

UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATION OF VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS AND THEIR HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES
IN THE UNITED STATES

Randy Scott Miller, B.A., M.Div.

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APPROVED:

Ronald W. Newsom, Major Professor
Kathleen Whitson, Minor Professor
Bryan Stewart, Committee Member
Jan Holden, Chair of the Department of
Counseling and Higher Education
Jerry Thomas, Dean of the College of
Education
James D. Meernik, Acting Dean of the
Toulouse Graduate School

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This research describes what motivates Vietnamese students to come to the U.S. to study for a degree, what outcomes they expect, and what they experience academically and culturally while studying in the U.S. Currently the surge of international students from Vietnam has reached an all time high of 13,112 students to the U.S. This moves the relatively small South East Asian nation to the ranking of ninth among all nations for the number of international students sent to the U.S. In depth interviews were conducted fall semester 2011 with 11 students enrolled in two large public universities in the Dallas-Fort Worth-Denton Metro area. The participants were students from Vietnam holding J-1 or F-1 visas who were in their sophomore year or beyond. Interviews were conducted with these undergraduate and graduate students on the campus where each was enrolled. Interview transcripts were provided to participants for their review and comments. Ethnograph qualitative research software was used to analyze and code the data. These students reported that the increased number of students coming to study in the U.S. is because of the reputation of higher education in the U.S., relatives living in the U.S. who create a support system, and economic growth in Vietnam which has made education abroad more accessible. More students are coming to the U.S. for study because of the respect that these students families and friends have for the educational system and potential of opportunity that a U.S. degree brings. Meaningful relationships with other

students provide a better and broader educational experience for Vietnamese international students. Vietnamese international students desire not only gainful employment from their degree but also a balanced growth experience that includes friendships, immersion in the culture, and being responsible members of the host society. These students made strategic use of the community college to enhance their higher education experience. The findings indicate that universities and colleges interested in attracting students from Vietnam should forge partnerships between community colleges and universities and with local Vietnamese communities to promote recruitment, affordability, retention, and graduation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My introduction to Vietnam began in 1995 on a cross-cultural trip into Hanoi and north to the highlands in an attempt to study the musical diversity of the tribal ethnic minority groups in Vietnam. However, I became intrigued with what I saw developing in this third- world nation. The misconceptions that I had of the people were immense. I came believing that I would find a people who were angry with me as a US citizen for a war that had occurred in their country. The hotel I was staying in and would subsequently reside in within Hanoi was on the very property of the acclaimed “Hanoi Hilton” which housed famous US servicemen like John McCain and others. But what I found was very different. This was a people who had maintained their uniqueness among many foreign attempts to subject them. This was a people who had been fighting invaders for centuries. From their perspective, we as Americans were simply another invading power who had come to take something from the Vietnamese people. I gained great respect for this nation and people group on that first trip and subsequent opportunities to discover more about the people and history of Vietnam.

On other journeys into this diverse and beautiful country I studied their educational systems. Like the people, their education has been greatly influenced by different nations in the attempts to conquer and colonize this small, but potent nation and people. For centuries, the Chinese had been the most influential on the educational direction of the Vietnamese people. China has long been a larger and stronger older

brother to Vietnam, due to the geographical location. Yet, the resolute of the people of Vietnam would not be conquered by the strength and determination of China despite the centuries of attempts. Other invaders also came to Vietnam seeking to colonize and shape the educational system of the country; the French domination, the Japanese insurgency, and the French again, followed by “the American War.” All of these invasions brought with them influences into the systems of education upon the nation and people of Vietnam.

In 1980, a new movement began that was called the *doi moi* period or period of change. A new nation began to emerge after the abandonment of the American influence in 1975. Vietnam started seeking change of its own. A relationship with the world began to take shape and like their bigger communist counterpart, China, Vietnam was seeking to find her place in a changing global economy.

My journey into Vietnam intersected with much of this change that was taking place. I was witnessing a nation in the midst of transformation in the areas of economics, politics and education. I began to investigate further the impact of *doi moi* on the growing higher education system in Vietnam as it related to my own continuing education. The residual impact of the Chinese, French, Russian and American was evident in the systems of education. Northern Vietnam was heavily influenced by communist Russia through the country’s transition into communism during the 1950s. The American influence had arrived in Vietnam in the 1960s through community college systems in Southern Vietnam. This was soon interrupted by the Vietnamese-American War.

This was a nation that seemed to value the education of its people but appeared to be fragmented in how they would accomplish the task of educating a nation. The higher education system was schizophrenic because of the influences of the nations that had colonized Vietnam or nations that Vietnam had sought to emulate. There was an intense hunger for a system of education since the pathway toward growth and a value for learning had been instilled in this nation through Ho Chi Minh and many other great influencers imposed by the Chinese emperors in the very first established schools.

I had the opportunity in 2003 to participate with a US community college consortium that had formed to consult with the emerging community college system in Vietnam. The community college rectors in the Vietnamese higher education system were passionate about their developing country and the opportunities that foreign influence and partnerships could create. This group also spoke of a need for more interaction and development of students within the current higher education systems in Vietnam. This consortium noted that there also seemed to be many contributing factors hindering the growth of higher education in Vietnam. There was a hunger for more access to institutions within and outside Vietnam for this rapidly growing population of students within the country.

Key Educational Issues in Vietnam

As I visited a variety of higher education institutions within the country, I noticed several issues that seemed to be consistent throughout the system of higher education. The issues of access, job availability after degree completion, and organizational chaos

appeared to form a growing desire for change within the higher education system. The leaders of community colleges and politicians with whom I spoke seemed very open to coordination with businesses, educational institutions and governments of the world in order to improve and develop the Vietnamese system of higher education. These issues also form the basis for the hypothesis of why Vietnamese students would seek higher education outside their home country and what their experiences could benefit both the individual and the country?

Access was and continues to be a key issue that poses a problem in the educational system of Vietnam. The accessible public higher education system was overburdened with students and lack of proper facilities. Despite enormous growth in the available institutions, there simply were not enough available opportunities for students who desired higher education. Access was also limited by the rigorous examination that acted as a very tight sieve upon the students who sought higher education. This exam is restrictive in allowing students to achieve passage onto higher education within the country.

A second issue hindering growth is the limited number of jobs available for students upon graduation from a higher education institution. Many, if not most, students would exit with a degree in hand and would find themselves back with their families working the same subsistence level jobs they were working before achieving their degree in the first place. Ransom, Khoo, and Sevaratnam, (1993) state the absence of jobs reflect “the production of graduates whose skills and specializations do not reflect those needed in the labor market” (p. 1). This situation was the result in some cases due

to cultural traditions and infrastructure limitations which “cause students to study subjects, such as humanities and the arts, that offer limited job opportunities and lead to ‘educated employment’” (Task Force, 2000, p. 24). This inability to find more beneficial employment with the attainment of a degree would lead to discouragement and a lack of confidence that education was an answer to meet the needs of individuals and the country as a whole. This story would quickly pervade the educational process with an attitude that challenged the age-old notion that higher education would lead to success. Jobs seemed only available to those that had “connections” with the old regime and system.

A third force creating challenges for growth in the educational system was the hodge-podge of foreign investors and educational capital that saw Vietnam as a prime key resource of untapped opportunity. Therefore, there were ongoing attempts from foreign influence through the means of business, labor and education. The response was somewhat overwhelming as many factors and influencers have flooded into Vietnam. This country and her people have often shown that they are a productive and long-suffering group, despite outside influences. A large number of foreign partnerships that would often begin but seldom sustain work in Vietnam have created a chaotic mixture of influences resulting in an already complex appearing to lack a prime direction.

As an observer of the dynamic situation that was occurring in Vietnam, I began to ask many of the questions that I pose in this dissertation. Who will be the leaders and influencers of higher education in Vietnam in the future? Just as Ho Chi Minh once did, I believe it will be those who possess a vibrant nationalistic tie to their beloved country and

who seek to change the systems and processes from within the system. This then leads to a second question: who will educate these reformers and transformers and what will be their means of influence?

Given the factors underlying the evolution of the higher education in Vietnam discussed above, currently the surge of international students from Vietnam has reached an all time high of 13,112 students to the US. This moves this relatively small South East Asian nation to the ranking of ninth among all nations for the number of international students sent to the US. Of these students, 67.6% are seeking an undergraduate degree and 18.7% are in graduate studies. It is also interesting that Vietnam ranks second among all nations sending international students to community colleges within the US. (Open Doors, 2010). The number of international students sent to the US from Vietnam has risen an incredible 726.2% from 1998 to 2010 (Open Doors, 2010). During this same time the total number of international students from all countries rose 31%, which displays a significant rise in students from Vietnam compared to other nations.

Not to be overlooked is the incentive for the growing business of catering to international students and the opportunities for developing strong foreign relationships. A competitive market has emerged for higher education as a key export of the US. Vietnamese students have shown great interest in studying in the US, and we must seek to meet these educational needs if we are going to stay competitive in reaching them. International students also equate to a significant increase in economic growth for countries that become the destination for these students. This growth occurs in the direct investment in tuition and living costs to an amount of \$12 billion in Australia and \$15

billion in the US (Douglas and Edelstein, 2009). According to the Institute of International Education, more than 70% of undergraduate students pay full tuition and receive no financial aid, thus allowing schools to offer more financial assistance to American students (NAFSA, 2003). Educating international students also gives nations the influence to shape future world leaders and contributors to the global economy (NAFSA, 2003). This has been an objective of the US within Vietnam for some time. The US government hoped to train students from South Vietnam with an American-based education in order to combat Communism (Pham, 2002). Therefore, from the US perspective, the education of students is good business and sound foreign relations policy.

Over the past several years, there has been a remarkable increase in the number of Vietnamese students who seek higher education outside the confines of the tertiary systems within Vietnam. The UNESCO Report of 2006 on the outward bound mobility of students in tertiary education showed 15,817 students leaving Vietnam for study in other countries (UNESCO, 2006). A follow-up report in 2009 showed this number to have increased to 44,038 students, an increase of 178.4% (UNESCO, 2009). The US was the top choice of these students in both reports; 3,165 in 2006 and 12,612 in 2009 (UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO 2009). The Open Doors study of 2009 shows a remarkable 46.2 percent increase in undergraduate students from Vietnam which matches the previous year's number as well (Hvistendahl and Neelakantan 2009). Why are these students coming and what do they hope to achieve for themselves and for their country?

Klieger (2005) indicates that there is a gap in the literature concerning the evaluation of the experiences of international undergraduate experiences. One scholar

notes, “systematic information on why foreign students choose one institution over another is needed... there is very little information on what determines the institutional choices of foreign students” (Lambert, 1995, p. 26). Others have also commented on the lack of sufficient information: “one of the most important constraints to the development of effective responses is the scarcity of information useful for improved decision-making by policy-makers, institutional administrators, and staff and students” (Wagner and Schnitzer, 1991, p. 286).

Several studies have dealt with the growing group of international students’ perceptions of their US higher education experience, but very little research has been done on the segment of Vietnamese students. A literature search revealed that there were studies exploring the results of the adjustment pressure on cultural identity of Vietnamese American immigrants (Stevens and Phillips, 1990; Saito, 1999), or the adaptation of the Vietnamese students prior to 1975 (Pham, 2002) but not on the experiences of current international students of Vietnam (Huu, 2005). Information that continues to mine the data of students from different countries should be developed so that higher education can continually be more effective in reaching these students.

Extensive research on why Vietnamese students choose the US for their higher education and what their experiences are here has yielded only one scholarly publication (Do, 2005). Do’s study was completed when the number of Vietnamese international students numbered between “2500-2800” students (2005, p. 11). There have been similar studies done with a variety of international students from other Asian countries, Africa, the Caribbean, and Pakistan, but no studies could be found that dealt with the experiences

and expectations of Vietnamese international students (Douglas-Chicoye, 2007, Hamrick, 2007; Mwaura, 2008). Compared with students from other Asian countries whose adjustment to the American system of higher education has been the subject of numerous and careful studies, the adaptation of the rapidly growing group of international students from Vietnam has been largely neglected. Thus, the absence of qualitative data on the subject of Vietnamese international students encourages this study, which seeks answers to the following questions: what motivates students from Vietnam to seek higher education in the US, and what are their experiences while they are here?

Statement of the Problem

This study examines the motivation of Vietnamese international students and their reasons for choosing higher education within the US. It also investigates the outcomes these students expect, and what their experience has been in studying in the US.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to describe what motivates Vietnamese students to come to the US; the outcomes they expect; and their experiences while studying in the US.

Research Questions

1. What factors have motivated the Vietnamese international students to select higher education in the US?

2. What educational and professional outcomes do these students expect to achieve by studying in the US?
3. What are the academic and cultural experiences reported by Vietnamese students attending US higher educational institutions?
4. How have these student's perceptions of the US and Vietnam changed as a result of their higher education experience?

Definitions

Vietnamese international student – This study defines a Vietnamese student as a citizen of Vietnam who holds a J-1 or F1 visa for the purpose of studying for a higher education degree in the US.

Factors – This is something that the participant identifies as a motive or influence of their decision to come to the US to pursue a degree.

Academic experience- This is a self-reported experience by the participant in the context of the education they are seeking.

Cultural experience – This is a self-reported experience by the participant relating to their interaction with other students, in-campus activities and interaction within the community.

Perceptions-- This is a self-reported cognitive awareness by the participant from his or her experience which results in a comparison of the cultural norms of the US and Vietnam.

Delimitations of the Study

This study involves a limited amount of time spent with each individual participant allowing me to only see the perspective of each participant. The responses of participants are self-reports that indicate their understanding of their own higher education experience.

The number of students is a small purposeful sample so that the depth or “thickness” of the description can be assessed. This focuses the research on the activities and responses of this particular group and should not be generalized to all students who have come to study in the US from Vietnam

Although the participants are reflective of Vietnamese students studying in a large urban metropolitan area with multiple kinds of higher education institutions, this study cannot be generalized to all students who come from Vietnam to pursue higher education in the US.

Limitations of the Study

In a qualitative study, the researcher is the primary instrument of collecting and assessing the data. A limitation of this study is the fact that my perspective carries with it an inherent bias. The answers given to me by these students could also carry bias due to the fact that I am an American seeking insight from them, and their answers could reflect a desire to impress the researcher. I am also not Vietnamese, so there is the likelihood that I may not understand some verbal and non-verbal cues that are available from those participating.

The students have met the criteria of students selected or allowed to go abroad for higher education. This demonstrates an English proficiency enabling entrance into US higher education institutions and at least the minimum qualifications from the Vietnamese governmental perspective. This ability and drive may not be representative of all Vietnamese students seeking higher education. These students could be present in the US due to scholarships or key connections politically and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the population of all Vietnamese students.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Vietnamese Educational System and Its Influences

We are now a generation removed from first-hand experience with America's direct involvement of troops in Vietnam (1963-1975). As tensions ease between these countries, and intellectual interchange is developed, a general understanding of the history and future of higher education within Vietnam is needed. The goal of this discussion is to provide a brief history of higher education from 111 BC to the present, to highlight key changes that are taking place in higher education as a result of economic, educational and political transformation.

A Brief History of Higher Education in Vietnam

During the period of Chinese imperial domination in Vietnam; from 111 BC to AD 938, education was developed which centered on the sons of the ruling classes of Chinese society (Hac, 1995, p. 42) Education within this period was also offered to the highest classes of Vietnamese. The system of this period mirrored the Chinese system that provided primary education up to 15 years of age and higher education for those over 15 who were elite (1995).

The Chinese Imperial reign concluded with the battle of Bach Dant in AD 938, which ushered in a period of national independence characterized by

private education provided by Buddhist schools. By 1076, education came to be centered in Thang Long (Hanoi) where the sons of high dignitaries were schooled in moral development and training (1995, p. 43). In the subsequent Vietnamese dynasties, education was reserved for those in the administrative and ruling levels or “courts,” which was similar to the Chinese system of civil service examinations. It was in 1075 that the first competitive examinations were administered. These examinations continued to develop and eventually led to the establishment of the first rank of *tien sy* or doctor (1995, p. 44). This led to the progress of distinguishing levels of educational rankings based on the scores of the competitive examinations as Pham Minh Hac (1995) notes,

Trang nguyen, being the first rank doctorate and first laureate, *bang nhan*, being a first-rank doctorate and second laureate; *tham hoa*, being a first-rank doctorate and third laureate; and the remaining candidates who passed all four competitive examinations obtained the title of doctor, namely, *tien sy*. (p. 45).

Up to this time in the development of Vietnam, the written language was formed by Chinese characters that were spoken in a Vietnamese way. However, with the influence of Jesuit missionaries, a Romanized form of writing was introduced called *quoc ng* (Do, 1995, p 139). The French Navy soon followed and began the French colonization period (1850-1954). The education promoted by the French occupation was primarily to promote the development of interpreters and train provincial leaders and the Vietnamese system was eventually eradicated (Do, 1995). Thus, the continued growth of the Vietnamese system of education realized during the period of national independence was halted and significantly regressed. It was not until the early 20th century that a formalized system of education, including higher education, was introduced. According to Khe Ba Do, the motivating factor was to prevent a mass exodus of the people to other areas in

Southeast Asia such as Hong Kong or Japan (1995, p. 140). The introduction of the French system left the great majority of the Vietnamese without any education at all. The higher education that was made available was taught almost exclusively by French professors and was certainly not attainable by the masses of rural Vietnamese (Do, 1995). The French influence provided workers for France's economic machine, but left the masses uneducated and dependent on their foreign patron.

Following the World War II victory over the Japanese in 1944-45, the Vietnamese nation saw an extended period of attempting to gain independence. In 1945, the Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh declared:

An ignorant race is a weak one; we must launch the anti-illiteracy campaign to overcome the obstacle of having 95 percent of the population illiterate. At the same time we have to lay down as a policy, the educational reform and the construction of a people's democratic educational system by keeping three principles: that education be national, scientific and popular. (Nguyen, 1965, p. 2)

For the first time in over 1,950 years, the goal of education within the country was not for the proliferation of other cultures but for the increase in quality of life for the people of Vietnam. They had begun the long road of developing their educational system (Hac, 1995, p. 51).

The next phase of historical development of higher education in Vietnam was the period that included the civil war from 1955-1975. During this time of upheaval, education continued to suffer because of a lack of a unified country and educational system. The Soviet model of higher education influenced many schools because of the training being done in Soviet bloc countries (Nhungs, 2000, p 36). The history of Marxist leaders was added to the standard curriculum, as well as a tendency to direct students into

specific specializations needed by the Communist machine. Consequently, a dichotomy of education emerged between the French and Soviet models and competing systems slowed down the progress of the country as a whole. Additionally, the destruction of a complete generation was taking place. By 1956, 7 tertiary institutions had been established, most of them in or near Hanoi. By 1975 there were 30 institutions in the North and 15 in the South (Nhung, 2000, p. 54-55). Despite the obvious difficulty created by the war, Vietnam's education and literacy were growing. This trend continued to accelerate as the war ended and reunification took place.

Reunification (1975-1992) brought additional growth and change to the rapidly developing system. A new degree plan was initiated that divided higher education into two stages: the first two years were composed of fundamental study while the final two were more specialized. The main international model that continued in its development was the French model. Added to it was the influence of the US model of higher education (Nhung, 2000, p. 36). Higher education is was broken down into six areas: university and teacher training colleges; colleges of industrial and technological education; colleges of agriculture/forestry/fishery; colleges of economics and management; colleges of medicine and physical education; and colleges of art and culture (Hac, 1995, p. 58). The lack of a "true" university system allowing exchange of respective disciplines is a potential weakness.

Vietnam today is an emerging country seeking to better itself. Its people have endured many foreign occupations and influences upon its educational system. It is very difficult to discern between what is truly Vietnamese and what is a remaining influence

of all these amalgamated cultural and educational influences. Although a generation was nearly wiped out in the Vietnam/American War, there now emerges the burgeoning generation of the post-war children that are primed and ready for higher education. What is their future? What are the obstacles that they must overcome?

Higher Education in the Doi Moi Period of Renovation (1986-Present)

Doi moi literally means renovation. It stands for a movement of the Communist Party of Vietnam towards the pursuit of an open-market economy that maintains the principles of socialism (Can and Sloper, 1995, p. 3). What is driving this renovation? As with every economy it is predominately economic. Vietnam has fostered global relationships with a variety of countries and relief organizations. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) and the World Bank are two agencies that are assisting Vietnam in this renovation. Vietnam desires to be a player in the Southeast Asian economy and is learning how to play the game. In this section, the current transformation in higher education as a result of doi moi is reviewed, as well as some of the obstacles that these changes are creating. The privatization of many elements in higher education is one such transformation. However, higher education within any country does not occur in a vacuum. There are the other layers of education that provide the basis for tertiary education. These layers have experimented with varying levels of privatization with mixed levels of success.

Vietnam has achieved moderate success in dealing with primary education (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1998). In an emerging economy, however, where much of the

economic basis is still agriculturally based, secondary education falls behind. One hypothesis for this lies in the fact that the students are needed to work on the farms. An education past the secondary level is not seen as being significant enough for their absence in the family income base (Glewwe and Jacoby, 1998, p. 205). This is not much different from the US prior to the Second World War. One can extrapolate that if there is a lowering of value placed in the respective value of education at the secondary level, this devaluation of education will continue and expand as it relates to the value of tertiary education.

One might assume that there would be a significant difference in the urban areas that are not primarily based on an agrarian economy; however, this is not the case. Another hypothesis that relates to the urban areas is that there are inadequate jobs available to those emerging from higher education levels, translating into a devaluation of higher education in urban areas. While these hypotheses refer mainly to primary and secondary levels of education, enrollment statistics in tertiary education are directly proportionate to those in secondary education. Privatizing education at all levels in Vietnam has been difficult due to the stark poverty existing in most of the country. In 1992, the average salary for a professor was about 200,000 dong per month (\$20 US) (Nghie and Sloper, 1995, p 108). One issue in privatizing some of the educational structures requires that the student's parents or students themselves pay some of the fees and tuition costs. This alone could prevent many students from pursuing a degree. The alternative of a non-democratic institution run strictly by the state is not necessarily better

in light of Vietnam's experience. The answer is likely to be found in Vietnam's attempts at forging alliances that will bring expertise and much needed funding.

Vietnamese higher education has attempted to fund education by linking with businesses that will benefit from the production of skilled workers. As the private sector expands, the need for skilled labor also increases (Unesco, 1991, p. 60). However, one of the critical linkages missing is the preparation of graduates for what they will experience in the private sector. Dang Xuan Hai (1993) recently reported to the National Institute for Educational Research that, "the linkage between knowledge and skill provided by university programs and real needs of industry is weak. Teaching and training methods change very slowly and do not produce students capable of initiative and creative thinking" (p. 157).

Another key challenge is the type of teaching that takes place in the tertiary setting. It is considered to be of generally low quality and irrelevant to practical requirements (Tri, Slang and Sloper, 1995, p. 196). A report concerning the staffing profile of Vietnamese higher education by Nghi and Sloper (1995) states,

A total of 74.7 per cent of interviewed students thought that lecture periods are often boring.... 68.8 per cent of students believed that the lecturer's evaluation of their assignments and examinations is based too much on evidence of knowledge which has been learnt by heart; and that most lecturers pay inadequate attention to the aspects of creativity and the development of critical thinking. (p. 106)

This issue is systemic with teaching within Vietnam. Most students received their training in the Soviet bloc system. This system focused on theoretical specialization and neglected practical application and knowledge in a professional setting (Nghi and Sloper,

1995, p. 104). The teaching methods found in higher education in Vietnam are a symptom of another problem-- a lack of adequate resources.

This problem is two-fold: first, in relation to the teacher's ability to have adequate financial resources to focus on their assignment; and second, to the learning resources that are available in the tertiary setting. Teacher's salaries are very low. Most teachers are required to find additional means of employment in order to survive. At the University of Hue, for example a lecturer and his family can live only 10 days out of the month on the salary earned (Berlie, 1995, p. 162). It would be a difficult task to put in place the creative teaching methods needed since these methods have not been experienced and because it would mean children were hungry.

The other resource issue deals with the lack of available learning resources. Teaching in the Vietnamese system of higher education is largely based on lectures because of the limited availability of texts and research facilities. At the University of Da Nang a new six-story library was recently completed. There was only one thing missing – books. University officials admit that, “without access to modern teaching materials, higher education will be unable to produce the skilled workers needed to transform the county” (Lopatin, 2001, p. 11). The problem does not stop with books. It extends to laboratories and other learning resources (Dao, Triep and Sloper, 1995, p. 81). Libraries are typically small, and filled with a predominance of Soviet resources that reinforces a technological focus rather than a practically applied one (Tri, Sang and Sloper, 1995, p. 185).

Computer availability is also an issue. Although computers are available to students, they are not high enough in quantity to be used by the masses. And even if they were, the technological battle of staying for even the wealthiest of institutions in the wealthiest nations is a barrier. Vietnamese officials are hopeful that new electronic links with worldwide institutions of higher education will be a great improvement to the current situation (Lopatin, 2001). These and other changes are bringing hope and improvements to higher education in Vietnam (Lam, 1997, p. 367).

The issues that have been brought to the surface during this *doi moi* period are all tied to funding and budget. Vietnam has begun the recovery but will need a great amount of help from organizations and nations around the world if they are to succeed. The economy in Vietnam is growing, but with this growth will come the need to properly prioritize for future growth. Education may appear to be lower than poverty or potable water sources. Yet, if these most pressing issues are to be alleviated then education must be harnessed and improved. According to Jean Berlie (1995),

Higher education must stay ahead of development and the booming economy. Although there is an increase in the percentage reserved for education in the national budget, the part given by the State to higher education does not appear to be increasing and may even be decreasing proportional to pre-1988 financial planning. (p. 161)

The World Bank has suggested that budgeting for higher education in Vietnam should be “output-based,” to link funding to performance. This is believed to provide incentive for the institutions to move toward growth and expansion rather than waste (World Bank, p. 50-51). The direct correlation of the percentage of school enrollment to Gross Domestic Product in the rapidly growing economies of Southeast Asia, namely

Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Thailand underscore this point. The post-secondary enrollment has grown in Thailand (the weakest country of those mentioned), from 2% in 1970 to 19% in 1992. However, Vietnam is currently at 1% post-secondary enrollment and looking dimly at a projected growth of 3% by the year 2020 (World Bank, p. 118). Therefore the picture may appear somewhat bleak, but the objective is clear.

Current Development of Higher Education in Vietnam

As was stated earlier the issues of access, job placement and overall educational confusion within the country have created an environment where higher education study outside Vietnam had become the desire of many students, but what was occurring in the higher education system within the country? What are the goals for the future of education in Vietnam? A recent report from the general committee of Vietnam's communist party states the following objectives to be completed by 2010:

Independent and creative thinking; self-discipline and social responsibility; control and use of science and modern technology; teamwork and community skills and spirit; and healthy and harmonious living. (Vietnam Development Report, p. 54)

Along with these objectives is the desire to create "some high-quality institutions" (Vietnam Development Report, p. 55). This is being accomplished by consolidating smaller specialized institutions and by creating new innovative partnerships. A picture of hopeful success is the development of a private university in Hanoi called Thang Long University, the first private higher education institution in Vietnam (Sinh and Sloper, 1995, p. 200). Its objective is to create an environment where the following can be achieved: open enrollment, new standards of teaching for teachers, and new standards of

honor for faculty. Its student body includes many who had already received a degree in a Soviet institution or Vietnamese university but could not achieve employment (Sinh & Sloper, 1995, p. 201). Thang Long has introduced another innovation, partnership with a foreign university based in Paris.

The Institute Supérieure de Gestion Paris has assisted Thang Long University in the training of Vietnamese professors in Paris, in developing teaching programs' and in sending books and advisers to Hanoi to develop management programs at the University. (Sinh and Sloper, 1995, p. 202)

A challenge in the current slower growth economy is financial independence.

There is resistance to the new fees imposed upon the students, which is new for most in the Vietnamese system of education. They are meeting with some success even though they are made up of many students who could not achieve entrance to the public institutions of higher education due to failing the entrance examination. The institutional goals are to achieve a student enrollment based on reputation, rather than student necessity alone.

Thang Long University represents an example of entrepreneurship in the higher education system in Vietnam (Sinh and Sloper, 1995). It is a movement toward tuition-based education. This concept will struggle to gain momentum until the economy, or outside sources, make education affordable, achievable, and significant. However, contributing outside nations and other sources must not repeat the mistakes of the past. Higher education in Vietnam should be allowed to develop a character and style of its own. Of course, the sources that participate will influence development, but as with every society, it should be an adaptation rather than an infiltration. The roles for foreign assistance are many. Money may be the most pressing, but closely behind is the

expertise of those who understand what the marriage of the emerging market economy and higher education can produce if allowed to court properly.

Another helpful role that foreign assistance can provide is that of English, French and Japanese language training. Perhaps some of the best individuals to accomplish this are the second generation Vietnamese-Americans who have a tremendous knowledge and ability to contribute back to their native culture.

Students in Vietnam can now do what they have never been able to do before. They can transfer from one institution to another. This recent event has been seen as one of the most beneficial changes in the renovation of the national higher education system (Mason, Arnove and Sutton, 2001, p. 128). This could not happen when Vietnamese colleges and universities were exclusively specialized, as was the case under the Soviet model (Dam, Thiep and Sloper, 1995, p. 85). The system has come so far from the days of 1971, where the desire for what has been accomplished would have seemed impossible (Truong, 1971, p. 63). The growth of any developing nation does not occur in a vacuum. Vietnam is no exception. Vietnam's current goals and expectations are indications that they will once again survive and thrive.

However, the context of this educational system and the lack of a consistent world-class doctoral granting institution within the country influence many students to seek an education outside the country. Many of these students desire to return and build the educational capital of the country (Ashwill, 2005).

Reasons Why International Students Choose Higher Education in the US

Other studies have sought to assess why international students seek higher education within the US. This study compared the finding of these studies to the motivations of Vietnamese international students as they seek a degree from a US higher education institution and what are their experiences while they attend.

Many students in the world continue to see the US as the ideal place to achieve their dreams. They view America as a place that values diversity and welcomes people from all nations. Some students hold that the US is a place of “limitless opportunity” and “culture sharing.” A key word as students describe their reasons for studying in America is “opportunity” (Borsztein, 1987).

One factor for coming was the high international regard of American higher education institutions. The United States is viewed by many countries to be the best educational system in the world (Altbach, Gumport, and Johnstone, 2001). Students stated that they believe that an education received from an institution in the US will increase their academic growth and that the quality of the faculty and curriculum is superior (Borsztein, 1987). Do (2005) in his study among Vietnamese international students found that many of these students were “impressed with the American system’s superior physical environment in addition to its practicality and applicability that depart radically from their own system” (p. 154).

In an interview on National Public Radio, Dr. Raul Choudaha of the World Education Services addressed the reason why international students chose the US as a “push” and a “pull” factor. The “push” factor comes from the high number of students

who are seeking higher education in their countries while a limited supply of jobs are available. Thus an international and especially US based education could give them the “push” that they need. The pull factor exists because the US provides an attractive destination for higher education because of the long-term social and economic mobility (Martin, 2010).

Being a part of a US institution also enables the environment for an international student to acquire a greater proficiency of the English language which is a coveted skill in the world today (Crawford, 2001). Many students attend an intensive English language program and then enroll in a regular academic program. Proficiency in English has become a new standard for the international scientific and business communities (Hwang, 1998). This is also a part of the dimension that creates an allure of the US being the dominant country in the global political economy.

Political instability and unfavorable opinions of their country’s higher education systems have added to student’s decisions to seek education outside their home countries. Christopher Jenkins (2007) discovered that issues within the home country were a factor for choosing higher education within the US:

A few students spoke of prejudices that exist within their home country or barriers to advancement that led them to seek a better opportunity in America. Some students used the word ‘escape’ to describe the desire to leave their home country to come to America. Another student spoke eloquently of how desperate he was to leave his country and what he would do to be able to come to America to study. (p. 33)

Other students have indicated that their parents concern for their safety and having a familiar setting where other relatives were located was also a factor (Klieger, 2005). There is also a contingent of people from a variety of countries located near

American institutions. This contingent is seen as an established support group and causes families from that country to feel comfortable in sending their children to that area. American universities benefit from being in a multi-cultural arena that provides relative safety and protections that many countries do not.

Issues Cited Within Other Studies of International Students

In a study that followed eight Vietnamese international community college students in the California Community College system, Do (2005) discovered that there were a number of factors that these students dealt with in their acculturation process to American higher education. The difficulty participating in relationships and educational opportunities due to the lack of proficiency of the English language was a concurrent theme among these students. This issue affected their class participation, and willingness to engage friendships with American students. These students stated that they often chose opportunities that would place them in contact with other international students rather than American students primarily because of the common struggle with the English language. This situation is not isolated to Vietnamese international students. African international students also noted the difficulties in maintaining friendships with American students when the openness to these relationships was not reciprocal. Mwaura notes that “adjustment does not occur simply by being in a foreign country but one must interact also with others in order to gain an understanding of the host culture as well as to be understood by those within that culture” (2005, p. 262).

These students also cited many positive aspects of the US higher education system. One of these was the rapport of teachers with the students. The Vietnamese higher education system places a degree of “distance” between students and teachers. This may be in part due to the concept of “respect,” and also a by-product of the large class size as well as the reliance upon lecture as the primary teaching method. Crawford (2001) identified many cultural differences in the way that students interact with instructors. Do (1995) also noted that these Vietnamese students appreciated encouragement of class participation, discussion and group learning even though these educational opportunities required them to stretch outside their comfort zone when it came to their proficiency of English. Mwaura (2008) in his study with African international students were enriched with “a wide variety of new experiences and knowledge were achieved as a result of American education including problem solving skills, emotional stability, and critical thinking skills” (p. 263).

Do (2005) also identified an interesting cultural characteristic that these students identified within their Southern California setting, “several students assumed that religion is a personal and familial matter and were ‘shocked’ when having to face the continuous attempts to convert them from Buddhism to Christianity” (p. 184). This is a phenomenon that can be explored in this study as well as a specific cultural experience. Other experiences noted by these students as contrary to their expectation was the pace of life and the tendency for American students to work while studying. Many students in Vietnam do not work while they are studying and these students found this quality quite admirable and different from what they had expected (Do, 2005).

Why Vietnamese International Students Choose Institutions in the US

Ho Chi Minh declared that “whether Vietnam can be on par with other powerful countries in the world or not depends significantly on the youth’s ability to study well” (Ashwill, 2005, p. 52). The Vietnamese nationalist leader appealed to the US shortly after the defeat of Japan in World War II. Roger Hess (1975) writes that,

The American ideological and personal influences were evident in the Vietnamese proclamation of independence and subsequent Viet-Minh appeals for the United Nations and US support. During the summer of 1945, Ho Chi Minh asked Americans about the wording of the American Declaration of Independence; an army officer managed to provide Ho with a copy. Before half a million persons in Hanoi on September 2, Ho proclaimed Vietnamese independence in the name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The declaration quoted directly from the preamble of the American model, and after listing the grievances of the Vietnamese against the French. (p. 21)

It was in the malaise of the end of World War II that America had a keen opportunity that it allowed to slip through its grasp. Vietnam seemed poised to receive the US assistance as is noted by the statements of the Vietnamese Minister of the Interior Vo Nguyen Giap speaking of the American friendship, “The United States of America has paid the greatest contributions to the Vietnamese fight against fascist Japan, our enemy, and so the great American Republic is a good friend of ours” (Hess, 1975, p. 21). This friendship promised the opportunity of educational exchange as one of its primary objectives. It was shortly after Vietnam’s declaration that on October 17, 1945 the Vietnam-American Friendship Association was founded in Hanoi. It was here that General Gallagher spoke at the program and endorsed the Association’s plan to cultivate an American-Vietnamese educational exchange program.

Over the previous decade there has been a concerted effort to increase the educational interchange between the US and Vietnam. This was a primary directive of the normalization of trade between the US and Vietnam stemming back to 1995.

One particular point of this trade normalization was an agreement of the Vietnamese government to repay \$146 million of wartime debt incurred by the armies of South Vietnam to their representing principal –the US. In doing this the director of the external division of the Finance Ministry stated, “We had to agree on old debts so we could have new relations, such as new loans and cooperation agreements” (Ashwill, 2005, p. 47). This agreement made way for the Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF).

The Vietnam Education Foundation is a model long-term educational exchange program between the US and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that provides fellowships for Vietnamese nationals to study at American institutions of higher education at graduate levels in the fields of mathematics, medicine, engineering, sciences, and technology; and enables professors from American institutions to teach in these same fields within Vietnam.

The opportunity for this new investment into educational interchange was expressed by outgoing President Bill Clinton as he spoke to an audience at the Vietnam National University in Hanoi on November 17, 2000.

The United States has great respect for your intellect and capacity. One of our Government’s largest educational exchange programs is with Vietnam, and we want to do more. Senator Kerry is right there, and I mentioned him earlier—leading an effort in our US Congress, along with Senator John McCain and other veterans of the conflict here, to establish a new Vietnam Education Foundation. Once enacted, the foundation would support 100 fellowships every year, either here or in the US, for people to study or teach science, math, technology, and medicine. (Clinton, 2000)

According to the 2009 Annual Report, the Vietnam Education Foundation has paved the way for many other students to follow toward a higher education experience by successfully sending a total of 306 outstanding Vietnamese nationals to 69 top university graduate programs in the US (VEF Annual Report, 2009). This and many other factors have increased the number of Vietnamese students in the US from 2,266 students in 2000 to 13,112 students in 2010 (Open Doors, 2010). This represents one of the largest percentage increases of any nation during this same time period. Vietnamese students are coming to the US to learn in record numbers.

Students who have participated in the Vietnam Education Foundation programs have attested to the quality of their education and have indicated how they believe their degrees achieved in the US will assist their futures and the future of their country. One student when asked what they were going to do with their newly acquired degree upon their return to Vietnam stated,

At this time, all I have to do is work harder rather than thinking about finding a position in the future. I just know that I will return, but I don't have yet a clear plan what to do. Nevertheless, I prefer to be involved in an academic, educational environment once I return, because I feel that's where I can make the best contribution for Vietnam. (Ashwill, 2005, p. 51)

Another student was quite certain what her future would be. Bui, an aspiring maxillofacial surgeon hopes "to make radical changes to Vietnam's oral health care via health education, prevention and appropriate treatment" (Ashwill, 2005, p. 51). These examples of the experiences and expectation of recipients of the Vietnam Educational Fund fellowships show an emerging desire of students leveraging their higher education attained in the US to enable personal and national gains upon their return.

Ambassador Michael Michalak stated that it was his objective to double the number of Vietnamese students in American Universities. He states,

Even before arriving in Vietnam five months ago, I was aware that education is a key component of the relationship between the US and Vietnam. I was aware of the importance of educational exchanges, and in my Confirmation Hearing last July; I called for the number of Vietnamese Students at American universities and colleges to double during my tenure. I was also aware that Vietnamese leaders including Prime Minister Dung and President Triet had formally requested American and other international assistance to help train its next generation and modernize its educational system. (Michalak, 2008, p. 1)

Thus, through these remarks a strategy becomes visible to influence and shape the development of the Vietnamese educational institutions through the transfer of knowledge that occurs when the indigenous stakeholders of students are influenced by the educational institutions of the US and other international partners of Vietnam. One specific means through which this interchange can be influenced is through the Fulbright Program in Vietnam. The Fulbright Program was established in 1946. According to the Fulbright website,

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the US government and is designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the US and the people of other countries. The Program was established in 1946 under legislation introduced by the late Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas and is sponsored by the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Approximately 300,000 "Fulbrighters," 114,000 from the US and 186,000 from other countries, have participated in the Program since its inception over sixty years ago. The Fulbright Program awards 8,000 new grants annually. Currently, the Fulbright Program operates in over 155 countries worldwide. (www.fulbright.state.gov)

Ambassador Michalak indicates that the Fulbright Program in Vietnam has assisted over 400 Vietnamese students to earn advanced degrees in the US as well as

bringing hundreds of Americans to interchange with the educational institutions of Vietnam.

We're ready to put more funding in our exchange programs now so this effort can get underway immediately. I hope some of you in this room will have a chance to take part....Let me say, as important as knowledge is, the benefits of knowledge are necessarily limited by undue restrictions on its use. We Americans believe the freedom to explore, to travel, to think, to speak, to shape decisions that affect our lives enrich the lives of individuals and nations in ways that go far beyond economics. (Clinton, 2000)

This process of American investment to bring Vietnamese scholars to the US has continued with a larger financial contribution to Vietnam than any other country in the world. Former US Ambassador to Vietnam, Raymond Burghardt said that the US provides nearly \$10 million a year to fund exchange programs between the US and Vietnam (Ben, 2004).

Factors Influencing Vietnamese Students to Choose US Higher Education

In order to understand why Vietnamese students choose higher education in the US, one must first assess that the overall need for higher education within the Vietnamese system is not being met. One significant contribution to this situation is the burgeoning growth of the population that has reached college age. Between 1992 and 1995, the number of students almost doubled from 210,000 to 414,000 due to the demand of students seeking higher education within Vietnam. This number doubled again between 1995 and 1997 (Ashwill, 2002). Another synergistic agent in this equation was the fact that the Vietnamese higher education system was running short on resources to meet this demand. It was plagued by over-crowding, low faculty salaries, crumbling infrastructure,

outdated and limited supply of curriculums and training, and mixed results in efforts to produce graduates with the skills and qualifications that were needed to succeed in this growing economy (Ashwill, 2002).

Another key factor that legitimized the flow of students from Vietnam to the US was the improving relations between these two countries. The lifting of the trade embargo in 1994, normalization of diplomatic relations in 1995 and the acceptance of Vietnam into the WTO (World Trade Organization) in 2007 all were key benchmarks for the establishment of steady increases of Vietnamese students to the US and other destination countries for higher education(Adams and Le Tran, 2010; Ashwill, 2002).

The flow of new capital into the country promoted the emergence of urban elite who were intent to make contributions to their country's growing market economy. A steady influx of educational interchange from US institutions and increasing marketing available through the internet, again paved the way for a steadily increasing stream of higher education students from Vietnam.

Another key factor influencing the choices of students is the influence of their solidarity towards their own government. The President and educational leaders of Vietnam have sought to make key connections with the US Government and US higher educational institutions. On a visit to the US in 2007 the President of Vietnam, Nguyen Minh Triet, stated his objective of partnership with the US clearly that improving higher education was pivotal to Vietnam's economic-development effort. President Triet said, "We want to learn your experience and want your assistance and support for our endeavors in higher education" (Wasley, 2007, p. A-21). Vietnam's Education minister,

Nguyen Thien Nhan indicated that their expectation was that they hoped to bring Vietnam's number of doctorates to 20,000 by 2020 with the desired that 2,500 of these would be educated in the US. The eventual goal is to form a core group of indigenous faculty trained from the US and around the world that would usher Vietnam into a tiered system of higher education. The eventual goal of which would be to have a top 100 University in Vietnam by 2020 (Wasley, 2007).

Conclusion

Thus, the literature available displays that the lack of access, lack of employment related to their degree, and the current evolution of higher education within Vietnam has created a desire for students to seek higher education outside the country. This occurs in a variety of nations, but the US has consistently been shown to be first choice of the majority of outbound students in Vietnam (UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO, 2009). The relationship between the US and Vietnam has consistently encouraged educational exchange. The US institutions of higher education also have a reputation that Vietnam seeks to build within their country and therefore a desire to send student here to learn exists.

Other studies conducted with international students will provide a protocol as my interviews take place. Do these students concur with others that they came to the US: for higher education because of the US reputation for quality higher education, cultural sharing, English proficiency, student safety, and the escape of political or educational instability within their home countries? And in comparison with these other studies have

the students I interview found the same challenges in: accepting new teaching methods, relational “closeness” with instructors, difficulties in building meaningful friendships with American students, and antagonism when dealing with religious issues within the US? These issues guide my discovery as I compare these issues and seek out other related contexts within the motivations of these students in coming to the US and relating their cultural and academic experiences during their study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the rationale and processes by which the data will be identified, gathered, processed, analyzed and presented. The details of the selection of sites and students will be presented. It also provides the information about the instruments used for data collection.

Research Methodology

A qualitative research design was selected as the appropriate method to understand participants' perspectives about a phenomenon (Janesick, 2000) and to explore why they chose to study in the US. A qualitative research method was chosen for this study to answer the broad research questions concerning the reasons why Vietnamese students have come for study in the US. Qualitative methodology allows the in-depth questioning to provide "indirect information filtered through the views of the interviewees" (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). This study utilized a basic interpretive qualitative study approach borrowing data analysis techniques from grounded theory. In a basic interpretive qualitative study Merriam (2004) states that the researcher is interested in "understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon, this meaning is mediated through the researcher as instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (p. 6). Additionally, the responses are indicative of the values and experiences of the participants.

This qualitative study applies the ethnographic interview to collect data. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative researchers are interested in *meaning*—how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structure of the world” (p. 145). Thus, the focus in this research is one of meaning as it relates to Vietnamese international students as they engage a different culture. Gathering the meaning of their experience and understanding how they make sense of what is going on around them is the goal. As indicated earlier in the problem statement, the primary guiding question of this—What motivates these Vietnamese students to seek higher education in the US, and what are their experiences while they are here?—is a multifaceted question that has many individualistic answers. These answers do not have a static pattern but a dynamic pattern. Students are coming from a variety of different backgrounds, and they are entering a variety of different institutions in the US. In order to assess this, the need for a qualitative inquiry is called upon to gauge the depth of these students’ experiences and the many factors that influence their choices and their futures. Miles and Huberman (1994) add that qualitative data yields “richness and holism, with a strong potential for revealing complexity” (p. 10).

The qualitative method gives a “thick description” that provides a depth of investigation of a particular experience or phenomenon (Bogdan and Bilken, 1998; Ely et al., 1991). According to Ely et al., “The major purpose of an in-depth ethnographic interview is to learn to see the world from the eyes of the person being interviewed” (1991, p. 48). Thus as a qualitative researcher, I realized that I become the primary research tool who is given access to the lives of individuals.

The Research Questions

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that research questions “make the implicit explicit without necessarily freezing or limiting your vision (p. 25). These questions create the skeleton of the research and allow the information to be processed upon them. However, these questions form a “growing skeleton” as Creswell states (2009) that the researcher should “expect the research questions to evolve and change during the study in a manner consistent with the assumptions of an emerging design (p. 131). As a process Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that researchers should keep these questions in hand and review them during fieldwork in case they need to refine or reformulate these questions while collecting data. The four primary research questions for this study are:

1. What factors have motivated the Vietnamese international students to select higher education in the US?
2. What educational and professional outcomes will these students achieve by studying in the US?
3. What are the academic and cultural experiences faced by Vietnamese international students attending US higher educational institutions?
4. How have these student’s perceptions of the US and Vietnam changed as a result of their higher education experience?

Through the process of the literature review, several issues emerged that provide a protocol and comparison with conclusions reached with other international students. Do these students concur with others that they came to the US for higher education because: of the US reputation for quality education, cultural sharing, English proficiency, student safety, and the escape of political and/or educational instability within their home countries? And in comparison with other students in other studies, do these students find

the same challenges in: accepting new teaching methods, relational “closeness” with instructors, building meaningful relationships with American students, and antagonism when dealing with religious issues within the US. As the interview protocol develops each of these issues will be addressed while addressing the more broad ideas set forth by the research questions.

Research Strategy

The process of qualitative research employed individual face-to-face interviews with participants and follow-up focus groups. Creswell (2009) concludes that these interviews “involve unstructured and generally open-ended questions that are few in number and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants (p. 181). Patton (2002) described the interview as an attempt to observe thoughts, and intentions.

The purpose of interviewing...is to allow us to enter the other person’s perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

The researcher has provided a sample of these questions in the appendix. These questions formulated a template for the questions were asked to each participant so that each interview took on a similar flow which allowed the contents of the interview to be coded and explored. However, the researcher attempted to allow the answers of the specific participant to guide the direction of the interview in order to elicit views and opinions of the participants.

Selection of Participants

This study focuses on Vietnamese students in a metropolitan area in the Southwest. The individuals selected were in part due to convenience as I live in a large metropolitan area that has multiple four year higher education institutions as well as several community college systems. I chose to look at two public universities. By comparing student responses from these two institutions, their responses provide triangulation of the data and findings.

The University of North Texas is a student-focused, public, research university located in Denton, Texas. It is home to over 36,000 students and offers 97 bachelors, 101 masters, and 48 doctoral degree programs within the university's 12 colleges and schools. Denton is the northern point of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area which has a population of 5,704,148. Currently there are over 2600 international students from 121 countries which represent 7% of the student population at the University of North Texas.

The office of International Student Advising at the University of North Texas was contacted to gain access to potential students who meet the interview criteria from Vietnam. Upon receiving these contacts, an initial e-mail introducing myself was sent to request a one-hour interview with these students. I also described the process of transcription of the interview and the opportunity for each participant to review the transcript and provide any clarifying statements.

The University of Texas at Arlington is a campus with 33,000 students offering 80 bachelors, 74 masters and 31 doctoral degrees in an extensive range of disciplines. The university states that it has an annual economic impact of more than \$1 billion in the

region. Ten percent of the student population is international students. UTA is located in Arlington which is in the south central part of the metro Dallas/ Fort Worth area.

The office of International Student Advising at the University of Texas at Arlington was contacted to gain access to potential students who meet the interview criteria from Vietnam. Upon receiving these contacts, an initial e-mail introducing myself was sent to request a one-hour interview with these students. I also described the process of transcription of the interview and the opportunity for each participant to review the transcript and provide any clarifying statements. After conducting the interview, I originally planned to have each participant participate in a focus group that would focus on any follow-up questions that emerge from central themes of the interview research, however after assessing the richness of the data provided in the interview, it was determined that a focus group would not likely yield additional data. This was also influenced by the conclusion of the fall semester coming prior to the transcripts being returned to the researcher which was a pre-requisite to conducting the focus group.

For this qualitative investigation, I sought to collect data from approximately 10-15 Vietnamese international students who have chosen the US higher education system for undergraduate education before returning to their country of origin, Vietnam. These students were purposefully selected because of the researcher's ability to access them due to close proximity. All prospective participants have the option to participate or decline participation in the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this qualitative research began as soon as interviews have been conducted. The process of data analysis included the following stages: reading, describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. After transcribing the interviews and submitting them to the participants for review, the researcher began a close reading of the text and making margin notes, using the process of coding described by Miles and Huberman (1994) as “tags of labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). The describing stage illustrated the meaning of the experience for the researcher. The classifying stage uncovered and listed emerging patterns of meaning for the participants and then grouped the patterns into meaning themes. The interpreting stage develops a textural description (what happened), a structural description (how the phenomenon was experienced), and an overall description of the experience.

Data collection and analysis usually coincide. Creswell (1998) suggested that the most important work of the qualitative researcher is to establish patterns and look for a correspondence between two or more categories. The process involves recognizing patterns, generating tentative explanations for the patterns, working explanations into a theoretical mode and confirming and/or modifying the theoretical model.

Using the available protocol and findings of other studies, a matrix was created which addressed each of the key issues discovered and the research questions of this study. This matrix was utilized as each interview was conducted to seek a response that

either affirmed or refuted previous findings. Additionally, other repeated themes and patterns were analyzed and noted for future studies.

The researcher transcribed the interviews and reviewed the transcripts several times, coding the interviews until the data become clear. Throughout the reading, the researcher identified themes and patterns within the interview and between other participants. From these themes a coherent meaning was constructed.

Validity

Although this qualitative study involves a limited number of participants, Patton (2002) indicated that validity has more to do with the participants selected and the richness of information gathered rather than with the sample size. The study utilized member checking as the interview transcripts were reviewed by the participant to allow a check for accuracy of representation. Another example of validity within the study involves the use of multiple sources of data exemplified by the participants interviewed. A third validity measure is the use of two institutions within the geographical area. This allows the researcher to identify themes reported by participants from different higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

An overview of each of the participants and the selection process follows. I contacted each of the universities international student offices and gained the cooperation of key administrative staff. After talking with them personally and achieving my institutional review board approval, an open e-mail to participate in research concerning the motivations and experiences of Vietnamese international students was sent to the campus e-mail addresses of all the enrolled students in the fall 2011 semester. From the total number of students, 12 students responded. Seven students were from one university and five from the other. A series of contacts via e-mail and eventually through texting, interviews were scheduled with 11 of the 12 recipients. At some point in the process, one student stopped responding to e-mails and this student was dropped from the study.

The summary of the available students from the University of North Texas follows. In all, 30 students were contacted at the University of North Texas that met the criteria for this study. These students were here in the US on an F-1 or J-1 visa and were enrolled in the fall semester of 2011. Within this group 23 students were completing their bachelor's degrees; 2 were completing a second bachelor's degree; 3 were completing a master's degree and 2 were completing their doctoral degrees. This group was composed of 8 male students and 22 female students. Of these students only 5 female students agreed to participate and were interviewed on the campus of each

student. Therefore, from the total of the Vietnamese students available, 17% of the students participated. 4 of the students who participated were seeking a bachelor's or second bachelor's degree and the fifth participant was enrolled in the master's program.

The summary of the available Vietnamese students at the University of Texas at Arlington follows. In all, 95 students were contacted and 7 students responded to the invitation to conduct an interview as a part of this research; thus, 7% of the available students responded to this invitation. This group was composed of 47 female and 48 male students. Of the 7 who participated, 5 were female and 2 were male students. Additionally, of the 95 students enrolled in the fall semester of 2011 at the University of Texas at Arlington; 81 students were seeking bachelor's degrees, 9 were seeking master's degrees, and 5 were seeking doctoral degrees. The University of Texas at Arlington also provided information which reflected the year of study in which these 81 undergraduate students were currently engaged: 11 were in their freshman year, 16 were in their sophomore year, 39 were in their junior year and 15 were in their senior year. Of the 7 participants, 3 are seeking their master's degrees, 1 is finishing a doctoral degree and the other 3 are earning their bachelor's degrees.

The findings begin with an individual description of each of the participants. Each provides a unique prospective of this research. In essence this research is a descriptive case study of each participant which seeks to look at common factors that exist in the group as these relate to the research questions. The depth of this research could not have been achieved without the willingness of the participants to allow me to hear and record their stories. Once each participant has been introduced, the chapter

discusses the research strategy and provides analysis of the findings for each research question.

Biographical Sketches of Participants

An (Male, 28, Master's Degree in Computer Science and Mathematics)

An is from Kien Giang province. He went to high school in Can To province where, of over 500 in his high school, only 5 passed the exam to continue on to higher education. An pursued his higher education degree at the National Science University in Ho Chi Minh City where he received a Bachelor's degree in math and computer science in four and a half years. His parents have owned a fashion clothing shop in the town where he grew up and he often worked with them in this shop. An's family is funding his higher education.

An's parents completed secondary school but did not attend higher education. He has an older sister who has completed higher education at the same university in the US that An attends. She became a US citizen by marrying a Vietnamese American and intends to graduate next semester with a bachelor's degree.

An was able to get an internship while going to school in Ho Chi Minh City. He was 22 when he completed his degree in Vietnam. He then applied to come to the US for his master's degree, but failed on his first attempt. He worked for three years after achieving his degree for the same company that he had an internship while finishing his bachelor's degree.

His parents wanted to have a college degree but did not have the opportunity. But they wanted him to achieve more than they did. He said that from a young age, they encouraged him to seek an education abroad in the US. They paid for private tutors and extra study so that he could eventually come and study in the US. An's father cried when he told him that he had been accepted into the US for study. He said that his parents thought that America was the best place that he could study, more than anywhere else in the world.

His primary views of the US came from working with American customers through the company that he worked with which developed software for hospitals in the US. He also talked with his sister who told him how wonderful life was in the US. While with his company, he had a six month opportunity to work in Japan and experienced the Japanese culture. He determined that he did not want to live in Japan based on their lack of friendliness and over-commitment to their work life. But his sister was the primary influence upon him and his views of the US. He also had a cousin who graduated from an American institution.

He hopes to continue in his education and receive a doctoral degree and return to Vietnam to teach. He would also encourage other students to study abroad in the US. Another dream of his is to develop open source software that would generate income which could enable him to help the Vietnamese people.

One of the struggles that An encountered was to improve his English. He attended West Texas A&M to take English classes. He received a provisional letter and proceeded to the school where he is currently enrolled. His first TOEFL (Test of English

as a Foreign Language) score was 480, and it was 550 after taking three semesters at West Texas A&M. He still needed to accomplish a 580 before continuing on to the larger university, but because of his high marks in computer science, he was granted a provisional letter.

He practiced his conversational English and discovered the values of America by watching *It's a Wonderful Life*. By watching this movie, he learned about values from the conversations among family members. He indicated that this movie was much better than “fighting movies” because there was more dialogue and relational situations that helped him to understand these cultural elements.

An volunteered at a local Catholic church and worked with children to improve his English skills. His family in Vietnam is Catholic and he found local Christians to be very helpful in learning the culture and practicing his English skills. He also found that networking with friends that he meets in his classes to be helpful in assimilating with the American culture. Because of his expertise in computer science, he would tutor other students and utilized these encounters to make deeper relationships with American students. In this way, volunteering and tutoring became bridges to relationship building with American students. An also has a Vietnamese-American girlfriend who has helped him a great deal to improve his English.

An wants very much to go back to Vietnam to help other students to experience the same thing that he has had the opportunity to experience.

Binh (Female, 24, Bachelor's Degree in Biochemistry)

Binh has completed her bachelor's degree and is waiting for an interview with a dental school in Chicago at the time of this interview. She is 24 years old, and is from Da Nang in central Vietnam. Her family currently lives in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. She attended high school at the Chu Van An High School in Hanoi. This is a famous high school because of its exclusiveness. Each year it has 3000 applicants for the 500-600 students that it will accept. It is designated as a school for the gifted and talented.

Binh was accepted in the medical school of Hue. She would have liked to attend the medical school in Hanoi, but felt that she would not have a good opportunity due to her lack of connections at that school and to the fact that her city of origin was Da Nang and not Hanoi. So, she decided to choose Hue as her first choice of medical schools. She attended there one week before deciding to study abroad in the US. One particular story that she recalls is that when she first attended the campus of the Hue Medical School on a rainy day in June. The entire campus was flooded and the infrastructure of the campus did not meet her expectations. This was the point that she determined that she would seek education outside the country.

Binh also mentioned that she felt that the playing field to get into the choice higher education programs in Vietnam was not level. She said that there was the issue of key connections that made it easier to be chosen for the limited spots at each school. She also indicated that certain students seemed to have access to the exam beforehand and therefore achieved higher scores because they knew how to prepare. Binh said that she

felt this was inequitable and was a contributing factor to her desire to seek higher education outside of Vietnam.

Her father studied at Da Nang Medical Technology College. He is a prothodontist in Hanoi. Her mother achieved an associate degree in middle school education but did not actually teach. She also has a 10 year old younger brother. She is the first person in her family to seek higher education outside of Vietnam.

She is funded primarily by her parents but does have a scholarship from her university which covers about 50% of her college tuition. This institution is not her first to attend in the US. She first attended Richland College, a community college in the Dallas Community College system. There she took three semesters and 40 credit hours before transferring to her current institution.

She came to Richland primarily from the input of her aunt and uncle who live near the Richland College campus. Her aunt told her that it was a quality institution where she could begin her higher education.

In her family the US is known as “the beautiful place of opportunity.” Many of her family members reinforced this idea that the US would be a wonderful place to continue her education. She expressed that the primary contributor of her view of the US prior to coming here was movies and interaction with people here. From these, her perception was that American teenagers had a considerable amount of freedom when compared to how she perceived her own life and this was desired. She felt that her own shyness kept her from engaging students here in the US.

Binh shared a moving story about her desire to pursue dentistry. Her father was a dental technician and her hope to become a dentist began while watching him make a difference in people's lives by forming teeth to replace lost teeth of Vietnamese people. She remembers doing simple dental lab work on wax impressions while she was at home with her father. She also shared a specific incident that helped her want to be a dentist. One of her best childhood friends had a cleft palate and a group from foreign countries came to perform dentistry with poor children. This group was called "Operation Smile." Her friend received the free surgery this impacted her as she witnessed a transformation in her friend's personality which created a similar desire for Binh to be able to do this same thing in the lives of others. She hopes to be a part of this type of group to help "desperate" children.

Success in Binh's estimation would be to use her degree to give back to her community and other poor countries. This is why she wants to continue to pursue education in order to become a Doctor of Dental Surgery. To this end, she will be interviewing in Chicago to be able to take this next step in her educational journey.

She felt that by coming to the US she would have greater access to better education and better opportunities to become successful. Binh did consider going to Australia because her father had a friend who was a successful dentist there, but she gave two reasons why she chose the US over Australia. First, she believes that the English in America is a better form of English and secondly, that the education is better.

Binh found that she did struggle with English as she arrived in America. One significant difference here was the focus on individualism and the expectation of self-

promotion in the US. She indicated that the process in Vietnam promoted a sense of community and teamwork rather than affirming the opportunities for students to take strong leadership in an attempt to “promote themselves.” Her English skills seemed to be a deterrent to her confidence in this area and therefore became an obstacle that she has sought to overcome. She is focusing on this issue more at the time of the interview because she is preparing to “sell herself” in front of the acceptance committee of the potential dental school.

She self-reported that she views her reading proficiency in English is medium to high. This is mainly due to her medium to high scores on a reading proficiency exam for her entrance into dental school. She believes her listening and understanding skills are medium because as she watches movies, she can pick up on most of the conversation. She does better in her classes because the professor’s comments in the class syllabus make it possible for her to prepare prior to class. She does watch two television shows to follow conversation and relationships: *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Friends*. Binh self-reported her proficiency in speaking as medium because she would like for her vocabulary to improve especially for the opportunities like the upcoming dental school interview. She improved an initial TOEFL exam score of near 400 by attending English classes at Richland Community College. She did not need to repeat the TOEFL exam by having good grades in the English classes at Richland Community College.

Binh expressed difficulty in making friends with American students. Most of her friends are comprised of other international students such as African, Indian, and other Asian international students. She feels more responsible for her lack of American friends

because of her shyness and limitations in English. She does feel that American students are less patient with her English limitations and this seems to create additional barriers in developing these relationships. She feels that her friendships with other international students stems from the commonality of starting from the similar places with the English language. Binh expressed that she enjoys the opportunities to learn other languages and culture.

Binh finds it difficult to make friends with other Vietnamese Americans, because there are many communication barriers that stem from their view of the Vietnamese-American War. She wishes this were different because she feels the Vietnamese American community could do a tremendous amount more to help students like her. This was a disappointment for Binh as she compared herself to other Asian communities who seem to support students from their country of origin like China.

She views the differences between Vietnamese and American structures of higher education to be quite different. She noted the infrastructure, technology, use of media and classroom management as specific examples where the structures of the US Higher Education system to be superior. The access of high school students to the higher education systems specifically with chemistry labs is quite different here in the US in comparison to Vietnam. One part of her experience in college was to attend local high schools and she was shocked to see the labs that were in the high schools were better than the labs she had seen in the Vietnamese systems. She had specific examples of this as she discussed the higher education systems with her cousin who was getting a similar degree in Vietnam. She felt that her cousin did not have the kinds of practical

experiences and classroom activities that she has had; like writing lab reports, working with teams on experiments and developing the results of beneficial experiments.

Some classroom strategies that she experienced difficulty with were also cited such as speaking in front her class. This was difficult in part due to her shyness, but also in part to her limitations in English. She expressed some disdain for the lack of respect that she observed from students to their professors. She feels that this is something that the American students could learn from the Vietnamese environment. However, the opportunity for more relational closeness with her professors here in the US has been beneficial for her. These professors are also former international students and she feels very comfortable in sharing her struggles and questions with them.

Another key difference between the higher education systems of these countries was the US had better preparation for students to succeed. Specifically the multiple quizzes, homework assignments, and more than one final test in a course prepared students to retain more of the information. Binh stated that she felt that 80% of students would wait until the last minute to cram for the final exam and that consequently, their degree did not prepare them for retaining the information that was their degree focus. This was a key reason why she felt that a degree in the US was more beneficial to a degree received in Vietnam.

The most useful activities that she found helpful in developing her skills are community service opportunities. She has visited high schools, worked in a free community dental clinic for lower income people who cannot afford quality dentistry. Binh understands the priority of her own studies but also indicated that the opportunity to

serve others was beneficial to her development of friendships. She also stated that the international student organization was excellent in providing opportunities for students to connect with others.

Binh expressed that some recent events on her campus had made her feel unsafe on her campus and that she needed to continue to be more aware of her surroundings. She never walks alone and sometimes uses the school's escort service to travel across her campus to her apartment. When asked if she would feel safer in Vietnam on a college campus, she said "yes." This was mainly due to her familiarity with the surroundings and her closeness to her family. She would encourage the creation of a mentorship program to help international students assimilate into the university life. She said that this program was available for new students but is not aware of the availability of a similar program for experienced students. She noted that her program could be improved if the classroom environment could be more open between students and encourage openness to other backgrounds and cultures.

Her perceptions of the US have changed during her time here. She no longer believes that the US is "heaven." Instead she understands that it is difficult to succeed here and things are not given to you like she was led to believe. It is possible but you must work for it. She hopes that in the completion of her degree, she will be able to help others. This is why she wanted to share her experience and her story. This is a way that she is can give back to others. She would be very willing to help other students know what to expect in coming here to complete higher education.

She believes that many Vietnamese international students do not come for the education. Instead, they come and adapt to the American culture and go to clubs. They make American friends and work at nail salons to make money and look for a spouse from America so that they can have a better life. Binh came to experience a better education and she is cognizant that people in America could get the wrong impression of all students by focusing on these who are not properly focused on their education.

Cam (Female, 19, Bachelor's Degree in Business)

Cam is from Ho Chi Minh City, District Three and attended Colette Middle School through the ninth grade. She is 19 years old. She has studied English since she was in second grade. She had studied English because her parents wanted her to be fluent in another language and wanted to prepare her for the future. Cam picked up on the language pretty quickly. Her school taught the vocabulary, shapes and colors through songs and she enjoyed learning another language.

Cam came to the US as a sophomore student being fifteen years old. At that time she came to live with her uncle in Houston and attended a Lutheran private school for her high school years in the US. She graduated from this high school in Houston. Cam is one of two students I interviewed who received high school degrees in the US through these exchange programs who also continued to higher education within the US. The school she attended was close to her uncle's home. She received information on the school as her relatives went to the school and sought out information about her attending if she came to live with them.

Cam's parents both completed college within Vietnam at the Economics University in Ho Chi Minh City. Her father completed a bachelor's in business. Her mother completed this same degree at the same school. She also had a cousin who attended college in Australia. She has a younger brother who is 14. Her brother is attending an international school near her home in Vietnam. He will likely also come to the US, but not as early as Cam did. They hope that his English will continue to improve so that he can also come to the US.

Cam said that her parents have chosen to have their children educated in international schools because they believe that this type of education is better. They believe that the style of teaching is better for children and want their children to have access to it. One aspect of this is that Cam believes that there is too many subjects that Vietnamese students must focus on and it does not leave them time to practice what they learn so that they can apply it.

Cam's parents are both involved in business. Her father is the chairman of a seafood import/export company. Her mother owns a cosmetic store. Her father's parents were also involved in dealing with seafood as a fisherman and seller of fish as well as repairing fishing nets. Her mother's parents both were English teachers. Her grandmother also taught French and German. All were supportive of her coming to the US.

Cam is able to go back to Vietnam every summer and keeps in touch with her family through Skype. She keeps up with her brother on Facebook and instant messaging. She is currently working to complete her bachelor's degree in

communications with a concentration on public relations. She is also considering continuing to complete a master's degree. This is her second year in college. She discovered this college through a college fair that came to her high school. She chose this particular school because it was in Texas and she had other relatives who lived closer to it.

Had Cam remained in Vietnam she said that she would have attended Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) located in Ho Chi Minh City, because it is a school that teaches in English with western educational philosophy. RMIT was familiar to Cam because they had come to her middle school and provided invitations to a conference held at the school. RMIT is also attractive to students because it has a large centralized campus outside the city and does not look like Vietnamese institutions. Many of Cam's friends attend RMIT.

Cam felt that the US would be a "great" and "fun" place. She predominately received these messages through her cousins who had attended United State's universities. She also said that she had done research through the internet as well. Cam anticipated that she would have more freedom and she also anticipated that there would be less tutoring than the education she would have in Vietnam. Cam believes that Vietnamese high school would have been much more difficult than what she experienced in the US. She cites the fact that in ninth grade she was doing calculus in Vietnam, yet in the US, she did not do calculus until she was a senior.

While in her middle school in Vietnam, Cam went to school from 7am-12:30pm for six days, Monday-Saturday. She would also have a private tutor every afternoon.

Typically it was in a block schedule where they would work on math for a whole day and other subjects on consecutive days. She enjoyed her high school in Houston because she would change classrooms where in Vietnam, the students would stay in the same room while teachers rotated to them.

Another influence on Cam's perceptions was American television. She often watched *High School Musical* and believed that the US would be like this. She was actually pleasantly surprised and felt that her high school did reflect many of the things that she enjoyed about the television show. Cam mentioned that she also liked having her own locker that she could decorate. She especially mentioned the opportunity to have activities like prom and ballgames with cheerleaders. Cam mentioned that she was encouraged by the school spirit that was displayed by students and having a mascot. She felt that this was a significant difference than the experiences that she had in Vietnam. During her high school experience, Cam was a part of the drama club and choir which were not activities that she would have had in Vietnam. She was able to participate in choir competitions and on choir tours as well as retreats with her class. She also participated in the football and basketball games which she felt gave her a more well-rounded cultural experience.

Her class size in Vietnam would have 45-50 students. But at her private school in Houston the class size was about fifteen students. Cam believed that her school work was easier here, but she did struggle with English in her classes. During her first year, she was the only international student, but in her second year there were at least two others who joined her. Since she was the first international student that the school had

ever had, the school at times was delayed in helping her get her necessary paperwork together at the proper times.

Cam believed that the US offered her freedom to allow everyone to be equal. This was especially seen in the roles of teachers and students. In Vietnam, she felt that teachers were not approachable. She also believes that the diversity that she has experienced in the US also influences this equality. This also provides a wider cultural perspective. She expected the people here to be friendly and willing to help her with any issues that she would face.

While she was in Houston, she attended a Vietnamese Catholic church and would also participate in community activities with her relatives with whom she lived. Her Vietnamese neighbor in Houston invited her to attend church so she started attending with them. Cam was Catholic in Vietnam as well and volunteers with her church.

Another key influence for Cam was a cousin who was four years older than her who had attended a university in Massachusetts. She had talked with her several times about education and life in the US. Her cousin told her school work would be lighter than it was in Vietnam. She also said that there would be a lot more activities to go to and there would be space away from her parents. Cam's parents were quite strict and did not let her spend much time with her friends. She noted a specific instance that occurred in Houston when she got out of school early, and was able to be brought home by a friend. This was not something that she would have been allowed to do in Vietnam, so Cam sensed that she had more independence from her parents by being in the US.

Cam also researched her high school's website before she arrived. On it she saw pictures of activities that she had never experienced in Vietnam. On it she saw pictures of a book fair, football field and gym which represented new and exciting opportunities for her.

Cam believes that her parents believe a diploma from a higher education institution in the US would enable Cam to go literally around the world to secure a good job. They believe that it holds higher value than any other institutions in the world. They also had many friends who had sent their children abroad and those children had returned to be very successful. Some of these had remained in Vietnam, while others had maintained jobs in the US. Cam desires to return home and perhaps work with her father doing public relations within his company. She believes that this would involve event planning and public relations as a publicist. Public relations jobs are currently growing in Vietnam according to Cam.

If Cam remained in the US for a master's degree she might attend Emerson University in Boston because of its specialty in public relations. Her cousin who lives in Massachusetts has researched this school for Cam. Cam believes that her degree will allow her have more opportunities to practice the kind of work that she would like to do. She also believes that having a degree from this institution will allow her to be more competitive in this field.

Cam mentioned experiencing difficulty with the vocabulary and slang when she first arrived. Even though she had been in English classes since she was in the second grade, using it every day was a challenge for her. She mentioned that her aunt and uncle

only spoke Vietnamese with her, which is something that many students mentioned as a hindrance toward their being immersed in the American language and culture.

Cam self reported that she was medium in her English proficiency because she does not like to read and therefore it takes her longer to finish her reading. This is especially the case because she likes to be precise with the vocabulary and get every word which takes too long for her to finish at times. She rates her listening and understanding as high because she communicates constantly with people in her residence hall and people understand her. She also feels that she understands others very well. She indicated that her three years of cultural immersion in the high school in Houston helped her to have the confidence that she has today. She reports that her proficiency in speaking English is also high because she has chosen communication as her major and really enjoys it.

Cam has many American friends because she lives in a residence hall and communicates with them constantly. She often plans events for her residence hall and is on the multi-cultural affairs committee, international student organization, and the hall council for her dorm. Through these positions she is planning and attending events for a variety of American and foreign students, which puts her in contact with many different students. Cam is the public affairs representative for the international student organization which means that she puts up flyers and seeks to network with all the various ethnicities of international student on her campus. She indicated that the primary means that she publicizes events is by attending different groups and personally invites them to the events that are hosted by the international student organization. She also

recruits others through Facebook and the creation of flyers and publicity pieces. She estimates that there are over 3000 international students on her campus.

Cam noted that it is often difficult to gain entrance to the different ethnic groups because each feels most comfortable communicating in their own language. The research has indicated that this is something that American students do, but I find it interesting that Cam has seen this expressed in virtually every nationality. We tend to gravitate toward people we can identify with, and common language is a key piece of commonality. She sees that international students do sometimes have difficulty making friends with Americans because when they come to go to school here, they tend to get an apartment with people of their own nationality and isolate from other students. Cam stated that she does not see a difference between her American and international student friends. She no longer views people as primarily along their nationality lines. She has commonality with American students because she has been here for four years now and understands their point of view. She can also mix well with international students because she shares the common experience of entering a culture that was once foreign to her.

Cam expressed that a key difference in American education is the self-learning process which lends itself to a more practical form of learning. She felt that education in Vietnam was largely dependent upon whatever the teacher would say and not on the self-learning process. She also feels that there is a closer relationship between students and teachers in her education here. She noted that you can express your opinion more in her classes here than she could ever do in her education experience in Vietnam. She also noted that the sense of respect and honor given to teachers in Vietnam was different than

it is here. Sometimes that sense was too rigid because it did not enhance creativity; however, she still believes that classroom respect and admiration for professors is important.

Cam said that she was thankful that by coming to the US as a high school student that she avoided the college entrance exam in Vietnam. She said that really it was much like the ACT and SAT tests here, but in Vietnam she felt that students stressed and focused on them too much. They became the focus rather than the education and she is glad that she avoided them altogether. She also said that the test there is often unfair because the fourth subject of the test is not announced until later and this creates great tension for many students.

Cam enjoys going to restaurants and movies with friends. She believes that extracurricular activities are very important to a student's understanding of the culture. She believes that it also gives you a greater opportunity to practice your English and immerse yourself within the culture. It can also enhance your learning because you have people around you who have different perspectives of your classroom assignments which could help you see things in a way that you might not otherwise experience. She would encourage other students to stay away from alcohol related parties because they could have a negative effect on you.

Cam participates regularly in religious activities. She does not feel that there is undo pressure on international students to participate in these. She admits that they are readily offered, but students are under no obligation to attend. She also feels that on her campus there are two distinct sides, one that is safe and one that is questionable. She

lives on the safe side in a residence hall, but the closer you get to apartments, the less safe the campus becomes. Cam feels that she would be more safe in Vietnam, because her parents would be there protecting her.

She appreciates the university providing a good international student office that provides workshops on visa status and activities. They are readily available to students and encourage participation.

Cam's perceptions of the US has changed somewhat in that it is not as easy as people had said. But she would encourage others to push through the difficult times so that they could have the experiences that she has had. Cam believes that she has overcome her shyness and is a much more confident person today than she was when she first came. She feels that she is a transformed person because of the experiences she has had. She feels that she will be successful if she is able to get a job that she enjoys.

Cam also expressed that she believes the increase of Vietnamese international students is due in large part to the fact that many students have come and been successful upon their return to Vietnam. More students have witnessed this, and therefore also want to come and experience what students before them have achieved. Cam believes that the US has made it easier for students to come over time even though the immigration process has become more challenging. Cam said that the more challenging it is causes even more students to want to come. She also noted that there are more international opportunities within the country and because of this many more students will choose to remain in Vietnam and still experience an English based education.

Cam also noted that she desired to come and study in the US more than any other country because she had relatives here. But now, she believes that it was the best choice for her. Other friends of hers have studied in Singapore, Australia and other places but she considers her choice to be the best. I asked her about China and its increasing world presence, but she still maintains that English is the most prominent world-wide language.

Diep (Female, 24, Master's Degree in Business and Master's Degree in Accounting)

Diep is from Ho Chi Minh City and Bui Thi Xuan High School which is located in District 4. She did not take the college entrance exam because she came to the US during her senior year of high school. She was chosen to go to a high school in Kansas. While there, she was one of two international students in this school. Her host family father was a Veteran of the Vietnam War and the mother was a Vietnamese whom he had met while in the Vietnamese-American War. Diep was the only Vietnamese student in the high school that she attended. She was able to graduate from the high school because she went to night school to complete four years of English in one year. This is atypical for cultural exchange students who come to the US during high school because transcripts from Vietnam do not match to the American high school credit system.

She enjoyed her first year here and desired to continue on to higher education. She was influenced by many friends who had done cultural exchange in the US and this encouraged her to come as well. Neither of Diep's parents has graduated from college. Her father owns a tourism company and conducts motorcycle tours that go throughout Vietnam and into many countries. He has come into contact with many tourists from the

US and this influenced him to encourage his children to study here. Diep's mother has worked for a bank for 17 years and is a branch president. Diep's younger brother came to the US when he was 16 and has also studied in Oklahoma and New York.

She attended Dominican University for one year in Chicago and then transferred to SMU (Southern Methodist University) where she received a bachelor's of finance. She thought the school in Chicago was too small for her so a transfer would be better. She is currently seeking a Master's of Science in Accounting. She was on a full scholarship at SMU for her grades and extracurricular activities. Her family is funding her current degree and plans to graduate by next December.

Diep would like to attain a job and believes that she needs the additional qualifications of a master's degree in order to compete for a job here in the US. She would like to work for a few years here in the US and would then consider returning to Vietnam. If she had remained in Vietnam, Diep would likely have attempted to enter the International Trade University. She was actually very fearful of taking the college entrance exam and thought that by doing a cultural exchange during her senior year of high school; she could avoid and "escape" taking the college entrance exam. She views herself as an average student in Vietnam. This self-reported description of being average is due to her inability to memorize the material which she felt was required to be successful there.

Diep's parents both wanted her to attend higher education in the US, but it was difficult for them to allow their only daughter to come here. Diep's impression of the US anticipated a land of parties and people who did not need to work very hard. Her friends

told her that the classes here were easier than in Vietnam. They prepared her for difficulty with English for the first two years and then said it would get easier. Her brother's experiences also affected her. He came to the US for 9 years but chose to return to Vietnam to start his own mining company. He completed a bachelor's and master's degree from Oklahoma State University.

Diep choose to stay here because her parent's expectation was for her to complete a bachelor's degree. She then attempted to get a job but could not, so she returned to complete her master's in business administration and continued onto another institution for this degree. She believes receiving a degree will enhance her ability to get a job. She further believes that the experience you get from your classes makes a bigger difference than the degree itself. Her eventual hope is to get a job in a public accountant firm like Deloitte, PPMG or Ernst and Young.

It was interesting that after all these degrees in business and accounting, she is actually not interested in business at all. She has not worked in this field and is not sure whether she will like the work or not. Her hope is to work for one of the big accounting firms and perhaps a bank.

She communicates with her parents often through the phone and e-mail. She has also returned to Vietnam quite a few times. She stays in contact with friends back in Vietnam through Facebook and is currently studying to take the Certified Public Accountant Exam.

Diep believes that her English proficiency in reading is high because it takes her about the same time to accomplish reading and research as other American students. In

listening and understanding she would also rate herself as high because she understands what her professors say and understands her friends well. In speaking she would rate herself as medium–high because expression becomes more difficult especially when tired.

Diep has many friendships with different kinds of people including American students. Part of this comes from her immersion into American culture in Kansas and Illinois. While there she was one of the only Asian students so this encouraged her to make many friends. She also has many friends who are international students as well. She says that she is very friendly and says hello to everyone.

Diep views education in Vietnam as mainly memorization and feels that her education here is more practical and useful in the business world. She feels that friends who are in Vietnam are equally as intelligent but may not have the same opportunity that she has had to study here. She feels a greater connection to her professors here than she would have had in Vietnam. The relationship with her professors here includes being able to meet with them after class and getting to know their families. This is not a luxury that she thinks she would have had in Vietnam. She also feels that the way students study here in the US makes it less stressful. If students listen to the professor here, they will do well. But, if you were not good at memorization, then students would not fare well in Vietnam.

Diep has learned the strategy of research utilizing the available resources at the library which is something she would not have had access in Vietnam. Her activities off of the campus include volunteering at a shoe warehouse to organize shoes that go to

children in Africa on a weekly basis. She also goes to restaurants and bars to “hang” out with friends. She also feels that she should spend more time studying but also sees the priority of meeting people and making more connections. Diep would encourage students to be well rounded by doing well in school and in meeting others. She does not attend many activities through the international student office but chooses to meet most of her friends through her classes. She would encourage new international students to be cautious to go with people that they know rather than going to bars and drinking with people that they do not know.

Diep was introduced to Christianity through her host family in Kansas who are Catholic. She did not feel pressured to convert. She welcomed attending church with them in Kansas but she has not continued to do this as she came to Texas.

Diep does not feel totally safe here but feels that it is safe enough. She also does not believe that she would feel safe or secure in Vietnam either. She expressed that students are responsible for themselves wherever they are and should be careful. Her views of the US have changed. She feels that “life is good when you make it good.” She would tell others that you must work hard to earn money. It may seem like it is easy, but it is not. She said that people in Vietnam do not like for her to say this, but “it is the truth.”

Her goal is to have a good job and have balance. The key word that I heard from Diep is the concept of balance. She sees a great deal of imbalance in Vietnam and in the US. She would like to earn more money be able to be comfortable. But she definitely believes she will be more successful by coming here than if she had stayed in Vietnam.

She has undergone so many changes in her personality and believes that she would not be the same person if she had remained in Vietnam.

Diep states that the increase in the number of students coming to the US is because people want to have better lives. Many of those that came as refugees in 1975 have told their relatives in Vietnam about the life that they have here. Those who came have better educations and their children are more successful. Other Vietnamese see this and want this for their families and children. She believes that many people who come here would do anything they can to stay. She does not believe that sacrificing everything to stay in the US is worth it.

Diep stated that her belief in the increase in the number of students here has arrived because the US has opened the door. Her brother had great difficulty in getting an interview. So, she believes that the Vietnamese government wants people to go. They know that people have relatives in Vietnam and that the resources that they earn will flow back to Vietnam. One evidence of this she stated that many of the Vietnamese Government worker's children also come here, so this is proof that they want people to go out and be successful.

Diu (Female, 20, Bachelor's Degree in Business)

Diu is a 20 year old bachelor's student who came from Ho Chi Minh City, District 10 which is Ba Had. She attended Le Quy Don High School there. She did not finish high school in Vietnam but came to the US and completed a final year of high school and first year of community college in Washington State. It was called Edmonds Community

College in Lynnwood, Washington. She attended there three years and completed an associate degree in business. She is currently seeking a bachelor's in human resources. She expects that it will take two additional years to complete her degree.

Her parents did not attend college in Vietnam. They own a furniture shop in Ho Chi Minh City. She has two younger brothers who are not in the higher education system inside or outside of Vietnam. Her parents are funding her higher education experience.

She would likely have gone to Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology if she would have attended higher education in Vietnam. She began to think about coming to the US in high school. There is no test required to attend RMIT. She would have chosen this the program of RMIT to study because she felt it would have been a better education than what she could receive in a Vietnam university.

She chose to come to the US primarily because the programs and equipment are more modern than what she could find in Vietnam. Her parents were also encouraging her to attend a foreign country to attain higher education. This came from her father's travel to the US, and her mother's study in Australia. She also had many friends who attended school in the US. She primarily contacted these friends through Yahoo messenger and Facebook. Her friends told her that the program in the US was excellent and that studying in the US was easier and of a much better quality. Diu said that many of the subjects that they were required to study in Vietnam were not practical and that the subject matter in her classes in the US was much more practical.

The primary influences on Diu's perceptions of the US were very limited except from dialogue with her friends. She looked forward to the opportunity to have more

freedom here from her parents. She desired to come here for higher education so that she could “get a better job that paid more money.” Diu also does not plan to study beyond a bachelor’s degree at this time. She hopes to work in a company in the human resources division. She would like to find a foreign company that desires to do business in Vietnam since she does not have a great deal of faith in the state owned companies in Vietnam.

She found out about study in the US from an agency who helps students find higher education institutions. She felt that most of the subjects that she needed to study in Vietnam were unnecessary. There she had to learn agriculture, and cooking which she thought to be a waste of her time.

Diu believes that every country respects the educational system here as the best in the world. She holds that this is an obvious fact that is widely accepted, but she did not provide further evidence for this thought. She also saw the problem of her transcript not being accepted here in the US. I gathered from the conversation that she saw this as a proof that the US standards were higher than that of Vietnam and that this was the cause of her transcript being rejected. I have understood this to be a major problem for students who are coming here in high school. There are not standardized transcripts that match the US system. Standardizing transcripts could be a great resource and for-profit venture due to the fact that this might allow for students who come to the US in their junior or senior year of high school would be able to potentially graduate and make the transition from high school to college within the US much easier.

Developing friends in the US has been difficult for her because she tends not to initiate conversation. She also felt that this was difficult for her in Washington State because it was a small community college, and she lived primarily with other Vietnamese international students. Diu also struggles with English in her classes especially in the area of philosophy because there are so many new and unfamiliar words.

Diu self-reported that her proficiency in reading English was medium because she thinks that she is lazy in learning new vocabulary. She was able to bypass the TOEFL exam by taking three ESL classes over nine months. By doing this, she was admitted into her current university. Her grade point average that she held within these courses was 3.3 on a 4 point scale. She also stated that she was not a great student in Vietnam because there were too many subjects in which she found no interest or practicality. She self-reported that her proficiency in listening and understanding English was low- medium because it depends on who she is speaking with. She believes that the professors are easier to understand more than students because the students use more slang and speak much faster. This is an obvious frustration for her. She self-reported that her proficiency in speaking English is medium because she has a limited vocabulary and limited English speaking friends to allow her to improve. She currently lives off-campus with another Vietnamese international student. She also shared that she was fearful to do the interview because was concerned that she would not be able to express her ideas in English.

Her friends who are in college in Vietnam told her that many of their courses are irrelevant. Diu feels that the professors here teach about the basic information and in Vietnam the professors teach on a much different theoretical level. She enjoys the

discussion that goes on in her classes here. She feels that in Vietnam the students simply sit and listen to lectures. She also feels that she is learning to be more confident as she participates in the class discussion with American students that she views as very confident. Diu has increased her friendships with American friends through her time in classes and through the World Life Club. It meets every Friday and here she meets international students and American students. She indicated that within the last two weeks she had gone to her first restaurant in Texas with her World Life Club. Diu is not a religious person and does not feel pressure in the US to become Christian. She indicated that she actually feels safer in the US more than she does in Vietnam. She also has had several relatives who have attended universities here in the US, but she could not remember which ones. She also feels that the university she attends is very helpful to provide practical knowledge that will be useful in her future job. One thing that she would like to be different is more opportunities to make friends with American students.

She at one time she believed that studying in the US was easier but now she believes that they are equally hard. She also is homesick for her country which mainly involves the interaction with her friends. Diu said that she goes back to Vietnam every summer, so it could be deduced that this might be having an effect on her assimilation and depth of friends here.

Diu would consider success as learning here and getting a good job and earning lots of money. She would also like to one day be married and have children by the age of 30. She does not want to stay in the US but wants to return home. She feels that more students are coming here to the US because the education system in Vietnam is very

poor. Diu also feels that there are more students today because America has opened the door. She feels that this is true because so many students want to remain in the US and not return home. Therefore, it is emerging that the view of these students is that the US does not want these students to remain but to return home. Diu's perception that the US does not want Vietnamese students to return to Vietnam differs from my earlier understanding.

Hien (Female, 35, Master's Degree in Behavioral Analysis)

Hien is a female master's student in behavioral analysis. She is a 35 year old student from Ho Chi Minh City District 3. She attended the Minh Khai High School. Hien passed the entrance exam for college and completed a bachelor's degree in English literature and linguistics at the College of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City. She had been selected for a special class specializing in English since she was in middle school. After completing her degree there, she went on to Payap University in Chang Mai, Thailand and received a master's of arts in linguistics over three and a half years.

Hien is an only child and her father was in the third year of his college education when the Americans left in 1975 and did not finish his degree. This was a degree in law. Her mother finished high school and became a house wife and dress maker. Her father was an accountant at a medium sized company in Ho Chi Minh City but is currently retired.

She has been a translator for a variety of clients including publishing company. She began to do this while in her second year of her bachelor's degree in Ho Chi Minh City. She also worked as a translator after coming back from Chang Mai. Hien decided to go to Chang Mai because at that time it was the only linguistics program in South East Asia. She went on a full scholarship from a linguistics institute in the US. Hien learned about this program through a friend who knew a professor at the Payap University. She desired to become a professional translator so this is the educational track that she took.

She returned to Vietnam in mid-2003 and worked as a translator until she came to the US in 2009. Here she began work on her master's degree in behavioral analysis. Her interest began as she translated some books on autism and then discovered the degree in behavioral analysis and sought it out. This interest has since merged into a specific interest in verbal behavior which is a combination of behavioral analysis and linguistics. This is now the focus of her study.

Her perceptions of the US came from her time in Chang Mai as she shared a house with a US citizen. Most of her professors in Chang Mai were Americans as well. Her friend was studying one primary language in South East Asia and the linguistics school was less expensive there than in the US. She discovered that higher education in the US was not cheap. She felt that the Chang Mai program was a bit easier than programs in the US. Her view was that the educational programs in the US were of a very high quality.

She went outside Vietnam for linguistics because at the time, Vietnam did not have quality programs in linguistics. She did attend a linguistics program in Hanoi, but

she did not believe it was the quality of program that she desired. And she has now come to the US, because she feels that Vietnam does not have the quality of behavioral analysis programs that she seeks. Hien felt that academic life here would be challenging and competitive. She felt that students in the US who were in master's programs would be very smart and focused on what they wanted to achieve. She learned cultural aspects from her house mate in Chang Mai as well as other American friends. These influences created a greater desire for her to be immersed in the culture herself. Hien anticipated that the American would be more individualistic and less focused on the family primarily because of what she saw in the media. She was also influenced by cable television shows such as the *Discovery Channel* and *Animal Planet*. She also enjoyed movies that displayed American and European life such as *Gone with the Wind*, *The Sound of Music*, and *My Fair Lady*.

Hien desires to help others more, and the education she is receiving through these degrees will enable her to do this more effectively. She hopes, as a translator of books, she would be able to give the next generation more resources than she had. She gave the example of someone desiring to raise their children and the lack of resources about this topic that are available in Vietnam compared to what is available in the US. This is just one example of the kind of impact that Hien hopes that her education and skills could have in her home country. Now, after translating different topics such as autism, she wants to focus her skills on special needs children in order to increase the development of resources for parents and professionals.

Hien discovered the programs that are available at the university that she is now attending when the school sent a group from the college of education to Vietnam in 2008 to do a workshop. Hien was a translator for them and was able to interact with the students and professors that attended. She began to discuss with them the available programs and how she could attend here. It will take one additional year to complete her master's degree and she would also like to do pursue a doctorate in reading difficulties. She feels that the degree earned here will equip her in dealing with autism and other behavioral difficulties. She especially appreciates the practical nature of her study here which has allowed her to take a "hands-on" approach to her education.

Hien self-reports that her English proficiency is high because she is able to comprehend the textbooks that she has translated. Of course, Hien's specialty is linguistics and is highly skilled in this area. She said that on a 10 point scale, she would rate herself at an 8.5-9.0 level. She self-reported that in her listening and understanding skills this would depend on who she is speaking with. The factors of intonation and accent would also be critical in this area. She found it difficult to understand people from Texas but had an easier time with the mid-western US dialect. The regional expressions and idioms also have proved challenging for her while coming to Texas and interacting with people here. She would rate herself as high in speaking primarily because the people she interacts with understand her perfectly.

Hien has been able to develop friendships here at this university at the Friday night club that is primarily made up of Christian students. Hien is also Christian. This faith based meeting provides a common ground to develop solid relationships. She also

develops friendships with students and teachers assistants from her classes. The Friday night event is jointly hosted by the Baptist Student Ministries and a local church and is advertised by word of mouth to other students.

Hien's comparisons of the Vietnamese and US higher education systems provides a unique perspective from many of the students that I interviewed since she had a full experience in Vietnam, Chang Mai Thailand and in the US. The professors in her program in Vietnam had studied abroad and employed teaching methods that were quite modern. She does say that the American professors are much more casual than her Vietnamese professors. Although her situation was atypical, she went on to describe what she witnessed to be the typical structure of Vietnamese college classrooms. The classroom would largely be like taking dictation from the professor's lecture. The professor would not seek out students opinions and would squelch student input in the classes. The class size was also large at approximately 35 students per class. In the US her class size is a maximum of 25. She also indicated that her professors here would talk about physiological needs of human behavior would be "food, water, clothing, shelter, and sex." This reference to sex is not something that she thought a Vietnamese professor would make reference to even though it is in every text book. Hien noted that this was a significant shock to her and was a certain difference between Vietnamese and American professors.

Another item that she identified is that professors here would sit on the table and would in general they would be more casual. Her feeling is that a professor in Vietnam would look serious all the time and refuse to admit wrong so that they could garner the

respect that they think the office of professor affords. Class dialogue was present in her Vietnamese classroom, but the students did not participate as much because the students were not used to these new strategies. Here, the students view this as normal and therefore the strategies work much better. Hien does believe that she has a much closer personal relationship with her professors here and the interaction with them is much greater here than in her Vietnamese experience. In Vietnam, the access to a technological classroom was not available. Also the classroom structure was not like the resources that she experiences here.

Hien participates in the Christian club on Friday evenings, and is a part of a departmental book club. The international office also calls her to escort and help new Vietnamese students assimilate into the college campus. She enjoys going to restaurants and eating Asian food with friends. Hien's friends in Vietnam joke with her that she is not truly Vietnamese because she can eat such a variety of foods from other cultures. She communicates with these friends and family in Vietnam via Skype and e-mail.

Her interaction with American visitors while she was in Vietnam created some isolation from her Vietnamese friends. They actually did not always consider her as traditionally Vietnamese because of her close interaction with foreigners. Her excellent English skills can tend to ostracize her from the general Vietnamese population.

Hien believes that her extracurricular activities have enhanced her abilities by releasing her passion to help others. She does not want to look back someday and regret that she neglected others for the sole purpose of study. She encourages others, especially her roommate to branch out participate in these activities so that she can have a broader

experience in the American culture. She feels that this helps the student to become a more complete person by being involved in community service and involvement. This is quite a distinctive of the American education because in Vietnam students are conditioned to focus only on their study and not extracurricular activities, outside jobs or even household chores. Hien said that this is one reason why Vietnamese students experience culture shock because when they come here they are expected to do their own laundry and prepare their food which they would not have to do in Vietnam. She also feels that this is one reason why these students want to get home to their usual support systems that they have not had while studying in the US. She would also discourage students to avoid going to the bars. In the Vietnamese culture, girls especially are not seen around bars because this is not a proper place for them. She feels that her friends have understood her reluctance and do not seem to look down on her for her desire to avoid these locations.

While she was in Vietnam, Hien was a protestant Christian, but does not feel that there is not an external pressure for Vietnamese international students to convert. But, in Vietnam the traditional religion is Buddhist and families are often not involved. So, Hien could see how the open invitations could be perceived by some to feel like pressure. However, she does not feel that this is the intention of those hosting the religious activities.

Hien generally feels safe on her campus. She related one story about when she was on the bus and one male student got on the bus and started acting crazy. But no one intervened, finally his girlfriend intervened, but then the male got mad at her. Hien

looked at another male on the bus hoping he would intervene, but he did not. She generally feels that her international student office is proactive and improving. They were a bit slow processing her paperwork in her first year, but it has improved.

She wishes if American students could have a better understanding of another culture. She feels that often times American students are oblivious to things that they might be doing that are offensive. Hien gave the example of interrupting someone while they are talking and overtaking the conversation. It was interesting that during our interview as we were talking about this, someone entered our interview unannounced and rudely walked around the room, actually reinforcing the point that Hien was making. She began to understand that this was part of the American conversation style and has even understood that her classmates expect her to do the same.

Her perception of the US and its people has changed. She feels that the Vietnamese media has portrayed Americans as individualistic and selfish. But she does not believe that this is true. She knows that selfish people are everywhere and not just in American culture. She noted that when friends are true friends then they will do whatever they can to help one another out, and she has witnessed this in her own experience in the US. Now she can see the reality of American culture. Before, she did not think that Americans did not value a family centered culture, but now she knows that Americans look forward to special family times and they look forward to these times the whole year.

Hien believes that success does not always mean that she will get the best grade, but that she would become a more complete person. She eventually plans to return to

Vietnam and help translate in the field of behavior analysis and provide resources for these families. She believes that there must be a foundation to build upon before her abilities can be best utilized. She also feels that there must be significant government connections in order to make a larger impact and she does not feel that she has those resources at this time to make that kind of impact.

Hien believes that the large increase in Vietnamese international students comes from the belief that an American degree would equate automatically to a higher paying job. She believes that this is generally true and that the number of international students here will reflect that belief.

Kieu (Female, 21, Bachelor's Degree in Math and Finance)

Kieu is a 21 year old female student from the Tan Bien district of Ho Chi Minh City. She was born in the Quang Ngai province and moved from there when she was 10-11 years old. She attended Le Hong Phong High School. She took the college entrance exam and did well.

Had she continued in higher education within Vietnam, she would have chosen to attend the Ho Chi Minh Economics University. However, her mother encouraged Kieu to come to the US and support her sister who was already involved in higher education here. Kieu's sister was experiencing some depression, so her mother encouraged Kieu to come here and take care of her. She is three years older and is also a student at the same university that Kieu attends. Her sister had come to the US as a 16 year old high exchange student in Georgia. Her sister came to Texas to complete her bachelor's, then

went to Maryland for her master's, and has now returned to Texas for her Ph.D. Kieu joined her and attended a community college in Maryland before joining her in Texas. Her sister was pursuing chemistry related fields.

Kieu also has another younger sister who is 16 and is still living in Vietnam. Kieu's parents both attended medical school in Hue, Vietnam. Both are physicians in Vietnam, her father has his own private medical clinic there while her mother works as a doctor for the government. Kieu's sister's initial interest was in pharmacy school, but she ended up in chemistry. Kieu is seeking a bachelor's degree in math, but previous to being in Texas, she attended a community college in Baltimore County Maryland. She also has attended two community colleges in Texas as well. While at these schools, Kieu was working on her general courses and preparing for her four year degree. She primarily took philosophy, English, and math courses. She did not take the TOEFL exam. Kieu had always taken English classes in elementary school since she was six. She was able to by-pass the TOEFL exam by completing the English courses on her Baltimore county community college campus.

Kieu desired the better higher education that was available in the US. However, she noted that she was very appreciative of the high school education that she received since it prepared her well for coming to the US. Before coming, she felt that the education here would be achievable for her. She feels that the high school program of education within Vietnam is a bit heavy, but that it prepared her well for what she would experience in college. It helped her a great deal with the fundamentals. As she reflected upon why she thought so many students chose to come to the US, she noted that English

is the most desired language of students in Vietnam. She also believes that the access to technology and resources are a significant draw, especially the ability to go on-line and find resources that directly relate to their majors. Kieu also holds that Vietnamese students in Vietnam become stuck in the habit of only doing whatever their teachers tell them to do rather than branching out and learning on their own. She sees this as a primary benefit of her education here in the US.

Kieu's view of higher education mainly stemmed from her sister's comments to her. However, her basic introduction came through the advisors and first professors that she encountered in the first community college in which she was enrolled. Kieu believes that her parents expect her to return to Vietnam upon the completion of her degree. She expressed that she had never really thought about going abroad and that she would have considered herself just as happy if she had remained in Vietnam for higher education. The key goal was not the higher education itself, but rather getting a good job. She also had little or no contact with Americans while in Vietnam, so all in all this was a new concept to her.

Kieu desired a college degree because she wanted to learn. If she had not gone to college, she would likely have gone to culinary school. But she did think that her parents expected her to go to college. Her grandfathers on both sides were both in the army. They both became physicians and there was likely influence there because her father's uncle was a doctor and teacher at the medical school in Hue. Kieu initially went to the Baltimore community college because her sister was in the university in Maryland and they wanted Kieu to be close to her. She indicated that she chose the community college

because it was considerably cheaper than other options on the East coast. She felt that her time spent in the community college assisted her both from an educational and financial standpoint to be prepared for the degree that she was seeking currently.

Kieu feels that her class size in Vietnam would be bigger, but the numbers are static over the time spent in the Vietnamese higher education system which allows the students to become very familiar with each other. Kieu also stated that her desire for a sense of adventure and difference were important in her choosing to go abroad for a degree in higher education. She had also considered going to Singapore or Europe, but chose to come here primarily because her sister was here. She likely would proceed further to grad school in mathematics in the US and eventually become a teacher. Kieu's primary motivation to receive this degree was to follow her passion to teach and not a high paying job.

Kieu believes that a degree achieved in the US will help her to find a job in Vietnam. She also believes that her degree here will help her to work in a variety of companies who are looking for students with her skills. She generally feels that she has not experienced a great deal of difficulty with English in her classes.

One reason that Kieu has been successful she attributes to her two semesters of English that she accomplished in the community college. She followed those up with two semesters of English composition and the combination of these were enough to get her up to speed on her English for the remainder of her time spent in the US. She self-reports that her proficiency in reading English is medium because her SAT score was not so high in reading. Her score was 450 and she also feels that her speed is slower than

some students. Her self-reported proficiency in listening and understanding is also medium because she feels that she can generally understand what people are saying but she does skip some words. But she is able to focus on the key words, and this becomes more difficult when someone talks too quickly. She used the example of a math teacher that she had who was from New York and spoke very fast. She felt fortunate that she was dealing with math because this enabled her to keep pace. But she did have difficulty understanding him. In comparing her time in Baltimore with Texas, she finds that it is more difficult to understand the accent used here in Texas. Kieu rates herself as between medium and low in speaking English because she does not speak a great deal to people in English. She rarely speaks to American students outside the classroom.

Kieu has not developed many friendships with many students here. She indicated that she had more friends in Baltimore and many of them were Americans. The primary reason that she gave was that Baltimore was quite a bit smaller than the school here and had very few organizations that she could join. She said that in Texas the scope was too big and she feels lost. She has met other Vietnamese international students and has had them over to their apartment for dinner.

She stated that she does go to Thai and Italian restaurants but that she does not hang out with friends very often. Kieu believes that American students are friendly but that her primary barrier is herself. She feels that they have different interests since she does not like shopping or hanging out with friends. She would prefer to stay home and study but this was not quite the same when she was in Vietnam. In Vietnam, Kieu said that the large numbers of people within close proximity almost forced one out into the

process of going. But when asked what the difference is with her experience here, she stated that although Texas is big, people are spread out and she does not feel the same encouragement to get out.

She does have several friends who are international students. Kieu met these friends through the international student organizations that she attends. She knows that there are many more activities available, but she does not attend much. She attributes this to her own laziness. But it is interesting, that she is appreciative that the opportunities are available, even though she does not normally attend.

Kieu does not see a great deal of difference in the amount that she studied in Vietnam compared to the amount she studies here. She feels that both are challenging. Kieu identified computers being in the classroom as a major difference that she sees between Vietnam and the US. The teachers there do not use computers to add to their lectures, but may write on the board or read from the text. She does believe that she has more interaction with professors here in the US. Here she can e-mail or ask questions of the professor both inside and outside of class. But in Vietnam, the professors do not take time to ask if the students have questions.

Kieu is not a fan of group work because she feels that it distracts her from doing what she should be focused on. She also points to her dislike of personal interaction as a factor in this as well. Some methods that she has learned here in her studies that she would use with future students would be computer modeling, and the use of graphing calculators.

Kieu has attended a cultural event at the school. Here they participated together in making cards for cancer patients. She and her sister have also invited friends over for dinner. But overall, she is not largely involved in many activities, but it is largely her own choice. She does communicate with her parents by Skype on the weekends. Kieu's time is mainly consumed by studying and sleeping. She will watch television on the weekends, but limits it to documentaries and *Dr. Who*. Kieu would encourage others to participate more than she does. She volunteered in Baltimore as a teaching assistant and enjoyed that very much.

While in Vietnam, her aunt and mother would attend the Buddhist Temple. But here, she might attend the temple on the Tet holiday but she does not consider that religious. She does not feel pressured to attend religious activities here. She does feel safer here in Texas than she did in Baltimore. This is largely due to the fact that she was near an inner city. She did indicate that she would feel safer in Vietnam because of the fact that her family was there and available to her.

Her university has been helpful in keeping her notified via e-mail or text of issues that could affect her. Kieu's perceptions about the US have remained fairly constant since she has been here. And she remains committed toward returning to Vietnam. Kieu believes success for her would be finding a job that she loves to do. She would also like to give back to her nation by becoming a teacher. She would also encourage others to go abroad and expand their world.

Lam (Female, 21, Bachelor's Degree in Art and Journalism Advertising and Bachelor's Degree of Fine Arts in Printmaking)

Lam is a 21 year old student in advertising and print. She is junior at the university and is from Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. She attended Nhun Chinh High School in Thanh Xuan province. Her parents are divorced and Lam lives with her mother. She is an only child and her parents have been divorced since she was five. Lam scored a 22 on the college entrance exam, where the top score was 30. She did not want to study in Vietnam, but she took the exam because her mother wanted her to at least prepare.

She took one year off after high school to study English, but then sought to come to the US. Her mother especially did not want her to come to the US except to complete a master's degree, but Lam persuaded them that she should go abroad for her bachelor's degree. Lam's mother received her bachelor's degree in linguistics in Russia, and completed her master's degree inside Vietnam. Her mother is now a teacher in English, and Lam had studied English with her for 7 years. Her mother was an interpreter for Russia, and then pursued a master's degree in English and is currently a teacher at the Hanoi National Foreign Language University.

Lam specifically wanted to come to the US because Vietnam did not offer a bachelor's degree in the field she wanted to pursue, but only offered a two-year associate degree in printing and she wanted at least a bachelor's. Her mother held out for a year, but Lam persuaded her that she should go abroad.

Lam's grandfather was a soldier for the Northern Vietnamese army and does not like the US. Her grandmother was in some part of the royal family of Vietnam, but the

war tremendously changed her life. Lam's grandmother had a brother that was killed in the war. Her family resisted her desire to come to the US because of their ill feelings toward the US. Lam's family has a tremendous value of education. Her mother has 6 siblings, and 5 of the brothers and sisters are teachers. Lam's mother currently teaches at the Hanoi University of Business and Technology, so it would have been very easy for Lam to have remained in Hanoi for her higher education, but she desired something different.

If Lam would have remained in Vietnam for a degree, it would likely have been at the school in which her mother taught. She said, "it would have been the only choice." She actually sent her exam scores to this school. Lam explained the exam process more clearly to me. She stated that you can choose three different schools to have your scores sent. However, once a school chooses to take a student, then they have no other option. Because of this, the students are required to list these schools in order of the ones they want to attend. If the first school does not choose them, then their scores will be sent to their second choice. But when the school accepts them, then the process is complete. They cannot opt out and change their mind on which school they would like to attend. Her interest was in multimedia and not in business. This was not available in Vietnam. Her passion is more on the art and creative side of the process.

Many of her perceptions of the US came from her family. Her grandfather was angry with the US because of the loss of his siblings. Her grandmother encourages him to stop talking about the war because she did not want the grandchildren to be negatively affected. Her grandfather made her promise that she would return to Vietnam, because

he does not like the idea of her meeting someone and remaining in the US. He also injured his back in the war and it is affected by the weather changing, so it is a constant reminder of a difficult time in his life.

Lam's mother had an invitation from a US company to come and work here, but she had to turn it down because Lam was only seven and she would not have been allowed to bring her. Lam feels a bit of responsibility that her mother was not able to come to the US. She believes that her mother's life could have been very different. So, there is a sense that she is making up for what "could have been" in her mother's life.

Lam read many articles about higher education online. She thought that the education here had much better equipment and professors. She sees that most of the materials are in English. She also views the English spoken in Singapore and Australia to be inferior. She feels that the English spoken in Australia is mixed with Indian. She knows this because of her friends that attend school in both Singapore and Australia. Lam is not pleased with her friends English. She also indicated that she feared that if she were closer, her mother would come and visit her, and she wanted to have some freedom and space away from her mother.

Lam would pay close attention to the Vietnamese Online Newspaper and the articles that students who were studying abroad would write. Her mother also had a friend who was an agent for students who were studying abroad and she enlisted her help in persuading her mother to let her come to the US. This friend was the one who told her about a community college in Dallas, because she had a friend here who lived in this area. He told her that the tuition in Texas was more affordable. She also had two close

friends who had come to the US a year earlier. One was going to school in Iowa and one in California. They both encouraged her to come, but told her clearly that it was not like movies they had watched together about America. They said it was harder than they thought it would be. They told her to expect “culture shock” and difficulty with English.

Lam’s friend who was attending college in Iowa had attended college in Vietnam as well and told her that it was totally different. She said that there were more activities and more involvement and therefore more fun. Lam felt that high school in Vietnam made you “study like hell.” But when you passed the exam to get into the university, students would stop trying. There was the sense that the process to get there was important and challenging, and that once you were there you could coast and not continue to challenge yourself. Lam felt that college life in Vietnam was much easier than high school life. She felt that the parents ceased to push the students once they were in the University, and because of this, many students would fail.

Lam had a strong motivation that she would not fail her mother’s expectation for her or her own expectation for her to succeed. Her family’s educational value and personal investment into her was always a motivating factor for her. Because of this she must try her best and never fail. She felt that her mother had sacrificed a great deal to allow her to have the good quality of education here in the US and she must not let her down.

Lam is receiving a scholarship and she is partially funded from her mother. She also came to the Texas region because of the weather. She searched for a place where the weather was similar to the weather in Hanoi. She did not want to go to the north where it

would be too cold. The tuition in Texas was also cheaper than in other states. She knows this because she has friends who are going to school in other parts of the US. She has a friend who is in Pennsylvania, and her tuition was more than twice what Lam paid to go to the community college in Dallas. A third reason was that the community college had the associate degree that she desired. She was also attracted to the community college campus because it had a lake in front of it. This seemed to remind her of her hometown which is famous for the lakes that are placed around the city.

Her choice of a university was similar. She visited a couple of different schools before deciding on this one. The art department of the other school she visited was much smaller than the one she chose. She also thought that the traffic around this school was much less and this was a positive factor as well. There were many more Vietnamese international students on her community college campus than on the university campus. She had read online that there were over 300 Vietnamese international students on her community college campus, but only sixteen were from Northern Vietnam, and the rest were from the South. She anticipated that this was because many from the South of Vietnam had relatives in the area. Lam stated that many of her friends came to Texas because they had an aunt or uncle who lived in the area.

She also believes that there is some geographical draw to similar regions of the origin country. She said that she thought students who were from North Vietnam would rather go to the Northern US and students from Southern Vietnam would prefer the Southern states. Lam also expressed that she experienced resentment from people who were from Southern Vietnam when they discovered that she was from Hanoi. This is

fairly easy to distinguish because of the dialect and vocabulary that is used. Lam experienced times where these people would make fun of her accent and assume that she is a communist. Most of these issues occurred in the restaurants of the Vietnamese community in Dallas. However, Lam indicated that this is primarily an issue of the generation before her and not among the students who are her own age. She said that she is good to those people who are good to her. She does not like the politicizing of the relationships.

She has already had an offer for a job upon her return to Vietnam from the school where her mother works. She is not as concerned about the job but is more concerned about whether she gets to do what she loves. Lam would actually like to go from the US to Japan. Because of this, she is taking Japanese as a minor. She truly loves Japanese culture. I asked her why she did not go immediately to Japan for her education. She told me that English had been her focus since she was a little girl and not Japanese. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on English within her Vietnamese culture. So, she has only recently discovered her love for Japanese culture. It has become her personal hobby. The tuition for Japanese universities is also prohibitive and there are very few scholarships available. Her hope is that she will be able to complete a master's degree there in Japan because she can also work there.

If she cannot go to Japan, she realizes that she will need to get a job first. She knows that her mother will not support her beyond the bachelor's degree. She also has a boyfriend who is a resident of the US, so she views remaining here and getting a job as an option as well. He wants her to stay here rather than going to Japan.

Lam expressed that she can be very creative in her program here. In Vietnam she sees the program of study to be theoretical and rigid. Here she feels the freedom to think “outside the lines” and be creative and even “crazy.” In Vietnam she views education as a process that goes very much the same everywhere, but in the US she feels that she gets to experience the freedom of her expression.

Lam did state that she had difficulty with the English language in her classes. When she first arrived, she took the SAT exam and skipped the language classes. Her scores on the SAT were: Verbal-510; Writing-660 and Math-680. Because of this she did not take any ESL classes and the speed of regular courses was too fast. She recalls that in her first week of speech class, her syllabus said that she must have fluent English, and her teacher was questioning why she was in the class. Her speech teacher helped her and she got an “A.” She did not talk to anyone in class and focused intently on the professor so that she could understand. In her first two weeks in the US she called AT& T to set up her internet and called her bank to set up an account, and they could not understand her. This shocked her, because she believes that her English study would have helped her more. She also was overwhelmed at the height of people here- everyone was bigger than her.

Lam self-reported that she was high in reading because she took a course in world literature and had to read 150 pages a day. She read at twice the rate of one of her friends who was a resident of the US, so she felt that this was a good indicator that she was high in reading. She also had to summarize the reading and she wanted to spend adequate time to do this because she is able to comprehend better when she does this. In listening

and understanding she self-reported that she was medium because when watching movies she would have the correct details of the plot summary. She also does not need to ask people “what do you mean?” except for colloquial phrases. She does not relate to conversations that deal with television shows. She finds that many of her friends make references to popular television shows which she does not understand. The one exception here was *The Big Bang Theory* because she would watch this show with her boyfriend.

Lam self-reported that she was high in speaking because professors say “your English is getting really better.” She also notices that people seem to be able to understand her most of the time. She also said that her scores on the grammar and punctuation exam given to all journalism majors was an indication that she was doing better than when she first arrived.

Lam does not have many American friends. This was strange to her because when she was in Vietnam, she had many friends. But here in the US she wanted to have just a few close friends. Her main friends are other international students from other countries. She has one Philipino friend that she made in her Japanese class. This friend had a car and enabled her to get around town. She felt that Americans were friendly and especially one reached out to her because he had an interest in Vietnamese culture. She viewed that her problem was more on her side of not reaching out because she was so focused on school.

She objects to the openness between students and professors. Sometimes she likes it because the professors want to listen and be less formal. But she is not used to this. She feels that this is not polite when students can object in class and give their own

opinion. In Vietnam, the process of education is very formal and especially the classroom etiquette. If you want to question something, you must raise your hand, wait, and when called upon- stand and give your reasoning. She feels that here it is too much freedom and casualness.

She does like to know her professors on Facebook and outside the class. In one class, her professor asked her why she does not share more of her opinions in class. This is because this is not her culture. Her culture results in her having a more reserved attitude.

Lam views classroom technology and access to the internet as major differences between Vietnam and the US standards of education. She would say that Vietnam does have libraries but they are not utilized like they are here in the US. Class strategies here are very practical and hands on. In Vietnam, the focus is on theory and the format is very rigid. Especially in art, there is freedom to express yourself in your own style rather than attempting to duplicate the style of the professor.

Lam also views that the system of education is changing. Many parents have not been satisfied and now they are changing the classroom procedures. There is more discussion and more homework. But in Lam's opinion, the change is not dynamic, but it is multiplicative. The system is simply adding additional elements rather than changing the system. This seems to result in the students being more overwhelmed and less productive. This is not a positive move in her opinion because it is resulting in more pressure on the students and not less. She feels that they should reduce the theory and add practical elements.

When she does relax, she likes to go back to Dallas on the weekend and goes to movies and out to eat. She prefers animation, comedy and action movies. She also likes going window shopping at the mall. Lam does not watch sports much because there is not a focus on soccer which is more familiar to her.

She has a great deal of stress while she is on the campus here because she has five classes this semester. There are many activities on the campus but they happen on the weekend and she tends to go away to be with her friends on the weekend. She does attend leadership workshops on the campus. But she does like to get to know the people in her classes.

She would encourage students to avoid misarranging their priorities and forgetting about studying. They have fun on the weekend but focus on their studies during the week. But she has some friends that want to get together every day and party. But she views this as irresponsible. She does not feel pressured to become Christian. Her father's side in Vietnam was Catholic and her mother's side was Buddhist. She did note that there are many invitations but she does not feel pressured to convert. She does like the opportunities to communicate with Americans, but Lam has decided that she does not want to participate in any religious activities. However, she does feel bad sometimes because she wants to be polite. She wishes that they would stop inviting because it does become annoying when they continually invite even though she does not ever reply.

Lam does not feel safe on her campus because she rides her bicycle a lot and works late into the night in her studio. One night when she was coming home, a man approached her and asked her for money. He said he was hungry and needed some food.

It was 11 pm at night and some people opened the gate and she ran inside. This was discomfoting to her. She also calls her friends when she is on her way home. She feels it is safer here than in Vietnam, but she has requested more lights and police presence on her campus. Her campus does have a shuttle that she has also utilized this. She has also received an e-mail about a local robbery and this concerned her even more. She does feel safer when on the campus rather than off the campus.

She appreciates the help that she has received from the international student office. She feels it is better here than it was on her community college campus. They are much quicker to respond to her needs here. At the community college campus, she called and e-mailed many times before she received an answer.

Her perceptions of life in the US has changed somewhat. She now views life in the US as boring. She has found that she does not have many activities outside of class. If she had extra time, she would sleep. She has too many classroom responsibilities.

She would change the core curriculum. She does not know why she needs to take chemistry. Her friend who is in school in the UK does not have to do this. This she feels overwhelms the students. She also does not like how scholarships are delineated. A 4.0 GPA can get a \$6000 scholarship, but if you are 3.99 then it drops to \$4000. She believes this is inequitable and puts too much pressure on students. Another issue is the idealism found in the degree plans which indicate that you can finish this plan in four years, but she does not think that it is the reality. Part of this comes because they are based on pre-requisites. This can also create issues between the students and their parents, because the school catalog says she can finish in four years but she does not

think it is possible. Lam will view herself as successful if she loves what she does and has enough money to send some back to her mother and to live a life that is enjoyable rather than so hectic.

Lam feels that the increase in the number of students is because the US is opening the door more. Lam cites the story of her mother as evidence of this. Ten years ago, her mother attempted to come to the US and applied for her visa. She did this with some others, and of the five who attempted, Lam's mother was the only one who received the visa. She believes that Vietnam understands that many people will stay in the US. She would personally not like to stay in the US because her family and friends are in Vietnam. However, she is considering staying in the US because she is in a relationship with a citizen. And it is not likely that she could convince her boyfriend to come back to Vietnam with her. But if it were not for her boyfriend, she would not even think of staying here after graduation. Many times she feels that families encourage students to stay here so that they can pay off their debt of school before returning home. If they can work for two years here, then they can pay for their school. She does see that the government does attempt to keep up with what the students are doing. A couple of years ago the government considered requiring the students to send back their grades and degrees sought back to the Ministry of Education for review. But here in the US there is protection for students. She feels that the government tries to control them, but they cannot do it because they are already abroad. She feels that they cannot be controlled.

Lam feels that when she is in the US, then her opportunities for employment are based upon her abilities. In Vietnam, she feels that her employment is based on the

connections she has and the amount of time spent in the system. So, even if you have the ability to be a CEO in a company, you will not have the opportunity to do so, because of the system. Here in the US, if you have the ability, then the position can be acquired faster.

Lam feels that she has control of the situation. She can stay or go because she has the support of her family. She does not think that the amount of money that earners make in the US and send back to Vietnam is a major factor in the Vietnamese government's allowance of this apparent defection. Lam thinks that the amount of money that she would send back to her mother in Vietnam is small compared to the money that she would be earning and spending in this economy. But the government does not have much choice since she is already here.

Mai (Female, 26, Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality Management)

Mai is a 26 year old female student pursuing a bachelor's in hospitality management. She is from Da Nang which is in central Vietnam. She is from Quang Nam province and Phan Chau Trinh High School. Mai attended the Da Nang Foreign Languages College and received a bachelor's degree in English in four years. She received a score of 17 on her college entrance exam: math-7, English-5, and literature-5. This was her second choice of schools. Her first choice was Ho Chi Minh City Foreign Trade University. This school was a fifteen minute motorbike ride from her home. So, she lived at home while going to school there.

Mai came to the US in 2008, and she is currently seeking a Bachelor's of Science degree in Hospitality Management. Her first semester here she was enrolled in an ESL course at Brookhaven college in the Dallas community college system. Then she transferred to the Collin county community college system to take her core classes for two, and then finally enrolled at this four year institution for the last three semesters. She expects to attend three more semesters.

She works as a hostess and cashier in a restaurant in a neighboring town and drives to this university about 45 minutes one way by car. Neither of Mai's parents has attended college and her father operates a clothing store which sells leather clothes while her mother is a housewife. She has three sisters, and she is the second oldest. They are 28, 26, 18, and 16. Her grandparents also did not have a degree, so she is the first generation in her family to receive a college degree. Mai has several reasons for seeking a college degree. While pursuing her degree in Da Nang, she had the opportunity to visit many of the foreign owned resorts in her home city. Upon doing this, she recognized that the service at these five star resorts was not very good, and that foreigners were managing them. She wondered why there were so few Vietnamese managers. This created a need and opportunity for the potential of her study.

She chose the US primarily because she had some relatives here. Mai believes that it is easier for female students especially to have family support if they are going to be successful in seeking a higher education. She also chose the US because she felt that she could work while going to school, thus making her financial way possible. This option is not available in Singapore. She is funding her higher education by working in a

nail shop and as a hostess in the restaurant. She also has a scholarship for \$1000 per semester from the school based upon her grades and multicultural status. Mai did work as a receptionist for a company while attending school in Vietnam but quit after four months to focus on her studies. She also helped out her parents in their clothing store when she had time.

Mai believes that a degree from the US will help her a great deal more than having achieved a similar degree inside Vietnam. She holds that the US is the strongest country with the best education system. She views this because she sees this country as rich and strong militarily and therefore holds a strong academic background as well. Her aunt also sponsored her family to come here to the US, and she expects her parents to come here within the next year. She would like to get a job here in the US and work for about five years before returning to Vietnam. She hopes eventually to be a bridge between the US and Vietnam in the area of tourism and hospitality. She would like to work for someone like Hyatt who has resorts here and in Vietnam so that she can continue to travel back and forth between the countries.

Her perceptions of the US were primarily formed from Vietnamese people who live in the US from Vietnam. Friends and family referred to the US and “the heavenly place.” Her parents watched the television and believed that the educational system was superior. They say this because of their belief in the opportunities that are available here to succeed. Mai truly loves her hometown and would love nothing more than to return. But most importantly for Mai, she believes that home is wherever her family is. Mai felt that education in the US would be a bit easier than her education in Vietnam. She stated

that the education in the US was more practical and that there were not as many subjects as her education in Vietnam. Mai has a more rounded experience to communicate from since she is one of the few respondents that have completed a degree in Vietnam.

Mai did not take the TOEFL exam, but enrolled in an ESL course here so that she would not need to take the TOEFL. She explained that an assessment test was given to determine the English proficiency, and this assessment dictated that she would need to take one ESL course for one semester. Compared to other students interviewed, some had taken up to four semesters of English. Mai's skills were rated at 3 or 4 in each of the English proficiency. Mai was tested when she first entered the program at the Dallas community college system and was given one ESL class to take. When she transferred to the Collin county system, she was assessed again and was found to be proficient enough to bypass any additional English classes.

Mai's family was affiliated with the Southern Vietnamese Army. Mai's aunt came to the US and is married to a US citizen and desires to help all of her family to relocate here. Since she was very young, Mai can remember that her mother would encourage her to get her education because she knew that it would do the best to help prepare her to become successful in whatever she did. She also remembered that it was also her desire to do something different with her life. She did not want simply a normal Vietnamese life but desired something different. She is different from her older sister, who is a mother of three girls and has involvement in a Vietnamese business. Mai also feels that the expectation of her family for her to succeed is a motivating factor that encourages her to push herself.

Mai calls her parents most every day. She does not use the computer to communicate as much because their computer skills and availability are limited. She does however utilize instant messaging, e-mail and Facebook to communicate with friends that she was in school with in Da Nang. Her aunt was the main source of communication about higher education here in the US. She contacted a consultant agency that helps students who want to study abroad. This agency helps get students placed in desirable schools here in the US for a fee.

Mai wants to become a hotel or resort manager here or in Da Nang. She believes that her degree will help her accomplish this. This is likely the final degree she will attempt in this field because she believes it is a profession that is largely based on experience. However, if she has difficulty finding a job, she would consider the pursuit of more education if she felt it would be beneficial. Her education has been very beneficial because this major has been very practical and useful for her. She also has enjoyed studying other subjects as part of her core curriculum in the community college systems.

She did share that she experienced some difficulty with English primarily in understanding the professor's lectures. She was more confident when she read her textbooks and sought to grasp the material through this means. Her problem was self-assessed as an inability to focus for long periods of time which was required when attempting to learn through the lectures. She said that she would "zone out" after about five minutes. In reading English, Mai assessed herself at a medium level because she received high grades in her reading class. She admits that she might not get the meaning

of all the words but enough to understand the context and answer the questions. In listening and understanding she self-assessed her skills as lower. She believes listening is the most important skill because it helps one to understand and eventually to be able to write. Mai self-assessed her skills in listening and understanding skills as medium as well because she can understand what people are saying most of the time but not all of the time. She is improving all the time, but feels that she can continue to grow in her confidence level. In her field of hotel management, she believes the understanding and listening skills to be paramount. She understands that if she cannot understand her customers or set solid examples for the people who are working for her, then this would create significant issues in her professional development. In the Da Nang area, the resort industry is primarily geared toward foreign guests and English becomes a bridge language if there is no other common language between the guests and Mai as a future manager. In speaking, Mai rates herself as also medium because people can typically understand her, but sometimes people have difficulty understanding her pronunciation. She also readily admitted that her intonation and pronunciation was not correct at times.

Mai believes that the people who have the most difficult time understanding her are those who are also not native English speakers. Thus, when her pronunciation is slightly askew and their listening is also hampered, then the communication flow is difficult at best. Mai encounters this frequently on her campus and in her classes with students from other countries. She enjoys making friends with these students especially other Asian students because she feels that they share the same culture. Developing friendships with American students is something that Mai expressed as a particular

problem for her. Many times this is because she fears that the American students will not understand her. She also expressed that she develops friendships with older people rather than with college students that are her age. There is a sense that these students are arrogant and look down upon her. She feels that this is based upon on her speaking skills, so she chooses not to talk to them. This has occurred specifically in her restaurant class when they were asked to work in teams, in this process she feels that she conflicts with other female students because of some sense of jealousy. Mai does not feel this as much with male students, because the natural attraction helps to ease the tension.

Mai has good friendships with her co-workers more than with her classmates. She assumes that this is because she sees her co-workers every day. Off campus relationships are more meaningful to her because she commutes to school and does not live on campus. These friends are Tai, Indonesian, Mexican, and Vietnamese women with whom Mai works.

Classroom technology was the first thing Mai mentioned as a difference between the US and Vietnamese education. The access to technology makes the education in the US much more practical in her opinion. She also feels that the tests she takes here are easier. In the US, the tests tend to be multiple-choice and she finds these easier since she has a good short term memory. In Vietnam, the tests would be more essay answers and this was much more difficult for her. There is also more group work and projects involved in the education in the US and the projects are more professionally related. However, this creates a particular difficulty for her, because she tends not to get along

well with her classmates. Mai also acknowledges that she must adapt and change if she is going to work well in an international marketplace.

Mai also struggles with classroom presentations but feels that she is forced to improve in areas that she presents as weaker areas. Her professors encourage her to overcome her weakness. She does not believe that there is a wide gap between the relationship with her professors here and in Vietnam.

Mai is not involved in many on-campus activities because she commutes from 40 miles away from the campus. She is involved in volunteering for a local food pantry with seniors. She finds that these seniors do not view her as their competitor and thus they are more open to develop a relationship with her. Younger people tend to use phrases that relate to popular culture and this creates more difficulty in her understanding them. She finds that the senior adults talk more slowly and use a more “official” or formal language which Mai is more prepared to communicate through. Mai does “hang out” with her work friends by going to a restaurant/bar. She does go to action and comedy movies as well. She feels that on campus and off campus activities help international students to build confidence, learn the language, and understand the culture of the US. She indicated a certain level of disappointment with the fact that she does not have more American friends. She also felt that she has missed out on part of her cultural interaction, because she has not reached out more. But one older American has had a great deal of impact on her understanding the culture here through his perspective.

Mai indicated that her perception of Americans is that they are very “easy” or casual. She used the example of the potential of meeting someone at a bar and then

assuming that they may sleep together. Mai said this was not something that she would do, and therefore it made her uncomfortable for her to think that this is what people in this culture would do. She fears that people may misunderstand her friendliness and take advantage of her if she has too much to drink. Mai has been warned of these types of situations by her mother and her aunt. She also commented that Americans were not loyal or committed in their relationships. Divorce and a general lack of commitment were indicators that Americans were too casual in their committed relationships.

Mai grew up in a Buddhist home. Her mother was very involved and attended the temple regularly. Her aunt with whom she lives also attends the local temple regularly. She would also consider herself as Buddhist. But, she does not feel that she has been pressured to convert to Christianity. She has seen family members who have converted to Christianity because a Christian group met his needs when he was first in the US. Mai feels great loyalty to her family in the area of religion; therefore, she will be whatever her family is religiously. She seeks to make her parents happy, and wants her to marry a Buddhist as well.

Mai feels safe in the places that she lives, but she does observe the warnings of her older family members to be careful and wise. She would feel safer in Vietnam because she would always have family and friends with her, but here she often feels alone and isolated from community.

She appreciates the university she attends because of the international student activities and their willingness to provide scholarships to international students. Mai is also appreciative of the degree that she is receiving since it is not a degree that is offered

at most schools from her perspective. Because she has \$1000 scholarship, this enables her to receive in-state tuition which assists her greatly since she pays for her own education. Mai believes this is something that is unique in Texas and is a main reason that she remains in this state for her higher education.

Mai regrets that she has not been more involved with activities on the campus. The main reason that she gives is her distance from the campus and her work schedule which keeps her from these activities. Mai believes that the US is not a “heavenly place” as her parents led her to believe. She thinks it is a place where you must work hard, and the struggling economy has made it even more difficult. She is also concerned with the terrorism that has occurred within the US and the effects that it has had upon the ability to immigrate to the US. She especially dislikes the difficulty in being able to work legally in the US.

Mai summed up her feeling about the US like this, “in the U.S. you will work hard and you will have something, but in Vietnam even you will work hard you will not have anything.” She also views that the educational system here would be better for her younger sisters. But she wants them all to be prepared, that life here is also hard work. Success for Mai is self-described as being able to learn from the lowest level and be able to work her way up to a high level manager. She longs for the respect that she could receive from other employees who have watched her learn and grow in the organization over time. In her opinion, it is this long view that enables a person to know the whole of the business if they have experienced it at every level.

Mai feels that there are more students from Vietnam now because students can afford to go abroad. The living conditions in Vietnam have improved such that parents believe they can provide a better education for their children by sending them abroad. She does not feel that the Vietnamese or American governments have been restrictive to the point of deterring growth. She does think that there are many students who utilize their study abroad, just to get into the country and while here they seek to get married so they can stay. Mai did add that she feels that it is harder to get into the US than it is to get out of Vietnam. She views this as a result of the national positioning of the more wealthy nations. Her thought is that the wealthier nations make it more difficult for people from poorer nations to enter their country.

Ngoc (Female, 26, Master's Degree in Business Administration and Finance)

Ngoc is a 26 year old female graduate student who is receiving her master's in business administration and finance. She is from Ho Chi Minh City and District 10. She attended Bui Thi Xuan High School in Ho Chi Minh City. She also attended college in Vietnam. She was accepted by her first choice of schools which was the Foreign Trade University in Ho Chi Minh City. The degree that was completed there was a bachelor's in foreign economics. She came to the US in August 2010 and expects to finish in 2012. Ngoc's parents also completed their degrees in Vietnam. Her father has a bachelor's in English from Vietnam National University, and her mother completed a bachelor's in English from Vietnam Open University. She is an only child. Her mother's father was in southern Vietnamese army. Her grandfather on her father's side ran a beverage business

until his current retirement. Both her paternal and maternal grandmothers were housewives and did not work outside the home. Ngoc's father is a sales manager for a company that specializes in lighting accessories. Her mother was an accountant for a state owned education company but is now retired.

Ngoc has worked as a ground service supervisor for Vietnam Airlines at Tan Son Nhat International Airport. She also worked for Indovina Bank in its international banking department as a bill supervisor for three years. She is self-funding from her years of working in Vietnam and she also receives support from her parents to achieve this degree. She also has a scholarship from the school she now attends. It is a \$1000 departmental scholarship from the business school which allows her to receive in-state tuition. She actually never considered doing her master's degree in Vietnam because of the influence of those she worked with who had received a degree abroad.

Ngoc's work experience helped her to determine exactly what she wanted to do with a master's degree and she determined that this was not available to her within Vietnam. She felt that her higher education needs would be met in the US. An education here would also improve her English and it was available because her uncle's family lived here and could provide support.

Ngoc compared the master's in business administration in Vietnam and in the US. She could do this because she had several friends who had completed this degree in Vietnam, and she could view their course work. She felt that it was typically covering unpractical socialist business theories, and this is not what she desired. She felt forced to study these.

Ngoc's main perception of the US was from her family who lives here. Her uncle told her that the life in the US was better and the educational quality was also higher than she would experience in Vietnam. Her uncle was a good example of this, since he came here 15 years ago and he is a successful dentist. Also she was certain that a degree from a US institution would yield a better promotion and compensation than degrees sought within Vietnam. This was proven by the people that she knew. Her supervisor in the Vietnam bank had achieved his master's degree from an American institution. She also felt that this degree would allow her to move to a higher position with higher compensation and knew that a degree in Vietnam would not allow her to do this. She also would like to work for a multi-national company which also values a broader experience in her education.

From the internet, she discovered the geography and culture of the area. She also researched the wide variety of types of higher education that was available in the US. She studied the private and public systems as well as the availability of the community college systems. She also looked at the educational systems in Singapore and Australia. Many of her friends had earned their degrees from Singapore institutions because the tuition was more reasonable, and they could return home more frequently. Other friends had earned degrees in Australia, but these friends reported that the education there was not very challenging and the cost of living there was less expensive. She also explored the business education in the United Kingdom because it has an excellent reputation, but the weather there was not a complimentary fit for Ngoc. The result of her internet search brought her to the US and to this school specifically because her family was close and the

educational system was culturally diverse. She enjoys studying with many students from a variety of cultures especially since one of her professional goals was to work with a multi-national company. She also felt very certain that employers in Vietnam value an education from the US more highly than a degree from Australia. This opinion was not only Ngoc's but one of her senior employers also told her that studying in the US was more beneficial because he had been a Fulbright Scholar in the US.

She anticipated that the US culture would be diverse. She also felt that Texas had a more ethnically diverse culture than many other states. She also valued the openness and freedom that would allow her to flourish. She also sensed that the people were friendly and more comfortable in communicating their openness. She feels that this is helping her to adapt to this open style and this will also aide her in her professional goals.

Ngoc notices two distinct types of students here on campus. There are many foreign students who want to stay in their own ethnic groups and then there are students who want to be open to explore all kinds of relationships with others. She sees herself in this second group who wants to explore the freshness of what all the blends of the cultural relationships can bring her. She feels that this second group is most prepared to enter the work force because this type of multi-cultural exposure will yield a greater sense of readiness to deal with a competitive environment. Ngoc senses a trend in the business world toward globalization from all countries. She expressed that if she wanted to be isolated then she would have stayed in Vietnam, but her reason for coming here was to expose herself to this type of multi-cultural atmosphere, so she would be regretful if she did not take advantage of it.

She further explained that many Vietnamese students come to the US and study in California because there is a larger Vietnamese community in California. This makes it easier for these students to come here and speak Vietnamese and become comfortable in their own Vietnamese communities. But this is not what she desired, she thinks that if you come to the US, you should speak English and take advantage of the diverse environment or else you have wasted your experience. She said, “if you want to speak Vietnamese, just stay in Vietnam you do not need to go to the U.S., so if you go to the U.S. you should learn about the new country, new culture, and new language and become more globalized.”

These new experiences were all issues that she dealt with as a new student, but knew that they were the very things that she must overcome if she was going to be successful. Since it was challenging, this caused her to push forward. She has seen many students who were wealthy who came here to the US and relaxed and did nothing. Consequently, they did not bring anything back to Vietnam. Ngoc’s parents made her promise to study hard and to bring back her master’s degree in business administration.

Her goal is to develop her career in finance and make the most of her master’s degree. She would like to find a job here in the US because she feels that what she learns in this unique environment could best be applied here. But her ideal job is to work in a multi-national business so that she can get the most of her degree. She believes that working for a company like this would give her the best opportunity to capitalize on the uniqueness of her own nationality. She gave the example of Wells Fargo Bank. She would like to get a job here with them and then return to Vietnam to lead in their

development within the country of Vietnam since they already have a presence there. This would enable her to have the best of both worlds: work in a multi-national U.S. owned institution and be close to her family.

Some of the difficulties that she has faced have been the high use of slang that is used in Texas. This has been more challenging for her to understand. The many nationalities with many different accents have also been a personal challenge for her. She self-rated her listening skills above medium because she can understand 80-90% of what people are saying and can respond adequately. She also feels that she has improved a great deal since she arrived. Ngoc indicated that when she first arrived, she could only comprehend about 60-70% of what she heard, but now it is upwards of 90%. She also self-reported that her reading skill is high because she can read material and understands it well. She self-reported that her speaking skill is above medium but still has room for improvement because she realizes that her accent is still there. However, she feels she is improving and the majority of people can understand what she is saying. She feels that she can speak fluently, makes fewer mistakes with grammar, and can utilize a widening range of vocabulary when speaking including the use of idioms. She learns these by learns these mainly from listening to the radio like 103.7 and 90.1 KERA which is a public radio station.

Ngoc has developed many American friends although it was not easy at first. She finds that patience is a necessary trait if American friends are going to reach out to an international student. Ngoc feels that the American friends that she has developed have had a good deal of patience with her in the area of communication. They slow down their

conversation and repeat things that she does not understand. These friendships formed from the study group that she developed in some of her classes. Now she feels more confident because she can make friends more easily now including a boyfriend relationship that is currently developing who is an American student.

Ngoc has experienced a certain amount of arrogance in American students as other respondents have indicated. She gave the example of the forming of study groups in her classes. She feels that American students tend to choose to match up with other American students to the exclusion of international students when forming study or work groups in class. She feels that this is largely due to the communication differences or because they have perception differences about a particular country. She overcomes this by being confident and asking them if she can join their group.

Ngoc feels that the major differences between the US and Vietnamese structures in the classroom include the social distance between the professors and the students. She has experienced that here the professor encourages you to participate in the class activities. In Vietnam, the professor expects you to sit and listen without interruption. Interruption is viewed as a form of disrespect, but it is an expectation in the American classroom. Ngoc indicated that the fact that students pay more for their education might be a factor in student's expression of independence within the classroom. Here the students feel that education is a part of doing business. She feels that because she pays for her education, she deserves to get something in return. This is not a perspective that she thinks students in Vietnam experience.

Ngoc also has a better understanding of the professor's personal life and has more of an opportunity to contact and have access to her professors. This is certainly different from her expectation of relational closeness that she experienced in Vietnam. Here the campus is bigger and the technology is more available to every student. She also appreciates the larger library and access to electronic resources which she rarely experienced in Vietnam.

Ngoc would like to be more involved in campus activities but has the barrier of living with her uncle's family which is a 45 minute drive away. Therefore she is not as involved in campus activities as she would like. There is one event that the university hosts that she believes to be absolutely necessary. She attends every job fair that the school hosts because she finds them so valuable.

Phuc (Male, 27, Ph.D. in Civil Engineering)

Phuc is an interesting case for this study. He is the only doctoral candidate who was interviewed. His previous study in Russia for ten years also was an intriguing factor with Phuc. I will say that when I first spoke to him on the phone, I was amazed because I would have anticipated that he had spent a great deal of time in the US because his English was impeccable. I could not denote a great deal of accent either which is not what I had anticipated. Phuc was also very muscular, not the typical body type for most of the Vietnamese men that I have met. Phuc is from the capital of Vietnam, Hanoi. He attended a gifted and talented high school in Hanoi and was accepted into a college there, but instead received a scholarship to attend college in St. Petersburg, Russia. His score

on the entrance exam was 27.5 out of 30. Had he stayed in Vietnam he would have attended the Water Resources University which was in Hanoi.

Phuc believed that relative's or friend's impression of the US was one contributing factor that increased his desire to come here. He had seen pictures of friends who were attending the universities here and thought it would be a great opportunity to come. These friends also indicated that students in the US were more involved in the practical aspects of their higher education experiences. There was less studying right from the book. However, he did not think much about it when he was in high school because his English was not very good. He did not contemplate attending school here since he was offered a scholarship to go to Russia. He did have a desire to travel. He has only been in the US for a year but enjoys the socialization aspects and making friends here.

Phuc's father also attended a university and received a bachelor's of electrical engineering in Russia. But today it is now located in the Ukraine. The degree that he received in Russia was a bachelor's in civil engineering and he also received a master's in civil engineering. Phuc indicated that it is very traditional in Vietnam to follow in your father's footsteps and even attempt to honor them by going one step further than they did. He was encouraged by his father to go abroad for higher education as he had done. He felt that this was important because Russia offered something more than what was available in Vietnam. His mother went to a language university from a university inside Vietnam and works for the United Nations. His father is a professor in a college on electrical engineering.

Even as a college professor, Phuc's father had a particular love for Russia having spent over ten years there. Phuc's impression of Russia came from his father since he had been there and thought that the people were very friendly as well. Phuc enjoyed the friendly people in Russia but found it difficult to get to know the younger students there. There were many international students and he befriended other international students from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Bjarabedan, and American friends.

Phuc appreciated the fundamental knowledge of civil engineering. He felt that his preparation in Russia was better than the education he could have received in the US. He felt it prepared him to conduct research. Phuc expressed that the systems of education in Russia and Vietnam were very similar in that they taught a great deal from the texts to insure that you would understand the theories. Thus his Vietnamese education allowed him to be prepared for what he would experience in the Russian system. This was so much so, that he did not feel that he had to learn much that was new for his first two years, but could concentrate on applying the theories that he knew so well. He did indicate that in America, there are constant updates on technology and what is available in the field. The downside is that you might forget the fundamental knowledge and depend too greatly on the technology. Class size is also a significant difference. While in Russia, his class size was 10-12 people, so the opportunities to get to know people were great. Compared to his education here in the US, the class size has been move varied. He has had some classes with as many as 70 students and several courses where there are less than 10, so this has been a substantial difference.

The Russian system goes deeper into theory to combat complex problems whether you will ever use it or not. But here in the West, there is more of an emphasis on what you need. As an engineer, he appreciates the thoroughness of his Russian education because he thinks that it will prepare him more for what could occur rather than what typically occurs. He definitely believes that the education that he received in Russia was better than what he could have received in Vietnam because it was more interactive and practical compared to an education in Vietnam.

He hopes to get a job here in the US with a project that he is currently working on with his major professor. He assumes that learning in this system best prepares you for working in this same system as opposed to working in someone else's system. This is important since he has already adapted to the environment, so he would like to take advantage of this and remain here to work in the environment that he has become acquainted. He also feels that he is a bit older now and needs to capitalize on this.

He is attending education here on a scholarship. He wanted to come to Texas, because he had spent the last ten years in a very cold environment and he desired a change in climate. He also indicated that there was availability to a larger Vietnamese community here which was also attractive to him. He also was attracted to the stipends and potential for jobs as a teaching assistant. His degrees in Russia were funded by the governments of Vietnam and Russia.

He keeps in touch with his parents often via instant messaging and Facebook. His younger brother is studying accounting in the United Kingdom. Phuc's parents understand that he would likely get a job here first, but would eventually like to get back

home and be around his parents like a “typical Asian kid.” His mother believes that any relationship that Phuc might develop with a girl should be with someone who speaks at least a little Vietnamese.

Phuc would like to continue the job that he is currently involved with which is funded by the US government. He believes that he would make more money in the US but tempers that with the fact that the cost of living is also higher.

Phuc has not experienced difficulty with the English language in his classes. He self-reports that his English proficiency in reading is high because reads everyday with good efficiency. He credits this ability to patterns that he learned in his experiences with Russian. He started his education in Russia knowing very little. So he applied these same strategies in his expansion into English. He was also the founder of an English club while in Russia which met to practice and improve in their English skills. He started this club because he knew that he would eventually come to the US.

Phuc also self-reported that his skills in listening and understanding English were high because people can understand him well and he can understand them. Of all the skills that he has, Phuc indicated that he struggles most with writing English. Phuc also self-reported that his speaking skills are also high because people have little issues in understanding him. It is interesting to me that I can pick up on some of his Russian tendencies in the pronunciation of syllables which is very precise even to the point of being incorrect because his pronunciation is phonetically accurate. However, there are many different options to put emphasis on certain syllables. One that I particularly

noticed was his pronunciation of the word, “fundamental.” Phuc put the emphasis on the second to last syllable “fun-da-**men**-tal.”

Phuc finds it easy to make friends with American and international students. These students have been open to him, and many of them do not know that he is actually Vietnamese. He does not sound like he is a foreign student. He meets other students for tea and volunteering. His friends generally watch sports, hang out and bowl. He does feel that these experiences keep him from being bored with all the emphasis on his graduate studies. Phuc sees himself as more social than “lab-mates” who tend to isolate themselves because of language barriers and work-load. He believes that the job that awaits him will be a well paying job.

Phuc was not involved in many religious activities in Vietnam. His mother went to the temple, but she was really the only one. He has not experienced any pressure to convert to Christianity. He does feel that the campus is safe, but he did recently receive some e-mails about some robberies locally. He did indicate that he was safer here than he would have been in Russia. He noted the presence of police as a significant factor in this. He does feel that the university is very proactive in helping international students to become involved in activities.

If he would have changed anything, he would likely have chosen to get his master’s degree here. But he does feel that his Russian education provided a great foundation for his work here. Phuc indicated that all the students in his Ph.D. cadre are international students like himself. There are not any students who have grown up in the American education system, so he could not answer some comparison questions because

there are not students for him to compare himself. Phuc believes that this is largely due to the long length that it requires in school rather than the need to get out and get a job in the field. He has an interest in teaching as his father does, but likely in the American educational system. Success would be defined by Phuc as being able to do something that he loves.

Phuc believes the large increase of Vietnamese international students is not the result of political issues. He believes that it is based on merit. Today, more people are better equipped with English skills and the number arriving will tend to be larger. He does not recognize any barriers from the political sides of the US or Vietnam.

Discussion of Research Strategy

The goal of qualitative research is to explore in depth a case or story. This study examined the experiences of 11 Vietnamese international students who were enrolled on the campuses of the University of North Texas and at the University of Texas at Arlington during the fall semester of 2011.

An open invitation to participate in a research interview for this study was sent to all the available Vietnamese international students through the international student offices on the respective campuses. This actually was sent more than once until an appropriate group responded. Five students from the University of North Texas and 7 students from the University of Texas at Arlington responded. From this initial affirmative response, contact was made and interviews scheduled using a combination of e-mail, text and phone calls in order to coordinate schedules and locations. All

interviews took place in a three week span from late October to early November of 2011. Each interview lasted from one hour to one and one-half hours on the respective campuses of these students. An informed consent form was signed and each interview was recorded utilizing a Zoom-H2 digital audio recorder. Each interview was recorded onto a 2-4 GB memory card and then transferred to a thumb drive for transcription. During each interview, field notes were taken utilizing a copy of the interview protocol. After each interview, the session was transcribed without correction of grammar, or spelling.

During this process, one respondent from UTA dropped out of the interview process. This left 5 students from UNT and 6 students from UTA for a total of 11 respondents participating. After transcription, the interview transcript was returned to each respondent via e-mail so that they could review and propose changes or additions to the information that was listed. This was done as a member checking process and also to insure the accuracy of the information given. After necessary corrections were made, the transcript was entered into the Ethnograph, E-6 software for qualitative research analysis. This software allows for coding and retrieval of coded text and is utilized to enhance the accuracy and speed of the coding process.

Beginning with three general categories of research questions, issues and challenges, each transcript was coded (see Appendix D). These codes grew to over 130 different identifiable items that are defined in Appendix E. Utilizing Ethnograph, a general matrix was defined and sorted. This yielded how many instances each subject code was identified across all the transcripts. Meaning or significance was determined

based on how many of the respondents expressed similar views or were identified with similar codes. If 45% or 5 of the 11 participants made similar coded statements, then these coded responses were reported, and the responses cited in the findings for each research question.

The information and findings are organized first with responses that related to the research questions. The common responses are reported in descending order from most frequent to least frequent responses. For instance, in Research Question 1 the most frequent response was based upon the reputation of the US. The final response that was common across at least 45% of the respondents was scholarships that were made available to these students. This was done for each research question, and for the category of similar challenges between Vietnamese students and other studies involving international students from other ethnicities discovered in the literature review.

Findings are presented in a style that allows the students to speak for themselves. Therefore, the quotations used are as the students said them and are presented without spelling and grammatical corrections. This requires that the reader to “wade through” the comments, but in my opinion, the tone and content of the respondent should be presented in the way that it was given in the interview in order to maintain authenticity and reliability. Also, in order to maintain anonymity, when a respondent states the name of his or her current institution, it has been replaced with the following format: (University). However, if a respondent lists previous institutions by name then these have been listed so that the reader could have clarity in-between respondents. The names of the respondents used in the study are not the actual names of the students but have been

substituted in a format that created order for the researcher. However, the use of these pseudo-names remains consistent throughout the document and coordinates with the biographical sketches of each respondent that is also a part of chapter 4. In the dialogues that follow, I am identified as “RSM.”

Research Question 1: What Factors Have Motivated the Vietnamese International Students to Select Higher Education in the US?

This first research question was one that guided the others. With the large increase in the number of Vietnamese international students coming to the US for higher education, information that relates to this question could be useful in understanding these students, and in attraction other students who might have similar motivations. The reputation of education in the US, the influence of family members, and the belief that higher education in Vietnam could not adequately prepare them were the three most common findings among these participants; all 11 participants reported these influenced their decision to come to the US to study. Other influencing factors that were not as prominent as those but still found to be significant were: having a relative here in the US, the influence of friends who had attended higher education here, availability of the community college system, having parents who had a college degree, a desire to study English here, and availability to scholarship funds. These are described utilizing the comments that these students made in the process of the interviews.

Reputation of the US Educational System

As in other studies, the overall reputation of the US as a place of freedom, and opportunistic choice for students to achieve a quality higher education was shown as a clear factor that affected the motivation for these students to choose higher education in the US. Every respondent in this study indicated that the reputation of the US was a motivating factor that influenced their choice to leave their nation and come to study here. An, a student from Ho Chi Minh city, discovered through the internet a connection with a single professor at one institution but it was the overall respect for America that influenced him most.

An: I find a professor at (this university), he very interested in the thing I'm interested in too. And that is the way I tried to apply to university. Because all people on my town if they have a good ability for their children to go to overseas, the first place they think is America, nothing else.

Many students indicated that they felt that the reputation of the US was not localized to their country but was more global in scope.

Binh: And everyone knows that the US would have the best and more advanced technology than any other country, better education, more opportunity to explore your potential.

Cam: they think that like the diploma in the U.S. will be valuable in Vietnam in specific and like around the world in general so with a U.S. diploma I can pretty much go around the world and work.

Diu: every country also, ah, accepts the education of the US.... I think it's a true thing. Everybody can see?

When asked the factors that influenced them and when it began, several students sided with Hien, a student who received a degree within Vietnam, a Master's in Thailand, and now another Master's within the US as she stated, " I would say I always think U.S.

have a very good educational program.” Others intimated that in comparison to the opportunity for education in Vietnam,

Kieu: Yes because the US education will still be better in the long run.

Lam: In Vietnam, the education in general is more like theories. But here in the U. S. it is more practical.

Mai: Of course because US is, they call the strongest country in the world sometimes so a degree from them would be a lot better than my degree from my hometown.

Ngoc: yeah. and I know that the education system in Vietnam cannot meet my demand. I want something, um, the education here in U.S. is, I mean, can meet--satisfy my need for my career development. I did a lot of internet search on the different education system and I choose here, because I have my family here and then also, like, the reputation of the education here and I also appreciate the multi-cultural education system here. Yeah, it means it's very diversified. You not only study with American students, you also study with students from other international-like countries, and then it's very good experience for me if I want to work for multi-national company. I cannot find it in Singapore, I cannot find it in Australia, I cannot find it in UK, but I can find it here in US.

The Influence of Family Members and Their Impression of the Esteem of the US

Perhaps it is the sense of community that is prevalent in many Asian nations as well as the impact that family has in every society, but it was certain that the perceptions and input of family was a contributing factor towards the choice of pursuing higher education in the US for these students. Every respondent commented that this was one factor that influenced them to come to the US. An shared the following story with me about how he had not passed in his first immigration interview to come to the US, so he took an opportunity with his company to go to Japan, but he had another interview,

An: And my second interview to go to U.S. it very short, like three minutes because they have all my commendations in there. My first interview, I actually remember was 20 minutes. I try to explain everything, but it not go through. But

second interview is so great. And they ask me where your passport? And where your immigration to go to Japan? I bring it with me because at that time but I didn't think I need it. And when they see it they shake hands with me and say congratulations, good luck for you in the future (To go to the US). I'm so happy, you know. And at that time when I called my parents, my father cried. I can still remember that.

An: Let's say my parents want to pursue a degree, but they don't have a chance. That's they have a lot of patience for me to try to get a degree. And I say that Vietnamese tradition it a little bit very similar to the way American tradition. The way parents really want their children to grow up better than what they have. And they tell me a lot and they told me all their whole lives just working for me. Actually they said that when I'm very young they say that you need to go overseas to study. I and my sister need to go overseas to study. And that's why when we were born until we grow up and they work very hard to be able to do that. And they just do step by step like you need to get to a good university in Vietnam to get to a good university in US and that's why they teach a lot.

Other students also related their family's influence upon their decision to come to the US for higher education.

Binh: In my country, the US is translated...like a beautiful country. So everyone thinks the US is a wonderful place to live, it's like heaven. I was just a kid and I heard it from my older family members. It was only from hearing. I never went outside to different country before. I wanted to have an opportunity to fulfill my dream.

Cam: Because they think the education in the US is better and like they agree more on like the way people teach children in the US because back there we have to learn a lot and we don't have time to practice what we've learned.

Diu: My parents go to the US...my father go to the US and my mother go to the Australia and they say the education of foreign country is better.

Diep: Well, I think that my dad, he went to America pretty, like, young and he travel a lot and he have different perspective than other people and he think that the U.S. has more, plus all the freedom, and then he talk with a lot of people so he get perspective from his friends too.

Mai: I got it from everyday life, my parents, my friends, we are all believe that US is strong country. And they are rich. They have like, like, how do you say it, military strength.

Other family members within the community also have key influence; in this segment,

Ngoc speaks about the influence of her uncle,

Ngoc: He's a dentist now, so he's successful in his education and he say that he learn a lot from the education system here and something very practical. and so he encourages me to come here to study and then, you know, and also in Vietnam why you have a degree from overseas, especially in US, it can give you better promotion...better compensation because people appreciate, or highly value the degree from the US.

When asked if students want to go abroad Phuc recalls that it was a building desire that had its start in the conversations with family and friends:

Phuc: Well, I think every single one of us—

RSM: So, where does that--what does that come from--that perception that the U.S. education is really good.

Phuc: It may come from relatives, -- friends, like, hey, you know they--they doing, you know having the occasion over there to going to school, you know. You'll see pictures of them saying, -- "this school is great," you know. And, so, that kind of desire, you know, being built up in me

Belief That the Educational System in Vietnam Was Inadequate to Meet Their Needs

The desire and motivation of these students however was not only to the positive aspects of coming to the US. Every student noted that there were specific inadequacies within the Vietnam educational system either in their high school years or as they looked forward to their higher education opportunities. An commented about the heavy weight that final course tests took on his ability to pass, delay in finishing and the personal toll it took on him,

The reason is very a little bit difficult because we need to take a final test every course. And the final test is very hard. It can go up to 90 percent of your grade.

And if you cannot the pass that test, if you get 50 percent, if you go under 50 percent you fail that course.

An: And the only way for you to take we send to America but you need to wait maybe one or two semesters before that course open for you to take it. And one of the problem I need to take four and a half years because my final semester I fail one of them and because that course not open I need to wait one more semester for last semester to be able to finish it.

Binh was accepted into the medical school at Hue but recalled her experience on her very first day she arrived on the campus was enough to warrant a journey elsewhere for higher education.

Binh: When I came, I remembered the first time, it was in June and it was raining very hard. There was flooding all around the campus. I lived in Hanoi. But the Hanoi Medical School is like very comparative. It's like they only accept certain number of applicants and they give priority to people from Hanoi. My family is from Da Nang, basically another city, so I was not on the priority list like the others in Hanoi. It's a lot of complicated things in Vietnam. People there have to have connection. There's other way to get into the university without having a good education and it's not fair for the applicants.

Cam's parents conveyed their preference for western teaching methods as she stated:

Cam: Because they think the education in the U.S. is better and like they agree more on like the way people teach children in the U.S. because back there we have to learn a lot and we don't have time to practice what we've learned.

Another student identified the curriculum that is covered within the Vietnamese system as repetitive and unpractical. Diu commented,

Diu: Thing is, in Vietnam we have to study a lot subjects, but most of them, I think, is unnecessary because we can't use after we studying: agriculture, there is about how to fix a pork or something like that, and everything to do for farmers, cooking or something...a lot of subjects, but I don't remember.

She added this comment after communicating with her friends who were currently involved in the higher education system in Vietnam. "The student who study in the university of Vietnam, they say that the program is very boring."

Rote memorization as a characteristic stereotype in the Vietnamese system was confirmed by Diep especially when compared to what she experienced in the US system,

Diep: Study in Vietnam, is more like, more like memorize stuff and you don't get to know why is it or why do you have to memorize that. So in here you, like for me, I get more control of what I have to study or when I need to study to get what is done. I guess if they (students in the US system) listen to what the professor say and if they really gets what it is then it's easy to do the test. But in Vietnam, even if you know the material but you don't know words by words it's hard for you to get a high grade.

Mai: In Vietnam they teach you a bunch of things and you don't know you going to do with those.

This type of education that does not release the creative abilities of students were especially evident in Lam's comments about the way she contrasted the teaching of art within the Vietnamese and US educational systems,

Lam: in Vietnam, it's different. It's more about theory. You read a lot. You read tons of materials. You summarize it and if you do a report you have a format. You just follow it, nothing new. It's like you copy the format. No creative. Even for the art. Like here, my professor in figure drawing, he told me, like, he respects all of artist have their own style. Some like rough, some like really smooth out, some like really abstract, some like beautiful, perfect. He respects us and he lets us go with – as long as you show me your work that show your ability, have your, like, effort that you put lot of labor in it. You have some type of concept. That's fine. But in Vietnam, it's like, "This is wrong. You have to fix it." It's like, my professor in Vietnam will have one style and all twenty students in the class after that class will have the same style as him. If you have another class that someone has another style, you have to change your style. Go with another one. That's the one I don't like.

Another student added the issue of specialization that appears to be missing within the current forms of higher education of Vietnam according to these respondents. Hien is a student who sought the specific areas of linguistics as it related to multinational publishing and later in her career toward the issue of behavioral analysis. Because of the

absence of these specialties, she sought master's degrees in Thailand and now in the US all after achieving a Bachelor's in Linguistics from Vietnam.

Hien: And you know, around that time when I graduated from college we didn't really have good higher education in Vietnam, especially in linguistics. And so that is why I had to go outside Vietnam to do my first Masters. And this time we don't have behavior analysis program in Vietnam, so I came here.... The linguistics program as well as the behavioral analysis were not really majors that were provided with any depth in Vietnam.... I've heard that they had linguistics program actually in Hanoi -- the Institute of Linguistics. I went there for a visit after my study in Chang Mi though, but I don't think they offer a good quality program.... Again, around that year 2000, I know that in Vietnam we have some master's programs but their quality was not really good.

Along with the lack of specificity, another student identified the inability of the Vietnamese educational system to meet the demand of their career path.

Ngoc: I know that the education system in Vietnam cannot meet my demand. I want something, um, the education here in US is, I mean, can meet--satisfy my need for my career development.

Lam also added to this point in our following dialogue:

RSM: So you want to do a degree that really was not available in Vietnam as a bachelor's degree but only available as a certificate?

Lam: Yes.

RSM: And that is in journalism and printing?

Lam: No. At first it's Multimedia, General Multimedia. I don't want business. So, I was interested in the digital art. So, I tried to study something related, that's why I attempt the degree in advertising, because they don't have the concentration in art. Yes. That is what I want. I don't want to work with marketing or business.

RSM: You want to do digital art?

Lam: Yes.

RSM: So, actually, making it in a computerized format to do printing?

Lam: Yes. But, not the print making – I started because I wanted to understand about the process of the transfer of the print from like your idea into the paper. And how – like – you understand about your ink and your paper and everything else. So that's important too.

Respondents also consistently identified a disparity in the use and availability of technology within the higher educational system of Vietnam.

Kieu: Technology is a major difference. Vietnamese classes are more lecture style without the use of technology. They basically read the text to you.

Lam: So, like I read the articles and I think my major -like - the higher education here is better. Because we have more equipment and tools and the classroom and the teacher is better....We don't have access to the Internet. That is great here. We have general labs. I don't think we have that in Vietnam. We might have one in the whole big school. The access is really limited. We have a library, I think, even a big library. But still, not a group or study at home. Not many students have the intention to go to the library on the day after class and stay in the library or hours.

Having a Relative Who is Already in the US

Within this study, 73% of the respondents indicated that part of their educational process was influenced by the fact that they had relatives already living in the US. In some cases, these relatives were the sponsor of the student, while in other situations it was a sibling with whom they were sharing an apartment. Here are some of their comments as it pertained to this significant characteristic.

An: I'm 20 year old and I try to apply because my sister at that time was living over here and she say a lot of good things. But the way to get me very to go to U.S. to study when I'm working because I know a lot of good things about the working environment in here.

Binh: When I lived in Vietnam, my Aunt and her husband live in Sachse, close to Garland. She heard from friends that (the community college) is a good college and it's close to her house. She picked up an application and sent it to Vietnam to me.... I have an advantage because my Aunt lives here so she kept telling me that I have better education here and also the Hue Medical School was not what I expected.

Cam: I have some relatives, they live in Houston and the school actually closer to the house so they just went to the school and asked for information and then I think it's a good school so if I'm interested in they can help me to contact school and do all the paperwork.... When I go to start study abroad, my relative already here so that's why I choose America and I live here for four years already and I like the environment, yeah, I like the country itself so I want to stick with the U.S.

Another student identified that it was her belief that she believed that relatives being here in the US was the most important reason that there has been a large increase in the number of Vietnamese students coming to the US.

Diep: I think most of them come here because they know someone or they have relative, so they stay with their relative a lot.... I think that because most of the people go they still have relative in Vietnam, so they bring back money, they bring back resources and it's helping the country. So from Vietnamese government perspective I think that they want people to go.

Lam: Many of my friends came here and they have like aunts and uncles or relatives here. That's why they come here. Like, other states, especially states in the North, not many Vietnamese students are there.

Mai: Because I have relatives here. It's easier for me as a girl to start somewhere I am familiar with and also, the US, you can work during, like you can go to school, you can earn money.... This is another reason why I come here because my aunt here, she sponsor my family to move here and my parents worry that at the time when we be able, when we are eligible to move here I would be too old to come with them and they want me to be here. They always believe that there are brighter futures here for me.... My auntie is the one who gave me that information. At first, when I want to study abroad I really have no idea what I need to do or what I should do and it sound very complicated at first time but soon I go through all that, then it's easy.

It appears that at times, younger siblings are sent to provide a sense of community and family for students who are already here but might need encouragement and support.

Kieu alluded to this:

RSM: What made you want to come to the US?

Kieu: My sister is also here and my mom suggested that I come and be with her.

For Kieu, her sister was enrolled in the same school attempting to complete her Doctorate and began to experience some depression, so Kieu arrived to assist and began the pursuit of her own education within the US. Lam also reported about the encouragement that comes from family.

Ngoc: yes, and one more thing is that I'm living with my uncle's family now. So, I can get some support from them and then, um, I think the most important reason is that, like, I don't want repeat the same way that I study in my undergraduate level.

Therefore, for a significant number of these respondents, their choice to come to the US and in some cases to come to a specific regional area was due to having relatives in this particular area. This then would seem to indicate that as more students come, a trend toward even more students from Vietnam will follow.

Influence from Friends Who Have Been in the US

These students were not only significantly influenced in their motivation by the opinions of family members, but of friends as well. All of these students documented that they stayed in touch with friends via e-mail, Facebook , and instant messaging. Again, 73% of these students self-reported an impact that their communication with friends had made to their flow of information which affected their choice to come to the US for study. I am not indicating that this was more or less important, but that it was significantly “present” in the responses of these students to be noteworthy of mentioning.

Phuc, a doctoral student who had received his bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering in Russia shared the following dialogue toward this point:

RSM: Did you have a desire to go to the U.S. at that point in time initially?

Phuc: --well, I think every single one of us—

RSM: So, where does that--what does that come from--that perception that the U.S. education is really good.

Phuc: It may come from relatives, friends, like, hey, you know they--they doing, you know having the occasion over there to going to school, you know. You'll see pictures of them saying, "this school is great, you know. And, so, that kind of desire, you know, being built up in me, like, "hey man, I want to travel" Well, but that moment you have a chance.

Many of these students had already been successful within Vietnam in well-paying jobs. Ngoc, worked with Vietnam Airlines and as a supervisor within a large bank in the billing department. And it was there that she came into contact with friends and in her case a supervisor who influenced her decision to build on her already successful career path by seeking a double Master's in business administration and finance within the US.

RSM: People that you would work for, potential employers all had a higher view of US education?

Ngoc: Yeah.

RSM: Did you ever prove that--did someone tell you that? Or, is it just assumed?

Ngoc: Assumed? No, no, I don't think it's assumed, because I see many, like director of my bank, he study in the U.S. And he, I mean, achieved his Master's Degree in Business Administration in U.S.

Ngoc: But, I, myself, feel like just--feel like I want to be more competitive in the labor market in Vietnam. And I just, I--I don't want to, like, be satisfied with my current position. And I want to move on to the senior labor market--high quality labor market with higher position, higher compensation. And I know that just acquiring a degree in Master's of Business Administration in Vietnam cannot help me with that.... One of the senior employers in my bank, he told me that, if you go to Australia to study just like you study and you like enjoy at the same time. But, if you go to the US to study, it's really you study something. Okay and he

was a candidate of the Fulbright program, and then he experienced the education system in U.S., so he appreciate it.

Other students when mentioned their acquaintances who were residing in the US.

Mai: But from the Vietnamese people who live in here.

Mai: They always you know when they come back Vietnam they talk about it's like a dreamy place, like a heaven and how live a good life here and then. It's make the people in Vietnam believe that coming here would be the best choice for them.

But, these friends not only encouraged these students to come, but also helped prepare them for what life in the US and their higher education experience would be like. In one case, Lam, who was a confident and outgoing student from Hanoi, her friends who were already studying in the US helped to prepare her for the “shock” that she would encounter as she arrived here to study.

Lam: But I have two close friends in the U.S., one in California and one in Iowa. They come here one year before me and we kind of like talk together, talk to each other through the Internet and they both told me like you watch the movies, “don’t think it's going to be like that.”

RSM: So they said, “Don't think it's the same?”

Lam: It's different.

RSM: Did they tell you what it would be like?

Lam: It's harder.

RSM: They said it would be harder?

Lam: It's harder. We gonna have the shock of the culture and shock of English. And I think that's true. And like, but one of my friends, the one in Iowa, told me the life in college. She attended Vietnamese college before so, she compare the two experiences and she told me it's totally different. You get more involved with the school, more activities and its more fun. It's great.

Hien was one of the only students who spoke less of their family's immediate impact on her decision to come here or of the influential role of having family here already. Perhaps this is due to the fact that she was an only child and was older than the median age of the respondents (24.6). Hien is 35 and is already an experienced student abroad after achieving her Master's in Linguistics in Thailand. Hien also has worked and been successful in her field of publishing as an English interpreter. However, it was obvious to me that Hien's friendships developed in Thailand and through her interpreting opportunities had influenced her decision to further her career and educational development within the US.

Hien: Well when I was in Chiang Mai I shared the same house with an American housemate and we've learned a lot from each other. I've learned most of American culture -- English from her and from other American roommates too and most of my professors they're from U.S. too so I had different opportunities to talk with them.

Hien: Well, again, I heard a lot about American culture from my roommates and, I don't know, I still feel like I really want to know American culture -- actually live in that culture.

Hien: In 2008, (A University) sent a team to do a workshop in Ho Chi Minh City and I was in the translation team for that workshop. So that is how I got to know two professors on the team and they were from (University) and we were talking about the possibility to come here.

Hien's case is one in which a definitive road of relationships led her to further education and a narrowing of her focus toward linguistics, publishing interpretation, interest in Autism and speech behavioral analysis. Towards the end of our conversation, Hien told me that she plans to continue on this path and earn her Doctorate in a further progression of this path again within the US.

Other students came to the US as high school students and their friendships encouraged a return to the US for higher education. Cam is a good example of this.

RSM: Was that a plan all along when you left Vietnam? You thought you would come back home after the year in high school.

Diep: No, no, actually I didn't know anything. I just want to have an experience, you know. My friends come here, you know, a lot of them and say they love it here, so I just want to see what is it like.

Cam is another student who came to the US as a sophomore in high school. Her experience has been forged by her friendships here. Here is a statement that she made about the private high school she attended.

Cam: Yeah, because I think the things here in the U.S., they enhance the school spirit pretty good; all the mascot and all the cheerleader. Because back there we do have soccer tournament but we don't have cheerleader, we don't have like a mascot school, we don't do all the shouting ... like GO, GO, GO. We don't have that so I think it's a good thing for you to have like show your school spirit and I have pretty good school spirit over here.

And although, this quote does not speak specifically about her friends, as she related it to me, it was obvious that Cam was an “American” high school student and not really “Vietnamese” any longer. But her friendships did direct her focus on where she would attend college.

Cam: Because, at my particular high school, they had a college fair so that there's a bunch of colleges would be there, so I looked around and see that this school is pretty close to Houston and plus I also have friends and all the relatives live in Dallas so close an area so I pick this school.

These cultural exchange programs seem to till the soil for not only students who are in them but for others who are in contact with them. Diu is a student who represents this group.

Diu: Ah, my friends in high school go to study in the U.S. a lot. So, I also want to go.

Diu: The first I heard from my friends that, uh, the program of the university is very nice, and they can make you try to study than (more) Vietnam, you know. Other influential friendships developed literally over the phone as the result of work relationships. An worked for a company that made hospital software and would interact with customers over the phone and working on joint projects. Through this, he developed an understanding of American culture and values which led him to an eventual opportunity to study here, but it all began for him with these business friendships.

An: But the way to get me very to go to US to study when I'm working because I know a lot of good things about the working environment in here and that customer tell me a lot about the university in here and how good and where he go into the university and the way to study and stuff and that's a very good thing for me.

An: But let's say when I talk with American customer, I know how beautiful America is and I go online and try to search for some university and some university is very something related to my study.

Thus for most of these students, these friendships played a significant factor in the motivation for them to seek higher education in the US. These friendships also lessened the culture shock and created pathways toward further education all which led to the continuation of higher education in the US.

Having Parents Who Have a College Degree

Phuc responded to the opportunity to do an interview and I knew that he would be an interesting person to interview from the phone call that I received informing me of where I would meet him to conduct the interview. I did not know that he was Vietnamese! When we sat down and told me that he had only been in the US for a year, I

was amazed. I then discovered that he was completing his doctorate here in the US after completing a bachelor's and master's degrees in St. Petersburg Russia over the previous seven years. Phuc's response as I asked about his father's education provides an excellent backdrop for this segment as I consider the impact of a parent's education on the students who responded to my invitation to conduct these interviews.

Phuc: I think it's very traditional, you know, thing in Vietnam that you got to follow your father's footstep, like, you know, try to be him or even further. So, yeah, he constantly encourages me to, you know, go for higher education.

Six of the 11 respondents had at least one parent who had received a degree. Two parents of respondents achieved education abroad in Russia.

Ngoc: I think my dad finished with the--the bachelor in English with, let me see...I think it is the National University.

Lam: Like, my mom studied abroad before and she studied in Russia. But because I'm the only child, so she doesn't want me to stay away, especially the USA is so far. So, it's like, "No, don't go. Wait for master's degree." But I was like, "No, I want to go now." So, I took off one year to study English and try to come here.

Kieu: They (both) went to Medical School in Hue Med. School.

Hien: My Dad was in the third year when 1975 event happened so he never finished his college degree.

Cam: In Vietnam in the school called University of Economics in Ho Chi Minh State, (they both received a bachelor's in business.

Binh: My father got the degree from Da Nang College – called Medical Technology College.

Phuc: Um, my dad, he--I think he went to school in--in--I think in Russia. But back in the day it was like Soviet Union I think it was in electrical engineering.

You will notice that Hien's father was very close to completing his degree when the reunification occurred, and I got the impression that he would have difficulty returning

after this event. It was apparent that each of these parents wanted more for their children and that it was a great sacrifice for them to send them a great distance away and in most cases to pay a great price for their educational development. Lam's story was one that should be shared and understood. Lam is from Hanoi and in her family, education is a key value.

Lam: My mother has total of 7 siblings and 5 are all teachers. Including my mom, 5 out of 7 are teachers. So, in my family, the education is really important.

Knowing that her mother is a divorced professor in Hanoi and that Lam is an only child made the story that Lam shared even more poignant to the understanding of what kind of sacrifice these parents make for their children.

Lam: When I was seven, my mother got an invitation from a U.S. company to come to the U.S. and work here, but she had to turn it down because she could not bring me with her. They did not allow her to bring her family with her for two or three years. So she turned it down and I think if she had a chance to come here, it would be really different. Her life would not be as hard. She had to work really hard. So, when I was like ten or something and I heard the story it kind of like motivated me to come here and see why my mom lost the chance to come here. I will make up for it.

In every case of those whose parents had received a college education, these students seem to be propelled to go further than their parents. And, for others, they are breaking new ground not only in being first generation members of their family to go abroad, but to gain the knowledge and status of a degree from the US.

Accessing the US Community College System

My original intent was to attempt to study the development of the community college system in Vietnam. However, that did not come about. So, I was amazed as I

conducted the interviews and discovered this trend emerging from the data. One key discussion point throughout the growing pains of Vietnam as it experiences the transformation of its higher education system is the lack of transfer from one institution to another, and from one kind of institution to another. So, the fact that so many of these students have taken advantage of the community college and small college system in the US is an intriguing find in this study. These students utilized these schools to accomplish greater acumen in their English skills and to navigate through their transferrable courses with less expensive tuition before moving to the larger state universities where these interviews were conducted. It was identified that through this process of taking English courses at the community college level, in several cases the TOEFL (Test of English as a foreign language) was avoided all together.

This is included in the motivation for seeking higher education section, because it appears from this group of students, that Vietnamese international students are utilizing the community college system to navigate the US higher education system with great efficiency and with greater affordability. 7 of the 11 students utilized small colleges or community colleges as part of their process to arrive at the larger state universities. That is quite a number, especially when you add this to the fact that three of the remaining 4 students came to the US with a bachelor's or master's degree already in hand. And the fourth student came to the US as a sophomore in high school and actually graduated which most Vietnamese international students are not allowed to do.

An came to the US with a bachelor's degree from Vietnam Science University but needed some specific help with his English skills before continuing on to the

institution where he is receiving his master's degree. His computer science and math skills enabled him to be one of only 5 students out of the 500 in his high school to be accepted into the Science University. So, when An considered coming to Texas, his first stop was at West Texas A&M.

An: I want to go to (University) but the thing is (University) don't offer the English course before you go to the college. They don't have like -- you need to finish -- if you finish your English good, you can go to university because usually a good university, I go to another university. That university much smaller than (University), West Texas A&M University. And I take the first English course there. But when I go to US I need to have a letter to get the conditional letter. That conditional letter they said that okay if you finish two semesters in English, you can go straight away to university because I say your grade in computer science is good enough. And if I bring that letter, that letter, it makes for sure that I can get a university. But when I go to U.S., I know that I love (University) more than that kind of university and I need to go to do the transfer. I transfer -- when I take my first semester in that university, English in that university, I transfer back to English here in (University). And, at that time it totally different because in this language internship not related to this institution. And I need to take the first test to be able to get to the English. And at that time I know that I need to take three more semesters or four more semesters in English to be able because my English when I come here in Texas you say take, took and taken. But I say take, took, took. At that point I still remember oh my dear, that is very basic thing that master's students need to know. But I forget everything and I take everything from the beginning. And when I take two semesters I know that I can take the TOEFL and if my TOEFL is good enough I can go straight to university and I don't need to take fourth semester. And I take the TOEFL and I take a GA (General Admittance) Exam and luckily it good enough and I go straight to university at that time. But it still took three years or three semesters for me.

Binh wants to become a dentist like her father in Vietnam. At the time of our interview, she was leaving the next week for an interview with a dental school in Chicago, but she started her higher education in the US at a Dallas community college.

RSM: Did you get the scholarship prior to coming to the US?

Binh: No, when I first came I went to a community college, Dallas community college.

RSM: Which campus in Dallas?

Binh: Richland College.

RSM: Ok. How many years did you study there? Did you study two years there?

Binh: Yeah, about two years.

RSM: Did you finish an associate degree there and decide to move on?

Binh: No, I got about 40 hours and decided to transfer to (University).

Diu wants to work in human resources perhaps at her father's business in Vietnam. Diu was an interesting case because she came as a junior in high school, but went straight to the community college.

RSM: What was the community college that you went to in Washington State?

Diu: Edmond.

RSM: Okay...in Washington State. Do you know what city that was in?

Diu: Lynwood.

RSM: So did go two years at the community college?

Diu: I think it is 3 years.

RSM: Did you complete a degree at the community college?

Diu: Yes, business associate of...business...I don't know exactly.

Kieu adds that she attended not just one but several community colleges in Baltimore, Maryland and now here in Texas. Her sister completed her bachelor's in Maryland and is now finishing her doctorate in Texas. But Kieu went to a community college in Maryland while her sister was there and then transferred to two different community colleges here in Texas before coming to this state university.

RSM: Have you gone to college anywhere else?

Kieu: Several community colleges in Denton and Corinth.

Lam brought to my attention that there was a concentration of Vietnamese international students at one college, Richland College, in the Dallas community college system. She also indicated that she had checked out the weather in the north Texas region and liked it because it was a similar climate to her home in Hanoi.

Lam: The first thing is the weather. The second thing is because tuition. Here it is cheaper than other states. Like, one of my friends in Pennsylvania, I think, she paid like two times higher than my tuition when I was in Richland. So, it was like really expensive and if I had to pay that much I can't afford to stay here. The third one is because Richland had my Associate Degree in Art and Technology. So, it was like – it's good.

RSM: Did you look at other community colleges in the area beside Richland?

Lam: I think no. I did not really – like – I just looked at Richland. It was nice. The school has a lake, an artificial lake. So, it was – like – “Let's go!” I like that....Because, one time I read the study sheets that they posted online. I think I found somewhere and Vietnamese students were number one- 300 students. But there was something different cause out of 300 students only 16 are from the North, the rest are from the South.

Mai displayed the effectiveness of our system and something that many of our students do not utilize: the ability to take courses at a less expensive rate and transfer them to the larger universities.

Mai: No. Actually when the first semester I was here I taking ESL class from Brookhaven College. And then I transferred to Collin College to take my core classes like history. It took me another 2 years and then I transferred here for my majors.

A Desire to Study English

English has been a most coveted language in Vietnam since the introduction of *Doi Moi* in 1985 within Vietnam. The interaction with these students identifies that

learning English and participating in fully English higher education was a significant motivation for these students as they sought higher education within the US. Many of these students had extensive study in English before coming to the US, but their choice to come here to study, be immersed in an English culture, and develop meaningful relationships with English speakers indicates that this was a primary motivation for choosing higher education in the US. 7 of the 11 students (64%) indicated this as a motivation for them to come to the US.

Phuc's case was somewhat of an outlier, but I would like to begin with him. Again, when I first met him, I was shocked that he was a Vietnamese international student, because of his English clarity and his muscular build, both of which were atypical in this study. When I then discovered that he had gone straight from Vietnam to Russia, I was puzzled even more to be attempt to understand why his English was good. My interview seemed to shed light on why this was. When I asked Phuc about his perceptions of the US when he graduated from high school, he self-reported "I think it was higher than, you know, my ability at that moment, because, you know, I got to try a bit harder, because my English was kind of terrible." Thus with Phuc, my question was how did you go from "terrible" to where he was currently, when the time in between was spent achieving a bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering in a language that he learned while attending school there,

Phuc: Well, it was easier when I, um, got back to English in, uh, Russia. At that time, it wasn't time to, so moreover, when I started learning Russian, it was from zero. So, it gave me the whole system--how to go, like, from zero. So like, ok, that's how you approach a new language and you try to apply it back to English.

Phuc had developed a system in learning to speak, read, and write a language with his Russian experience that he was able to transmit to his learning of English. This was amazing to me, but it still left me puzzled about his conversational English which was again quite good. He later provided some insight to this as well.

Phuc: Of course. Well, I think--I was the founder of a...we got a small English class. And you know, we students, we gather once or twice every week to speak the language.

Phuc's case is one that is not as clear in his English development as many of the other students but since he has expressed a desire to get a job here in the US in civil engineering as well as a desire to teach here—it is quite obvious that English was a motivating factor for him.

For many of these students, their preparation for coming to US began early with a concentration on English which has now become compensatory in most Vietnamese schools starting as early as the third grade. Cam expressed this as part of her experience.

RSM: So you have been studying English for a good amount of time?

Cam: Yes, since second grade.

RSM: What was your basis for wanting to study English or I guess your parents obviously wanted you to study English. Why did they want you to do that?

Cam: Because they wanted me to know another language because they think it would be better for me like later on and because since I was little I like to learn the language because I catch up on everything pretty fast; learn the vocabulary and stuff. And I think because I start off at the right place and I like the way they teach me how to learn English through songs and all that stuff. People here start to learn those in kindergarten, but I got those like learn the vocabulary and all that stuff through the songs; all the shapes, all the fancy colorful things since the second grade.

Hien is another example of someone whose whole life has been in preparation to interact with English and likely the US. She was a linguistics student specializing in English. She has worked professionally as an interpreter of Vietnamese into English both in print and as an oral interpreter. Her master's degree is in linguistics and now she focuses on how speech can be an indicator of behavioral and learning issues. For Hien, this preparation began early, "Well my major in undergrad was English literature and linguistics and since middle school, I was in kind of not really special classes but a class whose major was English too. So I kind of figure out that is my direction."

Kieu also began preparation for English very early and in this conversation she identifies that English was a key value for her parents.

RSM: Did you take a lot of English classes in VN?

Kieu: Yes, since elementary school.

RSM: Do most students take English at that age?

Kieu: No

RSM: What are some of the reasons why you want to come to the US?

Kieu: Primarily, the education system

RSM: Is the education here more difficult than in VN?

Kieu: High school education is very heavy in Vietnam. But they prepare you with good knowledge for university.

RSM: Why do you think the reputation of the US education system is so high?

Kieu: First, English is a universal language. Second, the technology is high.

Some students not only identified a value for English, but indicated that there was a distinct preference for English as taught and utilized in the US. They could receive an

English centered education much closer in Australia, and much cheaper in Singapore, yet an overwhelming number of Vietnamese students prefer the US. Lam points to her reasons for this choice.

Lam: So, like I read the articles and I think my major -like - the higher education here is better. Because we have more equipment and tools and the classroom and the teacher is better. Many more materials are in English. Either you go the U.K, Europe or U.S. I don't like Singapore because their English mixed with Chinese and I don't like that accent.

RSM: What about Australia?

Lam: They mix with Indian. So, cause I have friends that - like – study in Australia and in Singapore. They told me – like – “my accent is like crazy sucks.” And it's like, yeah, I can see. I didn't say I like the country, but I don't like the English accent.... So, it's like so far away. And in Australia, because of Indian accent. So, I don't really like it. And...

RSM: When you say Indian accent, do you mean the Aboriginal accent or do you mean the influence from India?

Lam: Influence from India.... They have a lot of Indian students there. My friends told me it's kind of bad. Even the professors speak like Indian and English and it's really hard to hear, to understand the lecture. You know, because I'm already an international student. It's going to double my challenge if I have to try to understand something in English.

However, even with a degree in English, many of these students continued to struggle with the immersion into an English speaking world of education. Mai speaks of her experience,

RSM: So you had a BA in English and when you came here you still did the ESL classes at Brookhaven.

Mai: Yes.

RSM So did you feel like your degree prepared you, a degree in English prepare you for actual speaking and reading and doing all the English things you needed to do?

Mai: Yes, it does.

This is a very important issue for Mai, because she would like to be in hotel management at a luxury style resort back in Vietnam. The following dialogue points to the importance of her desire to become increasingly more comfortable with English especially in this industry.

Mai: Yes. I, the longer I am here I getting better but not to the point that I think I am satisfied with that; I'm confident about my listening skills.

RSM If you were in a position of leading or managing a resort in Da Nang how important do you think your listening skills with English would be in that type of position?

Mai: Wow. It's be really important because at the time you know. As a leader, I must showing them like I have a leadership skill. But if I cannot understand the other, especially my customer, I will become like a clown or something like idiot in the eye of my employee.

RSM: Ok. And so are most, is there a high need for English in the resort industry especially in the area of Da Nang?

Mai: I think so because back like the resort there they charge a lot money so only foreigner can afford that.

RSM: Ok. And is it primarily English speaking foreigners or...?

Mai: I don't really know about that but English is official so everywhere so far. So, if you don't speak the same language so just use English.

It is evident through this conversation that in situations like Mai is describing; English becomes the “bridge” language between foreigners who do not know Vietnamese, and Vietnamese business people who do not know other languages such as German, Italian, or Japanese etc.

Ngoc also identified that English was a key reason why she chose to study here.

Ngoc: The first thing, like, I worked for a while, so I know that what exactly I want to...for my Master. And I know that the education system in Vietnam cannot meet my demand. I want something, um, the education here in US is, I mean, can meet--satisfy my need for my career development and then more I can improve my English.

Having Access to Scholarship Money

While the majority of the student respondents self-reported that their families were solely funding their higher education experience in the US, 5 of the 11 (45%) participants commented that scholarship money was assisting and encouraging the continuation of their study here.

Lam: I have scholarships and my mom sends me the money.

RSM: Do you know where you got your scholarships? Are they from the Vietnamese side or US side?

Lam: US side – (University) scholarship based on my GPA (grade point average).

RSM: The rest your mother is funding for you?

Lam: Yes.

Mai was another respondent that self-reported that she was the recipient of scholarship funds.

RSM: Ok. So, do you have any scholarships?

Mai: I do have.

RSM: Ok. Are they scholarships from (University)?

Mai: Uh-hmmm.

RSM: Do you know approximately do you receive from scholarships?

Mai: Uh, last year I only get \$500 per semester but this year I have a \$1000.

RSM: Great. Are these scholarships specifically for international students or are they just based on your GPA?

Mai: The first one is for, is called departmental scholarship. I think it has a more potential for international students but the second one is from the (University) committee so I think it just for my GPA.

Mai also identified another benefit of receiving scholarship money within the State of Texas. When asked why she chose the particular institution that she had selected, Mai responded,

Mai: First of all, I think that they are the only one who has a degree in hospitality management in this area. I mean if you go further you may find it. They also have a lot of scholarship that will help you financially because as you know as an international student I have to pay non-resident tuition. But, if I get a \$1000 scholarship then I pay resident (tuition) and that helps me a lot, because I pay on my own. I do appreciate that rule or law because I think only Texas has that. I don't know any other states that have this but in Texas if you get \$1000 for the amount of money for a scholarship then you can pay the resident (tuition).

None of the scholarships discussed by these students were full scholarships. Ngoc gave a clearer discussion of how the combination of self-funding, financial support from parents and scholarships worked together to fully pay for her education.

RSM: how are you paying for your school here?

Ngoc: like I worked for 3 years so I have some of my pocket money, and I also have support from my parents.

RSM: Ok

Ngoc: It's just like half-half .

RSM: Ok. and so like, half and half, basically?

Ngoc: No, no...like 2/3 from my dad and 1/3 from myself.

RSM: Ok. That's very good to know, ok.

Ngoc: yeah

RSM: And, would you say, any scholarships or anything like that?

Ngoc: Now I have the scholarship from the (University).

RSM: And what is your scholarship based upon?

Ngoc: Based...upon..? What do you mean?

RSM: I'm sorry, is it, um—

Ngoc: Merit based or..?

RSM: Is it merit based...is it--grade point average, or is it an international student scholarship?

Ngoc: uh...

RSM: How did you get the scholarship? Let me ask it that way.

Ngoc: Ok, so, is it the departmental scholarship...the college--the college of business administration.

RSM: Ok.

Ngoc: And I think this is the first time they grant the scholarship and then I got it and it gave--it gives me \$1000 for a semester.

RSM: Ok.

Ngoc: Not for a semester, for an academic year.

RSM: Alright, so \$1000 per academic year. Now, I've heard in some instances one student who had a scholarship of a thousand dollars could get in-state tuition

Ngoc: Yes, yes that's true that—

RSM: Does that qualify for you?

Ngoc: Yes, that's true.

RSM: Ok.

Ngoc: It help me a lot

Binh also received a scholarship from her current institution and said that it covered about 50% of her needs while the other 50% was provided by her parents.

Two other students were significantly aided by scholarships in their educational journey, but for these students, it came as they accomplished master's degrees in other nations before coming to the US. Hien received a master's from Thailand and Phuc from Russia.

RSM: Let's talk about a little bit your reasoning for going to Chiang Mai? Why did you choose a school outside of Vietnam; why did you choose Thailand?

Hien: Well, the reason was that I got a full scholarship for that program so I went there and it was the only linguistic program in Southeast Asia back then and I liked linguistics.

RSM: How did you find out about the school in Chiang Mai; how did you find out about your scholarship opportunities?

Hien: Well, a friend of mine happened to know a professor there and so the professor kind of introduced me to the bulletin/flyer for that program so I contacted them and you know just sharing with them my interest and my background and I was working as a translator so they were interested in and later they told me that they would give me a scholarship to go.

As discussed earlier, Phuc was the only student interviewed who was currently studying to complete his doctorate. His Bachelor's and his Master's degrees were from a Russian school in St. Petersburg.

RSM: And, uh, did you attempt to go to higher education or college in Vietnam?

Phuc: Well, actually, I passed the entrance exam—

RSM: Ok.

Phuc: --for one college and from that I got a scholarship to go to Russia and study.

And from Russia, Phuc talks about the decision to come to the US and why he chose this particular area and school.

RSM: How are you funding your education here?

Phuc: Here?

RSM: Uh huh.

Phuc: The US? I got a scholarship.

RSM: So is it a full-ride scholarship?

Phuc: Right.

RSM: Ok. How did you come in contact with it, and how did you choose--why did you choose this particular institution?

Phuc: Um, I think I got a couple of options, uh, back in the days last year. Um, Texas because...the weather's different, because I've been in Russia, in the cold--coldest place in the world, it's time, you know, to do a change.

RSM: This was a better financial situation for you--coming here with a scholarship and that type of thing?

Phuc: Yes.

RSM: Ok. Is it the kind of scholarship based purely on merit--GPA, that type of thing, or was it because you're an international student?

Phuc: It's a TA...it's a teaching assistant.

RSM: Teaching assistant, ok.

Phuc: Right.

RSM: So you're actually teaching here on the campus as well.

Phuc: I'm helping.

RSM: Helping teach while you're doing it, gotcha. K. That's a very good point. So, what about your degrees in Russia? Were those funded primarily through scholarship, or you parents?

Phuc: Fully funded by, I suppose the government...and partially Russia.

So, it is evident that while scholarships do not solely influence students to come to the US, they have certainly been a factor among several of the students that participated in this study. For some, they were an encouragement to continue, while for others, these scholarships provided the full means to move further ahead in their educational journey. At the very least, scholarships were added to the equation of these international students being able to focus on their education rather than worrying how or if their parents could come up with the necessary funds that would enable them to continue.

Research Question 2– What Educational and Professional Outcomes Do These Students Expect to Achieve by Studying in the US?

The results of this question might seem predictable as the overwhelming goal of college students in the age and culture that we live in is the same—to get a job. Unequivocally, this was not different with this group of Vietnamese international students. Every one of these students stated that their desire was employment, but the reasons given for this employment did vary somewhat. Other highly significant reasons were also given such as the desire to gain further education and have the opportunity to assist others. Several students reported that they expected a certain level of gained confidence and independence to come from their experience of studying abroad. Finally, a desire to become an innovator of new ideas was the expectation of a smaller number of students; however this appears to be a huge need in Vietnam evidenced by the low patent rate due to a “lack of capacity to innovate” (Harman and Ngoc, 2010 p. 98).

Obtain Employment

“Go and get a job,” is the response of many a parent when the issues of expectations and outcomes of higher education are in play. This was evidenced as being a unifying cultural expectation evidenced by every student identifying that was a desired outcome of the higher education experience in the US. All of these students believed that their degree earned here in the US would give them an advantage over other students who did not come here for their higher education.

Since we were very young, instilled within us all is the question, “what do you want to be when you grow up?” As I sat down in each interview, and came to this question, I must say that this is how I felt as I inquired about what each student wanted to accomplish with their degree? I remember some students stating what they wanted to accomplish very quickly as if it had been rehearsed, while others would pause to consider just how they could answer this question. I will discuss An further as further education stands between where he is and where he wants to be but his plan is to become a professor in a higher education institution as a result of his degree. This is also an interesting direction considering that one of the greatest obstacles standing in the way of Vietnam having a world-class research university and an improved higher education situation is the lack of professors with doctorates. The question for An is one that faces most every one of the students I interviewed. Will they stay in the US or will they return to Vietnam to reinvest in their own country?

Binh is attempting to follow in her father’s footsteps and become a dentist. The motivation for this will be shared later in this section as I discuss the opportunity to assist

others. But it is obvious that Binh wants to be employed as a dentist. Cam believes that her degree will prepare her not only for a job, but for a job that would stem from an educational system that is recognized in the global marketplace.

Cam: Because they think that like the diploma in the US will be valuable in Vietnam in specific and like around the world in general so with a US diploma, I can pretty much go around the world and work.

Cam is very specific about what she wants to do. No one would question that she has a definitive direction. She also believes that her degree achieved here will give her a competitive edge over others in the same field.

Cam: I want to get a bachelor's degree in public relations and work in the media field like a publicist and entertainment fields and things like that. Yes, and like the public relations job now is like growing back in Vietnam and they actually have like public relations firm and entertain company, so I hope by the time I am done with my study, there will be more opportunities for me to work back in Vietnam.

RSM: What do you think it will help you achieve? By getting your degree here?

Cam: Hmm, I don't know but by getting the degree here, throughout the studying process, I have more chances and opportunity to practice what I study like right now I'm not only just study but I join other organizations to plan events and all that stuff because I want to practice what I learn, what I like to do so I think studying here will help me with that because I know that in Vietnam it will be more competitive for me to do like join the group and then like not that many event will be back in Vietnam so I will have more chance to do it here.

RSM: And do you feel like the degree that you get here will help you to be competitive back in Vietnam?

Cam: Yes, maybe, because like back then it will but like now there is a lot more student who go abroad to study so, yeah.

RSM: So you feel like the competition might be a little bit fiercer because there are more students coming back from abroad as well?

Diu is clear that her plan certainly involves making more money.

Diu: The first thing I want to have a better job--a good job with the highest salary as I can. I'm looking for a company that's foreign, US company invest in Vietnam.

RSM: Why would you look for that?

Diu: I think because, I, I don't have a good impression with a company of a government of Vietnam....

RSM: So how would you define being successful? What do you want to become? If you--if you woke up one day and said, "Diu is, uh, successful," what would that look like?

Diu: Think, uh, good studying have good job and earn a lot of money.
(Laughing)

RSM: What would you do with all the money that you had? If you have a lot of money, what would you do?

Diu: Maybe own a business.

Diep expressed a great deal of realism as she shared her experience and her expectations with what education would bring. This is in part because of her previous attempts with little success.

Diep: No, so, I just want to get a job. So, Because I am an international student it's harder for me to get a job and so I think I need more qualifications than other people to get the same job.... At first I think that my parents want both of us to have a least bachelor's degree so that's why I choose to stay here and finish my bachelor. A job, actually, I did try, but I could not get the job that I wanted, you know, so I choose to go higher.

Diep sees the competition level rising with all the students that are abroad and the changing levels of expectation that is growing inside the country.

Diep: So it's still like, I think a degree help in some way but it doesn't guarantee that you gonna have a job and that you gonna be successful in Vietnam. There's too many competition in Vietnam right now, I think, it's not like a couple of years back with a degree in the US, gonna guarantee you to get a really good job in Vietnam, but not now.... For me successful is for me to have an easier life financially.

The rising level of competition was also addressed by Ngoc as she discusses how she has experienced this in the banking and financial business inside Vietnam. This increasing level of competition drew her into the US for higher education in order to prepare her to compete at a higher level because of the degree she achieves.

Ngoc: but, I, myself, feel like just--feel like I want to be more competitive in the labor market in Vietnam. And I just, I--I don't want to, like, be satisfied with my current position. And I want to move on to the senior labor market--high quality labor market with higher position, higher compensation. And I know that just acquiring a degree in masters of business administration in Vietnam cannot help me with that.

Hien believes that an education here does translate into a greater opportunity to have better employment when she returns. But she believes this is the predominant view of students who come to the US.

Hien: Well, again, in order to get a good job, people back home might not care what you actually learn. Some people might not learn anything here, but they try themselves to pass on the exam, get enough grade and that's it. I get a degree and as long as I have a degree from U.S., from American college/university, it means I will have a good job back home and that's it.

But, while some like Diep and Diu point to a better paying job that will make life easier, others like Kieu desire other intrinsic rewards. Kieu says, "I want to be a math teacher. I like this job, an interest and passion."

Lam brings still another view of employment. She already has a job waiting on her, but indicates that it is not really the job but the subject matter of art that is important to her.

Lam: Right now I already have one job offer from my mom's boss. That if I finish my degree and come back and work for him, he will give me one position. So, I'm kind of like thinking.

RSM: So, that's in the school of education or the school there?

Lam: That's a department that works like advertising for the school and stuff, So, I think that's Ok. I want to do something that focus on art. So, I just...art is fine. Anywhere is fine.

She also espouses a similar view as Diep, that her goal is that she will not work herself to death as it appears that she has seen this cycle repeated in Vietnam within her family.

Lam: I think I'm successful when I'm satisfied with the things I have done, like get a degree and get a job. I earn enough money to send some to my mom and have a go life here; enjoy my life here. And I don't need to, like, squeeze the budget as much as I have to. That is good.

Mai embodies still another specific outlook that exists within the culture. As she looks ahead to a career in hospitality management, she revealed not only her values but her work ethic as well.

Mai: I am the one who, I want to learn and experience everything from the lowest level. So I want to get out of college and get a job at a hotel. Maybe at the front desk, then I will work my way up, but I want not only to be a manager. I want to be a general manager or regional manager, so that when people look at you they respect you because of your position.... You know because I feel that you must understand everything to do it well. Like as a manager, if you do not know how the front desk people work then you will not really appreciate them or when a problem happens you will not know how to solve it. If you were a front desk person before then you know what happens because I have experienced this before. You will help your employee more if you have experience about that.

Throughout the interviewing process, it appeared that the respondents were somewhat hesitant to commit to a definite plan of staying in the US or returning home. I sensed that the overwhelming desire was to return home to Vietnam, but it also appeared that the longer they remained in the US, the more they had difficulty in seeing a lucrative and fulfilling position for themselves inside their own country. Phuc was the most advanced student that was interviewed. He already had a secured job on a US government project.

Phuc: And, that's a really close connection between school and the industry, so I would rather go to seek a job around here, rather than go outside the U.S.

Because, I mean after this something else is, I mean differences between their system and our system to spend time to get adapted to, you know, the environment. And it'll take time, which is--which is very crucial right now...and getting old, you know.

Even after considerable time spent in Russia, Phuc saw the opportunity to accomplish more in the system that he was now involved with inside the US.

Employment is a crucial discussion in the economy that exists here in the US currently as well as the global financial environment. So, it is no accident that this was a primary answer to this research question. However, there were many different views and means of achieving this goal. Some students identified that they would get a job as soon as possible, while others had already been employed and were involved in further higher education to improve their outlook, salary or security. The greater number of female students (9) compared to males (2) was also an interesting facet of this issue. If these numbers portray the reality of the future of Vietnam, then this could point to not only more women in the professional workforce but also increasing competition for these jobs

Gain Further Education

Education has been seen as a key to success as previously identified by not only these students and the families from which they come. Because of this, it is no surprise that in addition to getting a job, furthering their education is the second most common factor among these students. Of these students, 82% indicated that they would like to get further education as a part of their future outlook. This is especially significant since one of only two students who did not respond to this factor is completing his doctorate, so it would be unlikely that he would desire further education. The other student is

completing a double Master's in an industry that tends to value business experience over a doctorate in that particular field (Accounting). But these comments will show the diversity of what these students expect from their anticipated educational achievements.

Mai's first goal is to get a good job, but sees further education as the next step if she experiences difficulty with this.

Mai: But I may. If you know after I graduate, if I cannot get a job to stay here I need to get a higher education, to keep going to school.

Kieu sees further education for her to accomplish what she wants to do as future educator. She would like to become a teacher and views graduate school as a necessity to add to the Bachelor's she is currently completing. Her plan is to accomplish this here in the US. Hien has earned a bachelor's degree inside Vietnam, a master's degree in Thailand and a second master's degree in the US. Each time, her focus has narrowed based on the interaction that she has had in connection with jobs and volunteer positions. In our conversation, she indicated that she was not finished yet.

RSM: What would you like to do?

Hien: After this?

RSM: Yes.

Hien: I might continue to PhD.

RSM: Okay. If you continue to your PhD, do you have any idea where you would like to go?

Hien: Well, my supervisor will help me with that. It depends on the topic of my thesis. I'm interested in reading difficulties, like children ... they have reading difficulties.

Diep indicated however, that school itself was not the answer. It was the whole experience of education and the experience that comes with it that is important.

Diep: But I think that even in Vietnam or even anywhere in here, is not the degree that matter it's what you get from the school that matter and a lot of student that come here or to England or to other country to study to get a degree but there's too many of them go back to Vietnam with their degree but they still don't have experience, they never work or they don't learn enough. So it's still like, I think a degree help in some way but it doesn't guarantee that you gonna have a job and that you gonna be successful in Vietnam. There's too many competition in Vietnam right now, I think, it's not like a couple of years back with a degree in the US, gonna guarantee you to get a really good job in Vietnam, but not now.

Cam is one of the few bachelor's degree students who participated in this study, and even then there are a significant number of the master's students who plan on continuing their education. Cam does plan on furthering this education.

RSM: And what degree are you trying to get here?

Cam: Right now is the bachelor degree but I might go back for master's degree.

RSM: You said you were thinking about the potential of a master's degree. Where do you think you would attend a master's degree? Is there a particular place you already have in mind?

Cam: I'm not sure yet but maybe Emerson College in Boston.

RSM: Okay, great. And how do you think this degree will help you with your educational and professional goals? What do you think it will help you achieve? By getting your degree here?

Cam: Hmm, I don't know but by getting the degree here, throughout the studying process, I have more chances and opportunity to practice what I study like right now I'm not only just study but I join other organizations to plan events and all that stuff because I want to practice what I learn, what I like to do so I think studying here will help me with that because I know that in Vietnam it will be more competitive for me to do like join the group and then like not that many event will be back in Vietnam so I will have more chance to do it here.

Binh's desired profession will require a next step of education, dental school, but as she waits to be accepted she continues to be involved on her current campus. An came to the US for a master's and now plans to continue with his doctorate. His dream is to become a professor and continuing to encourage other Vietnamese students to come and have a similar experience to his.

In the process of her education here in the US, Lam took Japanese at her community college and began to investigate Japanese culture. Because of this, she plans on finishing her degree here, and then getting a job in Japan to be able to continue her education there. She includes a job in her planning because she realizes that her mom will not continue to fund her education beyond her bachelor's degree. In this conversation, she presents this opportunity.

Lam: If I can't get a transfer to Japan and get a degree there with an affordable amount of tuition, I will first need to work. My mom's not gonna support me after my bachelor's degree is done. She will, like, "I will throw you out of my house. Get to work." At first, If I can't get a scholarship enough to have my master's degree, I'm gonna work first.

Education has been seen as a bridge toward success for these students and their families. Clearly, if they did not believe this, then they would not be here. And it is also evidenced here that these students also look toward further next steps of education, even to the concept of lifelong learning and the reinvestment of their abilities into others.

Assist Others

Of these students, 45% indicated a desire for their education achieved here in the US to have a direct influence on a benefit to others. It is important, in midst of

understanding these students certainly expressed an expectation that their education would benefit them personally, they also desired to enhance the lives of others around them. An expressed this when he discussed what he would do when he had achieved the education he sought here in the US that he would like to exchange places with another student who was in currently in Vietnam. This was actually a motivating factor in his participation with this research.

An: I still have a lot of things I can think of. Go back to Vietnam. If I can get a good chance to get, I love to become teacher and professor or stuff. I love to -- let's say I want to change my position from international student for another international student. That's why you know when you send me the e-mail I just want to reply right away.

He also spoke of the opportunity to “give back” to his nation in the form of the development of “open source” software which was the subject of his own study. In doing so he believed that he would achieve his education, “and later on I will go back and to help the Vietnamese people”

Binh plans on returning to Vietnam to become a dentist there. Here she expressed what she expects to be a part of her educational and professional development.

Binh: Hopefully help others. I feel lucky because I have a lot of people that helped me. I need to share my story, especially those who go into my profession.... All I want to something, if I'm successful, is to give back to our community to undeserved patients in Vietnam and other poor countries.

Diep expressed a willingness to help others, but also a lack of confidence in knowing how she could make this kind of a difference. This was observed by my question and her response.

RSM: Right, do you ever think about going back to Vietnam to help and to improve the life of Vietnam?

Diep: Yes, I don't know how right now, but I think that if I have more knowledge or if I have more experience I know how to help, but right now I'm just stress out of school so is hard for me, like I want to help but I don't know how.

Kieu, a student who would like to be a math teacher, also alluded to the concept of reinvesting her knowledge into the growth of her nation.

RSM: Is there a sense that you want to reinvest in your nation?

Kieu: Yes. I have the opportunity to get a better education here and I would like to give back to them.

Another student, Hien, had planned her whole educational path with the intent of affecting the issue of special needs children and their families which was an area that she indicated was vastly under-resourced in her home country of Vietnam. However, she hoped to be a part of that beginning to change.

Hien: I just want to help more and in order to do that I know that I need to be more equipped in training, in skills.

RSM: Great. Going on with that, who would you like to help? Who would be the recipients of the education that you've received? Who would be the primary recipients of that?

Hien: Well, for example, like before when I wanted to become a translator, back then in Vietnam we didn't really have many books, you know, for any areas or fields so I feel like as a translator I might help people right now or the next generation to have more options to read. For example, if they want to read about how to help your children, right now they might have like five or six options to choose from, but back then they might have only one or two options and I don't really like that idea because compared to American society you have so many choices to choose from -- you just pick one topic and you can just go to the bookstore, you know back then maybe the internet was not common then. You can go to bookstore and choose any book or whatever books that you want, but in Vietnam we don't have -- we didn't have that luxury so that is why I wanted to become a translator. And later, after translating different topics, I'm really interested in autism because you know children with autism -- the rate of children with autism is kind of increasing now in Vietnam and parents, professionals there didn't they really understand what was going on -- why that happened, how do we help these kids? And so, I feel like okay I should learn more about this and other

maybe to train them directly or indirectly by translating books to just give them available resources for parents and professionals.

However, Hien understands the great challenges that would accompany this dream. She has no expectations of grandeur, but simply that she desires to be part of the solution to an extreme need.

RSM: Do you plan to use your skills and abilities in the social systems, educational systems within Vietnam?

Hien: Well again, I feel like I cannot really help directly with any professionals or parents so my dream is to being a translator but this time more specifically in behavior analysis. With that I can be wherever as long as I can be helpful.

RSM: Right. So the desire is not necessarily ... you don't have a specific desire to go and reinvest in your home country? You feel that you're more investing in people wherever you're at? Is that fair?

Hien: Right, right. And, of course, the reason for that is because right now in Vietnam we don't have any facility or foundation yet in order to do so. Yes, and I don't see myself can do that.

RSM: Okay. You don't see yourself as being able to go back and begin that process. You would like to go back in and be a part of something that's already going ... that's established?

Hien: And again, the reason for that is because in order to establish anything new, you really need a connection, a network -- true so many people.

Gain Confidence

Only three students reported that their higher education has literally transformed them into a different person with respect to confidence. And although, this was not a predominant view expressed by the majority of the respondents, I felt that it was compelling enough to share their statements. Cam described a personal transformation that her emersion into another culture had begun.

Cam: Back then I used to be very shy and I don't really want to join all the activities or maybe if I join, it will have to be like my friend being in the thing so I will join with them, but now I can speak up, like I told you, I used to be very shy and won't speak in class, but right now I can speak up, I can join whatever I want to join.... It's kind of changed me, like back then, like I depends on my parents a lot but now I can be independent and like be on myself.

Diep agreed that her abilities and independence had grown immensely during her higher education experience in the US. She even went further to express this as a healthy opportunity for other students in Vietnam who were considering it.

Diep: If I were in Vietnam I cannot imagine how I were, like even my perspective and career wise, I cannot imagine. Like, I change so much since I came here, yeah, in Vietnam I could not have that kind of thinking.

RSM: Very good, anything that you'd like to add about what your experience has been here overall? Would you encourage other students to come and do what you've done?

Diep: I encourage anyone to go far away from home and to explore.

Hien's experience had begun in Vietnam as an only child who earned a degree in Vietnam even when her parents had never had such an experience. She went on to a master's degree in Thailand, returned back to Vietnam to work, and was now here in the US achieving a second Master's even considering a Doctorate. This had been quite a journey for her from an only child to a "well-rounded" student

Hien: Again, I don't think success means best grade, but I see that I can become more well-rounded person. That is success for me already.

Research Question 3 – What Are the Academic and Cultural Experiences Reported by Vietnamese Attending US Higher Education Institutions?

Another interest of this study was to determine to what level these students engage their on and off-campus communities. Many international students are viewed as

students who focus only on their studies to the exclusion of the world around them. This can be influenced by the language and cultural barriers which will be shown as part of their academic and cultural experience. It is not only important to show how these obstacles such as difficulty with English and differences in the culture play a part but also how it is traversed.

But among these students, the overwhelming majority displayed involvement in their international student and departmental organizations. They developed friendships with Americans and other international students. They went to restaurants, churches and temples. They gathered at bowling alleys, movie theaters and other amusement establishments much like any other college students. And 82% of these students specifically indicated that these academic and cultural activities played a beneficial role in their understanding the culture and becoming a balanced global citizen.

Another interesting discovery was that these students volunteered a wide range of community and campus organizations. They see these experiences as key to participation in this culture and in many cases they desire to carry on these values in their own families and relationships. Understandably, these students were ones who volunteered for this study. Are they a representative group that can be generalized toward all Vietnamese international students? I do not make this claim, but they do show definitively what is important to them.

They Experience Challenges with the English Language

Of all respondents, 91% expressed that they experienced challenges with the

English language in their classes and in their interaction with the culture. As has already been reported, these students took many different actions to overcome these challenges. Many took English courses at community and small colleges to enhance and further their education. Others went to night school to constantly improve their skills. Others engaged other English speakers in order to overcome their deficiencies and increase their vocabulary and verbal skills.

I enjoyed a discussion with An as he told me that he specifically watched American movies that engaged dialogue and displayed American values. He told me that he watched *A Beautiful Life* over and over to understand the colloquial dialogue. I questioned him about this movie, believing that if it helped him then it might help others. It was a comical exchange since I was not familiar with this movie, but finally, overcoming our own listening obstacles, I realized he was talking about *It's a Wonderful Life* which happens also to be my favorite movie. Here is part of our discussion which typifies the barriers of communication and the joys of overcoming them together.

RSM: So what helps you in listening and understanding?

An: Movie. I can say family movie. Because people talk a lot than fighting movie. Because when I watch fighting movie, I cannot learn a lot of English because they just fighting each other, they didn't say that much.

RSM: Now, you said *Beautiful Life* was a movie that you really enjoyed?

An: *It's a Beautiful Life*.

RSM: *It is a Beautiful Life*. That is not the Italian movie, is it? *It is a Beautiful Life*?

An: No, it one of very famous traditional American movies.

RSM: Now, you mean *It's a Wonderful Life*?

An: Yeah.

RSM: *Wonderful Life!* Black and white movie?

An: Oh, yeah, that one.

RSM: Jimmy Stewart?

An: Yeah, you know that?

RSM: My favorite movie. Wonderful. So, yes, very family when he talks about he's at Christmas and he thinks about killing himself?

An: Yes, that one.

RSM: All right. That's very funny. That is my favorite movie.

This dialogue explains the patience that is required by both parties if the true meaning of the conversation is to be discovered.

Several students expressed that many of their issues in English were as a result of slang and colloquialisms that were frequently used by students more than adults.

Cam: Basically, the vocabulary and all the slang. Yeah, like sometime people talk in like slang and vocabulary that I've never know before and I was like I don't understand that so I need to ask them again what they say and listening to because I've learned English since the second grade but I don't practice it every day so the listening part is kind of hard for me because over here I have to like talk and communicate with people every single day with English.

Diu: Like I think the professors easier to understand than the student- because they use the word slang; I cannot understand.... A professor speaks slowly. When American student talk together, I slip behind; I cannot understand.

Diep: No, but, but still, there's a lot with the communication outside like, with the slang and like different group of people have different kind of expression. I learn, but its still, there's still some things that I don't get so I need explanation.

Ngoc: I don't know about the other states in the US, but here in Texas, people use a lot of slang. And then so it's hard for me to understand. At first, the slang was, and then, because of the multi--they have different nationalities here, so they have different accents. So, it's hard for me to listen.

Hien identified this as a particular problem as she came to school in Texas.

Hien: In my first year, I found it a little bit difficult to understand people from Texas. Well, I don't know how to describe this, but this is kind of fun illustration that I usually told my Mom that, you know, if you say, for example, think about something round but if you talk with a person from Texas it's not completely round anymore, yeah, that's how, yeah ... I don't know how to explain that. So there was a drawl ... there instead of an exactness, there would be drawn out ... Yes, again, in general, Americans in general, sometimes they would use expressions or idioms -- that's another reason.

Diu also expressed difficulty with vocabulary, especially in classes that required new words with very specific meanings like philosophy.

Lam described this not only in connection with her classes, but in tasks like setting up her wireless internet. She said she had difficulty with people understanding her over the phone.

Lam: I try to understand and for the first two months even I talk to the bank, I call AT&T. I try to set up my line, try to set up the internet, and try to set up the bank. I talked but they did not understand. They talk, I did not understand either. I had to hang up. It was really and I was... I did not expect it would be that bad cause somehow I feel like I've been studying English for a long time. So, it's going to be hard. But I did not think it was going to be that bad. Combined with the shock of the culture I feel that everyone is different.

Other students like Mai pointed to the shows that many college students would watch and then include these phrases directly into their phraseology which was difficult to understand for two reasons. First, the language was cloaked in humor that specifically related to a television show which was again often colloquial in nature, and secondly because most of these students self-described that they were not avid television watchers.

They Engage in Meaningful Relationships with Other Students and See These as Beneficial to Their Overall Development

Another study done with Vietnamese international students found that these students had difficulty cultivating meaningful relationships with American students. Although there were some students who identified this as a struggle, 73% of these students stated that they had close American friends. All the students identified that friendships with American and international students were important to their educational experience.

One student whose English skills were excellent said that he did not communicate to friends that he was an international student.

RSM: Have you found that relationships with American student been pretty easy for you to do?

Phuc: Yes.

RSM: Do you feel like they are pretty open to you?

Phuc: Right.

RSM: Why do you feel like--are you intriguing to them, because you're Vietnamese? Or do they even know that you are from Vietnam when they first meet you?

Phuc: Oh, they definitely don't know.

RSM: No?

Phuc: They ask you if I was born in somewhere, and I say, "no."

Ngoc witnessed groups of international students that kept themselves isolated from others and identified this as an unhealthy practice.

Ngoc: So, even I noticed in my college of business administration, I see very clearly two groups of students. One group of students, they just isolated in their

nationality, like the Chinese students. They just want to speak and study and do everything together with other Chinese students. While the other, they are more open. And they have friends with Americans students, with other students from other countries, and I think I am one of the second group.

RSM: Ok, who--what group do you think is best prepared to enter the workforce?

Ngoc: Of course the second group.

RSM: And why would you think that?

Ngoc: I don't know why, but let me think about that...but, I think that, um, the more experience you have with different kinds of people, the more competitive you are in the labor market. Like in your work environment, in your working environment, you are not suppose--or you are not expected to deal with the same kind of people all the time. You have to deal with other kind of people, and so why not make friends, or why not make yourself more prepared for the diverse working environment.

She goes on to describe these friends as having patience with her difficulty in communication, but this willingness is what solidified the friendship.

Mai describes that these relationships are very difficult for her. She reported that she especially struggles in group work when formed together with American females. She describes a jealousy and tension that is present there which she admits that she participates. She also indicates that she does not feel this same tension with American males.

Mai: They are so about themselves and arrogant and they look down on me sometime especially because of my language. My speaking is not very good and whenever I tried to tell them something, if they don't understand they look at me with a weird way and I just can't accept that so to be better I just don't talk to them.

Binh is another student who struggled with making friends with Americans. She states, "my personality it's hard to get close to American friends." But this is not the case with her international friends so she explains,

RSM: Did you find that white American students were not as friendly? Perhaps discrimination?

Binh: I don't think it's discrimination, I think that they're not patient enough to understand my culture, and personality. If I want to say something, I don't know how to express it and I feel like they are not patient enough to listen. But my African friends, they're more patient and they encourage me.

RSM: Do you tend to gravitate more towards other ethnics? Why?

Binh: We start from the same place, ground. We understand the difficulty of each other.

Lam comes across as a truly friendly person in the interview, so I was shocked that she did not have many American friends, but here she describes why she may come across to others as unfriendly.

Lam: I think some Americans are really friendly. Like the guy at SMU. He was the one to approach me. Right now, he text me- "Hey Sue" – (That's my nick name. No one can pronounce my name correctly and spell my name wrong.) "Hey Sue. How are you? Want to hang out?" He likes Japanese culture too. He is really interested in Vietnamese culture. So he talks to me "Teach me some Vietnamese food. Teach me some Vietnamese words. Where should I go?" He tries to communicate with me. For others, generally, I think, Americans they are quite friendly. But because of the first year when I was in class, I tend to – like - just stay quiet and try to understand what people are talking about. So I did not really engage in the discussions or whatever. So it's like they feel like I'm not friendly. Like, I'm not familiar with the way like (they say to me) – "Hey, What's up?" "How are you?" "I'm fine, thank you." "Have a great day." That's really different, that's not my culture.

Another student, Hien developed strong friendships with Americans while she was in Thailand. Her roommate was an American. While in Texas, she has developed new friendships with Americans and internationals centered on her Christian faith.

Hien: I usually go to the Friday night where we have like a social night among American students and International students in general. And most of American students there are Christians and because I'm also a Christian... We kind of share the same faith so it's really easy for me to hang out with them to learn from them and just from them, it's kind of the place to start with. And then some of my

friends from class or from my department like TA (Teacher's Assistant) -- I have time to interact with them and just to build more confidence and trust -- and friends.

Diep describes that the immersion into the culture was a positive experience for her. She came to the US as a senior in high school and was the only international student in her school. She also went to a small university in Chicago where she was in a regular dorm. These experiences caused her to be immersed into many relationships with Americans which she enjoyed. While Diu pointed to her experience in "World Life Club" which meets on Fridays where she can experience "American friend and international friends and we can practice English."

Cam was a high school exchange student who arrived in her sophomore year. Her experience in high school seemed to solidify her confidence to engage American students on a regular basis. Here she discusses what she liked about her American high school.

Cam: I think the things here in the U.S.; they enhance the school spirit pretty good; all the mascot and all the cheerleader. Because back there we do have soccer tournament but we don't have cheerleader, we don't have like a mascot school, we don't do all the shouting ... like GO, GO, GO. We don't have that so I think it's a good thing for you to have like show your school spirit and I have pretty good school spirit over here.

These experiences seemed to prepare her for college so that when she arrived, she immediately connected. The ability to stay in the residence hall and become a leader in this area yields great confidence for Cam.

Cam: I think one of my advantages is I stay at a resident hall so like almost all American people so I have more chance to talk and to know them. I don't see a difference because with American students, I've been here for so long so I can talk to them like related more with the stuff they are talking about and international students I have the same view with them about how life here without parents is different.

Cam sees herself as a bridge between American and international students. This enables her to be a connector between different ethnicities of students. She feels that she has been in the US long enough to understand American students, but is close enough in touch with her own homeland, that she also can relate to international students. Here is her encouragement to international students coming to America; she believes involvement is paramount to your education.

Cam: Get to know more about America, not just like study, study. Because I know a lot of Vietnamese students, they put the grades very high though they try to get all "A's," yeah like they try to study a lot like even during weekend they try to study all the time. So just hangout with friends ... make more friends and for sure, let every school that international organization, join them, get to know more about people.... Let's see ... well, you get to talk to them so that will improve your English a lot. You get to hangout with them which will help you know more about America, yeah. And if you have questions, you can ask them about class and it might better for you than be in your room and study by yourself.

An believes that he has found it easy to make friends with American students, but as with any friendship, it takes effort. He first found commonality among people with the same major and in some cases offered to help students who were struggling in computer science and math. This led to other conversations and friendships as well. In this process, An provided help with math while American friends provided an understanding of culture and English. He was very happy with the friendships.

These relationships were essential to the degree with which the Vietnamese student felt a part of the American culture. It was fairly obvious to recognize which of these students had strong social and communication skills. Students, who had been immersed in this culture the longest, seemed to be the most satisfied and pleased with

their experience. Students who had struggled to form relationships either longed for it or were ready to return back home as quickly as they could.

They Volunteer in Their Communities

Among the many obstacles that faced these Vietnamese international students, an opportunity emerged that was unexpected by the research. Perhaps encouraged by scholarships that promote community involvement or organizations that require student participation, (83%) indicated that volunteering in their community was a factor in their academic and professional growth and experience.

An attributed this activity as responsible for his development in using the English language especially in his conversational English. He discussed his opportunity to help other students in computer science and in so doing, deeper friendships were the result.

An: And the way I am doing it, I go with undergraduate student first because they need help in computer science.

RSM: So you're helping American students in computer science?

An: In computer science. And that way people say okay, maybe this guy is good and we can keep talking and not talking only on computer science anymore, we talking about something else and that's why we can keep in touch.

This tutoring and mentoring experience has given An a platform to develop meaningful relationships by using the skills that he is gaining in his major. However, he also explored other opportunities off-campus at the church he attends that produced a similar benefit for others but also for him.

An: And that's not the whole thing. I find other way to do it. I go to church and I teach Vietnamese for American children. And I say that that is a wonderful experience. It's a volunteer experience, but I'm teaching over there to American

Vietnamese. But they're so nice. It's very kind of them but they already want to spend their time, let's say we have separate classes I teach Vietnamese for American children. They take Bible for American children. But the way we do it, I have something with one of the teacher on Bible classes. And that teacher he so nice, and the way he help me when I speak something not incorrect in English, they help me correct it. And I love doing that.

Binh has become involved in her community began because of a requirement of her dental school.

Binh: Also, my dental school requires 12 community service hours, so I volunteer at the dental clinic at Mission Arlington during Spring Break, helping out with the dentists.

This comment from Binh was no accident as I noted in the transcript several instances where this theme had emerged. She had a sense of responsibility to reciprocate the help that she had received and to promote the kindness displayed to her and to others she loved.

Binh: Hopefully help others. I feel lucky because I have a lot of people that helped me. I need to share my story, especially those who go into my profession.... All I want to something, if I'm successful, is to give back to our community to undeserved patients in Vietnam and other poor countries.

Binh's initial desire to become a dentist certainly was heavily influenced by her father's work, but there was another factor that seemed to drive her toward this accomplishment which also fueled her desire to help others.

Binh: There was another incident that happened in my childhood that made me want to be a dentist. I have a friend with a cleft pallet. Vietnam is poor and healthcare is not readily available to ordinary citizen, so many children have to live with that imperfection to adulthood. But when my friend go for free help from foreign dentist through Operation Smile, she went from being shy and timid to very happy and joyful. I see myself wanting to be a part of Operation Smile.

Cam is heavily involved with her international student organization on her campus. But, rather than simply participating, Cam has taken a place of leadership. She

openly recruits to get other international students involved in helping each other and their community.

Cam: Through Facebook and I make flyers and I talk to friends like I will recruit people ... I will ask them, “do you know about the organization?” and like I tell them about the organization and all the events we do and like ask them if they want to join. Pretty much talk to people and get them to join the organization.

Many of these students do not live on campus so this can be an obstacle between them and their community involvement. However, Diep exemplified that this “volunteering spirit” present among these students could be lived out in the communities in which they lived which in her case is more than 40 minutes away from her campus.

Diep: Oh, Okay, I like to do volunteering.

RSM: Okay. Where are some of the places that you volunteer?

Diep: I went to almost like every week, every other week, to a shoe place warehouse, so it just to help people to organize the shoes for the children.

Most of these students were involved with an international student organization in some way. Hien had become an ambassador for them, in helping visiting students to become acquainted with the school.

Hien: In our department or sometimes when international office, international students office, they have like sometimes there are like students come to visit at (University) and especially when they have like a group of Vietnamese students come, so international students office would ask for help from Vietnamese students, you know, for the discussion panel, you know, things like that, then I would join them.

Kieu participated with her organization “making cards for cancer patients” and by becoming a volunteer student teacher. Mai worked as a volunteer in a food pantry and Phuc joined with other civil engineering students to raise money for the Salvation Army.

These students have not only come for an education, but they have also come to contribute to the communities they have become a part.

They Get Involved on Their Campus

Whether it was an international student organization, religious organization, residence hall, or departmental group, satisfaction tended to be strong in students who were involved in campus activities. However, several students indicated that they had chosen to live with family and were consequently further from campus than they would have liked. Seven of the eleven students indicated that where they lived created a barrier to their being as involved as they would have liked to have been. Nevertheless, student involvement on-campus seemed to be a significant response of these students.

One of the most listed areas of involvement was within international student organizations. Both of the universities that I chose had very active international student organizations with activities and resources available for international students. As stated earlier, An tutors within his department of math and computer science, but his international student organization has been important to him as well.

An: International office in here, whenever I asked any help, they help me, you know, with all they heard. Because I need some advisor here, international office adviser who I can talk to whatever I want to. And you know they try to help me; they try to help me out in all situations at hand.

Other students have found great benefit from the international student offices and activities as well. When asked what activities she would encourage others to participate in, Binh said, “probably international student organization, they have a lot of activities that help build your skill.” Others added:

Cam: Right now I'm in the multicultural affair, international student organization and hall counsel for my resident hall so we plan an event every month. We have event for student to come out and the main one I'm in is international student organization, because I'm the public relation officer so pretty much I have to advertise all the meeting, all the events we have.

Diep: I guess there are so many wonderful activities that they try to offer to international student to welcome them. I'm not new anymore. I'm here for 7 years already so I know how to get through but for someone that just come here, like any activity that the school organize is very helpful to get the new students to meet new friends even if like to connect with other Vietnamese friends is very helpful for them to not feel lonely and another chance is to practice English.

Hien: Yes. I do go out with friends and I joined book club. In our department or sometimes when international office, international students office, they have like sometimes there are like students come to visit at (University) and especially when they have like a group of Vietnamese students come, so international students office would ask for help from Vietnamese students, you know, for the discussion panel, you know.

Phuc: I think it's the information they provide for international, you know. Um, and then all activities constantly encourage you to get involve in things like that, then I would join them.

Other students indicate that there are workshops, events and clubs that are helpful for them to feel a sense of connection to the university and other students.

Ngoc: but, like, there's one event held by the university that I feel is feel really beneficial is the job event. The job fair is held twice in a year and I almost, like, every time they held the job fair, I came to participate.

Diu: I have a life--a world life club.

RSM: A world life club? Ok, tell me a little about world life club...what is that?

Diu: The, uh, we see every Friday. Yes, and I have American friend and international friends and we can practice English—

Lam: And I do attend a workshop, a leadership workshop here to improve my skills.

These activities and organizations were mentioned multiple times by every student as beneficial. There was very little criticism of the opportunities that were available. Some did indicate that they might not participate as much as they would like or because they viewed themselves as lazy, however even these students seemed appreciative that it was available.

Research Question 4 – How Have Student’s Perceptions of the US and Vietnam Changed as a Result of Their Higher Education Experience?

Reputation of the US Has Grown or Remained Positive

This question attempted to describe the participants’ subjective understanding of the transformation of their perceptions of the US and Vietnam. Again, I allow these students to speak for themselves without making generalizable statements for all students. It is evident that these students would likely have had options of where they would choose to study and chose to study here. That choice is by nature of the other options, a statement of preference of what they believed the US to be. Statements from these students are given that provide evidence that these preferences were evident in their families and in the students themselves. At the conclusion of each interview, the following question was asked: Have your perceptions of the US changed since you chose to come here? Their answers to this question and others that relate to their initial perceptions before coming to the US are shared. A key indicator of a positive view of the US would be shown if students expressed specific interest in remaining here.

In order to understand student responses to this question, the responses and means by which these students formed their initial perception is presented. The question that

was asked to each interviewee was, “What was your perception of the US before you arrived?” Follow up responses were asked about the following specific areas: higher education, academic life, US culture and social life in the US. Another question sought to determine the primary source of this information to the student. It was “what were these perceptions based upon?” The following is a synopsis of how these students responded concerning their perceptions of the US before arriving here and the sources of that information.

Binh mentioned that when she thought of the US she had an image of personal freedom. She also indicated what she thought of the US educational system and her preference for it over the Australian system.

Binh: I watched movies and saw Americans have lots of freedom. The teenagers, they have more freedom than me, even at their age. I'm kind of shy girl when I was in Vietnam. It's very hard for me to adapt to the social life of the American standards here long time.... And everyone knows that the US would have the best and more advanced technology than any other country, better education, more opportunity to explore your potential.

RSM: Were there any other country that you considered?

Binh: I wanted to go to Australia because my father's friend was very successful there and she wanted me to come there. But I think that the Australian English is not as good as the American English. Secondly, I think the US has a better educational system, that's why.

In these statements Binh also mentions two sources of her perceptions: movies and a friend of her father. She was also one of two students who mentioned that they were taught that the US was like a “heavenly place.”

Binh: In my country, the US is translated...like a beautiful country. So everyone thinks the US is a wonderful place to live, it's like heaven. I was just a kid.

Cam, who came to a Houston high school as a sophomore, pointed to her main sources of information about the US being her family, magazines, movies and the internet. She thought that the US would be “great and fun.” She later added this.

Cam: There would be more freedom and the school ... well, they don't let you to study that much. Basically just on your own, you don't have to go for tutoring or ... because back there we have to go and catch up. We, on the material, we need to go to tutoring after class, but here it's basically just you and a lot more extra activity for you to attend.

In Cam's comments one can see the perceptions of the US being painted on the canvas of the students previous experiences with their education in Vietnam. This obviously is their only comparison point. When perceptions are discussed, there is assumed a comparison to something else. And for these students it is their own country, culture, sense of community and educational system. In Cam's comments you see this when she mentions freedom as it is associated with the absence of the need for personal tutoring. In Vietnam, this is a common occurrence for students. Most students go to school about 5 hours a day, 6 days a week. This allows for their afternoon's to be utilized for meeting with a personal tutor who instructs them more thoroughly.

Diu's comments throughout the interview were very short and if given the opportunity, she would give a non-descriptive answer. She stated that she believed that the US schools and technology would be much more modern than her country of Vietnam. Her perceptions seemed to be formed largely by the influence of her family and friends who were studying here.

Diu: My parents go to the US...my father go to the US and my mother go to the Australia and they say the education of foreign country is better. I heard from my friends that, uh, the program of the university is very nice, and they can make you try to study more than Vietnam.

Diu also mentioned the concept of personal freedom from the close watchful eye of her parents to be appealing to her.

At first when asked, Diep stated that she did not have time to form expectations, she just packed her bags and came. But later she elaborated on her thoughts and the source of them.

Diep: I think like from the movies it shows like all the big cities and all the fun stuff and people party and dress up and you know like having such a fun life and I think that everyone in here like they don't work hard and they just, they just have so much time to party, yeah.... I think that, no I heard from my friend that they think that classes here are not so hard, not as hard as Vietnam so, besides the language difference and I could have some difficulty around one year or two years but they said that past one years or two years I be fine.

Generally, then from Diep's perspective prior to arriving, it could be said that she assumed that the study here would not be difficult.

Hien's primary source of information about the US were her roommates and friends that were Americans that she came into relationship with in Chang Mai, Thailand as she attained her Master's in Linguistics.

Hien: Well when I was in Chiang Mai I shared the same house with an American housemate and we've learned a lot from each other. I've learned most of American culture -- English from her and from other American roommates too and most of my professors they're from U.S. too so I had different opportunities to talk with them.

I asked Hien about her parents influence and she mentioned that they had left the decisions up to her. She is an only child whose parents did not have a degree, so it appeared that they trusted her to make good decisions where her education was concerned. Hien did comment about what she believed about the study and students that she would find in the US.

Hien: I know that it would be really challenging. Maybe strong competition even and I feel like most American students when they chose to study their Master's degree, most of them are really smart, hard worker and really serious about their study.

When asked about the US culture, she brought up another concept stated by several of the students either as a positive or a negative trait believed about Americans.

Hien: Well, I guess before I came here I kind of had a wrong impression about, you know, like family values for American culture, for example.

RSM: What did you think they were?

Hien: Well I guess one of the very common things that we've heard is that like American culture highlights individualism. So because of that maybe family value is not really something that most Americans will value or appreciate. So I would say that is what I had in mind before I came here.

Hien identified the media as the primary source of these perceptions and also indicated that she watched three popular movies that also influenced her beliefs about the US.

They were *Gone with the Wind*, *My Fair Lady*, and *The Sound of Music*.

Lam was one of the more vivacious interviews recorded. Earlier her story was shared concerning her desire to complete what her mother did not have the opportunity to accomplish by coming to the US, but it was clear that Lam had done her research on where she wanted to come.

Lam: So, like I read the articles and I think my major -like - the higher education here is better. Because we have more equipment and tools and the classroom and the teacher is better. Many more materials are in English. Either you go to U.K, Europe or U.S. I don't like Singapore because their English is mixed with Chinese, and I don't like that accent.

Another key influence for Lam was a friend of her mother's who was agent for an agency that helped students come to the US for higher education. This friend was instrumental in persuading her mother to let Lam come to the US.

Lam: Yes. She knows how to – like – Ok – what is best if you study here or there. So, I came to talk to her. She really wanted me to go to the U.S. and it was because of her – like she tried to push my mom, - like – “You have to let her go. It's good for her.”

So, while her mother's friend was influential to allow her to overcome her hesitancy, it was Lam's two friends who were already involved in higher education here that made a significant contribution to her own perception of what the US would be like.

Lam: Yeah. I watch movies. But I have two close friends in the U.S., one in California and one in Iowa. They come here one year before me and we kind of like talk together, talk to each other through the internet and they both told me like you watch the movies and don't think it's going to be like that.

RSM: So they said, “Don't think it's the same?”

Lam: It's different.

RSM: Did they tell you what it would be like?

Lam: It's harder.

RSM: They said it would be harder?

Lam: It's harder. We gonna have the shock of the culture and shock of English. And I think that's true. And like, but one of my friends, the one in Iowa, told me the life in college. She attended Vietnamese college before so, she compare the two experiences and she told me it's totally different. You get more involved with the school, more activities and its more fun. It's great.

RSM: So your friend really told you about higher education - that the experience in the U.S. is very different?

Lam: Yes.

And as in Cam's comments earlier, Lam gives an understanding of her perceived American experience as it compared to what she witnessed in the lives of her friends and in her own experience with the Vietnamese system.

Lam: I think if I ever attend the Vietnamese University, it would be very different. In Vietnam, when you are in high school, you study like hell- and then when you pass the exam, you become a student of a university. It's like you stop trying. It's easier somehow. Parents, they don't...

RSM: Even in Vietnam – So you are saying that higher education – that college life in Vietnam is easier than the high school life?

Lam: Yes. Because in high school, parents push you. You have to get to that school. That's your goal. That's it. No argument. You have to study like – study like – is really hard. I was in high school and every day I just go to school and go to study, private tutors – and that's it. No television and barely go out for fun. But when you enter the university, parents they don't really care – like – Ok – Now that's good. You're an adult. You have your life ahead. So many students, they feel like, Wow, this is cool. I'm going to enjoy my life. Don't need to be a great student with high GPA anymore. So, they kind of slow down, slow down, and just is like passing is enough. It's not like in high school, in high school passing is not enough. You have to have high score. That's the goal. But in university, they don't care. Some great students in high school fail because they don't have the motivation anymore and no one push them anymore. Because everyone, like, Ok, you're an adult. Go study.

This dialogue helped me to understand the pressure of the Vietnamese system and to understand the importance or detriment of expectation. In the US today college degrees have become what high school degrees were shortly after World War II. Currently, the expectation for higher education is more common and has become the new base line. As Lam, conveyed her story, I began to see the transformation that is taking place in Vietnam. Parents have come to expect their children to get a college degree, but once they are in—they seem to relax. But the push for better institutions and sending students overseas is a precursor to the sense that the expectation is on the rise once again.

The influences upon An came from a very different source entirely. He had achieved a degree and was working for a multi-national company which had moved him

to Japan. A key influencer was his interaction with American customers who were purchasing the software projects he had been creating.

An: Let's say where I get that perception because I work three years over my company I work with, you know, Japanese customer, American customer, Korean customer, Chinese customer. And when I have a future to work with the American customer, the way they talk, the way they open, I can say whatever I want to compared with Japanese customer I need to be very lower than their position be able to talk. But when I talk to American customer, on both sides we can keep talking. And if we right, we say we right. And if we not right, American people say I'm not right. But for Japanese, I need to think a little bit because sometimes say okay you right, but at the end of a project I kind of be terrible. That's the only perception I see through American by I work with American customer. And that's wonderful and actually I know before when I am university you know I'm 20 year old and I try to apply because my sister at that time was living over here and she say a lot of good things. But the way to get me very to go to U.S. to study when I'm working because I know a lot of good things about the working environment in here and that customer tell me a lot about the university in here and how good and where he go into the university and the way to study and stuff and that's a very good thing for me.

Mai's strongest voice of influence and perception before she arrived was her family.

Mai: The biggest voice? Um, I think that my parents because my dad, he watch TV every day and even I am not interested in, I stay in the same living-room so I could hear about that almost every day in Vietnamese so it's not too difficult to understand what they are doing at our time.

RSM And, the aunt that's here, is that huh your mother's sister?

Mai: My mother's younger sister.

RSM: Ok. And, does she talk a lot about what the US is like to your mother?

Mai: Yes, she does because my family, my grandpa, he used to like, my family support in the Vietnam War, my family is in the allied with the US side not the communist so when after the independence day our family lost everything and my aunt, the one who live in here, she kind of upset at the time feeling like they got everything from her and once she gets here, she never want to come back.

Mai was the second student who noted the concept of the US being like "heaven."

Mai: When I was in Vietnam my parents talked about this place as a "heaven."

Ngoc's experiences and influences upon her perception are many and varied. Ngoc had significant working experience in Vietnam with an airline and bank. She also had significant input from her uncle who is an accomplished dentist in the US. She had friends who were here and she also did her own research on the computer.

Ngoc: I learn from the internet, like, I learn about, um, the culture here, and then the geography something, and then the system, like the private system, and the public system in education here, and US has wide variety of--of institutions. From the college community college and then university and then it can--it has the private, also has the public university.... I did a lot of internet search on the different education system and I choose here. because I have my family here and then also, like, the reputation of the education here and I also appreciate the multi-cultural education system here. Yah, it means it's very diversified. You not only study with American students, you also study with students from other international-like countries, and then it's very good experience for me if I want to work for multi-national company.

She also was influenced by her employer who also had been a student here in the US.

So, the foundation of what these student's perceptions were before they arrived and who the primary influences were upon these perceptions. The question now becomes, did these perceptions change as a result of their study. Again, the responses that will be shared are ones that seemed to be stated multiple times.

Life in the US Is Not as Easy as They Thought It Would Be

Mai made it clear that the US was certainly not "heaven" as her parents thought it would be.

Mai: Yes, because when I was in Vietnam my parents talked about this place as a "heaven." But when I came here I found that it is not at all. You work so hard here and you do not have time to enjoy yourself. And the economy goes down and I think that it just gets harder. And the terrorism between the US and some other countries makes it harder for international people here.

Mai went on to give perhaps the most profound quote of the entire study about what the real story is for many of these students. They have a deep love for their country and yet they have chosen to come to the US, and in most cases might see their parents and friends from home once a year. Yet there is a struggle for what is best for them and their future. Mai says it much better than I can.

RSM: You mention that the US being “heaven” and earlier you mentioned your parents wanting to come here. Have you discouraged that because of your experiences here?

Mai: A lot, every day, every time.

RSM: So, you tell them that they need to stay there?

Mai: I didn't tell them that they need to stay there, because I know that they really want to come here. And they are right about this, here in the US if you work hard you will have something. But in Vietnam, even if you work hard you will not have anything. And also the education here is good for my younger sister. They may have a better life here. But, I just want them to be prepared and not believe in this so much, that when they come here it kind of shocks them.

Mai understands that the US is a great place of opportunity for her and her family, but it is much harder than what she was led to believe. It is harder because of the distance from her family, but it is also not given to you—you must earn whatever you get.

Cam continued with this theme as 55% of these respondents agreed.

Cam: Maybe a little bit but it's not ... well, it's not that easy. Because maybe they get used to it ... they get used to the environment so they say it's easy, but actually it's not. Well, especially for the first time, there will be a lot of difficulty for you ... get to know people, settle down and all the language difficulty.

Diu: I think the study in the US is easier than study in Vietnam, but I change my mind. I think it is equal...heavy.

Diep: Before I came here, I think that, like I told you, I have a perception that not everyone working hard, so, life is good when you make it good, is like when I go back to Vietnam people think that, they want to hear different thing that what I

tell them the truth, like, they think that the life in here is so wonderful you know. It's not, like, you have to work, like, they think like that in here that whatever you do you can earn money, a lot of money. And I'm like how? And they're like any kind of work you earn like a \$1,000 or \$2,000 a month is a lot, but in here you do hard work like for people that don't have education they have to work, like most woman come here to do nail and they work in salon or they work in restaurants but they work hard, like 10-12 hours a day to earn that much money, translate into Vietnamese Dong (currency in Vietnam) is a lot of money, but in here, all the expenses is not that much.

Lam: It kind of overwhelms the students because, you know, in order to have good grades. And I have tell you this. (University) offers a scholarship, like, \$6000 for two years for a 4.0 GPA. If you drop to 3.99 you only get \$4000 for two years. So it's like, only .001 point and you lose \$2000. That's why it forces me to maintain it. That's really stressful. And another thing, it's like, when I look at the degree plan; it's like, 4 years. You can graduate in 4 years. I can tell you – I can guarantee you, unless you study like 6 classes per semester, 6 classes in the summer you can't graduate in 4 years. I am trying my best to, like; I have 83 hours in 2 years. And now I have three more years to finish my degree. It's like, 5 years and I'm studying like crazy. Right now I'm doing everything that I can – everything – and I can't do anything else. If studying even harder than this. No. Because, it's like, where's my life? Right now I feel I don't have a life already.

Thus, the comments of these students show that life in their universities is much more difficult than they expected, and this is a significant change to their perspective previously.

They Would Encourage Others to Come Here

Another example of evidence that these students are maintaining a positive outlook of the US is based on whether they would encourage other students from their country to walk in similar steps that they have walked. Of these students, 45% specifically mentioned that they would encourage others to come. If you couple this with the fact that several already have siblings here, the percentage among these students increases even more.

RSM: Do you think as a teacher, you would encourage others do what you've done?

Kieu: Yes because the US education will still be better in the long run.

Diep: I encourage anyone to go far away from home and to explore..., and to be on their own, because in Vietnam even like 24 or 25 they still live with their parents, yeah, and depends on parents too much.

Cam: Yeah, if you are really, really interested in the language, the cultural and you want to study more -- yeah, it's a good place for you.

An: Let's say I can say from the point of American, I mean the Vietnamese citizens, people want their children get some more, you know, grow up and get some more things. That's why they want the children, I mean, they still -- and another you can say from the viewpoint of Vietnamese citizens, if I'm here when I talk to my friend, I already working with some document from one few of my friends to get to (University) too. I just help them to get a recommendation and stuff.

Increase in Students Is a Result of the US Opening the Door Rather than Vietnam Opening the Door

Another interesting discovery made through the interview process challenged a belief that I had formed through my own experiences as I entered and exited from Vietnam on the several trips that I had made. As I evaluated the question of why there was such an increase in the number of Vietnamese international students over the last 10 years, my thoughts had always gone to the likelihood that the Vietnamese government was easing restrictions and therefore allowing more students to leave. However, early in the interview process, this idea was challenged and reversed from the view of the students. On the contrary, many stated that they believed that there were more students coming from Vietnam because the US was allowing more students to come rather than Vietnam allowing more students to go. Because of this discussion, I believe it is

important to see the consistency of the student responses on this issue as well as some comments that point to additional beliefs as to the result of this growth in the number of Vietnamese international students coming to the US for higher education.

This discovery was made as I began to understand the process that these students had to go through in order to achieve their visa. My first interview was with An. As he described his process of interviews, I came to understand that he was required to convince the US embassy of his “worthiness” to enter the US. My error in assumption was that this process ran through the Vietnamese government. Here is the conversation where I made my discovery and then began to ask a new question, “Do you believe the increase in the number of students coming to the US is due to Vietnam opening a door or the US opening a door?” In this situation, An has told me how he failed his first interview, but then was selected to go to Japan with his company which added credibility in his desire to go and further his education in the US.

An: And the way I show it okay why I can go six months to Japan to study computer science to be able to grow up. Why my company don't choose another person to go to. And then I got a lot of good certificate in that company to be able to go to show them. And my second interview to go to U.S. it very short, like three minutes because they have all my commendations in there. My first interview actually remember 20 minutes. I try to explain everything, but it not go through. But second interview is so great.

Cam: I know they changed the immigration process ... it's actually harder for students to pass, because you have to get an interview in order to get the visa to go to U.S. Back then for me it was easy, but right now it's pretty harder, but the harder it get, the more people will try to get it maybe because of that.

Diu interjects another issue into the discussion, and Binh will add to this. Their belief is that it is the number of students who come and stay that has affected the US immigration policy. I began to even get more specific in how I asked the question, because I was

realizing just how naïve I had been in assuming that the “Communist” Vietnamese government was not willing to lose their people, however these students were helping me see the otherwise.

RSM: Do you think the government of Vietnam has held people back from going back to the US?

Diu: No I think contract...I think the government of the US...yes.

RSM: Ok, tell me about that, because the last person I did an interview with said the very same thing.

Diu: Because a lot of people want to go to the US and study and stay forever. They don't want to go back to Vietnam. A lot of people do that, so the government of the US is very hard to get your visa.

RSM: Ok...because they--the government of the US believes the people will stay in the US and not go back to Vietnam. But you don't think that the government of Vietnam thinks that people will stay? They're not are concerned?

Diu: Yeah because to go to a US, you have to [have] a lot of money. Yes, because the tuition, my tuition in (University) is \$30,000 per year .Yes, very, very expensive.

Binh: Not all come here for education. They have different motives. They don't focus on school; they end up working somewhere and think it's better for them. They have a different agenda. I don't want people to think that all students who come here are that way.

Diep: I think the U.S. government opened the door more because before it is very hard for you to get you to get the interview to come here. Like for my brother, I think he came here in 1998 or something at that time is very difficult like they fail most of the students who try to come to go here as international students.

Lam: I think it's more like the U. S. try to open it. Because my mom told me, let's see, almost ten years ago, when she tried to have her Visa to come to the U.S. it is super hard. It was like, five people come in and she's the only one who got the visa – four were rejected. So, right now many students get the Visa. It's kind of the process gets easier.

Mai: But I think the American side, they restrict now. I do not know how about before but now because so many people want to come here. And not only come here but when you go for a degree abroad they want you to prove that you are

going to get your degree and come back home. But there is a lot of them that just get a degree and then they get here and get married and then they stay here. And that is against the rule of the way that it works. A non-immigrant person will remain a non-immigrant, don't change your status. So, you have to prove to them that you are financially good enough so that you don't want only to stay here but that you can come back home and live your life well.

Hien shared another view that aligned with the findings of this study. She identified that the cause of the increase was the ability to get a job once you had a degree from the US.

Hien: Well, again, in order to get a good job, people back home might not care what you actually learn. Some people might not learn anything here, but they try themselves to pass on the exam, get enough grade and that's it. I get a degree and as long as I have a degree from U.S., from American college/university, it means I will have a good job back home and that's it.

Mai shared yet another view on this issue, which I also believe is a key to the increase in the number of students. Vietnam is in a much different place financially and in the eyes of the world than it was 10-20 years ago. This has caused more prosperity in the people, which has allowed more people to be able to afford to send their children abroad. The issue is also an economical question.

Mai: I think none of them. In Vietnam, they never restrict us from going anywhere. And the US either, they do not restrict us from getting in, but I think it is financial. Now, they can afford to go abroad. I feel that life is now easier in Vietnam. The living conditions get a lot higher, and they can afford to send their children abroad to achieve something more.

Thus, the reputation of the US has remained strong, and as Research Question 1 discovered, the educational system in Vietnam still leaves a disparity which in tandem makes the US a definitive place of better educational and professional opportunity. But in an overwhelming fashion, there was not one student who was not thankful for their opportunity to come to the US. None of them expressed anything but appreciation for the chance to better themselves and their families through international education.

Challenges Similar to Other Studies with International Students

Finally, I would like to discuss the findings from these interviews that compared to similar or dissimilar challenges found in other studies with international students. I raised these to create an ongoing comparison of students and studies in order to continue to add to the body of knowledge in these areas. The issues raised were international students: difficulties with new teaching methods encountered in the US, a difference in the relational closeness with instructors, and religious antagonism to leave the faith of their country in order to convert to Christianity while in the US.

Accepting New Teaching Methods

The students who participated were overall pleased with the teaching methods they encountered here in the US. Although their struggles with the English language at times produced greater challenges, the consensus was appreciative of strategies that were very different from their home country.

Mai stated repeatedly that the teaching methods in the US focused on practical knowledge and on necessary subjects. She specifically pointed to Vietnam's requirement to teach Marxist/Leninist economic theory which she believes to be out of date and irrelevant in the current economy.

Working in Groups

Mai: Because at class I would teach something I have never done before and how to solve a problem and what going to happen in some situations whatever. So I feel like this major is very practical; it have a lot of common sense you know. It's easy for me to understand. Here you have a more group work than Vietnam, a lot

more. Like in Vietnam, we do it individually. Not so many group projects. Here it's a lot more and more professional using PowerPoint and how do you divide like, ok, you do this part and I do this part, how you manage the project is good. Binh: Education here is much better because for example my cousin in Vietnam who received a Chemical Engineering degree in Vietnam told me that her lab experience during school was more for fun than knowledge. My lab experience in the US consists of working with a partner, sharing our data and analysis, and discuss how and what we've learned from the experiment. These activities are not taught in Vietnam.

Use of Technology and Library

Kieu: Technology is a major difference. Vietnamese classes are more lecture style without the use of technology. They basically read the text to you.

Lam: We don't have access to the Internet. That is great here. We have general labs. I don't think we have that in Vietnam. We might have one in the whole big school. The access is really limited. We have a library, I think, even a big library. But still, not many students come to the library to study. I can see my friends; they tend to study as a group or study at home. Not many students have the intention to go to the library on the day after class and stay in the library or hours.

Ngoc: the campus is bigger for sure. More, uh, technology; the technology here is more advanced. Like, and available to every student, every time I need it, the wireless is faster and the library here--I like the library here. It has a lot of books, and then also, they have the electronic library resources that I can make use of, and then, so, in general like, I like the environment here.

Binh: The infrastructure and technology here is much higher. Powerpoint is never used in VN's classroom.

Diu: Uh, the first is equipment is- very modern here.

Display of a Professor's Willingness to Learn

Hien: Well as a professor in Vietnam, um, they might try to look serious all the time so that students would respect them and, um, they would avoid discussion because it would be really embarrassing for a professor to admit that, "well, I don't know."

Self-Research

Diep: Uh, I guess the most efficient way is to learn to how do the research by yourself like to know what you can do and how do you get the answer for your questions.

Cam: Like I said earlier, over here they give you more opportunity to practice what you learn. Well, basically, you learn by yourself enhance your ... like you to actually study but back in Vietnam, like we, I would say we depends a lot more on the teacher like we wait for them to teach us what we need to know but over here you need to figure it out yourself. Because like back there we have to rings owe, if we don't understand anything, we can ask them or ask parents, but over here it's pretty much just you and your friend. And with that, it give you more chance to be close to your friend too.

Class Discussion

Cam: Yes, sometimes, because back there a lot of students, they don't want to speak up; they just like attend class and go home -- that's it. But here, if they disagree with the teacher, they will say, "I don't agree with that" and they will argue about a point so I like about it.

Course Structure and Examination

An brought up an interesting observation. In his courses in Vietnam, there were very few day to day grades taken, which meant that the course grade was determined by a final course exam. This led to last minute cramming and a focus on memorization rather than learning.

An: First thing I really have to talk about testing, testing, testing after every classes. I don't have that pressure when in America because I have maybe three separate tests. I have a lot of homework and the grade is distributed.

Class Size

Two students spoke specifically about the issue of class size within Vietnam as it compares to the US.

Kieu: Classes in Vietnam tend to be bigger.

An: And the second thing is I can say classroom environment. It's so wonderful because at UTA it's a small classroom.

Relational Closeness with Instructors

This issue was one that many students reported a positive response in conjunction with their educational experience in the US. In Vietnam, there is a relational distance that exists between students and professors that is largely culturally induced and work load capacity codified. Thus, a sense of a professor's position is reinforced within the culture and then it is heightened even more because the professor to student ratio is high. However, there was also expressed a conflicting opinion that the relational closeness observed in the American college classrooms can lead to lack of respect for the professor that can be detrimental to the learning environment.

An: And the number not important, but the way we can talk. I can talk with the professor or whatever I want to. Raise your hand and talk ask whatever question you want to. And I think it's a little bit different is the way the professor answer the question, they want to answer the question completely. And if we do not understand, they can hold the lecture to another day, nevermind. They just want us to understand, want us to understand what we want to get the information. Like if I had a question, at the end they go, did you understand that? And if they see my face a little bit nervous they keep explaining it. And that is why I love. And I am for sure that when I ask the question I will understand it completely before I go home. All the way I say that I know it a little bit long. Let's talk after class. But they keep the promise. After class they go to my seat and continue discussing about that.

Binh: Yes, I have a very good relationship with several professors. It's funny because they're not Americans. They used to be International students too. Because they experienced what I'm experiencing, they help me a lot and I feel more comfortable to share my story.

Cam: Like everyone's equal because I think like as I told you last time like between student and teacher is like ... you can talk to your teacher like friend over here but back there, you cannot. You have to show them some kind of respect.

Diep: Like, I think that I can connect more with my professor here. I can ask them question and conversation is more casual, I guess, and you can you, can have greater connection.

Several students did caution that this privilege can go too far if students cross the line and disrespect their professors. Thus, indicating this reminds us that there are always great opportunities for us to learn from other cultures as well.

Cam: Well, there's pro and con for both sides. In Vietnam, you need to respect your teacher but sometimes it's just too much -- sometime you want to get to know the teacher better but it's something you shouldn't do because, like the cultural thing, you shouldn't do it, so I don't think it's a good thing, but respect your teachers is good. But over here you can talk to teacher like friends but sometimes because they think teacher may be your friend so sometime somebody will be rude to the teacher. Be friend with your teacher but show them ... have respect.

Binh: Vietnamese professors are there to just be respected. They have all authority. In our culture, we as students, have to respect our professors, even in the way we submit our homework. In Vietnam we bow to show respect. I don't see that here in the US. I think this is what's good about our culture. Students here have too much freedom and sometimes they disrespect the professors. In class, if they disagree with the professors, they may say something inappropriate. They are not scared of anything. That's the biggest difference. That's not my culture. One thing here I don't like is the openness between students and professors.

RSM: Ok. So you don't like that?

Lam: I don't really like that. Sometimes I like it. Because my professors, they are really –like- open to me and listen to me, try to talk to me, like openly, closely, not that formal. But in my country, it is formal between student and teacher.

RSM: Tell me why you do not like that?

Lam: I don't like it because, I think - I feel it's not polite. When the professor is talking about this and you just out of nowhere, you stand up, "No, I don't like that, blah, blah, blah."

RSM: So you feel the approach of the students to the professor is not polite?

Lam: Yes. In my culture, that is not polite. My teachers in both middle school and high school, they are extremely strict about your behavior. Like, when you want to speak, you have to raise your hand and quietly wait until she calls on you. "Ok, Lam, tell me your opinion." Then I have to stand up and tell, "This is my opinion..." in a very formal way. But here, it's like, you can sit down. I don't like that. I like that, this – this – this – you can joke around and have fun with others, but in my country, in the classroom, No.

Antagonism When Dealing with Religious Issues within the US

While in preparation for the writing the literature review portion of the dissertation, I came across a study with Vietnamese international students at a community college in California. This study noted that many of the students within the study experienced a degree of religious antagonism from Christian groups seeking to have them convert to Christianity. As a result, I added a question that asked these questions, "Were you involved in any religious activities while in Vietnam? And, have you been encouraged to participate in religious activities in the US? What thoughts or insights do you have about this?"

Within the group that was interviewed, three students classified themselves as Christian while the rest said they or their family was Buddhist. However, none of them reported that they felt any pressure to convert in their experience. A few did state that

they had been invited to attend Christian clubs, activities, or organizations, but none of them indicated that they felt that they would be ostracized if they did not participate.

An: Yeah. And maybe that question I'm not -- I not feel have problem with that. But I know somehow I can explain it because a lot of Christian student help me when the first time I come here. And they still ask me to go to church. They said that's good, church is good. But I am fortunate I'm already Christian I don't worry about that. But I say that it can be a problem because I know one of my friends like the first university I go over there, he don't want to. He don't want to go to church. I say he needs the chance people to help him to improve English and stuff.

Cam: Not really. Depends on the group though, but at (University) I don't think so. Well, but there are some group that ... they're not pushing you but sometime they keep asking you about that, so it might make you feel uncomfortable about that. They didn't say that you have to be Christian for this, but they keep asking you, "Oh, are you going to come to the bible study, the worship session," maybe that will bother them.

Diep: No at first it's kinda, it's not pressure, but I feel like I'm different. But when you learn more and for me I know that I don't need to participate in any kind of religion to feel good.

Hien, a self-reported protestant Christian, could understand why some students could describe this invitation as pressure to convert. Lam also was irritated by the constant invitations.

Hien: Well, I would say probably because the national religion in Vietnam is Buddhism and, you know, like some families, they might be Buddhist, but they don't necessarily go to the temple or participate in any religious activities including the children and so, in that light, I think I can understand why the Vietnamese students feel pressure to join in.

Lam: I think it's not really pressure, but invitations that keep coming. Like the church near Richland organize an event for international students. And they invite the international students to come and they will talk about Bible study and Christianity, they encourage us to come to the church. At first, we don't need be converted, but just get involved more and more. One side is good cause' we meet up with Americans and talk about the cultures. They do have some – it's like talk show – and you talk about what the differences – it's like this – we share. So it's good. But one the other side, like, I don't want to participate in any religious

practices. That's just me. And so other students, we are from an Asian country. We have, like, mainly Buddhist religion. It's hard. We don't...It's hard to say, "I don't like it. I don't want to go." It's hard. It's impolite. Like, I want to go there and participate and just look. That's it. We don't want like, about the bible. Sorry. I don't know. One of the times, the guy in the church, I attended only one time, and the guy in the church, he kind of, like, "So do you know about the bible?" And he start telling about, like, stories in the bible and he tried to engage me and tried to, like, to talk to me. But, I was, like, "I don't know." And I'm not really interested in religion. That's why I don't take any. It's so hard to refuse. Every week I receive the email, the invitation – "Please come join us." I think that's not real bad. But it just, they need to see that the students, they don't want it. Constant invitations, that's sometimes, like, annoying. You keep invite one person for, let's say, one month every week -for two months every week- and they never reply, never attend anything. You should see that's the indication of not interested in anything.

All other students simply said no to the question of whether they felt any pressure, so their responses are not listed.

The Concern of Safety

Another question that was asked which was outside the general parameters of the study dealt with safety. The question asked was, "Is your campus and environment are safe? Would they be more or less safe than you felt in Vietnam? Why?" Student responses will be given under three headings. Some students said they would feel safer in Vietnam simply because they had family there, and were more familiar with their surroundings. Others gave specific incidents that made them feel in some way unsafe, which are shared in this section.

Students Who Felt Safer Here

Diu indicated that she would feel safer here in the US than Vietnam because of

the “outside environment.” Lam said she believed her school was safer but not without a caveat.

Lam: Here is safer. Sometimes – according to the survey I answered one week ago for the safety on the campus, I suggested that the University put more lights on the street and have more, like, police presence just around. I'm just aware that (University) offers the shuttle. Yeah. So, after that, I have to call the shuttle to bring me home, because I don't want to encounter any. Because one week later, I received the emails stating a robbery. So, it's like, that's not good. But in Vietnam, I dare not to come home at 11 PM alone. No. Yeah. Because here, even in Dallas, Here on campus, so I feel like it is still safe because the police like to keep up with what's going around. Just sometimes something happened, but it is safe. Not in Dallas, No. If it is past seven and it's dark, I not going to walk alone.

Students Who Felt Safer in Vietnam

Kieu stated that she would feel safer in Vietnam because she had family there.

Mai: I would feel more safe if I were there. Because I would always have somebody with me, family, friends, all the time. In Vietnam I live in a group, a community, whenever I hang out whether lunch, dinner or wherever, I always have company. But not here, I don't have a lot of friends and maybe in my free time, they are not free, so I am just by myself.

Hien: Yes, except once. When I was on a bus and I was sitting on a bus by my ... I mean, sit by myself, but then there was a group of students getting on the bus and one guy came and kind of did some crazy things a little bit, but I could see that no one around me tried to do anything to stop him or, you know, to do something ... And finally his girlfriend kind of yelled at him -- his girlfriend was there, so she yelled at him to stop him but then he got really mad at her and another American guy was there and I was just looking at him ... like asking for help silently, but he didn't do anything except looking at this guy. And so this guy was kind of mad at him -- so that's the only time I didn't feel safe.

Diep: Most areas is not that safe. I think it's safe enough. I live off campus by myself. I think in every way you should be a little bit careful, like be aware of your surroundings like I mean in Vietnam if you walking somewhere that very dark and alone is not safe and in here too.

Cam: Because pretty much my parents will keep an eye on me all the time so maybe ...

Binh: Yes because I'm familiar with my homeland and I know what is going on. Here, I don't know much about my surrounding.

Thus, students expressed that they do receive alerts via their e-mail, but these e-mails seem to create a sense of caution that they might not otherwise feel. However, this is what the e-mail is exactly designed to do, so in that way, it appears that they are effective in informing and establishing an environment of caution. However, the majority of these students feel safer in their home environment.

English Proficiency

Students were asked to rate themselves in three areas of English proficiency. These areas were reading, listening/understanding and speaking. They were also asked to list the indicators of why they rated themselves at those levels. Some of the information yielded assisted the assessment of students motivation for choosing higher education in the US, the bulk of the information is shared here.

Reading

Of the respondents, 55% self-reported that they were a medium in reading. Of the respondents, 45% self-reported that they were high in reading.

- Descriptors of Reading - Medium

An: Being able to read and understand research papers.

Binh: I took the Dental test when I applied for school. They have the comprehension portion. My grade is not perfect, but my grade was not too low either.

Cam: Because I don't like to read so that's caused me problems ... when it comes to reading, I'll take more time to read cause I want to know exactly what each word is saying and because I know that much about my vocab so sometimes it cause me trouble.

Diu: Maybe because I'm lazy to learn new words. (giggles)

Kieu: Medium because my SAT was not as high in reading. It was about 450 in Reading.

Mai: I may not get like every meaning of the word but I get the whole context so it's good enough for you to like answer the questions.

- Descriptors of Reading- High

Diep: Uh, I think from, from what I read like textbooks and do research I think that my, it take almost the same time for me to do it than like other people like other American students.

Hien: Well, the comprehension skills for sure would be one of the indicators, because ... I feel like most of the time when I read textbooks for example, I can understand most of them, but I wouldn't say I understood them like completely, yeah, compared to like American readers.

Lam: I took World Literature and like we had to read a lot of many pages per day – and had to read like 150 pages for one day. It took me 2 ½ hours. Another friend of mine, it took him like 6 hours. So, I feel like that's better. A resident student. Even compared to some others, I think, if you force me to read every day I'm going to read faster. Like for the last book in class, it took me on a total of two days 4 hours – let's see for 300 to 400. I just focus and read. You forced me to read, I'm gonna' try to. But if you take my time, it's like different. Because the class is a fast track, we had to read every day. I had to push myself, read faster. After reading, I have to summarize it. So, I don't want to spend ten hours reading and then I don't have time to summarize it. It's going to be bad. I like to summarize stuff after I read; especially something I have to remember. Cause my study style is like, if I write everything by myself I'm gonna' – it's like memorize it really fast. If I write it down one or three times, and if I don't, if I just read it, like - take it away – three days later. I go- like - ask me again. I can tell you the main things but not like totally.

RSM: ok, what about in reading? would you rate yourself in reading English low, medium, or high?

Ngoc: I think it is high.

RSM: Ok, and how would you gauge that? What are the indicators that would tell you that your reading skills are good?

Ngoc: It is good? My reading skill is good because I can how fast I can read the material. And like, um, how comprehensive that I can understand the material and get what information I'm looking for.

Listening and Understanding

Of the respondents, 64% self-reported that they were medium in listening and understanding, while 36% of the respondents self-reported that they were high in reading.

- Descriptors of Listening and Understanding – Medium

An: A bit higher than reading.

An specifically watched *It's a Wonderful Life* over and over until he could understand the dialogue. He also listened in as other employees worked with American customers so that he could improve his listening and understanding skills.

Binh: I try watching movies and pay attention to the slangs in the conversation. They talk fast and sometimes I cannot follow. I love *Grey's Anatomy* and *Friends*. I like to have subtitles when I watch TV because some words are difficult and I don't understand.

Diu: Because, uh, depends on person who have, their voice, you know, some person I can't understand.

Kieu: Medium because I skip key words when people speak to me.

Lam: This one I'm not really sure. Maybe it's about medium. It's not that high, I think. I think when we come to the movies and we watch the movie, like five of us watch the movie, and come out and we argue about something and I'm trying to have the correct details, like, "No, that's not it. He said this one, not that one." Because later we come home and search for the plot summary and I'm the winner. So I think my listening is Ok. Except for the first year, I had to ask a lot, "Could you please say it again." For the second year, right now especially when I come to (University) with lots of lectures and like I had to listen through a lot of lectures I think it's getting really better. Right now I don't really have to ask, "What do you mean?" or "Can you say it again"- unless it's some words that are really strange or

something. Or even like something refer to the shows. I don't watch TV or if you talk to me about, let's see your favorite show. I know one show *The Big Bang* because my boyfriend watches that and everyday he talks about that. My favorite band is a Korean band and its name is "Big Bang." That's why I remember that. For others, I don't know.

Mai: Because I understand you most of the time but not all the time. The longer I am here I getting better but not to the point that I think I am satisfied with that; I'm confident about my listening skills. It's be really important (in business) because at the time you know. As a leader, I must showing them like I have a leadership skill.

Ngoc: First thing, I can understand people talking. And then I can respond to what they talk. I can understand not 100%, but maybe 80 or 90% of the conversation.

- Descriptors of Listening and Understanding – High

Cam: Ummm, because right now I can communicate with people like 24 hours a day with like English and I ... and back in high school, I stay home with my aunt and uncle so we talk in Vietnamese, but in here like nobody staying in resident hall all day long with English is improving a lot.

Diep: I think that from school, from the class I think that I get what the teachers say, what the professors say, and, um, I guess that's it, right?

Hien: It depends on who I'm talking with because I feel like it just takes time to get used to another person's pronunciation, intonation, everything. So I would say it depends and it depends on which topic we are talking about. Yes, I would say 80 or 85 for behavioral analysis; linguistics might be a little bit higher.

Speaking

Of the respondents 18% self-reported that they were low in speaking, while 36% of the respondents self-reported that they were medium in reading. Of these students, 36% self-reported that they were high in speaking.

- Descriptors of Speaking- Low

An: I often forget the final ending of the word. That's why people cannot get it. And the way I'm indicating why it's not good because when I talk to my professor, because we talk a lot, and he understand everything I'm saying. When I go out and talk with American people, I know that somehow people couldn't get it. And somehow people misunderstood what I'm talking because I often forget the ending. I say I want ca, you don't know what it. I want cash not a cot.

Kieu: Between Low and Medium because I don't speak a lot.

- Descriptors of Speaking – Medium

Binh: Medium. My vocabulary is not good enough to speak formally. I don't know how to impress another person formally.

Diu: think because I don't know--I don't have no vocabulary yet. And, uh, I don't have enough American friend to practice—

Mai: But sometime some people they cannot (understand me) and so, and especially my pronunciation. I want to change it but so far I do not be able to change, my voice feel like so hard. It's not soft enough like the intonation, the pronunciation is not correct at the time.

Ngoc: I still have my accent...like Vietnamese accent. It's not--because I know I can understand that but I just came here for one year. So I need more time to improve my speaking skill. But, as far as I know, people understand what I'm saying. Like I don't make--I don't--the criteria for me to evaluate my speaking skills is, firstly, how fluently I can speak. And then I don't make much--no, I don't make many grammar mistakes. And how much vocabulary that I can use in the conversations—(Ngoc listens to 103.7 light rock radio and 90.1 public radio stations to learn idioms and colloquialisms)

- Descriptors of Speaking – High

Cam: Because now I choose communication as my major so I'm pretty confident in my speaking and usually people will actually understand what I am saying.

Diep: Uh, Sometimes it hard for me to, when I get tired, or something, or yeah, something in my mind it's hard for me to get out and to explain myself, I guess.

Hien: I honestly don't know but most people that I talk with they understand me completely so I hope my speaking skill is alright enough.

Lam: Speaking – Like, generally, I think my speaking is good.

RSM: Ok. Would you say high?

Lam: Maybe lower than high a bit. If you want me to talk about something, like right now, I don't see you have to ask me to say it again a lot. It's Ok. As I told you, when I came to Boston, the professor, that's my mom's friend, he's American. He was a professor before and he talked to me and he told me like – “Your English was getting better.” “Thank you very much.” So happy! Last year I feel, like, I'm still a beginner. It's not because of the grammar. I think my grammar is good. I passed the grammar, punctuation, and spelling exam for the first time with a high score. And I don't need to ... That's the entrance exam for journalism major. I passed it. I spent only one day reviewing. That's fine.

Phuc was a different case entirely. He reads on a high level, listens and understands on a high level and speaks on a high level. I sought to understand why. Here is what I discovered.

Phuc: Right. I think I read every day, 'cause, well, it was easier when I, um, got back to English in, uh, Russia. At that time, it wasn't time to, so moreover, when I started learning Russian, it was from zero. So, it gave me the whole system-- how to go, like, from zero. So like, ok, that's how you approach a new language and you try to apply it back to English.

RSM: So you went from knowing no Russian, to being obviously probably very fluent—

Phuc: Right.

RSM: --in your ability to read Russian, and everything else with that?

Phuc: Right.

RSM: And so that gave you skills, then, to be able to know how to do English.

Phuc: Right.

RSM: Now, did you go--did you come into the US having some English skills?

Phuc: Of course.

RSM: Okay, it's obvious to me that you did, because... But, tell me about that. How did you maintain your English skills, while you were in Russia? I mean, because, my guess is, you're not speaking a lot of English with Russians.

Phuc: Of course. Well, I think--I was the founder of a...we got a small English class. And you know, we students, we gather once or twice every week to speak the language.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Vietnam has gained attention over the last decade as it seeks to emerge from a history of war and occupation and move toward a contributor on the global scene. Vietnam has undertaken a specific movement that highlights the growth of higher education within the country and outside. Vietnamese international students have increase in the ranks of students arriving within the US for higher education. These in depth interviews with Vietnamese international students have sought to provide a rich description of the perspectives that these students have while immersed into American culture and educational growth within the context of higher education in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan area. This year over 13,000 Vietnamese international students are enrolled in colleges and universities across the US (Open Doors, 2010). This study has sought to discover the motivating factors of why these students chose the US for their higher education experience. It further explored the desired outcomes of these students from an academic and cultural perspective. And, finally this study sought to understand how their perceptions of the US and Vietnam have changed as a result of their higher education experience in the US.

The reasons why students choose a particular school, major and even country to study in are many and varied. However, this study found that students from Vietnam are most influenced by the reputation of the US as having a higher education experience that will be respected by others in the marketplace and globally. Equally important to these

students was the inadequacy of higher education within their own home country to meet their specific needs. Every student reported that his or her family and friends' impressions of the US were paramount to their choice to attend higher education here.

Secondary factors also emerged as significant factors affecting the choice of these students to choose higher education in the US. Of these students, 73% had relatives already in the US. Many of them were currently living with or near these relatives. This fact seemed to be important for security and supportive confidence for the students that shared this fact. Some of those who had family here were siblings of these students who were preceding them in study or following their lead.

Another secondary factor that emerged was the correlation of students whose parents also had a college degree. This factor displayed the general conclusion that parents desire for their children to move in some way beyond the education level that they had achieved. Many of the parents who had received college degrees sought to give their children something that they did not have an opportunity to receive—a degree from a country most respected for its higher educational system. None of the parents of any of the respondents had a degree from the US; however two of the eleven respondents had parents who had received degrees from Russia.

One of the most interesting and potentially most beneficial findings of this study was the discovery of the effective use of the community college system by these students. This study found that 64% of these students were enrolled in community colleges for the purpose of increasing their English skills and accomplishing their prerequisites at a more affordable tuition rate before moving on to the four year institutions. For these students,

and likely for other Vietnamese international students, the community college provided a means to study and later pursue a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree which promotes English language learning, cultural immersion, and a more economical means to complete the first two years of the undergraduate degree. This discovery could be very beneficial for future international students and for educational partnerships that would enhance both the community college and four year universities.

The desire to study English in the US and to be immersed in an English speaking culture was another secondary motivation for these students' choice of education here. These students valued English taught in the US as more beneficial than English taught in Australia, Singapore, or England. They felt the quality was better and the reputation of English taught here was more significant. This desire to become more proficient and fluent in the English language as experienced in the US and taught in its colleges and universities indicates that a continual steady stream of international students coming from Vietnam will likely not only continue but increase.

Finally, scholarship money available to these students certainly made their education more affordable and was a contributing factor towards their decision to come to the US. Several students indicated that they felt that education was also more affordable in Texas and this was influential on their decision to come here. Thus, as more students discover the opportunities to gain in-state tuition by receiving at least a \$1000 scholarship, this will continue to encourage additional students to seek these types of scholarships.

The second target of inquiry that this study sought was what were the educational and professional outcomes expected by these students. All students stated that their eventual goal was that their education in the US would yield a job that would support them and their family. However, the study discovered that these students had different ideas of what acceptable outcomes of this employment might be. Some stated the expected income as the goal, while others primarily wanted to assist others through their gainful employment. These participants may represent the larger group of Vietnamese international students and suggests that these students' educational and professional goals include not only employment but a meaningful experience in their education that yields both employment and a desire to contribute to the world in which they live. Students who study here from Vietnam expect that their degree will make them more employable but will also impact their values as they become immersed in the western culture.

Of these students, 82% also indicated their desire to continue their education within the US. This was especially significant due to the fact that one student was currently receiving his doctorate and two others were working on their second master's. There is a current need within Vietnam for students with master's and doctorates so that the continual building of a research based higher educational system can be constructed. Several students indicated that an ever increasing competitive job market in Vietnam and the global economy mandated that more education would provide an even greater position to achieve employment. To this end, many students were delaying potential job prospects for further education, and it would likely take place here in the US. There were no responses that gave any indication that further education would take place anywhere

but the US. Thus, according to this study, if the amount of students who come for high school and college bachelor's degrees increases then it is likely that they will remain in the US to achieve Master's and Doctorate degrees as well.

A smaller number of students indicated that an unexpected outcome of their study in the US was a boost to their confidence and personal development. This could have been generally assumed for these students, however three students stated that their decision to come to the US literally transformed the person that they had been.

A third area of interest sought by this study was an understanding of the specific academic and cultural experiences of these students. What were the activities and expressions of these students as they engaged the American culture through their educational experiences? A stereo-type of the Asian student has emerged as supremely focused on their education to the exclusion of other activities on and off-campus. This was not the conclusion of the students in this study.

Of these students, 82% stated that the activities that were not tied to their studies were beneficial in their personal development. These students also contributed to their local communities while they studied here. They worked in community service opportunities thorough student organizations, churches, and civic groups. These provided them an outlet for using their abilities and assisted them in realizing that there were people whom they could help. This enabled personal character growth and built confidence in their abilities and in the cooperation with others. While this alone was an interesting discovery, this study explored what these activities were and sought to look for patterns of the involvement of these students. This portion of the study also sought to

identify specific academic obstacles that occupied the attention of these students.

Vietnamese students who engage in activities outside the classroom benefit in terms of their personal development and their English skills. As these students became more engaged in activities, they were encouraged to use English conversationally and discover a deeper level of relational understanding of the people they encountered. All of these activities added to the product of their overall experience in the US.

One academic challenge faced by these students was the English language. Of these students, 91% expressed that this one area posed the greatest obstacle to their development. The mastery of speaking and conversing in the English language was the most significant academic challenge for these students. Even though many of these students had years of English training in Vietnam and even other countries, only immersion within the US higher educational system propelled these students to the linguistic confidence level that they so desired. This is not shocking since this one area has been the focus of many other studies among all international students. However, throughout this study I have attempted to share the story of these students and how they worked to overcome these obstacles. Some students even shared that their desire to participate in this study was that through their participation other students might find assistance in their shared experience and challenge. Thus, this study has shown that it is critical for the personal development of international students in the US that they begin and maintain meaningful relationships with American and international students while studying here so that their English skills could improve.

Recommendations for the Higher Education Systems in the US

As opportunities for students to come from Vietnam to the US increase, it is highly likely that the US will continue to be the choice destination for students seeking higher education outside their own country. One of Vietnam's goals for higher education is to produce a well-respected research based university of its own. But in order to accomplish this, foreign trained doctoral students and alignments with respected world class tertiary institutions will likely be a continued course of action. This is an indication that the growth of US trained Vietnamese students will be a continued trend.

With this thought in mind, this study produces a few recommendations for colleges and universities that are seeking to be the destination for these students. These would include: a strong international student organization, solid linkages with local community colleges especially in their English language courses, mentoring programs for students, cultural education of resident students concerning the unique needs of international students, targeted informational sessions with demographics of ethnicity in your area and continued financial assistance.

Half of students indicated that they were strongly linked to their on-campus international student organizations. Based on the data from these participants, on-campus international student organizations appear to be critical to promote the integration and success of Vietnamese international students. Students like An and Binh felt that international student organizations were helpful in their international experience and education.

An: International office in here, whenever I asked any help, they help me, you know, with all they heard. Because I need some advisor in here, international

office advisor, I can talk whatever I want to. And you know they try to help me, they try to help me out in all situations at hand.

RSM: Which activity would you recommend?

Binh: Probably International Student Organization. They have a lot of activities that help build your skill.

Of these students, 55% utilized community colleges or small colleges in their education either for specific English training or accomplishing their pre-requisites before moving on to a four- year institution. This was one of the most interesting and potentially important discoveries in this study. There seems to be a direct connection of students to these community colleges. It appears that Vietnamese international students view community colleges as more affordable and efficient educational alternatives to taking English courses at the larger four-year institutions. The recommendation is for four-year institutions and community colleges to realize the ways that they could partner to meet the needs of these students as well as attract even more students when these students were made aware of the available partnerships. Four-year institutions could benefit by providing a new pipeline of students that represent a significant and steady supply of typically good students who tend to stay for related master's and doctoral degrees. Community colleges can benefit by these students tuition and through the enhanced connection with a four-year institution in their area. Here Lam talks about the aesthetic connection she had with the community college she chose, but she also mentioned that she liked it because of the presence of over 300 Vietnamese international students. Colleges like Richland could be studied to see how they are being successful in reaching this segment of international students.

Lam: I just looked at Richland. It was nice. The school has a lake, an artificial lake. So, it was like – “Let's go!” I like that.... You know, I think at least 300 Vietnamese students.

Understanding the needs of these students but also their unique abilities could provide mentoring opportunities that would benefit Vietnamese students and other indigenous and ethnic populations of students. An described this as his strategy for gaining new American friends. He would offer to mentor a student in math or computer science. As he became acquainted with the person through this tutoring, he received assistance with his English and in time, he would be introduced to others, thus expanding his friend network. These students have great skills to offer, and the opportunity to utilize these skills will benefit their English abilities and their cultural growth. This would be a good description of an idea that could be a win-win for both international students and students with other needs.

A few students recognized that American students were typically uneducated to the needs and struggles of international students. While some of these students do not want to change, opportunities for cultural exchange and interaction should be provided on all campuses simply for the reason that we live in a globalized culture. Hien, who had often translated in Vietnam with English speaking groups, identified this need on her campus.

Hien: Well, I see ... I may be wrong for this though but I can see from a department like most American students they are not aware of other cultures and, because of that, sometimes they say things or do things that might be offending to others. So it would be really great if like there is some program or anyway to help American students in general to a better understanding of other cultures.

This could be accomplished in a general orientation time for all students. However, it could possibly be more effective if a university sought to create a multi-cultural experience where students could be immersed in a variety of other languages so they experience what it feels like to be immersed in a culture and language that is not their own. Perhaps this could include ethnic foods, music, etc... So that the environment could literally mimic what an international student feels coming to a different culture.

As the Vietnamese population grows in the US, more students choose to come to a place for higher education where they have an already established support system. This study discovered that these family members and friends who provided the support system for these students possessed significant influence on their decision to come to the US and the course of study these students would take. In many cases, this support system is available to these students, but their development tends to grow beyond their family toward significant steps of educational growth and independence. These students became involved in on-campus and off-campus activities which took them outside the family circle of influence. They also transitioned from their dependence on family relationships to a balance of family, university study, and relationships developed as a result of their study.

One outcome of this study was an understanding of the influence that residence families which often invited or hosted relatives from Vietnam possessed. Some of these students noted that their relatives had specific knowledge of the institutions that they chose. Therefore, if institutions researched the demographic of their target area for attracting students, and implemented some informational sessions that sought to engage

the specific needs of these international students, then the outcome could be mutually beneficial for the students and the universities. Of these students, 73% had a relative who lived in the area or within the same state of this study. This study also noted the importance that family and friends had in the student's choice to come to the US for higher education. If you combine the power of these two factors, then specifically marketing a university to an ethnic demographic could prove largely beneficial. Here are some examples of how the knowledge of these relatives who lived here led to these students attending schools with which they were familiar.

Binh: When I lived in Vietnam, my Aunt and her husband live in Sachse, close to Garland. She heard from friends that Richland is a good college and it's close to her house. She picked up an application and sent it to Vietnam to me.

Cam: Because I have some relatives, they live in Houston and the school actually closer to the house so they just went to the school and asked for information and then I think it's a good school so if I'm interested in they can help me to contact school and do all the paperwork.

Mai: My, my auntie's the one who gave me that information. At first, when I want to study abroad I really have no idea what I need to do or what I should do and it sound very complicated at first time but soon I go through all that, then it's easy.

Providing financial assistance is a great tool in attracting students to a University. However, especially in states that grant in-state tuition to students who are provided a certain level of scholarship, this becomes a very attractive means for securing international students within the university. Two students specifically reported that this was a significant reason that they remained in the institutions they had chosen. In these situations, once a student received a \$1000 scholarship, they were also granted in-state tuition. This was very helpful and appreciated by these students. My question is, if other

students were aware of this opportunity, would they apply for and receive these funds?

And if they did, then I believe the information would be beneficial for other students to be made aware of this opportunity. In this segment, Mai explains her situation.

Mai: First of all, I think that they are the only one who has a degree in hospitality management in this area. I mean if you go further you may find it. They also have a lot of scholarship that will help you financially because as you know as an international student I have to pay non-resident tuition. But, if I get a \$1000 scholarship then I pay resident (tuition) and that helps me a lot. Because I pay on my own, I do appreciate that rule or law because I think only Texas has that. I don't know any other states that have this but in Texas if you get \$1000 for the amount of money for a scholarship then you can pay the resident (tuition).

Recommendations for Vietnamese International Students

Since this study focused on the experiences of Vietnamese international students, one of the greatest beneficiaries of this information could be other Vietnamese or international students who could take advantage of the wisdom of students who have experienced what they will soon experience. Therefore, I believe the collective voices of these students would recommend the following to other students: get involved with the students and the culture; utilize the community college system that is available in the US; stay in touch with your family; focus on your studies, but have fun as well; avoid excessive partying and alcohol; volunteer to help others; and realize that this will be a challenge, but a challenge worth taking.

Of these students, 82% stated that the extracurricular activities that they became involved with were beneficial to their development as a student. These students considered this involvement to be a significant part of their educational experience.

Lam: Yeah. I think it's not because, like, it's important, important because I personally want to get involved. I don't really want to just go to class and know nobody in the class. It's not fun. I try to make friends. I try to go to the workshop. I gain the experience outside of class, the skills outside of class. I have some friends and I can talk to them. And it is better and it is fun. It's better than just go to school, go to class, go to the library, go to the labs, study until like 10 or 11 and then go home, sleep and the next day, the same circle. It would be really boring and it would be so stressful.

Mai: I feel like the more activity you get involved in you like become more confident, you get like better relationship with the other and also, like working too. And you learn the cultures from activity.

Ngoc gave one of the most complete explanations of this process of getting involved with the American culture and its benefits for students.

Ngoc: You know like there's a trend of globalization so everybody from every country from all countries, we can be friends. So, why not? Why isolated yourself in just a small group. I don't like it. So if I wanted to isolate myself and be satisfied with my small group, I will stay in Vietnam. But now I come here to the US, so it means I want something more diverse. Ok, let me tell you another example, like in my Vietnam, my Vietnamese community, like Vietnam student, when they come here, they usually study in university here in California. You know why, because there is a big community of Vietnamese people in California. Like when you come to California to study, you don't need to speak English, because, just speak Vietnamese. People around you, surrounding you are Vietnamese people. You don't need to speak any English, and so I think that...I don't agree with the way that people do. Like you come to another country and you only speak Vietnamese...speak your home country language. It's not good. Why? There's no benefit. If you want to speak Vietnamese, just stay in Vietnam. You don't need to go to the US. So, if you go to US, you try--you should learn about a new country, new culture, and new language. And become like more globalized. So, why not? So that's why I chose to move here, although I know that I can go to California and study there. And I don't need to be afraid of facing the new culture, the new people, and the new language. Because, you know as international student, I had, like I had a very hard time at the first...at the first time with language, with culture, with people, friends, and professors. But, I think that it was challenging, and I'm ready to face the challenge.

The message from these students is one of involvement. A person who is up to the challenge of leaving family, friends and comfortable culture behind, must immerse

themselves in the new culture if their sacrifice that they have already made is going to be worth it. The message from Ngoc is quite clear.

I have stated this in the earlier section. The study of Vietnamese international students' choice to attend the US community college system and transferring to four-year institutions could be the focus of a more targeted study. By nature of the choice of these students, I am inferring that this would be their recommendation to others. These programs were accessible to these students and represent something that currently is not available in their own country. Vietnam does not have a course transfer policy. It does have a developing community college system, but does not link the abilities of these community college systems with the four-year institutions. This is a huge advantage to the higher education system in the US. It provides students with a more affordable option and one that allows for a more gradual approach to a student who may need to live at home for one or two years. It certainly is something that students who are contemplating coming to the US should consider.

All students interviewed for this study said that they stayed in close contact with their family and friends in Vietnam and abroad. The means of doing this varied. In the case of parents, the students utilized communication that was comfortable for their parents. Most utilized cell phone or Skype. Some used instant messaging e-mail and Facebook. However, the important message that I received from them was that it was critical for the students to maintain connections with their culture and relational context. Some students actually indicated that they chose the US, because it was far enough away from Vietnam and required specific visas so that their parent would not show up and

visit. This was not a statement of conflict, but that they student desired this as a step of independence. But this student and all of the others maintained steady weekly or daily contact with their parents and friends. This impressed upon me that theirs was not an escape from their culture, but they maintained a constant lifeline to their family. I believe that this is a key value for all cultures. It is important to remember who you are, because if you immerse yourself without a sense of connection, then the likelihood of one losing their uniqueness is high.

Several students spoke of the importance of involvement, but also maintaining the ability to prioritize when it was necessary. Lam spoke of a group of friends who had a tendency to lose focus at times, even to the point that she had to distance herself from them so that she did not lose focus.

Lam: Last spring, I have some - it's a big group of Vietnamese friends and I think this doesn't really apply to only Vietnamese friends. You have a big group. When you have a big group of friends you want to meet up with them but you kind of have to be careful. Don't get carried away. It's the only thing about hanging out. Have fun and you forget to study. That happened to my group. It's like in my group, we have two small groups. The small one on my side we tend to meet up once a week. Have fun once a week. During the week day, we study. We study really hard. So, in the weekend, so- like – let's enjoy. But the other part, the other group, the other part of the big group, they hang out every day and every day they want to meet up. They want to go here, go to the lake or do the barbecue, whatever. It's like it takes up so much time. We could not study. And so much, like, in the mid-term or final, we need time to study. We have dinner at one friend's house and we can study together. Some of us have the same major. So we can talk together and share and – like – “What should I do with this or what should I do with that.” We help each other and that is good. For the others, they just have fun. That's why for this time we split. Goodbye!

Many of the students also gave a caveat to their involvement in the American culture. They stated that students should avoid the overuse of alcohol.

Cam: Like maybe alcohol party it's not good for you and well, you never know what will happen at the party so. Well, it doesn't mean that you cannot go to parties, but like be careful.

Hien: Well, in my culture, girls are not expect to see around bars because that would bring shame on herself and on her own family.

These students indicate that maintaining one's focus in the US should be on their academic studies but not to the exclusion of broadening their experience by being involved in extracurricular activities. However, it is important to maintain the perspective that they are still connected to their own culture, family and values. Drinking seems to be an accepted part of the American college life, and most of these students communicated that this was part of the process that they would encourage others to heed their warning.

Another interesting value that these students expressed that would be of value to other students following them is their choice of community service. This is a value that they may have had coming into the US, but regardless of where it came from, it is a value that can assist them in their own careers. Binh's volunteering to help in a local dental clinic for people who could not afford dentistry was a fulfillment of part of her initial value of education in the beginning.

Binh: There was another incident that happened in my childhood that made want to be a dentist. I have a friend with a cleft pallet. Vietnam is poor and healthcare is not readily available to ordinary citizen, so many children have to live with that imperfection to adulthood. But when my friend, go a free help from foreign dentist through Operation Smile, she went from being shy and timid to very happy and joy. I see myself wanting to be a part of Operation Smile.

Another student Hien began studying linguistics and is now planning on working with children who have special needs in the area of speech. She hopes to return to

Vietnam and utilize these skills that she has learned. But, this was enhanced here in the US as she was able to work in and around children with these special needs. Mai worked in a warehouse that distributed shoes to poor children. Other students volunteered on their campus giving tours to international students, tutoring and serving on various resident hall service committees. All of these pointed not only to involvement, but involvement that sought to meet the needs of others which is a value that once internalized will reap great benefits across a lifetime. Students should seek out opportunities to give of themselves and abilities while studying in the US. It yields growth in both the character development of the student and the community.

Another key recommendation from these students is to count the cost of coming to the US. Most of these students stated that life here was not as easy as they thought it would be. Their message to others is that the work is hard. The language is difficult to master. The people here in the US are busy and the life is fast paced. But, the struggle is worth the cost. Perhaps the best quote throughout the study was given to me by Mai as she explained that at one time she was told that the US would be like “heaven.”

RSM: You mention that the US being “heaven” and earlier you mentioned your parents wanting to come here. Have you discouraged that because of your experiences here?

Mai: A lot, every day, every time.

RSM: So, you tell them that they need to stay there?

Mai: I didn't tell them that they need to stay there; because I know that they really want to come here. And they are right about this, here in the US if you work hard you will have something. But in Vietnam, even if you work hard you will not have anything. And also the education here is good for my younger sister. They may have a better life here. But, I just want them to be prepared and not believe in this so much, that when they come here it kind of shocks them.

And this is my hope for this study, that it will inspire others to come and return to their home country and utilize their knowledge so that what Mai has said is no longer true. My hope is for a US and a Vietnam where you can work hard and have something.

Recommendations for Further Study

I have sought to explore the motivations and experiences of Vietnamese international students through qualitative inquiry. This has been a rich experience for me and I have sought to allow these students to share their experiences and increase the body of knowledge related to the study of why these students chose to come to the US and what their experiences have been while they were here. I believe that there has been some growth in the understanding of how Vietnamese students are similar to other students in some ways and also how they are different. This study was very focused and localized but could be expanded so that the research provided could be generalized to the whole body of Vietnamese international students. This research yielded some interesting understanding about how international students utilize the community college system, and about the importance of cultural immersion in learning. But much further study could and should be done which builds on what I have attempted to do in this study. To continue this process further study could be done on the following:

1. Examine other specific ethnicities to determine similarities and unique viewpoints.
2. Examine a larger sample group using these findings as a guide. Perhaps this could be done as a questionnaire given to the large body of over 13,000 Vietnamese international students.

3. Look specifically at the trend of international students attending community colleges and assess the linkages or breakdowns between the community college and four-year institutions.
4. Study a group of Vietnamese students who live off-campus and compare them to students who live on-campus looking for specific strengths and weaknesses of these two living options. Is there a tie to the student's involvement on-campus and with English speakers that seem to enhance their educational experience?

Final Thoughts

This journey began for me as I travelled throughout Vietnam and witnessed a higher education system that was undergoing a desire to change. However, in a centrally controlled system this will take time to say the least. However, what I witnessed in Vietnam was a desire for change and a look to the US for assistance. Perhaps, we should not have a voice in this discussion. We certainly have a host of issues that we are working on ourselves. Still, many nations and certainly people within those nations look to the US for a new hope of establishing a better life for their own people and nations. The hope lies in the determination and work ethic of students like I interviewed in the process of this research.

These students are hard-working and resilient. I learned a great deal about them and about myself in this process. But if these students are representative of the majority of the students who have provided this incredible increase of Vietnamese students studying in the US, then there is hope for Vietnam. If and when these students return to Vietnam, I believe that the relationships formed here will continue to build hope for the people of Vietnam. The respect for higher education in the US will also likely bode well

for the developing future of relationships between these two countries. This of course remains to be seen, but in my opinion, the future is hopeful.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH E-MAIL

Dear _____,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study on “Understanding the motivation of Vietnamese international students and their higher learning experiences in the US.” The study is being carried out by Mr. Randy Miller as part of his doctoral dissertation.

RSM’s dissertation aims at discovering the reasons why Vietnamese international students choose higher education within the US and what their experiences are both academically and culturally. This study will take place in the fall semester of 2011 and will involve a one-hour recorded interview and follow-up focus group with participating students. A typed transcript will be submitted to the participant for review before analysis. He is inviting the participation of all Vietnamese international students currently attending the University of North Texas. RSM is seeking the participation of male or female Vietnamese international students who (a) have enrolled in the fall 2011 semester and (b) are 18 years of age or older.

We invite you to participate in the study because of its unique attempt to examine the reasons why you have chosen higher education here in the US and what your experiences have been. The findings of this study will benefit not only benefit college administrators, student service personnel and faculty, but also international students like you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and, if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time. Data collected are for research purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. The real names of the participants will not be used in the research but will be replaced by pseudonyms. Your decision to participate will not relate in any way to any issues related to you role as a student at our current college, to any future college admission decisions, or to your ongoing immigration status.

Should you decide to participate in this research or need further information, please contact Mr. Randy Miller by e-mail, or cell phone. You can also contact his major professor at UNT, Ron Newsom.

Your careful consideration of this invitation is certainly greatly appreciated. We hope to hear from you soon. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: UNDERSTANDING THE MOTIVATION OF VIETNAMESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THEIR HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES IN THE US

Student Investigator: Randy Miller, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Counseling and Higher Education. **Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Ron Newsom Ph.D.

Purpose of the Study: You are asked to participate in a research study that explores the reasons you chose to seek a degree in the US and what your academic and cultural experiences have been as you pursue that degree.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to: participate in a one to one-half hour recorded interview, review the transcript of this interview and participate in an optional focus group with other Vietnamese International students. Interviews and focus groups will take place at the Mean Green Village Building B on the campus of UNT or at the International student offices of UTA. This will take approximately 3-4 hours of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: The findings of this study will benefit college administrators, student service personnel, faculty and international students.

Compensation for Participants: None

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Data collected are for research purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. The real names of the participants will not be used in the research but will be replaced by pseudonyms. Your decision to participate will not relate in any way to your role as a student, to any future college admission decisions, or to your ongoing immigration status. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations that may result from this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Mr. Randy Miller by e-mail, or cell phone. You may also contact the supervising professor, Ron Newsom.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB

can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights:

Your participation in the survey confirms that you have read all of the above and that you agree to all of the following:

- Randy Miller has explained the study to you and you have had an opportunity to contact him with any questions about the study. You have been informed of the possible benefits and the potential risks of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You understand you may print a copy of this form for your records.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

Signature of Student Investigator

Date

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Background information:

What is your name?

Age?

Gender?

What city and province are you from?

Where did you attend high school in Vietnam?

Did you pass the exam for entering higher education within the country?

Did you pursue higher education within Vietnam? If so where did you attend?

Have you completed a degree outside Vietnam?

If so: what was the degree and in what discipline?

Did your parents complete a higher education degree? If so: from what institution?

Have any of your siblings completed a higher education degree? If so: from what institution?

Have your parents or siblings ever sought higher education outside Vietnam?

What occupations do your parents have?

In addition to your education have you worked in a profession or occupation? If so: what was your occupation?

How are you funding your higher education experience? Family, scholarship?

If you would have attended higher education within the country of Vietnam, which institution would you have chosen? Why?

What was your perception of the US before you arrived?

Higher Education? Academic life? US culture? Social life in the U.S?

What were these perceptions based upon? Government, media, other students, family members?

Why did you want to pursue higher education?

How did you find out about pursuing higher education in the US?

Why did you seek higher education outside Vietnam?

What do you hope to accomplish with your degree?

What are your plans after you receive your degree?

Do you plan on returning to Vietnam or pursuing further education here in the US?

How will the degree you earn here help you achieve your educational and professional goals?

Have you experienced difficulties with the English language in your classes or in your relationships? Please describe these.

What is your level of English proficiency in reading? (Low, Medium, or High)

What indicators thinking about when you rate your English reading as _____?

What is your level of English proficiency in listening and understanding? (L, M, H)

What indicators are you thinking about when you rate your English listening and understanding as _____?

What is your English proficiency in speaking? (L.M.H))

What indicators are you thinking about when you rate your English speaking as _____?

Have you developed friendships with American students while involved in your study?

What are the differences have you noted between studying in Vietnam and the US?

Do you find classroom activities and format to be different here? How?

Are there any instructional strategies you have found difficult?

Are there any instructional strategies you have found beneficial?

Do you interact with your instructors more here compared to Vietnam? Please explain

Other than your time spent in class and studying, in what activities on or off-campus have you participated?

Have these activities enhanced or hindered your development? In what way?

Which of these activities would you encourage other students to participate in? Why?

Which of these activities would you encourage other students to avoid? Why?

Were you involved in any religious activities while in Vietnam?

Have you been encouraged to participate in religious activities here in the US? What thoughts or insights do you have about this?

Is your campus and environment safe? Would they be more or less safe than you felt in Vietnam? Why?

How helpful has your university been in meeting your needs as an international student?

What would be the most helpful change that could occur to help you be more successful in the pursuit of your degree?

How have your perceptions of the US been affected by your education that you are receiving?

How would you define success as you finish your degree here in the US?

APPENDIX D

DATA ORGANIZATION FOR ANALYSIS

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- R-1** What factors have motivated the Vietnamese international students to select higher education in the US?
- R-2** What educational and professional outcomes do these students expect to achieve by studying in the US?
- R-3** What are the academic and cultural experiences reported by Vietnamese students attending US higher educational institutions?
- R-4** How have these student's perceptions of the US and Vietnam changed as a result of their higher education experience?

B: ISSUES: WHY DID YOU COME TO THE US? (Compiled from the Literature review and interviews)

- I-1** US reputation for quality education
- I-2** Cultural sharing
- I-3** English proficiency
- I-4** Student safety
- I-5** Escape of political and/or educational instability within their home countries?
- I-6** Avoid the exam
- I-7** Funding
- I-8** Attended a community college

C. SIMILAR CHALLENGES FOUND IN OTHER STUDIES

C-1 Accepting new teaching methods,

C-2 Relational “closeness” with instructors,

C-3 Building meaningful relationships with American students

C-4 Antagonism when dealing with religious issues within the US

APPENDIX E

ETHNOGRAPH CODES WITH DEFINITIONS

Code Word	Definition
AGE	Age of Respondent
C-1	Accepting New Teaching Methods A similar challenge to other studies of int. students
C-1 CLASS SIZE	Class Size
C-1 METH IN VN SIM	Similar Challenge 1 - Teaching Methods in Vietnam were similar
C-1 TEACHING METHODS	Teaching Method
C-1- TECH	Technology in the Classroom
C-2 RELAT CLOSE	Students are relationally close to professors
C-2 RELAT NOT CLOSE	Student were not relationally close with professors
C-3 AMER FRIENDS	Building meaningful friendships with American Friends - This would be different than other studies with int. students
C-3 AMERICAN VN	Building Friendships with other Vietnamese Americans
C-3 NO AMER FRIENDS	Students do not have American friends
C-3 RELATE TO OLDER	Student relates better to older people especially older Americans versus younger Americans
C-4 ATTENDED CHURCH	Students attended church and therefore went against the other studies of religious antagonism
C-4 NO REL ANTAG	Students did not personally experience religious antagonism
COM WITH PARENTS	How did the students communicate with their parents in Vietnam?
COMM WITH FRIENDS	How do students communicate with friends in Vietnam or abroad?
EXAM - PASS	Students mentioned passing the college entrance exam
I-1 ADV ED OF US	Why did you come to the US? Education in the US was more advanced
	Why did you come to the US?
I-1-AD TECH	Advanced technology in the school
I-1-BETTER OPP	Why did you come to the US? Better opportunities here

I-2 GOT INVOLVED	Why did you come to the US? Cultural sharing - These students got involved
I-2 MULTICULTURAL	Why did you come to the US? Cultural Sharing These students participated in multicultural activities
I-2 RELAT BRIDGE	Why did you come to the US? Cultural Activities These students seemed to bridge other students- US>>World
I-3 ENG > AUS	Why did you come to the US? Greater English Proficiency They see US English as better than Australian English
I-3 ENG>CHINESE	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency These students saw English as a better language to know in the world than Chinese
I-3 ENGLISH COURSE	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency These students took extra ESL courses in the US
I-3 L/U MED	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Listening and Understanding as Medium
I-3 L>U HIGH	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Listening and Understanding as High
I-3 LISTENING TO RAD	English Proficiency was enhanced by listening to the radio
I-3 READING HIGH	Why did you come to the US? English Reading is High
I-3 SPEAKING HIGH	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Speaking as High
I-3 SPEAKING LOW	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Speaking as Low
I-3 SPEAKING MED	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Speaking as Medium
I-3 TOEFL SCORE	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency Students shared about the TOEFL Exam
I-3-READ MED	Why did you come to the US? English Proficiency

	Students who read as Medium
I-4 - SAFER HERE	Students self-reported that they feel safer in the US as opposed to...
I-4 AVOID PARTIES	Why did you come to the US? Student Safety Encouraged others to avoid parties or bars
I-4 NOT SAFE HERE	Why did you come to the US? Students did not feel safe here
I-4 SAFE IN VN	Why did you come to the US? Students felt safer in Vietnam
I-4 TEACHING METH	Why did you come to the US? Escape of Vietnamese educational or political system They did not like VN Teaching methods
I-4- INFRASTRUC TURE	Why did you come to the US? Escape VN Educational or Political system They disliked infrastructure issues in Vietnam
I-5 AVOID EXAM	Why did you come to the US? Escape VN educational exam
I-6 - FUNDING	Why did you come to the US? How were they funding their education?
I-7- COMM COLL	Why did you come to the US? They utilized the US Community College System
LOCATION - HA NOI	They are from Hanoi
LOCATION- DA NANG	They are from Da Nang
LOCATION- HCMC	They are from Ho Chi Minh City
RQ-1 - DREAM	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US It was their dream to come here
RQ-1 - FATHER DEGREE	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their father had a college degree
RQ-1 - FATHER OCC	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their father's occupation
RQ-1 - PRIVATE VN UN	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They mentioned the Private HE inside VN
RQ-1 CAME IN HS	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They came here to go to high school
RQ-1 CHEAPER IN TEXA	Students reported it is less expensive to attend Higher Education in Texas

RQ-1 CLASS SIZE	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Class size here was better
RQ-1 CUST/FRIEND	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US A friend or customer they knew spoke favorably
RQ-1 DIST FROM PAREN	Students desired distance from their parents
RQ-1 EDUC IS PRACTIC	Students viewed the education in the US as practical
RQ-1 FAMILY VAL EDUC	Education is highly valued in this student's family
RQ-1 FREEDOM	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They saw this as a place of freedom
RQ-1 GRAD FROM US HS	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They have a degree from a US inst.
RQ-1 GRAD OF VNU	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They have a degree from Vietnamese Institution
RQ-1 GRANDPARENTS	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Grandparents influenced them
RQ-1 HESITANCY	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They were hesitant at first
RQ-1 OTHERS HAD SUCC	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They knew others who had success
RQ-1 PARENT NO DEGRE	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their parents did not have a degree - First gen
RQ-1 PARENTS PROUD	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their parents displayed pride in them - reinforced them
RQ-1 PEOPLE FRIENDLY	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US People they came in contact with were friendly
RQ-1 REL HERE	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They had relatives here
RQ-1 REL STUDY ABRD	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They had other relatives that had studied abroad
RQ-1 REPUT OF US	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US The reputation of the US was good
RQ-1 RES OCC	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their occupation was a factor
RQ-1 SCHOLARSHIP	Students received some form of scholarship in their higher education experience

RQ-1 SEEN SUCC STUD	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They had seen other successful students - Already have a similar code to this
RQ-1 SIBLING IN US	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They have a sibling in the US
RQ-1 US OPEN DOOR	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US The US seemed to open the door for more students
RQ-1 VN MORE \$ NOW	People in Vietnam have more income now than previous history
RQ-1 WEATHER	Students mentioned weather as part of their reasoning for choosing this location to study
RQ-1- AGENT	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They had contact with an agent who assisted them
RQ-1- MOTHER DEGREE	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US Their mother had a college degree
RQ-1- MOTHER OCC	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US What was their mother's occupation
RQ-1- PERCEPTION FAM	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US The perception of parents and family affected them
RQ-1- POOR ED IN VN	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They felt that education in VN was insufficient
RQ-1- STUDY ENGLISH	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They wanted to study English
RQ-1- VN STUDY DIFF	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They felt studying in VN was difficult and US might be easier
RQ-1-COMM COLL	What factors motivated you to come to the US? Community College Program
RQ-1-FIRST GEN ABRD	Factors that motivated them to select HE in US They were the first generation to go abroad
RQ-2 BE INNOVATIVE	What Education and Professional outcomes do they expect? They want to be an innovator
RQ-2 FURTHER EDUC	What Education and Professional outcomes do they expect? They want further education
RQ-2 GET A JOB	What Education and Professional outcomes do they expect? They want to get a job
RQ-2 MORE CONFIDENT	What Education and Professional outcomes do they expect? They want to gain confidence
RQ-2- HELP OTHERS	What Education and Professional outcomes do they expect? They want to help others/ benefit Vietnam

RQ-3 ACT BENEFICIAL	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? Felt activities were beneficial
RQ-3 ACT W FRIENDS	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? Activities with friends
RQ-3 CHURCH	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They went to church
RQ-3 CLASSROOM	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? Classroom Activities
RQ-3 DIFF W ENGLISH	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They had difficulty with English
RQ-3 DIFF W INDIVIDU	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They had difficulty with sense of individualism
RQ-3 HOMESICK	Students commented about their homesickness
RQ-3 INT FRIENDS	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They had international friends
RQ-3 INT STUD ORG	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They participated in International Student Organization
RQ-3 NETWORKIN G	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They were involved in Networking with others
RQ-3 NO AMER FRIENDS	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They struggled to have American friends
RQ-3 RESIDENCE HALL	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They lived in a residence hall
RQ-3 RESTAURANT S	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They went to restaurants
RQ-3 SAME MAJOR	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They interacted with people with the same major
RQ-3 SCHOOL ACTIVITY	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They were involved in school activities
RQ-3 VN STUD NT INDE	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They were not independent
RQ-3 VOLUNTEERI NG	What Academic and Cultural experiences did they have? They volunteered locally
RQ-3 WHERE THEY LIVE	What academic and cultural experiences? Living only with Vietnamese
RQ-4 - OPPORTUNIT	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view US as an opportunity

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RQ-4 - US BORING	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view the US as boring
RQ-4 - US STUD RUDE	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view US students as rude.
RQ-4 ENC OTH TO COME	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They have encouraged others to come
RQ-4 EXPENSIVE HERE	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view the US to be quite expensive
RQ-4 FRIENDLY	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They see the US as friendly
RQ-4 FUN	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They see the US as fun
RQ-4 HELPFUL STD ORG	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They found that the student organizations were helpful
RQ-4 INTERNET	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? Perceptions developed with internet
RQ-4 NOT EASY	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? The US and education here are NOT EASY
RQ-4 NOT HEAVEN	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? US is not heaven as they previously thought
RQ-4 REP OF VN STUDE	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? Concerned about the reputation of VN students to others here
RQ-4 REPUT OF US	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? Reputation of US was good
RQ-4 STAY OR GO	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They mentioned staying here or going back home
RQ-4 US EASIER	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view education here as easier than VN
RQ-4 WK W CUSTOMERS	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They were influenced by customers they worked with
RQ-4- ED TOO GENERAL	How have their perception changed of the US or VN? They view the US education system as focusing too generally
RQ-4- HEAVEN PRIOR	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? Thought that US was a heavenly place
RQ-4- MOVIES/TV	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? They were influenced by Movies and TV
RQ-4-PERC	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN?

OF FREEDOM	Thought the US was a place of freedom
RQ-4- TEACHERS NO RES	How have their Perceptions changed of the US or VN? Concerned that teachers here are not respected
SUGGESTION S	Suggestions they have for others
UNDERGRAD UATE	They are here for undergraduate work
VN STUDY- RMIT	They mentioned RMIT as a potential school

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