

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Dr. Kostas Triantis for his help, patience, persistence and guidance. Dr. Triantis has been more than an Advisor. He has been a friend, philosopher and a guide. I consider myself extremely fortunate to have worked under him. I extend my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Barbara Hoopes, whose help has been invaluable throughout the duration of this project. I extend my gratitude to Prof. Ken Harmon for his support and encouragement. During the course of this long and tedious road, I have developed a special bond with all my committee members and earnestly hope that this association will continue in the years to come.

I would also like to thank the staff at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Graduate Center for making my stay so warm and memorable.

I wish to thank my parents and my sister for their continued support and faith. I would also like to express my appreciation to all my friends, Heather in particular, who have stood by me during hard times.

Finally, I owe my achievements to my parents and would like to dedicate this work to them for their unconditional love and support.