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Faculty Perceptions of International Students

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**FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Communication

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement of the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Catherine E. Kennedy

May, 1997

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Joan Livingston-Webber and Dr. Randall Rose for their participation as members of my thesis committee. Their comments and suggestions were extremely helpful. I would especially like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Michael Sherer. Dr. Sherer's guidance was invaluable and his patience was much appreciated.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their support and encouragement throughout the project.

ABSTRACT

This thesis applied a descriptive/interpretive approach to the study of faculty perceptions of international students. This study focused on the communication activities inside and outside the classroom between faculty and foreign students and also on the meanings, values and assumptions that professors share regarding these students. Semi-structured interviews revealed that problems do exist in communication between these two groups but that faculty would be willing to participate in a mutual cross-cultural training session to improve this relationship.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for this project arose from the author's experience with a professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). The professor mentioned an encounter with a foreign student, a Korean woman. The woman had come to discuss the possibility of enrolling in an undergraduate class. The professor confessed to feeling a certain amount of frustration and feeling sorry for the woman because she could "barely speak English." The professor then said that the student kept looking down and spoke so softly that she could not be heard.

This encounter gave the instructor the impression that the woman was woefully ill-prepared to attend American university classes and that she perhaps even lacked the aggressiveness she would need to complete a degree. Since her language skills were not sufficient, she might not be able to endure the rigors that accompany the pursuit of a degree. The student left feeling demoralized.

This particular young woman is an exceedingly bright and capable student who had received a 650 on her TEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

exam. A score of 500 is required for undergraduate admittance to most accredited American universities. As a Korean, her behavior had been entirely culturally appropriate. One shows respect for age and status by avoiding eye contact and assuming a meek demeanor. In Asian cultures, one shows sensitivity by speaking softly. What was a sincere attempt by the student to be respectful had completely misfired. Although the student had experienced some cross-cultural training in her native country and also in a U.S. based intensive language program, she didn't understand the significance of her non-verbal behavior nor how strongly it would color the professor's perceptions. As a direct result of this conversation, research questions emerged. Those questions are:

What are faculty perceptions of foreign students?¹

How do these perceptions play out in the classroom?

The purpose of this study is to explore professors' perceptions and to ascertain if a benefit can be derived from cross-cultural training programs for faculty. By

¹In the context of this paper, foreign students refers primarily to sojourners, i.e. students who study in the U.S. for a temporary period of time and plan to return to their home country.

focusing on the professor side of the dyad, the author hopes that better communication between instructors and foreign students will result.

Possible reasons that a professor might wish to participate in such training are:

1. To create a more interactive learning environment for students, both American and foreign.
2. To learn, as a professor, something from the foreign student.
3. To encourage foreign student perceptions that American professors care about their learning.
4. To encourage the feeling that there is a shared responsibility for cultural sensitivity.
5. To promote U.S. higher education in general as a worthwhile investment for foreign students.
6. To reduce stereotyped images of ethnocentric Americans.

Almost no research currently exists regarding this specific research question. Research on foreign students usually is concerned with English language proficiency and various psychological problems associated with culture

shock and cultural adjustment. Studies focus almost entirely on the foreign student's viewpoint rather than the host culture or professor's viewpoint. As a result, ESL instructors as well as foreign student advisors have contributed to the research but little has been done to add the professor's experience to the mix.

The author checked the following databases at the UNO library to discover any existing material on the research question: ERIC (the educational index), Sociofile (sociology), Psychlit (psychology), Periodical Abstracts, ABI Inform (the business index), PAIS International (the history and political index), and MLA Bibliography (the literature index). In addition, Genisys was checked for books as well as Lexis, the newspaper index, and the Reader's Guide to Periodicals. Several keywords were cross-checked in each of the sources. After checking all of the above, two studies were found concerning professor perception of foreign students. Each was at a single university with a single ethnic group. Even though there is not a great deal of relevant research on this particular question currently, related literature is useful and available.

So to begin, one might ask, who exactly then are these foreign students? The following statistics were derived from the 1994 annual report in the Chronicle

of Higher Education². In 1993-94, a total of 44,750 foreign students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. This record number was up 2.4 percent from the previous year. Foreign students are represented in large numbers at institutions across the spectrum, from research universities to two-year colleges. The U.S. enrolls about one-third of the students in higher education in the fifty leading countries, more than any other nation.

Contrary to what many Americans believe, the U.S. government provided primary financial support for only 1.3 percent of all foreign students. Todd M. Davis, Director of Research at the Institute of International Education states, "The foreign student presence is ubiquitous. The fact that almost three-fourths of them receive financial aid from outside the U.S. suggests that this is not a phenomena bought by the U.S. but a product that we are selling and they are buying."³

California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts and Illinois are the top five states for foreign student enrollment. Presumably these states have large universities and a broad choice of studies, as well as large budgets for

²Paul Desruisseaux, "U.S. Enrolls Record Number of Foreign Students.", The Chronicle of Higher Education 41, (Nov. 23, 1994): A38-41.

³ibid, A38.

recruitment abroad. Since recruitment is expensive we assume that many U.S. schools are actively seeking a foreign student presence.

As many universities and colleges in the U.S. are experiencing financial pressures and more and more internationals are being recruited for U.S. higher education, it seems logical that universities and professors would wish to adapt to this changing customer. Academia is dependent on student enrollment and if that enrollment includes foreign students, then academia must be flexible in accommodating, to a reasonable extent, their needs.

As far as which students are coming, areas of recruitment vary according to economic and political trends in the world. Presently, the majority of students come from the Pacific Rim; the top five countries of origin are China, Japan, Taiwan, India and the Republic of Korea. Regionally the students' origins are 58.9 percent Asian, 13.9 percent European, 10.1 percent Latin American, 6.6 percent Middle Easterners and 0.9 percent Oceania. "While there will probably continue to be scholarships for students from developing countries, the trend will probably continue to be students from wealthy countries with large populations who place a high value on education."⁴

⁴ibid, A38.

There is a trend toward more diversity overall in students coming to the U.S. to study. Foreign student registration shows that undergraduates outnumber graduate students and that men comprise 62 percent and women 38 percent of the foreign student population. Business and engineering remain the most popular fields, although foreign students have enrolled in a broader range of fields than previously. This is perhaps due to increasing numbers of women studying from abroad and/or better recruitment practices.

Since there are increasing enrollment and increasing diversity among foreign students, universities and professors are seeing a new presence in the classroom. This change in the classroom is a reflection of changes in our society. Clearly the U.S. is more and more engaged in a global economy. With modern technology, Americans have more and more international contacts. The implications of doing business, cooperating, and communicating successfully with foreigners has never been more important. Implicit in this realization is the concept of reciprocity, a willingness to "reach out" halfway so there can be a mutually beneficial result. It, therefore, makes sense to not only continue research on foreign student perceptions but to also research the second part of that dyad, the professor's perceptions. Cross-cultural communication between the two needs to be examined. By exploring this area, insight will be gained that will benefit students, professors and administrators .

The focus of research to date, as mentioned, has been on English language ability or counseling problems instead of actual interaction in the classroom. Cultural differences, the cause of many misunderstandings, have not been examined extensively within the context of the classroom. The stereotypes that both professor and student bring to class prevail. Surely this is an area which needs to have some light shed on it.

Universities currently require foreign students to achieve a passing score on the TEFL exam. This is considered the acceptable standard for admission. From the viewpoint of the student, he/she has done what is required of him/her. English language proficiency may imply speaking like a native but it does not indicate thinking like a native. In spite of some cross-cultural training in the home country, there is nothing to prepare the student for the cultural differences in communication and learning styles which he/she is about to encounter.

Since the U.S. is actively recruiting these students, we might ask if there is something that could be done by American administrators and professors to assist these students. This does not preclude some responsibility on the part of the student and home country training. Does the faculty have any responsibility, within reasonable limits, for making classes a positive learning experience for all students? Bearing in mind that professors cannot be expected to be an expert in every culture, they can nevertheless have their consciousness raised.

The majority of the faculty in schools and colleges that educate and train teachers are not prepared to respond positively to cultural differences, particularly with regard to their area of specialization. This is not to place the blame on a particular group of individuals but rather to point out that most of the instruction provided for in schools of education comes from professors who were educated and trained during a period when ethnic and cultural differences were not accepted as positive differences but rather as deficits to be ignored or handled as a disadvantages. Although the climate in the nations and world have encouraged more consideration of the need for multi-cultural education, this approach still does not have the hearty endorsement of most faculty.⁵

What then might one expect to find in the research available? The literature review reflects the emphasis on English language skills and advisor or counselor concerns. Some studies touch on cultural differences that affect communication and learning styles. Little to nothing relates to classroom interaction or cultural awareness in the classroom between professor and international student.

Issues involving foreign students are complex. By examining the literature some knowledge will be gained in relation to past and present research on foreign students' changing needs and what has already been done by university

⁵Gwendolyn C. Baker, Planning & Organizing for Multicultural Instruction, (Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1994), 75.

administrators and faculty to accommodate those needs. And from examining what has been done already, areas that need more elucidation will become clear. So once again the main focus of the research is to determine if cross-cultural training is beneficial for faculty members as well as foreign students.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-cultural communication is housed in different academic departments across the country. As a result literature concerning foreign students is to be found in many areas. That is the reason so many databases were used as stated in the introduction. While a great deal has been written about foreign students in general, almost nothing has been researched in relation to professor's perceptions of foreign students. Thus there is a void that needs to be filled.

There are not many cross-cultural or intercultural journals in existence so a good deal of this review comes from papers presented at conferences. The two most important conferences are TESOL (Teachers of English as a Second Language) and NAFSA (National Association of Foreign Student Advisors). Since ESL (English as a Second Language) programs are a "quasi-official" (non-credit bearing) part of most universities, information about foreign students often comes from these areas rather than academic journals.

In reviewing the literature, one can find many variables in relation to foreign students; much has been written specifically regarding a few of them.

Other variables, those most pertinent to this research question, have received much less attention. As a result, those studies concerned with the relevant variables, though older, have been included because their findings are borne out even today by current papers being presented at conferences and in current books. In addition, the reader should be aware when reading the review that the focus is primarily within the context of sojourners and university-level higher education. Immigrants and pre-university levels of education are not the main focus, though in terms of cultural awareness and sensitivity, there is some cross-over since both immigrants and sojourners are foreigners.

OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

When speaking of foreign students it is important to always bear in mind the complexity involved. Beyond the scope of language problems, variables such as age, gender, country of origin, motivation, academic background, prior international experience, contact, and duration of sojourn must also be taken into consideration, along with the obvious cultural differences.⁶

⁶W. Frank Hull, Foreign Students in the U.S.A., (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1978).

Although most foreign students arrive with a favorable attitude toward the U.S., Europeans are often generally more critical and Africans sometimes fear racial discrimination. Overall, students are satisfied with the quality of higher education in the U.S., but that does not preclude their critical evaluation of social practices or foreign policy. Student attitudes at the end of the sojourn seem to be a composite of pre-existing ideas as well as experiences while here in the U.S. Other factors, such as whether or not they established a warm relationship with an American or had a good experience with an American teacher, have an impact on their assessment. Since the amount of interaction with Americans seems to be closely related to the national origin of the student, this interaction may be dependent on cultural similarities. Finally, a major consideration in their assessment was the perceived helpfulness of the stay in relation to life goals.⁷

Little is known about the effects of foreign students on Americans, but it is known that foreign student evaluation of Americans remains the same over many years. Americans are seen as hardworking, friendly, informal, immature, superficial in friendships and sometimes superior in demeanor. Americans are also perceived as being poorly informed about other countries and having many

⁷Seth Spaulding and Michael J. Flack, The World's Students In The United States, (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1976), 310.

misconceptions as a result. Americans are seen as being almost completely unaware of the impact that actions of the U.S. have on others.⁸

There is little evidence that foreign students have a major impact on U.S. universities. Studies which do examine this impact seem to show that those Americans already interested in international affairs, either on campus or off, probably reinforce their interests through interaction with foreign students. There appears to be little impact on the academic structure and programs of universities as a result of large numbers of foreign students on campus, nor on the community as a whole.⁹

Academically, foreign students seem to perform as well as their American counterparts when success is measured by grade point average. There is a lack of knowledge concerning whether, to what extent, and in what ways cultural and personal learning needs and problems are taken into account in grading of foreign students. Dual standards, i.e. easier grading for foreigners, are generally rejected but occasionally practiced.¹⁰

⁸ibid.

⁹ibid.

¹⁰ibid.

Post-return studies show considerable utilization of the training foreign students have received, depending on personal characteristics, specific organizational milieus, for example a small company or a large corporation, and other factors in the home environment. Technical knowledge seems to find greater application than more abstract research skills.¹¹

In the U.S. few institutions have articulated clear policies with regard to international education and admission, presence, support and utilization of foreign students. Those that have such policies do not consistently apply them in educational or administrative practice. There seems to be considerable distance between those on campus who directly deal with foreign students and those who determine educational policy.¹² "U.S. universities are not well organized to host short term foreign visitors and provide suitable learning experiences for

¹¹James Darby Orr, Jr. (1971), "The Foreign Scholar Returned Home: A Review of Selected Research," PhD. Dissertation, Columbia University.

¹²William H. Allaway, "International Education Exchange in the U.S.: A National Profile." University of California Abroad Program, 13, January 1971.

them in their areas of interest.”¹³ Twenty years after this study was written the same thing is being said by people in the field.

In the U.S. multi-cultural classrooms are becoming the norm. It is becoming commonplace to share a classroom with people from different cultural backgrounds. The way Americans treat foreign students on college campuses, in particular, can have lasting consequences for America. “There has been very little effort to incorporate the unique resources foreign students--many of whom are high ranking in their own countries--bring to the academic community.”¹⁴ Although most foreign students are satisfied with their academic experience in the U.S., many also feel that Americans don’t know or even care if they exist. In a study published in 1976, 40 percent of the 247 foreign students surveyed at 38

¹³Margaret L. Cormack, 1962, An Evaluation of Research on Educational Exchange (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs).

¹⁴Mark D. Rentz, "Diplomats In Our Backyard," Speech given at a NAFSA (National Association of Foreign Student Advisors) Conference, Omaha, NE, Nov 10-12, 1994.

Southern universities felt “unwelcome, lonely and isolated, and the situation is not much different in the North.”¹⁵

The assumptions that previously have supported foreign student programs in American universities have generally related either to a national obligation to less developed countries or to an opportunity to broaden the scope of local students through exposure to persons from different countries.¹⁶ Today, the assumptions might be that foreign student programs are a chance to network internationally and to improve cross-cultural skills for the global marketplace.

“Too much attention has been accorded to foreign student attitudes and cross-cultural adjustments of student problems such as culture shock. The issue is what role the education of foreign students can play, and what experience they can offer, in the expanding international responsibilities of U.S. universities and colleges.... It may well be that the foreign student problem should be conceived primarily as a problem facing American educational institutions rather than a series of problems faced by the students themselves.”¹⁷ One can conclude that

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶Richard W. Brislin and Paul Pedersen, 1976, Cross-Cultural Orientation Programs, (NY: Gardner Press).

¹⁷Barbara J. Walton, 1967, Foreign Student Exchanges in Perspective: Research

future programs should place greater emphasis on “mutuality” of foreign students and their hosts . Foreign students should perhaps be studied within the context of the total student and university environment and their relationships examined there. This study will contribute to that knowledge by examining the foreign student/professor relationship.

A question that comes to mind when thinking of foreign students is why they come to the U.S. to study? One of the reasons is they can take advantage of the sheer number and range of institutional types offered in America. Other reasons include the need to master English (the U.N. endorsed universal language), the perception that the quality of higher education in the U.S. is good, and the availability of jobs and scholarships. ¹⁸

Specifically the preferences of Asian students for U.S. higher education include: an increase in economic ties, improvement Asian and American links, an increase in Asian immigration, a similarity in education systems, the absorptive

on Foreign Students in the United States, (Office of External Research, U.S. Department of State).

¹⁸Desruisseaux, Record Numbers.

quality of the U.S., the quality of U.S. education, the complementarity of the Japanese demand and the American supply and finally, cost.¹⁹

Future employment is certainly a consideration in coming to the U.S. to study. Many countries sponsor students so they can attend American universities. Countries which sponsor students undoubtedly have trade and economic ties with the U.S. and thus see U.S. education as a good investment in their own country's future. Coincidentally, many foreign countries now require TEFL scores on resumes, thus students are eager to improve their English skills to add a tool that enhances their employment prospects.²⁰

From the overview, one can see that there is indeed a need for university teaching/support staff and administrators to find ways to improve communication with the foreign student population. As explained in the introduction, we know that large numbers of foreign students are coming and some of the reasons why

¹⁹William K. Cummings and Wing-Cheung So, "The Preference of Asian Overseas Students for the United States.", The Chronicle of Higher Education, 14(4), (August, 1985): 403-423.

²⁰Majorie Smith "International Student Recruitment: The Basics", Paper presented at the NAFSA Conference, Boseman, MT, November 2-4, 1995.

they are coming. Now we can examine the literature further to find what else we know about foreign students.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Concern with English language skills is a major factor in the literature. A good number of the problems that foreign students encounter stem from lack of English language ability. Students are very vulnerable in the first year when they are coping with culture shock. Back home they might have been a star pupil in English grammar. But being immersed in a foreign culture and language is not the same as passing a test of English.

Of all language skills, the one most frequently mentioned as problematic by professors is that of writing. Obviously, speaking ability could be a problem as well, depending on the nature of the course, but writing is cited more often. Listening skills may also be weak, but the professor will be less likely to notice listening difficulties than writing difficulties. Overall, the evidence is inconclusive as to the relationship of English language proficiency and academic success. Clearly the complexity of variables surrounding foreign students often makes it difficult to be conclusive.

It is certain that ESL classes are beneficial, but it is also clear that variables such as age, gender, socio-economic class, choice of majors, number

of ESL classes, nationality and educational level all impact TEFL results and academic performance. ESL classes are an asset in terms of improved English language ability but ESL alone does not appear to predict academic success (i.e. graduating or receiving a degree.) Students with high ESL grades (i.e., in non-mainstream classes) have a strong correlation with high GPA's after being enrolled in mainstream classes, and ESL students also maintain a higher GPA over time.²¹

There is a strong argument for ESL classes in terms of writing and composition. ESL students outperformed those foreign students in mainstream classes and even had a higher passing rate than native speakers in mainstream courses. This indicates that during the freshman year, foreign students benefit from being channeled into ESL classes for which they receive credit or ESL classes in conjunction with mainstream classes.²²

²¹Coleman South, "Intensive ESL Course Performance As A Predictor Of Academic Success", (Masters Thesis, Portland State University, Portland, OR, 1992): 68-70.

²²George Braine, 1994, "A Comparison of the Performance of the ESL Students in Mainstream Classes of Freshman English" paper presented at TESOL, Baltimore, MD, March 8-12, 1994.

The TEFL exam at present does not appear to have good predictive value for academic success. When GPA's are examined at the time of departure, gender seems to be a better predictor than TEFL scores with women outperforming men. This seems to be particularly true of business majors. In a 1976 study, it was found, at that time, that TEFL scores were reliable in predicting academic success.²³ The changing reliability of TEFL as a predictor, may reflect larger numbers and diversity of students taking the exam, as well as the fact that the TEFL exam is constantly changing.

When examining GPAs, there seems to be only moderate effects of English language fluency for foreign students. Cultural differences account more for impediments to academic success. Surprisingly attainment of a bachelors degree in the U.S. rather than at home actually had a negative effect on U.S. grades.²⁴ So what criteria should be used to predict success?

²³Aaron W. Hughey and Danny Hinson, "Assessing the Efficacy of the TOEFL", Psychological Reports, 73, (August, 1993): 187-193.

²⁴Ross M. Stolzenberg & Daniel Relles (1991), "Foreign Student Academic Performances in U.S. Graduate Schools: Insights from American MBA Programs." Social Science Research, 20 (1), March 1974-1992.

If ESL grades, TEFL scores, and a U.S. bachelors degree cannot predict academic success, but considerations such as gender and cultural differences are better predictors, perhaps there is a need to refocus on what constitutes success and what factors affect it exclusive of English language ability.

LEARNING AND COMMUNICATION STYLES

A major factor in academic performance of foreign students stems from differences in learning and communication styles. Many students come from oral traditions (story and anecdotal telling rather than writing) that rely heavily on non-verbal cues. These cultures are group-oriented, and they rely on memorization. Thus for an Asian who communicates indirectly, is very concerned with saving face and for whom silence is communicative, Western style communication must be daunting. These differences in communication style inevitably affect learning²⁵ and certainly affect grades.

Although foreign students might master vocabulary and grammar, their writing often appears disorganized and not to the point. However, different

²⁵Lynne W. Clark, Faculty and Student Challenges in Facing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity, (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1993).

cultures have different logical systems and consequently different formats of text organization.²⁶

English texts are direct and straightforward, with one point following the next and minimal digression. This is quite different from, for example, Arabic and Hebrew texts which are based on a series of parallel constructions. These in turn are quite different from Asian texts which are indirect and turn around a topic to show a variety of tangential views. Because a topic is not explicitly addressed, ideas are developed in terms of what they are not rather than what they are. This would seem perplexing to an American professor who does not have a shared knowledge with the writer. American professors find African writers get off the point but Africans use an anecdotal or topic associating style. Variations of stress and intonation patterns link anecdotes and emphasize points. Because of these deeply embedded cultural differences in organization and logic, foreign students' writing is often perceived as bad.²⁷

Other factors affecting academic performance are academic support systems, the ability to infer, the ability to think critically using inductive and

²⁶R. Kaplan, (1966) "Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education," Language Learning, 16:1-20.

²⁷ibid.

deductive reasoning, and text comprehension. These skills are not necessarily a part of a foreign student's educational background. In cultures where people are not asked to use their imagination, creative writing is extremely difficult.²⁸

"A great deal of research on reading has shown that students' knowledge of content schema and text grammar schema is critical for successful text comprehension."²⁹ Content schema refers to the hierarchical organization of information on a topic, and text grammar refers to overall organization of the text. Foreign students' experience is usually with narrative text, not expository. "Comprehension occurs at different levels. Students often feel that they have comprehended information if they have memorized it. If the professor asks for other than a regurgitation the student is lost." For many foreign students, their entire academic background consists of rote memorization; and when asked to elaborate on or make a thorough application and explanation of a concept, they are at a loss. They are not accustomed to application of knowledge only to memorization.

²⁸Clark, Faculty Challenges

²⁹ibid, 194.

To attain English proficiency, students must gain knowledge in the reading process, be able to integrate this knowledge with other knowledge they possess, and use this in decision making and problem solving. These are dependent on critical thinking. Faculty must not assume that poor academic performance is due to lack of ability. Faculty cannot do much about personal issues of students but they can do something about learning and communication styles. University faculty often maintain that they should not have to deal with culturally different students, that is the job of the public schools.³⁰

Certainly public schools need to address this issue for immigrants, but universities likewise need to address the issue for the sake of the sojourn population and particularly in light of the increasing numbers of foreign student enrollment and the university's stake in their success.

For all students, the heart of the educational process is the relation between the teacher and the student.³¹ It is through this relation that the university makes its major impact upon the student. The way the teacher interacts with students is a major determinant of the quality of education he or

³⁰R. Horowitz, 1985b, "Text Patterns: Part II", Journal of Reading, 28: 531.

³¹U.S. Commission of Civil Right, Report Five: Teachers and Students (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1973), 3.

she receives. It must be remembered that foreign students who are sojourners have not necessarily experienced American educational culture. The sojourner population must be distinguished from the immigrant population. Immigrants may be somewhat assimilated because of prior experience in U.S. classrooms. Sojourners do not have prior experience. Therefore, the need for some kind of cross-cultural training for sojourners as well as faculty and staff seems evident. The idea of mutual "reaching out" and reciprocity is fair.

When focusing on listening skills, it appears that foreign students learn very little from listening to lectures. Instead they rely almost exclusively on class notes from overhead projector transparencies.³² This suggests that even though foreign students often audio tape lectures, their listening skills are weak. When American professors lecture, they presuppose a great deal of background knowledge of history, current events, and colloquialisms that foreign students may not know. This unwitting ethnocentrism would clearly add to the comprehension difficulties for foreigners, and it might be added to the teaching difficulties of the professors.

³²Robert Bohlken and Lori Macias, "What a Non-Native Speaker of English Needs to Learn Through listening," Paper presented at the thirteenth annual meeting of the International Listening Association, Seattle, WA, March 5-7, 1992.

In addition, non-native speakers of English may not listen for discriminating nuances of the language. Even if lectures are audio taped, a foreign student might not recognize the inflection used to indicate questions, humor, sarcasm, certainty and emotion. Not recognizing these intonation patterns might render the speech unintelligible.³³ Again, a cultural difference in the way we use language makes the foreign students' task more challenging. The student is of course aware of this listening difficulty beforehand and is responsible for his own comprehension, but that does not mean a professor cannot be helpful by speaking clearly.

In terms of learning styles, there are four groups of underlying values and practices in American education that foreign students must adjust to. The first is individualism and competition. This greatly influences classroom interaction and grading and is difficult for students who come from collective cultures that emphasize group welfare. The second group of values is equality and formality.

³³Alex McKnight, "The Business of Listening at University: Do International Students Learn By 'Not' Listening?", Paper presented at the annual meeting of TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language), Baltimore, MD, March 8-12, 1994.

Foreign students must understand these in order to have good personal relations while in the U.S. Group three is pragmatism and reasoning style. Americans emphasize practicality and directness which incline them toward “doing” rather than “being.” These values also make them time oriented rather than process oriented. For Americans, learning is an open-ended pursuit in which both students and teacher are engaged and in which critical thinking is valued. These ideas are difficult for students accustomed to memorization. The fourth and final group is the U.S. philosophy of education and ideas about plagiarizing and knowledge ownership. These ideas are not always compatible with those of other cultures, nor is the concept of a well-rounded citizen.³⁴

These values and practices of the American educational system are not anticipated by foreign students. Cross-cultural training at home or in a brief orientation cannot hope to address nor anticipate all these subtle types of problems. These difficulties are cultural differences. Students arrive feeling insecure about their English, but ironically it is often these submerged cultural differences which cause them the most problems.

³⁴Jennifer Robinson, "International Students and American University Culture", Paper presented at the Washington Area TESOL annual convention, Arlington, VA, October 16, 1992.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Any foreign student advisor can tell you about the common sources of stress for international students. They have many psychological problems because of the massive adjustments they are required to make abruptly in their social and academic lives. These range from homesickness, loneliness and irritability to severe depression, confusion and disorientation.

Stress is one of the more obvious problems that foreign students have to deal with. Communication competence and social integration help the most for coping. Also it can probably be assumed that students with cultures more similar to the U.S., suffer less from stress than those which are very different.

Other sources of stress for internationals are related to their world view (pluralistic vs. homogenous, collectivist vs. individualist), cultural empathy (if the student can relate to another culture), linguistic abilities, views of the target culture (if the student feels hostile or intimidated), and organizational skills. Of least concern to students are money and amenities. This is presumably because they are supported by parents or sponsors. Other considerations of stress concern anxiety, task-related behaviors (doing rather than theorizing), quirks of their personalities, authoritarianism (the hierarchical system the students come from), perfectionism, ethnocentrism, rigidity, narrow mindedness and self-

centeredness. Most of the concern for foreign students is in the area of school, the extended family, cultural differences and aspects of the American lifestyle such as crime and sexual permissiveness. Foreign students are deemed by advisors to be determined, confident, thankful and cheerful if somewhat lonely and cautious.³⁵

For those students, especially those who come from cultures that are very dissimilar, the problem of American ethnocentrism and xenophobia have not been closely examined. Research in this area usually refers to the immigrant population, but foreign students are also adversely affected by it. "American education has been soundly criticized in recent years for allegedly teaching only a Western, Anglo culture and values system, to the exclusion of other groups."³⁶

As American society is becoming more and more diverse, it is no longer correct to assume whites of European ancestry as the norm.

³⁵Mark V. Redmond & Judith M. Bunyi, 1993, "The relationship of Intercultural Communication Competence with Stress as Reported by International Students", International Students, 17(2), 235-254.

³⁶Jane R. Ballinger and Pu-Tsing King "Alternative Media Use and Support for Multicultural Education" annual meeting of Education and Journalism and Mass Communication, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, August 5-8, 1992.

In one study, a correlation was found between contact with minority groups and support for multi-cultural education by Anglos, but not for ethnics. This suggests that a lack of support for multi-cultural education among Anglos is related to their lack of contact to ethnic groups. Once contact is made, there is less fear and ignorance. Nevertheless, political ideology was determined to have the strongest correlation with support for multi-cultural education.³⁷

In addition to people who are sometimes ethnocentric, there has been sometimes ethnocentric bias in textbooks, specifically social science encyclopedias, over a period of half a century. Much of what is written is from a Western perspective and Western value system. Little is included from a non-Western perspective. One wonders how often educators stop to consider their own ethnocentrism and that of the learning and teaching materials.³⁸

There is currently, and has been in the past, criticism of international programs in US colleges and universities. Some Americans are concerned with US competitiveness and thus view foreign highly skilled scientists trained in the

³⁷ibid.

³⁸Frederick Gareau, (1983), "The Increasing Ethnocentrism o American Social Science: An Empirical Study." International Journal of Comparative Sociology, 24(3-4), September, 244-258.

US, as well as business scholars in MBA programs, with great skepticism. Critics are also concerned over the amount of alleged favoritism shown foreign students in admission and financial assistance. This is evidence of a growing U.S. xenophobia, as are the recent restrictions on certain types of information and research made accessible to foreign scholars.³⁹

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

When speaking of cultural differences, it is fruitful to look deeper than the surface. Differences in communication and learning styles have enormous impact on how students perform and how they are perceived by faculty. In addition, issues such as origins in a high or low context cultural background have an effect. High context cultures are ones in which the meaning comes from the situation, where silence is communicative and there is a shared knowledge. Low context cultures get their meanings from words, and silence is awkward. These differences can have an effect on the interactions between professors and foreign students. Whether or not a person comes from a collectivist (group-

³⁹Peter C. Magrath, "Education for Foreigners and 'Americans'". Paper presented at the annual convention of NAFSA, Cincinnati, OH, May 24-27, 1983.

oriented) or individualistic culture affects judgments of professors and foreign students. There are psychological ramifications from those judgments and they have nothing to do with the English language ability of the international. These judgments may lead a person to believe that a member of the opposite culture is rude, embarrassing, or stupid. This misperception is based on a lack of knowledge of cultural differences.

For example, foreign students find it difficult to do academic writing in the U.S. Their writing is influenced by cultures where people communicate indirectly and holistically, value the wisdom of past and downplay the individual in favor of the group. The dominant communication style of the U.S. is highly valued by “only a tiny fraction of the world’s peoples.”⁴⁰

Difference in world view have an impact on the way a person writes. As previously mentioned, creative writing is not easy for foreign students but neither is analytical writing. Critical thinking made visible, that is, analytical writing, is not so much a mental process or an intellectual skill as it is a culturally specific world view that is individualistic, egalitarian, scientific and based on direct, sparse communication style that relies little on shared knowledge. Non-Western

⁴⁰Helen Fox, Listening to the World: Cultural Issues in Academic Writing, (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1994).

students on the other hand tend to value indirectness or more roundabout communication strategies, expect the reader to infer a great deal that is left unsaid, value tradition and authority more than originality and find it inappropriate or unfruitful to critique authorities in a field, especially while a student. "Teachers who realize the culture-bound nature of critical thinking and analysis will be able to see the difference language rather than deficit language when working with international students and will find it easier to bridge the gap."⁴¹ Cross-cultural training for faculty would assist professors in this kind of challenge.

MULTI-CULTURAL EDUCATION

Multi-cultural education is currently a controversial political issue. There is active opposition to it, and "English only" amendments are being discussed. One view says that "English only" will bring America together. The other view says that it will not increase English language skills but will punish those who have not

⁴¹Helen Fox, "What in the World in Analysis?" Presented at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Cincinnati, OH, March 19-21, 1992.

yet learned English and heighten racism and bigotry.⁴² While this issue applies mostly to immigrants, it impacts sojourners because opponents to multi-cultural education do not distinguish between immigrants and sojourners.

An opinion survey in New York state showed however, that most Americans believe students should be taught traditional history as well as contributions made by ethnic and racial populations.⁴³ This would suggest that Americans believe in cultural sensitivity. Why would they not extend this same courtesy to foreign sojourners? After all, Americans perceive themselves as a friendly and hospitable culture.

In spite of some negativity, there nevertheless is a new sense of awareness and consciousness-raising about multi-cultural education and the need for teacher training to deal with these changes.

Educators, especially professors, are responsible for helping schools achieve the goals and objectives of a democratic society. The teacher is in a key position because he/she has the task of fostering positive attitudes in the

⁴²Deroy Murdock & Millie Brown, Jr. 1986, "Point-Counterpoint: English Language Amendment." Point of View, Fall, 17-18.

⁴³Fact Finders, Inc. 1991, NY State Teachers 1991 Education Opinion Survey, (Delmar, NY).

classroom. Books by Kenneth Clark, Mary Ellen Goodman, and Bruno Lasker have found that American students go to class with negative attitudes previously established about people different from them. Little is being done to counter these prejudiced attitudes in the classrooms. If the teacher and school have the responsibility of preparing students to live in a democratic society, they must teach students how to relate to people of all cultures. Obviously the curricula should reflect the diversity of the world. The implications of cultural pluralism for education and teacher education are monumental⁴⁴

This is just as true at the university level as it is at the high school level. Again, sojourners' needs have to be considered as well as immigrants. Ten imperatives have been set out for multi-cultural teacher preparation which are useful at any level of education and can be adapted for university professors:

1. Teachers need to have experiences in which they examine their own culture, in order to understand the importance of culture in general.

⁴⁴Gwendolyn Baker, Planning & Organizing for Multicultural Instruction, 2d ed., (Menlo Park: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.) 1994.

2. Teachers need experience that exposes them to diversity.
3. Teachers need experience that will encourage positive attitudes about cultural diversity.
4. Teachers need to be involved in situations which allow them to have direct contact with individuals who differ from them.
5. Teachers need to understand the importance of language in culture and the implications of bi-lingualism for learner and teacher.
6. Teachers should be familiar with a second language and the culture from which it emanates.
7. Teachers should explore the impact of reducing racist, xenophobic, and sexist attitudes and behavior.
8. Teachers need to be instructed how to evaluate materials for multi-cultural classrooms.

9. Teachers must learn how to evaluate relevance and select materials for multi-cultural classrooms.
10. Emphasis must be placed on guiding teachers to develop teaching techniques that will allow for culturally individualized teaching/learning environments.⁴⁵

The development and use of multi-cultural materials and curricula are important and necessary steps, but, these steps are not enough. A teacher's behavior in the classroom is a key factor in helping all students reach full potential regardless of race, sex, religion or language.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Gwendolyn C. Baker, (1977), "Multicultural Imperatives for Curriculum Development in Teacher Education," Journal of Research and Development in Education, 11(1): 73.

⁴⁶Donna M. Gollnick & Philip Chinn, Multicultural Education in a Pluralistic Society, 3d ed. (Merrill Publishing Company, 1990).

“Recent teacher effectiveness research has provided clear evidence that individual teachers do make a difference in student’s learning.”⁴⁷ They can also make a student feel very special or stupid and worthless. What are the qualities of teachers who make a difference? “When students are asked what makes a successful teacher, fairness comes up again and again--the ability to establish a democratic classroom where all students are treated equitably.”⁴⁸ Foreign students are clearly going to be concerned with fairness. Their treatment in the classroom will doubtless be communicated back in their home countries. Since foreign students will spend a good deal of their time in class. The classroom will become a microcosm of the U.S., and professors and American students will become ambassadors.

Unfortunately some professors respond differently to students because of their cultural membership. Researchers have found different expectations of students based on their race, sex, and class. Unknowingly educators often transmit biased messages to students. But by working on the elimination of bias

⁴⁷T.L. Good, 1983, Essential Knowledge For Beginning Educators, (Washington D.C.: American Association of Colleges for Teachers Education , 1983), 55-64.

⁴⁸M.P. Sadker & D.M. Sadker, "Between Teacher and Student", Sex Equity Handbook for Schools, (NY: Longman Publisher, 1982), 96-132.

in the classroom, proactive teachers can create a good learning environment for all students regardless of their cultural background.⁴⁹

Some guidelines for excellent insight into the dynamic process of negotiation of meaning, knowledge and understanding between faculty and foreign students are to:

1. Project a feeling of understanding.
2. Recognize mutual understanding of a long term struggle.
3. Be a role model of multi-culturalism.
4. Be non-judgmental but know the bottom line.
5. Distinguish between legitimate categorizing and stereotyping.
6. Be aware of one's own attitudes and critically examine them.
7. Be aware of one's own hesitancy to intervene.
8. Explain differences and engage in open discourse.
9. Do not be afraid of possible conflict.

⁴⁹ibid, 293.

10. Do not ignore possible difficulties and tensions.⁵⁰

Faculty need to challenge the more traditional modes of teaching with roots in mainstream orientation.

Instead of compensating and tolerating student's differences in learning and communication styles, faculty can embrace and appreciate what is already there. Instead of alienating students, professors can assist foreign students to become acculturated and experience being a part of the academic community. Instead of viewing the diverse patterns of writing and of speaking as deficits, perhaps faculty can be enriched by different modes and see them as assets.⁵¹

Becoming culturally sensitive does not require foreign travel. Global competence can be acquired without overseas experience if teachers seek out

⁵⁰P. DeRosa, 1991, Context: Southeast Asians in California, (Cambridge, Bicultural Project for Communication and Education).

⁵¹Clark, Student Challenges, 20-21.

personal contact with those from other cultures.⁵² Most foreign students are eager to meet and make friends with Americans so this should in no way be a difficult task. Developing international friendships can lead to increased cultural sensitivity. Contacts can be made through campus organizations or even through something as simple as a conversation partner.

Non-verbal communication is another area where proactive teachers can make a big difference. Non-verbal cues are often overlooked in the environment of the classroom. Specific non-verbal messages that are culturally bound can be identified in order to help educators avoid sending negative messages and to validate the voices of a diverse population in the classroom.⁵³ Examination of non-verbals like eye contact, personal space and touch can be a very effective key component in the initial stages of multi-cultural education. Most of human communication is non-verbal but non-verbal behavior is culture bound.⁵⁴ Teacher

⁵²MaryAnne Fluornoy, "Educating Globally Competent Teachers". Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Council on International Education Exchange, Washington D.C., November 4, 1993.

⁵³Debra Pitton, Multicultural Messages: Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom, (Minnesota, 1993), 1-23.

⁵⁴Linda Chiang, "Beyond the Language", Paper presented at the annual meeting

sensitivity and understanding of non-verbals can make a difference in classroom interactions, as the original anecdote in this paper made clear. Downcast eyes in many cultures means respect, not deceit.

Twenty years ago there was clearly not a big push toward training teachers for internationalism. Some schools did expose their teachers to some aspects of internationalism but offered no degrees in the field. Only one school of five degree-granting institutions awarded a degree to undergraduates as well as graduates. Of those schools that do offer an international dimension, some like the University of Pittsburgh, do try to infuse internationalism in all of their programs, whether for students or teachers. None, however, except for The Experiment in International Living in Brattleboro, Vermont have as their *raison d'être*, the total commitment to world mindedness. Most universities and colleges offer courses or programs from which to choose and most are at the graduate level.⁵⁵ Twenty year after this research was done the situation remains almost identical.

of the Midwest Association of Teachers of Educational Psychology, Anderson, IN, Oct 2, 1993.

⁵⁵Natalie K. Camper, "American Teacher Education for World Citizenship", (Masters Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1976), 83-85.

CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING

The final factor to emerge in the literature has been some fledgling attempts at cross-cultural training at universities. While universities may not be internationalizing a great deal in terms of curricula or teacher training, they have launched some efforts in conjunction with student service organizations and the student body.

In Texas, one way the administration is trying to accommodate more Mexican students is by allowing them to pay in-state tuition rates. At one campus they are offering free Spanish lessons and pronunciation guides for monolingual professors. Mexican students attend ESL classes for their first year, for which they are not given credit, but it gives them a chance to become English-proficient in a less stressful environment.⁵⁶

One technique that has been very successful in several universities is adopting the Model United Nations program from high schools.⁵⁷ These

⁵⁶Amy Rubin, "Life in a Global Society" Chronicle of Higher Education, 41, (January 27, 1995): A41-43.

⁵⁷ibid.

programs give both faculty and students meaningful contact they would not otherwise have. In addition, they are a very effective way to promote internationalism. These programs have promoted international friendships which in turn have benefited the universities through exchange programs and increased enrollments.

A successful cultural awareness program was launched by Golden West College in California.⁵⁸ It established a program to enhance campus-wide awareness of cultural diversity through services to the international students and the campus community. A task force found strong support for their mission. The program provided peer counseling for language homework and pronunciation. They also provided faculty with modules and workshops on international education, audiotapes for ESL students, information on study abroad programs, and classroom materials for writing assignments. In addition, the college prepared a manual of common misperceptions of a variety of cultures, arranged to have speakers on cultural sensitivity, had receptions for exchange students, and produced print and television promotional materials for local media. Their

⁵⁸K. Nunez-Cronk & Donna Willoughby, 1993, Golden West College Intercultural Center. Paper presented at Western Regional Conference of Comparative and International Educational Society, Los Angeles, CA, November 5-6, 1993.

program met with great success as assessed by student, faculty and administration.

Other possibilities for promoting internationalism that have met with success are conversation partners, speaker's bureaus with foreign students as guest speakers, classroom buddy systems with Americans studying foreign languages and having students from various campus organizations meet for an evening of celebrating diversity. Many classes could be co-ordinated with a component of internationalism. For example, physical education could sponsor a class together to discuss games, sports and dance in foreign cultures. Music or art classes easily lend themselves to these exchanges, and almost any class could be adapted to an international day.⁵⁹

A program at Marriott School of Business Management at Brigham Young University had received complaints from international students who felt abandoned when they arrived. The university responded by doing research on foreign students' needs, concerns, and problems. The university then established a two-week, international student orientation seminar/workshop for

⁵⁹Bayo Oludja, 1993, "Experiential Approach to Intercultural Communication", paper presented at Joint Meeting of Southern States Communication Association & Central States Communication Association, Lexington, KY, April 14-18, 1993.

all first-year, foreign students and interested faculty. Surveys of faculty and students after the workshop found students integrating more effectively, successfully bridging cultural differences, feeling more secure because the support system was in place, and feeling more positive about the school.⁶⁰ This program would argue that something as relatively simple as a two-week orientation program can make a huge difference in both faculty and student perceptions.

The examples above illustrate that both short and long term efforts at cross-cultural training marked an improvement for students, faculty and administrators. Participation was voluntary in all programs. Becoming culturally sensitive is not something that can be mandated.

If international students can be viewed as a benefit to our campuses, there are rewards to be gained by both American students and professors. Foreign students contribute not only to the American students in the classroom but also to the professor. They do so by improving everyone's skill in

⁶⁰Janet M. Howard and Reba Keele, "International Students in a U.S. Graduate Business Program-Culture, Subculture, and the New Student", paper presented at annual East Michigan University Conference of Language and Communication for World Business and Professions, April 3-5, 1991.

communicating cross-culturally. " In a job market that is increasingly requiring the capacity to think and work across cultures, this is good practice."⁶¹

Foreign students encourage a professor to think about what and how he/she teaches. Professors become aware of their own ethnocentrism in their texts and of differences in learning and communication styles. The American students are also made more aware of these things. International students' questions can force professors to confront a different set of issues and consider different perspectives though it may mean a change in lesson plans, lecture or syllabi.

Foreign students force us to see the importance of developing a capacity to see issues from the perspective of another culture. They also remind us by their questions and observations that each culture has its own way of dealing with the inevitable conflicts that arise. An Asian student said, " Why do Americans recognize Asian art and Asian cuisine but not that there is an Asian way to approach human rights?"⁶² Comments such as these force us to consider our own prejudice about the universal appeal of the U.S. "Surely we ought to

⁶¹Allan E. Goodman, "What Foreign Students Contribute" Chronicle of Higher Education, 42, (February 16, 1996): A52.

⁶²ibid

step up our recruitment of foreign students. Doing so has the potential to make America's colleges and universities classrooms for world citizenship."⁶³

Why should professors and universities make these kinds of efforts? Because, as previously stated, we are actively recruiting these students. They are customers. We presumably want to meet their needs so our universities reputations are enhanced. On an individual basis, we desire good reports when foreign students return home, good "word-of-mouth" so that other foreign students will seek U.S. higher education.

We want to be good ambassadors for our schools and our countries. If one believes in international diplomacy, then one must believe in good treatment of foreign students.

In addition, the benefits we receive from foreign students' presence are not inconsequential. We must start developing a sense of world-mindedness when the world economy figures so prominently in our lives. When we live in a world of potential nuclear disasters in which we could all perish together, it does not seem unreasonable to promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. We can learn from these students if we treat them as a valuable resource rather than a curiosity.

And if for no other reason, why not promote these kind of programs out of simple human decency? The U.S. prides itself on being a nation in which equal opportunity is valued. We should be welcoming these students who are short-term guests, but who will be leaving with lifelong memories.

⁶³ibid.

SUMMARY

This review has attempted to include that literature which pertains most directly to professors and universities. Because almost nothing is written on professors' perceptions or host country perceptions, I chose those studies felt to be most relevant to educators. The conclusion one can draw from this review is the need to examine the perspective of the professor. This is a gaping hole in the research. Perhaps it has not been done because the task is a daunting one.

But surely some initial exploration is called for. In view of our changing society, American professors may soon find a need for cross-cultural training and a need to begin the process of internationalizing our universities. Auditing students' needs and concerns must continue, but the literature indicates that almost no one has the power and the capacity to make a difference the way the teaching professor does, and he/she therefore merits some attention.

The review makes it clear that professors make a significant impact on foreign students lives and are central to their success. If faculty choose to be proactive and promote internationalism, they can benefit themselves, the students and their universities. And it might be added, in light of the increasing foreign student enrollment, they will also be acting in their own self interest.

As previously stated, the purpose of this research is to ascertain if a cross-cultural training program might benefit faculty and by extension foreign students also. In addition, the author will seek insight into how faculty's

perceptions of foreign students play out in the classroom, what kind of interpersonal dynamics exist between professors and foreign students and whether there are any special behaviors in this relationship.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Communication difficulties that sometimes arise between faculty and foreign students will not disappear. In fact with the increasing diversity of foreign enrollment, problems will probably increase. As long as one is communicating cross-culturally, the possibility of misunderstandings will be multiplied not only for language reasons but also because of cultural differences. In spite of this, there are still means to improve the communication between the two.

Cross-cultural training is only one of a host of worthy programs that universities and faculties are asked to consider. Many proposals are worthy of their consideration, and addressing foreign student problems may or may not apply to their particular campus. Nevertheless, as Marshall McLuhan's global village becomes more of a reality, faculty must perceive a need for training to deal with the changing student body. One only has to look at the international use of satellite television, like CNN, and the use of the Internet to see that McLuhan was correct. We are all becoming more interconnected, and cross-cultural communication is more important than ever.

As there is no “a priori” theory on this subject, a descriptive/interpretive approach was used, and the author sought to develop a picture rather than study cause-effect relationships. This picture emerged inductively through interviews with informants. Thus the author hoped to interpret how the perceptions of professors played out in the classroom and whether these perceptions lead to the belief that a cross-cultural program might be mutually beneficial.

The Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research has its roots in cultural anthropology and American sociology.⁶⁴ It has only been recently adopted by educational researchers. The intent of qualitative research is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group or interaction. The object was to investigate, not to categorize, the object of study. The researcher tried to enter the world of informants and search for their perspectives and meanings.

There were six assumptions that indicated the use of qualitative research for this study.

⁶⁴D.C. Miller, Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurements, 5th ed., (Newbury Park: Sage Publishers, 1991).

1. The researcher was concerned with the process more than the outcome.
2. The researcher was interested in meaning: how people make sense of their lives and experiences.
3. The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data was mediated through humans rather than inventories, questionnaires or machines.
4. Qualitative research required fieldwork, going directly to the people or institution.
5. Qualitative research is descriptive/interpretive so the researcher was interested in the process, meaning and understanding gained through words.
6. The process was inductive, and theory built from details.⁶⁵

⁶⁵S.B. Merriam, Case Study Research in Education, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 1988).

A descriptive/interpretive approach was used, that is, a study in which human experiences are examined through detailed descriptions of the people being studied, was used. This is one of the traditional approaches used in human and social sciences. Ideally, there should be no preconceived notions, expectations or frameworks to guide the researcher. Theory or patterns emerged from this design. This approach was well-suited for this study because so little data or theory currently exists on faculty perceptions of foreign students, and so much of what research exists is exploratory.

The Researcher's Role

Since qualitative research is interpretive, such things as bias, values and judgments of the researcher were taken into account.⁶⁶ As the author has broad experience teaching foreign students and experience of UNO as a student and teacher, extra care was taken to objectify data and to remain neutral. The writer feels she bears a bias of sympathy toward foreign students' problems. As an ESL program specialist, the author receives considerable feedback from

⁶⁶John W. Creswell, Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishers, 1994).

international students concerning professors. In general, the writer feels, based on this feedback, that American professors are not as attentive to foreign students' needs as they might be if a cross-cultural training were provided.

In this study, universities in metropolitan Omaha were chosen because of accessibility. UNO is a municipal university with a largely non-traditional student body. St. Mary's College is a Catholic women's college, and Metropolitan is a community college. Creighton University is a Catholic Jesuit university and the only school with dormitories; the others are primarily commuter campuses. These factors were taken into account in the research.

Semi-structured interviews were used. The interviews were conducted in a neutral place, at the convenience of the professor so as not to disturb his/her schedule. As there could be sensitive ethical issues involved, data will be confidential; informants will remain anonymous; and the research will be used only for the stated purpose.

Admission departments were consulted to determine those departments with the most foreign students. When possible, the Chair of the department was contacted to discover which classes and professors had more foreign student enrollment. Where there was more than one choice, a name was randomly selected.

Ten informants were chosen according to their discipline to reflect those fields where foreign student enrollment is highest: business, engineering, English

and social studies. Professors of both sexes were interviewed, and all are teaching faculty.

Data Collection Procedure

To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted two practice interviews to refine the process, removing questions which led away from the author's purpose. The interviews were face to face and were semi-structured and open-ended. The questions were derived from the literature review, the author's personal experience as an ESL instructor and from the practice interviews. The idea was to have a friendly conversation, but with a purpose. The entire interview was audio taped (with prior permission) so that the author could concentrate on listening and asking questions. At the beginning, there was a short ice-breaking period in which the informants were asked about their background while notes were taken. The probes that were used at that time to get started were:

Have you any international experience?

- A. Have you studied or taught abroad?
- B. Do you speak a second language?
- C. Have you ever traveled abroad for work or pleasure?

After the interview was completed, the entire recordings were transcribed. First the author tried to get an overview of the data. The notes were often reread and tentative conclusions were sometimes changed or modified. By describing, analyzing and comparing data, central themes emerged. Interviews were especially useful in this project because logistically it is not possible to observe professors in the classroom in relation to significant numbers of foreign students.

“Interviews enable the researcher to learn about things that cannot be observed directly, while remembering that what an informant says may not represent the whole story.”⁶⁷ As Fetterman (1989) notes, interviews are important because they explain and put into a larger context what the interviewer sees and experiences. Informal interviews help the researcher in discovering what people think and how one person’s perceptions compare with another, thus enabling the researcher to identify shared values within the culture he or she is studying.”⁶⁸ Interviews were well suited in this study because they helped the

⁶⁷Thomas R. Lindlof, Qualitative Communication Research Methods, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishers, 1995), 167.

understanding of the informant's perspective. The professors were able to give accounts of their behavior and explanations for it.

"The researcher can also take advantage of the performance quality of the interview itself to infer the communication properties and processes of interpersonal relationships."⁶⁹ Another advantage that was received through interviewing was being able to elicit the distinctive language, idioms, jargon, and forms of speech used by the informant.

Interviews share a common goal of collecting data in different situations. The normal progression in the interviewing process flows from using open-ended questions as ice breakers to establish rapport with the interviewee to negotiating a more detailed scope and range of follow-up questions. There was no set format. The questions that are in the appendix were merely possible options.

Questions and probes were designed to encourage self-disclosure. Naturally the informants had their own interpretations of the questions.

⁶⁸Linda M. Moorman, "The Symbolic Construction of Thinness: An Organizational Culture Study of Weight Watchers", (Masters Thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, NE, 1994) : 32.

⁶⁹ibid.

Given the culturally diverse and heterogeneous populations, problems and biases are becoming more apparent. Variables in the interview process are: age, gender, race, educational level and social status. Because of cultural and linguistic variables, different people attach different degrees of importance to the value, worth, or intent of certain questions and answers.⁷⁰

By using professors teaching in Omaha, the author was attempting to keep the informants homogenous meaning that all were Ph.D.'s, teaching undergraduate and graduate school at accredited universities and colleges. In addition, the author sought to utilize both men and women professors from those fields which have the highest foreign student enrollment.

Lindlof states that:

Interviewing is a social accomplishment of all of its participants. Recognizing this denies to interview questions the status of 'instruments' for creating data. Questions are merely one element of communicative engagement, set apart by the fact that they are purposely inserted into the conversation stream. Chance, surprise and persistence contribute at least as much to the happy results of an interview as advance planning.⁷¹

⁷⁰Felix T. Chu, Interviewing in Educational Research, Bibliographic Essay, (1993).

⁷¹ibid.

As interviewer, the author allowed for and welcomed spontaneity. The author's job was not to follow a plan. The plan was to keep the interview as unstructured as possible and to use questions and probes only to keep the interview on track when digression was getting too far off the topic.

Interviewing also demanded reflection on the informants' perception, of the interviewer, depending on the way the author talked, looked, and introduced herself. Based on these perceptions, the interviewees might or might not have aligned their interests with those of the author. They may have felt free to evade, dismiss or critique questions. The author bore this in mind:

Interviewer is also a participant observer. As participant the researchers involved in language games, but which also allows him/her to have an authentic relationship with the other person. As an observer one decides on what to ask and how to respond.⁷²

The author, therefore, understood that the goal was not to manipulate but to frame, inform, encourage, and enjoin.

The research questions driving this study made it clear that no interviewee would answer any of the questions without giving some thought to the purpose of

⁷²ibid.

the questions: No informant would want to reveal any prejudice, bigotry, ethnocentrism, or xenophobia toward foreign students.

Informants will be curious as to what the research is really about and which questions are really relevant to the research. This is most clearly seen in unstructured interviews where the informant always has to make a choice between what they want to tell and leave untold. When the interviewer asks something surprising, the interviewee will reconsider the interviewer's intention and may respond by asking what he 'means' by the question. It would be an oversimplification to suggest that people only use one stereotypical frame of interpretation within which they define a situation. On the contrary they use many.⁷³

Interviewing allows the researcher to discover historical information and allow control over the line of questioning. For a set of questions see Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection. There was a voluminous amount of data; the author attempted to identify and interpret patterns of behavior and patterns of communication. The researcher collected

⁷³Pevtti Alasuutari, Researching Culture. Qualitative Methods and Cultural Studies, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publishers, 1995), 90.

and formatted the information into a picture and wrote the text. There was obviously a great deal of reduction of data. It was reasonable to approach the tapescripts with some skepticism in determining whether they were answering the question being explored. The author considered whether or not there were more plausible explanations for the findings.

Since this area of study has been largely ignored and the nature of the study is exploratory, the author considered that some of the responses, because of human nature, were likely to be those that are the most "socially acceptable."

In the examination of tapescripts, the author began the process of answering the questions put forth in the study. In addition to the audio taping, the researcher took notes to provide information on non-verbal cues.

Validity

The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention, worth taking account of? Reliability is typically held to be, in the words of Kerlinger (1973), synonymous with "dependability, stability, consistency, predictability, accuracy." Reliability is not

prized for its own sake, but as a precondition for validity. Reliability is usually tested by replication.⁷⁴

The issue of internal validity was addressed by arranging feedback from the informants. After the interview, each informant was contacted by the author to give a brief summary of comments and conclusions about their interviews and to allow them to correct any misconceptions. The categories or themes that emerged were discussed with them in order to ask whether the conclusions were accurate or not. As for external validity, there will be limited generalizability of findings from this study as there were few interviewees and also because of the exploratory nature of the study. Instead the author is trying to provide a unique interpretation of experiences.

Activities that make it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced are: prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Activities that provide an external check of the inquiry process (peer debriefing) and activities providing for the direct test of findings and interpretations with the human sources from which they have come (member checking) are also used.

The first technique, prolonged engagement, is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes, testing for misinformation introduced

⁷⁴ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, Naturalistic Inquiry, (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1985), 290-291.

by distortion either by the self or by the respondent, and building trust. The author attempted to spend as much time with each informant as they would allow and several interviews went well beyond the allotted time. Most professors allowed time to do some informal feedback immediately and clear up misconceptions. The second technique is persistent observation. If the purpose of prolonged engagement is to render the inquirer open to multiple influences that impinge upon the phenomenon being studied, the purpose of persistent observation is to identify those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail. The author attempted to keep the informants on the subject and constantly asked for more and more specific details and examples to illustrate what they were stating.

Peer debriefing is useful in establishing credibility. It is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirers mind. Multiple purposes are served by such a debriefing, most important from the point of view of credibility is that the process helps keep the inquirer "honest", exposing him or her to searching questions by an experienced protagonist doing his or her best to play the devil's advocate. Debriefing sessions also provide the inquirer with an opportunity for catharsis thereby clearing the mind of feeling and emotion that

may be clouding good judgment or preventing emergence of sensible next steps.

The author frequently spoke with her ESL peers to see if her interpretations were significantly different from theirs; these colleagues frequently played the devil's advocate, giving the author pause for thought about her perceptions and interpretations.

Finally, is the member check, whereby interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of the group from whom the data was originally collected, the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member checking is both formal and informal and occurs continuously.⁷⁵ The author, as stated previously, checked back frequently with the informants regarding her conclusions and especially on those items that were consensual.

Credibility was based on the author's positions, central assumptions, the selection of informants and any stated biases and values which will enhance the chances of further exploratory work in another setting.

RESULTS

This was a naturalistic study. Therefore the results are in descriptive/interpretive form. The description communicates the overall picture of

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 301-314.

the experiences and perceptions of faculty members toward foreign students. It relates the informants' experiences and the meanings they attach to them. This allows the readers to vicariously experience the difficulties they encounter and give some insight into what might be done to address these challenges.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research and simple observation suggest that there is limited interaction between U.S. faculty and foreign students, yet faculty members are generally favorably disposed to having foreign students enrolled in their universities and support programs which make foreign students presence possible. Although this interest exists, many foreign students complain of feeling isolated from faculty, as well as the student body.

It seems obvious that academics would be drawn to the intellectual stimulus of interacting with students from other cultures. One might expect that both faculty and American students would seek out those who are foreign. But the reality is different. There seems to be a combination of linguistic, cultural, and psychological barriers from both sides. The author will present a discussion of the four primary themes that have emerged as revealed through the interview data.

These themes revealed that while some faculty welcome foreign students enthusiastically, others express reservations. The themes also revealed the

shared assumptions, meanings and values of the professors and shed light on how little is known concerning the relationship between foreign students and their relationship to American professors. Each instructor that was interviewed did carefully qualify that they did not have extensive experience with foreign students or individual ethnic groups. The data from this research revealed that some changes need to be made to improve this relationship.

In studying the themes of the university culture of professors, the four primary themes that emerged from the interview data concerning foreign students were English language ability, communication and learning styles in the classroom, cultural awareness, and cross-cultural training.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ABILITY

The first theme, the importance of English language ability, was a major concern for professors. For some of them, the feeling was that if the English language ability was sufficient, any other problems paled in comparison. There was a consensus among professors that foreign students are unaware of the number of total language skills that are necessary for them to be successful in mainstream University classes.

Whether coming straight from their native countries or from ESL classes, foreign students were perceived as overestimating their English language skills.

Specifically, one professor felt that perhaps ESL and intensive language programs “coddled” these students. “All the personal attention, the mothering, and the unnatural setting, i.e. no competition from American students perhaps lulls these students into a false sense of security.”

Another aspect of English language proficiency that was specifically mentioned was the lack of consistency in the level of their skills. Foreign students might be strong in verbal or listening skills but very weak in writing. Or if the writing is at an acceptable level they might have difficulty keeping up with the reading assignments. When tape recorders were heavily relied on and electronic translators were used on exams, professors began to wonder if these students really were ready for mainstream classes.

There was no attempt by the professors to lay blame for these problems on the foreign students or the ESL programs, however several informants felt it was the university’s responsibility for admitting under-prepared students, thereby creating the situation of overestimation of abilities. Admitting these students, then in turn, does an injustice to both the foreign students and the professors. The students are frustrated and the professors don’t like feeling as if they are unkind or unsympathetic. One professor even mentioned that in light of the fact that these students are an increasing market for universities, it would be wise for the universities to consider these types of problems expediently.

One of the most frequently mentioned problems was the fact that foreign students are reluctant to use oral skills and speak out. Their reticence was mostly attributed to nervousness about language ability or shyness. A few professors recognized that there was a cultural component in their hesitancy to speak out and two professors said that they had noticed foreign gender roles in this respect. In one particular case a professor said, "It finally dawned on me that she was afraid to speak up because she might show up her male co-nationals who were also in the class." It is obvious from such observations that professors *do* notice and sometimes note these differences, but not in any systematic way. In general, however, in classes where verbal participation was expected, foreign students did not excel.

While speaking and writing skills might be more evident, listening and reading skills were not so obvious. Some professors felt "blank expressions" during lectures caused them to question whether anything was really being processed by the foreign students. Several informants said, if they called on a foreign student and the student clearly did not understand or could not respond, that they would not call on that student again "so as not to embarrass them." Copious note-taking was observed when overhead transparencies were used but not during straight lecturing. This also reinforced the professor's perception that the internationals were not comprehending everything that was being said.

In general, professors were not aware of the reading and listening skills until students started falling behind in class assignments. Sometimes during office hours, instructors would notice for the first time that a foreign student did not understand them. Unanimously the professors stated that a foreign student had “never requested him/her to speak more slowly during a lecture.” Interestingly, most of them said they would have attempted to comply as long as it was not detrimental to the rest of the class. They also reported that foreign students were much more communicative in one- on -one situations with them than when put in groups or partners with their American classmates. Not one of the professors related this to anything cultural but assumed it was nervousness instead.

Reading was rarely recognized as a problem for foreign students unless they were requested to read out loud in class or during office hours. Falling way behind in homework assignments was usually the first indication of reading problems. One professor said that he did not realize that one of his students was looking up virtually every word he did not know in his bi-lingual dictionary until he requested a conference with him. The professor was shocked when he asked him to explain a passage, and the student looked up three words in one sentence! The professor felt sorry for the student but did not feel that this was his province and referred the student to a tutor.

Professors are aware that a standardized test of English skills exists for admissions to American universities and that ESL courses are available. They support these programs and realize that they play a role in English language proficiency. However, they feel that success in the TOEFL exam is not an accurate predictor of academic success. Like the SAT and the GRE, standardized tests cannot predict extraneous variables that affect the success of a student. None of the professors had ever seen the TOEFL exam but nevertheless suggested that, "perhaps it needed a higher standard."

Writing, in particular, was perceived as a weakness for foreign students. Several informants suggested raising the requirements for writing on the TOEFL exam. (Currently the TWE, Test of Written English is not required on the TOEFL exam). Foreign students writing was described as "disorganized" and "incomprehensible." The students "did not seem to know how to make their point." The professors from the English departments were more sympathetic to the foreign students' language problems and also more frequently mentioned "cultural problems" than the faculty from the other departments. Presumably this is because of their intense involvement with language arts and a higher enrollment of foreign students in their classes. Also perhaps they are more aware of these same problems with the American students in the same classes.

Overall professors indicated a positive attitude toward ESL classes provided through intensive language programs. One informant said, however, that he did not have much faith in ESL classes and thought that they did not do an adequate job of preparing foreign students. Another, on the other hand, said she thought the task must be formidable to bring a student from an absolute beginner up to TOEFL standard in such a short time. Yet another suggested that there should be a forum of some kind for professors and ESL instructors to interact. This, it was felt, would be mutually beneficial and would also, no doubt, benefit the foreign students.

Faculty want to raise acceptable standards of English language ability for mainstream university course work. It was strongly felt that foreign students should not require remedial work by the professor but instead should be referred to tutors and learning centers. Additionally, it was strongly felt that foreign students do not utilize these resources nearly enough since so few of them seem to be aware of them. Some professors were willing to work with international students on an individual basis but only to a reasonable degree. A couple of professors indicated that they no longer do this because it became so time intensive for them and the students had become too dependent on them as well. Over and over again, informants stressed that students need to be able to write standard English in order to function in mainstream classes.

Clearly English language ability has always, and will continue to be, a focus for faculty when dealing with foreign students; but there are other significant themes that emerged during the course of the research. These themes might not be as evident as language, but they still play a major role in the perceptions of professors.

COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING STYLES

Other major factors contributing to foreign students' academic difficulties may be their cultural communication and learning styles. Many international students come from cultures that rely heavily on the spoken word rather than written communication. In such cultures, learning is based on watching and listening rather than being formally taught. These cultures also rely on shared information in their communications, and consequently their spoken language need not be explicit. The communication may, as a result, be ambiguous to the listener who is not part of the group.

In most traditional, or non-Western cultures (that is cultures other than Euro-Americans), learning styles are field dependent and holistic, rather than field-independent and analytic. These field-dependent cultures are highly sensitive to the social environment. They approach learning by paying close attention to non-verbal behavior to interpret events. They prefer group, and

prefer to memorize rather than analyze. Americans attend to discrete aspects of the environment or task, focus on verbal information (sometimes ignoring non-verbal cues) and prefer independent study and their own organization instead of tasks. Thus, it is clear to see why an American professor would not be aware of these differences on any daily basis and why it would be so difficult for foreign students to adapt and break with a lifetime of patterns which are subconscious and come natural.

Foreign students frequently do well on tests requiring memorization. "They also frequently request definitions where there is none and prefer that to understanding or application of their knowledge," one professor commented. "Internationals seem to be very good at regurgitating material but there is no evidence of real comprehension especially theory and conceptualization of ideas," another said. Other professors felt that students' understood the material but lacked the linguistic infrastructure to verbalize their knowledge. They could however demonstrate their knowledge in engineering fields and in math and science fields where the language was not required.

It was also mentioned that foreign students have a great deal of trouble using their imagination and have trouble doing "creative work." Faculty complained that they appear to be at a loss unless given explicit directions and assigned tasks (preferably written). Even something as simple as choosing a topic of their choice seemed alien to them. They preferred the instructor to

assign a topic to them. These observations would lead one to believe that foreign students are not used to acting independently and the role of teacher to student is different in respective cultures. Several professors had reflected on this fact.

Faculty were vaguely aware of differences in communication and learning styles pertaining to education, but rejected these theories. The majority of these professors felt they have enough to do without being unduly concerned with these problems of foreign students, especially as they did not feel they could cope with all the different ethnic groups they might encounter anyway.

“Since foreign students have made the choice to study in the U.S., it is incumbent on them to adapt to the culture in which they find themselves. International students have the responsibility to learn American patterns of communication and learning styles if they wish to appear competent,” is the way that one faculty member stated it. It was thought that these issues should be addressed before admission to mainstream classes. However, once foreign students are in their classes, most professors admitted they could have been more proactive in dealing with this problem by referring them to the library, computer, tutorial and learning center resources.

In spite of the fact that these cultural and stylistic problems exist for foreign students, the majority of the faculty still recognized the fact that these same students could be an excellent resource for their classroom if they can be

drawn out. Professors felt that international students are good resources, but one professor pointed out that these students should not be viewed as experts, but rather as mere exposure to another point of view for the American students. These viewpoints are of interest to the faculty and are considered to be a benefit to their American classmates. Coaxing these viewpoints out of foreign students, however, presents a challenge.

Not all faculty see foreign students as good resources.

“Behaviorally oriented social scientists have been more hesitant to accept foreign students as resources. Some felt the standards of objectivity are often sacrificed when foreign students speak about their own countries. Others have difficulties understanding what ‘cultural perspectives’ foreign students can add to their own presentations, based on the assumption that scientific principles are universal and affected only in minor ways by cultural variables. For this reason it is difficult for some faculty to identify new and different intercultural dimensions of their disciplines which go beyond what is commonly acknowledged.”⁷⁶

A couple of the interviewees expressed similar attitudes to the above and were somewhat scornful of these students being used as resources.

Thus some of the informants felt that foreign students should adhere to certain universal principles shared by their American counterparts and that culture-specific variables should not play a role. Several mentioned that they felt our similarities should be emphasized and not our differences. However, while

⁷⁶ Josef Mestenhauser and Dietmar Barsig, Foreign Students As Teachers,

similarities are important, consciousness may need to be raised regarding differences in order to better understand different learning styles and communication behaviors in the classroom.

CULTURAL AWARENESS

Where foreign students are concerned, there are genuine anxieties about confronting differences; people often avoid them by denying their existence and by arguing that everyone is, after all, human. However, it is obvious that psychological and cultural barriers cause faculty and American students to approach foreign students with trepidation, if they approach them at all. It would seem that the same force is also at work among the foreign students as several professors noted that large numbers of foreign students, when invited to participate, did not do so.

Research has shown that, in general, U.S. students feel that they can learn from foreign students, but are anxious about confrontation. Other anxieties are more subtle: guilt over U.S. affluence, fear of criticism, avoidance of unpleasant subjects like the C.I.A., corruption in multi-national corporations and personal fear of self-exposure. Professors are also concerned about these problems arising. Some of the professors had tried various approaches to

discussions but were nervous about provocation, racism, xenophobia, hurt feelings or even worse some sort of "incident".

Faculty awareness of foreign student ethnicity is often vague. They are sometimes aware of an ethnic name, physical appearance, or a religious holiday that will draw attention to a foreign students' origins. Amazingly not one informant mentioned accents or English language usage (grammatical errors or pronunciation) as a source of ethnic recognition. Most faculty said they became aware of a student being a second language learner through the fact that they were falling behind in their homework assignments. None said they had ever queried a student about his/her ethnic origins because they did not want to offend the student, even if they might be curious.

Faculty did not distinguish between sojourners and immigrants and were not aware which were which. Even if an immigrant had broad experience in the American education system, faculty did not perceive any difference. When there was ethnic recognition of a second language learner, professors felt that they neither discriminated nor applied a double standard in grading. Several professors admitted to giving foreign students more of a benefit of the doubt when it came to grading.

Certain traits seemed to make faculty aware of cultural differences in the classroom or in one- on- one conversations. The most frequently mentioned was the lack of verbal participation. They mentioned "indirectness," "awkward

silences,” and “ramblings,” descriptions they conceded might also apply to American students, but seemed more noticeable in foreign students because they are objects of curiosity or considered “exotic.” One professor said that while this perception of exoticism was unfair, he felt that it was unavoidable.

Another trait that came up frequently was foreign students unwillingness to disagree with the professor or American students. The perception was clearly that the internationals wanted to avoid conflict at all costs. Their motives were attributed to politeness and embarrassment at not being able to defend their positions as eloquently in a second language. The idea of cultural differences in conflict resolution was never mentioned by the informants.

In addition to avoidance of conflict, gender roles were occasionally noted as another cultural difference. These seem to particularly noticeable if both a man and woman of the same culture were in the same class. It was noted that the woman usually deferred to the man by not volunteering even if she knew the answer and he did not. One professor felt that he had committed a *faux pas* when he praised a woman and not the man. Other professors said that female members of certain ethnic groups were totally different people when no men were present from their culture. They were more communicative with female members of the class and more reticent with male members. While these kind of cultural differences were only occasionally noted, other behaviors were much more commonly recognized as culturally based.

Non-verbal cues were often picked up as distinguishing factors. Non-verbal cues, such as facial expression, body language, eye contact and space and distance, were observed and were the aspect most commonly mentioned by the faculty as making them culturally aware of differences. Certainly space and distance were obvious to them, particularly in relation to females. A professor recounted how a female foreign student sat far away from him in his office, even though the door was opened. He felt as if he were shouting and this made him feel uncomfortable. The whole conversation seemed "surreal." He did not say anything to the student because he did not want to embarrass her. In fact of all the professors interviewed, no one had inquired about non-verbal behavior, even though they had been perplexed at times.

Facial expression was sometimes an enigma to professors. In the classroom foreign students were often described as having "blank expressions;" or, if they did have an expression on their face, the professors could not "read them." They were not aware if the face was sullen, angry or embarrassed. Smiles were commented upon and said to occur at "inappropriate times." The professors' methods of coping was usually to "look away." They seemed to feel that something was going awry but did not know how to deal with it. Embarrassment was to be avoided for both parties.

Body language was noticed particularly in regard to posture. Foreign students were seen as having a more "formal" posture. No slouching or feet

on the desk were seen. When speaking face to face standing up, foreign students were perceived as much more erect. One informant said he was not sure if the student was paying respect or was afraid of him. Even in the corridors, it was noticed that foreign students seldom sit on the floor or lie on the benches. Another professor stated that his perception was that foreign students' body language was almost obsequious although he sensed that was not their intent.

Eye contact was perceived as being very different from the American norm because the lack of direct gaze felt disconcerting for some professors. While most of the faculty were aware of cultural difference in eye contact, the majority felt that part of communication competence was non-verbal and that foreign students needed to be made aware of the U.S. norms. Females were singled out as being very difficult to talk to at times because of their downcast eyes. Professors felt uncomfortable with this but were afraid of being misinterpreted if they tried to force eye contact. Likewise, overly intense gaze from same sex encounters made the American instructors apprehensive. It appears that non-verbal communication with foreign students does make professors more culturally aware of differences, but that there is no follow-through on the part of the professor or the foreign student to clear up misunderstandings of this nature. Presumably there might be questions and explanations if the problem were linguistic. Nevertheless, professors' perceptions of foreign students were

not limited to tangibles. They also indicated philosophical differences were observed.

Overall, faculty perceived international students' world-views in a tendency to look at humane things mathematically. Some were aware of east/west dichotomies but not of any others, and philosophical differences were sometimes noted but not really understood. Again faculty thought that this was yet another area where the "guests" should be informed of the American viewpoint; and while their own viewpoints should be respected, it was their duty to adapt as Americans would be expected to adapt in their countries, if they studied abroad.

In addition to a "mathematical" perception, both faculty and foreign students apparently experience what they perceive as ethnocentrism and xenophobia when they interact. One professor was curious as to why some students who appear to "hate the U.S." come to study here. It is well documented that foreign students perceive Americans as nationalistic, aware only of Western-orientation, and not open to or curious about their cultures. Foreign students often say that although Americans are polite, superficially friendly and generous, they are oblivious to other cultures' contributions.

Most faculty said they welcome comments or discussion concerning ethnocentrism. Few, however, claimed to have ever stopped and considered if their texts and lectures might be so. The majority felt that racism and

xenophobia were just too emotionally charged and that both Americans and foreign students usually avoided these subjects. Professors seemed to realize that what these students might share with their co-nationals would not be likely to be volunteered in an American classroom. Nevertheless, most professors thought that these issues should probably be discussed, if possible in a non-threatening environment for all.

CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING

By becoming cross-culturally competent, faculty would better understand, appreciate, support and more effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse students. Achieving cross-cultural competency would require lowering defenses, taking risks and practicing behaviors that might feel unfamiliar. It would require an open heart and a willingness to accept alternative perspectives. It might even mean setting aside some beliefs that are cherished (by both sides).

Some feel that faculty must begin by being aware of their own self and culture, and then proceed to further gain sensitivity and specific knowledge of various cultures. They can then gain the ability to engage in successful interactions with students about which both will feel positive.

Interviewed faculty were interested in cross-cultural training only if it offered something “new.” Specifically professors wished to avoid what they perceived as typical cross-cultural training - “the touchy feely” encounter group atmosphere. Not one of the ten interviewees had ever participated in cross-cultural training of any kind, though, as stated earlier, none felt that they had had extensive experience with the foreign student population. Several were aware of occasional special workshops dealing with diversity, but none had ever attended any dealing with foreign students. Some of the workshops had concerned only minority American students. Nevertheless, they all maintained that they would consider cross-cultural training if it gave specific and practical advice on how to accommodate foreign students’ needs, based on predominant ethnic groups at their respective institutions.

On the whole, the consensus seemed to be that professors were willing to “reach out” to foreign students, but were not prepared to give special treatment to these students or to neglect their American students. The author had the impression that all of the professors thought of themselves as “nice people” who cared about their students including international ones. They expressed a desire to treat foreign students fairly and to be sensitive to their special needs.

They also expressed a desire to recognize foreign students’ uniqueness , to make use of them as resources when possible and to make these students

feel good about themselves. A few mentioned that the simple process of participating in this study had raised their consciousness somewhat. Some said they might become more proactive in terms of referrals for assistance and in checking for ethnocentrism and Western bias in their texts, syllabus and lectures. A portion of them said they would also be willing to give some time of their own (within reason) to help foreign students.

Many felt that a dual cross-cultural training with foreign students would be the most beneficial. Face to face contact with foreign students seemed to appeal to them more than lectures or trainers. One professor indicated that the sessions should be interactive but not "warm and fuzzy." The trainers could stand by to assist if difficulties arose. Specific approaches, techniques and strategies for lesson plans were desirable as were components such as non-verbal, and cultural misunderstandings.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are not considered generalizable. The ten interviews were exploratory and intended as a starting point for further study. There is extreme diversity in the number of variables when dealing with foreign students. Items such as age, gender, social class, ethnic membership, educational level, duration of sojourn, and individual personality traits are too complex to generalize. And of course, most of these same variables apply to the faculty.

Faculty diversity must be kept in mind as well. Each faculty member has varying degrees of experience with foreign students, as well as his/her own political, religious and economic background. The faculty interviewed also felt that geographic regionalism and the culture of the university itself greatly affect their perceptions. Their personality, empathy or lack thereof, and attitudes toward multi-cultural education also have an effect. All this notwithstanding, the following conclusions were reached based on the ten interviews:

First, the attitudes of faculty are generally favorable toward foreign students, even if faculty behavior is not currently very proactive. It appears that

with some consciousness raising and cross-cultural training, professors are willing to take a more active role in facilitating better relationships with foreign students.

Second, faculty recognize the difficulty and importance of ESL training but also perceive a need for greater ESL emphasis on reading and writing.

According to faculty:

- a) Foreign students need help with self-assessment of their English language skills. Students must understand competition in their native countries or with other foreign students is not the same as competing in the American classroom with native speakers.
- b) Professors do not like to be perceived by foreign students as being unduly harsh on them but feel that foreign students must have realistic expectations of classes as well as realistic appraisals of their own performance.
- c) Foreign student evaluation as it now exists with TOEFL needs to be improved. International students have the misperception that if they achieve a passing score on TOEFL, they are

well prepared for mainstream American classes and many of them are not. In fact, part of the problem seems to be that students are being “trained to pass the TOEFL” rather than acquiring English language proficiency. They must be made aware of the total language skills that will be necessary for them to succeed in American university classrooms.

- d) More to the point, TWE needs to be a required part of the TOEFL. Writing is integral to their success in American academics.

Third, faculty are only slightly aware of differences in communication and learning styles but do not feel that these should be unduly emphasized as they consider that foreign students are the people who are obliged by coming to a new culture to understand and deal with cultural differences. The professor cannot be expected to provide education based on ethnic background but rather to help the internationals adapt to the U.S. norms.

Fourth, faculty recognize their own lack of cultural awareness but feel that they do try to accommodate foreign students' special needs to some extent. Although professors wish to be perceived as kind and culturally sensitive they stress that the onus of cultural awareness is on the student. They don't feel that

it is fair to American students to be so concerned with foreign students' needs that American students' needs are diminished.

Finally, faculty are willing to make an effort to improve their cross-cultural skills by means of a seminar or training program. As long as these programs focus on specialized and practical advice, they are willing to attend and listen. They would prefer an interactive approach involving foreign students as well as themselves. They would like to hear about case studies and any approaches that have already been found to be successful for daily classroom use and, if possible, field specific information.

Clearly faculty members must leave the training feeling that their time was well spent. The program must be well-organized rather than left to the chance of spontaneous interaction between students and professors. Good relationships between Americans and foreign students cannot be expected to occur through osmosis.⁷⁷

It must be kept in mind that most faculty view foreign students as here to receive an education for use in their home countries. Thus, the point of view that foreign students are resources for education of U.S. students is something of a reversal of a dominant thinking pattern. As stated previously, most training theories are based on the assumption that the person coming to a foreign culture must be prepared to understand and cope. In cross-cultural training, the

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 13.

facilitators are trying to reverse this direction, because we are concerned with the impact which a culturally different “minority” makes upon the “majority.” This is unique because nothing in the literature review would indicate a concern with this direction. Yet clearly this approach is relevant in programs of social change, in understanding the roles of so called “change agents” and in dealing with problems of relationships between educated “elites” and their publics. Foreign students should be especially interested in these experiences, because when they return to their home countries they will be, once again, a culturally different minority, attempting to make an impact on the majority⁷⁸. Therefore one might conclude by stating that this research leads one to believe that cross-cultural training for both faculty and foreign students would be beneficial and that much might be gained for the entire university environment as well.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 11.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study supports the idea that cross-cultural training would be beneficial for both faculty and foreign students. However it is limited in scope. First, the immense diversity when speaking of foreign students in terms of their ethnic group alone makes it ungeneralizable. Potentially, members of each ethnic group could have their own sub-culture with shared meanings, values, and assumptions different than that of the larger foreign student culture. Future researchers may wish to investigate just one of these sub-cultures to increase our knowledge of their particular relationship with American professors.

Another limitation of this study was the narrow regionalism of the faculty interviewed. All of them derived from relatively small Omaha colleges and universities. It is possible that faculty from large universities with high foreign student enrollments and from different regions of the U.S. might have different perceptions.

Future studies of other professor's perceptions of foreign students would be beneficial to determine if the perceptions of the Omaha professors are similar to other university professors. For example, future research might ask if cross-cultural training for American faculty would change their perceptions of foreign students. Would cross-cultural training for foreign students change their perceptions of American professors? Would new courses, concurrent enrollment

in mainstream and ESL courses, or a forum between professors and ESL specialists and instructors enhance cultural awareness? Investigating these questions in future studies might increase our understanding of the relationship between this dyad and ultimately benefit all in the university community.

APPENDIX A

Interviewing

At the beginning of the interview, the author gave a definition of the term "foreign students" to mean sojourners as opposed to immigrants. Following are the questions the author attempted to interject during the interview:

1. Would you tell me about the extent of your experience with foreign students in your classes at any time during your academic career?
Would you tell me about your awareness of numbers of foreign students in your class?
2. What kinds of things made you aware of the presence of foreign students in your class?

Prompts:

- A. The presence of an ethnic name on the roster
- B. The student's spoken English
 1. The student's accent
 2. The student's English language proficiency
- C. The student's written English
- D. The student's non-verbal cues

E. Student's physical appearance

3. What are your feelings regarding multi-cultural education?
4. What do you consider adequate English skills to attend American university classes?
5. Tell me about your experiences regarding foreign students' academic performance.
6. Describe to me what it is like when you converse with a foreign student.
7. How would you describe foreign students' writing skills? Oral skills?
8. Relate to me any experiences you have had relating with foreign students in terms of demands on your time or their expectations. For example, after class or office hours.
9. Tell me about any experiences, good or bad, you have had with foreign students as a result of cultural differences. (Non-verbal, etc.)
10. Have you ever been aware of ethnocentrism in your textbook or in your own lectures? If so, did you change anything?
11. What are your feelings regarding a cross-cultural training program for faculty and foreign students? If such a program existed, would you attend if it were not obligatory? If you attended what kinds of things would you hope to learn?