of international graduate students from 2010 to 2011. “The gain is the largest since 2006, when international first-time graduate enrollment increased 12%” (CGS, 2011). After China, which sends the most graduate students to the U.S., the number of graduate students from the Middle East saw an increase of 14% from 2010 to 2011 (CGS, 2011).

The number of international graduate students in the U.S. has increased and is now at an overall high of 296,574; however, these students still make up less than 4% of total U.S. higher education enrollment (Bhandari & Chow, 2011). Thus [administrators at higher education institutions] have considerable room to “host more international students at their campuses” (Bhandari & Chow, p. 3, 2011).

There are now more choices from which to select for international graduate students when deciding what college or university to attend. U.S. institutions of higher education currently face stiff competition from other foreign countries such as England, Australia, Germany, France, and Japan. Furthermore, higher education administrators in China, Japan, India, and South Korea are encouraging more of their own graduate students to attend in-country universities and enable more

international graduate students to come to their country to pursue their graduate degrees (CGS, 2008). Due to this increase in competition for international student enrollment, the U.S. share dropped from 26% in 2000 to 22% in 2005 (CGS, 2008). To stop this decrease, U.S. college administrators may need to compete more vigorously for international students. This “investment makes... a world in which [the U.S.] can be secure” (NAFSA, 2006, p. 3).

Many of the world’s most brilliant foreign scientists and thinkers received their graduate education in the U.S. and many have even decided to remain in America to pursue their interests (Gungor & Tansel, 2008). However, this might not be the case as there are more and more obstacles being put in place for those who intend to live in the U.S. after graduation. One such obstacle is the Employ American Workers Act added to the stimulus bill in February 2009. This bill “prohibits financial institutions that receive federal bailout money from hiring foreign workers if they have recently laid off American workers in similar jobs or plan to do so” stated Mangan (2009) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Mangan continues to state, “further restrictions [like this one] could send the wrong message overseas” (March 24, 2009). Losing these people back to their own countries might make the U.S. less competitive in the global economy. This is another reason why the U.S. should do what it can to hold onto these students and encourage their graduate studies. Because of globalization, America needs to

provide a good quality of life for its citizens while providing foreigners the opportunity to better themselves at the same time (NAFSA, 2006).

There is no other nation in the world with as unfettered a research and development community as what exists under the democratic governance of the U.S. The proof comes from the number of Nobel Prizes awarded to foreigners who can attribute at least some of their success to either their education/work within our borders or use of reference papers developed by their foreign national colleagues who received Doctorates in innovative research from the American higher education system. Many of these future science and engineering graduate students come from Asia, India and the Middle East (Bhandari & Chow, 2011).

Despite cultural challenges international graduate students face upon entering U.S. colleges and universities, graduate level academic research and development are historically well-funded in the U.S. by a progressive, democratic government, which actively encourages creative thinking. For instance, according to the CGS survey, “the total number of non-U.S. citizens who applied for admission to Master’s and Doctoral level programs at American colleges and universities rose 8% between 2006 and 2007” (2007, p. 3). This is much better than the 28% decrease during the 2003 to 2004 survey period, but CGS reports this increase as not significant enough to reverse the overall decline experienced in the first two years of the survey (2007).

Data from the 2007 CGS survey on the quantity of international applications for admission to graduate schools also showed the number of students seeking to attend American programs had not improved in the aftermath of the 2001 World Trade Center bombings (2007). “The most recent *Open Doors* report from the Institute for International Education (IIE) shows that between 2001 and 2006, the total number of international graduate students attending schools in the U.S. fell from 264,749 to 259,717” (CGS, 2007, p. 4).

However, this situation is starting to change. During the last five years, there has been an increase in the number of international graduate students attending U.S. universities. Currently there are approximately 296,574 graduate students pursuing their graduate degrees in the U.S. (Chow & Bhandari, 2011, p. 61).

According to the *Open Doors 2011 Report on International Education Exchange* published by IIE: “Approximately three percent of the Middle East’s tertiary students study overseas. Outbound mobility rates are on the rise in many countries including Egypt, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia and the number of students from Saudi Arabia increased by 44% in 2010-11, supported in large part by the Saudi government’s study abroad scholarship” (p. 48). This very large group must be understood and assisted by U.S. higher education administrators by identifying what constitutes a successful transition to college since failing to do so may endanger not only their budgets but also general economic (and possibly even

national) security. When foreign graduate students are given an opportunity to learn under the U.S. higher education system, they may take democratic ideals back and can positively change their own societies to make them more modern and accepting of new technologies and the great wealth, which often follows.

It is crucial to “understand the factors that affect the quality of international students’ adjustment in the U.S. educational system” (Crano & Crano, 1993, p. 267). Various theories exist on general student transition experiences (Chickering, 1969; Taylor, 1994; Tinto 1987) as well as those that focus more specifically on international students’ transition to U.S. higher education institutions (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Even though other researchers also point out and even categorize international students as a “high-risk group,” (Alexander, Workney, Klein, & Miller, 1976) little research on their transition has been completed.

By uncovering patterns or sequential stages of psychological and identity change, several individual models reason how the international graduate students’ adaptation process to the host culture might occur. Gonzales (2004) discusses various studies that have focused on adaptation difficulties resulting from academic and socio-cultural differences. She shows how these studies identify some coping strategies students develop to resolve these differences (Gonzales, 2004). Her findings suggest multiple “domains” can affect the social and cultural adaptation of graduate international students into U.S. universities. Domains, such

as personal (age, gender, marital status, affective and cognitive characteristics), belief and value systems, cultural distance, attitudes, thinking styles, and social and political situation in their country of origin, can influence adaptation. Gonzales (2004) points out that “international students go through adjustment stages and acculturation processes that will affect their academic performance” (p. 50).

Apart from this effort, research is seldom focused on transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students (MEGS). When research with this population is undertaken, it focuses more toward the issues of religion (Asmar, 2005; Cainkar, 2002; Kaya, 2007; Peek, 2005; Smith, 2002) or gender (Shavarini, 2006).

Research hardly discusses the transition experiences of Middle Eastern students.

IIE lists Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen as

Middle Eastern countries (Bhandari & Chow, 2007). CGS includes Cyprus and

Turkey to the list of Middle Eastern countries (2008). Among Middle Eastern

countries, the three with the greatest increase of international graduate students in

the U.S. during the 2006-2007 academic year were Saudi Arabia at 128.7%; Iraq

with 37.9%; and then the Palestinian Authority with 16.8% (Bhandari & Chow, p.

37). When this growth is compared with the number coming from Europe, the

Middle East's is far greater. To give an idea of just how much this really is, note

that the number of students from the Middle East increased by 25.4%, and those

coming from Europe decreased by 2.3% during the 2006 – 2007 academic year (Bhandari & Chow, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

From a policy perspective, there are four main reasons for bringing more Middle Eastern students to America: (a) they are a major revenue source; (b) attracting the best and the brightest international graduate students is critical to maintaining U.S. technological superiority; (c) international student socio-cultural diversity broadens and enhances the educational experience for all concerned; and (d) it promotes U.S. foreign policy and international leadership.

Several deficiencies exist within the focus area of international graduate students: (a) most studies related to international graduate students focus on students from Asia but not from the Middle East (Durkin, 2008; Garrod & Kilkenny, 2007; Ingman, 1999; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Nasrin, 2001; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Seo, 2005; Swagler & Ellis, 2003); (b) the majority of research is quantitative, and focuses mainly on identifying variables rather than the qualitative component of personal experiences, attitudes, and ideas which are what higher education administrators must understand to retain these students (Altbach, 1989; Gold, 2006; Kashima & Loh, 2006; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2005); (c) a comprehensive model that incorporates existing models of student transition that are applicable to both American and foreign

students (Chickering, 1969; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Taylor, 1994; and Tinto, 1987) is needed to enable college and university administrators to better understand the experiences of international graduate students studying at their institutions, and (d) research on the type of “students who were more likely to encounter prejudice show that Middle Eastern ... students were more likely to [face such behavior] than those from other regions” (Bevis & Lucas, 2007, p. 244) upon coming to America.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how MEGS experience the transition from home to host culture. Gathering transition experiences will enable university and college administrators, faculty members, and U.S. policy makers to better focus their actions on attracting more MEGS (Lacina, 2002). The conceptual framework used in this study was a comprehensive model that focuses on the individual, the environment and the experiences of the person going through the transition. This comprehensive model incorporated Schlossberg et al.’s 4S Transition Model (1995) and drew various elements from (a) Chickering’s Vectors of Adult Development (1969), (b) Tinto’s Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), (c) Taylor’s Cultural Learning Model (1994), and (d) Furnham and Bochner’s Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986).

Schlossberg et al.'s 4 S Transition Model (1995) stated that people undergoing transition generally went through these stages: (a) moving into, (b) moving through, and (c) moving on. Breaking down the transition process here identified what individual potential strengths and weaknesses were to cope with the learning situation or environment (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). The researcher examined how subjects coped by comparing these stages with a ratio of assets and liabilities related to a special subset of four factors i.e. "4S": (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategies. Grouping the transition experiences of Middle Eastern international graduate students using these four factors, along with four different theories (Chickering, 1969; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Taylor, 1994; and Tinto, 1993), allowed the researcher to develop detailed descriptions for analysis.

A comprehensive model incorporating Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S Transition Model with general student transition models as well as specific models of international student transition was chosen and developed because it enabled the researcher to increase her understanding of MEGS as they moved into, through, and out of the U.S. higher education settings (Evans et al., 1998). Schlossberg's (1995) 4 S Transition Model provided a practical conceptualization of adult life transitions. The adult participants in this study were transitioning during a unique socio-cultural period in their lives to a culture that was foreign to them. To fully

understand this transition, the researcher needed to understand how they adapted to the U.S. and the American culture as a whole. Using main ideas from Taylor's (1994) theory aided the researcher in this respect. The researcher also needed to understand how they adapted to the academic (Chickering, 1969) and social environment (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Using main ideas from Chickering's (1969) as well as Furnham and Bochner's (1986) theories enabled the researcher to identify how they adapted to academic and social environments. Finally, the researcher needed to understand how they integrated into both academic and social environments. Main points of Tinto's (1987) theory enabled the researcher to focus on this aspect. To do this, she also needed to identify what experiences they had in these new environments.

The sample included 8 students from the IEE list of Middle Eastern countries. These students were enrolled in a graduate program at a U.S. university. Participants had either just arrived in the U.S. or could have returned to the U.S. to continue their studies.

Research Questions

The following questions to guide my research:

1. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe the academic and social environment* in which they find themselves? (situation)

2. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *experience the academic and social transition* to graduate school in the U.S.? (self)
3. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe adapting to* graduate school in the U.S.? (strategy and support)

This phenomenological study provided a detailed exploration into these transition experiences. Participants described their experiences during in-depth interviews. A series of three interviews was conducted with each participant, interviews ceased when data saturation was reached. That is, when no new information surfaced during data collection and the researcher “began to see or hear the same things over and over again” (Merriam, 2002, p. 26).

After the interviews, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and sent to the participants to ensure their views and ideas had been correctly represented. Analysis of the interview transcripts, notes taken during the interview, and the audit log provided an understanding of transition experiences for MEGS. This study provided information for university administrators, faculty members, and other policy makers who want to improve the retention of MEGS.

Significance of the Study

This study was important for several university constituencies. One group included future MEGS getting ready to enter a host culture. The results of this

study might provide this group information regarding the host nation's culture and potential challenges students might face at a university in the U.S.

Another organization that might benefit from the results of this study would be graduate school administrators and student affairs officers. Administrators and student affairs officers might use the results to identify the support mechanisms needed for a smoother transition for future MEGS.

Another group that might benefit from the results of this study could be the CGS. The results of this study might provide strategies that MEGS could use to convert the negative experience of "culture shock" into something with a positive learning outcome. CGS professionals could use this data to transform their programs appropriately and use it as a marketing tool for their foreign graduate program.

A significant future policy finding from this study might be encouraging various academic departments to work on a multi-disciplinary, socio-cultural program. Currently, each university works independently to provide support to international graduate students. They seldom consider families of students' (Gold, 2006; Szelenyi, 2006). The results of this study could focus efforts on MEGS, further smoothing the transition experience for them to provide an environment conducive to academic success.

Delimitations of the Study

A significant limitation of the study might result from a limited sample set. This study focused on a group of MEGS from only one type of institution: a mid-western university in the U.S. There might have been other factors at play if the researcher incorporated participants from a variety of institutional types, i.e. liberal arts colleges, private universities, and maybe even have addressed the size of the schools themselves (perhaps transitions are easier when the student bodies are smaller and less diverse?).

Another limitation might be the relatively small number of participants. This study only focused on eight MEGS. There might have been other themes identified if the researcher could have interviewed a larger number of participants.

A final limitation might be from interviewing the same 8 participants during each of the three separate interviews, which lasted from an hour to 90 minutes. The number of interviews and the time commitment expected of each participant might have been too great for more participants to want to take part in the study. There might have been more variety of responses the researcher could have identified if the participants were interviewed only once.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One contained the purpose for conducting the study, a brief topic description, discussion on the significance of the study, and its impact. Chapter Two presented the literature review of the study. Chapter Three defined the

methodology for conducting the study and includes the sample selection process and procedures used for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four summarized the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter Five contained a discussion of these findings and a conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

During the past 50 years, national attention on graduate student success resulted in a large number of scholarly investigations into the graduate experience. A large body of research attempting to analyze factors affecting the attrition and persistence of American graduate students exists, but surprisingly, not for those from Asia and the Middle East. There is even less information on Middle Eastern students. Although various pertinent theories like Tinto's (1993) *Theory of Doctoral Persistence* on student persistence has been developed, very few address the transition experiences of international graduate students. This study bridges a gap in research on the socio-cultural transition of MEGS in particular. While doing her study the researcher used a comprehensive model focusing on the individual, the environment, and the experiences as they go through the transition. This comprehensive model applied Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Model to general ideas from existing, relevant theories on general student transition experiences and those more specific to international students and the higher educational setting which are Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994), and Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986). Integration of these theories effectively broadened the scope of the study so

as to better identify relevant trends.

Schlossberg et al.'s 4 S Model

This model focuses on how the individual describes the experience of transition, or “describes any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27). It was the phenomenological study upon which this description of MEGS student transition was based, and therefore, similarly defined “transition” as the experience of an “individual” leaving their home country and entering a new “environment” i.e. a host country full of new “experiences.” Schlossberg et al. (1995) also stressed a role of “perception” as indicating a “transition” only when the person experiencing it has cognitively defined the occurrence and the issues associated with it.

A transition may be caused by a single event or non-event; however, “dealing with a transition is a process that extends over time” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 112). Schlossberg’s (1995) model not only supports this idea, but breaks it down to three sub-parts: (a) approaching transitions (i.e. transition identification and transition process), (b) taking stock of coping resources (i.e. the 4Ss), and (c) taking charge (i.e. strengthening resources).

Approaching Transitions

In this phase, the individual will have identified the nature of the transition

and determined the process for the best way to resolve it. At the same time, the person must consider the transition type, context, and impact to determine their next course of action. Within this framework, Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Goodman et al. (2006) describe the transition types: (a) anticipated transitions (predictable); (b) unanticipated transitions (surprise or sudden); and (c) non-events (expected but do not occur). When considering the context of a transition, a student needs to consider whether it is one's own or belongs to someone else. The foreign graduate student also should consider the setting where the transition took place. Impact, on the other hand, focuses on the amount of change, which the transition brings to daily life (Evans et al. 1998).

This transition process also has three elements: (a) moving in, (b) moving through, and (c) moving on. People, who move into a new situation, become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system. Therefore, organizations provide orientation programs to help individuals know what is expected of them (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). University officials typically provide orientation programs for international graduate students to ensure their smooth transition.

Following the orientation programs, foreign graduate students find ways of balancing their academic activities with social expectations. To get the most from their academic experience in America, they should also figure out and implement

their desired support structure during their graduate school journey.

All these issues take place once they have become familiar with the environment, and are in the moving through, a critical time that can determine the success or failure of a Middle Eastern graduate student. For some, this in-between time can evoke new questions about the transition: “Did I do the right thing?”, “Why am I bored?”, “Can I commit to this transition?” (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989, p. 16).

The moving on phase is where part of the transition process ends and the foreign student starts to think about “what’s next?” International graduate students, who have not been socialized into U.S. culture or their profession’s culture, might find this phase very challenging (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). At this stage, new international students might realize “socialization” is now occurring and lament over the loss of personal goals, old-friends and the traditional family support structure. Ultimately, successful integration is achieved by dealing effectively with the current situation and then moving forward after having constructively evaluated the experience for future guidance.

Taking Stock of Coping Resources Phase

Schlossberg et al. (1995) identified four major sets of factors that influence a person’s ability to cope with a transition: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategies called the “4 Ss.” If individuals perceive the transition as positive, then

they will have an easier time dealing with it; however, if they take the transition as negative, then the experience will be much more challenging. Schlossberg et al. (1995) and Goodman et al. (2006) call this the “primary appraisal” phase since there is an emphasis on initial perception. “Secondary appraisal” is the self-assessment of one’s ability to deal effectively with the change. “The 4 Ss [situation, self, support, and strategy] provide a framework for an individual’s appraisal process” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 113). Furthermore, personal appraisal types vary according to what point an individual is within the period of change and is “situation” dependent.

Along these lines, “situation” refers to “trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experiences, concurrent stress and assessment” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 53) during emotional events. When investigating integration of MEGS, one should assess the situation from each individual’s perspective as they might be remarkably different and could be interdependent upon such issues as gender, country of origin, religion, and economic status.

When investigating the situation, the following questions could be considered: (a) what might have caused their transition, (b) did they think the transition came at a good or bad time, (c) did the transition cause them to lose or gain control over their lives, (d) did they have to experience any change of roles, (e) did they see the transition as a temporary or permanent part of their life, (f) how

did they cope under similar circumstances with transitions in the past, (g) did the individual currently experience any stress (and to what degree), and (h) did the individual see the transition as positive/negative (or indifferent) (Goodman et. al., 2006; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Considering this, Schlossberg then defines “self” as a broad reference to “personal and demographic characteristics (i.e. socioeconomic status, gender, age and stage of life, state of health, and ethnicity) and psychological resources (i.e. ego development, outlook – optimism and self-efficacy, and commitment and values)” (1995, p. 58). While surveying MEGS, the researcher should identify if (a) “they can deal with ambiguity, (b) they are optimists, (c) they blame themselves for what happens, (d) they feel in control of their responses to the transitions, and (e) they believe their efforts will affect the outcome of a particular course of action” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 67).

The third S, “support,” refers to its social aspect and consists of types, functions, and measurements. Assessing graduate student needs would require identification of any internal and external emotional support “mechanisms” currently available to the family. Schlossberg et al. found four sources of this: “(a) intimate relationships, (b) family units, (c) networks of friends, and (d) the institutions and / or communities of which they are a part” (1995, p. 67). It follows that identifying how the support methods are perceived by the individuals should

also be considered.

The last S refers to the “strategies” that an individual uses while coping with transition challenges: those modifying the situation, those controlling the meaning, and those managing stress in the aftermath (Evans et al., 1998). “Whether individuals want to change their situation or reduce their distress, they can choose from among four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intra-psychic behavior” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 74). The following are what people mentally employ to resolve arising problems: denial, wishful thinking, and distortion. Proper assessment of these coping strategies used by graduate students from the Middle East would identify whether “they use a variety of strategies, know when to do nothing, and can flexibly choose different strategies depending on the challenge at hand” (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 76).

Taking Charge – Strengthening Resources

This is the final aspect of the Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) transition model and focuses on development and reinforcement of new strategies (i.e. the 4 Ss) for dealing with transitions. Individuals might not have control over these experiences, but by strengthening their new strategies, they can control and manage the transition experiences (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) transition model provided a structure for the researcher while she investigated transition experiences of MEGS. Apart from the

structure, the comprehensive model also enabled her to apply various existing theories related to student transition.

Theories Related to Student Transition

Even though some might think that it would be difficult to apply general student transition theories based on undergraduates to graduate students, there are those who think otherwise. For example, Tukono (2008) stresses the importance of questioning how well general student transition theory can be applied to graduate and undergraduate students as: (a) graduate students are more likely to be international students, married, and older; (b) graduate students are mature and have been through a more selective process; (c) graduate students seek different degrees, so for the educational experience for each can be unique; and (d) graduate study is more intense and focused - often involving a master/apprentice relationship with a faculty member. Tukono asserts here that it can be difficult to apply theories of adjustment for undergraduates to graduate students (2008). However, he also states, that “despite these obstacles, it is worth examining existing theories [related to undergraduates] as they might contribute to a better understanding of the experience of graduate students” (Tukono, 2008, p. 28).

Apart from investigating the applicability of undergraduate transition theories, one must also compare the different challenges of this group to those of their American classmates to fully understand foreign transition. Even though there

is an age gap among different levels of foreign students, the two most significant areas of challenge, linguistic and cultural adjustment, seem to have the same effect on their social interaction. Therefore, researchers should be able to investigate the foreign graduate student group experience using these same factors and adjustment transition theories. However, researchers should be mindful that the graduate students might experience them to a lesser degree because of their greater maturity and responsible behavior.

With this in mind, various theories can be linked to the foreign graduate student experience: Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994), and Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986).

Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development

Chickering's theory is popular in higher education as it deals with issues directly related to college-age adults. Tokuno (2008) suggests that there is no age constraint so this psychosocial theory can be applied to graduate students as well. Chickering (1969) identified seven vectors for development: (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) developing autonomy, (d) establishing identity, (e) freeing interpersonal relationships, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity. Tokuno (2008) indicates how "these vectors occur roughly in a sequence - although he does not insist that they constitute stages" (pp. 31 - 32).

Chickering (1969) suggests educators' help students move along in this sequence, he uses "vector", or movement directly toward a goal. This seems to imply that there is an end, as Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering (1989) have pointed out, but this does not resolve the situation especially with older adults returning to undergraduate studies. Because of interviews carried out with this group, Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering (1989) found transition was the focus of discussion even though the vectors stayed the same. They also discovered older students have (a) a greater need to fulfill multiple roles, (b) have a wider range of individual differences and past experiences, (c) are more concerned with practical application of degrees, and (d) have a greater degree of self-determination. Tukono further states how "many of these [differences among undergraduate and graduate students] are consistent with what other theories of adult development would predict" (2008, p. 32).

Tukono (2008) hypothesizes that if the vectors do not change for older students returning to undergraduate studies, then they could also be true for graduate students. The primary difference would be the graduate student's relationship with the institution. Chickering's (1969) ideas could assist in highlighting various issues related to the transition of graduate students in the following ways:

Developing competence. This vector focuses on intellectual competence,

which is the easiest to measure with educational objectives (Chickering, 1969). The graduate student would be expected to master content and use various intellectual skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and application of knowledge (Tokuno, 2008). Additionally, the international graduate student would need to develop competencies in “American culture, a new educational system, and possibly, the English language” (Andrade, 2008, p. 75).

Managing emotions. Chickering’s (1969) second vector discusses the need for the college student to control emotions. Tokuno (2008) points to how the intensity of graduate study could create new psychosocial demands on graduate students who are expected to have already developed managing emotions such as anger, depression, anxiety, and shame. Andrade (2008) also highlights how international graduate students find emotional management much more difficult due to the feelings of isolation and anxiety resulting from being in an unfamiliar environment.

Developing autonomy. This vector focuses on the need of a graduate student to have the skills to work with others since advanced scholarly research is a more collaborative effort (Chickering, 1969). However, a major educational difference for international graduate students is how their undergraduate experiences might have been emphasized by individual rather than collaborative learning styles (Schutz & Richards, 2003). Even when they are required to carry

out group related work, international graduate students could form groups with other international students because of language difficulties and cultural misunderstandings. Similarly, “U.S. graduates might also be reluctant to include international students into their groups because of communication difficulties due to cultural or language differences, perceptions that international students produce lower quality academic work, or preference for working with those of similar backgrounds” (Andrade, 2008, p. 74).

Establishing identity. In this vector, Chickering (1969) emphasized how a college education in the 20th century focused on building a student’s identity. Even though graduate students are expected to have established their own identity, international graduate student, might experience adversities like discomfort with their appearance, low self-esteem, and lack of placement into local social and cultural contexts upon entering a host culture (Tokuno, 2008). MEGS might think they do not belong in a society with different social and cultural norms. They may also perceive a loss of their own culture as they become accustomed to the American way of life (Andrade, 2008).

Freeing interpersonal relationships. Chickering (1969) emphasized the need for students to develop in two distinct ways: “(a) tolerance and respect for those of different backgrounds, habits, values, and appearances, and (b) a shift in the quality of relationships with intimates and close friends” (p. 94). Graduate

students seem to have a more challenging time balancing between working closely with others in the program and meeting the needs for intimacy especially when they are in an unfamiliar environment.

International graduate students must negotiate a network of new and sometimes already established interpersonal relationships. Graduate students might be assisting in the adjustment of their partner while simultaneously trying to establish fruitful relationships with peers and faculty members who will be mentoring them in their new professions and studies (Andrade, 2008). Cultural differences between these groups might also cause difficulties in the formation of such relationships due to socio-cultural misunderstandings (Andrade, 2008).

Developing purpose. According to Chickering (1969), developing oneself professionally requires making plans and identifying priorities incorporating these aspects: “(a) avocational and recreational interests, (b) pursuit of vocation, and (c) life-style issues including concerns for marriage and family” (p. 108). International students might experience additional pressures when making post-graduation plans (Tokuno, 2008). International graduate students might want to return home or might want to stay and be employed in the U.S. They also might find it challenging to establish, and keep, the connections needed to assist them in obtaining positions after degree completion in their home country, which could cause even further frustration of their desire to continue pursuing their degree (Andrade, 2008).

Developing Integrity. This is the last vector in Chickering's (1969) model. It focuses on developing a set of values and beliefs to guide one throughout life. Personal values are critical for graduate students arriving at this vector. Graduate programs aim to teach ethical conduct in research, and provide professional training for their personal development in this area (Tokuno, 2008). International graduate students, who have been educated outside of the U.S., might have a different set of values and beliefs about academic honesty (Andrade, 2008).

As can be seen in these examples, Chickering's (1969) vectors are also applicable to graduate students, or more specifically, international graduate students. Use of his overlying concepts, rather than individual vectors, will enable the researcher to see how the academic environment affects the overall transition experience of MEGS. Furnham and Bochner's (1986) model will now set the stage for developing the composite transition model by connecting of social skills to cultural adaptation.

Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model

Furnham and Bochner (1986) show how social adjustment challenges are a result of students not knowing the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to function in the host culture. For example, when international graduate students continue to display passive learning strategies at U.S. universities, they face various difficulties from improper social integration. With inadequate

socialization, foreign graduate students continue behaving as they would in their home country while not knowing that their behavior is unacceptable to the host. This might ultimately lead to conflict and eventually bring about “culture – shock.” Furnham and Bochner (1986) focus on this disequilibrium aspect of Taylor’s (1994) model, and emphasize the need to adopt the successful behavioral learning strategies explained by Taylor, i.e. observing, participating, and making friends (Andrade, 2008).

International graduate students need training on the same reflective skills identified in the previously mentioned literature previously discussed to attain intercultural understanding. Without this, they are more prone to culture - shock, which is a prerequisite for positive change and growth. They test their new assumptions through trial and error, and as a result, might see changes in their worldview and ability to meet the expectations of the host culture. “If students fail to recognize cultural differences, see them as threatening to their own ways of viewing the world, or ignore them, they not only miss opportunities for intercultural learning, but have difficulties adjusting due to misunderstandings” (Andrade, 2008, p. 76). In other words, international graduate students should recognize and explore differences to act appropriately in their new culture (Andrade, 2008). By considering this point, the researcher can explore international academic transition experience from the culture – shock point of view

and determine how foreign graduate students deal with this while integrating into U.S. universities.

Other theories based on American students, such as Tinto's (1993) Theory of Doctoral Student Persistence, may also be relevant to international graduate students. This theory identifies the concept of student retention because of integration into academic and social communities within the university.

Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence

Existing theories on student transition primarily deal with undergraduate students (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1975, 1987, & 1993). Tinto's (1993) seminal work is his three-stage theory of student retention: transition and adjustment, the development of competence (attaining candidacy), and completion of the capstone project (i.e. thesis, dissertation, etc). The process of graduate retention appears longitudinal in nature. Graduate persistence is influenced by "the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that comprise the academic and social systems of the institution" (Tinto, 1993, p. 231). Tinto (1993) describes this transition and adjustment phase taking place during the first year as integration of the student into the academic and social communities of the university. This might be difficult for MEGS since they might be experiencing contrasting cultural values that might place the student at risk for leaving the institution (Andrade, 2008). Graduate

students with conflicting thoughts regarding friendship and culture may not have the sense of belonging that Tinto believes necessary for persistence (Andrade, 2008). Therefore, Tinto's theory could help identify further challenges which MEGS are having by focusing on how they integrate into the academic and social environment when they arrive in the host culture. Taylor's (1994) Learning to Become Inter-culturally Competent Model complements Tinto by focusing on the formation of inter-cultural identity, which is crucial for international students.

Taylor's Learning to Become Inter-culturally Competent Model

Even though Taylor's (1994) cultural learning model was not created for international graduate students, it provides valuable insights into how they might experience the transition from their home to the host country. There are five components, depicted in Figure 1, making up the experiences, events, and strategies that each person living in a host culture must go through, while learning social survival skills in the host culture. These are setting the stage, cultural disequilibrium, cognitive orientation, behavioral learning strategies, and evolving intercultural identity (Taylor, 1994).

Setting the stage acknowledges how participants have prior information from inter-cultural experiences that influence the learning process. Prior events explain why some have chosen to live in a foreign culture, and could account for why they persist even in the face of challenges. MEGS may be pursuing a degree

in America because of the quality of education. They also might have friends, who were educated in U.S. universities, encouraging them to go. Such positive intercultural experiences also contribute to emotional readiness (Andrade, 2008; Taylor, 1994).

Cultural disequilibrium is created by “dissonance between the home and host cultures resulting in stress and increased emotions...acting as a catalyst for intercultural learning” (Andrade, 2008, p. 76,). Disequilibrium, i.e. “culture - shock” is continuous, but lessens over time, as the individual acclimates to the host culture. Factors like marital status, gender, and race can intensify the feeling; and previous experiences of marginality, higher degrees of host language fluency, and more time in the culture can reduce it (Taylor, 1994).

Cognitive orientation is the common response by people faced with cultural disequilibrium that results in a “non-reflective” or “reflective” action. If participants accept prior values and assumptions with little or no questioning, then their orientation is non-reflective. However, when participants try to make sense of the event causing disequilibrium, and are aware of their learning strategies, behavior changes, and emerging intercultural competence, they are reflectively orienting themselves in the host culture. As an example, a non-reflective approach is represented by an international graduate student who feels uncomfortable challenging his or her American friend’s cultural or political views in or out of

class. A reflective approach would be analyzing why commenting on his or her friends might cause feelings of discomfort, finding why Americans are open to this sort of activity, determining reasons for or against adopting this academic behavior, and then acting in ways appropriate to the new culture (Andrade, 2008; Taylor, 1994).

Behavioral learning strategies are what learners use to balance out disequilibrium. Students practice strategies such as observing, participating, and developing long-term relationships with people in the host culture while coping with this sort of imbalance. International graduate students are socialized into American culture, and their professions, because of interacting with classmates, professors, and Americans on a day-to-day basis in various social and academic contexts. The more they get to take advantage of these opportunities, the easier it will be for them to balance the disequilibrium.

Evolving intercultural identity enables students to “actively negotiate intercultural understanding” (Taylor, 1994, p. 172) by developing the ability to identify with differing points of view. Students do not need to give up their values, but just recognize the aspects of various cultures and adjust their behavior accordingly. For example, MEGS may know American methods for academic writing, accept this approach, and do it on various writing tasks in the U.S. However, they would also be able to do the same when back in their own culture

equally well due to fluency in that particular language (Andrade, 2008).

Therefore, Taylor's (1994) model in general allows for identification of various MEGS challenges during the transition from home culture to the host culture. Even though the researcher did not focus on every aspect of the model, it helped her focus the study on the challenges mentioned by participants.

Several other models have been used to explain transition by focusing on the international student's adaptation to the host culture. These theories have been used to uncover patterns, or sequential stages of psychological and identity change, and were useful for this study.

Models Focusing on Adaptation Processes

In one such model, Wilson (1982) found, apart from length of stay, how gender, age, marital status, mobility of residency, perceptions of the individual's degree of openness of belief systems, and cultural thinking styles significantly influenced adjustment phases. In a manner similar to Tinto (1993), Wilson concluded how the kind and quality of relationships, which international students establish with their classmates and professors, influences their value and belief systems and their social behaviors in turn (Wilson, 1982). Furthermore, Taylor (1994) also pointed to this when discussing "cultural disequilibrium." To emphasize the point further, Gonzales (2004) also stated:

The degree of assertiveness, punctuality, responsibility, creativity, critical

thinking skills, self-concept, and self-esteem that international students will actualize in their behaviors will impact the quality of the relationships that they can establish with professors and classmates within the academic world. Thus, cultural value and belief systems will impact the particular expectations and goals set in programs of studies, and whether these coincide or differ between students and professors will influence the degree of success perceived by both (pp. 27–28).

Another model developed by Wong-Reiger (1984) focused on cross-cultural adaptation and could be applied to adjustment problems of international students. This study proposed three processes of cultural adaptation: (a) learning new social norms, (b) matching behaviors to these new social norms, and (c) matching the individual's self-concept to the newly formed behaviors and social norms. The researcher suggests that international students can learn to form successful coping strategies within the framework of the mismatch model.

Another study by Lee and Ray (1987) surveyed international students from Iran, Nigeria, Taiwan, and Venezuela, while studying in U.S. universities, about a desire to remain in the U.S. after graduation. This could be linked to Chickering's (1969) "developing purpose" vector. Their intent to return home was based on the following: (a) country of origin, (b) reasons for remaining in the U.S., and (c) anticipated satisfaction with the home country by the time of return. When

considering “intent,” the researcher’s own personal experience from discussions with her Middle Eastern graduate colleagues show perceptions of the political and economic situation were also determining factors in either deciding to stay in the U.S. or returning home.

Reiff and Kidd (1986) also recommended effective assimilation methods for international students, desiring to transition into the college culture, based on the adaptation problems that international students might encounter: (a) orientation sessions, (b) intercultural exchange, (c) educational enrichment, and (d) intercultural communication. The more social contact international students have with the American college culture; the faster and easier their adaptation process will go. Thus, the more social that exchange opportunities offered by the American university staff are; the more successful international students should be in their academic endeavors (Furnham & Bachner, 1986; Reiff & Kidd, 1986).

A final study conducted by Goodwin and Nacht (1984) in Mexico, Indonesia, and Turkey investigated the intellectual and professional decay, which is the essence of Chickering’s (1969) “developing integrity” vector, of students graduating from U.S. institutions. It also assessed this issue’s seriousness, and then proposed some solutions. They determined professionals were less effective in performing the functions for which they were trained, and suffered from qualitative changes such as the loss of contact (a) with colleagues, (b) current developments in

their respective disciplines, and (c) the ethics of conducting research. Among their recommendations, the best ones related to continuing communication within their technical specialty, staying current on new trends and maintaining a working relationship with contacts still conducting research in an academic environment to stay aware of changes in research reporting protocols.

In summary, this section discussed various theories linked to the foreign graduate student experience: Schlossberg et al.'s 4S Model of Transition (1995), Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994), and Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986).

The Comprehensive Transition Model

Figure 2 represents the comprehensive model used to describe the international graduate student's transition experience. This also shows how general concepts in the previously stated models were incorporated to represent issues affecting the international student's transition as they changed environments and encountered new experiences. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S transition model, depicted by the gray arrow in Figure 2, provided a structure for the researcher as she recorded experiences of international individuals in transition. The arrow also symbolizes the mobility of the transition, as people in transition are moving in, moving through or moving on from one experience to another. Therefore, their

The Comprehensive Transition Model

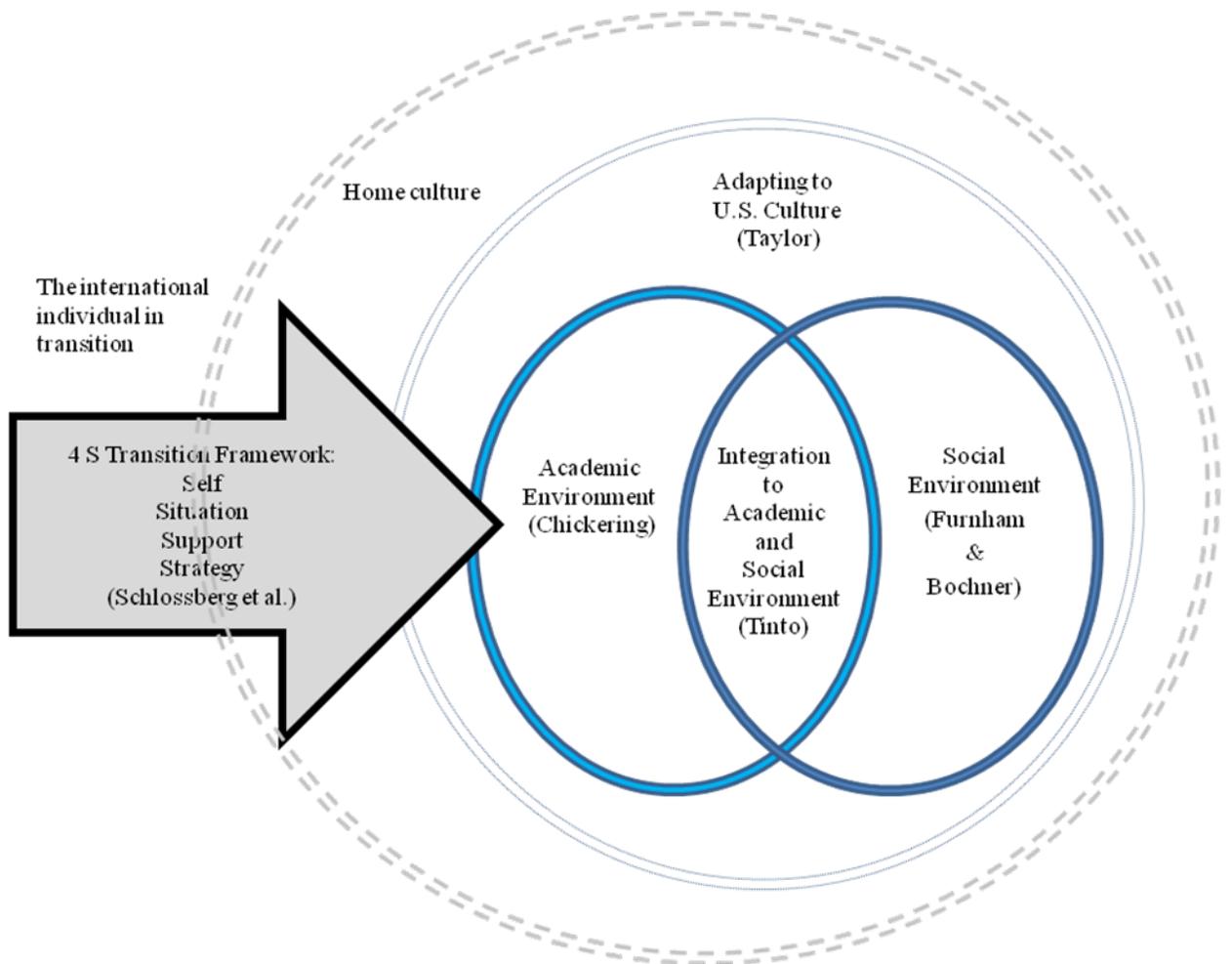


Figure 2: The Comprehensive Transition Model

environment, the people with whom they interact, and the events, which they encounter continually change. However, the constants in every new environment, or encounter are the norms, values, and beliefs from their home culture and previous experiences, which make them who they are.

The dotted gray, outer circle represents the international individual in transition. As this person moves to the U.S., they bring a set of values, norms and beliefs related to their home culture, which will be used as reference points while they figure out how to function in this new environment. They also bring experiences, events, and strategies to deal with this transition.

The next circle represents adapting to the new environment and the host culture.

Components of Taylor's (1994) intercultural competence model enabled the researcher to investigate what kind of approach this group used while learning survival skills in the U. S. culture. In this case, two new environments came into focus: academic and social and upon arriving in the U.S. MEGS were supposed to function well in both. The two Ss of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) Transition Model that are more evident at this stage are self and situation because everything is new to the individual. They are excited to be in a new environment and are not too critical. This is because they focus more on themselves and the situation, instead of analyzing and criticizing it.

The inner two circles represent Chickering's (1969) vectors and Furnham and Bochner's (1986) social skills and cultural competence model. Main elements from the first model led the researcher to identify the necessary academic skills for MEGS to learn and retain effectively while attending a foreign university. Primary concepts from the second model enabled the researcher to further focus on social skills which MEGS needed to master for functioning properly in the new culture. Finally, overarching concepts from Tinto's (1993) theory, represented by the overlapping parts of the two inner circles, highlight the importance of integrating international students in both academic and social environments. As the individual adjusts to the American culture, and encounters people from a different culture, i.e. America, in different academic and social settings, the last two S's: strategy and support, come into play. At this stage, the individual gradually becomes more aware of the challenges of being in a different environment, is more critical of the experiences encountered, and identifies support systems needed.

An understanding of the transition experiences of MEGS could encourage a smoother transition experience. This is important information for university and college professionals since the number of MEGS on U.S. campuses is increasing; therefore, more insight into the transition experience of this group needs to be obtained, especially after the tragic events of the World Trade Center bombings in 2001 (9/11).

Middle Eastern Culture

The Middle Eastern way of life mixes artistic forms and cultural contrasts into true connecting point between East and West. Western civilizations have always been challenged to understand it. For centuries, the area has been a bridge for people travelling between Asia, Europe, and Africa who have kept their ways of life. Middle Eastern people are proud of their historical traditions and maintain them in their patriarchal family-first structure (Gardner, 1959).

Due to matters such as tribal and religious associations, socioeconomic status, and gender inherent to each community in the Middle East, any type of overarching generalization are not appropriate. An overview of elements important to the formation and character of Middle Eastern societies can highlight some factors, such as race and religion, in Middle Eastern societies to differentiate them from the West (Reininger, 2004).

Religion is the widest measure of commonality for Middle Eastern people. Islam is, and has been, the religion of the majority throughout the Middle East more than 1,400 years. Since the nature of Islam calls for the unity and “family-hood” of all believers, the union of Islam serves as the strongest yet, and most demanding connection between individuals throughout the Middle Eastern region (Reininger, 2004). The perspective of loyalties to the immediate group supports the strength of religion as a uniting factor between countries and different nationalities.

Although most Muslims neither live in the same country nor speak the same language, the culture of Islam overrules difference with similarities transcending physical boundaries since there is a specific language, method of worship, and set of social rules all Muslims, as believers, must follow (Reininger, 2004). Regardless of the variances between sects and interpretations of Islam throughout the Middle East, Muslims share a depth of passion and commitment necessary which allows Islam to work as a unifying factor across the Middle East (Reininger, 2004).

Within this framework of Islamic influence, several additional elements also extend across national boundaries in the Middle East. One is the idea of honor, which is very much a matter of public perception, a concern for the way an individual, family, or group might be judged and treated due to the way that individual, family, or group acts. As Bates and Rassam (2001) state, “honor [for Middle Eastern people] is the ability to live up to the ideal expectations of the society” (p. 236). In this way, the concept of honor is also a system of accountability, as well as a method of social control with checks and balances.

There are various sources of honor such as family origin, piety, prowess, generosity, and above all, autonomy. Any breach of the code of sexual modesty, just as any assault on a man’s general sense of pride, brings shame. Of all sources of shame, none is felt more acutely than that by a breach of a sexual nature. Throughout the Middle East, the most potent insults refer to the sexual behavior of

a man's mother or sister. Family responses to incidents, such as premarital sexual liaisons or marital infidelity, range from ignoring or playing down the situation to the extreme of killing the woman in the name of the family's honor (Bates & Rassam, 2001).

There is a close connection between the concept of honor and gender in Middle Eastern societies. Even though honor is an issue belonging to both genders, women bear the burden, both for behavior and consequences, as part of the social accountability enforced by honor. Across the Middle Eastern region, each society not only places the responsibility of maintaining honor on the shoulders of women, but also assigns the right of judgment to men as to whether or not women maintained or compromised honor as well as to reward or punish them accordingly. Although maintaining purity of honor is of vital importance to both men and women, it appears to have a different type of importance to each gender. For men, the significance of maintaining honor lies in the perception of one's reputation, but for women, the gravity of maintaining honor, while including the matter of reputation, lies more in the matter of personal survival (Reininger, 2004).

Islamic and Middle Eastern codes of modesty not only regulate sexuality but also attempt to restrict it to the private domain of the home. What distinguishes the Middle East from the West is the extent to which concepts of honor and shame are considered as explicit bases for social action and the extent to which social

institutions reflect this. “The code of sexual modesty and the seclusion of women are important means for effecting male control over female sexuality and reproductive capacity” (Bates & Rassam, 2001, p. 241).

Other generalizations applied to Middle Eastern people are related to causative gender issues. For example; (a) sons are favored over daughters, and children are taught from an early age about ways of behaving in public that are appropriate for their gender; (b) girls are given domestic responsibilities and placed under strict supervision from an early age; (c) women are brought up to find their primary ties and ultimate sources of economic security in relationships with their fathers, brothers, and sons; and (d) “women find their lives tied much more closely to family and household, while men lead their lives in the public domain of mosque, market, and workplace” (Bates & Rassam, 2001, p. 231).

The sexuality and covering of Muslim women has been subjected to intense political debates but hides cultural resistance to secularism. The significance and meaning can only be understood when examined in a richly historical context. For some people in the Middle East, the veil represents an archaic patriarchal order, an embarrassing relic of the past, and an impediment to progress. For others, it symbolizes a core Islamic idiom regarding sexual morality and tradition. For still others, veiling is an explicit political statement (Bates & Rassam, 2001). All of these connecting elements – religion, honor, and gender – create an environment,

unique to Middle Eastern societies. Being aware of the differences between Middle Eastern and Western cultures enabled the researcher to comprehend the transition experiences of MEGS coming to study at a U.S. university in the post 9/11 era.

The Effect of 9/11 on Middle Eastern Graduate Students

As a result of 9/11, U.S. officials took a number of precautions to better control admission into and departure from the country. It follows that the Report of the U. S. Department of Homeland Security's *Secure Borders and Open Doors Advisory Committee* (2008) emphasized creation of the "U.S. Department of Homeland Security," reaching new security agreements with foreign governments/international organizations, and placing new mandates on federal immigration, the private business sector and educational institutions for management of foreign employees and students. A list of further actions are found in Cainkar's (2002) report, "*No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion after September 11,*" and include:

- The U.S. government announced the finger printing and registry initiative on August 12, 2002 for persons from select Arab and Muslim countries (p. 26).
- In late October, the State Department issued a classified cable imposing a 20-day mandatory hold on all non-immigrant visa applications submitted by men aged 18-45 from 26 countries, most of them Arab (p. 27).

- In November, the Justice Department announced its intention to interview some 5,000 individuals who came to the U.S. from [the Middle East] since January 1, 2000 on non-immigrant visas (p. 27).
- In January 2002, the INS launched an initiative to track down and deport 6,000 non-citizen males from Middle Eastern countries who had been ordered to leave by an immigration judge but had never left the U.S. (p. 27).
- On May 14, 2002, Congress enacted the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act. Among many provisions of this act, which included calls for the integration of INS databases, the development of machine-readable visas, the requirement that all airlines submit to the U.S. all lists of passengers who boarded a plane bound for the U.S., and stricter monitoring of foreign students, is a restriction on non-immigrant visas for individuals from countries identified as state sponsors of terrorism (p. 27).
- On July 14, 2002 the INS announced that it will begin enforcing section 265(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which requires all aliens to register changes of address within ten days of moving (p. 28).

- On August 12, 2002 implementation of a program to require thousands of approved, visa holding foreign visitors to be fingerprinted, photographed, and registered upon entry to the U.S. (p. 28).

Because of all these and other security precautions, international students coming to the U.S. started to encounter difficulties starting on the day when they had received permission to study. Immigration regulations and interviews became problematic enough to discourage some from applying to U.S. institutions in the first place. Students also encountered unnecessary financial burdens due to immigration delays (Altbach, 1989).

Apart from regulatory entrance difficulties, social and community factors also adversely affected international students' experiences after arriving and upon their decision to stay. As a result, NAFSA called for an international education policy to promote international, foreign-language and area studies; create a comprehensive strategy to restore America's status as a magnet for international students and scholars; establish study abroad as an integral component of U.S. undergraduate education; and strengthen international citizen and community based exchange programs (2007).

In 2008, NAFSA identified three more areas for improvement in relation to international education: coordination, visa reform, and immigration reform. To rebuild America's academic reputation abroad, NAFSA (2008) also espoused

further expansion, funding, streamlining and regulation of federal exchange programs.

The number of graduate international students travelling to the U.S. has increased just recently. According to *Open Doors 2011* survey (Bhandari & Chow, 2011), there are approximately 296,574 international graduate students currently studying in U.S. universities. To keep the numbers up, the federal government, university and college administrators, and policy makers need to understand what international graduate students are experiencing when they transition to the U.S. This study shed light on MEGS transition experiences in a post 9/11 era, using the comprehensive international graduate student transition model.

In summary, literature review for this study began with an explanation of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4S Transition Model. Schlossberg et al. (1995) state four major sets of factors influencing a person's ability to cope with a transition the 4 S's: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy. "Situation" is related to how, when, how long, and how stressful the transition experience was for the individual. "Self" refers to characteristics and values of the person going through the transition. "Support" refers to the type, function, and amount of social support the person needs and receives during the transition. Finally, "strategy" refers to what the individual does to modify the situation, control the meaning of the situation, and manage the stress in the aftermath.

The researcher developed a comprehensive model to investigate MEGS transition experiences using major concepts from various student transition theories. Chickering's (1969) Vectors of Adult Development theory was chosen as it explained how the academic environment affects the undergraduate student transitioning to the first year of college. Tukono (2008) suggested that this theory could also be applicable to the transition experience of graduate students; therefore, this led to identification of the first part of the researcher's comprehensive transition model: academic environment. Additionally, Furnham and Bochner's (1986) Social Skills and Culture Learning Model focused on international students and showed how social adjustment challenges are a result of students not knowing the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to function in the host culture. This led to identification of the social environmental aspect in the comprehensive transition model. Tinto's (1987) Theory of Doctoral Persistence further built on these ideas since it pointed out the importance of integrating the graduate student into both social and academic environments together. Finally, Taylor's (1994) Learning to Become Inter-Culturally Competent model was incorporated to show the importance of assisting international students as they adapt to U.S. culture. This brought in the last piece of the comprehensive transition model: adapting to the U.S. culture.

This section closed with research summarizing MEGS socio-cultural

transition challenges after defining the comprehensive transition model. The literature review continued by focusing on the characteristics of MEGS, and concluded by stating the difficulties people from the Middle East encountered when they travelled to the U.S. after the “9/11” tragedy.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This chapter contains a description of the methodology used to conduct the study. The purpose of this study was to identify the transition experiences of MEGS in the post 9/11 era. The researcher used a comprehensive transition model that focused on the individual, the environment, and the experiences of the person going through the transition. This comprehensive model incorporated Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition theory with main ideas from Chickering's (1969), Furnham and Bochner's (1986), Tinto's (1993), and Taylor's (1994) models to gather and assess perceptions of graduate students coming to study at U.S. universities or colleges. For the purpose of this study, MEGS were defined as any student from the following countries: Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen and were enrolled in masters or doctoral classes. The 4 Ss refer to Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Model, which has four major sets of factors that influence a person's ability to cope with transition: (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy. Specifically, three main research questions guided this study:

1. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe the academic and social environment* in which they find themselves? (situation)

2. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *experience the academic and social transition* to graduate school in the U.S.? (self)
3. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe adapting to* graduate school in the U.S.? (strategy and support)

In the remaining sections of this chapter, the design of the study is explained; therefore, this chapter contains a detailed explanation of the rationale for conducting a qualitative study, a description of the sampling procedure, the instrumentation, the procedures used to collect and analyze the data, and the authenticity and trustworthiness of data.

Rationale and Assumptions for a Qualitative Design

The researcher's purpose, or rationale, is the initial and most important consideration that influenced the decision to use a qualitative design (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002). MEGS transition experiences were investigated using a qualitative design. This enabled the researcher to present the "essence" (Merriam, 2002) of the phenomena through the eyes of the participants (Creswell, 1998). It also allowed the researcher to present a rich, thick description of the natural setting (Denzin, 1989) where the study was carried out. A qualitative approach enabled inclusion of contextual information as well as stories of the participants from their individual points of views (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This study's qualitative approach provided a more systematic approach to facilitate

data collection and analysis. It also had the flexibility to be open to the emergence of new ideas as they came up (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the most appropriate qualitative method to achieve the purpose of this study was phenomenology.

Using this approach, the researcher “addressed questions about common, everyday human experiences, believed to be important sociological or psychological phenomena of our time or typical of a group of people and transitions that are of common or contemporary interest” (Merriam, 2002, p. 93). This phenomenological study provided a detailed account of the transition challenges faced by MEGS.

Patton (2002) stated that “the first step in carrying out a phenomenological analysis was called *epoche*” (p. 484). This was where the researcher critically analyzed her own views to eliminate or became aware of any preconceptions, which she had. The second step, “phenomenological reduction” (Patton, 2002, p. 485), involved the researcher “bracketing out” and identifying the data in pure form. This was followed by data being “horizontalized” (Patton, 2002, p. 486), organized into meaningful clusters, and the elimination of repeated ones. This led to the identification of themes, which enabled the researcher to “perform an “imaginative variation” on each theme” (Patton, 2002, p. 486). Synthesis of texture and structure conclude the phenomenological model. The researcher in the former gave “an abstraction of the experience that provides content and illustration, but

not yet essence”, and in the latter “looked beneath the affect inherent in the experience to deeper meanings for the individuals who make up the group” (Patton, 2002, p. 486).

The rigor of this phenomenological design was established with the researcher’s detailed understanding of the setting as a foreign graduate student herself, access to the participants, and ability to deconstruct and reconstruct meaning from interviews with the participants. The study was bounded by time – interviews were carried out within 6 months and by place – participants were attending one U.S. university in the mid-West.

Role of the Researcher

Merriam (2002) suggests researchers use a strategy called “reflexivity” which is where researchers “explain their position vis-à-vis the topic being studied, the basis for selecting participants, the context of the study, and what values or assumptions might affect data collection and analysis” (p. 26). Lincoln and Guba (2000) defined this as the “process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, and the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 183). To take on the reflexivity strategy, the researcher was a female graduate student pursuing her doctoral degree at an American university in the southern mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. She was also working as an English Language Instructor at the Intensive English Program (IEP) at the University of Missouri teaching international students English for Academic

Purposes. She is originally from Turkey, a country that is on the CGS's list of Middle Eastern countries. Even though her reason for coming to America was not mainly to pursue a doctoral degree, she did experience first-hand much of the discrimination, sense of alienation, and isolation Middle Eastern people have seen since the great tragedy of 9/11 befell the people of the United States. It is important to note, however, she does not appear to many as the stereotypical Middle Easterner, since she neither dresses nor acts in the traditional ways expected of people from her region of the world. Many of the socio-cultural adaptations from transitional experiences, life styles, and personality traits of the participants were gathered and developed by establishing relationships with the respondents throughout the duration of this study.

This prior knowledge and experience of moving from a Middle Eastern country to the U.S. and pursuing her graduate education at a U.S. university established participant trust. This enhanced the rigor of the study.

Con conversationally, she planned on briefly describing her own relevant transition experiences to participants to improve the quality and depth of discussions on what it was like to come from a Middle Eastern country since she shared a regional relationship and might be familiar with the cultural elements which participants might be referencing during the interviews. As a result, her similar transition experiences in the U.S. had the potential to enhance the study's data gathering,

quality, and assessment. Conducting research in a setting familiar to the researcher frequently occurs in qualitative research (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

To take on the perspective of epoche, the researcher explored her personal experiences as they related to this study. She then tried to put these prejudices and assumptions aside by “bracketing” them so as to influence the research process as little as possible (Merriam, 2002). While coding and re-coding, throughout the research, she kept an audit trail of her assumptions, viewpoints, and prejudices. She bracketed these as well. She also carried out expert peer reviews and asked an expert in the higher education field to check her interpretation of the data once she started to code to insure the data were neither unduly influenced nor transformed by personal bias.

Sample Selection

Qualitative research calls for purposeful sample selection to identify sites and participants best able to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling means that study participants were selected based on the potential quality of their data. The researcher identified the type of institution from where she drew the samples. She lives in a mid-western college town with a university with a graduate school and a total of 1,747 international students (Bhandari, & Chow, 2008). Therefore, she chose this institution since it had a graduate school and graduate students from the Middle East. To select participants for the study, she used a

purposeful, criterion sampling method. Criterion sampling, a quality assurance measure researchers take where they review and study all cases to ensure they meet some predetermined criterion of importance, enhances the rigor of a study (Patton, 2002). According to the *Open Doors* report there was a “10.9% increase in the number of students coming to the U.S. from the Middle East during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic years” (Bhandari, & Chow, 2008, p. 39). For the purposes of this study, MEGS studying at a U.S. university in the mid-west were approached and asked if they would like to participate. The researcher identified eight MEGS who were willing to participate in her study. Patton (2005) states “validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational / analytical capabilities of the researcher, than with sample size” (p. 247). The number of participants of eight graduate students in this study enabled the researcher to obtain rich, detailed, and extensive information that ensured the credibility of the findings. Participants took part in three in-depth individual interviews each. Participant selection continued until data saturation was achieved, or when the researcher “begins to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as [the researcher] collect[s] more data” (Merriam, 2000, p. 26).

Participant Profiles

There were eight participants who were currently enrolled in a graduate program of a research-intensive U.S. university situated in the Mid-western region of the U.S. Demographic information for the sample can be found in Table 1. All of the participants had been in the U.S. between 3 and 18 months. Three participants were women, and five were men. Two of the women were from Turkey, and one was from Iran. Two of the five males were from Iraq, and the rest were from Kuwait, the Palestine Authority, and Lebanon. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 33 years. Two of the eight participants were pursuing Ph.D. degrees, and the rest were pursuing Master's degrees. All of the females were married. As for the men, both Iraqis were single; the Kuwaiti Ph.D. candidate had just been married and brought his wife to America; the Lebanese citizen was in a relationship while his partner lived in a different city; and finally, the Palestinian participant had a Puerto Rican girlfriend. Participants reported their English proficiency levels as "good." Only two said they had "excellent" English, and these two also held Teaching Assistantships (TA). There were three others who held Research Assistantships

Table 1
Demographic Information of Participants (N = 8)

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Country	Been in U.S. for	Degree	English Proficiency level	Major	SES of family	Married or Single?	Participant Code
Belal	Male	23	Iraq	6 Months	MA	Good	Engineering	Middle Class	Single	1
Diba	Female	24	Turkey	6 Months	MA	Good	Engineering	Upper Middle Class	Married spouse is in U.S.	2
Esso	Female	25	Turkey	3 Months	MA	Good	Statistics	Upper Middle Class	Married spouse is not in U.S.	3
Khaled	Male	29	Kuwait	1.5 years	PhD	Good	Design	Upper Middle Class	Married spouse is in U.S.	4
Leo	Male	33	Lebanon	6 Months	MA	Excellent	Masters in Fine Arts	Upper Middle Class	In a relationship	5
Mehmet	Male	28	Palestine	1.5 years	PhD	Excellent	Computer Science	Upper Middle Class	In a relationship	6
Serdar	Male	25	Iraq	6 Months	MA	Good	Engineering	Middle Class	Single	7
Zeynep	Female	30	Iran	6 Months	MA	Good	Masters in Fine Arts	Middle Class	Married spouse is in U.S.	8

Note. Pseudonyms are names selected by participants. Participants self reported their English proficiency levels and SES of family.

(RA) from the university. The remaining three participants had scholarships from their governments, which did not require them to be employed while pursuing their graduate degrees. To more easily identify and have access to the international graduate student body at the Midwestern university, the Dean of the Graduate School was approached to see if he would be interested in working with the researcher throughout the study. A letter detailing the study was given to him for his records. A copy of this letter is provided as part of the attachments to the completed study (Appendix A). Once acceptance from this gatekeeper was granted, the researcher provided him with a written explanation of the study and asked him to send this out through the internal e-mail service as a call for volunteers. A copy of this e-mail is provided as an attachment to the completed study (Appendix B). As volunteers were identified, the researcher also asked if they could give her contact information for any of their Middle Eastern friends who might also be interested in participating in the study. She then contacted them to see if they would be willing to take part. Therefore, she used the “snowballing technique” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 73) to encourage students to participate in her study.

After identifying those who were willing to participate in the study, the researcher sent them an e-mail containing a letter explaining the rationale of the study (Appendix C). She also attached the informed consent forms for both

Virginia Tech and University of Missouri (Appendix D and E) to this e-mail so they were made fully aware of the details for the research. She also asked them to read the informed consent forms and bring any questions to the first interview. Finally, she asked them to let her know when they would like to meet. She told them interviews would be held in Columbia, MO, at a place of their choice, where they could privately and openly discuss their transition experiences.

Instrumentation

Data was gathered using Seidman's (2006) three in-depth interview approach.

Seidman's Approach

“At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Seidman (2006) provides a means for understanding the experience of other people and what it means to them. This approach is accomplished with three consecutive interviews for each participant. The first is a focused life history to provide the context of each participant's experience. For this study, emphasis was placed on the participant's life in their home country. The second one details the individual's current experiences as they relate to the topic of study. This allowed the participant to reconstruct recent transition experiences, and then share a story of a typical academic, or social, experience which best

represented their transition into a U.S. university and the local community. The third lets the participant express the meaning of his, or her, experiences. For this study, the participants explored the meaning of the transition experiences in the context of what their future goals and aspirations were.

Seidman (2006) believes the opportunity for the participant to review his or her current experience in depth, and in the context of the factors that brought the individual to their present situation, were critical steps in their understanding of the transition process. This protocol also offered the interviewer a window into the individual's life, which helped them experience the events through the participant's eyes to gain more meaning.

These in depth interviews built on each other and included several common questions (see Appendix F - H). Probes and follow-up questions, when needed, helped keep the participant on track and helped to link the three interviews. Seidman (2006) recommends the interviews be spaced approximately a week apart, but close enough for the participant to keep the responses from previous sessions in mind, and yet long enough to avoid idiosyncratic interviews when the participant was having a "bad - day." However, he also states how interviews can be scheduled two or three weeks apart, where the interviewer needs to start the interview by reminding the participant of topics discussed in the previous session.

For this study, the researcher tried to schedule the interviews two weeks apart at most.

Interviews

The three-part protocol for the first interview is shown in Appendix F. The aim of this first interview was to create the context: the participant's life history. The first part entitled, "individual," sought demographic information about the participants, including ethnicity, gender, age, level of English proficiency, highest academic degree earned, and type of job they had in their home country. The second part, "environment" consisted of questions to elicit information on how individuals perceived their environment in the Middle East. The last part, "experience" had questions to elicit information about how they made the decision to come to the U.S. and the kind of reactions they had from their family and friends.

The two-part protocol for the second interview is shown in Appendix G. The aim of the second interview was to identify details of their transition experience. Information was gathered through another set of open-ended questions. After getting a general idea of what their life in the U.S. was like, the researcher asked participants to think back to their first days in the U.S., and tell her of their experiences during that period. They discussed the support mechanism participants

had to handle issues. Interview questions regarding challenges and success revealed the strategies, which they used.

The protocol for the third interview is shown in Appendix H. The aim of this last interview was to determine the meaning of their transition experience for them as a person. The researcher asked various open-ended questions to identify how they understood this transition, what they thought about their decision, and how satisfied they were at the U.S. university.

Pilot Study

Before carrying out the interviews, drafts of instruments used to obtain data during the interviews were reviewed by a board of higher education academic experts in the field of English language who had experience working with international students. These faculty members identified various questions that could be misunderstood by MEGS due to a lack of English proficiency.

Pilot participants were selected from international students taking one of the courses offered by the English Language Support Program (ELSP) at the University of Missouri. The ELSP program provides academic skills support to international students enrolled at the University of Missouri. International students, who need extra assistance with writing, reading, speaking and listening to academic lectures, enroll in courses offered through ELSP.

The researcher requested the assistance of instructors working at ELSP in identifying three students with whom she could pilot the interview questions. As soon as students were identified for the pilot study, she administered mock interviews, and according to their answers, she identified questions that needed revision. For example, the question, “How integrated do you feel with the university community?” became, “Describe the university community. Is it friendly? Open? Relaxed? Intimidating?” This enabled the questions to be clarified and misunderstandings to be reduced.

Data Collection Procedures

A research application was forwarded to both Virginia Tech and University of Missouri’s Institutional Review Boards (IRB) for review. Upon receiving IRB approval from both institutions, data collection began. Copies of the two IRB approval letters are provided as attachments to the completed study (Appendix I and J).

Interviews

There were three in-depth face-to-face interviews conducted which each lasted up to 90 minutes, spaced no more than three weeks apart, and conducted in a mutually agreed upon location. The researcher also sent e-mails at least three days in advance of the scheduled times to remind participants of the place and time of the interview. She also reminded them to bring the informed consent form and any

questions they had regarding the study. On the day of the interviews, before asking the first question she chatted with participants to put them at ease. She then explained the study's intent and asked them to review and sign the informed consent forms (Appendix D and E). To avoid any technical malfunction she used two tape recorders simultaneously. She sought permission to audio record the interview first, and upon receiving permission she then started operating both recorders and made sure they were working properly. She also mentioned about taking written notes throughout the interview as well. Finally, she told participants that they would receive the transcriptions to make sure she had represented their ideas accurately. This was followed by her asking the first interview question stated in the interview protocol (Appendix F).

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as they were completed; six were done by the researcher and two were done by a transcriber. Throughout this period, the transcriptions and the audiotapes, were secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's residence. All participants were asked to select a pseudonym to protect their confidentiality. All identifying information was also masked in the interview transcriptions. Transcriptions were coded with the appropriate participant's pseudonym. This was followed by an analytical triangulation called a "review by inquiry participants" (Patton, 2002, p. 560). Conducting such a triangulation method contributed to verification, validation, and

led to an increased credibility of the study (Patton, 2002). Participants received a copy of their interview transcription through email to review and assure accuracy of what they intended to convey and verify identifying information was masked. This led to the beginning of data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was iterative, systematic, and emergent (Patton, 2002). The researcher audio recorded and transcribed the interviews. After transcription, she sent the interview content to the participants to ensure their views and ideas were correctly represented. Themes from data provided an understanding of the adjustment to living in the U.S. These data also provided ideas on how MEGS experienced transitioning from their home culture to their host culture.

To start the data analysis process, each transcript was read several times and then coded using open and axial coding techniques. Open coding is the initial stage of data analysis where the researcher examined the transcripts line-by-line and identifies categories and codes to describe what is being conveyed in the data. Axial coding, on the other hand, enables the researcher to put the data back together after open coding by “weaving the fractured data back together again” (Glasner, 1978, p. 116) to establish meaning.

During the first reading, the open coding technique was employed by making notes in the margins on possible codes for participant comments. During

the second reading the researcher uploaded the transcripts into the qualitative data analysis program called QSR NVivo 8. During the third reading, she used this program to check the codes and assign a color to those that referred to similar phases of transition. Red was used for the moving on phase, green for the moving in phase, and blue for the moving through phase of the transition. Then she reread all the color-coded transcripts and codes a fourth time to identify recurring ones and assigned them to themes. Direct quotations from the participants were used to illustrate each theme. For example, during the first interview when participants explained their lives in their home country, they might have said, “I used to work in a lab”, this was highlighted in red because it referred to the moving on phase of the transition, and it was coded as “job in home country”. They might have continued to say, “but now I am a graduate student.” This was highlighted in blue as it referred to the moving through phase. It was then coded as “role change.” If participants said they had less money because of the role change, this also got a blue color and was given the theme of “economic issues.”

The researcher also kept a record of recurring themes and comments of “disconfirming cases... [which] are examples that did not fit [as these cases are especially important] to place boundaries around confirmed findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 239) which provided valuable insight and a different perspective on what appeared to be a pattern. This contributed to the study’s credibility through a

“systematic search for alternative themes, divergent patterns, and rival explanations” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). Data from the second and third interviews were incorporated into the qualitative data analysis program QSR NVivo 8 and analyzed in the same manner.

Another step in increasing the credibility of findings, was accomplished by “the expert audit review... [technique which] involves using experts to assess the quality of analysis” (Patton, 2002, p.562). The researcher asked an expert in the field of higher education to review the codes and themes to ensure consistency.

Direct quotations from the participants were also used to illustrate each theme. For example, while answering the research question, “How do Middle Eastern graduate students describe the academic and social environment in which they find themselves?” the participants described the academic and social environment they had in their home country as being full of family and friends. However, they only included faculty and staff members when they were describing their academic environment in their host country. When asked why that was during the second interview, they said they did not have a lot of friends in the host country when they initially arrived. This would later be given the color green and coded “feeling lonely.” In the third interview the participant would be asked what it meant to only talk about faculty and staff members as people in their social environment. Single participants said they initially neither had family members nor

friends in the U.S. and as a result, they felt lonely. This would be put under the “support” column and given the color green and named “lack of support.” If this was a recurring topic then it could be turned into a theme called, “isolation.”

In summary, the data were analyzed in an iterative, systematic, and emergent way (Patton, 2002). In addition to the spreadsheets, the researcher used QSR NVivo 8 to keep an easily accessible list of quotes relevant to the themes from the participants, which provided thick, rich descriptions using the wording of the participant. Interviews were transcribed, and audit logs were kept throughout the study in a secure location.

Trustworthiness

Several approaches were used to confirm the trustworthiness of this study. First, the researcher compared data from the initial interviews and follow up ones with codes that she identified to ensure accurate representation of participant views. She compared each code with other codes to ensure there was no occurrence of overlapping. Finally, she employed open and axial coding to transcripts that led to identifying themes representing conceptual relationships.

Second, an audit trail of all thoughts, ideas, and analytic memos were kept to track all decisions about procedures (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993). This occurred throughout the duration of the study in both data collection and analysis. She kept a research journal where she recorded detailed information and reflections on how

data had been collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the study (Merriam, 2002).

Third, an expert in the field of higher education was consulted. The researcher asked this person to read the transcripts and examine her codes, and categories. This enabled the researcher to represent the findings as objectively and accurately as possible (Creswell, 1998). She also asked a board of experts in the field of English language, who had experience working with international students, to examine the interview protocols and provide feedback, which enabled her to identify the questions that would be misunderstood by the participants (Creswell, 1998).

Fourth, she also conducted a pilot study of the interview questions with three international students that enabled her to identify any interview questions that might have been misunderstood. This led to rewording of some questions so that data could be gathered to answer the research questions more accurately.

Fifth, member checks of transcripts ensured participant views were accurately reflected in what they said during the interviews (Creswell, 1998). Authenticating the findings with participants through member checks is an essential part of congruence (Jones et al., 2006). To ensure congruency of data, the researcher e-mailed each participant a copy of their interview and asked them to read through to see if she had represented their views correctly.

Another approach used to assure the trustworthiness of study results was triangulation. This technique is linked with member checks as well as the constant comparative method. Throughout the study, data were gathered and compared from three in-depth interviews. Participants ensured accurate representation of their views was accomplished. The researcher was also able to clarify and further investigate issues that came up as she conducted three interviews with each participant, which gave her the opportunity to further ask questions about areas that needed clarification during any of the three interviews.

Finally, a table was constructed to show how the research questions were answered. This had three columns going across the top of the table, which were listed in order as follows: “research questions”, “themes”, and “academic and social”. There were three rows down the left hand side of the table with one for each of the research questions. All of the themes relating to “situation” were incorporated in the row for RQ 1. “Self” for RQ 2, and “Support and Strategy” for RQ 3 in the last column. The researcher also gave participants code numbers so when they discussed any of the themes, in the data this was shown in the table. This led to a complete picture of the individual going through the transition in different environments (i.e. academic and social) as they encountered different experiences. This was another way to ensure that overlapping of themes had not taken place.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results of Study

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the data analysis. There were three research questions that guided the study which were based on Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Theory (situation, self, strategy, and support):

1. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe the academic and social environment* in which they find themselves? (situation)
2. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *experience the academic and social transition* to graduate school in the U.S.? (self)
3. How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe adapting to* graduate school in the U.S.? (strategy and support)

This chapter is divided in three sections. In the first section the overall emergent themes for the first research question are presented. In the second section the emergent themes for the second research question are presented. Finally, in the third section, the emergent themes for the third research question are presented. The results and conclusion of the study are discussed in Chapter Five.

Findings

The findings are presented as themes that emerged during analysis. An explanation of each theme is provided using comments from the participants as

evidence. Table 2 shows which participant talked about the topics associated with each theme. The numbers in the matrix correspond with the participant codes given in Table 1. Four themes emerged that were related to how MEGS *described* their academic and social environment (RQ1): (a) made comparisons, (b) experienced challenges, (c) experienced role changes, and (d) experienced stress. Five themes emerged on how MEGS *experienced* the academic and social environment (RQ2): (a) proud, (b) overwhelmed, (c) conflicted, (d) homesick, (e) lonely, and (f) changed. Another five themes emerged related to how MEGS *describe adapting to transition* in their new academic and social environment (RQ3): (a) consulted others, (b) observed then acted, (c), relied on self, (d) became involved, and (f) sought out sources of support.

Results about How MEGS Described the Environment

In this section of the chapter, findings for the first research question: “How do MEGS describe the academic and social environment in which they find themselves?” are reported. Four themes emerged: (a) made comparisons, (b) experienced challenges, (c) experienced role changes, and (d) experienced stress. Table 3 summarizes the data analysis iterations resulting in these four themes.

Made Comparisons.

The first theme, *made comparisons*, has two levels. The first refers to how students compared their graduate school experiences in the U.S. with their previous

Table 2

Summary of Academic and Social Themes by Participant Code (N = 8)

Research Questions	Themes	Academic and Social
How did MEGS describe their environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made comparisons • Experienced challenges • Experienced role changes • Experienced stress 	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</p>
How did MEGS experience the transition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proud • Overwhelmed • Conflicted • Homesick • Lonely • Changed 	<p>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</p> <p>1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8</p> <p>1, 3, 4, 6, 7</p> <p>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</p>
How did MEGS describe adapting to graduate school in the U.S?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulted others • Observed then acted • Relied on self • Became involved • Sought out resources of support 	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 5, 6</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8</p> <p>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</p>

Note: The number listed under academic and social corresponds with the participant code, indicating that that participant provided comments related to the theme.

Table 3

Code Mapping for How Academic and Social Environment Was Described

RQ1. How do MEGS's describe the academic and social environment in which they find themselves?

Third Iteration: Data Application

MEGS described the transition to their social and academic environment at the U.S. graduate school by comparing it to their previous educational experiences in their home countries. Overall, students described graduate work as more challenging than undergraduate. Being away from family for the first time, meeting basic needs, and ensuring all responsibilities were carried out increased their stress levels. Student's experiences with faculty and friends influenced their transition. Most students experienced role change in both social and academic environments. This led to experiences of stress.

Second Iteration: Themes

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Made comparisons | C. Experienced role change |
| B. Experienced challenges | D. Experienced stress |

First Iteration: Initial Codes/ Surface Content Analysis

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>A1. Academic environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational systems • Quality of education • Facilities • Relationship with faculty and students <p>A2. Social environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living conditions • Social life <p>B1. <u>In their home country:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy • Not everyone can attend | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Isolation <p>B2. <u>In host country</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting to a new routine • Navigating the education system • Language difficulties • Classes + / - ? • Time management • Faculty or program not meeting students needs • Not having family around • Basic needs not being met • |
|--|--|

Table continues on next page.

Table 3 (Continued)

Code Mapping for How Academic and Social Environment Was Described

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting spouses social needs • Roommate problems <p>C1. professional – grad student and TA or RA</p> <p>C2. professional – graduate student</p> <p>C3. undergraduate – TA / RA</p> <p>C4. Being taken care of by parents or spouse to taking care of spouse or self</p>	<p>D1. From academic issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application process <p>D2. From social issues:</p> <p><u>In their home country:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events of the last week • Saying farewell to family in their home country <p><u>In the U.S.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being away from family • Trying to meet academic and social responsibilities • Culture shock
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DATA	DATA	DATA	DATA
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Note. To be read from bottom up.

undergraduate academic experiences. These previous academic experiences relate to the systems of education, the quality of education, the actual conditions of the facilities at which education was offered, and the relationships between students and faculty. The second level of the theme refers to how students compared their social experiences in the U.S. with their previous social experiences. These previous social experiences are focused on the living conditions, which participants had, and their social life.

All of the participants described their academic environments by comparing their home country's education system to what they experienced in the host country, and focusing on differences, such as how the host country's education system was difficult to understand and navigate. Most students had expected to be given more information and guidance regarding the new U.S. system upon arrival at the university. They needed to know various areas that were different. For example, the passing grade in U.S. universities is 70%, but it is only 50% in Middle Eastern institutions. Another difference is how papers and quizzes were used as parts of the final course grades rather than only as midterm and final exams. Serdar (Iraq) elaborated:

There is a midterm exam and a final exam, and the final [overall] grades will depend [only] on the midterm and the final exam. Like 50% for the midterm

and 50% for the final exam. And unlike here in the U.S., the [passing grade] in my country is 50%...This is the main difference.

When he pointed out this “main difference,” Serdar was focusing on two challenging aspects of U.S. education. The first was how U.S. students would pass with a 70% overall course grade while 50% was acceptable in his home country. The second was related to how the overall grade was determined back home from only a midterm and final exam, but U.S. students would have additional assignments as part of their overall grade in addition to examinations such as research projects (or papers), problem sets, and even quizzes.

A second difference was how the academic year would start at the end of September or the beginning of October, and end in June. Another distinction from the U.S. system was how courses with broad topics (i.e. History and Physics) were taught during an entire academic year, and not by semester. Participants also discussed another difference: the way plans of studies were made. Unlike U.S. institutions, participants were provided plans of studies by their faculty advisors in their home country. When they enrolled in their specific department, they would be assigned to undergraduate cohorts by major. Each cohort would then be given identical plans of study that were pre-selected by their faculty advisers.

Another topic MEGS discussed, while describing their academic environment, was the importance of getting quality education. All believed getting

a high quality education was possible if they got a graduate degree from a foreign country especially the U.S. Reasons for this were varied, but all participants shared how the U.S. graduate programs were superior to what were available in their native lands. Most MEGS thought universities in their countries did not provide quality education. As evidence, they cited limited availability of majors at the graduate level, outdated curriculums, and lack of modern teaching and learning technologies. In some Middle Eastern countries, political and social unrest caused the decline of education, since many faculty members were imprisoned due to their opinions. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) explained:

I highly doubt if we have a good graduate...education [in my country] in general. And that's the reason [why] I am here. If we [did], [then] I would have stayed there. [In my country] universities tend to be a social arena where you just go and socialize more than study. Due to the political situation, there [are] always strikes. Schools close for a week, or a month...you just never know.

Six of the 8 MEGS also talked about how different the facilities at U.S. universities were when describing the academic environment. This was a major concern since the physical aspects of their academic environment affected their educational experience. Apart from the building's appearance, MEG students also commented on how technologically behind universities were in their home

country, and how there were no adequate resources such as well-stocked libraries with current books and periodicals conducive to research. Overall, the excellent condition of the U.S. facilities was perceived by them to have a positive effect on their transitional experience. Zeynep (Iran), commented:

[Here] we have more facilities than we had in [my country]. For example, I wasn't [able to look at live models while painting] there. I had a MA in Illustration, but we didn't have any studio [available for this]. But here [in the U.S.], they give us a studio for free and we are able to use the studio.

Participants also spoke about the relationship with faculty when describing the academic environment. They discussed how faculty members at universities in their home country must be respected, as figures of authority. Faculty members at Middle Eastern universities literally gave orders. MEGS discussed how faculty members in their home country would tell them to either only speak to their assistants or totally ignore student questions. They also discussed how some faculty members were sanctioned due to their religious and political views. Zeynep (Iran) said, “And because of many, political [and] religious [restrictions]...we didn't have many good professors at the school. Many of them couldn't actually [work].”

However, when they talked about faculty members in the U.S., MEGS initially perceived them to be welcoming, approachable, and some even regarded

them as “father figures.” They commented on how different faculty members in U.S. treated students. They brought up how faculty would not mind if MEGS ate or drank in class, used faculty members’ first names when addressing them, and how there was an overall supportive relationship between faculty members and students.

Even though all the participants in this study thought U.S. faculty members were very helpful, some MEGS perceived them to have high expectations without knowing students’ educational backgrounds. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) gave this example of how his advisor treated him:

I think they expect you to know a lot of things. You're a graduate student, and you're just expected to know most things. And a lot of times, you go and ask them, and they say, “Well, you're supposed to know that.” Or they say, “You should have taken that in the pre-requisite class.” After some time I don't like these comments...They're not really willing to show you the concept or the basic, they just tell you, “I can't tell you that,” and that's about it.

However, most implied this was much better treatment than they were used to receiving in their home country. MEGS also described the classroom interaction when describing the academic environment. They described the behavior of their classmates as “interesting.” Some even described Americans as reserved and not

interested in being friends with them. Serdar (Iraq) explained:

I would have liked to be able to get to know more American students. They seem to be more reserved. They want to just come and go. They don't want to interact...They seem not to be interested in making friends. They only talk to you when they need help or when you are in a group to do some kind of homework or project.

MEGS also made comparisons when they described their social environments in their home country and the host country. They made comparisons especially when they discussed their living conditions and their social life. Some MEGS used to live in large cosmopolitan cities, and others lived in small towns. However, all of the participants were living with their family. Those, who were married, lived with their spouses either close to their extended families or in the same city. Of the MEGS, five single participants were living with their parents, two were in a small town, and three were in big cities. Leo (Lebanon) stated why:

I come from a culture...where you never leave your family. Your family never leaves you. You're never asked to leave the house...If you don't get married, you don't really leave the house unless you want, of course. It's not really part of here [in the U.S.]...it's not part of something set. So you can imagine that I was 33 when I left home...They were still supporting me at that age.

The only participant who was not living in the same city as her family was Esso (Turkey), and this was because her husband had a job, which required them to move to a different small town in her home country.

When describing social life in their home country, the majority of MEGS said they “had good friends” and were “very social.” As a matter of fact, their “social life [was] different; it [revolved around], family, friends, food, and chatting” (Khaled, Kuwait). They would regularly visit family members or socialize with friends. Zeynep (Iran) was the only participant who did not take part in social activities in her home country:

I [was] not...in good relations socially with people, I [was not] used to attending ...used to be[ing] in groups and going [places] with others. [Not] even [with] my colleagues [or] my classmates. Sometimes, I preferred not to even go to parties at school or only just with my parents.

As a woman, Zeynep (Iran) described feeling like an outsider in her home country so she preferred not to attend social activities. She gave this description because of her fundamental disagreement with many of the social rules in her home country, and believed she was always being scrutinized by the society. There was no freedom of choice, but there certainly were too many restrictions, which she found hard to endure.

Upon arriving at the Mid-western town the majority of MEGS described it as a small college town with a “community [which] is used to people from different worlds, [especially from] Arabic worlds” (Khaled, Kuwait). Mehmet (Palestine Authority) and other participants said, “What’s that!” about social life in their host country due to academic requirements. In general, 5 of 8 MEGS had limited social interactions in the host country: “We barely go out even to a movie” (Khaled, Kuwait).

MEGS discussed how they socialized mainly with people from their home country because they did not have opportunities to interact with Americans out of class. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) emphasized why MEGS had limited social interaction - even though they like to be socially active:

I mean, I do like it, I do love to sit and talk to people but God there is work to be done. I can't sit and do work and say, "I should go and talk to my friend", but it's the other way. [When] I am talking to my friend, in my mind [there is the idea of how] I should go back and do some work. So school is more important. Friendship and social life really comes all the way at the end.

However, some MEGS had different social life due either to their spouse or departmental responsibilities. Zeynep (Iran) commented on how she “pushed

herself” to be more socially active, since she thought she had the “freedom” of being herself in the U.S.

To summarize, while describing their academic and social environment MEGS compared their educational experiences in their home country with their educational experiences in the host country. They discussed the quality of education, the education system, the campus facilities, the relationships between students and faculty, and the social environments. They also focused on the challenges they faced in the academic and social environment in which they found themselves.

Experienced Challenges.

The second theme, *experienced challenges*, refers to the difficulties MEGS had to deal with throughout their transition experiences. MEGS discussed bureaucratic challenges related to not being able to get paperwork from the universities in their home countries in a timely manner; how not everyone in their home country could attend a university because students had to take very difficult exams that would determine their major; and finally, how not being supporters of the main political party would influence enrollment to a university. Belal (Iraq) explained:

The universities were working just to complete what [the political leader] needed, it was not just for freedom. Even coming to the United States, or

studying abroad was not an option for each student. It was for certain people who were either from [the political leader's party or they were] relatives. It was special [for them]. ...Even [student] acceptance [to the institution] was special.

MEGS also discussed being discriminated against because of their religion, their gender, or lack of qualifications, and isolation in their home country. These challenges were what motivated them to pursue a graduate degree. Belal (Iraq) explained the challenges he faced in the work place in his home country:

It's like, a lot of things need to be changed [in my country]...I tried to change what I can, but since I only [hold a] BSc [degree], and there's [people with] Masters and PhD's [working in the same company],... nobody listen[ed] to me.

Students did not face such challenges upon arrival to U.S. universities. However, they did describe other challenges. The first one was learning how to adapt to a new routine. Three MEGS discussed challenges related to the new schedule and academic environment. Some participants brought up the fact that they were mid-year enrollees, and described challenges they faced as a result of missing the orientation session given at the beginning of the year. Diba (Turkey) explained:

Because the old students already took classes, they knew the teachers, [and] everything [related to the system]. And I took [my] first [class at the beginning of the spring semester] and I went to classroom, [I] didn't have any idea [about the system] or about anything [else]...now, I am learning by myself.

Another challenge, which was brought up by five participants, was navigating the U.S. education system. As previously discussed, the U.S. education system is vastly different from the Middle Eastern education system. Students were not informed of the differences that they would face in the U.S. Therefore, they experienced challenges. Five participants, all of the females and two males, also commented on challenges due to various language difficulties such as writing precisely and mastering academic English well enough to write publishable papers.

All but one participant commented on challenges related to their classes such as not being taught more practical information that they could apply in the field, not having any friends, and cultural misunderstandings about terms such as “sexual harassment” Zeynep (Iran) elaborated:

Actually, I had heard about [sexual harassment] before I came here, when I was looking at web sites of the school. I found some information [about it] but it was funny for me. It wrote students shouldn't have sexual relations with their professors. It was funny for me that such things [were] written...because it was like obvious in [my country]. Actually, you're not

allowed to have any relationship with anyone. [I couldn't understand why they had to write such an obvious thing down].

MEGS also found it challenging to interact with Americans out of class. In their home country cohort members took identical classes, which would then enable each student to know the other very well, and encourage friendships. This would also lead to socializing outside of class if they desired. They thought the same situation would be available in the host country however, this was not the case. Therefore, most MEGS thought making friends was not easy they tried to make friends when they moved to the host country but faced various unexpected events. Khaled (Kuwait) explained what he experienced when he interacted with Americans:

When I first moved here, I had my first three [American] friends. One of them was interested in drinking and partying all night. The other one was a homosexual, and my third one was.... was some kind of missionary, and he was trying to convert me...that was the basis of his friendship. These are three typical cases but not typical to me. They are typical in American society but [they were very] foreign to me....I remember one guy asked me to come to the movies with him and he turns out to be a homosexual who was trying to hit on me.

Five participants also talked about time management being difficult since they had a lot of responsibilities and many roles to fulfill. They also discussed how this prevented them from social interactions that resulted in difficulty making friends. Diba (Turkey) said, “It's just related to having time and doing [all] this.” They were facing challenges because they were struggling with finding ways to balance their graduate studies along with their RA or TA positions and social responsibilities.

Six participants talked about faculty members or academic programs not meeting their needs. Some were expecting to work with a particular faculty on a particular subject; however, when they arrived at the Mid-western university, they learned that was no longer possible. Ezzo (Turkey) explained how she had hoped to work with a professor on stochastic processes: “But my advisor [told] me, ‘There is no one to study stochastic process, so maybe you can study times series,’ which is a different part of statistics. So I have to change my study area.” MEGS faced similar situations and they were forced to change their research interest and follow the advisor’s recommendations. Most of the MEGS considered this Mid-West university as their last chance among U.S. institutions.

MEGS also discussed one of the most important challenges they faced: not having family members close to them. Another was related to how some of their basic needs like food, weather, and emotional needs were not being met. All of the

participants were Muslims, which required them not to consume anything with pork products in it. They all stated that making sure they ate food that had no pork in it was difficult. Additionally, those living with their spouses in the U.S. talked about the challenges of meeting a spouse's social needs. The biggest challenge came as a result of the change in MEGS living conditions where they rented their own places; shared an apartment with a roommate; or got a room in the residence halls. Three of the MEGS had roommates that led to another challenge: getting used to living with someone other than their family members. They had to share the responsibilities of taking care of a house and doing various chores. Female MEGS who could not voice their concerns were struggling to find a way to balance academic and social responsibilities. Male MEGS in this study were more vocal than the women in this study and took action to resolve issues where they could. Mehmet (Palestine Authority), who had a particularly troublesome roommate, elaborated:

[H]e moved in with me and I started realizing he was a different person. His family is so screwed up. People, a lot of times, have a bad family history. Parents divorce. Parents have problems, domestic violence. They went through so many things that I won't go through. But they just go through all these things that make them go crazy. That was how my ex-roommate was like...His parents had so many problems. He'd been to jail so many times,

and he smokes weed all the time. He has no memory anymore. I just told him, “I would love to have you as a friend, but honestly you are not my friend. And you just need to leave my house.”

A final social challenge for MEGS was related to meeting their spouses’ needs. These participants wanted to take part in activities with their spouses; however, this also resulted in occasional disagreements between couples because the spouse would feel out of place and not want to go. Zeynep (Iran) explained:

We had a lot of problems when we came here. [My husband] didn't have anything to do; it was both a culture and psychological thing; he didn't have anything to do and I was busy with the school. I had my friends; I had my people around me and he had to be with them. He didn't have anyone for himself so...I like to experience all those new things; I wanted to go and he didn't like that, so we got some problems.

To summarize, MEGS had a number of challenges, which they had not experienced before in an open society like the U.S. In the U.S. they had to learn to live on their own, as they had been living with their families in their home country. They also had to deal with social responsibilities related to their spouses. Apart from this, they also struggled with language difficulties in the academic and social environments.

Experienced Role Changes.

The third theme is *experienced role changes*, which refers to the different roles MEGS took on as a result of their transition. These went from being (a) a professional to a graduate student and a teaching assistant or research assistant; (b) a professional to a graduate student; (c) an undergraduate to a graduate student and a TA or RA; (d) parents and/or spouse taking care of them to now taking care of self or a spouse. All of the participants made some kind of a role change when making the transition to the U.S.

Participants (i.e. 5 out of 8) had previous work experiences in their respective fields. While in the U.S., 4 of these same 5 were given either a TA or RA position. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) was an undergraduate student in his home country, and was given a TA position after the first six months in the U.S. with his department. He mentioned the invaluable experience gained because of his professor letting him “take over for almost a month and a half of teaching” as part of his TA responsibilities. As previously identified, all participants were living with family before their transitions. In the U.S., the major social role change for all was being able to take care of themselves or their spouses without the physical presence of their immediate family members such as parents, siblings and relatives. However, some were fortunate enough to have a sibling or relative already residing in the U.S. at the time of their transition. These relatives went to great lengths to

ensure the MEGS safely got to their destination, and assisted with their local domestic chores such as finding a place to live, showing them around the area, obtaining their initial residential supplies, and setting up bank accounts.

Single MEGS, who had not brought their spouses to the U.S., would be living with a roommate or on their own in the U.S. Of the 8 participants, 3 were living with their spouses, 2 were living with roommates, and 3 had rented a house in an apartment complex where friends were already residing, but were also living on their own. Individuals in each living arrangement had their own responsibilities. Khaled (Kuwait) explained the role change for both his spouse and himself:

Being in a remote country...my wife is [now] willing to cook, and she never cooked before. I can do laundry...I never do laundry before. There is of course more stuff, but it means a lot to us because we haven't done this before. (Khaled, Kuwait)

When MEGS transitioned to their host country, they had to get used to taking care of themselves and being away from family members. They also had to get used to their new roles of TA / RA. Juggling all of these responsibilities at times led to various causes of stress.

Experienced Stress.

The fourth theme is *experienced stress*, which refers to source of transition experiences MEGS found difficult to manage. In their home countries, MEGS had

various stressors ranging from the application process to the events of the week before they came to the U.S. MEGS also had various stressors in their host country such as being away from their family, culture shock, and trying to meet all the given responsibilities of their academic and social environments.

Half of the participants talked about how stressful the application process was for them; especially, identifying, applying, and awaiting acceptance to U.S. universities, which might take up to a year. Most of the participants “applied to many universities, but [were not] accept[ed] because of their low TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores” (Esso, Turkey). They spoke of how stressful it was to get rejections from various U.S. universities until acceptance from the Mid-west university mentioned in this study. Stress was also caused by “not knowing what was going to happen when they were going to move away” (Khaled, Kuwait).

Once accepted at the university, participants started asking for departmental assistance during the settling in phase when they did not have contacts in the Mid-west region. Consequently, this situation also caused participants stress due to the anxiety of not knowing how helpful the department would be. However, most of the participants said they did not have any difficulties obtaining visas. Zeynep (Iran) was the only participant for whom this was a major cause of stress before she came to the U.S. Zeynep (Iran) also pointed out that they “don't have a U.S.

embassy in [her country]” so she had to make arrangements to fly to another country, and stay there a couple of days while she and her husband took care of the visa issue. All of the MEGS also described the last week as one of the most stressful times of their lives when saying goodbye to their family.

In the host country, MEGS no longer had a nuclear family with them. They had to cope with this type of stress for the first time. Many stressors were time-dependent and could result in a cumulative negative effect on mental health if they occur either simultaneously or sequentially with no recovery time in between occurrences. For example, Diba (Turkey) experienced multiple emotive transitions in addition to separation anxiety from family members. Her particular situations were pursuing her graduate degree, marrying her American boyfriend, and now living in the Mid-western city:

But it all makes stress. Move here and not knowing the specific time I will be able to go back...You know I made this decision to come here not just for school...It's too much...in a short time. I think that grad school is good, and marriage is good also, but separately. And going to school and doing class stuff and studying. I think I have too much transition going on in my life. [I] feel weird. I think too much pressure in a short time is not good. I sometimes feel I am under too much.

Family members were also causes of stress for some MEGS while they were in their home country as well as the host country. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) gave an example of how his father was the source of stress for him:

Yes, it's the family. That's really the main thing. And a lot of times, I wish that they don't tell me what to do or don't interfere with my life. That's one of the [good] things about this [U.S.] culture. You grow up and you are on your own. But in my home country, you're like a kid all the time. They [are] always asking you. My dad is always investigating with me. He asks questions... "How many papers did you publish"? "How long [are they]?" "How many hours have you taken?" All these kinds of questions. They are too specific. They make me stressed out more.

Apart from familial stress, MEGS also had to deal with the demands of academic life in the U.S., which was another cause of stress. This could range from not knowing how to act in a U.S. classroom to learning the material and successfully carrying out the assignments. As a result of trying to cope with such stressors by themselves, some participants described instances of extreme anxiety potentially causing various health problems.

MEGS here with their spouses also described being stressed as a result of domestic difficulties when either a husband or wife had their own transition issues, which compounded problems for the one pursuing academic requirements. MEGS

also had to deal with “culture shock.” Some had little or no preparatory time to accept that they would actually be going to the U.S. in the face of last minute notifications by their governments. Seemingly simple, common sense cultural issues typically taken for granted by Americans such as, “How to pay for what you purchase?”; “What it meant if a girl smiled at a guy?”; “What defined sexual-harassment?”; and “How to respect each other’s personal space?” were also causes of great stress that led to various deep internal emotional conflicts. For example, one MEG spoke of how she learned about sexual harassment in the most difficult way possible, when a male professor accused her of sexual harassment stemming from her e-mail requesting assistance. In her home country, formal meeting invitations from her to faculty members always had to be respectful and flattering, and yet not allude to anything more than strictly academic assistance. As she had not been provided information about how actions could be understood or misunderstood in different cultures, she was unfamiliar with how a U.S. faculty member could possibly construe her deep seated respect as sexual harassment:

I never could believe that such a thing [an e-mail] could have such a reaction. I didn't know there was a rule for such a thing, actually. I had heard about it before I came here when I was looking at web sites of the school. I found some information but it was funny for me. It wrote that students shouldn't *have* sexual relations with their professors. It was funny for me

that such things were [even] written because in my culture students would not even *think of* having sexual relations with professors. (Zeynep, Iran)

Zeynep was shocked when she was accused of sexually harassing a member of the faculty when all she had done (in her eyes) was to write an e-mail stating her gratitude towards the faculty. She was “expressing her feelings freely and thanking” the faculty for his support and for helping her overcome the challenges by supporting her during the first couple of months she was in the U.S.

To summarize, four themes emerged on how MEGS described the academic and social environments as a result of their transition to the U.S. These were made comparisons, experienced challenges, role change, and stress. MEGS also decided to pursue graduate education in the U.S. because they were sure to get a high quality education to assure them a high salary job which would provide them with a good quality of life they are aspiring for, upon their return to their home country.

While these situational factors affected the transition to U.S. graduate school for MEGS, there were some individual factors that influenced the respondents. In the next section of this chapter, findings are presented relating to how these students described their academic and social transition to graduate school in the U.S.

Results About How MEGS Experienced the Academic and Social Transition

In this section, the findings are presented for the second research question: How do MEGS experience their academic and social transition to graduate school in the U.S.? Six themes emerged: (a) proud, (b) overwhelmed, (c) conflicted, (d) homesick, (e) lonely, and (f) changed. Table 4 summarizes the data analysis iterations resulting in these six themes.

Proud.

The first theme, *proud*, refers to two levels: making family proud and then feeling pride in their own accomplishments. The researcher found how pride and self-confidence for MEGS were culturally based on a myriad of familial situations, which closely intertwine with their professional lives. All participants talked about how their achievements made their family proud and built their own self-confidence. Since all were living with their family before they came to the U.S., MEGS were influenced either directly or after consultation with them. Three were directly encouraged to pursue foreign graduate education by their fathers. These MEGS were proud to carry out their father's wishes and meet his expectations. The other five participants consulted family before applying. When their family members encouraged them, they did their best to get a scholarship and pursue foreign graduate education so as to make their family proud. Khaled (Kuwait) explained:

Table 4

Code Mapping for How MEGS Experienced the Academic and Social Transition

RQ2. How did MEGS experience the academic and social transition to graduate school in the U.S.?	
Third Iteration: Data Application	
MEGS experienced the transition to graduate school in ways similar to other foreign graduate students. They described feeling proud, as well as overwhelmed by having to confront the common developmental task of gaining independence. They also described feeling conflicted. At times they described feeling homesick and lonely. The transition for these students was influenced by their determination to succeed so that they could return home and help develop their country. They also discussed having changed and improved themselves both professionally and personally.	
Second Iteration: Themes	
<p>A. Proud B. Overwhelmed C. Conflicted</p>	<p>D. Homesick E. Lonely F. Changed</p>
First Iteration: Initial Codes/ Surface Content Analysis	
<p>A1. My father was very proud. A2. I was proud of myself</p> <p>B1. Academics is challenging because of language B2. A lot of responsibilities</p> <p>C1. I am happy C2. I am very lucky C3. I do not have friends in class. C4. I thought... but... C5. I feel upset C6. I am trapped C7. Was intimidated</p>	<p>C8. Scared and afraid. C9. I need to impress them C10. I will do it. C11. I will go back</p> <p>D1. I miss my family E1. Students in class are like robots. E2. Socializing is different here. F1. I am maturing. F2. I am self-confident now. F3. I know more of who I am. F4. They say “you have changed.”</p>
DATA	DATA
DATA	DATA

Note. To be read from bottom up.

They [my parents] were happy; they were psyched about it. To know that I'm gonna (*sic*) move here. I'm gonna (*sic*) have a high degree. That will provide me a position in the university. My father was proud. He was very proud. Even my mother, I mean, "I'm gonna (*sic*) be a Dr.!" That was another motivation for me to make them proud.

In addition, 5 out of the 8 participants described being proud to be able to pursue graduate degrees in the U.S. because they knew “not everyone could get this opportunity” (Esso, Turkey). They also knew this would help them get a better job upon their return. The majority (i.e. 6 of 8 participants) wanted to return and contribute to the improvement of their countries. They wanted to reach their full potential to be a productive member of their community, and prove to themselves as well as to their own families, that they could do this. They also wanted their families to be proud of them and their accomplishments. MEGS described how the fear of failure, or inadequacy, in the face of their families always overwhelmed them emotionally when it came to their academic and social transitions.

Overwhelmed.

The second theme, overwhelmed, refers to how MEGS described difficulties caused by language problems, scholastic differences, and having to live on their own for the first time. When they transitioned to the host country, language difficulties affected them both academically and socially. It was hard for them to

understand English in the academic environment, and be active participants of the social environment, which required a totally different set of language and cultural competencies. In their academic environment, they were required to read academic texts, write publishable academic papers, and produce other high quality written work for their TA / RA positions. In their social environment, MEGS had a different set of responsibilities like adjusting to their host country's culture, and then successfully executing their socio-educational roles within its framework. MEGS described their abundance of language and scholastic difficulties, coupled with social challenges, as making them feel overwhelmed since they had only been living away from family – their major source for advice and recommendations – for the first time, and now had to think issues through alone in a lot of cases. Some of them were things even family might not be able to sort through if they had been available for consultations. Self-reliance, confidence and maturity really came into focus. All participants thought the amount of responsibility was ever increasing. Leo's (Lebanon) example is particularly interesting – describing a feeling of being so overwhelmed that even though he “was ready for a new beginning, and ready to really [be] challenge[d] on every level” that he “had to see...[a] shrink.” This was a result of him having to juggle his academic studies along with his social responsibilities, which required him to maintain a long-distance relationship with his partner:

It's very hard to have a long distance [relationship]. Yeah, that's one of the hardest things that I had to deal with on top of my transition...It went through some rocky rough terrain. Because like he [my partner] was already settled and accomplished here [in the U.S.], and I was struggling really to start a life here. It was hard for me to maintain the same balance between being able to, yeah, like being able to maintain a long distance relationship and to deal with the transition. (Leo, Lebanon)

Even though these MEGS described how they could feel overwhelmed, they typically did not give up to conflicting feelings of either intimidation and determination, or being pleased and disappointed at the same time, because of a true belief that these trials and tribulations would eventually make them better.

Conflicted.

The third theme, *conflicted*, refers to how these MEGS described being able to feel various opposing feelings (i.e. pleased and disappointed; intimidated and determined) simultaneously regarding their transition. For example, they describe being pleased and disappointed at the same time about their current academic and social environment. Four of the participants were satisfied with the academic environment as a whole, and some experienced gratification for being in an environment conducive to both their academic and social life. After arriving at the Mid-western town, they describe being positive, comfortable, and pleased to be in

a town “made for studying” (Belal, Iraq). They were also happy with the well-equipped facilities, the issue of safety on campus, and the support available for students. After orientation, they described being “safe and secure” (Khaled, Kuwait). Some MEGS were glad to know how supportive faculty members were when they first met them. The greatest area of contentment for MEGS was with their TA and RA positions. All were honored and “consider[ed] [themselves] lucky” (Leo, Lebanon) to have been given such an opportunity. Mehmet’s (Palestine Authority) TA position was particularly enlightening:

She [the professor I am working for] is someone who values my opinion. She's very respectful...she is always open to helping me out...and it was my first time TAing so that was the first time being involved in the real academic life. [It made me] feel like a professor, feeling so important...usually I have to do grading. We sit together; do the grading sometimes; I feel...She does make me feel...good about myself because she values my opinion. She always wants suggestions from me. She always wants to know what I think about certain issues in the class. She always wants me to get involved in organizing the class.

Even though participants were pleased to be in the U.S., they also described being conflicted since there were some aspects of the academic and social environments that made them upset. Some were disappointed by how small the

town was and where the U.S. university was situated, since they had a big-city image of America from the movies. Additionally, most commented on how disappointing it was about not having any American friends:

I go to class and finish the semester without knowing anyone.... A lot of times, if there are foreigners in the class, yes, you might get interaction. If there are no foreigners, and they are all Americans, most likely [you will] not [get any interaction]. (Mehmet, Palestine Authority)

The participants shared other disappointments regarding their academic environments. Some found the classes too theoretical; others thought they could not find appropriate courses that met their research interests; and some were dissatisfied with some faculty members. For example, Esso (Turkey) shared what she described as a “strange” situation where a faculty member could not answer her question and told her, “I have to research some formula, and afterwards, I will [tell] you how [to] do it.” This made her think, “If he doesn't know, how can I do it?” (Esso, Turkey). Half of the MEGS were looking forward to working with an accomplished professor in their particular interest area after arriving in the U.S.; however, sometimes they were told a particular faculty member had gone to teach at another university, but would be coming back the following year (Leo, Lebanon):

That's the reason why [I came].... I applied for university in the United

States and [chose the ones that] had a professor who was working on the stochastic process. ...After I learned [there was] no professor working on the stochastic process...I feel upset. (Esso, Turkey)

These MEGS often described such events as being “trapped” (Mehmet, Palestine Authority) since they could not transfer to another university or because they did not “have any choice to change university. This [was their] last chance, [therefore they had] to obey their [the university’s] plan.” (Esso, Turkey)

In the face of such challenges, they did not give up because all of them were determined to succeed no matter what. Some MEGS were intimidated when they met their advisors as they thought their advisors expected too much from them without knowing what their academic backgrounds were. However, this did not make them give up. On the contrary, it increased their determination. Some participants described being “scared”, and even “afraid,” when they were preparing to make the transitions from their home countries. During the first month in the host country, one participant stated it was, like he was “living on the moon,” as Mehmet (Palestine Authority) described. This was also because he did not know a lot of people during the moving in stage:

No one knows you; no one’s talking to you. You feel scared; you feel some fear from the culture and the people around you. You don't know how to

approach people; so it was scary; you just don't know where to go. (Mehmet, Palestine Authority)

Faculty and staff members were described as making these MEGS feel conflicted because they were welcomed, valued, and yet intimidated at times. They were “pleasantly surprised” (Eso, Turkey) when faculty members recognized and knew them by name. They also felt better as a result of information provided by the international center during the orientation after coming to the U.S. However, they were also intimidated by faculty members, their advisors, and the amount of time needed to get their graduate degrees. Male participants believed they had to impress the faculty and prove their abilities. Three male participants, who had not been in a co-educational environment before, also discussed how they were intimidated after finding out female faculty members would teach them. Some participants discussed how they would be intimidated in the presence of their advisors. While eager to impress, they also could not avoid describing how they would feel inferior in the presence of their advisors:

My advisor is my idol. I don't want to say something that she won't appreciate, or she'll think is not proper, or mature enough in terms of academic research. (Khaled, Kuwait)

Even though they were intimidated, all were determined to succeed, and thought it was important to pursue higher education in the U.S. for two reasons.

The first was more ego-centric - get a good job and have a much brighter future in their home country. The second was more selfless - “get their graduate degree and return home to their country” (Esso, Turkey) to start improving it. Those who had scholarships from their government (i.e. 4 out of 8) had to return to their country. Of the remaining four, there were two who did not want to return at all, Diba (married to an American), and Leo (whose partner was in the U.S.). However, Diba and Leo later said how they would eventually go back to visit their families.

Participants were also able to experience unique parts of American culture, which was described as being an invaluable part of being in the U.S. for some of them. Mehmet spoke of what happened after he went to a party and drank for the first and last time. He got drunk and passed out. His friends were worried and thought he was going to die. He also remembered everything, and how happy he felt. He was pleased to have lived through such an experience, but not to go through it again. Zeynep (Iran), who was socially uncomfortable in her own country, was the only participant who described being pleased about improving socially. Three of the 8 MEGS (all had their spouses with them) talked of being pleased with their social life in the U.S. Khaled (Kuwait) said:

I want to have my own autonomy. I want to live on my own; do whatever I want...I'm not really looking forward to [socializing] because I'm not trying

to get involved or getting closer to people...I'm not really interested in having this kind of life.

At times, MEGS described being conflicted during their transitions. They were pleased but dissatisfied; or they were intimidated but determined to succeed.

Emotional conflicts like these never seemed to sway them from their determination to do the best they could.

Homesick.

The fourth theme, *homesick*, refers to the emotions of participants who miss their families. Half of the participants reported being sad about not being with family. Homesick MEGS wanted to contact their family more often. They got emotional when thinking about family, and even tried to imagine past events with their family to cope. Even Zeynep (Iran), who thought spending time with her family was a “waste of her time,” when she was in her home country, started feeling homesick during the first six months of her transition. Some had extreme thoughts such as saying that being in a host country was like “being in an open air prison” (Esso, Turkey). Homesickness was one of the hardest things, which they faced, but because of their determination, none said they were thinking of going back before they had finished with their graduate degree. The idea of going back without reaching their goal was wholly unacceptable. They knew their family would be disappointed. However, Belal (Iraq) had a very difficult time dealing

with homesickness:

Everyone said you are going to [get used to it] in six months. You are going to forget your country, or you are going to start missing them less in six months. Six months [has] passed and nothing has changed. [The feelings have not] changed even a little. I miss them the same amount....It was very hard for the first month especially. The second month [I got used to it]. I had no other option [but to get use to it]...It's a new thing. I have to live with it; I don't know how to cope with it but I have to live with it.

Their determination helped them cope with homesickness. Most MEGS also communicated with their family on a regular basis via cellphones, e-mails, or video-chat. This also made it easier to manage homesickness.

Lonely.

The fifth theme, *lonely*, refers to how these MEGS describe their social and academic environments due to not being able to establish friendships in the host country. All of the participants were accustomed to establishing long-term friendships in their undergraduate studies without any difficulties. This was expected to be the case when they transitioned to the U.S. However, they soon found after arrival that this would not be the situation. MEGS spoke of not knowing various cultural and social rules such as acceptable ways of making introductions, establishing relationships, and the lack of social interaction between

classmates. In general, MEGS thought people in the U.S. seemed to have different expectations for “friendships” than they did. Mehmet explained:

Friends are much different...you make a friend for only one semester or only a year. They don't last. A lot of times it's only based on certain things: certain interests in that person's mind. He thinks, “I want to have this friend just because of that. Just because he's good in this class, I want to be his friend.” It's a one semester deal. It's like a business contract. And I don't like it...But in general, friends are not really friends...If you have a friend, don't rely on him much unless they're really close and don't expect them to last.

The MEGS, who were here with their spouses or found a local significant other, preferred not to take part in social activities since they typically shared only the company of each other. MEGS here alone described being “very isolated,” according to Belal (Iraq), who also stated, “I could get used to it. I didn't feel...hurt, or have to talk to somebody, because [I was] busy with studying at the same time. So there is something to [keep me busy].” Some MEGS said they did not have much time to socialize. In spite of the intense cultural loneliness, they were able to cope because they formed their own social support group by getting in touch with people from their own country. MEGS also typically espoused how overjoyed they were to be in the U.S. Esso (Turkey) said, “Overall, I am sure I am happy to be here, but I miss my family, my husband. But I am happy to be here.”

They further stated how advantages from this transition would be of benefit by developing and improving their knowledge, skills and world-views.

Changed.

The sixth theme, *changed*, refers to how the social and academic transitions to graduate school made participants change both personally and professionally. MEGS described being enabled to raise their awareness of how they were changing as individuals. This theme also resulted from family members recognizing the positive change in the participants.

Half of the MEGS commented on how they had changed personally. Some spoke about how their world-views on issues, such as dating before marriage, drinking, and even their own culture, had changed for the better. All of the MEGS described how as a result of this transition they were “maturing like [at] no other time” (Leo, Lebanon). After reflecting on their academic and social transition experiences, MEGS realized how they had become more self-confident over time:

I have [a lot of] responsibility [here], so I can survive in my country. I know all the responsibilities. I don't need anybody to help me. I can do anything. I can go everywhere...I do not [feel] very surprised or very proud. But I am more self-confident. In the face of hardships, I now can say, “I can do that, it doesn't matter for me” (Eso, Turkey).

Some MEGS also talked about how family and friends at home could see the

positive change: “Once, when I talked to my friend through Skype, she told me, ‘You really changed, you are talking with more self-confidence.’ It was good for me to hear that” (Zeynep, Iran).

In summary, MEGS described being proud by both living in the host country and knowing they were honoring their family’s wishes. However, they also described being overwhelmed by having to go through the tasks of gaining independence and managing to take care of themselves in a foreign country. MEGS were conflicted, but were determined to succeed because they knew how much better it would be for them in the long run. With the support from their family members, they were able to overcome most all of their obstacles. At times, MEGS became homesick and alone, but their determination to succeed, and then return home to better their country, enabled them to cope with the transition. They also stated that their families recognized the positive changes had made them more mature as a result of this transition experience.

While the MEGS were experiencing their transition into the U.S., they were developing strategies to deal with various academic and social challenges. Apart from personal coping strategies, they also had various external support systems to rely upon for assistance. In the next section, findings are presented which relate to how these students dealt with their academic and social transition into graduate school.

Results about How MEGS Described Adapting To Graduate School in the U.S.

In this part, findings are presented which are related to the third research question: How did Middle Eastern graduate students describe adapting to graduate school in the U.S.? Five themes emerged: (a) consulted others, (b) observed then acted, (c) relied on self, (d) became involved, and (e) sought out resources of support. Table 5 is a presentation of the data analysis iterations that resulted in these five themes.

Consulted Others.

The first theme, *consulted others*, refers to MEGS trusting and consulting their parents, friends, faculty, staff members, and student counselors at the university. As previously mentioned, participants had been living with their family before this transition. Generally, before making important life changing decisions, such as transitioning to the U.S., most of the participants talked to their parents. The participants stated that even though it was difficult to see their children leave home, most parents encouraged them to pursue foreign graduate degrees. In their host country, these MEGS also consulted friends and staff members about meeting their basic (domestic) needs. For example, they consulted staff members about issues relating to settling in the local area. Staff members arranged for cohort members to pick them up from the airport, show them around town, help them get

Table 5

Code Mapping for How MEGS Described Adapting to Graduate School in the U.S.

RQ3. How did Middle Eastern graduate students describe adapting to graduate school in the U.S.?

Third Iteration: Data Application	
<p>MEGS described adapting to their academic and social transition to graduate school in the U.S. in various ways. They got support from a variety of sources. For example, from their family and faculty, staff, and cohort members at the university. Students discussed the importance of finding people from the Middle East who would help them settle in. Few students reported negative experiences with advisors, so they sought assistance from other international graduate students, too. They do not hesitate to seek help from counselors or other professionals when they cannot cope with issues they are facing.</p>	
Second Iteration: Themes	
A. Consulted others	D. Became involved
B. Observed then acted	E. Sought out resources of support
C. Relied on self	
First Iteration: Initial Codes/ Surface Content Analysis	
A1. Getting advice	D4. Easier to communicate and understand each other's expectations
A2. Coping with stress	D5. Be friends with people from other cultures
A3. Share experiences	D6. Foreigners had better understanding of me
A4. Listen and learn from others	D7. Be selective
A5. Seek professional help	D8. Become friends with couples
B1. Observing classroom behavior	E1. <u>In their home country:</u>
B2. Observing social interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From family: encouragement, survival skills
B3. Observing cultural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From government: scholarships
C1. Rely on yourself	E2. <u>In the host country:</u>
C2. Do not hesitate to seek assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From U.S. university: financial support : TA / RA position, orientation to new environment
D1. Join social groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From professors: assignments, TA responsibilities, writing paper
D2. Join spiritual groups	
D3. Be friends with people from your country	
DATA	DATA
DATA	DATA

Note. To be read from bottom up.

oriented, and find their way around the campus. Some also billeted MEGS for a period of time until they could find a place of their own. MEGS consulted faculty members when they had questions about academic requirements. Zeynep (Iran) consulted her professor when she had a conflict with one of her classmates. In some cases, MEGS did not hesitate to consult professional help when they were overwhelmed and thought they could not cope with all the responsibilities in their academic and social environment. For example, Zeynep (Iran) also talked about why she needed to see a counselor:

[This transition experience] was too much for me; suddenly coming to here. Everything is different. I have anxiety. I used to take pills. I used to go to the counselors and someone was helping me. There were lots of things out of my control. It was too much for me, so I went and got help from the counselors.

In their home country, these MEGS relied on their parents for all their basic needs. They only had to study and get good grades, or if they were employed, do well at their jobs. However, the type of support from their family changed considerably when the MEGS transitioned to the U.S. Since distance now separated them, familial support evolved into one of discussion and mentoring with the purpose of relieving anxiety which the MEGS might now be experiencing. Most participants talked about finding sources of support ranging from faculty,

student counselors, and even mental health professionals.

Observed then Acted.

The second theme, *observed then acted*, refers to how MEGS try to understand all the events, which they are experiencing in their academic and social environments. They described wanting to be like other students. No participants received formal cultural awareness training prior to arrival in the U.S. However, they did at least get casual introductions to America before their transition either from friends and family, who had previously been there, or even from the movies and television. Half of the participants used the strategy of *observe then act* to better understand and make meaning of (a) classroom interactions, (b) social interactions, and (c) cultural issues. On the first day of class due to curiosity, consider how Belal (Iraq) preferred to observe everything around him instead of focusing on the lecture:

When I use something [at first] I feel [awkward]. But after that, I get used to it...Like when I [had] a class for the [first] time, I didn't listen to the professor [during] my first lecture. I just looked around the place...[It was] the first time in my life in the USA... So I wanted to see how it [was] happening. Both of my courses were nearly the same. I also took a view of how the social life is in the class.

Some MEGS spoke of trying various things, even though their family and

friends advised against them, such as drinking, going to bars, and dating Americans after observing them in the environment. Zeynep (Iran) even described herself as “wild” when she first came to the U.S. because she wanted to try some of the freedoms found in her host country. MEGS were observant during daily life. They made assumptions about American culture by reflecting on what they saw. Since they were not provided with any official training, they used observe then act as one of the strategies to understand their host country’s culture. They also discussed what they saw with members of their host culture when the opportunity arose. For example, Esso (Turkey) thought Americans did not “care about their family or friends” as she observed an old couple one day at a bank without anyone around to help them and reflected:

Maybe, they don't have any children to help them. But if they have children...they would help them. In my country, you [the elderly] don't go anywhere without your children even if you are very healthy. This couple was going to the bank together. I was very sad...I thought of my grandmother and my grandfather. My father [wouldn't have] permitted them to go by themselves to the bank.

Since the participants described the culture of the host country as so markedly foreign, they were always noticing these differences. Close observation and curiosity enabled them to learn about the new culture.

Relied on Self.

The third theme, *relied on self*, refers to how MEGS took charge and tried to find solutions to either problems or questions on their own. They prefer to solve the problems on their own because they want to prove to themselves that they can do it alone. MEGS thought initially asking for help would be taking the easy way out. Therefore, they insisted on trying to find a solution to any problem first.

Mehmet (Palestine Authority) explained:

If I face a problem, I always find a solution. And that's why I tell everyone, "Don't rely on your professor; do it yourself first. And if you have determination for finding a solution to a problem, you will find it with or without [their] help."

This is also connected to their need to prove themselves to their faculty and family. Only after trying and doing their best to find the answer, do they go and seek assistance from faculty members. Belal (Iraq) was proud to give an example of figuring out how to use a difficult computer program after two days without assistance:

So I [spent] two days, not doing anything but just studying the program for plotting. I reached a point [which is] more than normal, [I'm not] a pro but now I can plot anything; I can do things in the plot [most students can't]. So I plotted the same thing in a very professional way, with different curves, [in

a] very detailed plot. And I sent [it] back to the professor and I said "[see] now I can plot it now, after studying [the program]".

MEGS were self-reliant for the most part and thought they should handle a task first on their own. They needed to work and find a solution by themselves.

However, if after the initial effort, they still were not successful, then they were willing to consult others, such as faculty members or even other international students.

Became Involved.

The fourth theme, *became involved*, refers to how MEGS described the task of making friends in their academic and social environments. To them, getting involved encompassed either membership in social groups or taking part in social programs organized by the academic department. When MEGS learned about these activities, and had the time, they made an effort to attend.

Before making the transition to the U.S., all but one of the participants had active social lives. Most expected to find the same type of social life in the host country. However, once they arrived in the U.S at the small college town, they understood this would not be the case. As a result, they developed strategies to be more social. One was getting involved in academic and social activities. Some students tried to schedule their attendance of "social events arranged for students by the Graduate School" (Belal, Iraq). A couple of participants became members

of spiritual groups, which they found with the help of staff in their departments.

Another way to become involved was trying to find people from their own country. The main reason for this was how most of the MEGS expected to find “people caring about each other [in] the same way” (Mehmet, Palestine Authority) as they had cared for friends in their home country. Therefore, they preferred to socialize with people whom they could understand. The majority of MEGS stressed the importance of trying to either meet, find, or contact people from their country who were currently in the Mid-west U.S. as Esso (Turkey) stated:

You feel...more comfortable when sharing your feelings with someone from your country. I always say that because if you share your feelings with [people who are from] other nationalities, you have to [use English] and think in English. Maybe [this prevents] you [from] explaining exactly [what you mean]. So maybe that's why we want to meet each week with people from [our] country.

Having people from their home country in their academic, or social environment, was important since it was easier to communicate and understand each other's expectations. Those MEGS, who made the transition to the U.S. as a group, rented apartments in the same complex so they could live near their friends.

Most of the MEGS expected to be as social with their classmates as they were in their home countries. As a result, they tried to become involved with

students in their class; however, when they tried interacting they thought they “were not welcome” (Belal, Iraq). Mehmet (Palestine Authority) further explained:

Making friendships [here] is socially challenging and to me it seems to be impossible [in the U.S.]... I found that having friendships with people from other cultures, not the U.S. will probably do... I just felt foreigners had a better understanding of me. Our cultures have more commonalities than American culture. We don't have different expectations of each other. I mean I did try to interact with Americans, but I felt that Americans are not very serious [in terms of their education] as...foreigners [are].

In such an academic and social environment, MEGS decided to be selective when choosing friends. Some even pointed out preferring to stay away from Arabs because they “come here, are not serious about school, they come from Saudi Arabia, and they have tons of money...so they don't really care” (Mehmet, Palestine Authority). MEGS, who had brought their spouses with them, wanted to find couples so both could socialize together. Diba (Turkey), who was married to an American, tended to befriend her spouse's friends and socialize with them.

MEGS described wanting to have friends and interact with host nationals in an unstructured, non-familial environment, which is why they wanted to become involved in various organized academic and social activities. However, they faced

some difficulties from not knowing how to act in a host-culturally acceptable way that made them prefer people from their own culture.

Sought out Resources of Support.

The fifth theme, *sought out resources of support*, refers to the entity from whom the support originated, and the kind of support provided. In their home country, MEGS received academic support from family members to a limited extent. However, their family still provided emotional support once they moved to the U.S. Upon arrival, MEGS were provided academic support by staff, faculty, cohort members, and other international students at the Mid-western university.

When the participants were in their home country, family members encouraged them to consider obtaining a graduate degree from the U.S. since they knew there would be better economic opportunities upon their return. Due to the importance of obtaining foreign higher education, Middle Eastern governments also encouraged and supported high achieving students with scholarship opportunities. Khaled (Kuwait) explained:

There are many [government scholarships], because all the country supports...higher education. [The government] provides scholarship benefits through universities, schools. They push people to get a better degree from a different country.

Most of the participant's (e.g. 7 of 8) family members encouraged them to either apply for government scholarships or ask the U.S. university about TA / RA positions. The home government scholarship provided financial support for the duration of their graduate degrees. However, it also required them to serve their country upon getting their graduate degrees. Serdar (Iraq) explained:

If I want to study for 3 years in my Master's degree, one year for the language, and two for the Master's degree, I should serve my country for six years. For a PhD [of] 5 years, I should [serve] for 10 years.

Once these scholarship students had been identified, Middle Eastern governments also provided support by arranging information and training sessions on the application and enrollment process.

In the host country, MEGS obtaining financial aid and receiving an assistantship, were also provided support from their department's faculty. They were also pleasantly surprised about the very supportive relationship between the TA / RA and the sponsoring faculty member. It was reassuring to them that most of these faculty did not have unreasonably high expectations, and provided a lot of guidance and feedback on the tasks which MEGS were expected to accomplish.

MEGS were also provided support by family and friends as they were preparing for their transition to the U.S. During the last week before MEGS left for the U.S., most family members were sad, but were trying not to show it. Esso

(Turkey) talked about being treated like a “queen:” “They [my family and friends] did everything. My mother cooked my favorite food. My husband’s mother made a lot of food too.” Family members also tried to teach MEGS, who had never lived on their own, basic domestic survival skills like cooking and cleaning.

If they had extended family or friends living in the U.S., these people came to the small college town and helped them settle. If they had neither of these for support, they would have academic departmental staff, faculty, and cohort members, who would help them settle. Zeynep (Iran) explained:

We didn't know anyone here. We have some relatives in U.S. but no one around the mid-west. So I tried to contact my classmates and ask them for help. And they were really helpful. Two of them came and took us from the airport. We stayed in one classmate’s apartment for three days and nights. He helped me do everything, like making a bank account and everything, renting an apartment, and buying stuff and everything.

They also found staff members at their departments and the international center to be “nice” and willing to provide assistance from Internet links to on-line information, on-the-spot orientation when they arrived, and even helped them find their classes. MEGS mostly found their U.S. faculty members supportive, encouraging, and approachable, but there were always exceptions. When neither understanding the material nor how to complete a task, they would have no

problems making arrangements to meet with their professors for assistance. However, they first had to try to execute the task themselves, before seeking assistance. Study participants preferred individual interaction with their faculty members since they perceived in-class questions as making them appear incompetent to other classmates. Once a faculty member met with them on a one-to-one basis and explained the task, these MEGS successfully completed the assignment. Even though MEGS normally had no problem approaching faculty members for help, they were still more reluctant to ask their own academic advisors for assistance. Mehmet (Palestine Authority) explained a negative experience:

I think [advisors] are less helpful...They expect you to know a lot of things. You're a graduate student, and you're just expected to know most things. And a lot of times, you go and ask them and they say, "Well, you're supposed to know that." Or they say, "You should have taken that in the pre-requisite class"...But they're not really willing to show you the concept or the basic, they just tell you, "I can't tell you that" and that's about it.

As a result, he decided not to go and ask for assistance from his advisor, but sought the support of his international classmates. Half of the MEGS also preferred to approach their international classmates when they did not understand a topic.

Khaled (Kuwait) worked with another international student who enrolled in the program at the same time as he did:

There's an international student from Sri Lanka who got accepted at the same time as I did. We are very close. We share new information together. We try to do projects together. We try to help each other because we're struggling at the same time. We are in the same situation. That's why we're trying to help each other to move on, trying to push each other once in a while.

In conclusion, these MEGS used a variety of strategies to cope with the academic and social transition issues. They relied upon themselves initially when faced with difficulty and sought assistance when they could not resolve the issue. Answers came to them from family, friends, staff members, faculty, and professional counselors. They also wanted to make friendships like the ones at home, so they tried to become involved in academic and social events.

In this chapter, findings related to three distinct areas on how these 8 MEGS experienced the transition were presented. First, MEGS described the transition to their social and academic environment at the U.S. graduate school by comparing it to their previous educational experiences in their home countries. They also discussed various challenges, experiencing role changes, and stress. Second, findings were presented relating to how MEGS accomplished this transition. Along

the way, they were proud, and yet sometimes overwhelmed by inner conflicts like homesickness and loneliness. Finally, their adaptation to the U.S. graduate school environment was presented by describing how they made use of socio-cultural coping mechanisms and strategies: consulting others, observe then act, relied on self, and getting involved. They also got accustomed to their new environment with the support of various people like their family, faculty, staff, and cohort members at the university. In the next chapter, a discussion of the research findings and conclusions are presented.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Conclusion

A discussion of the researcher's answers to research questions is presented in this chapter. This is followed by a review of how the findings for these eight MEGS compare to previous research. Next, there is a discussion on how the findings might influence future practice, research, and policy. Finally, the study's limitations and a conclusion are stated.

There were three research questions posed to explore MEGS transition experiences into graduate school in the U.S. The first research question investigated how they described their academic and social environments. The MEGS in this study described their academic and social environments by focusing on the differences, challenges, role changes, and sources of stress encountered, and comparing them with what the higher education was like in their home country. They described academic differences in education systems, relationships among faculty, staff, classmates, and themselves. As for their social environment, MEGS described a social condition where they experienced isolation due to cultural and linguistic differences.

In general, these MEGS described academic differences as they related to classroom interaction: The majority of male MEGS discussed not being educated in a co-educational institution, and having little, or no, interaction with women in

an academic environment. Participants also described four main social differences. First, these MEGS had been living with their close-knit, extended families until they came to the U.S. even though all were between the ages of 23 and 33. This is noteworthy since their U.S. counterparts left home as early as 18 years old to attend college as undergraduates as opposed to study participants who departed from home at 23 to even as late as 33 years of age. Second, all the MEGS in this study were Muslims; therefore, they could neither consume pork nor products containing it. While describing their social environments, MEGS stated how they would need to ensure their food did not have any pork in it, and how uncomfortable this made them feel at social gatherings, when this was on the menu. Third, MEGS described preferring not to interact with host nationals outside of the academic environment. After initially trying to socialize, they came across some culturally unacceptable issues so rather than interacting, they regularly sought opportunities to socialize with people from their own country, or other international students, who might feel equally alone. Finally, the most distinctive social element described was just how naive MEGS were when it came to their expectations for having the same level of social support as they did in their home countries. They further admitted to not realizing how important social interaction and support systems could be during this transition, and how this happened only after coming to the U.S.

Overall, MEGS described several challenges in their academic and social environments due to language difficulties. For example, they discussed having difficulty understanding spoken and written English, and how difficult it was for them to write academic papers in English. They went on to describe challenges related to various role changes like how hard it was for them to get used to living on their own or even with a roommate. Participants also commented on how many more responsibilities there were, and how difficult it was to meet all the requirements of their new roles as lone graduate students in a foreign country. Another issue was their perception of host nation students as being “reserved” towards them. MEGS were used to having their best, or “real”, friends in class and socializing with them at the end of the day in their home country; however, they found this not to be the case in the U.S. Another challenge was cultural misunderstanding due to inadequate knowledge of typical western social concepts. For example, they had a different understanding of sexual harassment, which was essentially unknown, since teachers, instructors, and professors in their home country were treated as “father figures” who were expected to mentor in the same way as a parent might. However, the major reason for this lack of understanding seemed to originate from not receiving much introductory cultural input at the beginning of the semester. Without actually knowing beforehand who or what was

available to assist them, MEGS were mostly unprepared and felt even more isolated as a result.

Another challenge faced by some of the MEGS in this study was how some sponsors during training in their home country would deliberately misinform them about extreme challenges to over-prepare them emotionally. This created even more anxiety for the MEGS who thought they would be summarily dismissed upon the first instance of any infractions. An additional challenge was how most MEGS had *only* received an offer letter from the single Mid-west university in this study even though they had applied to multiple U.S. higher educational institutions. When some of their academic expectations were not met, they felt “strange” and “forced to obey” the university’s academic plan of study as a result. In general, they were determined to succeed one-way-or-the-other, and could not return home if the only issue was the university not meeting their personal academic expectations. These MEGS were strongly nationalistic; determined to obtain their degrees; and then return to contribute positively to their country’s economic development. It was an issue of personal honor to their families as well. Failure to do so was incomprehensible and made some MEGS feel great anxiety about it.

The aim of the second research question was to investigate how MEGS experienced their academic and social transition into a graduate school in the U.S. Themes were derived from commonalities arising from simultaneous, parallel

applications of the comprehensive model, literature, and interview data. The first result discovered was how MEGS experienced their academic and social transitions by making their families proud and instilling confidence through their acceptance into a U.S. graduate school. A second was experiencing the feeling of being overwhelmed by academic challenges and social responsibilities. A third finding was how MEGS also experienced homesickness, loneliness, and ambivalence toward being in the U.S. A final finding was, how MEGS, who were accompanied by their significant other, were pleased with their social lives. They felt emotionally free enough to do what was desirable of them and not have to socialize with other host nationals, if this was not their preference. On the other hand, single MEGS wanted to experience different cultural elements at least once, and also would have liked to interact with host nationals, but were generally unhappy about their social life.

Overall, MEGS at this Mid-western university experienced various conflicts regarding their transition. At times, they were pleased with the campus climate and the diversity within the faculty and students. However, male MEGS in particular were intimidated when they realized they would be interacting with female faculty and classmates since they had never been in a co-educational environment before. Furthermore, as the semester progressed, MEGS started experiencing intimidation when they realized just how much work their faculty and advisors expected them

to do. Even though they initially thought faculty were pretty relaxed, they soon changed their minds about this. MEGS also experienced a need to change their research interests due to the sudden, supposedly unforeseen, non-availability of their desired faculty member, and lack of valid research options. However, since they had not received acceptance from any other U.S. university due to their low TOEFL scores, those experiencing such a disappointment were forced to follow their advisor's suggestions. Furthermore, they experienced social life in the host nation by being selective when making friends and they preferred to interact with people from their own culture and their own country. However, three also commented on avoiding people from Saudi Arabia since they saw these students to be less serious in pursuing their graduate studies.

The third research question was how MEGS adapted to graduate school in the U.S. A major concern was being able to pay for graduate school. After obtaining funding, they were generally able to make the transition to graduate study. These MEGS had distinctive strategies and support systems so they could successfully adapt to some degree. One of their most important strategies was consulting others. They received assistance from university counselors or professional psychologists, when they could not cope with stressful events while adjusting to their new environments. As for strategies to improve their social status, some of the participants planned to get more involved in either social

groups or programs organized by the graduate school. Having enough time to take part in such activities was an issue; however, they were aware that experiencing the host nation's culture was crucial to their adapting successfully. As a result, they made time to participate in hopes of interacting with Americans because they were here to be educated on both academic and cultural issues, which would lessen their anxiety during the transition process. This was important for all MEGS because these experiences could teach them how to interact and work with host nationals in their home country.

The participants of this study were also distinct in the types and sources of support, which they sought. In general, these MEGS were self-reliant and tried to solve problems on their own. However, when they could not find a solution, they approached other international graduate students first when they needed clarification or explanation instead of seeking an advisor's assistance. In the area of social moral support, these MEGS also preferred advice from other international graduate students in either their academic or social environment. However, they did not object to getting professional help if the issue was emotionally too much for them to handle on their own. They willingly sought assistance from experts to help them solve their problems.

Limitations

As with any study, there are inherent limitations. An initial limitation was the difficulty in finding volunteers for the study. Asking participants to commit to three different interviews - each lasting from an hour to 90 minutes - could explain the limited number of volunteers who came forward. It also might have been simpler to find willing participants if compensation had been offered to prospective participants.

A second issue might be a limited sample set. This study focused on a group of eight MEGS from only one institution: a public, Mid-western, research university in the U.S. There might have been other factors to consider if the researcher incorporated participants from a wider variety of institutional types, i.e. private, rather than public, universities.

Another limitation could have been a result of the researcher's personal characteristics and past history. As a MEG, my experiences with transition likely influenced how I collected and analyzed the data. Additionally, the student participants may have viewed me as a representative of the university and framed their responses accordingly.

A final limitation could have been caused by basing the findings solely on self-reported data from the participants. I had no other method but interviews to collect data.

If other types of data were collected and analyzed different findings could have been obtained.

Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research

This study expands upon what is known about MEGS in the U.S. As illustrated in chapter 2, there is a myriad of information on transitions of the college-aged student (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Laanan, 2006; Lester, 2006; Townsend, 1995). A number of theories on traditional college-aged student transition experiences have been developed and then used to research U.S. student transitions to university life (Chickering, 1969; Taylor, 1994; Tinto, 1987). Some researchers suggest these could be applicable to the international graduate student population as well (Andrade, 2008; Tukono, 2004). Researchers have also developed models that investigate adaptation of international students to their new academic and social environments (Bartram & Terano, 2011; Lee, 2010). The researcher made use of a comprehensive model with ideas from existing, relevant theories on student transition experiences and those more specific to adaptation of international students within the higher educational setting like Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994), Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1993), and Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986) with Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Model. Schlossberg's model

was used as a framework for the study to explore MEGS' transition experiences since it provided a multidimensional lens to view how these students experience the transition. The literature on MEGS is limited so putting these theories together in a cross-cutting comprehensive model let the researcher more completely explore how selected MEGS experienced the transition to the host country. Current research was also used to fully explore the academic and social transition experiences of MEGS.

Schlosberg et al.'s 4 S Transition Theory (1995) was used as a framework to guide the research. Its constructs - the 4 S's: *situation*, *self*, *strategy*, and *support*, helped identify interview questions that were used to explore MEGS transition experiences through different lenses. The first construct, *situation*, helped to reveal information related to how MEGS described the social and academic environment (RQ1). The second construct, *self*, helped reveal information related to how MEGS experience this transition (RQ2). The third and fourth constructs, *strategy* and *support*, helped reveal information related to how MEGS adapted to the new academic and social environment (RQ3).

Apart from the framework, various elements in the comprehensive transition model enabled the researcher to explore fully MEGS' transition experiences. For instance, Taylor's (1994) first component, *setting the stage*, enabled the researcher to explore how an individual's prior experience from inter-cultural experiences

influenced their learning process. Before coming to the Mid-western university, MEGS had discussed the situation with relatives or friends who had either been educated at this university or had studied at other U.S. universities. Since using the strategy of consulting others, participants found out that the Mid-western university provided high quality education, had well-known professors in subject areas interesting to them, and was located in a relatively safe part of the U.S. MEGS chose the Mid-western graduate school because of their encouraging discussions with people who had attended the Mid-western university, acquaintances knowing of satisfying situations for those who had, and most typically, highly positive information (such as the yearly rankings from *U.S. News and World Report*) which was readily available about the university on the internet.

These MEGS were similar to other foreign students because they knew U.S. higher educational institutions provided a high quality education. However, MEGS were different from other international students in that they all considered the ranking of the university and financial support as the most important factors while deciding which university to attend. This mirrors Sirivastava et al.'s (2010) findings where they conducted an online survey to determine what influenced international graduates to apply to a certain school. They surveyed 558 international engineering graduate students and alumni. Of these, there were 43 MEGS who “gave equal importance to...being accepted into the program and

funding support as the major concerns before being accepted to a school” (p.1563). Therefore, 13.38% of the MEGS in that study had a research assistantship, and 10% had scholarships from their host university (Sirivastava, 2010). For MEGS in this study, the national ranking of the school was the biggest influence, followed by financial support for graduate study. If either one was missing, they would not apply to the school.

Once MEGS arrived at the Mid-west campus, they saw how different the academic and social environment was when compared to the situation in their home country. This finding also mirrored a study carried out by Poyrazli and Grahame’s (2007). They studied international students and found that they were more in need of support during their initial transition to overcome the challenges related to their academic lives, social interactions, health, and transportation. They concluded that the institution played a significant role in finding and implementing the resources needed to help international students have a successful adjustment experience.

The participants in this study also described various challenges on how to function in a U.S. classroom and navigate the U.S. education system. This result confirmed Andrade’s (2008) findings, which recommended international students might need additional information on how to navigate the U.S. education system. Being given information about the U.S. higher education system would enable

MEGS to make more informed choices regarding courses related to their major, and also allow for an easier adjustment time to their academic environment.

These MEGS also needed to become more competent in English language and develop competencies in the host nation's culture. Improving their English language skills would reduce the occurrence for various cultural misunderstandings and diminish some of the stress caused by their academic and social challenges. Cultural issues training would show them how to function in their new environment so they could feel better about their social and academic transition experiences.

The comprehensive model that I used in this study also included various elements of Chickering's (1969) model to explore the academic experiences for MEGS. I found that the first five vectors might be critical to understanding academic experiences during the transition into a U.S. graduate school in the Midwest. The first vector, *developing competencies*, could be used to identify how successful these students were in developing academic competencies. The findings indicate how MEGS needed extra assistance in understanding the academic requirements and carrying out skills like analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge. Their learning styles are different as the education systems in their home countries were generally based on memorization and rote learning. They also had a different understanding of what constituted academic honesty so faculty need

to provide more structured input, clearly explain assignment requirements, and clarify how not to plagiarize. Students might use office hours for this as they would rather ask such questions when they are not in class so as not to lose “face” due to either their perceived language inabilities or lack of knowledge. These findings also mirror Andrade’s (2008) findings that recommend international students need more support in language and cultural issues.

Chickering’s (1969) second vector, *managing emotions*, included information about how traditional college aged students needed to better manage their emotions. Andrade (2008) found that international students have a bigger challenge with this in an unfamiliar environment and cultural setting. The findings in this study mirror Andrade’s (2008) on how MEGS seemed to find managing emotions more challenging when compared to traditional aged college students. As they faced a number of stressful situations, they found managing emotions could be difficult. They experienced being overwhelmed by trying to carry out all their new responsibilities. In such cases, MEGS in this study applied reflective behavior (Taylor, 1996) when the event was in the academic environment. They would tend to be more reflective and try to understand how to overcome the issue by making use of several of Taylor’s (1996) behavioral learning strategies like observe then act and active participation. These MEGS also experienced homesickness and loneliness at times. They coped with such feelings by immersing themselves in

their studies, consulting others, or contacting family members in their home country with the help of technology – calling, e-mailing, or having video calls. However, if MEGS found it difficult to cope with such experiences and thought they could not adapt, they did not hesitate to seek further assistance. If they needed support on assignments or exams, they preferred to use the faculty member's office hours to clarify and fully understand the requirements of the assignment instead of asking for clarification during class. If MEGS did not use office hours for this purpose, they would try to gain insight from the test and exam questions, or they would consult another international graduate student. Participants were not reluctant to seek assistance when they felt unable to cope with social pressures either. They use strategies such as consulting others throughout their lives, so they saw no harm in consulting either university counselors or professional psychologists, if required. This finding is in line with Yi, Lin, and Kishimoto's (2003) study on the use of counseling services by international students, which found more than half of the international students using the counseling services had self-referred. This finding also mirrors the action of MEGS in this study. However, it contradicts Heggins and Jackson (2003), who looked at Asian students in the U.S., and found how informal social networks were important for this population since they were uncomfortable using university support services when

problems arose. These students typically lacked trust in the professional avenues of help available to them.

Chickering's (1969) third vector, *developing autonomy*, focused on how traditional college-aged students needed to develop the ability to collaborate with others. The MEGS in the researcher's study, when faced with a problem, initially tended to work on the problem by themselves. After finding a solution, they would share their knowledge with others. Participants of this study were willing to work in groups *only after* they had understood the issue and then completed the task. When they did not understand the material, some even preferred consulting other international graduate students after they initially worked on the issues, and tried to figure it out on their own, instead of asking for assistance from academic advisors. This was contrary to the research of Schutz and Richards (2003) research that discussed the importance of developing international student collaboration and teamwork skills.

These MEGS also reported how U.S. graduate students were reluctant when it came to working with them, which supports the findings of Andrade (2008) and Lee and Rice (2007). These researchers also investigated the challenges of international students when they went to the U.S. Students in these two studies discussed experiencing discomfort in classrooms where they felt either ignored in

lessons or excluded by other students. This result supported the researchers' findings on how MEGS also experienced such discomfort.

The fourth vector, *developing mature interpersonal relationships*, involved “(a) tolerance and appreciation of differences and (b) capacity for intimacy” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p. 48). This study's researcher found that MEGS were able to tolerate and respect the values of their U.S. counterparts, but criticized them a lot when they got together with other international students. When MEGS observed disagreeable social behavior among Americans, they might remove themselves from within that specific society. Study findings also supported Andrade (2008) where MEGS needed to negotiate a network of new interpersonal relationships. Other MEGS, who had their spouses with them, had to assist their spouses with adjustment while simultaneously trying to establish productive relationships with peers and faculty members.

Chickering's fifth vector is *establishing identity*. Even though MEGS in this study were adults, and older than traditional college-aged students, some of them initially did not have established identities. While going through transition, they were able to learn more about themselves and their culture. All of the MEGS in this study were determined to succeed. They all stated how they had changed in one way or another, and became more “mature” and “self-confident.” This is also consistent with one of the three elements in Taylor's (1994) last stage, *evolving*

cultural identity: improved self-confidence. While MEGS did gain more self-confidence, this study's findings showed they held tightly onto their cultural heritage. This mirrors the finding of Seo's (2005) study, which examined older Korean graduate students in the U.S. and found they would not let go of their cultural background while going through the transition. MEGS held onto their cultural heritage as well, and might have done so because most had the nationalistic aim of returning to help their country develop and improve.

Chickering's (1969) sixth vector, *developing purpose*, was of no concern for the four MEGS with scholarships since they had jobs waiting for them upon their graduation and return home. The others also had a purpose in coming to the U.S. to get a high quality education to obtain a high-paying job, which they could be proud to have. Most of the MEGS were determined to return home and would easily find a job since they would be in high demand.

Elements of Furnham and Bochner's model (1986) were also used in the comprehensive transition model, and enabled the researcher to identify the social transition experiences for MEGS. The findings of this study also followed the second stage, *cultural disequilibrium*, of Taylor's model (1996). MEGS mostly experienced "culture shock" when not properly oriented to their new environment since they were not aware of the need to be trained on the host nation's culture. Because specific research on MEGS was not available, the administrators at the

Mid-western university did not fully realize these particular students might have also needed additional training on cultural issues in spite of their apparent age and maturity as graduate students. MEGS, who were on campus at the beginning of the academic year, had been through an orientation program; however, cultural issues were not presented. Other sessions from their departments did not include this either. Since they needed an understanding of the host nation's culture for their graduate education to be ultimately successful, MEGS actively used the adaptive strategy of "getting involved" to take part in social events provided either by the graduate school or their departments. Most of their experiences mirrored Andrade's (2008) findings, which suggested graduate international students should actively explore and experience differences between cultures. They wanted to experience everything "at least once", and after having done so, found supposedly "social" activities, such as alcohol consumption to the point of inebriation, contradicted either their religious beliefs or were seen as culturally unacceptable behavior. As a result, MEGS preferred to opt out of things such as the "drinking culture" of the collegiate environment.

Another model used in this study was Tinto's (1993) Theory of Doctoral Persistence, which defines how graduate student persistence was influenced by "the personal and intellectual interactions that occur within and between students and faculty and the various communities that comprise the academic and social

systems of the institution” (p. 231). Tinto’s (1993) work was used to identify how MEGS experienced their transition into the academic and social environments and determine what type of support had been obtained. MEGS in this study described being provided with the same type of support as other foreign students by faculty and staff members in their departments and the international center. MEGS felt surprised at how “nice” they were treated, and this made them experience a sense of belonging to a limited extent. They also liked having meetings outside of class with faculty members when needed. This reflects the findings from current research by Maton et al. (2011) who carried out a web-based survey of 1,219 graduate students in Ph.D. or Psychology Doctoral programs comprised of African American, Latin American, Asian American, and European American students to investigate graduate student satisfaction. They found mentoring to be the strongest predictor of satisfaction across groups. MEGS in this study, who were pursuing their Ph.D., also discussed the importance of mentoring and sense of satisfaction from knowing this was part of their program. However, some MEGS also spoke of being discouraged by the unexpectedly poor treatment received from their mentors. This is also consistent with the findings of another more recent study from Mamiseishvili (2012), who considered academic and social integration of undergraduate international students enrolled in two-year colleges and four-year institutions. Mamiseishvili (2012) found that faculty members and academic

advisors played a crucial role in the first-to-second year persistence of international students at two-year colleges. Frequent meetings with academic advisors and interactions with faculty members were associated with a higher likelihood of persistence for international students attending four-year institutions.

In the U.S., these MEGS found the most support from international students from their own countries and actively sought these people out. They were highly interested in becoming members of student clubs with people from their home nation as long as they could meet their academic and Teaching Assistant / Research Assistant responsibilities. This finding also mirrors earlier research on minority students. Attinasi (1989) found that Mexican American students developed strategies to navigate the physical, social, and academic environments. Two categories described the strategies developed by Mexican American students: “getting to know” and “scaling down” (Attinasi, 1989). One aspect of “getting to know” was mentoring, or finding other students already at the university to serve as guides. A second strategy of “getting to know” was defined as “peer knowledge sharing.” This strategy involved sharing information with other new students to navigate the different geographies. These MEGS also made use of the same strategies especially during the early stages of their transition, which was why finding peer international student peers was so important.

Participants were also selective in their social interactions since there were conflicting opinions on friendship and culture when compared to host nationals. Deil-Amen's (2011) study, where 125 international students enrolled in two-year colleges, reported that in-classroom experiences and interactions were the source of not only academic, but social integration, as well. However, this finding does contradict the study results for MEGS. Maybe MEGS were looking for classroom situations, which were the same as ones in two-year colleges that were similar to what they had in their home nation's education system. However, Middle Eastern students in this study were at graduate level, enrolled in a four-year university with different modes of classroom interaction, which made socializing challenging.

This finding supports the work of Rajapaksa and Dundes (2003), who investigated whether students coming to the U.S. from abroad had greater difficulty adjusting to college life than U.S. students. They compared the adjustment of 182 international college students studying in the U.S. to a sample of American college students and found the concept of social network satisfaction closely related to successful adjustment among international students. The researcher's findings showed that MEGS would benefit greatly from improved social network opportunities in a similar way.

Lee and Ray (1987) found that most international students intended to stay in the host country after graduation. In this study, MEGS were mostly determined

to return to their home countries. This was due to the conditions of their scholarships along with their having a nationalistic viewpoint and a desire to contribute to the development of their home country.

Implications for Future Practice, Research and Policy

The researcher carrying out this phenomenological study explored Middle Eastern graduate student academic and social experiences of MEGS while they were transitioning into an American university in the Mid-west. This was accomplished using a comprehensive transition model incorporating Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) 4 S Transition Model with others of the same subject matter. Consequently, themes relating to the 4S's (Schlossberg, 1995) were identified.

Implications for Future Practice

Student affairs administrators and faculty members could make use of the findings of this study to improve recruiting, orientation, retention and the study experience for both undergraduate and graduate students from the Middle East. Knowledge of the transition experiences of these Middle Eastern students could assist student affairs and academic administrators and faculty in providing realistic information during recruiting activities on what students should expect before and after they arrive at their campuses. Once students have enrolled, administrators and faculty members could create and provide comprehensive orientation programs to

help MEGS integrate into the locale, college community and the academic department, and thus potentially improve retention.

Use of the results of this study by student affairs administrators and faculty members might benefit future MEGS since they could have a better understanding of what might be encountered when pursuing their degrees in the U.S. In addition, with an appropriate orientation, MEGS could set their personal expectations more in line with the realities of graduate studies. Current American graduate students, student affairs administrators, and faculty members could use the findings of this study to better understand cultural challenges of transitioning from the Middle East to America.

College administrators could consider another type of support to MEGS with orientation containing important local information on such items as housing and transportation. Because Middle Eastern families are typically hierarchical (with respect to gender and age), they communicate orally in a top down fashion all the time (Moghadam, 2003). Taking this into account, spoken presentations would be better than handouts with little or no accompanying verbal explanation. Housing is especially important because these MEGS did not typically prefer campus residence halls, so off-campus housing information would be of great benefit. This session could also contain information on domestic issues like how to open a bank account (i.e. difference between a credit and debit card); public safety concerns

(i.e. crime-ridden areas to avoid); and transportation (i.e. public bus schedules and on/off-campus traffic laws for personal cars and bikes). This last item is important since the study's participants wanted their own personal cars so as to neither depend on public transportation nor friends (as is the common practice in their own countries). These MEGS preferred to live independently and not be a burden to friends.

Student affairs administrators and faculty members could also consider providing MEGS, and other international students, cultural training opportunities on campus. This could be in the form of a first-year seminar for all foreign students. More specifically, these seminars could focus on social and cultural issues such as how to interact with people and how to deal with cultural situations. For instance, even discussing the meaning of “a smile” from a friendly host national female student, who is only acknowledging another peer on campus, is especially important for Middle Eastern men so as to avoid the potential for the occurrence of an unwanted event, which might be construed as sexual-harassment.

All MEGS in this study described coming from a stricter formal educational system where they needed to respect the instructor, who was seen as the “all-knower” and the “authority” figure. Most might expect the same in the U.S. Taking this into account, college administrators might provide information on the grading system, course selection, class schedules, course professors, the classroom

environment, and the course numbering system. Additionally, the first year seminar could also have a component where these students are required to do classroom observations and then write reflective papers on their experiences. This would provide MEGS a chance to initially observe classes and see how students and professors interact. When they write their reflective essays, MEGS would have to process what they observed, and express what they saw and learned from their experience as a result.

MEGS also typically had limited work experience so information could be given to those with teaching assistant or research assistant positions on how to manage their time to meet all their academic and professional responsibilities. This training could also include a section on the stress of being a student and an employee, and how they could deal with conflicts that might arise in a culturally appropriate way.

College administrators and faculty members could use the findings from this research when MEGS are in their cohorts by integrating discussion topics about Middle Eastern and American culture, educational system, and social life into their curriculum. They could also be encouraged to use MEGS' previous academic and professional experiences, and could also share these with their host nation classmates. This would enable faculty members and existing resident graduate students to better understand and accept Middle Eastern culture. This could

possibly decrease the transition challenges that MEGS currently experience when they come to a country where the cultural differences are so great. Therefore, incorporating materials on cultural issues (i.e. sexual harassment) related to both host and MEGS cultures could result in better awareness of students' backgrounds, and what challenges are faced due to the differences between their previous socio-educational environments and their new ones. This, in turn, could aid college administrators, faculty members, and student peers to better understand MEGS' backgrounds and foster a smoother transition.

These MEGS lived with their families until just before coming to the U.S. As a result, there was not a lot of experience with taking on responsibility, individuality, and even independence, before the transition to U.S. graduate study. However, they were eager to experience their newly found freedom in the same way that traditional aged college freshmen would when they moved away from home. Therefore, college administrators could possibly view MEGS as first-year undergraduates and provide them with the same type of support. Even though MEGS are typically older, they still need guidance regarding their new academic and social environment. Initially, college administrators could assign an academically successful, yet socially mature, peer mentor to MEGS so they have a point of contact for questions and concerns. This would be important during the first few weeks of the MEGS' transition phase.

When these MEGS transitioned from their secure, supportive environment and moved to the U.S., most were made to feel welcome. During their first couple of weeks, there were people to provide support such as cohort members, professors, staff members, extended family in the U.S. and even people from their own country currently living in the Mid-western city. However, since they no longer had their family's support and guidance, this study showed how MEGS were more likely to seek out people from their home culture when they needed assistance. As a result, the best way to support MEGS, and enable their smooth transition, might be to create a critical mass of highly visible supportive people from familiar cultures to help with this transition. MEGS could also be provided with opportunities to interact and meet other Middle Eastern students in the academic and social environment.

Implications for Research

This study begins to fill the gap in the literature on MEGS' experiences during their transition from their home country to their host country. A researcher could continue this study by conducting further interviews with MEGS in only one department to see if their transition experiences at specific departments are the same, instead of multiple departments, as was done in this study. This study also focused on a large research university in the Mid-west. Future studies could be

conducted across different institution types to determine if the transition experience differs by the type or size of the institution that the student is attending.

Furthermore, this study did not focus on the MEGS gender. Other researchers could look at transition experiences based on gender to identify unique gender based transition issues. Finally, the transition experiences among married and single MEGS might also be thoroughly assessed since this is also an important cultural support framework within their family units.

Additional studies to identify specific academic and nonacademic support strategies for MEGS could be carried out. This could lead to identifying their relative importance to graduate student experiences and their relationship to a MEGS' personal satisfaction. Further research to identify qualitative aspects of how to enrich an international student's social network could be completed. Further investigation into what international students are experiencing could contribute to their social network and allow development of programs which could have significant positive impacts during their stays in the U.S. and encourage more MEGS to apply to U.S. higher education institutions.

Implications for Policy

Higher education institutions, where TOEFL scores lower than 500 are acceptable, could have policies for requiring international students to take additional English language support (ELSP) classes. This would enable students to

improve their English skills and feel more comfortable in their academic and social environments.

Guidelines concerning teaching and working with international students could be articulated for college administrators, student affairs personnel, and faculty to make them aware of their responsibility for providing a welcoming environment for international students. These guidelines could state, for example, that MEGS may have different perceptions of the faculty-student relationship, could respond differently than American students in certain academic situations, and may incorrectly feel that authority figures are above reproach.

MEGS, as well as other international students, should also be made aware of intercultural issues that they are likely to find in the host nation's socio-academic environment. Students could be made more aware of the available policies, which state the type of support available and where to obtain it. More emphasis could be put on informing international students of avenues of support, and redress, should they encounter unfairness or threatening situations.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study adds to the research on MEGS. It provides a description of how some MEGS experience the transition. The findings revealed that MEGS could experience the transition to graduate school in the U.S. in some ways which are similar to other foreign students (Andrade, 2008; Poyrazli

& Grahame's, 2007; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Seo, 2005). It sheds light on cultural issues that MEGS must develop strategies to handle. These MEGS did face challenges and personal adjustment issues, but they moved through many of the same individual developmental tasks that other foreign graduate students have, and successfully navigated academic transitions. They needed support and guidance while they were navigating the socio-academic environment during their transition.

These results provide valuable insight into the experiences of MEGS. The findings show that these MEGS will have a successful transition if sufficiently supported by faculty, peers, and family. A successful transition is more likely to create higher retention and graduation rates of this population from U.S. universities to which they are accepted.

In closing, this paper presented a phenomenological study to describe the "lived" experiences of eight full-time MEGS. Themes, as presented in Table 2, describe what MEGS' transition experiences were like. The results of this study could be used by students, administrators, and faculty members to better understand the experiences of these MEGS, to develop policies and programs aimed at reducing attrition and improving retention of this group.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A: Letter to University of Missouri's Graduate School Dean

November 30, 2009

Dear Dr. Justice;

I am writing to ask for your assistance in carrying out research for my PhD dissertation. I have been working as an Assistant Instructor at the University of Missouri's Intensive English Program for the past three months. Prior to relocating to Columbia, MO I was living in Virginia where I started my PhD studies at Virginia Tech. I have successfully completed all the necessary course work and am at the final stages of my dissertation. I passed my prospectus exam and have written the first three chapters of my dissertation. I am considered ABD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a focus on Higher Education. I now need to carry out my research, collect data, and write up my findings in the last three chapters. The University of Missouri's IRB and the Virginia Tech's IRB have granted approval for me to carry out my research. I plan to investigate the transition experiences MEGS have during their first year of study at an American University. Therefore, I am writing to ask if you would be interested in assisting me in finding volunteers for my PhD research.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain an understanding of how MEGS experience the transition from their home to the host culture. The conceptual framework used in this study will be a comprehensive transition model that focuses on the individual, the environment and the experiences of the person going through the transition. This model incorporates Schlossberg et al.'s 4S Transition Model (1995) with main ideas from Chickering's Vectors of Adult Development (1969), Furnham and Bochner's Social Skills and Culture Learning Model (1986), Tinto's Theory of Doctoral Persistence (1987), and Taylor's Cultural Learning Model (1994). The following questions will guide my research:

- How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe the academic and social environment* in which they find themselves? (situation)
- How do Middle Eastern graduate students *experience the academic and social transition* to graduate school in the U.S.? (self)
- How do Middle Eastern graduate students *describe adapting to* graduate school in the U.S.? (strategy and support)

In order to answer these three research questions I will apply Seidman's (2006) three in-depth interview approach to understand the experiences of other people and what it means to them. This approach is accomplished with three consecutive interviews for each participant. The first aims to identify the participant's life history to provide the context of each participant's experience. The second one details the individual's current experiences as they relate to the topic of study. The third interview lets the participant express the meaning of his, or her, experiences. Volunteers will be asked to participate in three, up to 90 minute interviews with me at a location of their choice here in Columbia, MO. In total, the time commitment is not expected to be longer than four-and-a-half hours. During the study, participants may skip any questions they feel they do not wish to answer. However, I would appreciate them answering all of the interview questions because I feel that each question is relevant to understanding the experiences of MEGS. I will be audio recording the interviews and taking notes during the interview so that I do not miss any important information you provide. Participants will be able to read the transcriptions of the interviews to make sure I represented their views accurately. Participants will not be identified by name in the written paper, or in any report or publication resulting from this study.

The sample will include up to 12 MEGS who are enrolled in a U.S. University. Participants will describe their experiences during a series of three in-depth interviews that will continue until data saturation is achieved. All information provided by the participants will be combined and findings from this study will be shared in my dissertation. These findings may prove to be a valuable resource for graduate students, faculty, and administrators. The findings of this study will enable me to describe the essence of the transition experiences of MEGS. These findings will appear as two manuscripts, one focusing on the transition experiences and the other on the type of expectations MEGS had initially, whether these have been met or not, and possible suggestions on what the universities could do to better meet their expectations.

I believe having your support will allow me to be able to attract the best volunteers for my research. I hope to find volunteers that can share their experiences and those of other MEGS that will help me to describe the first year experiences of graduate students from the Middle East. My findings could be used to help MEGS transition from their home culture to their host culture. It could also be used to find better ways to attract and retain MEGS to your institution. Knowing their experiences and their expectations could assist the University of Missouri's Graduate school to provide the even more support for this group. If you would like

more information concerning this study please feel free to contact me via e-mail at marshf@missouri.edu or via telephone my cell number is (573) 355-6641.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this request. Please let me know if you would like to meet to further discuss this request.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Fulya A. Marsh

Appendix B: Call for Volunteers

Are you a graduate student from the Middle East? Would you like to share your stories about coming to the U.S. and adjusting to your life here?

Volunteers are needed to participate in a qualitative study a Ph.D. candidate is conducting to investigate the transition experiences of MEGS who came to America to pursue their graduate studies in a post-9/11 Era.

1. Are you a graduate student enrolled at the University of Missouri?
2. Are you from one of the Middle Eastern countries listed below?

Bahrain, Cyprus, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

3. Would you be interested in sharing your transition experiences?

If you answered Yes to these questions then please contact Fulya A. Marsh (marshf@missouri.edu) for more information.

Thanks very much in being interested in my research. I look forward to discussing it further. Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience for more information.

Appendix C: Participant Letter

Dear Volunteer:

October 12, 2009

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in taking part in my study, which is designed to better understand the experiences MEGS have during their first year of study. I believe that your experiences and those of other MEGS will help me to describe the first year experiences of graduate students from the Middle East. My findings could be used to help MEGS transition from their home culture to their host culture.

The study consists of three phases. You will be asked to participate in three, up to 90 minute interviews with me at a location of your choice here in Columbia, MO. In total, the time commitment is not expected to be longer than four-and-a-half hours. During the study, you may skip any questions you feel you do not wish to answer. However, I would appreciate you answering all of the interview questions because I feel that each question is relevant to understanding the experiences of MEGS. I will be audio recording the interviews and taking notes during the interview so that I do not miss any important information you provide. You will be able to read the transcriptions of the interviews to make sure I represented your views accurately. You will not be identified by name in the written paper, or in any report or publication resulting from this study.

The final decision about whether to participate in this study is yours. All information provided by the participants will be combined and findings from this study will be shared in my dissertation. These findings may prove to be a valuable resource for graduate students, faculty, and administrators.

If you would like more information concerning this study to help with your decision about participating, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at marshf@missouri.edu. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received approval by the Institutional Review Boards at University of Missouri and Virginia Tech. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact me at marshf@missouri.edu.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this request. Please indicate your willingness to participate and how I can get in touch with you in your response e-mail.

Thank you, Fulya A. Marsh

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Virginia Tech

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Transition Experiences of Middle Eastern Graduate Students in the U.S.

Investigator: Fulya A. Marsh.

I. Purpose of the Research.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students. The participants of this study are of different age groups, genders, and programs of study. Each participant is from a Middle Eastern country and has decided to carry out their graduate work at a University in the U.S. It is the goal of the investigator to identify common themes among participants involving their transition experiences. This information can potentially be used by universities to improve the transition experiences of other Middle Eastern graduate students entering American graduate schools and decrease attrition in graduate programs.

II. Procedures

Participants will meet face to face with the investigator for three interviews that will last from an hour to 90 minute each at a location of their choice in Columbia, MO. Interviews will be audio-recorded using interview questions composed by the researcher _____. Prior to the interview, participants will be given the opportunity read and sign the consent form. Before the interviews the consent form will be discussed and any questions participants have will be clarified. Interviews will be conducted on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia, MO at a mutually convenient place.

III. Risks

I understand that this study may potentially evoke emotions related to my transition from my home country in the Middle East to the host country and

graduate life in the U.S. I can choose not to answer certain questions or describe certain events. If I need professional services as a result of the questions asked, I will not hold the researcher and university responsible for providing me with these services.

IV. Benefits

I understand that this study could benefit administrators and faculty members at colleges and universities seeking to improve their graduate programs by providing them essential information on the successes and challenges Middle Eastern graduate students face when they decide to pursue their studies at a U.S. university. I also understand that my responses could improve the transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students coming to the U.S. to pursue their graduate education in the future.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

I understand that the investigator in this study will make every effort to protect my confidentiality as a participant. My name, the name of the institution I attend, and any other identifier will be altered to further this goal. The investigator will make every effort to ensure that all information that can be used to specifically identify me will be divulged from this study. Only the researcher, the chair, and the committee members will have access to the data collected in this study. After all reports regarding the study are completed, all audio-recordings audit logs, and any excel sheets used to record data from the interviews will be destroyed.

It is possible that the IRB's at Virginia Tech and the University of Missouri may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

I am free to withdraw from this study at any time. I may answer or choose not to answer any of the questions in this study.

VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the responsibility of answering questions truthfully and to the best of my knowledge.

IX. Participant's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Subject Signature

Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, I may contact:

Investigator:

Fulya A, Marsh
Graduate Student
Virginia Tech
marshf@missouri.edu

David M. Moore
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
moored@vt.edu

Steven M. Janosik
Chair, Associate Professor &
HED Program Coordinator
Educational Leadership and
Policy Studies Director,
sjanosik@vt.edu

Charles Borduin,
Campus IRB Chair, University of Missouri
Institutional Review Board Compliance
Officer
[borduin@missouri.edu](mailto:borduinc@missouri.edu)

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form for University of Missouri

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI
CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

INVESTIGATOR'S NAME: FULYA A. MARSH

PROJECT # 1151897

DATE OF PROJECT APPROVAL:

FOR HS IRB USE ONLY
APPROVED

HS IRB Authorized Representative
Date
EXPIRATION DATE:

STUDY TITLE: THE TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE EASTERN GRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE U.S.

INTRODUCTION

This consent may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

This is a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to participate. As a study participant you have the right to know about the procedures that will be used in this research study so that you can make the decision whether or not to participate. The information presented here is simply an effort to make you better informed so that you may give or withhold your consent to participate in this research study.

Please take your time to make your decision and discuss it with your family and friends.

You are being asked to take part in this study because you ARE A MIDDLE EASTERN GRADUATE STUDENT WHO CAME TO THE U.S. TO PURSUE GRADUATE STUDIES IN A U.S. UNIVERSITY.

In order to participate in this study, it will be necessary to give your written consent.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this study is to is to gain insight into the transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students. The participants of this study are of different age groups, genders, and programs of study. Each participant is from a Middle Eastern country and has decided to carry out their graduate work at a University in the U.S. It is the goal of the investigator to identify common themes among participants involving their transition experiences. This information can potentially be used by universities to improve the transition experiences of other Middle Eastern graduate students entering American graduate schools and decrease attrition in graduate programs.

This research is being done because currently there is no research on the transition experiences Middle Eastern Graduate students go through when they come to the U.S. to pursue graduate education.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

About 12 people will take part in this study at this institution.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE STUDY?

[You may provide simplified schema and/or calendar here.]

Participants will meet face to face with the investigator for three interviews that will last from an hour to 90 minute each at a location of their choice in Columbia, MO. Interviews will be audio-recorded using interview questions composed by the researcher _____. Prior to the interview, participants will be given the opportunity read and sign the consent form. Before the interviews the consent form will be discussed and any questions participants have will be clarified. Interviews will be conducted on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia, MO at a mutually convenient place.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

We think you will be in the study for about 2 months .

You can stop participating at any time. Your decision to withdraw from the study will not affect in any way your medical care and/or benefits.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

This study may potentially evoke emotions related to your transition from your home country in the Middle East to the host country and graduate life in the U.S. You can choose not to answer certain questions or describe certain events. If you need professional services as a result of the questions asked, you will not hold the researcher and university responsible for providing you with these services.

ARE THERE BENEFITS TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

This study could benefit administrators and faculty members at colleges and universities seeking to improve their graduate programs by providing them essential information on the successes and challenges Middle Eastern graduate students face when they decide to pursue their studies at a U.S. university. Your responses could improve the transition experiences of Middle Eastern graduate students coming to the U.S. to pursue their graduate education in the future

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?

An alternative is to not participate in this research study.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

The investigator in this study will make every effort to protect your confidentiality as a participant. Your name, the name of the institution you attend, and any other identifier will be altered to further this goal. The investigator will make every effort to ensure that all information that can be used to specifically identify you will be divulged from this study. Only the researcher, the chair, and the committee members will have access to the data collected in this study. After all reports regarding the study are completed, all audio-recordings audit logs, and any excel sheets used to record data from the interviews will be destroyed.

It is possible that the IRB's at Virginia Tech and the University of Missouri may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

It is possible that your medical and/or research record, including sensitive information and/or identifying information, may be inspected and/or copied by the study sponsor (and/or its agent), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), federal or state government agencies, or hospital accrediting agencies, in the course of carrying out their duties. If your record is inspected or copied by the study sponsor (and/or its agents), or by any of these agencies, the institution, clinic, hospital, etc. will use reasonable efforts to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your medical information.

The results of this study may be published in a medical book or journal or used for teaching purposes. However, your name or other identifying information will not be used in any publication or teaching materials without your specific permission.

In addition, if photographs, audiotapes or videotapes were taken during the study that could identify you, then you must give special written permission for their use. In that case, you will be given the opportunity to view or listen, as applicable, to the photographs, audiotapes or videotapes before you give your permission for their use if you so request.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

There is no cost for participation in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT IF I AM INJURED?

It is not the policy of the University of Missouri to compensate human subjects in the event the research results in injury. The University of Missouri, in fulfilling its public responsibility, has provided medical, professional and general liability insurance coverage for any injury in the event such injury is caused by the negligence of the University of Missouri, its faculty and staff. The University of Missouri also will provide, within the limitations of the laws of the State of Missouri, facilities and medical attention to subjects who suffer injuries while participating in the research projects of the University of Missouri. In the event you have suffered injury as the result of participation in this research program, you are to contact the Risk Management Officer, telephone number (573) 882-1181, at the Health Sciences Center, who can review the matter and provide further information. This statement is not to be construed as an admission of liability.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study. Your present or future care will not be affected should you choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind and drop out of the study at any time without affecting your present or future care in the institution. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. In addition, the investigator of this study may decide to end your participation in this study at any time after he/she has explained the reasons for doing so and has helped arrange for your continued care by your own doctor, if needed.

You will be informed of any significant new findings discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to continue participation in this study.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Health Sciences Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-3181

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact

Investigator:

Fulya A, Marsh
Graduate Student
Virginia Tech
marshf@missouri.edu
cell: (573) 355-6641

David M. Moore
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
moored@vt.edu

Advisor:

Steven M. Janosik
Chair, Associate Professor &
HED Program Coordinator
Educational Leadership and
Policy Studies Director,
sjanosik@vt.edu

Charles Borduin,
Campus IRB Chair, University of Missouri
Institutional Review Board Compliance
Officer
borduinc@missouri.edu

A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep.

SIGNATURE

I confirm that the purpose of the research, the study procedures, the possible risks and discomforts as well as potential benefits that I may experience have been explained to me. Alternatives to my participation in the study also have been discussed. I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below indicates my willingness to participate in this study.

Subject/Patient*

Date

SIGNATURE OF STUDY REPRESENTATIVE

I have explained the purpose of the research, the study procedures, identifying those that are investigational, the possible risks and discomforts as well as potential benefits and have answered questions regarding the study to the best of my ability.

Study Representative****

Date

****Study Representative is a person authorized to obtain consent. Per the policies of the University of Missouri Health Care, for any 'significant risk/treatment' study, the Study Representative must be a physician who is either the Principal or Co-Investigator. If the study is deemed either 'significant risk/non-treatment' or 'minimal risk,' the Study Representative may be a non-physician study investigator.

IF THE PATIENT IS INCOMPETENT TO GIVE CONSENT, COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING:

I, _____, hereby certify that I am
(Relationship to Patient)
of _____ and duly authorized to execute the foregoing.
(Name of Patient)

I consent to the research study, experimental treatment, test, drug, etc. as described in the attached consent form.

Legal Guardian/Patient Representative _____ Date _____

Study Representative* _____ Date _____

Witness (if required)** _____ Date _____

*Study Representative is a person authorized to obtain consent. Per the policies of the University of Missouri Health Care, for any 'significant risk/treatment' study, the study representative must be a physician who is either the Principal or Co-Investigator. If the study is deemed either 'significant risk/non-treatment' or 'minimal risk,' the study representative may be a non-physician study investigator.

**Regulations do not require the signature of a witness when the patient or patient's legally authorized representative is able to read and is capable of understanding the consent form document.

THE FOLLOWING REGULATION ONLY APPLIES WHEN AN ADULT PERSON, BECAUSE OF A MEDICAL CONDITION, IS TREATED AT A TEACHING HOSPITAL FOR A MEDICAL SCHOOL ACCREDITED BY THE AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION OR THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION AND SUCH PERSON IS INCAPABLE OF GIVING INFORMED CONSENT.

Persons authorized to consent when a patient is incapable of consenting to an experimental treatment, test or drug.

1. Legal guardian or
2. Attorney in fact (person appointed by durable power of attorney) or

3. A family member in the following order of priority:
 - a. Spouse unless the patient has no spouse, or is separated, or the spouse is physically or mentally incapable of giving consent, or the spouse's whereabouts is unknown or the spouse is overseas;
 - b. Adult child;
 - c. Parent;
 - d. Brother or sister;
 - e. Relative by blood or marriage.

Such legal guardian, attorney in fact, or family member is not authorized to consent to treatment in contravention to such incapacitated person's expressed permission regarding such treatment.

If the patient is competent to consent but cannot write, do not use this proxy consent form. Please contact the IRB for directions in this situation.

Appendix F: Interview Protocol for First Interview

First Interview: Setting the Context

Name: _____ Academic Program _____

Date: _____ Place of interview: _____

Time: _____

First, thank you for meeting with me today and for participating in this study. Is it okay to audio record this interview so I do not miss anything? You received a copy of the consent form. I would like to go through it and answer any questions you might have before we begin the interview. (After going through the form, ask the participants to sign it). Before we begin, I also want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

Part 1: Individual

Ethnicity: _____ Gender: _____ Age: _____

Highest degree earned: _____ English Proficiency level: _____

Type of work involved in, in home country: _____

Part 2: Environment

1. Tell me about your life back home.
 - i. Tell me about the people you interacted with / the places you went to /the things you did when you were back home.
 - ii. *If participants do not bring it up, prompt them to talk about the following things about their life in their home country their:*
 1. *academic life.*
 2. *social life.*
 3. *professional life.*
 4. *socio economic status in the society*
 - iii. Describe the roles you had when you were back home.

1. *Give example: spouse, parent, care taker of elderly parent.*
2. Tell me about graduate education in your country.
 - a. Why did you want to pursue graduate education?
 - i. Give example: better job opportunities, love of learning, change in careers
 - b. Why did you choose to pursue graduate education in the U.S.
 - i. Quality of education, government scholarship opportunity, friend & family recommendations
 - c. Why did you choose to study at the University of Missouri?
 - i. Friend recommendation, good ranking

Part 3: Experience

1. Tell me about how you made the decision to come to the U.S.
 - a. *What factors did you take into consideration while making your decision?*
 - b. *How was the timing of the move for you?*
 - c. *Was the move your decision?*
 - d. *Did you see this move as positive, negative or neutral?*
 - e. *Is it a permanent or temporary move?*
2. How did your family react when they heard your intentions of pursuing a graduate education in the U.S.?
 - a. How did you react to their reactions?
3. How did your friends react when they heard your intentions of pursuing a graduate education in the U.S.?
 - a. How did your react to their reactions?
4. How did your colleagues react when they heard your intentions of pursuing a graduate education in the U.S.?
 - a. How did your react to their reactions?
5. Describe the last week before leaving your country.

- a. How did your family treat you?
 - b. How did your friends treat you?
 - c. What were your feelings toward leaving?
6. List 5 of your social expectations before you came to the U.S.
 7. List 5 of your academic expectations before you came to the U.S.
 8. Tell me about the most memorable academic experience you had in your country.
 9. Tell me about the most memorable social experience you had in your country.
 10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

That brings us to the end of our interview. Thank you for talking with me today. The interview transcript will be emailed to you. Please review it to be sure it reflects what you intended to say and that all personally identifying information is masked. And remember, you are always free to email me if there are any areas that you would like to elaborate.

Appendix G: Interview Protocol for Second Interview

Second Interview: Identifying Details of Transition Experience

Name: _____

Date: _____

Place of interview: _____

Time: _____

First, thank you for meeting with me for a second interview and for participating in this study. I look forward to talking to you more about some of the things we discussed in our previous interview.

Is it still okay for me to audio record this interview so I do not miss anything? You signed the consent form for the interview previously; however, I want to go over it with you once again. Please initial here _____ if everything on the consent form is clear. I also want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

If this interview has been scheduled more than a week apart from the previous one, remind the participants about the content of the interview and what was discussed before proceeding. Remind the participant that the first interview focused on what their life back in their home country was like. And some points they brought up. Then proceed by telling them that this interview will focus on their life here in the U.S.

Part 1: Individual & Environment

1. Tell me about your academic life here in the U.S.

(if participant doesn't bring it up use the following questions:)

1. Describe what your typical week at school looks like.
 - a. Class schedule, assistantship,
 - b. Time they spend at the lab, library, studying.
 - c. How do you feel about your academic life?
 - d. Is there anything the university could do to support you so that you could have a better academic experience?

2. How integrated do you feel about the university community?
 - a. Your department? (are people friendly, approachable, intimidating, or threatening?)

2. Tell me about the most academically challenging thing you were faced with since you moved to the U.S.
 - a. What did you do overcome this challenge?
 - b. Did anyone help you overcome this challenge?
 - i. How did they help
3. Tell me about the most important academic success you've had since you arrived?
 - a. What did you do to reach this success?
 - b. Did anyone help you reach this success?
 - i. How did they help?
4. Tell me about your social life here in the U.S.
(if participant doesn't bring it up use the following questions:)
 - a. *Tell me about what you do to socialize.*
 - a. *Are you a member of any clubs?*
 - b. *Do you belong to any private organizations?*
 - b. *Do you do the same thing every week? Or are there weeks where you don't socialize?*
 - c. *How do you feel about your social life?*
 - d. *Is there anything the university could do to support you so that you could have a better social experience?*
 - e. *How integrated do you feel with the social environment?*
 - a. *Your neighbors?*
 - f. *Are you religiously affiliated?*
5. Tell me about the most socially challenging thing you were faced with since you moved to the U.S.
 - a. How did you overcome this challenge?
 - b. Did anyone help you overcome this challenge?
 - i. How did they help?
6. Tell me about the most important social success you've had since you arrived? ("Situation" / Social / R1)
 - a. What did you do to reach this success?
 - b. Did anyone help you reach this success?
 - i. How did they help?

Part 2: Experience

1. Describe your first days here.
 - a. What were your impressions of your new environment?
 - i. What did you think of the city?
 - ii. What did you think of your university?
 - iii. What did you think of the faculty?
 - b. What were your feelings?
 - i. How did you feel about the city?
 1. Please elaborate on why you think you felt like that.
 - ii. How did you feel about your university?
 1. Please elaborate on why you think you felt like that.
 - iii. How did you feel about the faculty?
 1. Please elaborate on why you think you felt like that.
 - c. What strategies did you use to survive?
2. Think about your personal relationships with people in your academic environment. Tell me about your relationships with:
 - a. colleagues
 - b. classmates
 - c. faculty members
3. Now I would like you to change gears and think about your personal relationships with people in your social environment. Tell me about your relationships with:
 - a. family
 - b. friends
 - c. neighbors.
4. Have you ever thought about leaving and going back home?
5. Tell me about your most memorable academic experience thus far at this university.
6. Tell me about your most memorable social experience thus far in this city.
7. Is there anything else you might want to tell me?

Thank you for talking with me today. The interview transcript will be emailed to you. Please review it to be sure it reflects what you intended to say and that all

personally identifying information is masked. And remember, you are always free to email if there are any areas that you would like to elaborate.

Appendix H: Interview Protocol for Third Interview

Third Interview: Determining the Meaning of the Transition Experience

Name: _____

Date: _____

Place of interview: _____

Time: _____

First, thank you for meeting with me for a third interview and for participating in this study. I look forward to talking to you more about some of the things we discussed in our previous interview.

Is it still okay for me to audio record this interview so I do not miss anything? You signed the consent form for the interview previously; however, I want to ask if you'd like me to go over it with you once again. Please initial here _____ if everything on the consent form is clear. I also want to remind you that your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time.

If this interview has been scheduled more than a week apart from the previous one, remind the participants about the content of the interview and what was discussed before proceeding. Remind the participant that the second interview focused on their life here in the U.S. and some points they brought up. Then proceed by telling them that this interview will focus on their future aspirations.

1. Considering what you have said about your life before you came to live in the U.S. (in our first interview) and given what you have said about your life as a graduate student (in our second interview). What sense does all this transition experience make to you?
2. What does it mean to you to be a graduate student at this university?
3. You have been studying at the University for ____ months now. Do you think your life is different from the type of life you used to lead back in your home country?
 - a. If so, how?
 - b. If not what has stayed the same?
4. Do you feel like you made the right choice? Why / Why not?

5. How satisfied are you with the universities efforts in helping you experience a smooth transition?
 - a. Is there anything the university could have done differently to help you have a more smooth experience?

6. In the first Interview you listed 5 of your academic expectations which were (list these so the participant could easily recall them)
 - a. Have these expectations been met?
 - b. Why / Why not?
 - c. What do you think could have been done so that your academic expectations were met?

7. In the first Interview you listed 5 of your social expectations which were (list these so the participant could easily recall them)
 - a. Have these expectations been met?
 - b. Why / Why not?
 - c. What do you think could have been done so that your social expectations were met?

8. Where do you see yourself in five years? (Encourage participant to elaborate on answer)

9. Is there anything else you might want to share with me?

Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today. It has been a pleasure getting to know you. The interview transcript will be emailed to you. Please review it to be sure it reflects what you intended to say and that all personally identifying information is masked. And remember, you are always free to email if there are any areas that you would like to elaborate.

Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter from Virginia Tech



VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail irb@vt.edu
Website: www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 12, 2011

TO: Steven M. Janosik, Fulya Marsh

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: The Transition Experiences of Middle Eastern Graduate Students in the U.S.

IRB NUMBER: 09-690

Effective October 23, 2011, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the continuation request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any change regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm> (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved as: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6, 7**

Protocol Approval Date: **10/23/2011 (protocol's initial approval date: 10/23/2009)**

Protocol Expiration Date: **10/22/2012**

Continuing Review Due Date*: **10/8/2012**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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Appendix J: IRB Approval Letter from University of Missouri



Campus Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia

485 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211-1150
PHONE: (573) 882-9585
FAX: (573) 884-0663

February 27, 2012

Principal Investigator: Marsh, Fulya Aydinalay
Department: International programs

Your Annual Exempt Research Certification to project entitled *The Transition Experiences of Middle Eastern Graduate Students in the U.S.* was reviewed and approved by the MU Campus Institutional Review Board according to terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	1151897
Initial Application Approval Date	November 19, 2009
Approval Date of this Review	February 27, 2012
IRB Expiration Date	February 27, 2013
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Closed - Data Analysis Only
Regulation	45 CFR 46.101b(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, serious adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All modifications must be IRB approved by submitting the Exempt Amendment prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Annual Exempt Certification Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped document informing subjects of the research and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eIRB.

If you have any questions, please contact the Campus IRB at 573-882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Borduin".

Charles Borduin, PhD
Campus IRB Chair

