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Modupe Soremi  
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EXAMINATION OF THE CHALLENGES FACED BY FOREIGN-BORN STUDENTS IN A  
STATE COLLEGE THAT MAY PROLONG/PREVENT GRADUATION.

By

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership  
in the College of Education and Human Performance  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term  
2017

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research study stems from several reports indicating the increasing competitiveness of the world economy, the requirement of at least an associate degree in the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. labor market, and the unprecedented increase in the foreign-born population in the United States since the 1970s (U.S. Census Bureau Web, 2016; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projection, 2009; President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), 2009). Understanding the challenges faced by foreign-born students at state colleges will create an avenue for recommending solutions to many these challenges, thereby increasing their educational attainment and economic productivity, hence preparing more Americans for the competitive 21st century global market.

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the researcher explored, interpreted, and described challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in a State college that could prevent/prolong their graduation. In addition, the researcher solicited recommendations for improvement in order to gather the necessary information to inform the creation of a comprehensive support center to address the challenges identified.

Pilot study data were collected from two sources including focus group discussions and survey. The survey was administered to all students enrolled in college credit classes at the college and two focus group discussions were held in 2017 spring semester. The result of the survey provided the preliminary data on FBS and collected information from those interested in further research participation via focus group discussions. Data were analyzed using suggested methods of analysis by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2007).

Using the College Impact Model and Socio-cultural theory as a framework, this pilot study found that foreign-born students experience social, academic, personal, organizational, and

mentorship challenges. Based on participants' recommendations, the conclusion is for the college to provide more opportunities to engage with both faculty, staff, native students, and other FBS; provide proper advising; provide avenues for cultural engagement for all; provide financial advising; consolidate and publicize all resources available to support students at the college (such as information regarding the honors society, volunteer society...); offer formal and informal English classes to FBS; hire qualified staff with proper training to each department (for example, placement services, advisors...); and hire bi/tri-lingual staff.

In phase II of this dissertation, an Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) was created as a comprehensive support center for foreign-born students. It is the intent of the researcher that the findings from this study will inform and provide clear direction for programs and policy implementations that will enhance the success of foreign-born students at Victory State College.

I dedicate this dissertation in practice to my husband and my three beautiful girls, who supported me with all they had during this long process.

•

For understanding my absence in mind, body, and soul; for pulling me up when I am drowning and overwhelmed with work; and for your unconditional love.

•

Through thick and thin we did this together, for without your cooperation, consistent reminder not to give up, and help, this would not have been possible.

•

Thank you for pushing and supporting me.

•

It is now clear to me that with God ALL things are possible, literally!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'll like to sincerely acknowledge my dissertation chair and my personal cheerleader, Dr. Carolyn Hopp. You believed in me that I can get this done even when everything visible indicated that this work is not possible. You are the blue print of what an educator should be. I look up to you and only hope to be an amazing and caring educator as you are to ALL students. I will never forget you because I am convinced that without your support, push, pull, and thug, this would not have been possible. You are a blessing to me and my family. THANK YOU is an understatement.

To Dr. Thomas Vitale as the program director, I say thank you for opening this great door of opportunity to me. As a professor, I say thank you for giving me the time and for nurturing me through the writing process. I am a better writer today because of your impact in my life.

To other committee members Dr. Richelle Joe, Dr. Thomas Cox, and Dr. Mutani Motumbo, your experience and the feedback that you provided made a difference. Thank you for your contribution that strengthened this work.

To my one and only doctoral sister, Dr. Shalander Samuels (yeah!). I love you so much. You promised to be here till the end and here you are. I am so glad that I met you and words are not even enough to express how much I appreciate your academic sisterhood.

To my awesome colleagues in Altamonte Suite 216, thank you for your support throughout data collection and beyond. Your friendship and mentorship encouraged me throughout this dissertation process.

To my department dean (Dr. Jobe) and Mrs. Jackie Dean for giving me the professional push to start this program, and for your consistent push to continue to the end. I am grateful for your support.

To the students that participated in this study, I say a BIG THANK YOU for without your contribution, there will not be a study.

Finally, to my family and friends, who supported and encouraged me throughout my studies. With a heart that is grateful, I say thank you for all you sacrificed to support me to the END!

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS**

ASEC	Academic and Social Engagement Center
EAP	English for Academic Purpose
ELD	English Language Development
FBS	Foreign-born Students
NS	Native Students

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

During an election year, it is no surprise that immigration is at the center stage of political rhetoric. In many speeches, debates, conversations, and news reports, the topic of immigration is attracting much attention. Despite political rhetoric is the fact that as the U.S. foreign-born population increases so does the portion of the foreign-born population in American higher educational system. Based on the data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the enrollment of the foreign-born and their children in the United States' higher education system was 34.7 percent in 2003 compared to 39.6 percent in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003 & 2013). Similarly, as the world economy is increasingly more competitive, America's comparative advantage in the global market depends on the education and skills of its workers. Job opportunities requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience in the next decade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projection, 2009). Boosting the success rate of all students should be a national priority, not only for individuals but for the nation.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the foreign-born are defined "as individuals who had no U.S. citizenship at birth. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylums, legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), and persons residing in the country without authorization (illegal immigrants). The terms foreign-born and immigrants are used interchangeably" (U.S. Census Bureau web, 2016)

In 2014, the United States foreign-born population was more than 42.4 million and represented 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population of 318.9 million (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

Today, the U.S. foreign-born population and their U.S. born children are approximately 81 million, representing 26 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). That is, one out of every four Americans is an immigrant or is a child of at least one foreign-born parent. The Pew Research Institute, however, estimated that by 2065 that number will rise to one in three (Cohn, 2015).

As the American foreign-born population grew and became more diverse, so did the portion of foreign-born in American higher education institutions, particularly at state colleges. As of 2010 about 27% of the young adults in United States' Colleges were foreign-born or children of foreign-born (United States Census Bureau, 2016). A large percentage of these young adults start their post-secondary education at a community college because of its open access admissions policy, affordability, convenient locations, and availability of flexible course schedules as well as developmental courses. In President Obama's words, "anyone with a desire to learn and to grow, to take their career to a new level or start a new career altogether... has the opportunity to pursue their dream" at a state or community college (President Obama's Speech at Macomb Community College, 2009).

Since foreign-born are an integral part of the United States, it is imperative to educate American foreign-born in order for the nation to remain globally competitive. Research indicates that foreign-born face significant challenges to gaining access to and succeeding in higher education (Sutherland, 2011; Conway, 2010; Olneck; Ordovensky & Hagy, 1998; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). Some of the challenges include adjusting to a culturally different country, social isolation, lack of information about postsecondary education, work and family obligations,

financial needs, academic preparation and achievement, and limited English proficiency (Erismas & Looney, 2007).

Understanding the challenges faced by the foreign-born students at state colleges will create an avenue for recommending solutions to some or all of the challenges. Furthermore, not only will this increase their educational attainment and economic productivity, but it will prepare more Americans for the competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century global market.

### **Problem Statement**

Numerous Research conducted has been on foreign-born students (FBS) in education in general (Rong & Grant, 1992; Ogbu, 1991; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Hirschman and Wong, 1986) and not specifically on foreign-born in state colleges. Vernez and Abrahamse's (1996) research on the education of immigrants was one of the first studies of immigrants in community colleges (mostly called State College today). The authors compared the educational attainment of foreign-born students to that of their native-born mates, and concluded that nativity was relatively less influential on college enrollment and graduation of foreign-born students when compared to race and ethnicity. Their study also showed that foreign-born students were 10 percent more likely to enroll in community college than native born students. Bailey and Weininger (2002) examined the experiences of immigrants and native minorities at City University of New York and also confirmed that ethnic background and race had a stronger influence on post-secondary school experience than nativity. "In particular, foreign-born community college graduates who attended high school abroad were the most successful; 42 percent of those who subsequently transferred to senior institutions earned a baccalaureate degree, compared with only 35 percent of native-born transferees" (Bailey & Weininger, 2002, p. 5).

Though several researches confirmed that, overall, foreign-born students do well academically compared to their native-born counterparts (Conway, 2009, 2010; Bailey & Weininger, 2002; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996), other research shows that foreign-born students in the community college system are faced with some unique challenges (Sutherland, 2011, Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011, The College Board, 2011, Batalova & Terrazas, 2010). Sutherland (2011) conducted a qualitative research study on seven black, foreign-born men in a community college and found that peers, family, and community played a significant role in their academic achievement.

Some of the challenges of foreign-born students at community colleges are similar to the challenges faced by native born students. Some of the challenges common to native- and foreign-born students are financial, work, and family pressures as well as the typical developmental issues faced by all students (Increasing Opportunity for Foreign-born Students, 2011). Other challenges unique to foreign-born students found in several studies are the need for English language acquisition, the lack of social support networks, racial labeling, post-traumatic stress syndrome, documentation challenges, unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and norms, the feeling of being an outsider (absence of social acceptance), and cultural adjustment issues (Sutherland, 2011, Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, & Suarez-Orozco, 2011, The College Board, 2011, Batalova & Terrazas, 2010).

Despite all research around the challenges faced by foreign-born students in U.S. higher education, research points out how much we don't know about foreign-born students in state colleges. Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco, and Suarez-Orozco (2011) reiterated the scarcity of research on foreign-born students attending community colleges and they urge continuous research on this

student population to broaden and to increase understanding of the experiences and outcomes of foreign-born students, specifically those attending United States community colleges.

As the population of the foreign-born continues to increase in the United States, and they seek educational opportunities, the problem of practice that this dissertation addresses is the challenges faced by foreign-born students that may prolong/prevent graduation at a local state college.

### **Background of the Problem in the Organization**

Victory State College (VSC) is a member of the Florida College System, where VSC ranked at 13<sup>th</sup> of the 28 state college members in terms of the associate degrees awarded (“Florida Department of Education” n.d.). Traditionally, colleges received state funding based on full-time students’ enrollment numbers at the beginning of the semester. Colleges were encouraged to enroll students to fulfill its open access policy to all. The problem with this type of model is that colleges were only motivated to enroll students and were less concerned about the educational attainment of these students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Florida began a funding model to allocate a portion of its funding to colleges based on performance indicators such as course completion, transfer rates, time to degree, the number of degrees awarded, job placement/continuing education, entry level wages, retention rates, or the number of low income and minority graduates (Jongbloed & Vossensteyn, 2001; Alexander 2000; Layzell 1999). This performance funding model came with an emphasis on quality and getting a return on investment for public dollars spent on higher education rather than on enrollment numbers (“Complete College America”, 2006).

VSC began to pay close attention to its college student graduation rate. The graduation rate in 2013 was 35.3 percent for students that graduated in 3 years. That is of every 100 students enrolled, only about 35 graduated in three years. Low graduation rate is a problem for the college because this decreases its funding base. It will also affect job placement/continuing education, entry level wages, and the number of low income and minority graduates (“National Conference of State Legislatures”, 2015). This means that four out of the ten performance indicators used in the state of Florida are being affected.

### **Key Stakeholders: Who is affected?**

The stakeholders affected by this problem are the foreign-born students, the institution, faculty, staff, the college, parents, employers, and the community at large.

First, the foreign-born students enrolled at the college are affected because they may suffer from stress associated with being in an unfamiliar environment. The most commonly identified stress related issues are social isolation and cultural shock; as well as academic, social, cultural, linguistic, and financial stressors (Sutherland, 2011; Teranishi, Saurez-Orozo, & Suarez-Orozo, 2011; Olneck 1993; Ogbu 1991). If their challenges are not addressed, they may not succeed at the college or their time in college may be prolonged.

Second, the college staff provide services outside of the classroom. Students encounter staff at enrollment, registration, on the phone, and through counseling and advising. Therefore, their understanding of the foreign-born students and the challenges they face is crucial to their success in fulfilling their roles (Friedman, 2007).

Third, when faculty lack the knowledge or understanding of teaching students from a different culture, student happiness on campus and later success in the workplace, that are critical

to the economic future of their educational institutions, can be undermined and without connecting to students, faculty may be less effective in teaching FBS (Schuetz, 2008; Kuh, 2007; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976; Tinto, 1975). Faculty's awareness of recent trends in U.S foreign-born populations and their cultures will improve faculty effectiveness in developing their students.

Fourth, the institution will suffer low graduation rates from foreign-born students faced with different challenges that may prolong/prevent them from graduation. Unsuccessful foreign-born students will further affect the community at large because taxpayer's funds might not be used to the maximum capacity. An unemployable student or a student employable with extensive training needs will prove the educational institution a failure. That is, students have wasted valuable time and resources, a devastating outcome for parents, students, employers, tax payers, and the community (Gross & Godwin, 2005). Therefore, employers and the local community/state colleges must work together in identifying the skills required by employers, include these skills as part of their curriculum in order for all stakeholders to benefit from trained and well educated college graduates (Gross & Godwin, 2005).

### **Significance of the Problem**

The 2008-2018 Economic and Employment Projection by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, projected a 10.1 percent increase in total employment during that decade, indicating a total of 15.3 million new jobs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The projection emphasized an aging and a more racially and ethnically diverse labor force. This supports the diversity in the Foreign-born population data reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in the 2010 Current Population Survey. Additionally, the report pointed out that nearly half of all new jobs and one-third of total job

openings during this decade will be in occupations requiring a post-secondary degree or award. Furthermore, “Among the education and training categories, the fastest growth will occur in occupations requiring an associate degree” (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009).

In 2009, the results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) showed 15-year-old students in the U.S. performed about average in reading and science, and below average in math (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). PISA focuses on young people’s ability to use their knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges conducted by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Among the 33 other countries of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, six countries had higher average scores than the United states in Reading; 17 countries had higher average scores on the mathematics literacy scale; and 12 countries had higher average scores on the science literacy scale (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar & Shelley, 2010).

Only 30 percent of U.S. students scored above reading literacy level 4 (these are students that are capable of difficult reading tasks), while 18 percent scored below baseline level of proficiency. In mathematics literacy, only 27 percent scored at or above average proficiency level 4, at this level, “students can perform higher order tasks such as solving problems that involve visual and spatial reasoning ... in unfamiliar contexts” (OECD 2004, p. 55); and 23 percent scored below baseline level of mathematics proficiency (level 2). On the science literacy scale, 29 percent of U.S. students scored on or above level 4, “in which students can complete higher order tasks such as “select[ing] and integrat[ing] explanations from different disciplines of science or technology and link[ing] those explanations directly to...life situations” (OECD 2007, p. 43).

Though the 2009 PISA scores are all higher than those from 2003 and 2006, they are way behind top performing countries such as South Korea, Finland, China, and Canada. In addition to these mediocre performances on the PISA exam was the decrease in the U.S. college graduation rate (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). In 1995 OECD reported that the U.S. ranked second in college graduation rates compared to 13<sup>th</sup> place in 2008, and only 8 countries out of the 34 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries ranked lower than the U.S (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011).

In response to these challenging results, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative at Malcomb Community College in 2009 to expand the capacity of the nation's community college system in order to increase the number of students graduating from college by 2020. "Community colleges are an essential part of our recovery in the present -- and our prosperity in the future. This place can make the future better, not just for these individuals but for America" (President Obama, 2009). Increasing educational attainment is not negotiable for America as today's high school and college graduates have to compete for jobs in a highly skilled global market.

Improving the education attainment of the foreign-born in the United States is key to increasing its college graduation rates, with the intention to prepare American youths for the competitive global economy. When tested, those born outside the OECD countries scored about 52 points below students without foreign-born background (OECD, 2012). Since the population of foreign-born is increasing, educating them can only boost the competitive advantage of America.

By increasing the educational attainment of the generation born in 2010, it could add about \$41 trillion to the U.S. economy over their lifetime (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). Hanushek and Woessmann (2011) concluded in their study “that the education impact of improved educational outcome remains enormous” (p. 1). Wadhwa et al (2007) confirms that education is correlated with high rates of entrepreneurship and innovation. “The U.S. economy depends upon these high rates of entrepreneurship and innovation to maintain its global edge” (Wadhwa et. al, p. 14, 2007). Therefore, educating the growing number of U.S. foreign-born is a vital sign of its capacity to participate in the global economy.

Significance of the problem to me as a research began when I read an article in the *Chronicles of Higher Education* in 2009, where I read that the graduation rate of a 2-year public college was 20 percent. This means that of every 100 students enrolled in a 2-year college, only 20 will graduate. The article went on to state that the 20 percent graduation rate was based on students that were reenrolled for three years. Since students were supposed to spend two years in this type of institution, a 20 percent graduation rate in three years seemed unacceptable. See table 1 below for the graduation rate of the 2008 Cohort.

The more I read, the more interested I became. After a while, I realized the magnitude of the importance of this research. There are several factors that might affect students in state colleges, factors such as prior knowledge before enrollment, socioeconomic status, employment engagement, and so on. Though the ability for all students to succeed is dear to my heart, I realized that I needed to narrow my studies to a population in order to conduct a feasible research.

Table 1  
 Graduation Rate of 2008 Cohort in a 2-year college

<i>Graduation Rate</i>			
	<i>All</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
<i>All Institution</i>	27%	34%	31%
<i>Public</i>	20%	21%	20%
<i>Private nonprofit</i>	50%	52%	51%
<i>Private for-profit</i>	59%	63%	62%

*Graduation within 150% of normal time*

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2012, Graduation Rates component. See Digest of Education Statistics 2012, table 377.

I resolved to pursue this topic specifically on foreign-born students because of the magnitude of their population growth in the United States, the ability to impact the pipeline of qualified employees for the nation, and the potential economic impact on the economy. In addition to the above, I must reveal that I am an immigrant myself and realizing that there were several challenges in my navigation through my education that could have been avoided. My intension is that through the pilot studies of this dissertation and the solution suggested there after to alleviate future foreign-born students of these challenges faced socially and academically in a state colleges.

**Exploratory Research Question(s)**

The problem of practice that this dissertation will address is the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong and/or prevent graduation. The purpose is to examine the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong/prevent graduation and to determine strategies to solve them.

The following sub-questions will inform the problem of practice central to this research:

What are the lived academic experiences (challenges) of foreign-born students attending a local state college in the United State?

What are the lived social experiences or (challenges) of foreign-born students attending a local state college in the United States?

What are the services needed to address these challenges faced by foreign-born students to ensure success at the state college?

### **Organizational Context**

This is a problem in this organization because as data continue to show an increase in the number of foreign-born students in the United States, there is no obvious arrangement that caters to the needs of foreign-born students within this organization. The challenges faced by these students, if not addressed, could cause their departure or prolong their time at the college contributing to the college's low graduation rate.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the foreign-born population in the United States has quadruple between 1970 and 2010. In 1970, the total foreign-born population was reported by the U.S. Census Bureau to be 9.6 million, this was only 4.7 percent of the population. By 2010, the number of U.S. foreign-born had increased to 40 million, or 12.9 percent of the population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). See figure 1 for U. S. population growth by decades since 1970.

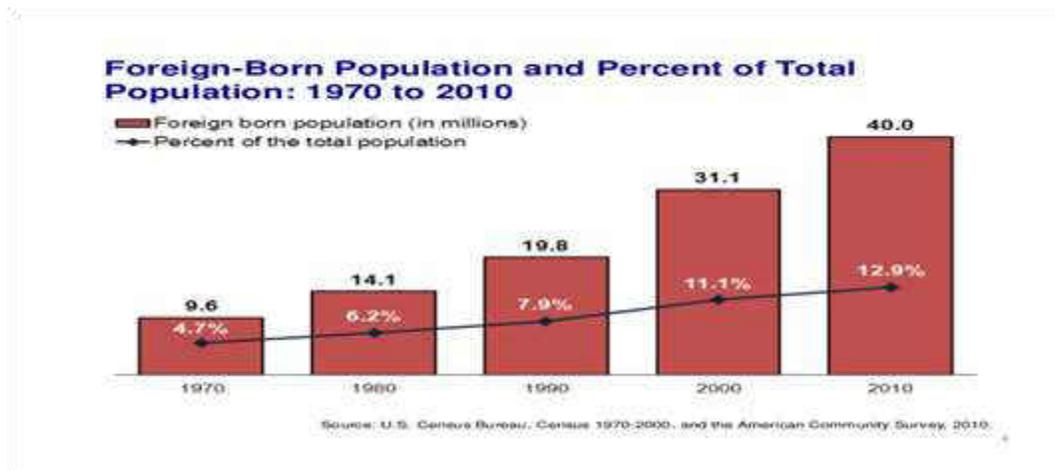


Figure 1. Foreign-born population and percent of total population: 1970 to 2010.

Reprint from U.S. Census Bureau, Census 1970-2000, and the American Community Survey, 2010, Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data.html>

Today, U.S. foreign-born and their U.S. born children are approximately 81 million, representing 26 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). That is, one out of every four Americans is foreign-born or is a child of at least one foreign-born parent. The Pew Research Institute, however, estimated that by 2065 that number will rise to one in three (Cohn, 2015).

If this foreign-born population is increasing in the United States, Florida, as one of the states receiving the largest numbers of foreign-born people (Gonzalez & Darling-Hammond, 1997), will also assume a large portion of the foreign-born students in its classrooms. Figure 2 presents data collected by the U.S. census bureau in 2010 revealing the percentage distribution of

foreign-born population by state.

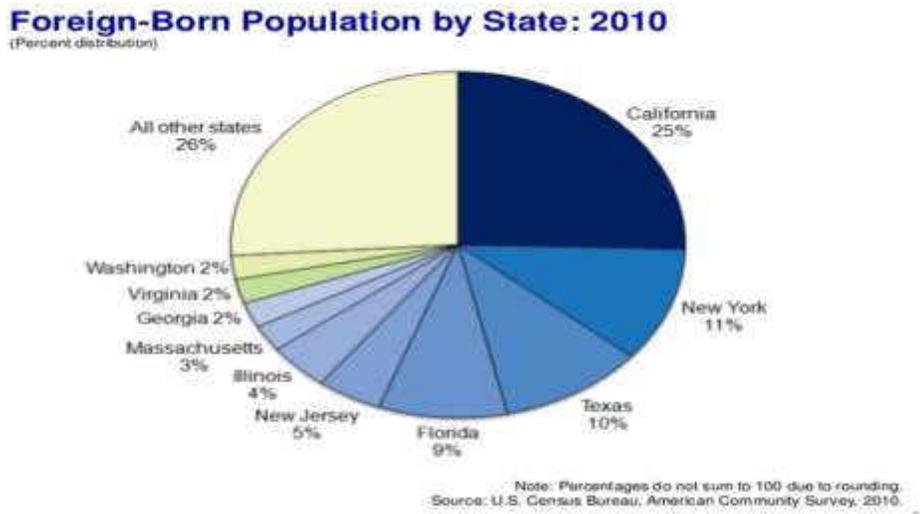


Figure 2. Foreign-born population by state: 2010.

Reprint from U.S. Census Bureau. American Community Survey, 2010, retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>

Data on foreign-born students enrolled at Victory State College (VSC) are limited or non-existent. The Institutional Effectiveness and Research center of the college provides data on international students dating back to 2011. The data provided was just a rough estimate of about a thousand international students enrolled at the college annually. Based on the national data from the U.S. Department of Education (2006), 25 percent of the 6.5 million degree seeking students in community (state) colleges came from a foreign-born background in 2003/04. These data indicate that a quarter of students in state colleges are foreign-born. Since VSC is located in

one of the largest U.S. states receiving foreign-born population, close attention must be placed on FBS enrolled in VSC.

Victory County is a county of seven cities and a population of 422,718 in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), indicating a 15.8 percent growth from 2000 data, and 11.8 percent of Victory county population are foreign-born today (“Victory County”, 2016). VSC, located in Victory County Florida, was originally established in 1965 through Florida State Legislature as Victory Junior College (Victory State College, Web) and started operation in August of 1966 with 800 students (Victory State College, Web). In 2014/15 academic year, SSC had a total of 29,683 students enrolled, 1,551 faculty and staff, and awarded 6,319 degrees and certificates (Victory State College Fast Fact Sheet, web). VSC today educates a large portion of Victory County population. A demographic characteristic of Victory State College student is presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
Victory State Population Data

	1997/1998		2005/2006		2015/2016	
Caucasian	19,822	72%	16,805	57%	14,246	49%
Latino	3,100	11%	4,699	16%	7,575	26%
African American	3,019	11%	3,529	12%	4,914	17%
Asian/Pacific Islander	953	4%	937	3%	1,208	4%
American	172	1%	125	<3%	N/A	N/A
Indian/Alaska Native						
Other	439	1%	3,427	12%	1,378	4%
Total	27,505	100%	29,522	100%	29,321	100%

Even as the college grew and evolved, its mission stayed fundamentally routed in serving Victory County residents interested in post-secondary education. Today, that mission is enhancing “the educational, economic, and cultural vitality of our region by providing exemplary learning opportunities to our diverse community” (Victory State College, Web). Diversity in the community reflects an increasing population of those that are foreign-born (Zhao, Kuh & Carini, 2005).

Victory state college therefore, in a mid-sized county in Florida, must understand the challenges of the foreign born students that they serve in order to meet their needs. Consequently, Victory state college would be able to play a greater role in helping foreign born students achieve levels of education that could lead to the students’ success.

### **Definition of Action Research**

Herr and Anderson defined action research as the inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them (2015). Action research is usually conducted by practitioners intentionally to improve their own practice or context. This study is an action research, where the researcher investigates the challenges faced by foreign-born students in a state college. This process is fluid until the research is complete, it will be conducted as learning that will lead to a change within my college. It starts by identifying a problem worth learning about, clarifying qualitative question approach, identifying questions, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting data, and creating an action plan to correct the problem.

### **Positionality**

This problem of practice is important to me because I am a foreign-born and a professor at a local community college who is passionate about the success of all students. I teach Principles of Economics, both Microeconomics and Macroeconomics, as a general education credit class to students intending to graduate with an Associate degree or transfer to a 4-year college. To me all students' desired outcome matters and students' success is important and essential to my work. In a college where the graduation rate is about 35 percent (Victory State Fast Fact, 2016 Web), I am concerned about the challenges faced by these students that delay or prolong their graduation.

As a researcher, Herr & Anderson (2015) will define my positionality within this problem of practice as an "Outsider in Collaboration with Other Insiders" (p. 49). I am an outsider in the context of this study in my role as a professor at the college. Since I am not a student at the college and I am in a position of power greater than that of the foreign-born students, I see

myself as a consultant seeking opinions of the insiders (foreign-born students). I attempt to solicit students' experiences at the college, analyze my findings, and decide on a course of action to change policy. This research will be conducted with the help of students as the insiders.

I am a foreign-born and everyone at the college knows that I am a foreign-born, if only through casual conversations via my accent which positions me as an insider. Though, I will conduct this study as an instructor at the college, I am also a doctoral student at University of Central Florida (UCF). Therefore, I will collaborate with the foreign-born students as an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p.45) at the college. My current experience as a doctoral student may be similar to Victory State foreign-born students' experiences. I will be able to engage students in a relaxed and comfortable setting.

My position as a professor assigns an authority that is superior and places me in a role of a consultant in this study. As a foreign-born and a doctoral student this softens my authority and puts me in an insider position, where students might at some point consider me as one of them. This is critical for this study as students become more willing to share their experiences.

These experiences may inform my judgment about this study. Therefore, the collaborative approach used in this study may reflect the researcher's experiences. My collaboration with foreign-born students, coupled with my personal experiences can enhance the willingness of the foreign-born students at the college to express their challenges, which could lead to the organizational change needed to address some of the challenges they face at the college (Herr and Anderson 2015).

### **Relationship to Other Organizational Problems**

The problem as it relates to other problems is complicated. Since time and resources are limited, the organization has to allocate resources efficiently. In the process of allocating resource, however, the college ignored a portion of its mission to enhance the educational economic, and cultural vitality of our region by providing exemplary learning opportunities to our diverse state and its first strategic goal to foreign-born students.

The influx of foreign-born students to this state, and consequently to the college, indicates that if attention is not focused on understanding the challenges faced by these students, the college's graduation rate will continue to fall. This ultimately will affect the college's first strategic goal.

When the graduation rate falls, the result is a delay in graduation or prolonged experience before successful completion of a program, consequently all the measurements of "improved student success" described above will be affected. Therefore, affecting the states formula for allocating resources to the college, this can further hinder future overall success of the college and all of its students.

### **History and Conceptualization of the Problem**

FitzGerald and Cook-Martin (2014) described the changes in the ethnic portrait of the United States based on the country of birth before migration. They revealed that prior to 1965, the immigration policy of the United States created a preference for immigration from Europe, especially from Germany. For example, in 1960, the Europeans and Canadians represented 60 percent of legal immigration, which dropped to 22 percent by 1970. When compared to the Asian share of legal immigration in the 1950s which was 6 percent, that rose to 35 percent by the

1980s, this reflects a significant change. Data from Migration Policy Institute indicate that 28 percent of foreign-born in the U.S. in 2014 were born in Mexico, making them the largest group in the country (FitzGerald, & Cook-Martín, 2014). The next largest countries of origin that account for about 5 percent each of U.S. immigration in 2014 are India, China, and the Philippines. Trailing behind these countries are El Salvador, Vietnam, Cuba, and Korea, accounting for 3 percent each. These top ten countries were the source of about 60 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population in 2014.

The collection of data on county of birth from the U.S. population began in 1850, when only 2.2 million reported as foreign-born, equating to about 10 percent of the total population (U.S. Population Spotlights, n.d.). The foreign-born population continued to increase until 1920 “peaking at 14.8 percent of total population in 1890 mainly due to high levels of European immigration” (McHugh & Morawski, 2016). By 1970 the share of foreign-born dropped to about 5 percent due to restrictive immigration legislation. The 1924 Immigration Act established the national origin quota system by setting ceilings on the number of foreign-born that could be admitted to the United States from each country. This law favored foreign-born from Northwestern Europe by placing no restriction, less restriction on Southern and Eastern Europe, and more restriction on Asia, Africa, and colonized Caribbean. “For example, the 1929 quotas gave 51,227 of the overall 150,000 annual slots to Germans, 100 to Greeks, and zero to Chinese” (Migration Policy Institute, Web, 2016).

In 1965, the United State Congress enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act which repealed the national origin admission quotas and replaced it with a seven category system based primarily on family unification. The new law increased the annual immigration limits from

154,000 to 290,000 and banned discrimination in the issuance of foreign-born visas based on “race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence” (FitzGerald, D. & Cook-Martin, D., 2014). This law was created primarily in response to foreign and domestic pressures. Foreign pressure came from the growing newly independent countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and the formation of world institutions such as United Nations, while domestic pressure came from the Anglophone settler societies, the civil right movement of the 1960s, the cold war concerns, and international reputation of the general public.

This new law transformed the ethnic image of the United States. The share of Asian legal immigration soared from 6 percent in the 1950s to 35 percent by the 1980s and 40 percent in 2013 (FitzGerald, D. & Cook-Martin, D., 2014). Between 1970 and 2014, the number of U.S. foreign-born more than quadrupled, increasing from 9.6 million to 42.4 million (Migration Policy Institute, 2016).

### **Conceptualization**

#### **Definition of “Foreign-born”**

In the United States, there is no general consensus for the definition of foreign-born which has resulted in multiple interpretations of who is foreign-born. It is compelling at this point to clarify the differences between a foreign-born, an immigrant, and an international student. A review of the literature leads me to believe that this is necessary since the majority of the research erroneously used them interchangeably.

The U.S. Census Bureau has no definition for immigrants but categorizes them as foreign-born individuals. The United State Citizen and Naturalization (USCIS Glossary of Terms) uses “alien” to describe immigrants and define them as “any person not a citizen or

national of the United States. International students “is defined as anyone studying at an institution of higher education in the United States on a temporary visa that allows for academic coursework. These include primarily holders of F (student) visas and J (exchange visitor) visas” (Institute of International Education, web). Foreign-born, also known as non-native, “includes anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth, including those who became U.S. citizens through naturalization. Native-born population includes anyone who is a U.S. citizen at birth (U.S. Census Bureau, web). Lay people define immigrants basically the same way that the Census Bureau defines foreign-born, and sometime they refer to foreign-born as foreigner. In this study foreign-born and immigrants will be used interchangeably to encompass all the definitions above. Simply meaning anyone residing in the United States, however born out of the United States. For this study we consider all students that were born in a different country other than the U.S. as foreign-born or immigrant, this include refugees and international students.

The subjects of this study are students intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor’s degree. I do this to focus on individual student’s goal and not on institutional goals, and to intentionally exclude students that attend college to learn English only or for recreational purposes. Therefore, this study assumes graduation as the goal to which a student is striving. Hence, we consider any factor that impedes the achievement of this goal as a challenge.

### **Theoretical Constructs**

While there are several studies on foreign-born students and their experiences in educational institution in general (Rong & Grant, 1992; Ogbu, 1991; Sue & Okazaki, 1990; Hirschman and Wong, 1986), little has been done on foreign-born and their experiences in the

state college context. Using the national High School Beyond longitudinal data set of 1980's tenth and twelfth grade students, Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) described the educational attainment of foreign-born at the postsecondary level. They concluded that race and ethnicity were more important factors than nativity in foreign student's educational attainment. That is a student's place of birth has no influence over student college outcome. Bailey and Weininger (2002) compared foreign-born and native minorities in terms of the number of credits earned, the likelihood to transfer to a four-year college, and of completing an associate degree and "found out that nativity, race, and ethnicity are all related to these outcomes" (p. 359).

The reasons why some students succeed while others do not is remarkable and several researchers have dedicated time and other resources to seek understanding of this phenomenon (Astin, 1977, 1984; Tinto, 1978, 1987, 1993; Weidman, 1984; Pace, 1979; Lacy, 1978; Chickering, 1969, Berger & Milem 2000). The conceptual frameworks chosen for this study are the college impact model and sociocultural theory.

### **College Impact Model**

Using Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, 2005) framework to organize the following study, I seek to discover the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state colleges that may prolong and/or prevent their graduation. This framework offers a comprehensive and integrated conception of foreign-born students' experience in a state college context drawing on sociological and psychological foundations proposed by Astin (1985, 1993), Tinto (1975, 1993), and Pascarella (1985). This framework also focuses on the organizational impact of the institution on students' outcomes proposed by Berger and Milem (2000).

This model starts by examining the intra-individual changes as they occur within (inside) the student that may affect their experiences in state college. These are changes relating to nature, structure, and processes of individual human growth (Baxter & Magolda, 2001; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kohlberg, 1969; Myers, 1980; Perry, 1970; Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, or Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). King and Kitchener (1994) suggested that educated people, in this case foreign-born students in state college, can identify factors that lead to their educational outcome on their own.

Next, this study will proceed to consider the inter-individual and environmental origin of students' experience in college. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) characterized this as "college impact model" on student learning and change. Their suggestion relies on several studies that concluded that there are factors that significantly influence the academic success of students. For example, Astin (1985, 1993), Tinto (1993), Pascarella (1985), and Holland (1997) presumed that demographics and other student characteristics (such as language differences, cultural expectations, class backgrounds, ethnicity), institutional traits and ethos were variables that could explain the academic outcome of foreign-born students in the American higher educational system.

Combining the intra- and inter- individual factors that may influence state college foreign-born students may lead this researcher to a comprehensive discovery of the challenges that may prolong or prevent student graduation. The investigator of this research will have the opportunity to examine multiple factors that influence students' outcomes. All the factors that impact students' outcomes will be incorporated into four sets of primary constructs: student

precollege characteristics and experiences, the organizational context, the individual student experience, and the peer environment. These factors were based on the combination of Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory and Pascarella and Terenzini's College Impact Model.

Overall, the college impact model aligns well with this study. It was chosen as one of the conceptual frameworks because it encompasses the intra- and inter- personal factors contributing to students' experiences. These factors appear to be relevant when explaining the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state college.

### **Student Pre-College Characteristics and Experiences**

State college students enter from various arrays of life. They come with different experiences and enter at different stages of life. Terenzini and Reason (2005) "described this as precollege background characteristics, academic preparation and experiences, and social and personal dispositions and experiences" (p. 6). "The student's precollege background differences could be "in their sociodemographic traits (e.g., sex, race/ethnicity, age, parents' education, family income), their academic preparation and performance (e.g., the nature and quality of their secondary school curriculum, and abilities reflected in grades and test scores), their personal and social experiences (e.g., involvement in co-curricular and out-of-class activities), and their dispositions (e.g., personal, academic, and occupational goals; achievement motivation, and readiness to change)" (Terenzini & Reason, 2005, p. 6).

In this study, the researcher will identify how these pre-college experiences present challenges to foreign-born students that might affect foreign-born students' academic attainment.

## **The Organizational Context**

“Students enter institutions that have established (sometimes long-standing) organizational characteristics and cultures” (Terenzini & Reason, 2005. P. 7) and with the power to shape their behavior and influence their success. Berger and Milem (2000) grouped these into organizational categories. The first category deals with the “structural-demographic features” (Berger & Milem, 2000, p. 310) of the institution involving the type of control, size, mission, or admissions criteria. The second category deals with the “organizational behavior dimensions” (Berger & Milem, 2000, p. 310), which involves the behavior, culture and climate.

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), structural frame beliefs demonstrate rationality that a suitable array of formal roles and responsibilities will reduce personal conflicts to a minimum, and increase individual efficiencies in an organization. They further suggest that by appointing the right people to roles will define the organization’s mission and can bring about optimal efficiency in the organization.

This structural frame is particularly helpful in understanding the challenges of foreign-born students in state college. The institution divides its structural configuration into a variety of departments: the Board of Trustees, the administrative team, the support staff, and the academic affairs division. The college’s mission is “to enhance the region’s educational, economic, and cultural strength of central Florida by providing exemplary learning opportunities to its *diverse community*” (Victory State College Web). The institution has five basics, intertwined goals toward fulfilment of the college’s mission. This paper will only analyze the first strategic goal of the college towards the accomplishment of its mission statement. That is, the “Goal is to improve

student success measured by College Preparatory Success, Program Completion Rates, Job Placement Rates and Success in Higher Education” (Community College, n.d., para. 2).

Terenzini and Reason (2005) assume that the “institutional effects are more a function of what institutions do than what they are”. What the institution does depends on its internal organizational structures, practices, and policies, which they further categorized into “internal structures, policies, and practices; academic and student affairs programs; and the faculty culture” (p. 8). These are assumed to influence foreign-born students’ outcomes based on the kind of values that the institution promotes or discourages.

### **The Peer Environment**

Since students are social beings, this pilot study will examine the potential influence of peer student relations on the challenges of foreign-born students on their academic attainment. Astin (1993) concluded that “*the student’s peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years*” (p. 398, italics in the original).

Astin (1993) stated that student’s development, and in this case academic attainment, is affected by peer group characteristics. Therefore, this pilot study will investigate the influence of other students on foreign-born students’ challenges.

### **Individual Student Experiences**

The most influential factor over foreign-born student’s challenges and academic attainment is students own personal experience. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) indicated that students’ experiences while in college has a wide impact on student academic attainment.

Terenzini and Reason (2005) incorporated three venues of college effects on student outcome: curricular experience, classroom experience, and out-of-class experience.

By curriculum experiences, Terenzini and Reason (2005) explored student's "general education coursework, their choice(s) of an academic major field, the nature and extent of students' socialization to that field (see, for example, Smart, Feldman, & Ethington, 2000), and the degree of exposure to other academic experiences that are part of the general or major field curriculum (e.g., internships, cooperative education, study abroad)" (p. 12). In their study, student's classroom experience includes "the kinds of pedagogies to which students are exposed, the amount of writing they do, the nature and frequency of the feedback they receive from faculty members, and their instructors 'pedagogical skills'" (Terenzini & Reason, 2005, p. 12). While examining out-of-class experiences, Terenzini and Reason (2005) included "such considerations as where students live while in school, hours worked on or off-campus, involvement (or lack thereof) in various co-curricular activities, hours spent studying, and family support" (p. 13).

In this study, the researcher examines the challenges presented to foreign-born students in the classroom, out of the classroom, and with the curriculum as well as how these challenges might influence their academic achievement.

### **Sociocultural Model**

Lev Vygotsky (1978) set the foundation for sociocultural theory in psychology. Looking at the important contribution of the society on individual development, sociocultural theory emphasizes the interaction between people and the culture in which they live.

Vygotsky believed that people learn on two levels. On the first level, people learn through interaction with others. On the second level, Vygotsky introduced a “Zone of proximal development” (ZPD). He believed that people’s cognitive development is limited to their ZPD. ZPD is the area of exploration where students require help and social interaction to develop. In this zone, students require a “knowledgeable other”, someone with more experience (for example, a teacher or a more experienced peer), to support and/or facilitate the student’s learning process.

“Every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relationships between individuals” (Vygotsky, 1978, p.57).

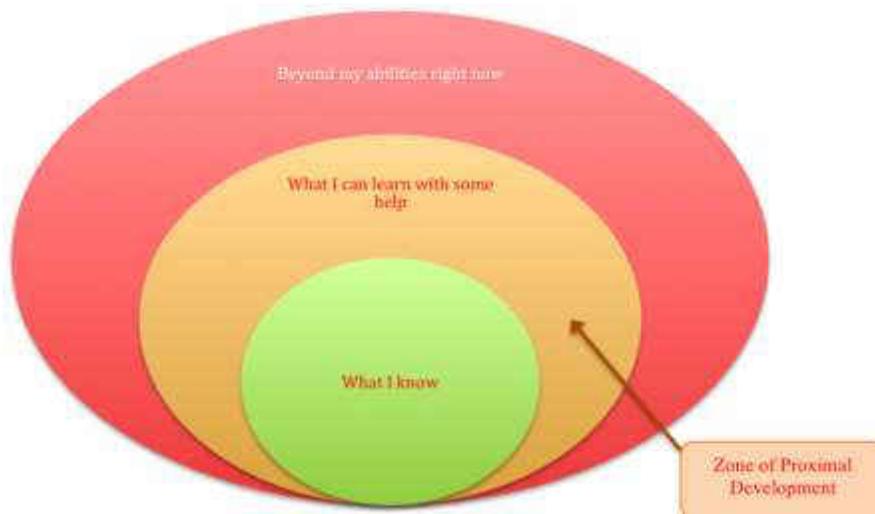


Figure 3. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development.

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This study will examine the importance of a “more knowledgeable other” in addressing the challenges of foreign-born students in a state college. Even though foreign-born students admitted to state colleges come with precollege characteristics and experience, literature led us to believe that they still encounter some difficulties in a new culture. Using sociocultural model, we will examine the influence of peer students and student-to-faculty engagement on student academic attainment.

### **Factors that Impact the Problem**

As the foreign-born population continues to increase in the United States, educators, institutions, and practitioners need to be aware of their challenges in order to address them. The problem of practice that this dissertation will address is the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong/ prevent graduation.

Table 3  
Study Preliminary Layout

Phase	Cite	Participants	Methods
Phase I:	Victory State College	Foreign-born	*Qualitics survey
The Pilot Study		students	*Focus group discussion
Phase II:	Victory State College	Program development	Creates a center that supports foreign-born students

This study consists of two major phases. In phase I, the researcher will conduct a pilot study to investigate the challenges that confront foreign-born students in a local state college. This investigation will be conducted using the College Impact Model and the sociocultural theory. The researcher will examine how the students' precollege characteristics and experiences, the organizational context, the individual student experience, and the peer environment contribute to students' outcomes in a local state college in central Florida. In phase II, the researcher seeks to develop a program that addresses many of the challenges suggested from phase I. Table 3 above presents the study preliminary layout..

Identifying the unique challenges faced by foreign-born students at state colleges would be a major contribution to the growing knowledge of state colleges in the United States. Though little research is available on this specific student body, evidence since the 1990's suggest that state colleges have a unique impact on students (Allen, 1992; Flowers & Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella, 1999; Pierson, Wolniak, Pascarella, & Flowers, 2003). Hence, additional studies of the foreign-born students' experiences in a state college setting are needed to identify the challenges faced by these students. Understanding their challenges will enlighten administrators, policy makers, faculty members, and all other stakeholders in developing programs to increase the educational achievement of these students.

The key stakeholders for this dissertation in practice include the currently enrolled foreign-born students at the college, the institution, faculty, staff, parents, employers, and the community at large. For this study, the focus will be on the enrolled foreign-born students with the end goal of completing a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor's degree.

### **The Pilot Study**

The researcher will utilize a qualitative questioning approach to describe “what” foreign-born students experience and “how” they experience it in a state college (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher’s intent is to report these multiple realities using quotes that directly states how individual participants’ experiences are different.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as “a situated activity that located the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos of the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

Since the findings from this study will inform the researcher towards the creation of a program to solve the challenges faced by foreign-born students in a state college, the researcher will seek to understand of the context through participatory paradigm or worldview. Using participatory paradigm, the researcher will rely on the participants’ view to understand their challenges in educational attainment from a state college and create a program that may reduce the challenges faced by foreign-born student in state college. Cresswell (2003) summarized a participatory study as “recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practice. Thus, at the end of advocacy/participatory studies, researchers advance an action agenda for change” (p. 22).

In addition to the above, the researcher will incorporate social constructivism in the process of understanding the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state colleges. From this perspective, the researcher seeks to make sense of the foreign-born students' environment from the participants' view point. Creswell (2003) calls this social constructivism paradigm/worldview. In social constructivism, the focus is on interaction with other people in their life setting.

The researcher will ask open ended questions to provoke participants' deep thoughts of their experiences. As discussed earlier in positionality, the researcher is aware of her cultural, personal, and historical experiences and how it might influence this research. Therefore, extra care will be taken to avoid making conclusions based on my own personal experiences. Table 4 summarizes the research design below.

Table 4  
Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design

Characteristics	Of this pilot study
Data Collection Site	Victory State College
Source of data	Phase I: Qualtrics Survey and Focus groups Phase II: Program Development
Data Analysis	Follow Moustaka's (1994) method of data analysis as follows:
Questioning Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Epoche Stage</li> <li>• Transcendental phenomenological stage</li> <li>• Imaginative variation stage, and</li> <li>• Synthesis of meaning and essences</li> <li>• College Impact Model by Pascarella &amp; Terenzini (1991, 2005)</li> </ul>
Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociocultural Theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978)</li> </ul>
Holistic Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual Experiences (Student's pre- college characteristics and experiences</li> <li>• Organizational context (The role of the college on student's academic attainment)</li> <li>• Social Interaction: Peer Influence</li> <li>• Academic Experiences (Faculty influence )</li> </ul>
Paradigm/Worldview/Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory Paradigm</li> <li>• Social Constructivism Paradigm</li> </ul>

@ adapted from Creswell (2003 p. 39)

### Data Collection

A Qualtrics survey will be utilize to gather preliminary information on student's demographics and to solicit participants for a focus group discussion. The qualitative data collected from the focus group will be used to create a program that will address, if not all, many

of the challenges identified from the survey and the focus group. In addition, the researcher will rely on research to add to students' recommendations. Due to limited time availability during this dissertation, the tangible deliverables from this dissertation in practice will not be implemented nor evaluated; though a comprehensive program that caters to the needs of foreign-born students will be created. The program model will include the program's goals, key activities and strategies, immediate and intermediate outcomes, and the outcome for students.

At the inception of this program the resources available will be in the form of funding from the Student Government Association and/or the Grant Development and Management Office at the college. This will be a division under student services of the college.

### **Research Site**

This pilot study will be conducted at Victory State College, which is in Victory County, Florida (VSC). Victory state college educates a large portion of the Victory county population. In 2014/15 academic year, VSC had a total of 29,683 students enrolled, 1,551 faculty and staff and awarded 6,319 degrees and certificates (Victory State College Fast Fact Sheet). The college has four campuses at Oviedo, Altamonte Springs, Heathrow, and Sanford/Lake Mary.

### **Participant Selection**

Criteria for selection of participation were as follows: Students must be foreign-born and enrolled in college credit course and have a defined end goal. End goal is associated with students who aspire to earn an Associate degree, a certificate, a diploma, a bachelor's degree, or transfer to a four-year college: that is, degree seeking foreign-born students. The end goal is required to interpret success or education attainment.

The researcher will use a combination of purposeful and convenient sampling due to the specific criteria of participants, that they must be foreign-born. Students will be solicited from several sources such as college faculty, Student Government Coordinators, Institutional Effectiveness and Research Center, Administrators, Students Services practitioners requesting for their help to inform current students enrolled about this study and encourage them to participate. My information will be provided through flyer so that potential study participants may contact me. The researcher will also solicit study participants from casual conversations with current students. There is no compensation or reward for participating, however, food will be provided during the focus group meeting.

In my search on sample size for the focus group discussion for this pilot study, I realized that there is no clear and evidence-based guidance. I discovered that it is generally accepted by researchers that focus group discussions with more than ten participants are difficult to control and limits meaningful interaction (Carlsen & Glenton, 2011; Merton, 2008; Halcom et al., 2007, Morgan, 1996; Kitzinger, 1995). The consensus is that mini-groups of three to six participants provides in-depth discussions while providing all participants opportunity to express their experiences (Merton, 2008; Morgan, 1996; Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996; Webb, & Kevern, 2001; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 1990). Therefore, this pilot study will identify about 6 to 10 foreign-born students for the focus group.

### **Dissertation Plan**

Today, U.S. foreign-born and their U.S. born children are approximately 81 million, representing 26 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau web, 2016). That is, one out of every four Americans is a foreign-born or is a child of at least one foreign-born parent. The

Pew Research Institute, however, estimated that by 2065 that number will rise to one in three (Cohn, 2015). This is up from 20 percent in 2000, and this percentage is expected to increase continuously (U.S. Population Survey, Census Bureau, 2000).

State colleges, in particular, are known for educating the majority of the foreign-born population in the United States. Though there is no comprehensive data available to describe foreign-born students attending American state colleges, the few available concurred that a quarter of state college students are foreign-born (Teranishi, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (2011); Bailey & Vanessa, 2006; Szelenyi & Chang, 2002).

If the population of the foreign-born continues to increase in the United States, and they seek educational opportunities mostly from a state college, administrators, faculty, staff, and policy makers need to be aware of the challenges they face and devise ways to address these challenges.

At this junction, therefore, the researcher explores a center that state colleges can create to address the challenges faced by this rapidly growing student population more effectively.

### **Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC)**

#### **What is it?**

The development of the Academic and Social Engagement Center is proposed to solve or reduce the challenges confronted by foreign-born students (FBS) students at a local state college as indicated by this pilot study. The overall goal of this proposition is to increase the educational attainment and to reduce the length of time to attainment. It will be created as an education and resource information center for FBS at Victory State College.

By increasing the educational attainment of foreign-born students, state colleges will better prepare these young Americans for the jobs of tomorrow, thereby promoting American global competitiveness (Wadhwa et al., 2007; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). In addition, by reducing the length of time it takes for academic attainment of foreign-born students will save American tax payer's hard earned funds (Wadhwa et al., 2007).

FBS face the regular financial, work, and family pressures in state colleges as their American born counterparts. However, unique to foreign-born students are challenges such as “English, language acquisition, cultural adjustments, citizenship and residency issues, and unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and community support services” (Increasing Opportunity for Foreign-born Students, 2011, p. 26).

Recognizing the academic and non-academic challenges faced by these students is imperative to devise services that address those needs. Based on findings from the literature, a holistic approach is necessary to support foreign-born students (Increasing Opportunity for Foreign-born Students, 2011, p. 26). I propose “ASEC” as a solution to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students. ASEC is a support center that will coordinate and centralize services for foreign-born students.

### **Relationship to Problem of practice**

The problem of practice that this dissertation addresses is the challenges faced by foreign-born state college students that prevents/prolongs their graduation. ASEC is a comfortable center created as an education and resource information center for foreign-born students at Victory State College. It is a place created to provide coordinated and centralized

social and academic support for foreign-born students. I propose “ASEC” as a solution to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students at the college.

### **Why will “ASEC” Work?**

According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), learning and development happens through social interaction. He stressed the fundamental role that community plays in the process of making meaning in our environment. Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is relevant in understanding the rationale behind ASEC. I particularly view ASEC as a place where foreign-born students at the college can connect with a “more knowledgeable other” in their “Zone of Proximal Development”. Within the college, foreign-born students will be connected to an experienced other, who will guide and share their experiences.

Other relevant theory applicable to support the creation of ASEC is the college impact model. Researchers confirm that when students get the help and support they need, and when they are engaged in the college activities, their chances of succeeding increases (Kuh, 2008; Schetz 2008 Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Tinto, 1975). Schuetz (2008) confirms a positive connection between student engagement in state college and student’s graduation success. Therefore, suggestions for state colleges to create learning communities, teach faculty to teach high impact lecture that incorporate peer tutors or mentors, increase faculty-student interaction, introduce social media, create online study group among other strategies to continue to engage students (Schuetz, 2008; Kuh, 2007; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976; Tinto, 1975).

In sharing his experience and his success, Dr. Andrew Grosovsky, the Dean of STEM at the University of Massachusetts, said “We wanted them to engage with other students, faculty,

advisors [and] academic support staff. We wanted them to feel this is their university [that] they know people [and] can feel comfortable as part of this community” (Cooper, 2014). Just as Dr. Grosovsky declared, Academic and Social Engagement Center aims at connecting students to the college via peer, faculty, advisors, and staff support.

## **CHAPTER 2 THE PILOT STUDY**

### **Introduction**

As the American foreign-born population grew and became more diverse, so did the portion of foreign-born students in American higher education institutions. Based on the data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the enrollment of the foreign-born and their children in the United States' higher education system was 34.7 percent in 2003 compared to 39.6 percent in 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 & 2013). Additionally, the world economy is increasingly more competitive, therefore, America's comparative advantage in the global market depends on the education and skills of its workers. Job opportunities requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience in the next decade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projection, 2009). Boosting the success rate of all students should be a national necessity, not only for individuals but for the nation.

In 2014, the United States foreign-born population was more than 42.4 million representing 13.3 percent of the total U.S. population of 318.9 million (U.S. Census Bureau's 2014 American Community Survey (ACS)). Today, U.S. foreign-born and their U.S. born children are approximately 81 million, representing 26 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau web, 2016). That is, one out of every four Americans is foreign-born or is a child of at least one foreign-born parent. The Pew Research Institute, however, estimated that by 2065 that number will rise to one in three (Cohn, 2015), representing about 33 percent of United States total population.

Since foreign-born are an integral part of the United States, it is imperative to educate American foreign-born for the nation to remain globally competitive. Therefore, understanding the challenges faced by the foreign-born students at state colleges will create an avenue for recommending solutions to some or all the challenges. Furthermore, not only will this increase their educational attainment and economic productivity, but it will prepare more Americans for the competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century global market.

### **The Problem Statement**

If the population of the foreign-born continues to increase in the United States, and they seek educational opportunities, the problem of practice that this dissertation in practice will address is the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong or even prevent graduation.

### **The Pilot Study Rationale**

This researcher sought to examine the essence, interpret, and describe the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a state college in order to gather the necessary information that will inform the creation of a comprehensive support center to address the challenges faced by these students. The researcher will utilize a qualitative questioning approach to describe “what” foreign-born students experience and “how” they experience it in a state college (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher’s intent is to report these multiple realities using quotes that directly state what foreign-born students experience at the state college. The researcher hopes to gather enough information from which specific challenges faced by these students will be extrapolated, analyzed, categorized, and interpreted.

## **Goal of the Pilot Study**

This is a pilot study intended to guide the planning and creation of a comprehensive support center for foreign-born students at Victory State College.

The researcher's goal in conducting this study is threefold. First is the goal to discover the academic and social challenges faced by foreign-born students in state colleges as they experience it. The second goal is to collect useful information from foreign-born students at the college regarding the resources they feel needed to alleviate the challenges they face. The third goal is to develop a comprehensive support center, based on the information gathered, where foreign-born students can access resources that can alleviate their challenges.

To achieve these goals, the researcher will:

- Administer a Qualtrics survey to all students enrolled in college credit classes during October 2016 to May 2017. The purpose of this survey is to collect demographic data and some preliminary information of foreign students' experience at the college.
- A focus group interview of about 6 to 10 students will be organized to understand the experiences of foreign-born students at the college. The researcher seeks to understand "what" they experience (their challenges) and "how" they are experiencing it.
- The researcher will develop a comprehensive support center where foreign-born students at the college can get the help needed to succeed.

## **Positionality of the researcher**

As a foreign-born doctoral student, I will collaborate with the foreign-born students as an "insider in collaboration with other insiders" (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p.45) at the college. My current experiences as a doctoral student may be similar to Victory State foreign-born students'

experiences. This will furnish a more relaxed and comfortable setting for students to engage freely and openly, which will further enhance the information provided from the focus group (Vygotsky, 1978). As a foreign-born and a doctoral “student” this softens my authority and puts me in an insider position, where students might at some point consider me as one of them. This is critical for this study as students become more willing to share their experiences.

In addition to being a foreign-born doctoral student, the researcher of this study is a professor of Economics at the college where this study will be conducted. Herr & Anderson (2015) will define the researcher’s positionality within this problem of practice as an “Outsider in Collaboration with Other Insiders” (p. 49).

In my role as a professor, I am in a position of power greater than that of the foreign-born students, I see myself as a consultant seeking opinions of the insiders (foreign-born students). I attempt to solicit students’ experiences at the college, where students will be considered the insiders. My position as a professor (“Outsider”), will improve the quality of the pilot study’s findings and analysis. Table 5 shows the alignment of the researcher’s positionality in her role in this pilot study.

Table 5  
Positionality of the Researcher

Positionality of Researcher	Validity Criteria
Insider in collaboration with other insiders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a foreign-born and a doctoral student at UCF, I am also an insider</li> <li>• Being a foreign-born and a doctoral student softens my authority as a professor and puts me in an insider position, where students might at some point consider me as one of them.</li> </ul>
outsider in collaboration with insiders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am an outsider in the context of this study in my role as a professor that assigns a superior authority and places me in a role of a consultant</li> </ul>

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

This dissertation in practice is an action research dissertation conducted by the researcher as a practitioner intentionally to improve her own practice or context. Herr and Anderson (2015) defined action research as a means by which an individual, or individuals, study a phenomenon occurring within an organization, with the intention to improve outcomes for the organization. This pilot study, therefore, employs a qualitative questioning approach based on a phenomenon and using participatory and social constructivism inquiry, which enables an understanding of how foreign-born students conceptualize the social and academic challenges they face in a state college. This qualitative questioning method is appropriate for providing participants with real voices while reconstructing their lived experiences (Creswell, 2003).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined qualitative research as:

“a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes,

interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos of the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005. p. 3)

Since the findings from this pilot study will inform the researcher about the creation of a program to solve the challenges faced by foreign-born students in a state college, the researcher will seek understanding of the context through participatory and social constructivism paradigm or worldview. Using participatory paradigm, the researcher will rely on the participants’ view to understand their challenges in educational attainment from a state college and create a program that may reduce the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state college. Creswell (2003) summarized participatory studies as “recursive or dialectical and is focused on bringing about change in practice. Thus, at the end of participatory studies, researchers advance an action agenda for change” (p. 22). While using social constructivism, the researcher seeks to make sense of the foreign-born students’ experience from the participants’ view point (Creswell, 2003). In social constructivism, the focus is on interaction with other people in their life setting, for this study a focus group will provide this social interaction between participants where they derive comfort from the support of other participants, like them, when describing their experience at the college.

The researcher will ask open ended questions to provoke participants’ deep thoughts of their experiences and in the comfort of their peers (other participants in the focus group). This type of qualitative questioning approach will enable the research to collect detailed and in-depth data on the experiences of the participants, to analyze and compare experiences, subsequently extrapolating the necessary information on the challenges faced by the participants.

The researcher is aware of her cultural, personal, and historical experiences and how they might influence this research. Therefore, extra care will be taken to avoid making conclusions based on my own personal experiences. Though I understand that it is nearly impossible to completely remove preconceived ideas when conducting a phenomenological research study, I will analyze the data collected by “bracketing” out my experiences as a foreign-born student. Moustakas refers to the bracketing process as the epoche of the natural sciences, that is “to stay away or abstain” (1994, p. 26). Moustakas emphasized the need to “set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” (1994, p. 85). “Bracketing enables a deeper level of researcher engagement and integration throughout all aspects of the qualitative research endeavor” (Tufford and Newman, 2012; p. 93). I commit throughout this research to the process of bracketing which will enhance the quality of this research.

The problem of practice that this dissertation will address is the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong and/or prevent graduation. The purpose is to examine the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong/prevent graduation and to determine strategies to solve them.

The following sub-questions will inform the problem of practice central to this research:

- I. What are the lived academic experiences of foreign-born students attending a local state college in the United State?
- II. What are the lived social experiences or of foreign-born students attending a local state college in the United States?
- III. What are the services needed to address these challenges faced by foreign-born students to ensure success at the state college?

## **Site Selection**

This pilot study will be conducted at Victory State College (VSC) in Florida. VSC is the eighth-largest member institution of the 28 locally-governed public colleges in the Florida College System. In 2014/2015 academic year, VSC had a total of 29,683 students enrolled, 1,551 faculty and staff, and awarded 6,319 degrees and certificates. The college has no data of the FBS population enrolled at the college. However, the Institutional Review and Effectiveness department of the college report 1000 International students from 82 countries in 2014/2015 academic year (“Victory State College” n.d.).

Since this is an action research conducted for the purpose of improving the researcher’s work environment, the researcher decided to conduct this research at her place of work in order to promote success of FBS at the college.

## **Participant Selection**

According to Hycner (1999) “the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants” (p.156). I purposively chose foreign-born students which is supported by Kruger (1999) as the most important kind of non-probability sampling to identify those who “have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched” (Kruger, 1999 p. 150).

The subjects of this pilot study are foreign-born students intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor’s degree. I do this to focus on individual student’s goal and not on institutional goals, and to intentionally exclude students that attend college to learn English only or for recreational

purposes. Therefore, this study assumes graduation as the goal to which a student is striving. Hence, I consider any factor that impedes the achievement of this goal as a challenge.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau the foreign-born are defined “as individuals who had no U.S. citizenship at birth”. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, legal non foreign-born (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), persons residing in the country without authorization, and excluding everyone born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents” (U.S. Census Bureau).

In other to emphasize who is considered foreign-born, it will be useful to define who is not. Those who are not foreign-born are considered native born. “The Census Bureau uses the terms native and native born to refer to anyone born in the United States, Puerto Rico, a U.S. Island Area (American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or the U.S. Virgin Islands), or abroad of a U.S. citizen parent or parents” (United States, Census Bureau, web).

After conducting research on the definition of foreign-born, the simplest definition is the one by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Who defined foreign-born population of a country as “persons who have that country as the country of usual residence and whose place of birth is located in another country” (United Nations, 1980), excluding those born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent.

The goal is to collect data on the foreign-born student population of the college. These are students born outside of the United States though they currently reside in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau the foreign-born are “individuals who had no U.S. citizenship at birth”. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent

residents, refugees and asylees, legal non foreign-born (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), persons residing in the country without authorization, and excluding everyone born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents.

Knowing that students attend college for a reason or to accomplish a specific goal, the goal of interest for this research is to graduate or transfer to a four-year college. Therefore, participant selection will be based on this criteria:

1. They must be foreign-born
2. They must be enrolled in college credit classes intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor's degree.

Participants will be screened through a preliminary demographic survey that will be administered through the Institutional Research and Effectiveness department of the college. The focus group participants will be selected based on students that provided their contact information after the survey as a show of interest in further research participation on the research subject matter.

## **Data Collection**

### **Survey Participants**

According to Creswell's (2014) indicators of qualitative research, data will be collected at the state college where the researcher works. With the help of the Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) department of the college, a demographic survey (see appendix G) will be administered through Qualtrics to all students enrolled in college credit in Spring of 2017. This survey includes a brief description of this research, a questionnaire requesting demographic

information, and willingness and ability to participate in a focus group. The intent was to collect preliminary data on the FBS at the college and to solicit participants for the focus group discussions.

The investigator through the Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) department of the college will email requests to participate in a survey to a complete list of students enrolled in college credit classes in the Spring of 2017 at Victory State College. If the desired participant responds affirmatively to the request to participate, s/he will be directed to complete a Qualtrics survey. If a desired participant responds that s/he is unwilling to participate, he/she will be directed to the end of the survey with a thank you message.

### **Focus group participants**

In this pilot study, I will take advantage of my experiences as a foreign-born student in the information gathering process. This information will be provided naturally because my accent will reveal that I was born in a different country, while the fact that this study is conducted to partially satisfy some of the requirements for my doctoral degree will reveal that I am also a student. This revelation places the researcher and the students in the same category, which suggest communal interests and goal to the students. Sarason (1974) defined sense of community as "the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, and the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure" (p. 157). This I hope, will encourage cooperation during the focus group discussion and suggest that

students and the researcher belong to the same group (foreign-born student group). The sense of common interest could further inspire students to discuss openly expressing their experiences freely and safely.

The focus group participants will be solicited through the survey. All foreign-born students enrolled in college credit classes that participated in the survey will be asked to indicate interest in further research participation on this topic. The students that indicate interest will be directed to provide their name and a contact information. The students that indicate interest in further research participation will be invited to participate in a focus group discussion via the contact information provided through the survey.

In addition to the above characteristics, focus group participants will be considered based on the following factors: the linguistic ability, length of time at the college, willingness, and openness to participate in this study will be evaluated. I will consider the participant's linguistic ability because it is a clear necessity in a focus group study where participants are expected to narrate what and how they are experiencing their phenomenon. The duration or length of time at the college is also necessary in order to fully understand what they have experienced and articulate it clearly. At least one semester will be considered sufficient time to reflect on their experience at the college in order to collect and synthesize any challenges faced during that time. The participants' willingness and ability to participate is crucial for this study as the focus group meeting will be conducted without compensation for participants' time. Openness is also an important factor to this study, as the strength of our data collection relies on the information provided by the students.

The researcher participants' selection criteria are based on Moustakas' (1994) guidelines to select those who have "experienced the phenomenon", are interested in "understanding its nature and meaning" and are willing to participate in a lengthy focus group (p. 107). Based on all these criteria, I expect about 6 to 10 participants in the focus group.

The focus group will take place at the Altamonte campus of the college (this could be changed based on convenience to students) for two hours. The researcher will review the informed consent process and ask the participants to agree to the waiver of documentation of consent prior to the commencement of the focus group. This discussion will be recorded using an audio recording application that allows the research to take notes on the recording. The investigator will take notes as deemed necessary during the discussion.

#### Focus Group Discussion Questions:

1. Please take a little time to share your personal thoughts on your experience as you try to settle down in the state college after admissions.
2. How would you describe your academic experience at the college?
  - a. Do you feel what you are learning in your course will help you reach your goal?
  - b. Have you had a positive experience in the classroom? If not, why not?
  - c. Do you have problems keeping up with homework? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe your social experience at the college?
  - a. Who do you turn to for help; student, faculty, staff, other?
  - b. What do you think of the professors at the college?
  - c. What do you think of the staff at the college?
  - d. Do you hang out after class?

- e. Do you work with other students? If not, why not?
4. Can you talk about your experiences as a foreign-born student at the state college?
5. Based on your personal experiences, if you were going to give advice to another student, what would you say?
6. How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?
7. Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to share with me?

All documents collected will be dated. Huberman (1984) emphasizes that memos (or field notes) must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data. I will be consciously open to explore differing perspective from participants; this could potentially illuminate other areas in need of exploration. The hard copies of these documents will be filed with the researcher. The survey and transcribed focus group discussions including my observation and reflective notes will be stored electronically on multiple hard drives.

### **Data Analysis**

In this research, I will use a modified Moustaka's (1994) method of data analysis because of its systematic steps and clear guidelines. This method has four stages for data analysis as follows:

1. The Epoche Stage (Bracketing).
2. Identification of significant statements.
3. Identification of core themes, and
4. Synthesis of meanings and essences.

First, in the Epoche stage, coined by Moustaka (1994) as a stage where we (researchers) "clear our minds, and put away whatever might color our interpretation of what we hear." As we

approach our field work, we do not take a position, and “every quality has equal value” (p. 87). In order to be as open as possible to the phenomenon of this research, I will have to suspend all previous assumptions consciously in an attempt to be objective and unbiased in reporting the students’ social and academic experiences at the college.

My position as a professor assigns an authority that is superior and places me in a role of a consultant in this study. This is the role that I will assume when analyzing the data collected and purposefully reporting study findings without embellishing my findings with my own personal experiences. Therefore, I will “bracket” my preconceived assumptions during the analysis phase of this research. Although, a clear understanding of my position in this research was analyzed at the start of this research endeavor, I will monitor my preconceptions throughout for insights or as a means to deal with potential obstacles as they arise.

Continuous bracketing will continue during survey and focus group discussion question formulation through constant dialogue with my dissertation chair and dissertation cohort members. They helped to refine my questions and to eliminate biased and unclear questions that could have posed barriers to exploration of this phenomenon. Observational comments and memos expressing my feelings and thoughts during the focus group discussion and a reflective notes will be written after the focus group discussion to enhance deeper engagement with the data (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

According to Moustakas (1994), the second stage involves identifying significant statements about students’ experiences at the college focusing on the challenges expressed. Here I deliberately suspend my own presuppositions and not allowing my meaning and interpretations to enter the unique viewpoints of the participants. I will listen repeatedly to the audio recording

of the focus group discussion to become familiar with the participants' viewpoints. Then, I will lay down all the viewpoints, give equal weight to each view. Finally, I will cluster the viewpoints into themes and write a textual description of the phenomenon as the participants experience it.

Third, in identifying core themes, I will develop a structural description of how each of the participants described the conditions, situations, or context of their experience, identifying underlying themes and universal structures, and searching for examples that illustrate the themes. I will create a table clustered into themes and include a line reference to support data from the transcripts.

Four, in the synthesis of meaning and essence stage, I will synthesize the textural and structural descriptions of the phenomenon from the participant's viewpoints into "a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). I must pay attention to unique voices when clustering viewpoints into themes, they are important counterpoints to bring out regarding the phenomenon researched. I will directly report participants overarching themes and subtle nuances of the participants' view in a balanced manner through constant reflection on my own feelings and biases. Table 6 presents an overview of activities with dates in this pilot study.

Table 6  
Schedule of Activities

Task	Planned	When	Completed:
			Yes/No
UCF IRB Submission	11/4/2016	11/23/2016	Yes
UCF IRB Approval	12/12/2016	1/3/2017	Yes
SSC IRB Submission	11/10/2016	12/1/2016	Yes
SSC IRB Approval	12/1/2016	12/7/2016	Yes
Survey Email 1 - Intro	1/16/2017	2/16/2017	Yes
Survey Email 2 - Reminder	1/23/2017	N/A	No
Survey Email 3 - Thank you	1/30/2017	N/A	No
	1/30/17-		
Qualtrics - Result Analysis	2/3/2017	3/7/17	
Focus Group Email 4 -			
Solicitation	2/9/17 -2/13/17	3/7/17	Yes
	2/17/17 or	• 3/24/17 @ 9:30AM – 12:00PM	
Focus Group Discussion	2/24/17	• 4/14/17 @ 11:30AM – 2:00PM	Yes
	2/24/17 -		
Data Analysis	3/15/17	2/24/17 – 6/30/17	

### **Success indicators**

The expected outcome of this pilot study is to gather enough information through the mouth of the foreign-born students at the state college about the challenges they face and for

them to make suggestions of the types of support that they believe could alleviate those challenges. The overarching goal of this pilot study is to create a comprehensive support center for foreign-born students based on the information gathered.

The ultimate goal of this pilot study is to determine what students need to attain graduation. The success indicators of this pilot study will be derived from the success of the comprehensive support center created as a result of this pilot study. The sole purpose of this center is to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students in a state college that could prevent them from graduating or graduating on time. Therefore, the success indicators of pilot study are:

- Increased involvement in complementary academic activity beyond the classroom
- Increased involvement in complementary social activities beyond the classroom
- Increased student retention
- Increased academic efforts and outcomes
- Increased personal development
- All of the above combined will lead to graduation and/or early graduation

Although, due to time limitation the success of this comprehensive support center will not be measured at this time, some of the success indexes for future study are:

- Student's participation and attendance at the center
- Student engagement in college activities
- Student engagement with peers
- Student engagement with faculty
- Changes in student's grade before and after participation

- Graduation rates of students that participate at the center

Several research studies indicate that when students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to persist and subsequently graduate from college (Astin, 1984; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). Quoting from Astin (1984) “Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly-involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students” (p. 297).

Social involvement refers to the degree of student participation at the college, specifically referring to the amount of activities in which students participate within the college or with peers outside the college. The term has been defined by Avison, McLeod, and Pescosolido (2007) as “the extent to which an individual participates in a broad range of social roles and relationships” (p. 333) and by Zhang, Jiang, and Carroll (2011) as “the commitment of a member to stay in the group and interact with other members” (p. 571). The specific characteristics of social involvement therefore are: collective activities, where students are engaged in an activity (something) with other students; student interaction, where at least two students are involved with the activity; social exchange, where the activity involve giving and receiving something form each participants in the activity; and participation is from free will, where students participate without force (Zhang, Jiang, and Carroll, 2011; Avison, McLeod, and Pescosolido,

2007; Astin, 1984). Hence a success indicator of social involvement is the volume of activities in which students participate measured through the amount of time they spend on these activities at the center.

Academic involvement, on the other hand, means interaction with faculty, having an interest in the subject matter, the amount of physical and psychological energy students dedicates to academic work both inside and outside the classroom (Astin, 1984). For example, “how many hours the student spends studying” (Astin 1984, p. 519), are students meeting deadlines on assignments, not skipping classes, or whether student comprehends reading assignments or simply stares at the textbook and daydream” (Astin, 1984, p. 519). Academic involvement will be measured through better grades, increased student-to-faculty involvement (measured through contact and frequency), and ultimately the graduation rate.

Rendon (1994) points out that when students view their interactions as positive and valued members of the college, the more integrated into the institution they perceive themselves and the more likely they are to persist and therefore graduate from the college. Tinto argues that “clearly, the academic and social systems of colleges overlay both classroom and colleges settings in such a way that experiences within and beyond the classroom both impact upon student persistence” (p. 169).

The positive connection between student engagement and graduation success in state colleges according to Tinto (1998), and Terenzini & Pascarella (1977) is fundamental in the planning of the comprehensive support center in this study and developed purposively to serve the foreign-born students at the college. The logic is that foreign-students will have the opportunity to connect with other students that faces similar challenges, socialize, get access to

resources in a centralized location, and have opportunities to develop academically and connect with faculty at the support center in a unique way.

## **Pilot Implementation**

### **Survey**

The purpose of the survey is to obtain demographic data on the foreign-born students at the college. Included in the survey were few questions to obtain preliminary information from the foreign-born students and to solicit participants for the focus group discussion. The information collected will further guide the focus group questions.

The researcher distributed, in collaboration with the office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness of the college, 11,741 surveys to students enrolled in the Spring Semester of 2017 using Qualtrics. An email was sent out on February 16, 2017 to introduce this research with invitation to participate as well as an individual link to the survey itself. Interested students were directed to click on the link that will lead to a Qualtrics survey (Appendix G). The survey results was collected throughout the following weeks for 2 weeks (till 3/2/16).

A total of 351 participants completed the survey. The following tables describe the demographics of the participants. The survey contained 17 items (see appendix D), where participants provided demographic information, indicated their level of social and academic experience at the college.

## **Results**

### **Demographics**

The specific characteristics of survey participants consisted of 98 (31%) foreign-born and 221 (69%) are natives. Of the total population of 351; 319 (91%) are degree seeking, 20 (6%) are in the college to get a qualification/certificate that will improve long-term job placement, and 12 (3%) are non-degree seeking or other. Of the foreign-born participants, the number of students enrolled in their first semester is 13 (12%), second semester is 26 (27%), third semester is 17 (17%), and more than three semesters is 42 (43%). Indicating the permanent age of arrival in the United States, 74 (76%) participants was less than 19 years, 14 (14%) was 20 – 24 years, 4 (4%) was 25 – 29 years, 3 (3%) was 30 – 34 years, and 2 (2%) was above 35 years. Thirty-one (31.63%) of the participants were male while 67 were female (68.37%).

The participants that indicated enrollment in college credit classes seeking a degree or to transfer to 4-year College were 319 participants, while 20 are seeking qualification/certificate and three are non-degree seeking. Figure 4 shows 13 students enrolled for one semester, 30 students for two semester, 18 students for three semesters, and forty-four students enrolled for more than three semesters.

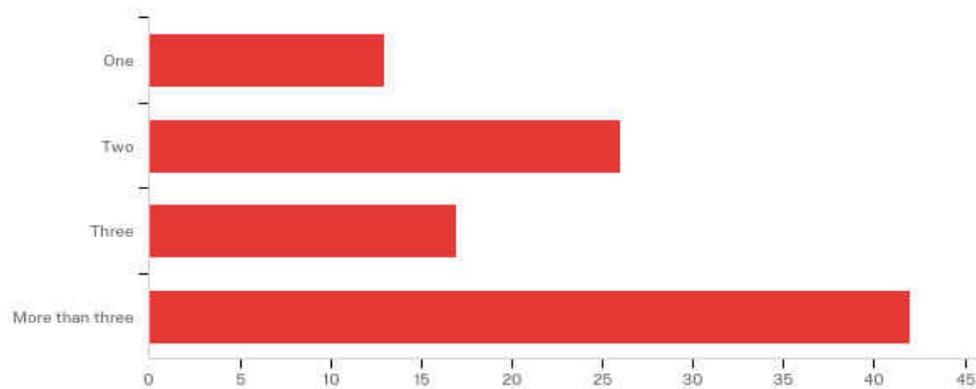


Figure 4. Number of semesters enrolled

**Country of birth:**

The country of birth varies with 12 participants from Columbia, 10 from Puerto Rico, 8 from Haiti, 4 from Dominican Republic and Nigeria each, 3 each from Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Cuba, Iran, India, and 2 each from Jamaica, Philippines, Peru, and Egypt, one participant each represent 26 other countries (Thailand, Germany, China, Curacao, Ecuador, Trinidad, Guatemala, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Congo, Lithuania, Philippines, Guam, Moldova, Bangladesh, South Korea, Ecuador, Tanzania, Morocco, Netherlands, Ghana, Russia, Croatia, Belgium, Bermuda, Portugal, Saudi Arabia). The continent with the highest participants (n=55), is South America, followed by Asia (n=17), Europe (n=14), and Africa (n=10).

**Racial or ethnic identity and family support in the USA:**

The dominant race is Hispanic, consisting 40 of the participants, followed by whites consisting of 19, then African Americans consisting of 18, and Asian consisting of 15.

When asked if they have any family in the United States 89 (90%) of the participants indicated yes, while 9 (10%) indicated not to have any family in the United States.

## **Survey Analysis**

The survey analysis began by extracting students' responses that stated No and Not Applicable into one group per question. This was followed by reading through all the questions and the other responses from the participants. The researcher jotted most repeated phrases in a notepad and repeated this process three times per question. Then, the researcher began to group commonly repeated statements into categories and each category was labelled with the most thematic codes from the group. This category was formulated based on the most repeated significant statement from each group. In the following sections, four emergent themes are summarized and discussed categorically based on survey questions.

## **Emergent Themes**

### **Academic Theme:**

*Q5 – In your experience (academic) at the State College, mark the box that best describes your answer for each question, indicating how often you did each of the following.*

Students were asked to indicate how often they participated in five academic activities at the college starting from “Not at all” to “A lot”. The purpose of these items was to elicit participant's academic experience at the college. Results from this item showed that 76 out of 98 students responded that they asked their faculty for information related to a course they are taking (such as grades, make-up work, assignments...) a lot and some. While 35 students out of 98 responded a lot or some to have participated with other students in a discussion with one or more faculty member outside of class. When asked if they had worked with faculty on activities other than coursework, 28 responded a lot or some. Sixty-one participants responded a lot or some to have discussed ideas from readings or classes outside of class (students, family

members, co-workers...). Finally, when asked if worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments, only 48 participants responded a lot or some. Table 7 presents an overview of the participants' academic experience at the college.

Table 7  
Indicate your Academic Experience at the College

Question	Not at all		A little		Some		A lot		Total
Asked your faculty for information related to a course you were taking (grades, make-up work, assignments etc.)	9.18%	9	13.27%	13	4.82%	40	36.73%	36	98
Participated with other students in a discussion with one or more faculty member outside of class	37.76%	37	26.53%	26	24.49%	24	11.22%	11	98
Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework	60.82%	59	10.31%	10	20.62%	0	8.25%	8	97
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (student, family members, co-workers, etc.)	14.29%	14	23.47%	23	24.49%	24	37.76%	37	98
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignment	21.43%	21	32.65%	32	29.59%	29	16.33%	16	98

**Social Theme:**

*Q6 – In your experience (social) at this college, mark the box that best describes your answer for each question, indicating how often you did each of the following.*

Students were asked to indicate how often they participated in four social activities at the college starting from “Not at all” to “A lot”. The purpose of these items was to elicit participant’s social experience at the college. Forty-seven (47%) students responded to have become some or a lot been acquainted with students whose interests were different from theirs. While 59 (60%) participants indicated to have been acquainted some or a lot with students whose background was different from theirs. Thirty (30%) students indicated some or a lot to have attended a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group. And finally, from this category, forty-six (46%) participants indicated some or a lot to it is easy to develop friendship of trust with other students. The results are presented in table 8 below.

Table 8  
Indicate your Social Experience at the College

Question	Not at all	A little	Some	A lot	Total
Became acquainted with students whose interests were different from yours	17.35% 17	34.69% 34	29.59% 9	18.37% 18	98
Became acquainted with students whose background was different from yours	12.24% 1	27.55% 27	32.65% 32	27.55% 27	98
Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group	49.48% 48	19.59% 19	19.59% 19	11.34% 11	97
It is easy to develop friendship of trust with other students	20.41% 20	32.65% 32	29.59% 29	17.35% 17	98

### **Organizational Theme:**

*Q7 – Please indicate how often you have used the following services during your time at the state college.*

Students were asked to indicate how often they used six services provided at the college starting from “Never” to “Very often”. The purpose of these items is to elicit participant’s level of knowledge about the services available to them to enhance both their academic and social experiences at the college. Only ten (10%) of the participants indicated to have never used the resources and services provided by the library, while six (6%) participants indicated never to have utilized the services provided by the academic advising/planning. The highest service that have not been utilized by the participants was career counseling, with 40 (40%) participants responding never to this item. Twenty-six (26%) responded to have never used the Academic Success Center, and Thirty-two (32%) responded to have never used the Computer labs.

The open-ended question asked in this survey provided rich data by providing an insight on the participants’ opinion on their challenges at the college. They were purposely designed to elicit more information from the participants by giving them the freedom to answer in as much detail as they prefer. For example, Question 8 was asked to solicit suggestions that will be considered as a recommendation to improve the challenges they face. Their responses were categorized into recurring themes that informed and guided the focus group questions.

*Q8 – Would you change anything about your experience?*

The number of participants that responded to this open-ended question were 90, of which 53 respondents wrote “No” or “N/A” or “Nothing”.

For the rest of the participants, I group their responses into themes as follows:

**Social Theme:**

Eight student's responses indicated a desire to have more opportunities to engage socially on campus, samples of student responses are as follows:

- "provide opportunity to students who want to engage in extracurricular activities".
- "SSC does it, but i was always keen on achieving more, but lack of resources made it difficult for me to do what i want to".
- "Professors should engage students in their work apart from the curriculum, that kind of experience is important for both the student and the teacher because at the end experience counts not grades"
- "Yes. I would like to be more social"
- "Do better in class, make more friends"
- "Be more social"

**Advising/Counselor interaction Theme:**

Eight students' responses specified discontent with their advisors and the services provided to them. They recommended better advising from the counselors and provision of all information upfront. Below are students' responses.

- "Better advising from counselors"
- "Fully trusting advisers, a lot of the times they have put me in stressful situations many times due to miscommunication"
- "Clearer help for non us students on course and degrees"
- "The staff is great, my advisor though looks like she hates her job"

- “more clarification when asking what is needed to graduate earlier”
- “will take more courses per semester from the beginning and enroll in honors program early”
- “I will like to have someone who really cares about us the students”
- “There is sometimes lack of information given to students, I would definitely improve that”

**Academic Theme:**

Nine student’s responses indicated a desire to have more opportunities to engage faculty on campus, interact more in class, practice what they are learning, and interact more with peers and weekend hours for the Academic Success Center for tutoring. Samples of student responses are as follows:

- “Yes, professors assigned to online classes should try to be more involved.”
- “I’d be more involved with my teachers.”
- “Yes. Get involved in academic activities”
- “I wish I would have had better help from faculty in achieving some goals early on and doing better in certain classes I did not do well in. Or having help being better prepared.”
- “They spend a lot of time on grammar, while we still cannot talk. I think the number of students in class is too much in one semester”
- “Interaction between students and professors”
- “would have tried to find more study groups for my classes”

- “have weekends hours for tutoring as well as library”
- “I would have tried to find more study groups for my classes”

**Financial Theme:**

Three responses indicate changes in financial aid policies that include or provide more support to foreign-born students. They suggested timely and free communication of changes in policy and a user-friendly application process for financial aid. Presented below are their responses.

- “Financial Aid requirements”
- “Financial Aid is difficult and not user friendly”
- “Communication regarding changes in Academics and Financial Aid”

*Q9 – How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?*

The purpose of this question was to confirm student’s responses from question 8. Question 8 specifically asked what students would change about their experiences at the college. The idea is that they would recommend a way to create the change they would like to see. I solicit recommendation for improvement with this question as well.

Eighty-two participants responded to question 9, where ten of them indicated they would not improve anything. Here is the reasons they provided:

- “I believe you are doing it great!”
- “I’m not sure it seems fine at the moment”
- “They've done great thus far”

The rest of the participants (n=72; 87%) responses were grouped into recurring themes as follows:

**Need more information Theme:**

Eight students indicated lack of or insufficient information and their responses are presented below.

- “I’m not sure... I did not know there was such support”
- “Offering more services”
- “You can offer help in applying for scholarships”
- “Better understand the whole point of college”
- “more guidance”
- ‘more support”
- “provide opportunities to get information on honors program, transfer program”
- “provide a guide to what it is required to have a degree”

**Social Theme:**

Seven students expressed the desire to be involved in a student club, desire to meet other foreign-born students. Overall, students would like more activities around the college for foreign-born students. Here are their responses:

- “Maybe do more activities at convenient times and locations for foreign-born students to gather and meet one another”
- “make a club for them”
- “create a club specifically for foreign-born students”
- “Create Clubs”
- “More activities to nonnative speakers”
- “More diverse clubs”

- “More activities”

### **Language Theme:**

Nine participants indicated language barrier as a hindrance to socializing, communicating, and understanding their environment. Here are their responses.

- “More trilingual staff”
- “More foreign language courses. (Chinese, Mandarin)”
- “Hire More Bi/Tri Lingual staff”
- “You can maybe not require them to take 2-years foreign language.”
- “having Spanish speaking that can assist in case of not understanding”
- “Reaching out to them more often making sure they are doing well. For a student such as myself English is not my first language so it is a bit more difficult to understand/keep up with everything”
- “When writing papers and speeches, please do not say it’s like English is your second language because it is. Maybe get to know the student and then try teaching. Not one student is the same.”

### **Cultural Theme:**

Three participants responded indicating the need for cultural awareness. Their responses are below:

- “Get to know the students' background”
- “More knowledge and information about other countries and cultures so they can have more understanding of where the foreign-born students are coming from”

- “To begin with, it is important to remember being foreigner does not make them bad, wrong or creepy.”

**Advising/counselor/Administration Theme:**

Here are the responses from participants regarding advising, counselling, and administration of foreign-born students.

- “more counseling available”
- “by letting them go see advisors whenever they need help”
- “Make it easier to get in touch with their counsellor”
- “Being more aware about what was going on with students and college staff”
- “A thing that can be improved is the administration, which is horrible for international students”
- “Understand foreign transcript based on students’ academic performance, not based on what transferred credits say.”

*Q17 – Would you like to add anything?*

This question was asked to confirm that participants were given every possible opportunity to express their experience at the college. The number of participants that responded to this open-ended question were 58, of which 46 respondents wrote “No” (n=41) or “N/A” (n=4) or “Nothing” (1). The purpose of the question is to confirm that the student had the opportunity to fully express their experiences.

Examples of statements from respondents are as follows:

- “I believe in experience is as important as education if not more. And College students should be motivated to engage with professors, more opportunities should be provided for and advertised to engage students”.
- “I wish there was an organization for Asian society just like the Hispanics”.
- “I feel there is not much support from the education department in general, not only SSC. When I first started taking college classes I felt lost and did not know what classes to take or what to do and that was the reason I dropped out”.

### **Summary of Survey Findings**

The questions on the survey were asked to explore both the academic and social experiences of foreign-born students (FBS) at the college, specifically the researcher focused on areas of challenge described. The most repeated challenges described by the participants were:

- Discontent with advising/counselors, they expressed having received wrong advice in the past that put them in stressful situations;
- Financial issues and complicated financial aid applications and requirements;
- Lack of or insufficient information
- Language difficulties
- Cultural differences
- Cultural unfamiliarity between natives and foreign-born students
- Lack of support
- Social challenges
- Academic challenges
- Organization challenges

- Personal challenges

When asked to indicate how often they used services provided at the college starting from “never” to “very often”, students responses showed that they have used these resources several times in the past and they are aware of their location and usefulness. In addition, when asked to indicate how often they participated in social activities at the college from “not at all” to “a lot”, students’ responses indicated that they are socially involved. However, the responses from the open-ended questions did not support the level of social involvement and resources usage. This confusion will be explored during the focus group discussion for clarity.

The recommendations for improvement from the participants are:

- Create clubs
- Provide more bi-lingual staff
- Provide more support
- Provide Extracurricular activities
- Provide Financial advising and support

### **Focus Group**

The researcher reviewed the students’ information for those that provided contact information as a show of interest. A total number of 44 students indicated interest. The researcher reviewed all contact information submitted for authenticity. An email was sent on March 7 to introduce the research and to inform participants of the Focus group interview date and location. Also, included in the email was the purpose and significance of the study. My

contact information was provided in the email and I solicited further response from participants to confirm availability and attendance.

All interested and available participants were contacted to make sure they met all the criteria to participate. They must be:

1. Foreign-born
2. Enrolled in college credit classes intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor's degree.
3. At least in their second semester at the college - Experienced in the phenomenon, measured through the number of semester at the college. I measure experience by number of semesters.
4. Provide their contact information as an indication of interest in "understanding its nature and meaning"
5. Willing to participate in a lengthy focus group, this will be measured through an affirmative confirmation of availability and attendance on the scheduled date and time.

On March 24, 2017, three students participated at the Altamonte campus focus group interview. Arrival time was 9:30AM. Students were seated at 10AM. A second Focus group was conducted on 4/14/17 with three other participants. Arrival time was 11:30AM. Students were seated at 12:00PM.

During the sign-in period, that is the half an hour before focus group session began, students were given a short survey. Students were asked to complete this survey and to read the

consent letter (see Appendix F). An introduction of why we were gathered followed immediately after students were seated. The protocol and the consent form were explained to the participants. Students were asked to complete a demographic survey confidentially during the arrival and introductory period (before we began the discussion).

Dr. Hopp (Dissertation Chair) was present at the first focus group. She was introduced to the participants and informed of the reason why she was present. They were told that since the researcher is not experienced in conducting focus group interviews, the need for an experienced practitioner was for validity of data collection. Therefore, Dr. Hopp facilitated the focus group as the moderator, and the researcher acted as her co-moderator. Dr. Hopp had trained the researcher in focus group implementation prior to Day 1.

The researcher was the only facilitator during the second focus group discussion. The researcher felt confident in her experience from the first focus group. These discussions were recorded using AudioNote and the investigators took notes as deemed necessary during the discussions.

### **Focus Group Participants**

There was a total of six participants on the scheduled dates, all born in different countries including Peru, Indian, Venezuela, Haiti, Ecuador, and South Korea. Three students participated on Focus Group-Day 1 and another three students on Focus Group-Day 2.

On Focus Group Day-1, all the three participants indicated that they have been enrolled at Victory State for more than three semesters. Two of them were female and one was male. Two of the participants did not attend U.S. High School and one student attended high school in the United States.

On Focus Group Day-2, one participant indicated enrollment of more than three semesters at the college while the other two participants were in their second semester at the college. They all attended U.S. High Schools.

Participants were provided a number as they arrived to protect the anonymity of the participants and their answers. Table 9 and Table 10 presents the participants' demographic for the focus group discussion, the six participants were presented as FGD 1-1 to FGD 2-3. FGD 1-1 means Focus Group Day 1, participant 1; and FGD 2-1 means Focus Group Day 2, participant 1 consecutively.

Before beginning each focus group discussion, the facilitators explained and discussed the guidelines for the discussion with the participants (see Appendix E).

Table 9  
Participants' Demographic: Gender, Country, English Proficiency, and Enrollment Status

Participant	Gender	Country	Understanding of English language	Length of time
FGD 1-1	Female	Peru	Moderate	Three semesters
FGD 1-2	Male	Indian	Very well	Three semesters
FGD 1-3	Female	Venezuela	Very well	Three semesters
FGD 2-1	Female	Haiti	Well	Three semesters
FGD 2-2	Male	Ecuador	Very well	Two Semesters
FDG 2-3	Female	South Korea	Very well	Two Semesters

Table 10  
 Participants' Demographic: Enrollment Status, Gender, and Continent of Birth

Enrollment Status/semester		Gender		Continent of birth	
Two	33 %	Male	33 %	Africa	0
Three	0 %	Female	67 %	Asia	2
> three	67 %			Europe	0
				South America	3
				Middle East	0
				North America	1

### Background of the participants in the Study

This section is comprised of the focus group participants' descriptions and my analysis of their strengths. Each of the focus group participants met the criteria for participating in this study. The eligibility criteria included the following: (a) they must be foreign-born (b) they must be enrolled in college credit classes intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor's degree (c) enrolled for more than one semester (d) linguistic ability to express in English (d) willingness, and openness to participate.

Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for confidentiality purposes. The six participants of this pilot study were presented as FGD 1-1 to FGD 2-3. FGD 1-1 means Focus Group Day 1, participant 1; and FGD 2-1 means Focus Group Day 2, participant 1 consecutively.

#### FGD 1-1

FGD 1-1 is a female student that came from Peru and attended high school here in the United States. This participant has been enrolled at the college for more than three semesters and is pursuing a major in Health Sciences. She stated her struggles in adjusting to online homework

platforms and stated that in her country everything “is on paper,” meaning all course work is on paper.

She spoke about the usefulness of her speech class in overcoming her fears of interacting with her advisors, and hence speaking to people in general. She emphasized the ease of developing friendships with Hispanics because they she can speak Spanish with them and she could develop a deep relationship. However, she is afraid to speak to “some random people” and her relationships with “Americans” is on a superficial level. They only talk about the class and nothing beyond that.

She is not a member of any student club or society at the college. Her strength lies in the fact that she is persistent in work and her confidence in seeking help from the counselors or advisors at the college. Although, she is not comfortable due to language insecurities to approach native students for help, she is comfortable in approaching students that speak her language.

### **FGD 1-2**

FGD 1-2 is a male participant that grew up in India. He graduated from a privileged and competitive high school and wanted to attend a large school in India where he planned to pursue Management Information Systems. Although he never considered an American post-secondary school education, it was during his vacation to the United States that he was encouraged to apply to UCF to study. The advisors at UCF told him to consider “a cheaper option” at a local State college. He has been enrolled at the college for more than three semesters. This is his last semester at VSC, and he hopes to transfer to a state university this fall.

English language was the national language in India since India was a British colony. He was surprised and almost offended when asked “if he spoke English in India.” FGD 1-2 implied

discontent about his education at the college and some negative experiences in the United States. He expressed disbelief in the lack of cultural awareness of other students and strongly suggested that this must be addressed.

He is a member of the Honor Society and expressed a desire to join more of the currently available societies such as the volunteer society. He spoke proudly of his background, he sets high goals and was upset when he couldn't achieve his goal. He expressed consistent adjustment of his strategies in order to achieve his goals. He knows what he wants and strives at all cost to get there. He is ambitious, persistent, hardworking and flexible with his plans to achieve his goal.

### **FGD 1-3**

FDG 1-3 is a 35 years-old female participant from Venezuela. She has been enrolled at the college for more than three semesters. She consistently expressed the fact that she started from "zero" when she came to the United States. She arrived in the United States without any knowledge of the English Language. Though she is now in English for Academic Purpose (EAP) classes, she stated that she started from the International Language Institute where she started to learn the English language from the elementary level.

She spoke proudly of her background and stated that she had no desire to come here before her sister invited her. She had since changed her mind. Although she is proud to be Venezuelan, she is aware of the value of second language acquisition and cultural diversity.

She had a bachelor's degree from Venezuela and stated that she graduated over 12 years ago, however she needed to start over again because her bachelor's degree is not accepted here. She continues to push herself even though her classes are becoming tougher since she is now enrolled in college credit classes. Her strength lies in her ability to work with others, the

willingness to seek help when needed, and the desire to be involved with the college. She shared that:

“I go to advisors and professors when I need help I talk to them. Actually now, I help the International students, the new ones, I try to get involved with the school” “I’m not technologic, for me if you have a good team, you can do a big change...”

She emphasized the importance of social gathering and meetings outside of the college. She is interested in helping other students that are new to the college and may be experiencing what she experienced when she first came to this country. She was enthusiastic to speak about the relationships she was able to form at the college. She spoke about having friends from India, Switzerland, and other places. She stressed the benefit of practicing spoken English with this group of students when they gather together.

#### **FGD 2-1**

FGD 2-1 is a female participant who was born in Haiti and came to the United States in Middle School. Her middle school experiences pushed her to learn English intensively which helped her transition, and prepared her to begin college level English at the college. She expressed that when she arrived in the state it was only herself and her brother in the entire school that spoke Haitian language. It was very difficult for her because there was no way to communicate with her teachers and classmates besides “Google translate.” Living in an area where no one spoke her language was complicated and stressful for her. This experience changed, however, when she moved to Florida where the population of Haitians at her school was very high. The advantage, as she stated, was the ability to communicate and to find someone

who could help her with her translations, however, the disadvantage to her was the tendency to become comfortable within the Haitian community and reliance on the Haitian language.

This participant has been enrolled at the college for more than three semesters and is a Psychology major. She is going to graduate in the summer semester after this focus group discussion. She stated that she became involved in college organizations and activities during her second semester at the college. Her strength lies in her ability to multi task successfully by creating a schedule for herself. She was able to allocate time for work, assignments, and college organizations/club duties successfully.

#### **FGD 2-2**

FGD 2-2 is a male participant from Ecuador who attended a United States high school. This participant has been enrolled at the college for more than two semesters and is pursuing a major in Computer Science. He stated that he did not have a lot of friends and didn't ask for help. He concluded that his social experience was not the "best." On the contrary, he stated that he was having "a good experience with my teachers." He preferred to work alone and ask his professors for help.

Even though this participant was shy and passive, he relied on self-knowledge to persist successfully in college. He continuously sought help from his professors and depended on completing homework on a timely manner as the way of achieving his graduation goal.

#### **FGD 2-3**

FGD 2-3 is a female participant who came from South Korea in ninth grade to live with relatives here in the United States. She stated that she was adopted by her aunt and uncle,

however her biological parents were still financially responsible for her. She attended high school in the United States.

This is her second semester at the college and she is an Engineering major. She frequently compared the education system in the United States to that of South Korea. She is happy to be a student here and prefers the education system in the States. She is a hard worker and sets high goals. She is determined to do all that is necessary to achieve straight A's. She demonstrated a lack of understanding of other students' apathy. She found the professors approachable and helpful. She was not afraid to ask for help.

She is a member of the Honor Society, which she found helpful in her engagement at the college and for awareness of other available resources. She stated, however, her desire to engage with other clubs, particularly those like her culture, but there were none available, at least at her campus or to her knowledge.

She stressed the benefits of relationships and friendships. One of the goals she set for herself to develop friendships with a least a student per class per semester. She further stated that the reason for these friendships was for her to get help from her classmates if she needed it. She mentioned how they provided mutual help to each other. Specifically, she mentioned a car pool situation and homework help.

## **Results**

During the focus group discussions, facilitators asked participants to discuss their experiences as students at the state college. The same protocol was followed in both focus groups.

The data analysis began by first transcribing the AudioNote recordings verbatim to ensure systematic analysis of the discussion and for the researcher to become familiar with the data. I read the transcription multiple times to make sure what was transcribed corresponds to what the participants said and to gain a deeper understanding of each participant's experience. Second, the researcher focused on identifying significant statements regarding participants' academic and social challenges as they described their lived experiences at the state college. This was done by jotting significant statements on the side margins as they came to mind when reading the transcripts. These significant statements were initially sorted through for each of the focus group questions. Third is the identification of core themes repeated through transcription. I developed a three-column table (see Appendix H) utilizing Microsoft Word. The first column consisted of the significant statements, followed by thematic codes, and finally the emergent themes. The table was color-coded to facilitate a visual aspect to the process of data scrutiny. Finally, the researcher synthesizes meaning and essence of academic and social challenges.

### **Identification of Significant Statements**

Below are participants' responses to focus group questions (day 1 and day2) the researcher extrapolated from the transcripts.

- 1. Please take a little time to share your personal thoughts on your experience as you try to settle down in the state college after admissions.*

All the participants in one accord agreed that the process of settling in the college was smooth. They emphasized the contribution of the International Student Advisor in this process. During the focus group discussions FGD 1-2 noted that:

FGD 1-2: “So coming to Victory State was never an option for me because I just wanted to get into one of the best large schools in India but I came here for my vacation and my Uncle showed me UCF. I liked UCF and I applied and they told me there was a cheaper option... So, I went to the International advisor at Victory, she was very helpful. And everything went smoothly”. Pursuing Management Information System and highest degree from home country is high school.

Participant FGD 1-3 indicated that the college is amazing. She said that people were nice to her and helped her a lot during her registration process. She started in the ESOL program however, she is now enrolled in English for Academic Purpose (EAP). FGD 1-3 stated that she had to start all over again like a baby. Even though she received a bachelor’s degree from her country (Venezuela) which is not accepted here, she still needs to learn a new language from scratch.

FGD 2-1 came in middle school to the United States, even though she attended high school in the states there was some information that she lacked because her parents did not understand it either. One of those was the lack of financial information which prevented her from starting college when she was ready to start. She did not know what was available to her and did not know where to go to find out. She said:

“When I applied here... for FAFSA, I didn’t know that I did not qualify for financial aid, so I wasn’t able to, like start right away. So, I have to like kind of go to work, save money and then come back. So basically, I wasn’t sure of the process and my parents didn’t know either. So, I had to figure everything out by myself, all the financial stuff, and there wasn’t a lot of scholarship I was aware off...”

The lack of or insufficient information problems claimed by FGD 2-1 was uniquely supported by FGD 2-2. He indicated the importance of information on his settlement process at the college. He stated that a few friends had gone to college before him and they revealed the

process to him prior to attending college. He stated how that eliminated a lot of the challenges that he would have had to deal with. This is what he said:

“I didn’t have a hard time because some friends came before me so they reveled to me how to do everything about financial aid, admission, and everything. Pretty much, it was easy for me. So, I didn’t have any problems with the financial or something.

FGD 2-3 professed the necessity to make new friends and learn a new culture as they settled at the college.

“I’m not from Orlando, I’m from a different state, so like I still have to make new friends and I’m living in an apartment with my roommates, I’m away from my parents...”

They all said making friends with students from their culture was easier than making friends with an American student. They felt that it was easier to communicate with other students like them mostly due to language barriers and insecurities.

**Summary of settling at the college:** For all the participants, this was positive and they credit this ease to their International Student Advisors. Although a few of the participants attended high school in the United States, they too reported ease in settling in the college, specifically during the admission process.

2. *How would you describe your academic experience at the college?*

After listening to the recordings, the salient theme that emerged was improper advising. They felt that at some point their advisors miss guided them or failed to provide appropriate information for courses needed. FGD 1-2 was bitter when describing his experience with his “academic advisor” as he described him/her. He stated how his advisor gave him an academic plan with his required classes to graduate, however the language requirement was not included. Being a foreign-born student relatively new in this country, he lacked the information of what is

needed in this country to graduate from college. He relied on his advisors to show him the right way but was disappointed in this process. FGD 1-2 described his experience as follows:

...my academic experience has been a *slumber* crap... My educational advisor was not very helpful because she told me what subjects I have to take every semester and she gave me a five... plan but she did not tell me foreign language requirements for UCF and uh I have to take credit by exam test, and PLAT which is the recognized exam for Victory State... So, I had to go to Minnesota University to take the exam but Victory did not accept it. Then I had to go to New York University, they took eight weeks to send my exam, and after the exam, they took their time to send the result. It was a lengthy process. And everything could have been easier, because all that happened last semester and like this semester. I'm already taking seven classes, so with that and the test in mind everything was stressful. I hope they improve, they have to include everything when they are advising"

They continue to reiterate the importance of information in their first semester at the college. Participant FGD 1-1 shared:

"Uh my academic experience, so far it's been good. I mean the first semester was a little complicated because when I came here to register for classes, they were supposed to help you pick the classes, because they give you this schedule/plan, so when I went to the computer, most of the classes were closed. So, I had to take classes here and then travel to other campuses, so it was a little complicated for me..."

Language issues was repeated as a challenge in their academic experience at the college.

Participant FGD1-3 expressed her level of discomfort with the English language and how this impedes her academically. She stated that

"... My problem is that maybe I understand more than I can speak, sometimes I'm like ah... If I don't understand something, she helps me understand or I can talk to another academic advisor. She is more in international, she knows more about international students".

The good news though is that she can find an advisor to ask for help. She was pleased to talk about her international advisor due to that fact that she feels that she knows understands her situation. FGD 2-1 expressed uneasiness with language as well. She posited her fears as follows:

“Well, I was kind of nervous when I started college... because of my English classes, like writing essays because English is not my first language. So, I was like, I love free writing but when it gets to a topic or a certain style like MLA or APA, it kind of get me nervous”

a. *In what ways do you feel what you are learning in your course will help you reach your goal?*

The participants believed that a few of the subjects were not beneficial and that their academic plan should be guided towards their major. To this end participant FGD 1-1 noted:

“Uh well most of my classes, I feel like they are going to help me to reach my goal but some of them have been uh, useless. Not trying to be offensive. For example music appreciation, I don’t really know what that has to do... I also had to take oceanography... “I don’t really know... They were recommended to fulfill my elective requirements... I don’t know why theater will be useful in my major”.

This sentiment was also shared by Participant FGD 1-2 who said:

“For me uh a lot of the classes are useful... I understand that it gets everyone at the level of the two years of college but they are technically useful for me except for only 7 classes that I have to take. I think I could have saved a year which people in United Kingdom and India do”.

They expressed the financial burden associated with tuition cost, and when they must pay for a class that doesn’t benefit them, the burden is augmented. It is important to note at this point that two of these participants pay international tuition rates, one paid out of state rate, and the other three receive in state tuition because they are Florida residents. FGD 2-1 explained,

“I pay most of my semesters out of pocket, and certain classes, like, I don’t know why. I’m a psychology major... For me there are certain classes that I have to take, and I sit there and I’m like why? What does that have to do with my major? So, for someone that’s paying out of pocket, it’s kind of like, you know, I could have used that money to take a class that relates more to psychology...”

FGD 2-1 said the classes that students take have no order and are assigned classes that are not related to their major.

“So basically, the class system you take really have no order... The one I’m taking, this one assigned is Psychology. So, my major is cyber security, so everything have to do with computer science. So basically, along math and Science. I take calculus, physic... For me, I don’t know why I have to take psychology, history, for me that is like a waste of time... And it doesn’t really help me a lot with anything”.

FGD 2-3 echoed the concerns expressed by previous participants. She saw no use to some classes that she was required to take.

“But like I know that it’s a state requirement like my major is engineering but like, I have to take psychology next semester, but like it’s kind of off topic. I mean, Psychology is still an interesting topic, but like I don’t see why I need to take it. I wish it was more towards your major, instead of, like, requirements”.

*b. Tell me about a positive experience in the classroom?*

Participants stated small classroom size and easy access to professors as their positive experience in the classroom. For example, participant FGD 1-2 said:

“So, my school in India had uhm a small classroom and teachers where into what can I do for students very much. And that is one of the reasons I came to Victory first and not UCF first, the small class size and that I can communicate with the teacher and being more involved in the class, and that actually happened... and that really helped, I can connect with the teacher and messaging him or her... So it’s really been helpful”

Participant FGD 1-3 added that access to professors at the college extends far outside the classroom. She expressed that they make her feel comfortable to ask questions anytime. She said “It’s been same for me the same. And more because it’s not only just in the classroom but it’s outside too. If you need my help and I’m in the other room, I mean the professor, professor room, and you can go there whenever you want, you feel comfortable to go there. And it’s his time, maybe to eat or check his text, and will help with grammar, reading...”

The outside classroom access to the professors was also emphasized by FGD 2-1 as:

“So, I was taking this professor, for like hum, it wasn’t an elective, it was sociology, so I really liked her class... Her energy, you know those classes you can never fall asleep on. She liked me so much, because I always do my work on time... and she asked me if I wanted to be an office for her club. So, I became the vice president of her club. It was amazing”.

She felt that this professor’s interest in her exposed her to other opportunities in the college. She is now very involved in student government, student leadership, and volunteer organizations.

Although FGD 2-3 agreed with earlier expressed sentiments on classroom experiences that classes are small and professors are accessible. She added though “I only saw one Asian in my class this semester. I don’t know if it’s the Oviedo campus or the classes I’m taking, but like I don’t know...”

*c. Do you have problems keeping up with homework? Why?*

In responding to this question, participants echoed difficulty with online homework, more so in their first semester than right now. However, there are still some challenges with online homework, the struggles are minimized with experience and familiarity with technology.

FGD 1-1 said “Oh well I don’t have any problem keeping up with my homework now, but at the first semester, I really had a lot of trouble because I have to finish one class and then go to another campus and come back. And then I had to do all the community service and then go to work and everything. So, it was kind of difficult, but since it was the first semester, the classes were not really that hard. But now most of the homework is online – the Mastering. I find that kind of homework a little bit stressful because it’s on the computer, and I’m using my country where everything is on paper, that was kind of a change for me. Yeah, I haven’t had any problems”

Participant FDG1-2 suggested incorporation of technological training and awareness during first year/semester orientation to foreign students. He suggested having the professor

speaking, and emphasize the importance of technology in students' success in various classes beyond online classes. He said:

FDG 1-2: "Hum... coming here hum, be dependent on technology so much was a drastic change. And in the first semester, Hum, with the easiest classes and with less classes, I scored the worst of my three semesters here. And the semesters went by, I took more classes and classes really difficult, and even that I scored better than what I scored in the first semester. So, maybe academic advisor should have showed or warn us, I guess, or at least tell us how, there should be an orientation for International students who had not studied in the United States for integration of technology and like how important it is"

He suggested not to have a class but an orientation, and for the college to "concentrate on first year students, have subject professors come in to talk about what is needed to succeed. How to use blackboard, Sakai..."

Besides the challenges with technology, participant FDG 1-3 also struggles with public speaking due to language barriers and fear of making mistakes.

"Yeah, actually for me this semester is hard because in the past I don't need to have a credit so now I need to have a credit... so I can pass. And uhm, the last week I did my first power point presentation because before I used to paper and everything so now it's different. And for to talk to people in another language, it is complicated and more because my class right now, my speech class is with Americans. For them it's very easy to talk, and for me it's bad pronunciation and yeah, it's difficult".

Balancing work and school was another challenge asserted by most of the participants.

FGD 2-2 indicated having a job in his first semester at the college. He described how hard it was to keep up with homework while employed.

"So basically, I had a job during my first semester; it was kind of hard to keep up with my classes and everything because the schedule that I had did not match my job. It was kind of hard sometimes to get, you know, some homework sometimes. You know some homework closes at 11:59PM and sometimes I get off work at 12 midnight. I couldn't really make it, I just have to quit and everything".

Although he needed the money but his education was his priority, therefore, he had to quit his job. FGD 2-1 shared a similar experience in her second semester “I got involved with a lot organizations and I had a part-time job. I was working like five days a week and balancing classes. I was taking three classes, one of them was math, and one of them was English. I had to change my availability at work, just because I feel like school was more priority”. FGD 2-1 struggled to keep a healthy balance between work and school “it was really hard, because I’d get home from work and I’ll be like I’ll get this done tomorrow because I’m really tired. But I will not get it done tomorrow, because something else will come up”.

**Summary of Academic experience:** As I listened to the recording and in my transcription, the emergent themes are disappointment with academic counseling experience, the requirement for irrelevant courses to major needed to graduate, technological barriers, and language barriers. They expressed their sense of disappointed as they described their experiences, specifically as they settled into the college culture. They expressed the lack of information that should have been provided by their advisors.

3. *How would you describe your social experience at the college?*

The most important challenge expressed by all participants was issues with communication.

a. *Whom do you turn to for help: student, faculty, staff, other?*

Student expressed difficulty with English language and the fear of making mistakes prevent them from socializing with “American” students. By American students, they mean native students that speak proper “American English”. Participants FGD 1-1 prefer to ask her advisors for help when needed rather than her peers. She said:

“I turn for help to advisors because I find it difficult really to American students because the first time I enter University, I still can’t talk very well with them because I get really nervous. I feel like the speech class really help me to connect to them, and try to speak to them because other than that I don’t feel I would have any social interaction with them at all”

Participant FDG 1-2 has a strategy to ask different people based on their specialty, however there are other issues that he has nobody to turn to. He said: “For my classes its faculty”, “For my academic plan, it’s my academic advisor, and for internships and the stuff that is not related to my academic thing and its related to my visa, it’s my International advisor. Sometimes, regarding other issue, I have nobody”.

Participant FGD 1-3 made an interesting comment that she usually go to advisors for help, however, now she helps the new international students. She also mentioned that she tries to get involved in the school and she became friends with her professors. In her own words:

“I go to advisors and professors when I need help I talk to them. Actually now, I help the International students, the new ones, I try to get involved with the school” “I’m not technologic, for me if you have a good team, you can do a big change. To me the people here changed my life. Some of my one professors is my friends, sometimes I told my advisor that you are my psychologist, every time I come here... she fix my problems. She is really good”

FGD 2-1 is involved in several student clubs around the college and this encourages her to mingle with all people, both American and foreign-born students. This involvement broke her insecurities and gave her the opportunity to speak more with everyone, this provided an avenue to practice the English language, both spoken and written. Therefore, she acknowledges confidence and growth in her social skills at the college.

“I got involved with a lot of organizations. So, most of my friends right now are like at school. Like, you’ve got to realize that when you start attending college, and you start having friends in these organizations, there are certain stuff that you cannot relate to

people that are outside of those organizations. So, if I need help with anything, they are the ones I turn to because they are with me, basically I live here. And my organization advisor, she's like, she's amazing. So, hum, it does matter... like you know there are certain times you are not supposed to text people out of respect, she doesn't care. At 11PM, if you have a problem, you text her... It's like she is always there. It's like I have a second family here".

Participant FGD 2-3 describe a strategic goal to meet at least a student in all her classes every semester. She decided to make this conscious effort because she felt the need to connect to at least a student in each class. Her reason for this strategy was so that they can help each other. She became excited as she continues to share her experience this semester, she said:

"I meet my friend the day before class and we became friends just like that. That was cool. Like at the beginning of the semester my goal was to have at least one person in class that I know. So, if I need help, I can reach for help, and then we can help each other for finals, maybe. Recently, I had to write a paper for my class. It was for Economics class actually, and that is the class that I'm struggling in, and I asked this person in my class to come and work in my apartment so that we can work on the paper together. And it went pretty well. Like I don't mind writing but when it comes to Economics, the topic is so difficult, like I need help".

She expressed that the cashier that rang up her purchase at Wal Mart the day before class, happened to show up in her class the first of the semester. In her own words, she said "and we became friends just like that".

*b. What do you think of the professors at the college?*

Participants stated that their professors are good and passionate. Even participant FGD 1-3 said: "I love them, and they are nice". Participant FGD 1-2 felt that they are very passionate but like everywhere else including in India

"...there are professors that are more passionate than others. They were not good at teaching but were inspirational, that is the same everywhere"

Participant FGD 1-1 stated that her professors are good and that she appreciated their guidance; however, she is having some trouble this semester with some of her professors.

Participant FGD 1-1 is one of the participants that have been at the college for more than three semesters, and it is interesting to note that this is her first not so good experience with her professors. She said:

“But this semester, I’m having trouble with the professors. Because my chemistry professor, his kind of scary, so I’m scared of asking anything because if ask, his going to give me attitude. And I’m scared a lot. And for my physics’ class the professor doesn’t speak English very well, Since my English isn’t that well, so if I ask him something he doesn’t understand what I’m trying to say, so we don’t really... so I have to look for help outside of the classroom. This is the only problem I’ve had, just this semester with those professors”.

FGD 2-1 claimed that most of her professors were “really nice”. She indicated earlier how her sociology professor invited her to join a student club, this invitation changed her level of engagement at the college and improved her social experience at the college. She also pointed out though that she asked for recommendations from her peers and sometimes meets the professor before enrolling in their class.

“Some of the professors that I took they were really nice... Before I took them, I asked like friends that took them before. At first, I used to go to rate my professors dot com, but that don’t work... For me, the easiest way was to meet with some professors before I took their class, they don’t even know that’s why I’m meeting with them. And also, was to ask different people about their classes and the professors. Most of the professors I took are really nice, helpful, most of them wants you to pass their class, so they give you the resources and help you. Most of my professors will be like if you need help these are my office hours or I’ll be at this room at this time so if you need help, just come by. So, they were really helpful”.

The students felt compelled again to compare the education system here to that of their countries. They expressed the ease and flexibility in the American education system, they felt

comfortable interacting with their professor, which combined enhances academic achievement and encourages and motivates them to learn. FGD 2-3 expressed

“May I say more? Comparing the school system to my country and here. I like here much more because it’s more flexible. And you get to pick classes you want, whenever you want. Either in canvas or online, right? I don’t know about prices but they are pretty good compared to my country”.

FGD 2-1 shared a similar experience with the American education system saying, “When I came here I was relaxed. Like when you go to school, you have to learn, like memorize all the stuff that you learn. And the next day when you go to school, you have to recite in front of the professor. You have to make sure that you know everything. When I came here, I’m like oh ho open book, woo! Yeah!”

*c. What do you think of the staff at the college?*

The consensus, when asked about the staff of the college, was that people around the college are nice and helpful. FDG 1-1 said, “The people at the information desk are very helpful. Every time you go there and ask a question they really direct you and they tell you where you need to go”.

FGD 1-2 raved about his experiences at the honors society. His enthusiasm was demonstrated in the intensity of his words and he encourages all foreign-born to get involved. This is how he described his experience

“...for me Barbara was the head of honors institute in Lake Mary campus and she was, I think, the perfect person. She helped everybody, she was kind, she supported everybody in the institute, and uhm but she had to leave for some reason last semester. This other lady joined the honors institute, I was skeptical of how she was but a week ago I went to talk to her about my accommodations... she was helpful too. So, for honors institute, the staff is great”.

FDG 1-3 expressed similar experiences with the staff at “the student center information, all the staff for international students are helpful”

FGD 2-1 also mentioned that her advisor was instrumental in determining her major. She is happy with her choice and she credited her advisor for this.

“With the staff, they are amazing. I also changed my major like twice. My first semester I went for Accounting-Office management because I love math, but after that class, I was like... So, I changed it to social work but I love psychology. So, after I talked to my advisor, she’s like why don’t I do psychology as a major and social work as a minor. So, I’m like, I never taught of it that way. So, kind of like helped me figure out what I really wanted to do... Yeah, I feel like if they see you often, they don’t need to be your advisor, they will just stop and talk to you... Hey, how is it going? ... When you get involved you get to know a lot of the staff. Like you don’t have to take their classes or be your advisor. If they see you only once, they are going to remember that face... At this point I have nothing to complain about. They are amazing”.

FGD2-3 also mentioned that “I like all the advisors... they advise me not to take some classes. I know they are not supposed to do that but they care about me. Therefore, they did it for me, which was super nice. When it comes to financial aid, I know I sound so stupid but like, I just ask them questions and they are pretty nice. But like I feel like, you know, they are annoyed by me because I’m asking all these stupid questions. Because I had never experienced it before, so like I understand that everything is on my own in college unlike high school...”

*d. Do you hang-out after class?*

FDG 1-1 only hang-out for group projects associated with class work. She finds it difficult to communicate and socialize with people. She explained that:

“...because I get really scared if some random people just start talking to me because I have to think and practice what I’m going to say, so like I can’t make friends here that easily. I do make friends uhm when they are Hispanic because we can talk in Spanish.

But uhm, If it's some other American person its... I mean were friends, they sit next to me and we can talk about the class but other than that no”.

FDG 1-1 expressed lack of confidence in her English language abilities, which is shared among the other participants as well. Participant FDG 1-3 also expressed fear of speaking English and not making sense. She said:

“Now I have friends around the world. Today I am going to meet one for example from Switzerland, she came to this country for learn English and we have one semester together and now she is my friend. And she come back to study here again. And yeah! I met people from India, from everywhere because they come to this country for learn English Language. Well, when it's the same language, sometimes we sit and we speak the same language, but when is another language, is really good because we do that for practice. So, in my case, my professors, the other time, maybe one time of a month doing like a we need to go for the lake, for you guys walking, I don't know, for you guys to more of Orlando. So. We went to field trips together, so it was really good”.

FGD 2-2 reported not hanging out due to other obligation outside of school. He works and attends school at the same time. Although his schedule is much better now, it is still difficult to combine both. “I don't hang out a lot with people from college because they have their schedule set and they don't match my schedule, so... because I don't have time”.

*e. What gets in the way of working with other students? How were your experiences in working with other students?*

The language barriers keep coming up with several questions asked during this focus group discussion. When asked what gets in the way of working with others all participants mentioned the difficulty with communicating with others due to lack of understanding from both ends. The “Americans” as they call it don't understand what they are trying to say, and this embarrasses them and cause some shame, it makes them squared to speak, and separates them from other students. FGD 1-1 summed up her feelings stating:

“Yeah, most of the time, has been positive. Sometimes it’s really difficult to try to say something because they may not understand what you are trying to say but there are some students that really try to help you overcome that fear of making a mistake when you’re trying to talk and say something but some other students are very clueless, they just look at you like whatever. So, they don’t care about you. But ehm, hopefully I haven’t really touched that kind of students, yet it’s just some kind of people that sometimes they put in your group and you have to deal with that. But other than that, if you get enough people that are trying to support you then its fine, you can ignore those people that ignore you”.

Although participant FGD 1-2 feels the same way, however he stated that this language barrier and difficulty with communicating his thoughts effectively only pushes him to want to do better. Here is how he summarized his feelings

“I believe in learning through experience and, the challenges you face when you are communicating with people who don’t speak your language ... and were speaking the language that you are not comfortable in, it only motivates you to do better. I guess, so you must be more comfortable now. It helps when people don’t understand you, It motivates you to do better I guess”.

Participant FGD 1-1 described her coping skills saying that she is more comfortable interacting when the group is small. Here is what she said:

“Well sometimes, it depends, because if it’s a group of 3 people, it’s easier to convey ideas. But if it’s a group of many people, it is more difficult to communicate. So yeah, it is fun to work with other people as long as it’s not a really big group. You get lost if you don’t understand something”.

Participant FGD 1-3 though liked to work in groups, in fact she stated that she does not like to work alone. However, the language is still an impediment for her to work freely and enjoy people, as she would like to do. In other to work with other students, she feels that she needs to first explain to her audience that English is not her first language, and basically begging for her audience to listen and not to judge her bad pronunciations or grammar. In her own words, she said:

“In my case ... I made a joke that I’m not from here ... I make a few mistakes. So, when I try to talk everybody knows, (Chuckle) and when I see their faces like hun, I try to repeat it in a different another words but everybody, most of the time, the people are very nice with me. They tell me when I say something wrong, they say just change the words. Yeah, I don’t have any problems”.

FGD 2-1 stated, rather contrary to other participants, that she knows she is an introvert and before coming to the college, she had problems working with people. She said

“So, I’m an introvert, because I’m involved so much lot, it doesn’t feel like it, because I kind of got out of my comfort zone... But the thing with me is that I get drained when I’m around of a lot of people, or if I’m somewhere for a lot of time, I start to, you know, getting drained or just like I ok I need to go home. I used to do this thing when I go to places, I look at my phone and scroll down my phone even though it’s dead. I just act just so that people will not come to talk to me...”

The good news though is that since she became so involved in student clubs at the college, she was taught about her personality type and how to manage interaction with people. She claimed that

“learning about my personality type and working with different people with different personality type, is just kind of like, you know, so that’s how people feel when I do certain stuff... It makes me put myself in their shoes. Because of that I learn different learning styles and all this stuff. Yeah, so it kind of help me be a better person, I guess...”

Through experience from her club involvement and some training, she figured out a way to work with others now. FGD 2-1 asserted that

“In certain classes, I had to do group project. And I hated group projects just because I kind of like working by myself... I have to figure a way to work with others, I mean in life I have to do that in real life. I might as well start practicing now. So, like I said, learning about different personality type and different learning styles, it helped me figure out a way to like in group projects in classes. It kind of like...If you met me one semester ago, you will be like... I used to take night classes so that I will not interact with people”.

A solemn observation was that four out of the six participants indicate that they like to work alone. This is an unusual or rather an unexpected discovery when asked what gets in the way of working with others? The researcher feels like if they prefer to work alone, then less effort will be made to get along with others. FGD 2-2 said

“... I just want to go to class, pay attention to the teacher or something. Well, I met this people, they are nice... but some of them are weird... You just can't imagine what they say... Like every time we meet together, you know because we've got to do this project, I try to connect with them... They just say/do weird things... I'm the type of person that like to work a lot by myself”.

Similar to the sentiments shared about working alone, FGD 2-3 said

“... I've never done a group project before, so I don't know how that is like. I like to work on my own, more likely, not everyone has high expectation as I do... I'm pretty sure I should be fine, but I prefer to work alone. Like I said, my goal was to know at least one person in each class, so I should be fine with working with people”.

4. *Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you encounter as a foreign-born student at the state college?*

The challenges were similar among the participants. They all agreed that knowing their way around the college is critical, especially during the first semester at the college. The ability to navigate the social and academic resources available at the college is very important in addressing some of their challenges. The unawareness of the technological requirements of the college seems to come up several times during the discussions. The technological unawareness is augmented for these foreign-born students because none of them has been exposed to technology in education from their country of birth. For example, FDG 1-1 said

“the only challenge that I encountered was the online homework, because, I mean I have never done homework on a computer before coming to here, that was new. It was an interesting experience trying to handle, other than that everything was pretty easy considering that I finished High School here. It wasn't that hard of a transition”

FGD 1-2 described his biggest challenge as lack of information. His description is as follows

“the lack of information when I came to the college... I had all these goals but when I came here in the first semester I did nothing but study and I didn't score well. And because I was unaware of the Victory State Volunteer Society and the other clubs, and the honors institute. I would have joined the honors institute if I know about it in the first semester, but I got to know about it in the second semester. So, I wasted those four months for nothing. So, I guess I had to find things myself, and the only way I got to know the honors society was just because of a sheet of clothe that was about the honor center and it was in a corner of the campus, what was the point. Even though that has improved now, I see posters, I see Chalk boards and stuff, but it wasn't there one year ago. People should be encouraged to participate”.

FGD 1-2 is now settled in the college and is now in a better control of his academics, however he felt alone initially and did not know where to get the information he needed to succeed. He discovered majority of the resources available by chance.

Language barriers and adjustment to American professors and their teaching styles coupled with lack of technological know-how were some of the major challenges of FGD 1-3. She stated that “everything is challenging because first the language; second the homework and online homework. I graduated maybe 12 years ago from my another degree, for me it's like I start to study again. I am 35 and it's like uh hun, I have to start again. And it's complicated”.

FDG 2-1 echoed the same language issues:

“...sometimes when I speak very fast my accent come out like extra strong. I used to get nervous for speech class, I had to do like speeches. I don't like public speaking, so when I get up there to speak, my accent get really strong... The way they were looking at me. I'm like do they understand what I'm saying? I'm like ouch!”

FGD 2-1 continued to compare her experience when she first moved to the United States and her experience now. She stated that,

“When I first came here, I moved to Arizona, and there were literally three Haitians in the school. There was me and my two brothers... We had to use goggle translator to communicate to our professors because there was no Haitian professor there. And there was literally no one that spoke French or Creole and it was horrible... I was square to answer, if they ask me how I was doing. I’ll just shake my head. But coming here I went to eight grade... and I feel like I was home. It was like a bunch of Haitians. I was still kind of forced to learn English, but I was more comfortable, if I wasn’t able to say something in English, then there were still people that would understand me”.

Though this study is interested in students’ social and academic experiences at the state college, participants repeatedly referenced and compared their experiences when they first arrived in the United States and settled into their respective middle or high schools. FDG 1-1 said, “Coming from high school to college here wasn’t that challenging, but when I came from my country to high school, it was really hard to accommodate, get used to everything”.

All of these participants expressed some financial challenges. They had to work to save to pay for college, however managing work and school was tough for them. FGD 2-2 had to quit his job and FGD 2-1 had to reschedule her time at work to give school more priority. In doing these though, it stressed them even more financially. FGD 2-1 indicated that “besides like the financial aid and scholarships... I don’t have any”

5. *Based on your personal experiences, if you were going to give advice to another student, what would you say?*

The one unique advice the participants echoed, based on their personal experiences, for another foreign-born student was to seek information. The ability to know the resources available to them at the college and the ability to know how to access those resources will alleviate some of the challenges they face. They recommend a place where foreign students can go to ask questions. This place must be welcoming and willing to provide the information sought. FGD 1-

3 related that “first, they have a lot of questions. So, we are here to answer those questions. We are here for help you, for you find out better ways...”

All participants explained that the new foreign-born students at the college would have many questions. FGD 1-1 related that getting information was an issue for her. She felt that some students held information on purpose. FGD 1-1 said, “If they have a center where they can ask something if they don’t know. Because I found out that sometimes here, they are very secretive with their information. Well, I think it will help other students if there is a center they can just go ask somethings if they don’t know. Because I find that sometimes here when you talk to any person about something I think they are very secretive about what they know. So because it happened to me like when I wannar apply for financial aid, I try to talk to some you know students. And they were like I don’t know... go ask someone else... So there should be a place where you feel comfortable to ask questions”.

FGD 2-1 is positive about her college experience and state that the college has a lot of programs available to foreign-born students. Her recommendation to the students is for them to speak and ask questions. The resources are available; they have to seek it though. She said

“I’ll definitely tell them to attend this college. From the past couple of semesters, I’ve been here, I’ve seen a lot of programs, of course they created to help foreign-born students, like Global Connections... I feel like it’s easier when you have students you can relate to... There is a lot of resources to help. They just kind of have to speak... Don’t be like me when I first started”.

FGD 2-2: I also recommend asking for help. He stated that help is available but you need to ask for it. In addition, FGD 2-3 advice was “be brave and reach for help because everyone will be there to help you”.

6. *How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?*

This question created an “aha” moment during the focus group. Participants suggested the importance of cultural awareness within the college. They felt this could be away for them to give back to the college. They felt that they could collaborate with the “Americans” where they both mutually benefit from this collaboration. They suggested creating/formulating a mechanism in which they can share their culture with “Americans” in a semi-formal or informal setting.

They can tell them about their journey, location on the map, food, culture... FDG 1-3 said

“for me is like meet new people from different countries its very interesting about your culture, about what do you doing in your country, learn about a different kind of stuff. For example, in this country, I meet a lot of people, American people say oh Venezuela is in ah... they don’t know. They’ve never travelled outside of the United States... I had an opportunity, maybe in the last month came people from France and I made for this people “Arepas” from my country. And I say for this people you need to make your own “Arepas” ... It was a new experience to learn from my country... Now they know “Arepas” from Venezuela, I met someone from there, and it is really good. I like it...”

They spoke about bringing in a cultural artifact from their country of origin that could be placed in a showcase. Dr. Hopp suggested that this could also be an opportunity for one of the foreign-born students to act as a curator for the artifacts. This could turn into a mini museum for the college. In Dr. Hopps words:

“You know this sort of brings another piece for the center. At some point, it will be great for the students to bring an artifact, a cultural artifact. And if we have this huge display case and you know, it becomes a center of attraction. It’s almost like a museum piece. You know, what are these things, you know and you will have students who will be curators of that. Everybody will want to bring things in and you just keep it. This is a logistic thing. Wherever they put this center, you want a display case”.

FGD 2-1 recommended to “continue to welcome them because I know how hard it is to come from another country. And to just come and not have any friends, it just makes you feel like an outsider. I would continue to make them feel welcomed...”

FGD 2-2 said, “I would say make a group or something, like foreign-born students or something. So, they can go in and feel comfortable. And see there are other people as you...”

Indistinguishably, FGD 2-3 said, “I would say connect with people who are from the same country as you or speak the same language as you. And then connect those people, like new people with old people so that they can help each other”.

In addition, they suggested a mentorship program in which new foreign-born at the college will be mentored by an experienced foreign-born student. They also, noted the benefit of being mentored by an “American”. They suggested mentorship between a foreign-born and an “American” will be beneficial to both participants. The American will learn a new culture and gain global exposure to another country and culture, while the foreign-born will get to practice English and acculturate. This interaction forces the foreign-born to practice and improve their English in order to communicate with their American mentor.

*7. Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to share with me?*

They all felt that they have shared their thoughts and had nothing else to add when we asked if there was anything not mentioned. FGD 2-1 made a recommendation to create a “booklet of resources and where to go in different languages, have some sort of fun fact about each culture”. FGD 2-2 suggested providing professionals that speak the same language,

translators, and resources for foreign-born. While FGD 2-3 proposed Language resources, have students who speak the same language as tutor.

### **Synthesis of Meaning**

#### **Emergent Themes**

Here I present the themes and subthemes that emerged from the survey and the focus group discussions. The analysis of the pilot study produced 233 significant statements, and sixteen sub themes. The sub themes were eventually categorized into five emergent themes based on college impact model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) and the sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) that guides this research. The college impact model fundamentally posits that student development is facilitated through students' interaction with peers, faculty, and staff at the college, while Vygotsky's sociocultural theory simply believes that people learn through interaction with others and through the support of a more experienced individual who will facilitate further learning and development. The emergent themes are Academic challenges, Social challenges, Organizational challenges, Mentorship Challenge, and Personal Challenges, shown in Table 11 below.

Table 11  
Thematic Coding and Emergent Themes

Exploratory Question	Questions	Emergent Themes
<p>What is the lived academic experience (challenges) of foreign born students attending a local state college in the United State?</p>	<p>How would you describe your academic experience at the college?</p>	<p><i>Academic Challenge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Barriers and Insecurities</li> <li>• Faculty Engagement</li> <li>• Cultural Difficulties and Unfamiliarity</li> <li>• Lack of Technology Knowledge Requirements</li> </ul>
<p>What is the lived social experience or (challenges) of foreign born students attending a local state college in the United States</p>	<p>How would you describe your social experience at the college?</p>	<p><i>Social Challenge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Engagement</li> <li>• Cultural Differences</li> <li>• Language Barriers</li> </ul>
<p>What are the services needed to address these challenges faced by foreign born students to ensure success at the state college?</p>	<p>Please take a little time to share your personal thoughts on your experience as you try to settle down in the state college after admissions.</p>	<p><i>Organizational Challenge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erroneous &amp; Inaccurate Advising/Counselling</li> <li>• Insufficient Information</li> <li>• Financial Issues</li> <li>• Deficiencies in the Knowledge of the Education System/Requirements</li> <li>• Navigating the System Alone for Resources and Information</li> </ul>
<p>Can you talk about your</p>		

Exploratory Question	Questions	Emergent Themes
	<p>experiences with the challenges you encounter as a foreign-born student at the state college?</p> <p>Based on your personal experiences, if you were going to give advice to another student, what would you say?</p> <p>How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?</p> <p>Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to share with me?</p>	<p><i>Mentorship Challenge</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Support</li> <li>• Lack of Extracurricular Activities</li> <li>• Lack of Diverse Student Club</li> </ul> <p><i>Personal Challenge</i></p> <p>Setting high academic goal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of Isolation</li> <li>• Time Management Issues</li> <li>• Setting High Goals</li> </ul>

## **Academic Challenges**

Through repeated review of the transcripts, the most noticeable sub themes associated with the academic challenges the participants experienced were: language barriers and insecurities; lack of faculty engagement; cultural differences and unfamiliarity; and lacking knowledge of technology.

### **Language barriers and insecurities:**

All participants reported they experienced challenges with the English language. Language issues are real for them, it limits their understanding in class and prevents them from engaging in class discussions. English language challenges directly affect their communication ability with native students, faculty, tutors, academic advisors... FGD 2-1 expressed how horrible her experience was when she just arrived in this country because she did not understand the language and her professor was not able to communicate with her. She had to use goggle translator for the limited communication that occurred. She expressed her language insecurities by saying, "I was scared to answer, if they ask me how I was doing? I'll just shake my head". FGD 1-1 mentioned how she was nervous initially to speak to Americans because of the language,

"Yeah, most of the time, has been positive. Sometimes it's really difficult to try to say something because they may not understand what you are trying to say"

FGD 2-1 described her experience as follows "...sometimes when I speak very fast my accent come out like extra strong. I used to get nervous for speech class; I had to do like speeches. I don't like public speaking, so when I get up there to speak, my accent get really

strong... The way they were looking at me. I'm like do they understand what I'm saying? I'm like ouch!" She described the need for cultural acceptance and the ability to engage more with native students in order to promote open and inclusive dialogue with all students. They suggested a need to hire bilingual staff.

**Faculty engagement:**

The participants in this study were cognizant of the value of their interaction with faculty. All participants frequently acknowledged the support received from the professors in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Although what they expressed was slightly different, the bottom line was that the professors were instrumental and aided their success in the college. They all acknowledge the easy access to their professors. FGD 1-3 claimed that "because it's not only just in the classroom but it's outside too. If you need my help and I'm in the other room, I mean the professor, professor room, and you can go there whenever you want, you feel comfortable to go there..." FGD 1-1 also confirmed what other students have echoed: "My experience in the classroom is also good, because your kind of get to interact with the teacher more, and uhm you get to learn, if you don't understand something you can ask him or go visit the office hours..."

Knowing that interaction with the professors is beneficial, they were challenged however to reach out to the faculty for different reason. A few of them expressed the desire to interact more, however their insecurities with the language was a hindrance. Therefore, they suggested in unison for the professors to reach out to them.

**Cultural differences and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS:**

All participants discussed how studying at the college exposed them to other cultures, and how this exposure cultivated their cultural awareness and tolerance; they express how it ignited the desire to be a cultural agent. FDG 1-3 captured the essence of cultural awareness as “now I have friends around the world. Today I am going to meet one for example from Switzerland, she came to this country for learn English and we have one semester together and now she is my friend. And she come back to study here again. And yeah! I met people from India; from everywhere because they come to this country for learn English Language”.

They felt that the Americans are unaware of the FBSs’ cultures or of where they (the FBS) came from. They expressed that even their professors are unfamiliar with their cultures. They felt that the Americans might be more receptive if they were culturally aware of their environment and of the people that live in it with them.

FGD 1-1 “...they may not understand what you are trying to say but there are some students that really try to help you overcome that fear of making a mistake when you’re trying to talk and say something, but some other students are very clueless, they just look at like whatever, so they don’t care about you”.

It was also apparent that some of the participants were uncomfortable interacting with natives due to cultural unfamiliarity. FGD 2-2 added by saying “... I just want to go to class, pay attention to the teacher or something. Well, I met this people, they are nice... but some of them are weird... You just can’t imagine what they say... Like every time we meet together, you know because we’ve got to do this project, I try to connect with them... They just say/do weird things...”

They all experienced some difficulties communicating and interacting with people, especially the natives. They associate some of these difficulties with cultural differences between themselves and the natives. They continue to articulate how they feel that other FBSs are more tolerant and easier to interact with than the native students are.

**Lack of technology knowledge requirement:**

Another salient theme under academic challenge was the technology requirement in education. Even though education comparison was not the focus of this study, all the participants, at one point or the other, referred back to their country of origin. When describing their technological requirements here and the challenges they faced, especially with homework and course requirements, they all agreed that they lacked the technological know-how needed to succeed in the college. FDG 1-3 expressed that “actually for me this semester is hard ... the last week, I did my first power point presentation because before I used to paper and everything so now it’s different”. FGD 1-1 added that

“Oh well I don’t have any problem keeping up with my homework now, but at the first semester, I really had a lot of trouble because... it was kind of difficult... most of the homework was online – the Mastering. I find that kind of homework a little bit stressful because it’s on the computer, and I’m using my country where everything is on paper, that was kind of a change for me. Yeah, I haven’t had any problems”

FGD 1-2 indicated that academic success is dependent on technological knowledge. He did not expect this and was not prepared to face this challenge. He recommended that his advisor should have warned him before he started class. In his words:

“... coming here uhm, been dependent on technology so much was a drastic change... So, maybe academic advisors should have showed warned us, I guess, or at least tell us how, there should be an orientation for International students who had not studied in the United States for integration of technology and like how important it is”

He suggested not having a class but an orientation. Concentrate on first year students, have subject professors come in to talk about what is needed to succeed. How to use blackboard, sakai...”

### **Social Challenges**

The challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) are not limited to the classroom but also in their social life outside of the classroom. Most of their challenges are associated with social integration and understanding the American culture. They felt it was easier to interact with students who share the same cultural background or other FBS. They expressed limited interaction with native students. The salient themes under social challenge were peer engagement, cultural difference and unfamiliarity, language barriers and insecurities – academic and social –formal and informal English.

#### ***Peer engagement***

FBS find it challenging to interact socially after class with native students which usually leads to feelings of alienation, but they all agreed that it was easier for them to interact with other foreign-born students at the college. FDG 1-1 described her interaction with native students as superficial and the difficulty of making friends especially cross-cultural friendship.

“So, like all the times I’ve hang out with students it was because of group projects... so like I can’t make friends here that easily. I do make friends hum when they are Hispanic because we can talk in Spanish. But hum, if it’s some other American person it’s... I mean were friends, they sit next to me and we can talk about the class but other than that no”.

FGD 2-2 continued to say “I don’t have a lot of friends, so I don’t ask for help... So, social experience, I will say it’s not my best experience I would say...”

It is interesting to hear FDG 2-3 describe her experience as her social experience stood out from the rest of the participants of this research.

“...So far everything is good... I meet my friend the day before class and we became friends just like that. That was cool. Like at the beginning of the semester my goal was to have at least one person in class that I know. So if I need help, I can reach for help, and then we can help each other for finals, maybe. Recently, I had to write a paper for my class. It was for Economics class actually, and that is the class that I’m struggling in, and I asked this person in my class to come and work in my apartment so that we can work on the paper together. And it went pretty well. Like I don’t mind writing but when it comes to Economics, the topic is so difficult, like I need help...”

To recapitulate what FDG 2-3 said, “so far everything is good... So if I need help, I can reach for help, and then we can help each other...” She said during the focus group that she went through a good ESOL program in high school and that she had no problem with the language. I believe that her experience and confidence in the language and the ability to make friends set her apart from the rest of the participants.

### **Cultural differences and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS**

The apparent cultural differences of the FBS and native students; and the unfamiliarity of native students to the FBS’s culture is crucial to the challenges the FBS face at the college. As discussed earlier under academic challenges, cultural challenges affect FBS’ social life as well. In order to communicate and to fully engage with the native students, FBS must gain knowledge of U.S. customs and culture. Participant FGD 2-3 related that a professor made a joke in class that caused other students to laugh, however, she was not able to participate because she did not understand the joke... Therefore, she felt alone and isolated at that moment and the point (connection to the content), and what the professor was trying to say remained a mystery to her to this day.

### **Language barriers and insecurities:**

The biggest challenge, prevalent even to other challenges, is communicating with other students from diverse backgrounds. Though they all agreed on the importance of socializing with native students, they repeated their insecurities in the language and the fear that the native students might not understand what they are saying. This prevents them from developing meaningful friendships with the native students, and hence a hindrance to their social engagement at the college.

### **Organizational Challenges**

After analyzing, the most repeated significant statement categorized under organizational challenges that FBS face at the college are insufficient information, erroneous and inaccurate advising/counselling, financial issues, deficiencies in the knowledge of the education system/requirement, and navigating the system alone for resources and information.

### **Erroneous and inaccurate advising/counseling:**

The role of an academic advisor/counselor at the state college is to provide educational advising and individualized attention to students. The academic advisors/counselors are staff members who work in the Student Affairs Office and provide services that support students. Some of the services provided are educational plans, academic counselling, and they connect students to others academic resources available at the college.

To most FBS, these are the only people in their support system that are familiar with the education requirements of this college and of the country as whole. Therefore, it is essential that these advisors deliver quality advising that will enhance their experiences and promote their success.

The first theme that emerged under the organizational challenge was erroneous and inaccurate advising/counselling. FGD 1-2 was passionate when recounting his experience:

“My educational advisor was not very helpful because she told me what subjects I have to take every semester and she gave me a five... to plan but she did not tell me foreign language requirements for UCF and uh I have to take credit by exam test, and PLAT which is the recognized exam for Victory State that does not have my language. So, I had to go to Minnesota University exam but Victory did not accept it, then I had to go to New York University, they took eight weeks to send my exam, and after the exam they took their time to send the result. It was a lengthy process. And everything could have been easier, because all that happened last semester and like this semester I’m already taking seven classes, so with that and the test in mind everything was stressful. I hope they improve, they have to include everything when they are advising”

FGD 1-1 summarized the frustration of the other participants.

“...the first semester was a little complicated because when I came here to register for classes, they were supposed to help you pick the classes, because they give you this schedule/plan, so when I went to the computer most of the classes were closed. So, I had to take classes here and then travel to three campuses, so it was a little complicated for me...”

She felt that her advisor could have helped her more or at least preempt her as a first-time student in college (fresh from high school) and new to the academic system in the United States. They all echoed the experience of disappointment with their advisor at some point during their journey at the college. They felt misguided, they felt that some valuable information was withheld from them, and they felt alone in an academic environment as they tried to understand “what is happening” to them alone.

### **Insufficient information:**

Another salient theme expressed by all participants was insufficient information. They have insufficient information about the resources available to support and to promote the overall students’ experience at the college. The significant word here was “alone”. Several students

indicated finding out about resources and programs alone or by chance. FGD 2-1 iterated how there are layers of resources available at the college to engage students, such as “student government, student clubs, academic support center, travel abroad, medical services, and work opportunities (on and off campus) ...” However, she suggested that FBS need to ask for help and to seek out these resources.

For all participants, having the information to identify and connect to resources was a challenge at the college.

For example, FGD 1-2 narrated his challenges when he arrived at the college:

“I believe that the challenge I face was the lack of information when I came to the college... And because I was unaware of the Victory State Volunteer Society and the other clubs, and the honors institute. I would have joined the honors institute if I know about it in the first semester, but I got to know about it in the second semester. So, I wasted those four months for nothing. So, I guess I had to find things myself, and the only way I got to know the honors society was just because of a sheet of clothe that was about the honor center and it was in a corner of the campus, what was the point. People should be encouraged to participate”.

They recommended advertising this information and consolidation resources in away that students can be made aware of their existence.

### **Financial issues:**

Financial abilities and information about the scholarships and aids available to FBS came up a lot in both the focus group discussions and in the responses collected from the survey. Students expressed their lack of knowledge about financial aid processes Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and how this challenged their academic pursuit. Participant FGD

2-1

“When I applied here... for free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), I didn’t know that I did not qualify for financial aid, so I wasn’t able to, like start right away. So, I have to like kind of go to work, save money and then come back. So basically, I wasn’t sure of the process and my parents didn’t know either. So, I had to figure everything out by myself, all the financial stuff, and there wasn’t a lot of scholarship I was aware off. So yeah”.

Similar sentiments were echoed by the words of FDG 1-2 and FDG 2-3, who expressed that colleges in the United States are expensive and they attend state colleges to reduce college expense. FGD 1-2 acknowledged, “I liked UCF and I applied and they told me there was a cheaper option...” Some of the FBS are not eligible for financial aid and/or they are unfamiliar with the process. They recommended extending scholarships or some aids to FBS.

#### **Deficiencies in the knowledge of the education system/requirement:**

Students frequently compared the education system in the United States to their home country. They spoke about the student centeredness of education here. They spoke about the ability to interact freely and openly with their professors in and outside of the classrooms. In as much as this system could be confusing to them at first, they spoke highly about the teaching style of the U.S. education system. For instance, FGD 2-1 said, “When I came here, I was relaxed. Like when you go to school, you have to learn, like memorize all the stuff that you learn. And the next day when you go to school, you have to recite in front of the professor. You have to make sure that you know everything. When I came here, I’m like, ho, open book, woo! Yeah!” FGD 2-1 was comparing the teaching styles in the United States to that of Haiti, where students are expected to sit quietly, write the teacher’s word verbatim to be memorized in preparation for exams.

To summarize all experiences of the participants, FGD 2-3 said “comparing the school system to my country and here. I like here much more because it’s more flexible. And you get to pick classes you want, whenever you want. Either in canvas or online, right... they are pretty good compared to my country”.

They expressed their disappointment as well about the general education requirements in the U.S. The academic system in the United States requires students to take some general education classes to expose them to various subjects. FGD 2-3 found no benefit in taking courses that are not directly related to their major. Expressing their challenges, they felt that time and financial resources are being wasted as they maneuver their way through a free system such as this. When compared to their native country FGD 2-1 said

“I pay most of my semesters out of pocket, and certain classes, like, I don’t know why. I’m a psychology major...For me there are certain classes that I have to take, and I sit there and I’m like why? What does that have to do with my major? So, for someone that’s paying out of pocket, it’s kind of like, you know, I could have used that money to take a class that relates more to psychology... FGD 2-3 expressed similar dissatisfaction “...they were recommended to fulfill my elective requirements... I don’t know why theater will be useful in my major”.

FGD 2-3 expressed how the American education system is good for her and provided opportunity to learn openly. She compared the system in the United States to the system in South Korea, where students have a set of prescribed courses for their major, which was predetermined for students. She expressed how this is rigid and students are taught to memorize and regurgitate knowledge during exams. On the other hand, though, for a student new to the American system, she spoke about challenges in understanding this new system.

FGD 2-2 encapsulate all their experiences by saying “so basically, the class system you take really have no order...” They spoke about how this could be confusing for them and how

the navigation between general education, core, and elective courses could be costly both financially and time wise. To conclude FGD 1-2 said “For me uh a lot of the classes are useful... I think I could have saved a year which people in United Kingdom and India do”.

**Navigating the system alone for resources and information:**

The ability to know, identify, and coordinate the resources available to FBS is important for their success at the college. FGD 2-1 stated how she joined a student club at the college, the importance of her club advisor, and the process of getting even more involved and engaged henceforth. She said:

“...With the staff, they are amazing. I also changed my major like twice. My first semester I went for Accounting-Office management because I love math, but after that class, I was like... So, I changed it to social work but I love psychology. So, after I talked to my advisor, she’s like why don’t I do psychology as a major and social work as a minor. So, I’m like, I never taught of it that way. So, kind of like helped me figure out what I really wanted to do... Yeah, I feel like if they see you often, they don’t need to be your advisor, they will just stop and talk to you... Hey, how is it going? When you get involved you get to know a lot of the staff. Like you don’t have to take their classes or be your advisor. If they see you only once, they are going to remember that face... At this point I have nothing to complain about. They are amazing”.

This experience did not come easy for FGS 2-1 and not all FBS are aware of such possibility. FGD 1-2 stated that the college have some resources that most FBS are unaware of, resources such as the volunteer society and the honors institute. He lamented about wasting several months at the college before finding out about some of these resources by chance and “alone”. FGD 2-1 added that she was not able to start college the first semester she was admitted to the college because she did not know that she had to qualify for financial aid. FGD 1-1 also complaint about her first semester because she registered for classes on various campuses and; commuting from one campus to another became a challenge for her.

Learning to navigate the college for resources and information is vital to the success of FBS at the college.

### **Personal Challenges**

The other challenges expressed repeatedly, which are personal in nature, were categorized under this theme. I chose to do this because there are some experiences that are intrinsic to who we are, they are developed overtime through “students” background and precollege characteristics” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 57). These are experiences gained through exposure from birth that culminate to develop student’s identity and personality. The focus here was to identify the challenges that were personal in nature as the students described their experiences in the college.

Some of the personal challenges reported were the feeling of isolation, time management, and setting high goals.

#### **Feeling of Isolation:**

The first theme that emerged and is personal in nature was the feeling of isolation. All participants from the focus group except one expressed the desire to be more social, recognizing the benefits of being social. However, they faced some personal challenges that prevented them from making friends with other students, therefore remaining isolated from the rest of their peers. FDG 2-2 said “... because I could be very shy sometimes...” FGD 1-1 also expressed that “I’m scared of asking anything because if I ask, his going to give me attitude. And I’m scared a lot”

FGD 2-3 shared similar personal traits that kept her isolated sometimes and prevents her from engaging fully at the college.

“The thing that I struggle with is I don’t know why but I always get overwhelm with male professors. For some reason, they scare b me”

FGD 1-1 added to the personal challenge of feeling isolated by saying that ...I'm not a very social person. So, like all the times I've hang out with students it was because of group projects because I get really scared if some random people just start talking to me... so like I can't make friends here that easily".

In terms of the overall feeling of isolation, through FGD 2-1's description of her experience, it was apparent that some FBS's feel isolated due to some challenges that are personal in nature.

"...So, I'm an introvert... But the thing with me is that I get drained when I'm around of a lot of people, or if I'm somewhere for a lot of time, I start to, you know, getting drained or just like I ok I need to go home. I used to do this thing when I go to places, I look at my phone and scroll down my phone even though it's dead. I just act just so that people will not come to talk to me... In certain classes, I had to do group project. And I hated group projects just because I kind of like working by myself... I used to take night classes so that I will not interact with people".

As FGD 2-3 expressed the need to meet new people and make new friends, she indicated loneliness because she is not from here and her parents are away. She said:

"And for me, I'm not from Orlando, I'm from a different state, so I like I still have to make new friends and I'm leaving in an apartment with my roommates, I'm away from my parents..."

### **Time management issues**

The second theme that emerged with respect to personal challenges was regarding issues with time management. All participants specifically addressed their initial challenges with managing work and school. FGD 2-2 reported that "I don't hang out a lot with people from college because ... I don't have time."

Managing work and school was the biggest challenge they expressed with keeping up with homework. For FGD 2-1 the experience

“I think it was after my second semester... I got involved with a lot organizations and I had a part-time job. I was working like five days a week and balancing classes. I was taking three classes... it was really hard, because I’d get home from work and I’ll be like I’ll get this done tomorrow because I’m really tired. But I will not get it done tomorrow, because something else will come up.”

In support of FGD 2-2 experience with managing work and school, FGD 2-1 added:

“So basically, I had a job during my first semester, it was kind of hard to keep up with my classes and everything. Because the schedule that I had did not match my job. It was kind of hard sometimes to get, you know, some homework sometimes. You know some homework closes at 11:59PM and sometimes I get off work at 12 midnight. I couldn’t really make it, I just have to quit and everything.”

In addition FGD 2-3 added that:

“Getting home late from jobs, I like think it’s nice that Victory State have online classes, so that you can take classes when you can get online and then take classes whenever you want. That is what I’m doing for summer.”

FGD 1-1 captured the time management challenges experienced by each of the participants as:

“... but at the first semester, I really had a lot of trouble because I have to finish one class and then go to another campus and come back. And then I had to do all the state service and then go to work and everything. So, it was kind of difficult...”

### **Setting high goals**

The third theme that emerged under this section revolved around setting high goals/expectations, thereby adding unnecessary pressure to the other challenges they already faced. A good example of the pressure experienced by the participants’ high goal supposition (belief/expectation) can be seen in FGD 2-3 statement about her personal high-grade expectation:

“For me, I have a very high expectations for myself, so I freak out if I don’t get higher grades.”

FGD 1-2 hinted that he had to exclude himself from social interaction because he wanted to study and get A's in his seven classes. He stated:

“For me, in my first semester, is with my family and just studying even though I didn't score like I tried to make sense of what was happening. In my second semester, I made a couple of friends, I hang-out, and I didn't get the academic results as I wanted them to be. So, in my third semester, I just blocked everybody and just studied, like all through and the results was good. In my fourth semesters, I'm planning to get seven As...”.

### **Mentorship Challenge**

All participants' response associated with needing help, support, or the desire to join a student club for meeting people or to engage in college activities were merged under mentorship challenge. The most repeated challenges, hence, the themes under mentorships are lack of support, lack of extracurricular activities, and lack of diverse student clubs.

#### **Lack of support:**

Some participants mentioned the importance of social support as one of the factors aiding FBS's smooth experience in college. For example, FGD 2-2 acknowledge pleasant experience as he settled down at the college because some friends showed him what to do. He said,

“I didn't have a hard time because some friends came before me so they reveled to me how to do everything about financial aid, admission, and everything. Pretty much, it was easy for me. So, I didn't have any problems with the financial or something”.

On the same note, FGD 1-2 talked about his influence on a friend that registered in a different college out of state. He mentioned walking him through the process of registration, enrollment, and his overall settling down experience as a college student in the United States. He concluded by saying that his friend did not experience challenges like he did when he first came and had no guidance.

The participants suggest seeking support when faced with challenges. FGD 1-3 mentioned social support as one of the coping responses that helped her survive her first year of college. She stated,

“First, they have a lot of questions. So, we are here to answer those questions. We are here for help you, for you to find out better ways...”

FGD 2-1 supported the idea of seeking help from other students, she added:

“...I feel like it is easier when you have students you can relate to... There are a lot of resources to help. They just kind of have to speak... Don't be like me when I first started”.

### **Lack of extracurricular activities and lack of diverse student clubs**

It was apparent through the focus group discussion that the participants that were engaged in a student club or activities expressed better experience than the participants that were not involved. FGD 2-1, FGD 1-2, and FGD 2-3 all reported participating in one of the student clubs, societies and/or programs, and how these experiences changed their perspectives. FGD 1-2 said:

“For me Fiona was the head of honors institute in Lake Mary campus and she was, I think, the perfect person. She helped everybody, she was kind, she supported everybody in the institute...”

He repeated several times that if he had been aware of the institute, he would have joined earlier for the support and resources extended to him through this program. In addition, he spoke about the Victory State Volunteers and Student Leadership Team where student render their time and service to non-profit organizations in the community. Besides the satisfaction from the service rendered to under privileged in our community, FGD 1-2 believed that students also got to support each other and gain the mentorship opportunity from the club advisors.

Although these students emphasized the value in college engagement and the mentorship possibility from different clubs and programs, other students collectively expressed the challenge of finding a club to connect to because of lack of diversity. FGD 2-3 suggested

“...connect with people who are from the same country as you or speak the same language as you. And then connect those people, like new people with old people so that they can help each other”.

She went on to say it would be easier for these connections to take place if these clubs were established. These connections typically creates an avenue for peer mentorships, faculty-to-student mentorships, and/or staff-to-student mentorships. These mentors can serve as the cultural medley necessary for the FBS and their success at the college.

### **FBS Recommended Solutions to Challenges they face:**

The question regarding how the college can improve the support offered to FBS was specifically asked to extract from the students the type of support they feel the college could provide to aid their success. Based on their responses, the conclusion is for the college to provide more opportunities to engage with both faculty, native students, and other FBS; provide proper advising; provide avenues for cultural engagement for all; provide financial advising; consolidate and advertise all resources available to support students at the college (such as, information regarding the honors society, volunteer society....); offer formal and informal English classes to FBS; hire qualified staff with proper training in each department (for example, placement services, advisors...); and hire bi/tri- lingual staff.

### **An “Aha Moment”**

Although the students provided all the above recommendation as solutions to the challenges they face at the college, they also suggested value they could add to the college. This

was not anticipated prior to the focus group discussions. In spite of the fact that they are faced by several challenges at the college and they felt that, the college could provide some resources to alleviate these challenges. It was a big surprise to me when they expressed that they also have something to offer back to the college. They suggested that they could be the cultural agents that the college needed to spread cultural awareness to its native students, faculty and staff.

They all in unison suggested adding a cultural engagement component to the solution the college could offer to solve the challenges they face. This suggestion was due to their experiences with native students' cultural unconsciousness. They expressed the ability of promoting their culture through conversations and artifact displays as icebreakers to instigate conversations with native students, faculty, and staff at the college. This in return will expose native students, faculty, and staff to different culture which could promote cultural tolerance (Sinclair, 2004).

## **Conclusion**

In this qualitative action research, the experience of foreign-born students enrolled in college credit classes was explored to examine the challenges they face in a state college that may prolong/prevent their graduation. In this chapter, I conducted a pilot study and sought to identify emerging themes related to foreign-born students. In this process, I selected the research site and participants, I determined the research methods and procedures, and I decided on data collection, recording, and analysis methods.

To capture the essence of the experiences described by the participants of this study, I employed a qualitative questioning approach based on a phenomenon and using participatory and

social constructivism inquiry, which enabled an understanding of how foreign-born students conceptualized the social and academic challenges they face in this state college.

I began the pilot study by surveying all the students enrolled in college credit classes in 2017 spring semester. The data collected from this survey provided information of those interested in participating in further research and guided the focus group discussions.

Five emergent themes were developed from the participants as they described their experiences at the college based on the College Impact Model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). College Impact Model focuses on student involvement and the degree of their college engagement, while Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, states that students need help to advance to the next level of development. These two constructs guided the way the themes emerged, which helped to answer the research questions of this pilot study. The survey and focus group discussions revealed that the challenges faced by most FBS could fall under:

- Academic Challenge
- Social Challenge
- Organizational Challenge
- Personal Challenge
- Mentorship Challenge

Sub-themes were integrated into the five emergent themes above. Although some of the sub-themes fit into different emergent themes. For example, the FBS language barriers and insecurity fits perfectly into all the categories because the lack thereof could cause potential social, academic, personal, and mentorship challenges.



## **CHAPTER 3 ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER (ASEC)**

### **Overview**

This research study stems from several reports indicating the increasing competitiveness of the world economy, the requirement of at least an associate degree in the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. labor market, and the unprecedented increase in the foreign-born population in the United States since the 1970s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Lacey & Wright, 2009; President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), 2009). In yet a different report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), was the reported decrease in the U.S. college graduation rate (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011). In 1995 OECD reported that the U.S. ranked second in college graduation rates compared to 13<sup>th</sup> place in 2008, and only 8 countries out of the 34 members of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries ranked lower than the U.S (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011).

Since foreign-born are an integral part of the United States, it is imperative to educate them for the nation to remain globally competitive. Therefore, understanding the challenges faced by the foreign-born students at state colleges will create an avenue for recommending solutions to some or all their challenges. Furthermore, not only will this increase their educational attainment and economic productivity, but it will also prepare more Americans for the competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century global market.

### **The Problem Statement**

The population of the foreign-born continues to increase in the United States, and they continue to seek educational opportunities. Therefore, the problem of practice that this

dissertation in practice will address is the challenges faced by foreign-born students at a local state college that may prolong or even prevent graduation.

### **The Pilot Study's Purpose**

The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the essence, interpret, and describe the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in a state college that may be preventing and/or prolonging their graduation in an effort to gather the information necessary to inform the creation of a comprehensive support center to address these challenges.

To understand the challenges faced by foreign-born students at this state college, the researcher conducted a pilot study to explore their experiences. In the first phase of the study, the researcher with the help of the Institutional Research and Effectiveness (IRE) department of the state college administered a survey to all students registered in college credit courses in the Spring of 2017. The result of the survey provided the preliminary data on FBS and collected information of those interested in further research participation. To further explore and clarify the challenges described through the survey, a focus group discussion was employed. In the second phase of this study, the researcher developed a solution to solve or reduce the challenges expressed in the study by the FBSs.

### **The Pilot Study's Outcome**

The survey and the focus group discussions were used to explore both the academic and social experiences of FBS at the college and to solicit recommendations for improvement. The pilot study found the following challenges: language barriers and insecurities (formal and informal English), erroneous and inaccurate advising/counseling, financial issues, insufficient information, time management issues, deficiency in the knowledge of the education system and

requirement, lack of support, cultural differences and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS, personal characteristics, engagement deficiencies (with both faculty and peers), feelings of isolation, necessity to make new friends, and navigating the system for resources and information (alone). These challenges are not in any particular order. Table 12 below presents a list of these challenges and the connection to emergent themes in the pilot study.

The exploratory question regarding how the college can improve the support offered to FBS was specifically asked to extract from the students the type of support they feel the college could provide to aid their success.

What are the services needed to address these challenges faced by foreign-born students to ensure success at the state college?

Based on students' responses, the resolution is for the college to provide more opportunities to engage with both faculty, staff, native students, and other FBS; provide proper advising; provide avenues for cultural engagement for all; provide financial advising; consolidate and publicize all resources available to support students at the college (such as information regarding the honors society, volunteer society...); offer formal and informal English classes to FBS; hire qualified staff with proper training in each department (for example, placement services, advisors...); and hire bi/tri-lingual staff.

Table 12  
Emergent themes and sub-themes

<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>
Academic Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Barriers and Insecurities</li> <li>• Faculty Engagement</li> <li>• Cultural Difficulties and Unfamiliarity</li> <li>• Lack of Technology Knowledge Requirements</li> </ul>
Social Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Engagement</li> <li>• Cultural Differences</li> <li>• Language Barriers</li> </ul>
Organizational Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erroneous &amp; Inaccurate Advising/Counselling</li> <li>• Insufficient Information</li> <li>• Financial Issues</li> <li>• Deficiencies in the Knowledge of the Education System/Requirements</li> <li>• Navigating the System Alone for Resources and Information</li> </ul>
Mentorship Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of Support</li> <li>• Lack of Extracurricular Activities</li> <li>• Lack of Diverse Student Club</li> </ul>
Personal Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of Isolation</li> <li>• Time Management Issues</li> <li>• Setting High Goals</li> </ul>

### **Theoretical Constructs**

Employing a holistic approach, this dissertation in practice sought to design a comprehensive solution to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in state colleges. The results from the pilot study found an array of challenges faced by FBS. These challenges were categorized into five major themes. First, the challenges that are academic in nature, that is, impedes the FBS academic progress. Second are the challenges related to their social interaction in the college which can also limit not only their social but also their academic

achievements. Third are the organizational challenges, such as the inefficiencies within this state college that impedes the spread and accuracy of information to FBS which is detrimental to their progress as a student and, to some extent as a person. Fourth were personal challenges of the students that might lead to contradict the students' action with their academic goals. Lastly, the challenges associated with mentorship, meaning lack of personalized guidance or a "more knowledgeable other" in their academic and social goal in the college.

The theoretical constructs guiding this research were the College Impact Model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) and Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978). Using these constructs, the challenges extracted from the student experiences were categorized under the five major themes described above.

The basic tenets of the College Impact Model are based on "the experiences students have while enrolled" at the institution that can foster students' success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 18). This model provided the researcher with an opportunity to recognize and investigate several factors that influenced students' experiences in college. "College Impact Model focuses on the sources of change in student experience (such as different institution characteristics, programs and services, student experiences, and interactions with students and faculty)" (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005, p. 19). The model describes the effect of the students' experiences and how these experiences, while enrolled at the state college, impact change (success) in the student. Pascarella (2005) claimed that "the structural features of an institution are believed to have an indirect rather than a direct influence on student development, with their impact mediated through the institution's environment, the quality of student effort, and students' interaction with peers and faculty members" (p. 57).

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of development, emphasizes the interaction between people and the culture in which they live. Vygotsky believed that people learn on two levels. On the first level, people learn through interaction with others. On the second level, Vygotsky introduced a "Zone of proximal development" (ZPD). He believed that people's cognitive development is limited to their ZPD, which is the area of exploration where students require help and social interaction to develop. In this zone, students require a "knowledgeable other," someone with more experience (for example, a teacher, a staff, or a more experienced peer), to support and/or facilitate the student's learning process. Vygotsky (1978) simply believes that people learn through interaction with others and through the support of a more experienced individual who will facilitate further learning and development. The participants indicated navigating the system for resources and information alone. They suggested that the resources and information search does not have to be a challenge if there was a "more knowledgeable other" to point them in the right direction.

The first four challenges identified through this pilot study align well with the factors suggested earlier by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) to impact students' development in college. In this pilot study, these factors were modified and renamed as follows:

1. The student demographic or precollege characteristics renamed as personal challenges;
2. Organizational characteristics of the college renamed as organizational challenges;
3. Students' academic experiences renamed as academic challenges;
4. Students' nonacademic experiences renamed as social challenges;

The final challenge identified through this pilot study aligns well with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory.

5. The lack of a "more knowledgeable other" which I renamed as mentorship challenge.

Using Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, 2005) College Impact Model and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural model, I proposed a comprehensive and integrated solution to the challenges foreign-born students (FBS) face in a state college as they work toward graduation. The College Impact Model addresses the sociological impact of the environment on FBS's ability to achieve their goals, that is, graduation. The model also focuses on student involvement and the degree of their college engagement. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, on the other hand, states that students need help to advance to the next level of development. Using these two constructs, I present a solution to the overall FBS experience at the state college. In this second stage of the dissertation in practice, I will develop and design a comprehensive and integrated student center where FBS challenges will be addressed: Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC).

### **Relationship to Problem of practice**

The problem of practice that this dissertation addresses is the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state colleges that prevents/prolongs their graduation. Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) is a center created as a comprehensive support center for FBS at Victory State College. It is a place created to provide coordinated and centralized social and academic support for FBS. I propose "ASEC" as a solution to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students at the state college. When students get help and support, and when they are engaged in the college activities, research asserts that their chances of succeeding will increase (Kuh, 2008).

Schuetz (2008) confirms a positive connection between student engagement in state college and student's graduation success. Research confirms state colleges can create learning communities, teach faculty to teach high impact lecture that incorporate peer tutors or mentors, increase faculty-student interaction, introduce social media, create online study group among other strategies (Schuetz, 2008; Kuh, 2007; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976 Tinto, 1975;).

Andrew Grosovsky, the Dean of STEM at the University of Massachusetts, stated in a report by Cooper (2014) that “we wanted them to engage with other students, faculty, advisors and academic support staff. We wanted them to feel this is their university, they know people can feel comfortable as part of this state” (Cooper, 2014, para. 14). Just as Dr. Grosovsky declared, ASEC really aims at engaging students.

### **Key Elements of the Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) Design**

The Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) is a comprehensive and integrated hub focused specifically on increasing FBS involvement and engagement at the state college. This center will coordinate and consolidate college resources to make available to the FBS.

All services will be free and available to all college students, however with more focus on FBS engagement. The effort of the center will be focused on bringing together and enabling an academic and social engagement of FBS through targeted programs. The work of the center will be focused around the five major themes that emerged from the pilot study.

### **Visual Representation of Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC)**

Academic and Social Engagement Center strives to provide the support services that enhances students' academic and social involvement at the college to promote student success to

graduation. The center will work in tandem with all campus departments to coordinate all the resources available to support students in a user-friendly manner.

Figure 5 shows some of the key elements of ASEC that address the challenges faced by foreign-born students at the State College. At the heart of this figure is a hub, a place or a center that is easily accessible, inviting, and comfortable. It is a place where any student can come for academic and social support, and a place where cultural exchanges are promoted and valued. Surrounding the center are key elements of the programs and activities offered.

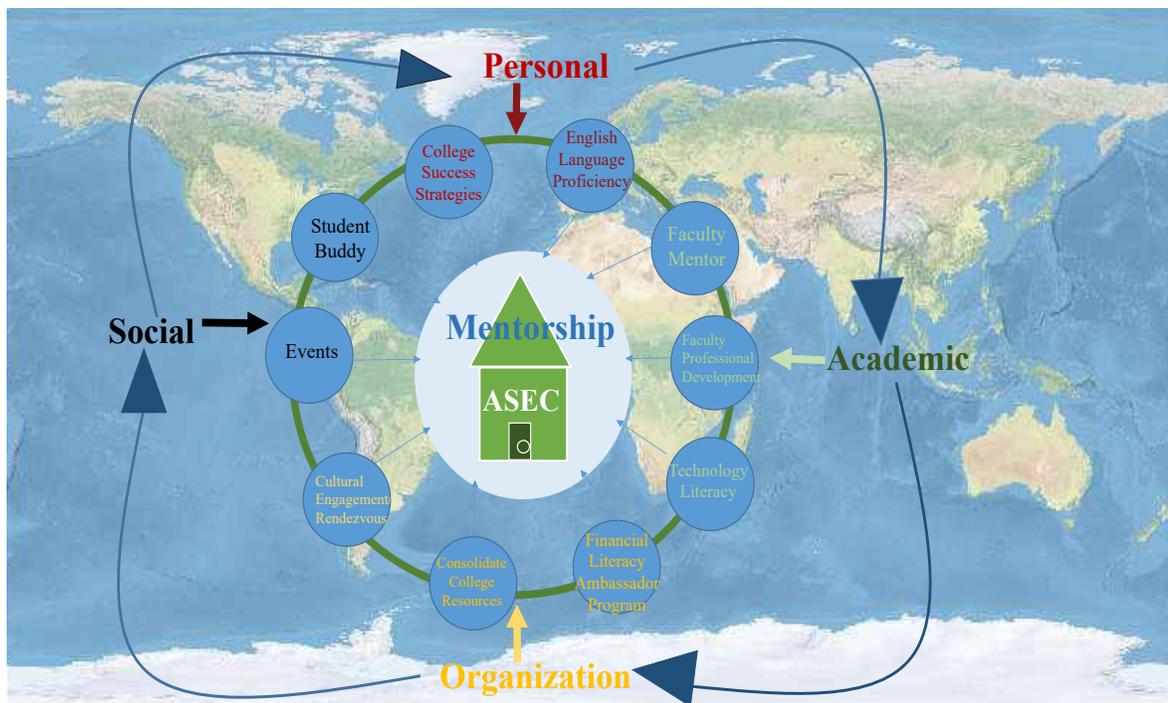


Image created by Doyin Soremi

Figure 5. Model of Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC)

The researcher is aware that the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) at the college are significantly different based on their personal characteristics and experiences,

therefore, students can use the center's resources at the level appropriate to address their specific challenge.

### **English Language Proficiency**

The participants in the pilot study were culturally diverse with different linguistic and educational backgrounds. All the participants expressed some form of language insecurity and/or stated ways in which their lack of language proficiencies limited their level of academic and social interaction in the state college. Consequently, the center needs to be prepared to address their needs and challenges uniquely. The center will provide several programs for students to access at the level relevant to their challenge.

Language proficiency is commonly defined as a person's ability to speak or perform in an acquired language. The importance of English language proficiency for social and academic engagement of foreign-born students in American state and state colleges cannot be exaggerated. As expressed by the participants from this pilot study, lack of language proficiency affected their interaction in and outside of the classroom, thus impeding their academic and social integration at the college.

To develop language proficiency that would help FBS communicate (read, write, and speak) more effectively, the center will have technology with programs that enhance English language proficiencies. Researchers agree that language learners that spend extra time on the computer after school on several language programs showed great improvement in their literacy abilities when compared to the students that did not participate (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2012; Marzano, 2007).

There will be conversational workshops in English with different topics that students can attend. These workshops will be forty-five minutes to an hour in length and will be designed as short educational sessions designed to share/introduce useful ideas/skills to improve students' experience. They will be scheduled for small groups of 6 to 15 students and participatory in nature. Some of these sessions will be student directed where students can collaborate to present during these workshops. Other sessions will be directed by faculty and/or staff, and with/without the collaboration of students.

These sessions are created to be informal and open. Students will learn by talking to others, they will be provided the opportunity to practice public speaking in an acquired language in a comfortable and open environment. They will have the opportunity to think more deeply about what they are going to say and are more likely to connect deeply to the conversation, the culture in the workshop atmosphere, and remember the information. Several studies on workshops impacts on students' grade reported positive connection (Lundeberg, 1990; Van Lanen and Lockie, 1997; Gattis, 2000; Wright et al., 2002; Grise and Kenney, 2003; Ogden et al., 2003). The conclusion is that peer facilitated workshops improve "the quality of learning; students are performing significantly better on exam questions that require higher-level thinking and instructors are now able to ask more of these questions on lecture exams" (Preszler, 2009, p. 189).

Since the language in the classroom is different from conversational language; students will be encouraged to register for English for Academic Purpose (EAP), or English Language Development (ELD). In the pilot study, students commented on the advantage of taking Speech classes at the college, hence, speech classes will also be recommended.

Through an exploratory case study of six schools in California and Arizona, Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990) acknowledged eight factors as important features for promoting the success of Latino English Learners in schools. To summarize and to integrate their findings into this study, I will consider that the Latino English Learners are like the FBS at this state college in that they suffer from lack of English language proficiency and insecurities. To combat this challenge as described by the participants of this pilot study, the eight factors from Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1990, p. 222) will be integrated into ASEC.

1. Value is placed on students' language and cultures.
2. High expectation of language-minority students is made concrete.
3. School leaders make the education of language minority student's priority.
4. Staff development is explicitly designed to help teachers and other staff serves language-minority students more effectively.
5. A variety of programs for language-minority students is offered.
6. Counseling programs give special attention to language-minority students.
7. Parents of language-minority students are encouraged to become involved in their children's education.
8. School staff members share a strong commitment to empower language-minority students through education.

In summary, the researchers posit that effective engagement, and hence the development of these students, takes place in schools that promote their success. Therefore, the language proficiency focus of ASEC will include technology with access to language development programs; peer facilitated workshops; faculty facilitated workshops; and recommendations to

English for Academic Purpose (EAP), English Language Development (ELD) or speech classes that reflects the goals of effective engagement of FBS.

### **College Success Strategy Workshops**

College success strategy workshops are workshops that “provide students with information about college and campus services, assistance with academic and career planning, and techniques to improve study habits and personal skills” (Karp, Bickerstaff, Ahidiana, Barragan, Edgecombe, 2012, p. 3). Several researchers identified connections between students’ participation in these classes and positive outcomes in students’ college experience (Cho & Karp, 2012; Yamasaki, 2010; Zeidenberg, Jenkins, & Calcagno, 2007; Schnell & Doetkott, 2003; Boudreau & Kromrey, 1994; Strumpf & Hunt, 1993).

Therefore, to address the challenges that are personal in nature (time management issues and setting high goals), ASEC in collaboration with faculty from the Social Science department will provide students several college success strategies workshops every semester. These workshops will follow the College Success Curriculum (SLS1101) provided by the State College; however, the center will offer these strategies in small increments (chunks) and by topic. Workshops will include topics such as setting goals, time management, information retention strategies, note-taking skills, managing test anxiety, developing critical thinking skills, diversity cultivation, and stress reduction strategies (Victory State College, Catalog, n.d.).

### **Financial Literacy Ambassador Program**

Students will be provided with materials on financial literacy and the importance of having good credit. In this class, students will learn about banking, budgeting, saving, investing, building credits, controlling debt, and the overall financial well-being in the United States. The

center will offer financial literacy workshops each semester following the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Building Wealth booklet.

The center will start a Financial Literacy Ambassador Program, where bilingual and bicultural students will receive training on how to facilitate workshops, according to the content in the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Building Wealth booklet. Ambassadors' training will include observation of workshop delivery and mentorship from a faculty member. Students must remain in the program for at least two semesters, maintain a minimum of 2.5 GPA, and facilitate two workshops per semester.

In addition, students will be introduced to resources on Financial Aid and the implications of student loans. The center will collaborate with the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships to educate students on benefits and available resources. They will direct students on the application process and work one-on-one with students to develop strategies that make college affordable.

### **Technology Literacy**

Many FBS lack the technology literacy skills necessary to be successful. This was confirmed by all focus group participants and a few of the survey responses that indicated this as a challenge. It is important that every student have the skills related to utilizing technology to complement their learning. To improve FBS experiences at the college, their technological and literacy skills will have to be promoted and enhanced.

Technology literacy skills “enable an individual to use computers, software applications, databases, and other technologies to achieve a wide variety of academic, work-related, and personal goals” (Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education, 2000, web).

Therefore, another focus of this ASEC is to develop basic technology skills for academic and social engagement purposes. Consequently, the center's focus is to provide students with the fundamentals of hardware, software, and efficient usage. Students will learn how to navigate a computer in order to perform basic tasks, such as creating Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents, sending emails, and locating and synthesizing information from the internet.

All college students will have to develop this skill at a point before graduation to be successful in completing research assignments. "Information literacy is the ability to identify what information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate and use information in solving problems and composing discourse" (Nolte, et al, 1993, p. 14). To help students develop their information literacy skills, the ASEC will collaborate with a librarian to facilitate this process.

In addition, technological knowledge and computer know-how is critical to hone this skill. Hence, the center will offer workshops and one-on-one coaching to students to develop technological and information literacy. The ASEC will collaborate with Computing and Telecom Services (CTS) personnel. These workshops will be facilitated by peers and or staff from CTS. An online tutorial with step-by-step instructions on learning computer basics will be available and made known to students. The center will also engage faculty members in facilitating online platform information sessions, where different platforms and their requirements for success will be shared with students. The center, with the help of personnel from the college CTS, will be engaged in providing an overall student technological literacy.

### **Consolidated College Resources**

The center will consolidate and make available all the resources provided by the college to improve student experiences through a brochure and eventually a website. The pilot study

participants reported lack of awareness of several programs that were provided by the college in addition to navigating college resources alone without guidance and they happen to stumble into resources at times. Participant FGD 1-2 expressed his feelings as:

“...I believe that the challenge I face was the lack of information when I came to the college... I had all these goals but when I came here in the first semester I did nothing but study and I didn’t score well. And because I was unaware of the Victory State Volunteer Society and the other clubs, and the honors institute. I would have joined the honors institute if I know about it in the first semester, but I got to know about it in the second semester. So, I wasted those four months for nothing. So, I guess I had to find things myself, and the only way I got to know the honors society was just because of a sheet of clothe that was about the honor center and it was in a corner of the campus, what was the point. Even though that has improved now, I see posters, I see Chalk boards and stuff, but it wasn’t there one year ago. People should be encouraged to participate”.

He continued to say that he found out about these programs by chance and by himself.

This information, though it was to benefit and engage students at the college, was not easy to access. Other participants expressed the difficulty with resource navigation in the college and suggested open publication or advertisement of such resources.

The Academic and Social Engagement Center will collaborate with Student Development, Student Life, Academic Affairs, Career Development Services, Read to Succeed QEP, Academic Success Center, Center for GLOBAL Engagement, and Disability Support Services, to list all available engagement activities or programs available in the college besides ASEC’s activities. This information will be combined and presented in a brochure that will be displayed throughout the college. The following programs and information available at the college to support students will be included in the brochure by each department:

- Volunteer Society,
- Honors Society,
- Leadership....,
- Civic Scholars,
- International Student Certificates to travel program,

- Academic Success Center tutors,
- Financial Aid,
- College Advisors/counselors,
- Student Life/Student Clubs,
- Career Development,
- First Year Experience Program, and
- Intramural and Recreational Sports.

In addition to the brochure, the following initiatives will be developed to respond to organizational challenges described by FBS in the pilot study. These initiatives will be rooted in developing cooperative working arrangements among college staffs, faculty, and administrators.

### ***Faculty Professional Development***

The center will offer two workshops targeted to provide cultural awareness and best practices in engaging foreign-born students in state college. The first workshop will be offered during the Fall Welcome Back conference and the second workshop will be offered during the Spring Winter conferences to faculty and staff. For example, students noted that Americans are unaware of their culture. Included as Americans are Faculty and staff, and without connecting to students, faculty could not be effective in teaching FBS (Schuetz, 2008; Kuh, 2007; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976; Tinto, 1975). Educating faculty on recent trends in U.S foreign-born populations and their cultures will improve faculty effectiveness in developing all their students.

### ***Student Buddy***

Recent research on the effects of peer tutors on tutees confirmed a positive impact on learning for both students involved (Robertson and Ford, 2008). According to Lev Vygotsky (1978), learning and development happens through social interaction. He suggested that potential knowledge gain could be facilitated with the help of a “more knowledgeable other.” The ASEC

will connect a “more knowledgeable student” (Student Buddy) to a foreign-born student. Knowledgeable is relative depending on the goal of this pairing. This pairing may be for cultural awareness, resulting students sharing mutually enriching cultural experiences. There are several other reasons why this type of pairing may occur. For example, this might be for academic purpose where students will help each. It might also be for personal reasons, for example, for car pool purposes, and/or for friendships.

Several researchers confirmed that these types of connections increase students’ chances of succeeding at the college (Kuh, 2008; Schetz 2008; Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Tinto, 1975).

### ***Faculty Mentor***

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) confirm positive connections between faculty-to-student interaction and student’s development. Developments are considered with retention, persistence and ultimately student graduation. Nora and Crisp (2009) stressed “the importance of mentors and role models and underscored its influence on student retention and persistence” (p. 21).

Other researchers emphasized that student cannot learn without strong socio-emotional supports (Nora & Crisp, 2009; Castellanos & Jones, 2004; Vygotsky, 1978). Faculty needs to understand FBS and their challenges to learn how to reach them, and hence how to teach them.

The faculty-to-student mentorships will be developed by the Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC). The ASEC will solicit faculty that are interested in such mentorship relationships and match faculty with students.

### **Cultural Rendezvous**

The focus group discussion lead to an “aha moment,” a moment of sudden insight where the participants suggested possible value they could add to the Academic and Social Engagement

Center and the possibility of transforming the center to a place where all students could learn and engage with others. At the beginning of this pilot study, the focus was on engagement to promote FBS success at the college, which the pilot study intended to measure through student graduation.

However, during the focus group discussion students expressed the frustration they felt because Native Students lacked understanding of other cultures as well as learning about other cultures. For example, FGD 1-3 expressed her experience as follows:

“...for me is like meet new people from different countries it very interesting about your culture, about what do you doing in your country, learn about a different kind of stuff. For example, in this country, I meet a lot of people, American people say oh Venezuela is in ah... they don't know. They've never travelled outside of the United States... I had an opportunity, maybe in the last month came people from France and I made for this people “Arepas” from my country. And I say for this people you need to make your own “Arepas” ... It was a new experience to learn from my country... Now they know “Arepas” from Venezuela, I met someone from there, and it is really good. I like it...”

They suggested turning the center into a cultural engagement facility where both Native students and FBS could share experiences. The additional researcher, who was present during focus group discussion day 1, further suggested a display of artifacts from around the world. She suggested that this could be a showcase and could be presented as a museum display where FBS could exhibit artifacts from their country. This could turn into “a center of attraction” for the college, according to the Focus Group - Day One moderator (Dissertation Chair). In her words:

“... you know this sort of bring another piece for the center. At some point, it will be great for the students to bring an artifact, a cultural artifact. And if we have this huge display case and you know, it becomes a center of attraction. It's almost like a museum piece. You know, what are these things, you know and you will have students who will be curators of that. Everybody will want to bring things in and you just keep it. This is a logistic thing. Wherever they put this center, you want a display case”.

Participants also expressed several opportunities that this “Cultural Show Case” could present. For example, it could create a need for a curator, someone who will select what to show and present artifacts in an educative way to the center’s audience. They suggested having a foreign-born student as the curator for three reasons: First, as an opportunity for the student to engage in a college activity; second, as an opportunity to communicate in an acquired language with the hope of building confidence in speaking; lastly, as an opportunity to proudly share their culture with the audience. Therefore, as an essential part of Academic and Social Engagement Center, I included the following to support participants’ suggestions:

- Cultural Show Case or Museum: This is a glass case that will be used to display artifacts donated by students from their countries or cultures.
- Curator: This will be a foreign-born student that will serve as a keeper of the cultural show case. This individual will be responsible for selecting art to display, provide displayed art information to the center visitors, and facilitate in cultural conversations at the center.
- Cultural Ambassador Program (Scholar): Each Fall and Spring semester the center will invite twelve students each (24 each Academic year) to join the Ambassador (Scholar) program. The students must serve 2 semesters, have a 2.5 minimum GPA, be a student buddy for at least 2 semesters, facilitate at least one cultural workshop each semester, must volunteer for center activities, must be a member of a student club (organization), participate in a community outreach, and report directly to the center coordinator. This program provides cultural awareness, academic support, leadership, engagement, and social network opportunities to students.
- Cultural Conversations. This is a form of roundtable conversations among students. The center will work with all faculty to facilitate various conversations in an open and respectful manner. These conversations will be based on students or faculty interest. When topics arise from students, the center will solicit faculty facilitators by email broadcast, snow balling, or direct contact.

- **Cultural Celebrations.** The center will engage in celebrating all cultures. The center will have a suggestion box monthly requesting ideas for cultural celebrations around the world. Suggestions will also be solicited from members of Global Connections. The center will collect, organize, and present this information. The goal is to have a celebration monthly.

All the above programs/activities will be facilitated to promote an inclusive culture at the State College. The center will support all students; promote students' initiatives on cultural conversations, celebrations, and/or ideas. The center will recruit students consistently to facilitate continuous growth, its goals, and need to the college. The center will create a respectful environment where students can learn about themselves and others.

### **Other Activities**

**Global Connections.** Global Connections is a student club (organization) founded by the researcher in the Spring of 2017 at the college. The goal of this club is to bring foreign-born students together through community service activities and monthly meeting. All participating members have an assigned responsibility that needs to be completed in collaboration with another student or the faculty advisor monthly. The activities of this club are based on the same theoretical background that the center relies on. Global Connections was rooted in student engagement theory and will extend its activities as part of the Academic and Social Engagement Center.

**Marketing Campaign.** For this center to be successful, students will need to know about its activities, programs, and the benefit it presents to all students. Best practices include publicizing the workshops and other programs and event well, creating fun and interactive material, and providing incentives such as food, extra-credit, or prizes (Alban et al., 2014). To comply with

best practices, the center includes a marketing campaign through collaboration with faculty, staff, and student clubs, print materials, signs, and email blast. The center will advertise on the college's website, the student official newspaper, brochure, and other opportunities that arise to advertise the college.

**The Center Coordinator.** The coordinator connects students to resources, services, and opportunities at the college. One of the coordinator's primary goals is to promote the activity of the center and the success of all the students engaged in the center's activities. The coordinator will be responsible for recruiting new foreign-born students to participate actively. Therefore, the coordinator will create an aggressive advertisement of the center's program and events targeted to engage all students and to introduce cultural activities to the college.

In addition, the coordinator will serve as a mentor to all students, will continue to engage all faculty and staff, will gather, and organize college resources and provide accurate information to students and the college at large.

Table 13 presents a summary of Academic and Social Engagement Center's key essential elements.

Table 13  
Key Essentials of Academic and Social Engagement Center

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>ASEC Key Essential to Address Challenge</b>	
<b>Academic</b>	<b><i>Faculty Professional Development</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fall Welcome Back</li> <li>• Spring Winter Conference</li> <li>• Faculty Facilitated Workshops for the ASEC</li> </ul>	
	<b><i>Technology Literacy</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaboration with Victory State College Librarians</li> <li>• Collaboration with CTS</li> <li>• One-on-one coaching</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Online Tutorial</li> <li>• Faculty facilitated sessions on Online Learning Platforms</li> </ul>	
	<b><i>Faculty Mentor</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty-to-Student</li> </ul>	
	<b><i>English Language Proficiency</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See personal challenge)</li> </ul>	
	<b>Social</b>	<b><i>English Language Proficiency</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See personal challenge)</li> </ul>
		<b><i>Student Buddy</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FBS-to-FBS</li> <li>• NS-to-FBS</li> </ul>
<b><i>Events</i></b>		
<b>Organizational</b>	<b><i>English Language Proficiency</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See personal challenge)</li> </ul>	
	<b><i>Financial Literacy Ambassador Program</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Collaboration with Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships</li> </ul>	
	<b><i>Consolidate College Resources</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer Society</li> <li>• Honors Society</li> <li>• Student Leadership Team</li> <li>• Civic Scholars</li> <li>• International Student Certificate to Travel Program</li> <li>• Academic Success Center Tutors</li> <li>• Financial Aid</li> <li>• College Advisors/Counselors</li> </ul>	

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>ASEC Key Essential to Address Challenge</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Life/Student Clubs</li> <li>• Career Development Center</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Cultural Engagement/Rendezvous</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Show Case or Museum</li> <li>• Curator</li> <li>• Cultural Ambassador Program (Scholar)</li> <li>• Cultural Conversations</li> <li>• Cultural Celebrations</li> </ul>
<b>Personal</b>	<p><b><i>College Success Strategies</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul> <p><b><i>English Language Proficiency</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A computer desk with internet and language programs</li> <li>• Conversational Workshops</li> <li>• EAP or ELD</li> </ul>
<b>Mentorship</b>	<p><b><i>English Language Proficiency</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (See personal challenge)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Student Buddy</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FBS-to-FBS</li> <li>• NS-to-FBS</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Faculty Mentor</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faculty-to-Student</li> </ul>

### **Goals of the ASEC**

The center believes in the overall success of students, as they develop to become lifelong learners and independent contributing citizens. The center’s goal is to promote foreign-born student engagement, thereby encouraging their involvement in college activities, which according to College Impact Theory will facilitate their success at the state college. For this center, the essential goal is to support students to graduate.

Subordinate goals include:

- Student persistence measured through repeat enrollment in college credit classes until graduation

- Course completion measured by successful completion of courses with a minimum C grade
- Cultural engagement measured through students' ability to successfully negotiate cross cultural differences.
- Student engagement and development measured through increased participation in ASEC programs, activities, and events.
- Faculty professional cultural engagement measured through consistent increased in faculty involvement in the center's activities and enrollment the professional development offered during fall and spring conferences

### **Center's Assessment**

Both formative and summative assessments will be required to evaluate the effectiveness of ASEC. Formative assessments will include student and faculty surveys pertaining to center resources. (See Appendix I). A summative assessment is needed annually to inform college administrators and the center coordinator of the effectiveness of the center's day-to-operations. Partnering with the Institutional Research and Effectiveness of the college, ASEC will collect data on key variables that measure student progress. Variables such as enrollment patterns, class performance through increased GPA, degree completion (the critical goal of the center) in comparison to the data of other foreign-born student's non-participants.

The center will also be assessed on increased attendance at its events, awareness of the centers events, and participation among native students, faculty, and staff. The centers goal to complete workshops and professional development for faculty will be measured.

### **Similar Programs**

As the America's foreign-born population continues to increase, so is the necessity to educate this population. The Community College Consortium of Foreign-born Education

(CCCIE) was created as a national organization dedicated to increasing educational and workforce opportunities for foreign-born students. CCCIE published a report that examines innovative strategies and promising practices in state colleges for supporting foreign-born students (Casner-Lotto, 2011).

For example, Johnson County Community College created Community Links to “help foreign-born students develop everyday life skills so they can navigate campus and community services and the work world” (Casner-Lotto, 2011, p. 26). Palm Beach State College exemplifies the need for information access for students by creating Davis Global Education Center. In addition, Bunker Hill Community College recognized the significance of language insecurities and the other challenges that foreign-born students face.

The three programs mentioned above were categorized as promising practices by CCCIE in 2011. Like the Academic and Social Engagement Center, the three colleges recognized the value of academic and social support services for foreign-born students and placed emphasis on student engagement. Community Links focused on providing bilingual staff that is culturally aware of student’s needs and challenges, to provide accurate advice and support. Bunker Hill Community College on the other hand, provides various levels of English course to accommodate foreign-born students at the appropriate English proficiency level. Furthermore, Davis Global Center operates similarly as ASEC offering “comprehensive, integrated educational and support programs draw[ing] on the strengths and resources of Palm Beach State College and community-based participants in the Key-Partner Network” (Casner-Lotto, 2011, p. 28).

Casner-Lotto (2011) reported that Johns County Community College's program is achieving its goal as indicated by the "satisfaction score of 4.0 out of 5.0 on all its outreach services and programing among foreign-born students" (p. 30).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the researcher presented an overview of the pilot study, starting with the purpose of the pilot study, followed by the problem statement, the results, and the theoretical constructs upon which the pilot study relies. Through this pilot study, the researcher discovered the importance of receiving feedback from the participants as they expressed the need for cultural sharing between native students and foreign-born students.

It was based on the participants' recommendations combined with Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, 2005) College Impact Model and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory that the researcher recommended Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC).

ASEC was created as a comprehensive support and information center that enhances students' academic and social involvement at the state college to promote student success to graduation. The center will work in tandem with all campus departments to coordinate all the resources available to support students in a user-friendly manner.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVALUATION OF THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT CENTER**

This dissertation in practice originated from several reports indicating the increasing competitiveness of the world economy, the requirement of at least an associate degree in the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. labor market, and the unprecedented increase in the foreign-born population since the 1970s in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Lacey & Wright, 2009; President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), 2009). In yet a different report from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was the reported decrease in the U.S. college graduation rate (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2011).

Since foreign-born are an integral part of the United States, it is imperative to educate them for the nation to remain globally competitive. Therefore, understanding the challenges faced by the foreign-born students at state colleges will create an avenue for recommending solutions to some or all their challenges. Furthermore, not only will this increase their educational attainment and economic productivity, but it will also prepare more Americans for the competitive 21<sup>st</sup> century global market.

#### **The Pilot Study**

In phase I of this dissertation in practice, the researcher conducted a pilot study using a qualitative questioning approach to provide participants an opportunity to describe their experiences. The purpose of the pilot study was to examine the essence, interpret, and describe the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in a state college that could prevent and/or

prolong their graduation in order to gather the necessary information that will inform the creation of a comprehensive support center to address these challenges in phase II.

Using surveys and focus group discussions, the researcher explored the academic and social experiences of foreign-born students at the state college and solicited recommendations for improvement. The pilot study found the following challenges: language barriers and insecurities (formal and informal English), erroneous and Inaccurate advising/counseling, financial issues, Insufficient information, time management issues, deficiency in the knowledge of the education system and requirement, Lack of support, cultural differences and unfamiliarity form both natives and FBS, personal characteristics, engagement deficiencies (with both faculty and peers), feeling of isolation, necessity to make new friends, navigating the system for resources and information (alone). These challenges are not presented in any purposeful order.

The pilot study specifically asked students to describe or recommend what the college could do to remedy the challenges they face: What are the services needed to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students to ensure success at the state college?

Recommendations provided by the participants to remedy the challenges they face were for the college to:

1. Provide more opportunities to engage with both faculty, staff, native students, and other FBS;
2. Provide proper advising;
3. Provide avenues for cultural engagement for all;
4. Provide Financial advising;

5. Consolidate and publicize all resources available to support students at the college (such as information regarding the honors society, volunteer society...);
6. Offer formal and informal English classes to FBS;
7. Hire qualified staff with proper training to each department (for example, placement services, advisors...); and
8. Hire bi/tri- lingual staff.

Therefore, in phase II of this dissertation in practice, the researcher designed a model to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students in state colleges. The key elements of the model were created based on the recommendations of the participants in the pilot study in phase I of this dissertation in practice.

### **The Model**

The results of the pilot study indicated that FBS at the college face academic, social, personal, organizational, and mentorship challenges. The recommendations the participants gave regarding how the college could improve their experiences at the college could be summarized to providing more support and opportunities for them. To remedy the challenges faced by foreign-born students at the college, the researcher created the Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) as a comprehensive support center based on the recommendations made by the participants, and guided by both the College Impact Model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005) and Sociocultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1978). College Impact Model focuses on student involvement and the degree of their college engagement, while Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, states that students need help to advance to the next level of development.

ASEC will provide the support services that enhance students' academic and social involvement at the college to promote student success to graduation. Services such as conversational workshops designed to facilitate public speaking and to encourage students to practice conversing in an acquired language (English), provide technology with programs that enhance English language proficiencies; college success workshops to address personal challenges and to teach students college survival skills. The center's financial literacy ambassador program was designed to empower students' financial abilities through workshops and one-on-one training on available resources at the college. The center in collaboration with other departments, will coordinate and consolidate college resources and educate students on navigating the college for access. The center facilitates several mentoring opportunities to form mutual friendships and support system for students. In addition, the center encourages cultural integration through its cultural rendezvous program where cultural events will be celebrated, cultural conversations will be facilitated; and a cultural showcase of artifacts from around the world will be displayed with a curator. The center will hire multilingual staff in support of the recommendation from the pilot study. Finally, the center will offer two professional development workshops annually to provide cultural awareness and best practices in engaging foreign-born students.

The rationale for ASEC is that when students are supported, and when they are involved and engaged in college activities, their chances of succeeding will increase (Kuh, 2008). Several research studies indicate that when students are academically and socially involved and engaged, the more likely they are to persist and subsequently graduate from college (Astin, 1984; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977).

Schuetz (2008) also confirms a positive connection between student engagement in state college and student's graduation success.

Quoting from Astin (1984)

“Quite simply, student involvement refers to the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience. Thus, a highly-involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students. Conversely, a typical uninvolved student neglects studies, spends little time on campus, abstains from extracurricular activities, and has infrequent contact with faculty members or other students” (p. 297).

Other researchers specifically state how state colleges can support and engage students. For example, they can create learning communities, teach faculty to teach high impact lecture that incorporate peer tutors or mentors, increase faculty-student interaction, introduce social media, create online study group among other strategies (Schuetz, 2008; Kuh, 2007; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976 Tinto, 1975;). Therefore, ASEC's vision is to enhance foreign-born student's involvement, and engage them by utilizing some of the best practices suggested by research and the recommendations from Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education (CCIE).

### **Goals of ASEC**

The center believes in the overall success of students as they develop to become responsible and independent contributing citizens. The center's goal is to promote foreign-born student engagement, thereby encouraging their involvement in college activities, which according to the College Impact Model will facilitate their success at the state college. “The greatest impact appears to stem from students' total level of campus engagement, particularly

when academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular involvements are mutually reinforcing and relevant to a particular educational outcome” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 647).

The sole purpose of this center is to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students in a state college that could prolong/prevent them from graduating. Challenges such as language barriers and insecurities, erroneous and inaccurate advising/counseling, financial issues, insufficient information, lack of support, time management issues, deficiency in the knowledge of the education system and requirement, cultural differences and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS, personal characteristics, engagement deficiencies (with both faculty and peers), feeling of isolation, necessity to make new friends, navigating the system for resources and information. Therefore, the center will address these challenges by providing help and support to foreign-born student from registration to graduation. Hence, the goal is student’s graduation.

Subordinate goals include:

- Student persistence measured through repeat enrollment in college credit classes until graduation.
- Course completion measured by successful completion of courses with a minimum C grade.
- Cultural engagement measured through students’ appreciation of diverse culture and cultural conversations and events of the center.
- Student engagement and development measured through increased participation in ASEC programs, activities, and events.

- Faculty professional cultural engagement measured through consistent increase in faculty involvement in the center's activities and enrollment in the professional development conferences offered during fall and spring conferences.

An additional goal was discovered during the focus group discussion when participants suggested that the center could be a place where foreign-born students could give back to the college. They suggested that the center could be a place for educating native-born students about cultural diversity. Therefore, the center will also serve as a place to educate other students, faculty, and staff on the diverse cultures of the college students' population. Foreign-born students, native students, faculty, and staff will interact at the center to enhance intercultural competence and confidence at the college.

### **Target Audience**

The Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) targets foreign-born students in Victory State College. One issue encountered during model design was that the student population is nonhomogeneous. Students come from diverse backgrounds with varying ethnicity, nationalities, financial status, academic achievements, and unique life experiences. With these demographic complexities in mind, this model was designed understanding that the need to support all students remain prevalent.

The purpose of this dissertation in practice was to design a comprehensive solution to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in Victory state college that prevent/prolong their graduation. Although the center's creation was based on the fundamental challenges expressed by the participants of the pilot study, ASEC's services will be available to all college students, however with more focus on FBS engagement. The FBSs were targeted as

the major beneficiaries of the effort of this model because data continue to show an increase in the number of foreign-born students in the United States, and Florida as the fourth major receiving state, there is no obvious arrangement that caters to the needs of foreign-born students within this college. The challenges faced by these students, if not addressed, could cause their departure or prolong their time at the college contributing to the college's low graduation rate.

The effort of the center will be focused on bringing together and enabling an academic and social engagement of FBS through targeted and meaningful programs. Although the efforts of the center were designed to target FBS, the center's activities are meritorious across all populations.

Specifically, the center will serve

- Foreign-born students
- Native students, faculty, and staff through Cultural Rendezvous and mentoring opportunities.

Ultimately, FBS, native students, faculty, and other stakeholders of the state college will benefit from the center's activities.

### **Anticipated Changes in Student Performance**

Several researchers tested and showed positive linkage between student engagement and desirable learning outcomes (Ewell, 2002; Klein et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kuh, 2008). The goal of ASEC is to support students to graduation by offering services designed to keep foreign-born students engaged and involved in college activities, thereby assisting them in overcoming the challenges they face in college. Specifically students are anticipated to:

- Develop a better understanding of the college environment and understand how they fit within the context they find themselves.

- Student will understand different ways of seeking and receiving help. They must understand the resources available to support them, they must understand how to locate the resources, and they must understand the value added in each.
- Student will appreciate and take responsibility of their academic success, this will be measured through better grades and increased grade point average (GPA) scores.
- Student will make deep and long lasting connections with other students, faculty, and staff. Through mentorship opportunities, student will develop friendships that could last for a lifetime.
- Student will develop interpersonal skills, especially the ability to work well with other. Through workshops, activities, mentorship pairing, student club events, cultural rendezvous, and other center activities, students will be familiar with working with other people of diverse backgrounds. The idea is that through practice and repetition, people learn (Dewey, 2007), therefore through several collaborative activities and events at the center, students will build tolerance and the ability to work with all kinds of students (Deltor et al., 2012).
- Students will develop communication skills and develop confidence in English language. Facilitating or participating in several workshops will present students with the opportunity to practice both formal and informal communication that could boost confidence and improve their command of the English language (Dewey, 2007).

### **Anticipated Impact of the Center**

The goal of the Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) is the student's success measured through student graduation. To achieve this goal, the center promotes foreign-born

student engagement by creating activities and events that make them feel good about the college and their own involvement in the college. Archambault, et al (2009), confirmed the importance of student engagement on student investment in their education.

An additional goal discovered through the pilot study was the need to promote inter-cultural understanding among foreign-born students, native students, faculty, and staff. The participants in the pilot study expressed the need to give back to the college. They suggested utilizing the center as a cultural hub where activities will be centered towards cultural integration and diversity celebrations.

Therefore, the center should affect the way students, faculty, and staff at Victory State College view cultural diversity. The pilot study revealed frustration with native students' lack of understanding of other cultures and anxiety about interacting due to language incompetence. By creating cultural rendezvous, that facilitates cultural conversations, the cultural ambassador scholar program, and the cultural showcase with curators, student buddy, and faculty mentor, the center should create tolerance among students. The center's activities should give students new perspectives and open the eyes of students that allows for unique bonds among students, faculty, and staff in the college. This should reduce stereotypes while allowing individuality and diversity that leads to peace and a civic community at the college.

### **Center Evaluation**

Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) defined evaluation as “the identification, clarification, and application of defensible criteria to determine an evaluation object's value; worth or merit” (p. 7). At the inception of the center, the method of “judging the worth and merit” of the center must be considered (Scriven, 1967). An evaluation plan is critical for making

judgments about the center's operations, to improve its effectiveness, and to inform future center decisions (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011). Therefore, the design of this center includes a provision for its evaluation.

To determine if the Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) is meeting its intended goals and outcomes, that is to determine if the stakeholders' resources are doing what they are meant to do, the center must identify and utilize appropriate tools for assessment and evaluation. Hence, the center must have an evaluation plan. Although there are several possible questions to be examined regarding the effectiveness of the center, the researcher prioritized the following questions as representing the most important aspects of the centers' use at this point.

To determine if the center's activities have been implemented as planned:

1. Is the center on track of meeting its intended goals and objectives?
2. Are planned activities delivered accordingly? and
3. What policies and practices impede active students' attendance/visits to the center?

To determine change in students' performance:

1. Is the center providing high quality engagement experiences to students?
2. How satisfied are the participants in center's activities?
3. Which activity is most engaging and why? Which activity is least engaging and why?
4. Are the current activities meeting students' range of needs? and
5. Are there any improvement in students' sense of belonging to the college community?

These questions are of prime concern to the researcher based on the results of the pilot study where participants expressed challenges with language barriers and insecurity, cultural unfamiliarity and differences, deficiencies in the knowledge of educational system or requirements, lack of support, erroneous and inaccurate advising, lack of information, and financial issues. It is critical to evaluate the center's activities and operations that were designed

as a solution to the challenges faced by foreign-born students at the college. Therefore, the questions listed above could be examined as a starting point for future evaluation of the center.

## **Methods**

The researcher decided to use multiple data sources. The center is new and small, the need to obtain information to improve the center's activities is preeminent, and therefore, an in-depth information gathering process is imperative. There is no need for a control or comparison group at the initial evaluation since the focus at this point is to evaluate the delivery process and to determine change in student's performance. The information collected will be used to improve the program. The evaluation will be conducted using mixed methods. Data will be collected using survey completed by the center's participants and visitors; faculty, and staff will be interviewed; and sessions will be observed. In addition, a suggestion box will be provided always at the center to solicit ideas and for possible student complaints. The data collected from the first evaluation will serve as a baseline for later evaluations. Table 14 provides a visual of how the evaluation will be administered as well as relevant instruments that will be used to collect data that will answer each of the evaluation questions.

Table 14  
 ASEC Evaluation Framework with indicators, methods, and information source

Evaluation Questions for Intermediate Outcomes	Possible indicators/Measures	Data Collection Methods and Information Sources
1. Is the center on track of meeting its intended goals and objectives? 2. Are planned sessions delivered accordingly?	*All student, faculty, and staff participation *45 minutes' workshops are scheduled for the semester *Workshop content and objectives developed *Students repeat attendance to workshops * Workshops and events are being implemented as planned	* Recruiting Strategies * Document review * Attendance records * Evidence of student reflection/perception * Activities deliverers perception
3. What policies and practices impede active students' attendance/visits to the center?	* Description of events, students, and the college	* Students survey * Attendance records * Interviews with activity developers and staff.
4. Is the center providing high quality engagement experiences? 5. How satisfied are the participants in the center's activities? 6. Which activity is most engaging and why? Which activities are list engaging and why?	*Student express satisfaction * Workshops are rated as effective (rigor, appropriateness of content, usefulness, etc.) by students * Deliverers are content with students' participation and interest in content matter	* Interview with staff and deliverers * Rich description of center's events and attendance * End of workshop survey * Observations and evidence of student work
7. Are the current activities meeting students' range of	*Students express desire to attend future activities	* End of workshop survey * Observations and evidence of student work

<b>Evaluation Questions for Intermediate Outcomes</b>	<b>Possible indicators/Measures</b>	<b>Data Collection Methods and Information Sources</b>
needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Students are able to describe skill learned</li> <li>* Students expression of needs been met by centers activities</li> </ul>	
8. Are there any improvement in students' sense of belonging to the college community?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Student express satisfaction</li> <li>* Increase student involvement in centers activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* End of workshop survey</li> <li>* Attendance records</li> <li>* Observations and evidence of student work</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MODEL**

Because the foreign-born population continues to increase in the United States and the world economy is increasingly more competitive where the fastest growing jobs of the future requires more than a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016; Lacey & Wright, 2009; President's Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), 2009), improving the education attainment of the foreign-born population therefore is key for preparing America for the competitive global economy. This dissertation in practice employed qualitative questioning approaches to explore the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) in a state college. This dissertation in practice designed an Academic and Social Engagement Center as a comprehensive support center to address the challenges faced by FBS that could prevent them from graduating or graduating on time.

#### **Implications**

To serve foreign-born students successfully at the college, professionals may find it helpful to understand and be aware of the challenges these students face. Awareness of their challenges could aid administrators to create strategic opportunities to solve these challenges. Because “individual effort and engagement are the critical determinants of the impact of college, then it is important to focus on the ways in which an institution can shape its academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 602). Specifically, I believe that the following measures could be considered by Victory State College leaders, administrators, students, faculty, and staff to address the challenges of foreign-born students and help them in their social and academic pursuits.

The College Board of Governors and administrators should recognize the significant increase in foreign-born student population in the community that the college serves, the challenges faced by foreign-born students and the benefits associated with accelerating their academic and social success (Building Engineering and Science Talent, 2003). Acknowledging these points are critical before administrators can devise opportunities for improvements that address uniquely each identified challenge faced by FBS. Academic and Social Engagement Center is a model designed to fit any college. Administrators could adapt this model to address the challenges faced by the students attending Victory State College (VSC). When students' challenges are addressed, students feel connected to the college, and this leads to student persistent, retention, and eventually graduation (Astin, 1984; Mallette & Cabrera, 1991; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977). The state funding formula depends on the college's persistence, retention, and graduation rate. Therefore, when this model is effectively implemented, and foreign-born students (FBS) are engaged and involved in college activities and events which research declared could lead to graduation (Astin, 1984), the college's graduation rates will increase thereby positively impacting fund generation for the college.

This model was designed to address the challenges FBSs face in state colleges by creating a comprehensive support center where students can receive the type of support that they need to succeed in college. The result of the pilot study indicated that FBS feel uncomfortable communicating, despite acknowledging the importance of communication, because of language barriers and insecurities. It is beneficial to reach out to FBSs and provide them with more opportunities to engage with faculty, native students, and staff. ASEC was designed with these in

mind. FBSs should tap into the resources offered through ASEC and be involved in the center's activities that are geared towards meeting their needs. They should take advantage of college events (structured or unstructured) to increase interaction with other students. Since, several researchers claim that when students get help and support, and when they are engaged in the college activities, their chances of succeeding will increase (Kuh, 2008; Schuetz, 2008; DiMaria, 2006; Pascarella, 1979, 1977, 1976; Tinto, 1975), ASEC was designed to promote students' academic and social success at the college.

Furthermore, this model design when implemented effectively, is expected to add value to the work of college faculty. The center aims to influence the faculty in two ways. First, through the professional development workshops, the center aims at educating faculty on latest best practice strategies for engaging FBS in state colleges. Second, through the faculty-student – mentorship opportunities, the center not only aims to offer college service hours (which is a requirement for faculty contract continuity) but also will create an avenue for faculty to learn about new cultures. Educating faculty on recent trends in U.S foreign-born populations and their cultures will improve faculty effectiveness in developing all their students (native and foreign-born).

Additionally, this model could affect the way students, faculty, and staff at Victory State College view cultural diversity. By promoting cultural awareness through the center's activities and events, the center should create mutual tolerance between foreign-born students and natives (Americans). The center's activities should encourage new perspectives and open the eyes of all students that allows for unique bonds among students, faculty, and staff in the college.

Ultimately, stereotypes should reduce while allowing individuality and diversity that leads to peace and a civic community at the college and beyond.

### **Limitations of this study**

Recognizing study limitations is common to all research strategies (Creswell, 2012). Since this dissertation in practice designed a model to address the challenges faced by foreign-born students (FBS) at Victory State College, it is especially important to address the limitations of this study at this point. The limitations obvious to the researcher are discussed below.

- This study was conducted on a small population who were enrolled in college credit classes in the Spring semester of 2017 at Victory State College. Expanding this pilot study to more participants during different semesters and multiple colleges would have allowed for generalization of the result to larger groups.
- Because of the time limit, the model design was not implemented and therefore, its effectiveness could not be measured.
- The definition of foreign-born used in this study might be too broad. Examining smaller groups of foreign-born by category might be useful in increasing the applicability of the result and to get a fuller picture of the challenges of each group and how they differ.
- The model design goal was limited to student's experience while in college and graduation, this could be extended to include foreign-born student's performances after college. For example, their employment situation, their perspective on civic responsibility, and the degree of their social integration in their respective communities.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This dissertation in practice focused on the challenges of foreign-born students in community colleges, and highlighted the insufficient research on this student population specifically in state colleges. Hence, the importance of further research on this student population is needed.

A follow-up to this research would be to measure the effectiveness of the model designed in this dissertation in practice. Therefore, it would be beneficial to implement the model and investigate its impact thereafter. Future research could focus on age at arrival which could provide additional information on generational differences related to age at arrival into the country. Since adult learners may have different experiences than younger students in state colleges.

Generally, sample size for qualitative research is usually smaller than those in quantitative studies because of diminishing return. That is, more data may not necessarily lead to more information (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). In qualitative research, once data is collected and a code is determined, frequency is not as relevant as it is in quantitative research. Hence, researchers need to recognize that different participants can have diverse opinions, especially in a study involving participants across cultures and nationalities. Therefore, the sample must be large enough to encompass all opinions that are important to this study but not too large that data collected becomes repetitious. The recommendation by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was to collect data until no new information is generated by doing so - until the point of saturation. A future study should consider the saturation point in data collection and could include larger number of participants to broaden this research on foreign-born students experience in state colleges.

It is possible that a longitudinal study of foreign-born students may enlighten research on how FBS remain true to their educational and career goals after graduation from a state college. Longitudinal studies involve the use and collection of data over a long period of time, they are useful to determine cause and effect effectively (Schulz, Altman, & Moher, 2010). The effect of the support offered through ASEC will be measured clearer through a longitudinal approach.

This researcher aspires for studies on foreign-born students' experiences will continue to expand and that this dissertation in practice and its findings will contribute to the larger body of research that eventually will enhance the lives, education, and cross-cultural experiences of all students.

### **Researcher's Reflections**

The desire to investigate the factors that impedes students from graduating and graduating on time began in 2009 when the researcher read an article in the Chronicles of Higher Education, which noted that 2-year public college students' graduation rate was 20 percent. The article proceeded to indicate that this 20 percent rate was based on students that completed in three years. Since students are supposed to graduate in two years, I was alarmed and interested in understanding the reason(s) why students were not graduating on time.

I contemplated this dilemma for several years, attended several professional development classes at my college, attended a conference, and read several articles and books on this topic, however, I remained dissatisfied. I started this program knowing that I was interested in understanding why students are not graduating from college, and I was particularly interested in State (then called community) colleges. The reason I focused on state colleges was their open enrollment mandate that extends higher education opportunities to all. I was interested in why

state colleges were successful in enrolling students and why they were not graduating students once they were admitted, at least not on time.

The Curriculum and Instruction Ed.D program has helped me to examine this question. This program prepared me by providing the foundational knowledge and rigor to persist to the end. I began this journey with Facilitating Learning, Development, and Motivation (EDP 7517). It was a difficult start, but I was quickly reminded by a quote that states “the road to success is not easy to navigate, but with hard work, drive and passion, it’s possible to achieve...” (Tommy Hilfiger). This was a challenging class for someone like me, who is new to the American Education system. I was grateful to have gone through this class because it prepared me well to expect nothing less than hard work through this process. In this class I learned about education theorists and I realized that I gravitated to those interested in student development and mentorship; basically, any theory interested in providing support to students beyond classroom academics. Of interest to me were Tinto, Vygotsky, Astin, Pascarella and Terenzini.

To identify and design solutions for a complex problem of practice was the focus of Organizational Theory in Education (EDF 7101). I was prepared in this class to recognize various complex organizational nuances through different theoretical lenses. I analyzed one problem through structural; political; human resources, and symbolic theoretical frames (Bolman and Deal, 2008). It was this class that shaped my writing skill. I was grateful to the professor that dedicated his time and effort to nurture me through the American writing process.

Additionally, my concentration classes were all in Community College Studies. This gave me an in-depth knowledge of from where the community colleges originated, the contemporary problems they faced, how they developed curriculum, the organization,

administration, structure, and implications for its future. Through these courses, I was able to understand why state college students were not graduating and the best practices proposed to deal with this problem.

Another course that prepared me for this dissertation in practice was Evaluating Complex Problems of Practice. This course prepared me for the dissertation writing by mandating Electronic Dissertation and Thesis formatting for success in one of the major assignments. This class also taught me about the evaluation process.

I appreciate the fact that this program was set up in a cohort structure where students support students. This practice is supported by the theories that guided my dissertation in practice (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Lev Vygotsky, 1978). They rely on the fact that when students are connected and are comfortable seeking and receiving support, they tend to persist through college and graduate. This could not be more applicable to my situation, I was able to develop a sisterhood relationship with one of my cohort members. This relationship has been instrumental to my success - to this moment in this program.

Finally, through the friendships developed in this cohort, I was introduced to my dissertation chair. Through her guidance, the process of writing has been systematic and progressive. As I reflect today on how this Ed.D program and course work prepared me to complete this dissertation in practice, I realize that many factors shaped my success. The Ed.D course works, the relationships with cohort members, advise and patience of faculty members (especially in understanding the needs of a foreign-born student), and the feedback from committee members, especially my committee chair.

**APPENDIX A**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**  
**UNIVERSITY of CENTRAL FLORIDA**



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research & Commercialization  
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501  
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246  
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2376  
[www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html](http://www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html)

### Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1  
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**  
To: **Modupe Soremi**  
Date: **January 03, 2017**

Dear Researcher:

On 01/03/2017, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination  
Project Title: Examination of the Challenges Faced by Foreign-born Students in a Community College that may prolong and prevent graduation.  
Investigator: Modupe Soremi  
IRB Number: SBE-16-12720  
Funding Agency:  
Grant Title:  
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. [When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.](#)

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the [Investigator Manual](#).

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Gillian Amy Mary Morien on 01/03/2017 02:55:21 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

**APPENDIX B**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL VICTORY STATE**  
**COLLEGE**

Seminole State College of Florida  
 Institutional Review Board  
 Request for Research Review

<b>Title of Research Project</b>	Examination of the Challenges Faced by Foreign-born Students in a Community College that may prolong and/prevent graduation.												
<b>Name of Principal Investigator</b>	Módupe Soremi												
<b>Phone number</b>	407-468-1204 (Cell) 407-404-6082 (Office)												
<b>Email address</b>	soremim@seminolestate.edu												
<b>Please describe the proposed study, including the research question, hypotheses, and methodology.</b>	<p>This is an action research intended to examine the challenges faced by foreign-born students at Seminole State College that may prolong and/or prevent graduation and to determine strategies to solve them. The following sub-questions will inform the problem of practice central to this research:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What is the academic experience (challenges) of foreign born students attending a local community college in the United State?</li> <li>○ What is the social experience (challenges) of foreign born students attending a local community college in the United States?</li> <li>○ What are the services needed to address these challenges faced by foreign born students to ensure success at the community college?</li> </ul> <p>This is a phenomenological study of foreign born student experience at Seminole State College of Florida. A demographic survey and a focus group interview will explore the lived experiences of foreign born students at the college.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin: 10px 0;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Phase</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Site</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Participants</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Method</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Phase I: The Pilot Study</td> <td>Seminole State College</td> <td>Foreign-born Students (Degree seeking foreign born students)</td> <td>* Demographic Survey of Students enrolled in college credit classes. *Focus group (10-15 students)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Phase II:</td> <td>Seminole State College – Altamonte Campus</td> <td>The researcher</td> <td>Create a program that supports foreign-born students.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><b>Survey</b></p> <p>The investigator will email request to participate in a survey to a complete list of students enrolled in the Spring of 2016 at Seminole State College. If the desired participant responds affirmatively to the request to participate, s/he will complete a Qualtrics survey. If the desired participant does not respond, a follow-up email will be sent one week later. If there is no response after one more week, the participant's name</p>	Phase	Site	Participants	Method	Phase I: The Pilot Study	Seminole State College	Foreign-born Students (Degree seeking foreign born students)	* Demographic Survey of Students enrolled in college credit classes. *Focus group (10-15 students)	Phase II:	Seminole State College – Altamonte Campus	The researcher	Create a program that supports foreign-born students.
Phase	Site	Participants	Method										
Phase I: The Pilot Study	Seminole State College	Foreign-born Students (Degree seeking foreign born students)	* Demographic Survey of Students enrolled in college credit classes. *Focus group (10-15 students)										
Phase II:	Seminole State College – Altamonte Campus	The researcher	Create a program that supports foreign-born students.										

Seminole State College of Florida  
 Institutional Review Board  
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	<p>will be eliminated from the list. If a desired participant respond that s/he is unwilling to participate, his/her name will be eliminated from the list.</p> <p>The students that agree to participate will further be screened based on country of birth and the desired goal at the college. Students must be foreign born and must be degree seeking at the college to participate in the survey.</p> <p>This instrument will be made available to all students enrolled in college credit classes at the college. The investigator will administer this survey in collaboration with the Institutional Effectiveness and Research department of Seminole State College.</p> <p><b>Focus Group</b></p> <p><b>Recruitment Methods:</b></p> <p><i>The demographic survey will be administered on qualtrics and all students enrolled in college credit classes at the college will be encouraged to participate. This will be done through the Institutional Effectiveness and Research department of the college. I will also solicit collaboration from colleagues to encourage their students to participate. My students will also be encouraged.</i></p> <p><i>The result from the qualtrics survey will guide the selection of 10 to 15 students that will participate in the Focus group. After completing the survey, a thank you email will pop up which will solicit further participation. If participant is interested, a box will be provided to provide a contact number and/or email. I will contact qualifying students that indicate interest in further participation through the email address or phone number provided.</i></p> <p><i>There will be no compensation to participants. Pizza and drinks will be served during the focus group interview.</i></p>
<p><b>Describe the target audience of participants, including the anticipated number of participants.</b></p>	<p><i>This study is targeted to all degree seeking foreign born students at Seminole State College.</i></p> <p><i>Survey: The criteria to participate in the survey is that students must be degree seeking and enrolled in college credit classes.</i></p> <p><i>Focus group: The criteria to participate in the focus group is that students must be enrolled degree seeking foreign born at the community college. I anticipate about 10-15 students.</i></p> <p><i>In this study I adopt the definition of Foreign-born as</i></p>

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	<p><i>defined by the U. S. Census Bureau defined “as individuals who had no U.S. citizenship at birth”. The foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), persons residing in the country without authorization, and excluding everyone born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents (U.S. Census Bureau).</i></p> <p><i>In other to emphasize who is considered foreign born, it will be useful to define who is not. Those who are not foreign-born are considered native born. “The Census Bureau uses the terms native and native born to refer to anyone born in the United States, or abroad of a U.S. citizen parent or parents” (United States, Census Bureau, web).</i></p> <p><i>After conducting several research on the definition of foreign born, the simplest definition in my opinion is the one by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Who defined foreign-born population of a country as “persons who have that country as the country of usual residence and whose place of birth is located in another country” (United Nations, 1980), excluding those born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent.</i></p> <p><i>The subjects of this study, therefore, are foreign-born students intending to complete a certificate, an associate degree, and/or with an end goal to transfer to a 4-year college or to earn a bachelor’s degree. I do this to focus on individual student’s goal and not on institutional goals, and to intentionally exclude students that attend college to learn English only or for recreational purposes. Therefore, this study assumes graduation as the goal to which a student is striving. Hence, I consider any factor that impedes the achievement of this goal as a challenge.</i></p>
<p><b>Describe the location of participants and how you will acquire access.</b></p>	<p>The survey will be sent to all students by the Institutional Effectiveness and Research department of the college. Students that complete the survey will be solicited to participate in a focus group discussion through a thank you note upon completion of the survey. Students will be instructed to enter a phone number or an email address in a box if interested in participating in further research on the same topic. I will contact these students that show interest thereafter.</p>
<p><b>Describe if participants are subject to any risk or harm from the study.</b></p>	<p>Surveys will not disclose the identity of the participants because data will be collected anonymously. The investigator will not collect student’s identity on the survey.</p> <p>The investigator will not disclose the identity of the participant but will use pseudonym throughout the report.</p> <p>A perceived risk of participation may include the student feeling threatened of faculty awareness of their personal views on the topic. Participants may also feel threatened to express their feelings due to cultural differences and lack of knowledge of their rights. The identity of the participants in the focus will be confidential, therefore the risk is minimal.</p>
<p><b>Projected start date for study.</b></p>	<p>January 2017</p>
<p><b>Projected end date for study.</b></p>	<p>April 2017</p>
<p><b>Targeted audience of participants.</b></p>	<p>This research targets enrolled degree seeking foreign-born students.</p>

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Provide details on how you will protect the rights of participants, particularly how you will ensure that subjects may elect NOT to participate without consequence.	<p>Survey: This will be conducted anonymously through Qualtrics and only the principal investigator will have access.</p> <p>Focus group: The focus group will be held in a pre-arranged conference room at the college allowing for a confidential and private discussion during the period of January 2017 – April 2017. This discussion will be recorded using AudioNote and the investigator will take notes as deemed necessary during the discussion. This information will be stored securely by the researcher only.</p> <p>Results from the survey and the focus group will be shared with the dissertation chair and Seminole State Institutional Research and Effectiveness department.</p>
Provide details on how you will verify informed consent and that participants are at least 18 years old (or provide attachments of consent forms).	Demographic questions are included in the survey. Consent form attached.
Provide details on who will have access to research data and how you will protect the data.	I will have access to research data, my dissertation committee and Seminole State College Institution Research and Effectiveness department.
Provide details on the questions or instruments used in your study (or provide attachments).	<p>The Following are attached:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Survey instrument</li> <li>2. Focus group protocol</li> <li>3. Informed Consent – Focus group</li> <li>4. Informed consent - Survey</li> <li>5. Email1 - Survey Introduction</li> <li>6. Email2 - Survey Reminder</li> <li>7. Email 3 - Survey thank you note</li> <li>8. Email4 – Focus group solicitation</li> <li>9. Email5 – Focus group thank you note</li> </ol>
Provide information on any other organizations, agencies, or departments involved in the study.	N/A
Principal Investigator's signature.	
<b>IRB Review</b>	
Exempt from Review	
Approved without Conditions	X
Approved with Conditions	
IRB Chair Signature	<i>(Handwritten Signature)</i>
Date	12-17-2016

**RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:**

- Any additions or changes in procedures in the protocol will be submitted to the IRB for written approval prior to changes being implemented.
- Any problems connected with the use of human subjects once the project has begun must be communicated to the IRB Chair.
- The principal investigator is responsible for retaining informed consent documents for a period of three years after the project.

**APPENDIX C**  
**SURVEY INVITATION LETTER – DAY1**

Dear Seminole State Student,

My name is Modupe Soremi, and I am a doctoral student in education at the University of Central Florida. I am investigating the challenges, which may prolong and prevent graduation, faced by foreign-born students in a community college. To complete this investigation, I am asking for your feedback. The purpose of this survey is to collect information from currently enrolled students in college-credit classes, specifically on their country of birth and experiences as a college student in the United States.

The survey contains 24 brief questions and should take no more than 15 minutes of your time. The deadline to complete the survey is Feb. 21.

Your participation in this survey will provide me with important information that will further our knowledge and understanding of how to support community college students, specifically foreign-born students.

Thank you in advance for your participation and support.

Sincerely,

**Modupe Soremi**  
Doctoral Candidate,  
College of Education and Human Performance,  
University of Central Florida

**APPENDIX D**  
**SURVEY INVITATION LETTER – DAY2**

Good Morning,

This is Modupe Soremi again. The reason you are receiving this email is because you participated in a survey administered by Seminole State College in February. Thank you for participating, your input is greatly appreciated and will improve other students' social and academic experience at the college.

You indicated interest in a focus group (small discussion group) to further investigate the challenges faced by foreign born students in a community college. Details of my next focus group is as follows:

Date: Friday April 14, 2017

Time: 12:00 noon until 2:00PM (about 2 hours)

Address: Seminole State College Altamonte Campus

Room: 214

The focus group will provide you with the opportunity to share your experiences with other students like you in a casual environment and with complete confidentiality. In particular, we would like to know

1. What is your academic experience as a foreign-born student attending a local community college in the United States?
2. What is your social experience as a foreign-born student attending a local community college in the United States?
3. What are other services needed by foreign born students to ensure success at the community college?

As a foreign-born student, your views and experiences are extremely valuable in helping colleges improve the types of support provided to foreign born students. Your input will greatly help to better serve students and promote awareness of the knowledge and understanding of how to support Community College Students, specifically foreign born students.

If you are available to take part in this focus group discussion on the above scheduled date, please contact me as soon as possible of your availability via email at [soremim@seminolestate.edu](mailto:soremim@seminolestate.edu), 407-404-6082 (office), or at 407-468-1204 (cell). Make sure you provide your name and phone number.

Thank you in advance for your participation and support.

Sincerely,  
Modupe Soremi  
Doctor of Education 2017  
University of Central Florida

**APENDIX E**  
**FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

#### Focus Group Guideline

**Topic:** Examination of the Challenges Faced by Foreign-born Students in a Community College that may prolong and/prevent graduation.

#### **Note to Focus Group Conductor:**

- Bring the following:
  - Focus group protocol
  - Digital recorder
  - Charger
- When you begin the focus group recordings, make sure you:
  - State the date:
    - March 24, 2017 at 10:00AM -12:00PM – Day 1
    - April 14, 2017 at 12:00PM – 2:00PM – Day 2
  - Location: Room 214 Altatmonte Campus

#### **Informed Consent:**

##### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this focus group is to understand your experiences as they occur as a foreign born student at this community college.

##### **Format:**

In this focus group, I will ask questions regarding your academic and social experiences at the community college (in and out of the classroom, relations with faculty, staff, and peers, pre-college experiences). I will solicit your recommendations/advise to future foreign born students coming to the community college.

##### **Confidentiality:**

All your personal information and identity will be kept confidential. The goal of this research is to gather your opinions about your experiences at the college. Therefore, you will not be judged as there are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions presented here. Every information you provide to me during this research is confidential. Please feel free to decline to answer any question at any time during this process.

##### **Risk:**

The interviewer will not disclose the identity of the participant but will use a pseudonym throughout the report. All data collected will be secured both electronically and physically.

##### **Benefits:**

Your contribution in this research will help gather important information that will help this community college in developing programs that will support foreign born students graduate and graduate in a timely manner. If the program becomes successful, it might be replicated in other community colleges, and subsequently helping more foreign born students in United States Community colleges.

Protocol: Each student should identify with a number each time they speak to maintain confidentiality.

Now introduce yourself using your number and where you are in your studies.

#### **Focus Group Questions**

1. Please take a little time to share your personal thoughts on your experience as you try to settle down in the community college after admissions.
2. How would you describe your academic experience at the college?
  - a. In what ways do you feel what you are learning in your course will help you reach your goal?
  - b. Tell me about a positive experience in the classroom?
  - c. Do you have problems keeping up with homework? Why or why not?
3. How would you describe your social experience at the college?
  - a. Who do you turn to for help; student, faculty, staff, other?
  - b. What do you think of the professors at the college?
  - c. What do you think of the staff at the college?
  - d. Do you hang out after class?
  - e. What get in the way of working with other students?
4. Can you talk about your experiences with the challenges you encounter as a foreign born student at the community college?
5. Based on your personal experiences, if you were going to give advice to another student, what would you say?
6. How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?
7. Is there anything that I did not ask you that you would like to share with me?

**APPENDIX F**  
**FOCUS GROUP CONSENT AND SURVEY**

### Foreign-Born Student survey

As the world economy is increasingly more competitive, America's comparative advantage in the global market depends on the education and skills of its workers. Job opportunities requiring at least an associate degree are projected to grow twice as fast as those requiring no college experience in the next decade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projection, 2009). Boosting the success rate of all students should be a national necessity, not only for individuals but for the nation as a whole.

I am trying to discover the academic and social challenges faced by foreign-born students at the college that may prolong and/or prevent them from graduation. Your responses to this survey will be completely anonymous and entirely confidential. A general account of the results will be made available when the project is completed but no respondent's answer will be identifiable in any way.

Please help by trying to answer all the questions as fully as you can and feel free to add comments at any point. Do this by placing ticks in the brackets beside the answers or write in the spaces provided.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this research. You are free to withdraw from this research at any time and your questionnaire will be destroyed.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. If you have questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may send a message to Modupe Soremi (modupers@knight.ucf.edu).

Thank you very much for your time and support.

Please answer the following questions.

*Q1. How long have you been at Seminole State College (enrollment status)? Semesters:*

- One
- Two
- Three
- Above three semesters

*Q2. What is your gender?*

- Male             Female
- I choose not to disclose

*Q3. What is your country of Birth:*

*Q4. In what Continent is your country of birth located:*

- Europe
- Africa

- South America
- Asia
- Middle East
- North America

*Q5. Race*

- White
- Black
- Pacific Islander
- Asian

*Q6. How would you rate your understanding of the English language today?*

- Very well
- Well
- Moderate
- Difficulty

**APPENDIX G**  
**QUALTRICS SURVEY**

## Foreign Born Student Experience

Q20 You are being invited to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the social and academic challenges faced by foreign born students at the State College that may prolong and/or prevent them from graduation. The questionnaire covers your demographic information and your academic and social experiences at the college. However, answering each question is voluntary, and all responses are anonymous and confidential. You must be 18 years or older to participate. The time needed to complete this survey is about 10 minutes. Please help by trying to answer all the questions as fully as you can and feel free to add comments in the space provided at the end. You are free to withdraw from this research at any time and your questionnaire will be destroyed. Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Q1 Q1. Thank you for your interest in this research. Do you consent to the terms and conditions as described above?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

Q22 Indicate your response by clicking the circle next to correct answer

Q2 Q2. What is your reason for attending Seminole State College?

- To get a qualification/certificate that would improve my long-term job prospects (1)
- Degree seeking (A.A., A.S., Transfer to a 4-year college) (2)
- Non-Degree Seeking (3)
- Other please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ (4)

Condition: Non-Degree Seeking Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey. Condition: Other please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ Is Selected. Skip To: Please indicate your desired qualification. Condition: To get a qualification/certificate that would improve my long-term job prospects Is Selected. Skip To: Please indicate your desired qualification. Condition: Degree seeking (A.A., A.S., Transfer to a 4-year college) Is Selected. Skip To: Q3. Where were you born?

Q21 Please indicate your desired qualification/certificate in the box below

Condition: Please indicate your desired qualification/certificate Is Not Empty. Skip To: End of Survey. Condition: Please indicate your desired qualification/certificate Is Empty. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q3 Q3. Where were you born?

- In the United States (1)
- Not in the United States (2)

Condition: In the United States Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q4 Q4. How long have you been at Seminole State College (enrollment status)? Indicate the number of Semesters:

- One (1)
- Two (2)
- Three (3)
- More than three (4)

Q5 Q5. In your experience (academic) at this State College, mark the box that best describes your answer for each question, indicating how often you did each of the following.

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)
Asked your faculty for information related to a course you were taking (grades, make-up work, assignments etc) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participated with other students in a discussion with one or more faculty member outside of class (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worked with faculty on activities other than coursework (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (student, family members, co-workers, etc.) (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignment (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q6 Q6. In your experience (social) at this college, mark the box that best describes your answer for each question, indicating how often you did each of the following.

	Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Some (3)	A lot (4)
Became acquainted with students whose interests were different from yours (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Became acquainted with students whose background was different from yours (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attend a meeting of a campus club, organization, or student government group (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is easy to develop friendship of trust with other students (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q7 Q7. Please indicate how often you have used the following services during your time at the state college

	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Often (3)	Very Often (4)
Library resources and services (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic advising/planning (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Career counseling (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Academic Success Center (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Financial aid advising (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computer lab (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Q8. Would you change anything about your experiences at the college?

Q9 Q9. How can we improve the support offered to foreign-born students at the college?

Q10 Q10. What was your age when you permanently arrived in United States? \_\_\_\_\_

- Less than 19 years old (1)
- 20 - 24 years old (2)
- 25 - 29 years old (3)
- 30 - 34 years old (4)
- Above 35 years old (5)

Q11 Q11. What is your country of Birth?

Q12 Q12. On what Continent is your country of birth located:

- Africa (1)
- Asia (2)
- Europe (3)
- Latin America (4)
- Middle East (5)
- North America (6)

Q13 Q13. Do you have any family here in the United States?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q14 Q14. How old are you now?

- Less than 19 (1)
- 20 -24 (2)
- 25 - 29 (3)
- 30 - 34 (4)
- above 35 (5)

Q15 Q15. What is your gender?

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- I choose not to disclose (3)

Q16 Q16. What is your racial or ethnic identity?

- White (1)
- Black or African American (2)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- Asian (4)
- Hispanic or Latino (5)
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
- Other (7)

Q17 Q17. Would you like to add anything?

Q18 Q18. Thank you for participating in this foreign born student experience research at this college. If you are foreign born and would like to participate in further research on this topic, please provide your details in the box below. I will contact you with more information to participate in a focus group discussion. Again, I thank you for your interest and participation. In this study, I adopt the definition of Foreign-born as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau defined "as individuals who had no U.S. citizenship at birth". The foreign born population includes naturalized citizens, lawful permanent residents, refugees and asylees, legal nonimmigrants (including those on student, work, or other temporary visas), persons residing in the country without authorization, and excluding everyone born abroad to a U.S. citizen parent or parents (U.S. Census Bureau). If you do not want to participate further, thank you for completing this survey, your responses have been recorded.

- I do not want to participate further (1)
- I would like to participate in a focus group discussion on this research topic (2)

Condition: I would like to participate... Is Selected. Skip To: Q19. What is your name?. Condition: I do not want to participat... Is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Display This Question:

if Q3. Where were you born? Not in the United States Is Selected

Q19 Q19. What is your name?

Display This Question:

if Q3. Where were you born? Not in the United States Is Selected

Q20 Q20. Please provide your email address below

Display This Question:

if Q3. Where were you born? Not in the United States Is Selected

Q21 Q21. Please provide your best phone number here

**APPENDIX H**  
**PILOT ANALYSIS**

## Pilot Study Analysis

Significant Statements	Thematic Codes	Academic Challenge	Social Challenge	Personal Challenge	Organizational Challenge	Mentorship
I had 233 total significant statements	Lack of Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English	Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English	Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English	Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English	Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English	Language barriers and insecurities – academic and social – formal and informal English
	Insufficient Information	Faculty engagement	Peer engagement	Feeling isolated	Erroneous and Inaccurate Advising/Counseling	Lack Support
	Erroneous and Inaccurate Advising/Counseling	Cultural difference and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS	Cultural difference and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS	Cultural difference and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS	Insufficient Information	Extracurricular activity
	Feeling isolated	Technology		Time management issues	Financial Issues	Student club

Significant Statements	Thematic Codes	Academic Challenge	Social Challenge	Personal Challenge	Organizational Challenge	Mentorship
	Transcript Evaluation			Necessity to make new friends	Transcript Evaluation	
	Peer engagement			Financial Issues	Deficiencies in the knowledge of the education system/requirement	
	Cultural difference and unfamiliarity from both natives and FBS				Navigating the system alone for resources and info	Placement Service
	Time management issues					
	Deficiencies in the knowledge of the education system/requirement					
	Faculty engagement					
	Placement Service					
	Lack of support					
	Navigating the system alone for resources and info					

Significant Statements	Thematic Codes	Academic Challenge	Social Challenge	Personal Challenge	Organizational Challenge	Mentorship
	Necessity to make new friends					
	Financial Issues Technology					

**APPENDIX I**  
**ASEC EVALUATION - SURVEY**

General Student survey ¶

Victory State College Academic and Social Engagement Center (ASEC) offers some free activities or workshops. To improve ASEC's services to our students, ASEC is conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness of the center. Please help in this effort by completing the survey questions below. Your responses to this questionnaire will be completely anonymous and entirely confidential. A general account of the results will be made available when this evaluation is completed but no respondent's answer will be identifiable in any way. ¶

Please help by trying to answer all the questions as fully as you can and feel free to add comments at any point. Do this by placing ticks in the brackets beside the answers or write in the spaces provided. ¶

You are free to withdraw from this evaluation at any time and your questionnaire will be destroyed. ¶

Q1. What was your reason for attending Victory State College? ¶

- Natural progression, it seemed the obvious thing to do after high school. ¶
- To get a qualification/certificate that would improve my long-term job prospects ¶
- For my own personal fulfillment ¶
- Degree seeking (A.A., A.S., Direct Connect) ¶
- Other please specify: \_\_\_\_\_ ¶

Q2. How many semesters have you been at Victory state college? ¶

- 1-4 → →  5-9 → →  more than 9 semesters ¶

Q3. Are you aware of the Academic and Social Support Center at Victory State College? ¶

- Yes. → → ¶
- No, if you answered this, skip to Q10. ¶

Q4. How did you hear about the ASEC's activities/workshops? ¶

- Faculty ¶
- Staff ¶
- Students/Friends ¶
- Victory State Website ¶
- Brochure/Flyer ¶
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_ ¶

Q5. Have you attended any activity/workshop at ASEC in the past? ¶

- Yes → →  No ¶

Q6. If you indicated No to question Q5, please indicate why not? ¶

\_\_\_\_\_ ¶

\_\_\_\_\_ ¶

\_\_\_\_\_ ¶

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Please skip to Q10, if you answered No to Q5.

Q7. If you answered Yes to question Q6, please indicate from which campus?

- Sanford/Lake Mary
- Heathrow
- Altamonte Campus
- Oviedo

Q8. Would you change anything about the activity/workshop?

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Q9. Do you intend to attend any activity/workshops in the future?

- Yes
- No

Q10. I would like the following topics to be discussed in future activity/workshops:

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Q11. How can we improve the activity/workshops to support you?

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Q12. How old are you?

- 18-24
- 25-31
- 32 and above

Q13. Are you?

- Male
- Female
- I choose not to disclose

Academic and Social Engagement Center's (ASEC) Satisfactory Survey

Thank you for participating in ASEC's activity/workshop, please take a few moments to complete this satisfaction survey.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of activity/workshop: \_\_\_\_\_

Presenter/Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

¶

Q1. How did you hear about this activity/workshop?

- Faculty
- Staff
- Students/Friends
- Seminole State Website
- Brochure/Flyer
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q2. Please rate the following aspects of the activity/workshop

	Excellent	Good	Neutral	Poor	Terrible	N/A
Relevance of the session topic	<input type="radio"/>					
Usefulness of information presented	<input type="radio"/>					
The time slot of session presentation	<input type="radio"/>					
Class room location on campus	<input type="radio"/>					
The speaker	<input type="radio"/>					
Overall satisfaction	<input type="radio"/>					

¶

Q3. Based on your experience at this activity/workshop, how likely are you to attend future activity/workshop?

Very likely → → Somewhat likely → → Not likely

¶

Q4. On a personal level, how important was the topic to you?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Very unimportant

¶

¶

Q4. What did you like most about this activity/workshop? Why?

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Q5. What aspects of the activity/workshop could be improved? Why?

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Q6. What additional activity/workshop would you like to have in the future?

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Q7. Please tell me about the skills you learned from this activity/workshop: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Is one activity/workshop enough to learn this skill? • Yes \_\_\_\_\_ → → No \_\_\_\_\_ →

---

Q8. Please share other comments to help us improve future skill building activity/workshop:

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**Thank you so much for your feedback!**

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