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Examining Cross-Cultural Communication Among First-Year Students at a Large, Four-Year, Research University

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EXAMINING CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AMONG FIRST-YEAR

STUDENTS AT A LARGE, FOUR-YEAR, RESEARCH UNIVERSITY

by

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This qualitative case study examines and explores cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students at Great Plains University, a large, four-year, research university located in the Midwestern United States. Specifically, this case study examines the ways in which first-year international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to interact with one another across culture in the classroom. The literature review discusses both international and domestic students' experiences and perceptions regarding intercultural communication, and also introduces a variety of barriers and facilitators of cross-cultural communication. Through introducing and relating cross-cultural communication to the goals of international education, the author asserts that cross-cultural communication is lacking on United States college campuses, and thus the goals of international education are not being fully realized. Therefore, the author seeks to understand how first-year international and domestic students make decisions regarding how to interact across culture in order for United States higher education to better facilitate cross-cultural communication throughout a student's collegiate experience.

Through classroom observations and one-on-one in-depth interviews with participants, main themes emerged that help to describe how first-year international and domestic students make decisions regarding how to interact with one another across culture. Findings indicated that both international and domestic students were primarily concerned with assessing the ease or

convenience of engaging in cross-cultural communication, and used a variety of factors to make this assessment prior to deciding to initiate intercultural interactions. This research provides a model for Great Plains University to increase and enhance cross-cultural communication in the classroom and throughout the campus, offering recommendations for future research and best practices in higher education student affairs and international education.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

At colleges and universities across the United States international students continue to enroll at an ever-increasing rate. According to Open Doors, an annual report carried out by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the number of international students studying in the United States has seen a steady increase in recent years, totaling 886,052 enrolled students in the 2013-2014 academic year – the most recent year for which data is available. According to the Open Doors Report (IIE, 2014), this represents an 8.1% increase in the number of international students in the United States since the 2012-2013 academic year and also represents a record high. Further, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014), the United States has the highest number of international students compared to all other countries. Therefore, if current trends in international student enrollment continue, the United States should see increasing numbers of international students enrolling in institutions of higher education in subsequent years. Indeed, many colleges and universities throughout the United States are currently expanding their recruitment efforts in various parts of the world to help increase their numbers of international students and to compete with the top-enrolling institutions of the United States (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013; World Education Services, WES, 2012).

The purposes for recruiting international students to United States colleges and universities are many. Among these purposes are increased revenue for colleges and universities as a result of the differential tuition and fees many international students pay (NAFSA, 2014; WES, 2012). Also of importance are the diverse perspectives international students bring to campus. Further, as the literature notes, international education and the presence of international students in United States higher education has several potential educational benefits for both international and domestic students as well (Andrade, 2006; Barron, 2006). For international

students, these benefits include internationalizing and enhancing their education, allowing students access to different perspectives on their area of study, and providing them the ability to develop intercultural communication skills useful in a variety of diverse work environments (Dunne, 2009; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002; Urban & Palmer, 2013). Similarly, international students have the ability to bring to domestic students diverse perspectives, experiences, ideas, and opinions (Barron, 2006; Geelhoed, Abe & Talbot, 2003; Urban & Palmer, 2013), and also have the potential to "transform the campus and the classroom into a vibrant microcosm of the world" (Leask, 2009, p. 206).

The purposes of recruiting international students to United States colleges and universities are also related to many of the goals set forth by the field of international education. International education, as a field, is primarily focused on the internationalization of higher education through study abroad, both in the form of bringing international students to study in the United States as well as sending domestic students abroad for higher education purposes. The goals of international education include the construction of inclusive, thriving communities and the creation of an interconnected world (IIE, 2014). In order to accomplish these goals, and to build connections among individuals that lead to thriving communities and an interconnected world, it is necessary that interaction and the formation of relationships occur among international students and domestic students. However, as research dating back to the 1990s through today indicates, interactions among international and domestic students on the college campuses of the United States and other English-speaking countries are largely not happening (Andrade, 2006; Barron, 2009; Lin & Betz, 2009; Zimmerman, 1995). This means, then, that many of the goals set forth by international education and student exchange are not being

realized, and also that the educational purposes of international student recruitment are not being fulfilled.

This lack of cross-cultural interaction not only has implications for international education as a field, however, but also has implications for students themselves. Specifically, this lack of cross-cultural interaction means that international students are often finding themselves, on campuses across the world, interacting mostly with co-nationals (Andrade, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). Therefore, international students are not experiencing the truly internationalized education they seek when coming to the United States given that their social networks, even within the United States, are mostly made up of individuals from their home countries (Andrade, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). For domestic students, this lack of cross-cultural communication means they are often missing an opportunity to develop skills necessary to engage with individuals across culture post-graduation and beyond (Dunne, 2009). In short, the potential educational benefit of bringing international students to higher education institutions in the U.S. is not being realized. Therefore, it is important for higher education institutions and those working within them to acknowledge and understand this lack of cross-cultural communication and work to find ways to increase cross-cultural communication in higher education.

One way of gleaning this understanding is to recognize the assumptions students have regarding cross-cultural communication and to understand both international and domestic students' experiences engaging in cross-cultural communication. The purpose of this qualitative research is to illuminate these assumptions and examine international and domestic students' communicative experiences. Ultimately, this research hopes to transform this knowledge into

practices that can help individuals in higher education and specifically within the field of international education increase cross-cultural communication on their campuses.

Gaps in the Literature

Though there is a wide variety of literature available regarding the lack of cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students and the factors that influence cross-cultural communication (Andrade, 2006; Campbell, 2011; Li, Chen, & Duanmu, 2009; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013), there remains little literature that helps to uncover why these two groups of students do not interact, or how these two groups of students make decisions about whether and how to interact with one another. Further, there is little literature that focuses specifically on first-year students and cross-cultural communication among this specific population. This study seeks to uncover the reasons why this lack of cross-cultural communication exists, and how first-year students specifically make decisions regarding whether and how to interact with one another across culture.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which first-year international and domestic students at a large, public, four-year institution in the Midwestern United States make decisions regarding whether and how to interact with one another across culture. Numerous studies have examined the notion that cross-cultural communication is lacking on campuses throughout the United States, as well as in countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia (Andrade, 2006; Barron, 2009; Dunne, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). These studies, however, have not examined cross-cultural communication among first-year students specifically, or been conducted within a specific context such as the classroom. The benefit of studying and understanding first-year students specifically is related to the longitudinal benefits

first-year students can gain as a result of learning to engage in cross-cultural communication early, thus allowing for the potential of cross-cultural communication to persist throughout a student's college career. Through understanding the decisions first-year international and domestic students make regarding cross-cultural communication within a specific institutional context, I will glean data related to the lived experiences of students in relation to cross-cultural communication. Thus, I will provide an understanding as to how these decisions are linked to students' behavior or experiences and vice versa. Further, I will also use this data to reveal factors that affect cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students.

Significance of Study

At higher education institutions throughout the United States, international students are enrolling at continually increasing rates (IIE, 2014). Further, many higher education institutions in the United States have recently developed various campaigns to increase the number of domestic students studying abroad (IIE, 2014). As mentioned previously, the goals of student exchange and international education include the development of inclusive communities among international and domestic students, which demands that international and domestic students communicate and interact with one another. Also of importance in creating and sustaining these inclusive communities is the development of global competence and intercultural communication skills among both international and domestic students, which also necessitates that international and domestic students interact with one another. Currently, however, the literature around cross-cultural communication acknowledges a lack of cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students in a variety of countries including the United States,

Australia, the United Kingdom, and Ireland, all countries among the top ten destinations for international students (Barron, 2006; Dunne, 2009; UNESCO, 2014; Wright & Schartner, 2013).

This study is significant in that it focuses on cross-cultural communication within a specific institutional environment and in a specific context, helping to glean understanding regarding how international and domestic students make decisions about how to interact with one another within the classroom environment. This study is also significant in that it focuses specifically on first-year students, and therefore can inform the ways in which international educators can facilitate cross-cultural communication early in students' collegiate careers.

Research Questions

To understand the decisions, behaviors, and past cross-cultural experiences of first-year international and domestic students related to cross-cultural communication, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to engage in cross-cultural communication in the classroom?

2. How and when do international and domestic students communicate with one another in the classroom? How do those communication interactions fit within the larger communicative dynamics in the classroom?

3. What factors within the classroom environment influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students?

4. How do personal factors, specifically past cross-cultural experiences, influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students in the classroom?

Through inquiring about the decisions, behaviors, and past cross-cultural experiences of the first-year students in this study, as well as through observations of these experiences in the classroom environment, this research sought to help formulate a comprehensive understanding of how first-year international and domestic students make meaning around cross-cultural communication. These questions allowed for both one-on-one semi-structured interviews and observations to emerge from this study. Through examining the dynamics taking place in a first-year seminar course and following-up with students regarding these dynamics and their own experiences, the student participants in this case study contribute to a greater understanding of cross-cultural communication, including the barriers that hinder it from occurring and the ways in which it can be better facilitated.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a constructivist paradigm and a case study methodology, and examined the assumptions and experiences of first-year international and domestic students in relation to cross-cultural communication at a specific university located in the Midwestern United States. This methodology was selected on that basis that it allowed me to co-construct knowledge with my participants and to study the phenomenon of interest in-depth through a specific unit of analysis, or case. Observations provided me with the ability to observe cross-cultural communication in a natural setting, and to confirm data gathered from these observations with participants during one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout this thesis to describe the ways in which cross-cultural communication is defined. These definitions are useful in understanding previous literature related to the topic as well as understanding the findings of this research.

Cross-cultural communication: For the purposes of this study, cross-cultural communication is defined as communication occurring between international and domestic students who do not share the same culture. Cross-cultural communication can also occur within international and domestic student populations among students who do not share the same identities. Examples of identities related to this study include but are not limited to birthplace or origin, race or ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, or sexuality. Cross-cultural communication is also sometimes referred to in this study as intercultural communication.

International education: A field which encompasses international student and scholar services, international recruitment, and education abroad programs. International education is concerned primarily with the internationalization of higher education as a whole and the development of internationally related skills in today's college students.

Co-nationals: Two or more individuals originating from within the same country.

Intracultural communication: Intracultural communication is communication that occurs among individuals who share the same culture or individuals who are co-nationals.

International student: An international student is one who migrates to the United States or another country for the purposes of completing either part or all of their higher education.

Domestic student: A domestic student is one who attends an institution of higher education within the country in which they were born, or within a country in which they hold citizenship.

Delimitations

Through use of the case study method, several boundaries to determine the unit of analysis within this study were used, which serve as delimitations of this research. This case study was focused on one specific institution and one specific section of a business

administration course in which all students were in their first year of college study. Further, all students were business majors within the College of Business Administration.

Limitations

Limitations which may impact the transferability of this study include the small sample within this study, as well as the specific institutional context in which this study was conducted. Additionally, time was a limitation. For this study, data were collected within a one-month long time period during a single semester. If this study had been conducted using a longitudinal approach, the development of assumptions and attitudes around cross-cultural communication in first-year students throughout the entirety of their first year could have been included.

Conclusion

This study examining cross-cultural communication among first-year business students at a large, public, four-year university in the Midwestern United States helps to corroborate many of the research findings of previous studies related to this topic. However, this study also works to identify new ways in which individuals can view cross-cultural communication and work to increase cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students. Given that first-year students are the focus of this particular study, my hope is that this level of cross-cultural communication can be facilitated within students first year of university study, and thus persist throughout students' collegiate careers.

In Chapter 2, the literature review provides an overview of international students in relation to United States higher education, and focuses on the attitudes, assumptions, and experiences of both international and domestic students regarding cross-cultural communication. In addition, a multitude of barriers to cross-cultural communication are presented alongside several interventions aimed at increasing cross-cultural communication. Chapter 3 presents the

methodology utilized in this study, outlining what was done within this study. Chapter 4

includes the findings of this research and the themes that arose during analysis of field notes and

interview transcripts. Finally, Chapter 5 connects the findings of this study to the literature

outlined in Chapter 2 and provides recommendations for how higher education professionals can

better facilitate cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic

students. In Chapter 5, recommendations for further research are also presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The lack of intercultural communication among domestic and international students occurring on today's college campuses is well-documented within the literature (Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2009; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). While some researchers conduct their inquiries from the perspective of the international student, highlighting the barriers and adjustment issues leading these students to shy away from intercultural contact with domestic students (Andrade, 2006; Hendrickson, Rosen, & Aune, 2011; Li et al., 2009; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013), others conduct their inquiries from the perspective of the domestic student (Campbell, 2011; Dunne, 2009; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). These researchers explore the perceptions of domestic students regarding international students, and also highlight the ways in which the adjustment issues of international students work to the detriment of cross-cultural communication (Andrade, 2006; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002; Wright & Schartner, 2013). Some researchers have attempted to find ways to address this lack of cross-cultural communication through interventions that assist directly in facilitating cross-cultural communication and also that attempt to change the ways in which cross-cultural communication is viewed (Campbell, 2011; Leask, 2009; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Urban & Palmer, 2013).

The literature review begins by discussing the experiences of international students in the United States. Then, the perceptions of domestic students about international students are discussed as well as the experiences of domestic students communicating with international students. Then, the barriers to successful cross-cultural communication are discussed, including two theoretical constructs– social self-efficacy and homophily – which both help to make sense of cross-cultural communication and the barriers which hinder it. Potential facilitators of cross-

cultural communication are then presented, including the influence university instructors as well as universities in general have. It should also be noted that although the focus of this particular study is on international students and cross-cultural communication within the United States, it is also informed by literature on international students in other English-speaking countries who may have similar experiences.

International Student Experiences at English-Speaking Universities

While many international students report general satisfaction with their experiences studying at English-speaking universities, international students tend to report a higher level of satisfaction with the academic components of these experiences than with the social components (Andrade, 2006). The social interaction and social skills often reported to be an integral part of an international student's experience studying at an English-speaking university are in fact the most difficult skills to accrue (Andrade, 2006; Hendrickson et al., 2011; Urban & Palmer, 2013). This is due to a variety of factors, many of which impact the adjustment of international students to the host country and culture. These factors include a lack of initiative by domestic students (Andrade, 2006; Wright & Schartner, 2013), and cultural competence or understanding among domestic and international students (Li et al., 2009; Urban & Palmer, 2013). Also, perhaps most widely reported, the status of many international students as English language learners (Andrade, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013; Urban & Palmer, 2013). Also noteworthy in shaping international students' experiences in the United States is the culture shock international students face, which affects the makeup of international students' social networks, and international students' perceptions that they are discriminated against by their domestic student peers (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

Lack of initiative by domestic students. In two different studies international students reported they felt domestic students lacked initiative in sparking conversations with them and interacting across culture (Andrade, 2006; Wright & Schartner, 2013). International students felt as though it was solely their responsibility to break the barriers of social interaction and make friends or connections with domestic students (Andrade, 2006), who often showed little interest in reaching out to their international student counterparts (Wright & Schartner, 2013). In one study, Andrade (2006) further found that "although international students are often encouraged to interact with native English speakers to improve their English, these students were not always welcomed by the latter who sometimes viewed them as less competent" (p. 140). Therefore, the views and perceptions of domestic students towards international students as well as international students' assumptions about how domestic students see them impact the existence, level, and depth of cross-cultural communication happening on many college campuses throughout the world.

Cultural competence. The array of differences international students face when they cross culture have the ability to lead to culture shock, or a lack of knowledge regarding the cultural or social cues of the host country (Li et al., 2009). This may cause international students to feel discomfort when interacting with members of the host culture because they lack a feeling of cultural competence when they come to universities in the United States or other English-speaking countries (Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2009). Due to this lack of cultural competence, international students may fear making a cultural faux pas when engaging with host nationals (Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2009). This same type of fear also has the tendency to work in the opposite direction with domestic students who may lack knowledge about international students' home cultures, causing them to feel confusion about how to interact with international students

and further perpetuating the barriers associated with cross-cultural communication (Andrade, 2006).

  English language learners. Perhaps the most oft-cited factor leading to the lack of social integration among international students and their host national counterparts is the status of many international students as English language learners (Andrade, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). In one study Wright and Schartner (2013) found that international students' interactions in the American classroom were "heavily skewed towards listening rather than speaking, and that most speaking occurred with other non-native speakers" (p. 118), even after a significant amount of time spent in the United Kingdom, in this particular case. Other studies have documented similar findings, concluding that international students, and English language learners in particular, often prefer interacting with co-nationals and tend to avoid interactions with host nationals (Andrade, 2006; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). This is likely due to international students' lack of confidence to effectively communicate in the English language and reported lack of improvement over time spent in the host country (Wright & Schartner, 2013). This lack of improvement was often reported to be a disappointment for international students, who believed their experiences studying in the United States or other English-speaking countries would be more immersive than they turned out to be, both in terms of how often the students spoke English and how integrated they became in the social culture of their host country (Wright & Schartner, 2013).

  Culture shock & co-national friendships. In addition to these adjustment issues, international students experience culture shock as a result of their sojourning to the United States for their education, often speaking a new and unfamiliar language, and living in a culture vastly different from their own (Campbell, 2011; Hendrickson et al., 2001). As Hendrickson, Rosen,

and Aune (2001) discovered in their study of international students' friendship networks, culture shock also brings with it a feeling of maladjustment or homesickness, leading international students to feel as though they do not belong in the host country. This feeling of not belonging then has a tendency to influence international students' social interactions, leading them to interact mostly with co-nationals in order to feel a greater sense of belonging and comfort that results from the similarities they share with co-nationals (Andrade, 2006; Hendrickson et al., 2001; McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Cook, 2001; Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013). The tendency of international students to interact mostly with individuals from their home country comes with many benefits as well as drawbacks. Among the most notable benefits for international students who interact mostly with co-nationals is the presence of a support network. However, although this support network is helpful in the initial adjustment process for international students, it has been shown that interacting primarily with co-nationals can have adverse effects in the long-term. These effects include lack of improvement in the English language, diminished academic success, as well as an overall lack of satisfaction with their experience studying in another country (Hendrickson et al., 2001). Still, Hendrickson et al. (2001) found that those international students who had more of an opportunity to develop friendships with co-nationals – based on the numbers of co-nationals present on campus – were very likely to do so.

  Perceived discrimination. Also of importance in shaping international students' experiences studying in the United States is the way in which they perceive their host environment and the welcoming – or not – nature of host nationals (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). In a number of studies international students reported they felt as though they were discriminated against by host nationals as a result of their foreign

status, or race or ethnicity (Hendrickson et al., 2011; Lee & Rice, 2007). Lee and Rice (2007), in

their study on international students' experiences with discrimination noted that while much of

the literature attributes international students' difficulty in integrating into the host culture to

international student adjustment issues, much of this difficulty could in fact be attributed to

inadequacies within the host society. These inadequacies include the hostile attitudes that

international students perceive domestic students to hold about them (Lee & Rice, 2007). Of

course, these perceptions or the actualization of them serve as a significant barrier to intercultural

interaction, and have been cited by some international students as the greatest barrier to

intercultural relations (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002).

Domestic Students' Perceptions of International Students

As research in the field of international education documents, domestic students hold

varying perceptions about international students and their growing presence on campuses in the

United States and other English-speaking countries (Dunne, 2009; Spencer-Rodgers, 2001;

Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002). Among these perceptions are also a variety of

stereotypes held about international students. Although international students are a vastly

heterogeneous group, this is not always recognized by domestic students or other individuals

such as instructors and professors (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). As Spencer-Rodgers (2001)

explained in her study on the stereotypes held by American students about international students,

this is due to the one commonality among international students, the fact that they are not

American. Therefore, despite the tremendous variability in international students across race,

ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status and other identities, international students

are often collectively seen as "foreign" (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001). Further, Spencer-Rodgers

(2001) found that domestic students hold a variety of other stereotypes about international

students, such as the assumption that they are naïve, maladjusted, confused, awkward, clueless, and the like. However, as is common in discussions regarding cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students, Spencer-Rodgers (2001) acknowledged the idea that many of these stereotypic beliefs likely come from the language and cultural barriers that exist between international and domestic students. These barriers between international and domestic students may also perpetuate American students' assumptions of international students as "socially inhibited, withdrawn, or insular" (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001, p. 651). Due to these barriers, it is further well documented that domestic students, like international students, tend to associate most often with other co-nationals on campus with whom these barriers do not exist (Spencer-Rodgers, 2001; Summers & Volet, 2008). Summers and Volet (2008), in their study regarding the attitudes of students around mixed-group work, suggested that local students often demonstrated poor attitudes or even an unwillingness to work in groups with students from different cultures, though they simultaneously demonstrated a desire to increase their intercultural competence.

Domestic Students' Experiences Communicating Across Culture

In studies regarding domestic students lived experiences communicating across culture, a number of barriers to cross-cultural communication emerge as a result of domestic students failed experiences forming relationships with international students (Dunne, 2009). As Dunne (2009) highlighted, domestic students often feel a great deal of anxiety in communicating across culture, cite a high level of effort in facilitating successful interactions across culture, and feel they are not able to fully reflect their true identities within these interactions.

Domestic students' anxiety. As Dunne (2009) found in his research regarding the perceptions and experiences of Irish students in communicating across culture at an Irish

university, Irish students felt a variety of forms of anxiety when engaging in interactions with international students. These forms of anxiety manifested themselves in student's fear of "unintentionally offending or embarrassing international students through their use of language, their overall communication style, or inadvertently asking inappropriate questions," being perceived negatively by the international students with whom they were interacting, and being ridiculed by their peers for engaging with out-group individuals (Dunne, 2009, p. 11). These forms of anxiety seemed to be linked to three important concepts, including the different cultural contexts within which domestic and international students communicate, notably the differing uses of humor among these two groups of students, and the different ways in which relationships are formed across culture, as well as the issue of self-esteem. Domestic students in Dunne's (2009) study reported the realization of these anxieties, and the overall consequences of a failed instance of cross-cultural communication, often led to a diminishing sense of self-esteem. These anxieties and their related consequences help to further illustrate the at times high-risk nature of intercultural communication, and also serve as important hindrances to the facilitation of cross-cultural communication.

Domestic students' perception of effort. Tied also to the anxieties domestic students experience when interacting across culture is the perception of domestic students that interacting across culture takes a high level of effort that is often perceived as unpleasant (Dunne, 2009; Geelhoed, Abe & Talbot, 2003). To describe the way in which domestic students make sense of this level of effort, and whether or not to exert it, Dunne (2009) described how domestic students calculate the "cost-benefit analysis" or "perceived utility" of initiating intercultural contact (p. 12), whereby the domestic student analyzes the usefulness that engaging in cross-cultural communication has for themselves. If this usefulness is calculated to be of a higher value than

the effort it takes to engage in cross-cultural interactions, domestic students will initiate this contact (Dunne, 2009). In terms of what is seen as a useful function for domestic students to initiate cross-cultural contact, Dunne (2009) cited "foreign language support, specific academic assistance, or information prior to visiting a foreign country" (p. 10). In the Geelhoed, Abe, and Talbot (2003) study regarding domestic students' experiences in a peer-pairing program with international students, domestic students also mentioned the level of perceived effort required to initiate contact with their international student partner. Geelhoed et al. (2003) noted that "for most, difficulty in establishing a relationship with their partner exceeded their expectations, and so did the amount of effort required to feel connected with their partner" (p. 10). Therefore, in order to aid in the facilitation of cross-cultural communication, the benefits of engaging interculturally need to be communicated to domestic students, as well as to international students, in the hopes that these benefits may outweigh the perceived level of effort it takes to initiate intercultural contact and intercultural relationships.

Identity loss. Also linked to the concepts of anxiety and perceived effort among domestic students in relation to cross-cultural communication is the perception of domestic students that engaging in cross-cultural communication leads them to feel a sense of identity loss. As Dunne (2009) describes, many domestic students in this particular study felt that when they were speaking with international students they altered "what they talk about, the way they talk about it, and how openly and honestly they talk about it" (p. 13). Further, domestic students cited that due to language barriers, they felt a need to talk louder, slower, or to change their speech by avoiding slang when communicating with international students who were also English language learners (Dunne, 2009). Due to these alterations of subject and speech, domestic students in Dunne's (2009) study felt they were compromising their identities, and not

engaging in the self-disclosure of their true selves. Furthermore, this loss of identity led to the

belief of domestic students that their communications with international students were superficial

or fake (Dunne, 2009). This is directly tied to the effort domestic students perceive to exert in

intercultural communications, and has implications in terms of international and domestic

students feeling they are able to relate to one another or form meaningful and long-lasting

relationships.

Benefits to domestic students who engage in cross-cultural communication. Though

domestic students failed experiences engaging across culture with international students have

resulted in barriers that work to hinder cross-cultural communication (Dunne, 2009), not all

experiences have resulted in negative outcomes. In various studies such as Campbell's (2011)

study and the Geelhoed et al. (2002) study, both which focused on domestic students' attitudes

regarding their participation in an international and domestic student peer-paring program,

domestic students also saw many benefits as a result of interacting with international students. In

Campbell's (2011) study, domestic students stated that they felt they had increased their cultural

awareness as a result of interacting with students across culture in the program, and also stated

that the program had helped them to learn about themselves. Domestic students in the Geelhoed

et al. (2002) study reported similar benefits. These students felt that many of the stereotypes

they held about international students had been directly challenged, and that they had "developed

empathy, influenced their family and friends' attitudes toward international students, and became

more competent with intercultural interactions" (Geelhoed et al., 2002, p. 11). Interestingly,

however, domestic students in each of these studies reported they felt apprehension about

communicating with international students prior to the start of the peer-pairing program

(Campbell, 2011; Geelhoed et al., 2002). In Campbell's (2011) study, the peer-pairing or buddy

program had been implemented as part of a class and thus was a compulsory assignment on which students were assessed as part of their course grade. For the students in this study, this meant there was not an option to forgo participation. As a result, these students admitted that had the assignment not been required they likely would not have joined the program voluntarily, and thus the assignment had been the push they needed to initiate interactions across culture (Campbell, 2011). For the students in the Geelhoed et al. (2002) study, the program was voluntary. Interestingly, over half of the students who participated had previous international experience through various study abroad programs, and therefore, according to Geelhoed et al. (2002), already had a vested interest in engaging in cross-cultural communication.

Barriers to Engagement

Two theoretical concepts – social self-efficacy and homophily – can help explain many of the barriers to cross-cultural communication discussed previously. Namely, international student adjustment issues, particularly in regards to English language learners, as well as both international and domestic students' tendencies to interact mostly with co-nationals rather than across culture. Additional barriers to international and domestic student engagement also include universities' grouping methods.

Social self-efficacy. In discussing the views of international students towards social interaction with host nationals, Lin and Betz (2009) use the term "social self-efficacy," a term that helps to describe their findings suggesting that it may not be the actual level of proficiency in the English language that facilities or hinders social interaction across culture, but instead the level of confidence international students have when speaking English. Self-efficacy can be explained as "students' self-beliefs about their capabilities to initiate and successfully perform specified tasks at designated levels" (Li et al., 2009, p. 392). When paired with social

interaction, social self-efficacy helps to explain the degree to which students feel capable initiating or successfully engaging in social interaction with host nationals (Lin & Betz, 2009). The application of self-efficacy as a theoretical construct or lens can be further evidenced by Wright and Schartner's (2013) analysis of international students' social interactions. In their study, Wright and Schartner (2013) indicated a tension or incongruence in international students' desires and expectations related to engaging with host nationals, stating the international students had a strong desire to engage with host nationals but their actions or reluctance to engage did not match their desires. This is related to social self-efficacy in that the international students reluctance may have been a product of their lack of confidence (or self-efficacy) in their ability to sustain social interaction with host nationals, due to factors such as language ability, cultural differences, or the lack of initiative from host nationals themselves (Wright & Schartner, 2013). In regards to domestic students' social self-efficacy, and how that relates to domestic students' interactions with international students, there is currently very little research on the topic. However, as Geelhoed et al. (2002) found in their study of domestic students' experiences in an international peer-pairing program, domestic students' initially felt apprehensive when engaging with their international peers, but continually developed confidence throughout the duration of the program, allowing them to have more successful interactions with their international peers. The notion of confidence in the Geelhoed et al. study can be related in some ways to the social self-efficacy of the domestic students.

Homophily. A commonly cited reason for the lack of cross-cultural communication that persists on college campuses in the United States and other English-speaking countries is the tendency of both domestic and international students to communicate and interact only with students who share their same nationality or culture (Dunne, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2011).

Though there are various aspects of university life that aid in the ease of these cultural-specific groupings, such as universities grouping methods as discussed below, this tendency is further observed in environments outside of higher education (McPherson et al., 2001). Therefore, the tendency of individuals to communicate only with those who they perceive to be similar to them arguably remains a tendency even without the influence of aspects such as universities grouping methods. This tendency is defined and operationalized by McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) as homphily, "the principle that contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (p. 416). In explaining this theoretical construct in societies generally, McPherson et al. (2001) cite geography and space, age, religion, sex and gender, race and ethnicity, as well as nationality – which bears particular importance for this study – as dimensions or identities upon which individuals determine their similarity to others and ultimately place themselves into homogenous groupings. Due to these homogenous groupings, cultural information and the sharing of cultures – as well as genetics and material information – tends to remain localized within homogenous networks (McPherson et al., 2001). The localized nature of culture, then, is one aspect which may perpetuate cultural misunderstandings and a lack of cultural context among domestic and international students (Dunne, 2009; Hendrickson et al., 2011; McPherson et al., 2001).

In the context of Dunne's (2009) study, students evaluated their own homophilic behavior, making the determination that intracultural communication provided them with a sense of security that was not present within intercultural interactions. However, domestic students in Dunne's (2009) study also evaluated the homophilic behavior of international students, asserting that due to the large numbers of international students, many from the same country, international students gravitated towards those who shared their same nationality. Thus,

international students, according to the perceptions of domestic students, had little need to interact with out-group individuals when their needs could be filled by co-nationals (Dunne, 2009). These findings are not only illuminated by Dunne's (2009) study, however, but are perceptions held by domestic students in the context of other studies as well, including Spencer-Rodgers (2001) study regarding the stereotypes domestic students hold about international students.

Universities' grouping methods. The ease of interacting with co-nationals also serves as a barrier to social interaction among international and domestic students as well as a barrier to international students' cultural adjustment (Andrade, 2006; Dunne, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). This ease, however, is often maintained by universities themselves in their grouping methods around accommodations and programming (Wright & Schartner, 2013). In Wright and Schartner's (2013) assessment of international students' social interaction habits, international student participants reported a lack of diversity in terms of the programming available to them as well as a lack of diversity in their accommodations, stating they often felt they were placed into country-specific groupings. Therefore, proximity plays a large role in perpetuating the ease of international students speaking in their first language with co-nationals rather than making new friends across culture.

Potential Facilitators of Cross-Cultural Engagement

Fostering cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students involves working towards the destruction of many of the barriers outlined in the literature, but also involves taking note of the way in which cross-cultural communication is viewed (Leask, 2009; Otten, 2003; Summers & Volet, 2008). Often times the domestic population tends to view the responsibility of initiating cross-cultural communication as that of the international student

while the international student sees this responsibility as that of the domestic student (Andrade, 2006). However, as Leask (2009) argued, in order to effectively implement cross-cultural communication on American and other English-speaking campuses, cross-cultural communication must be seen as a two-way process. As Leask (2009) further explained, it may also help to avoid viewing cross-cultural communication or international students in a deficit manner, "we need to move away from deficit models of engagement, which position international students as interculturally deficient and home students as interculturally efficient, when in reality both need support and encouragement and both have skills and knowledge relevant to the task" (p. 218). Support for fostering cross-cultural communication and changing attitudes towards cross-cultural communication, as outlined here, should come from each group of students themselves, instructors, administrators and the university community as a whole.

Influence of instructors. One factor influencing intercultural communication among domestic and international students, particularly within the classroom, is the behavior and teaching style of professors and instructors (Leask, 2009). Leask (2009), in her study on how both formal and informal curricula can be used to facilitate cross-cultural engagement, stressed the importance of professors and instructors guiding students in their cross-cultural communications and rewarding them for engaging in cross-cultural communication. Also of importance, however, is their actual teaching style. As Leask (2009) argued, instructors "must be able to adapt their teaching to an international, culturally diverse teaching and learning environment rather than expecting learners to adapt to a monocultural, inflexible environment" (p. 212). If instructors themselves do not use their role and power in the classroom as means to enhance cross-cultural interaction in the effective ways Leask (2009) outlined, it is unlikely cross-cultural interactions will occur due to the improbability that either domestic or

international students will take initiative in fostering these actions, or even have the authority or means to do so.

One way in which cross-cultural communication can be facilitated in the classroom setting is through the use of mixed-group work with teams made up of both international and domestic students (Dunne, 2009; Summers & Volet, 2008). Summers and Volet (2008) focused on this type of facilitation in their study regarding the attitudes of first, second, and third-year Australian students around mixed-group work. As Summers and Volet (2008) concluded, the students in this study did not have experiences with or attitudes toward mixed-group work in their college classes that helped to serve the social and educational goals of campus internationalization. This was in part due to the university's lack of intervention in combating these attitudes and enhancing the experiences of students, which could be accomplished via compulsory mixed-group assignments or having mixed-group projects be long enough to allow students to reap the longer term benefits of mixed-group work (Summers & Volet, 2008; Urban & Palmer, 2013). Dunne (2009) further explained ways in which instructors can encourage students to engage cross-culturally. Specifically helpful in facilitating intercultural communication is the use of small classrooms with a small number of students (Dunne, 2009). The use of smaller groups of students, and the pairing or grouping of students into cross-cultural groups by instructors rather than allowing groups to be formed via student-choice were mentioned by Dunne (2009) as ways to increase the likelihood of cross-cultural communication in the classroom, due to the preference of domestic students in this study for forced intercultural interaction. This forced interaction, would, as explained by the domestic students, help to alleviate many of the anxieties around intercultural communication, such as the fear of rejection by international students or the fear of ridicule by domestic peers as a result of engaging with

out-group individuals (Dunne, 2009). Otten (2003) further argued that internationalization of the

curriculum and the formation of cross-cultural groups in the classroom would allow instructors

to utilize the diversity in the classroom as a resource, and set the expectation that students do the

same.

      Universities' responsibility. In addition to the responsibility of cross-cultural

communication being that of both the international and domestic student, as well as college

instructors, the literature argued that universities themselves also play a large role in facilitating

this communication (Dunne, 2009; Geelhoed et al., 2003; Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013;

Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Summers & Volet, 2008; Urban &

Palmer, 2013). In Luo and Jamieson-Drake's (2013) study on the benefits of intercultural

interaction for domestic students, several ways that intercultural communication could be

facilitated at the university-wide level emerged. Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) argued that

student contact with faculty outside of class encouraged intercultural communication due to the

personal development that occurred as a result of these student-faculty interactions, which could

then motivate students to engage actively in class and other activities on campus, perhaps with

international students. Therefore, "institutions can encourage faculty members to take a more

proactive role in helping students develop a positive attitude toward international interaction and

in advising clubs or organizations to be more open and inclusive" (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013,

p. 98). Additionally, Luo and Jamieson-Drake (2013) suggested that universities implement

more interdisciplinary courses or programs due to the fact that students were more likely to

engage in intercultural interaction when taking courses outside of their specific major, strengthen

students' involvement in the campus community, particularly around cultural and global issues,

and utilize the knowledge of students who have studied abroad, encouraging them to share their

knowledge of intercultural communication with students who are perhaps unable to study abroad.

Urban and Palmer (2013) took a similar stance in their study regarding how universities can and should utilize their international students as a resource for campus internationalization. Specifically, Urban and Palmer (2013) stated that student organizations as well as cultural events where international students can share their culture are both valuable in facilitating cross-cultural communication, but that institutions must ensure they are engaging all students and not just those who already have a vested interest in cross-cultural communication and relationships.

Intercultural training. Another way in which universities can intervene to facilitate cross-cultural communication and bring broad awareness to the lack of cross-cultural communication in higher education is through intercultural training of students, faculty, administrators, and campus communities as a whole (Otten, 2003). The outcome of intercultural training is intercultural learning and competence (Otten, 2003), which results from the "experience of differences that causes cognitive irritation, emotional imbalance, and a disruption of one's own cultural worldview" (p. 15). While these things seem somewhat unpleasant, Otten (2003), in his study on the theoretical framework around intercultural learning, argued that for the international student, cognitive irritation or emotional imbalance are inevitable and unavoidable. This is primarily due to the international student's outsider status in the host country and on the host campus. Therefore, to train domestic students, faculty, and other members of the campus community to effectively deal with cognitive irritation or emotional imbalance is to facilitate intercultural learning and to perhaps increase the likelihood of cross-cultural communication being viewed as the norm on English-speaking campuses (Otten, 2003). Just as international students face adjustment issues, so too might domestic students in

navigating the diverse and multicultural environments of the college campus. Intercultural training can help to prepare domestic students, faculty, and campus communities for communication within a diverse world – especially students, faculty, and others who are unable to go abroad and experience what it is like to be in the minority for themselves (Otten, 2003).

International and domestic student peer-pairing programs. Other interventions aimed at increasing the intercultural communication and competence of college students include a peer-pairing program requiring a set number of interactions per semester between domestic and international students (Campbell, 2011; Geelhoed et al., 2003; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Sakurai, McCall-Wolf, & Kashima, 2010). The partnerships formed through peer-pairing programs focus on the co-participation of international and domestic students in activities related to daily life, such as cooking, or watching television with one another (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). In one example, a peer-pairing program was implemented as part of a classroom project (Campbell, 2011) whereas in another study (Geelhoed et al., 2003) the peer-pairing program was a voluntary extracurricular activity for students. Students in these studies, both domestic and international, reported a number of benefits related to the peer-pairing programs including a smoother transition for international students as a result of their relationships with domestic peers, and greater cultural awareness for domestic students (Campbell, 2011; Geelhoed et al., 2003). Further, many students who participated in these programs expressed a desire to continue to engage in intercultural interactions and make friends across culture given that these programs had aided them significantly in increasing their intercultural communication competence (Campbell, 2011; Geelhoed et al., 2003).

Based on these findings, it can be concluded, then, that the facilitation of intercultural communication requires a comprehensive effort that is exerted from the beginning of a student's

collegiate career. If students, both international and domestic, are led to believe that intercultural communication is something they should expect throughout their time in college, perhaps this communication will become easier to facilitate. As Dunne (2009) argued, students can be taught to expect this from the beginning through the use of new student orientation, which is currently a separate event for domestic and international students at many campuses. Further, universities should also communicate the benefits of cross-cultural communication from the start as well. Perhaps students could then better understand these benefits, and begin utilizing them in their assessments of the utility, function, and usefulness of communicating across culture (Dunne, 2009).

Gaps in the Literature

Gaps identified in the literature that may have informed this literature review include a discussion of first-year domestic student adjustment issues and how these issues impact cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students. Further, there was little literature on the social self-efficacy of domestic students specifically and whether or how domestic students' social self-efficacy impacts their interactions with international students. Additionally, there was little literature identified that helped to describe the ways in which trends in cross-cultural communication within United States higher education have evolved, particularly given the higher numbers of international students on U.S. college and university campuses today. In the context of this particular study, it may have been helpful to understand whether or not cross-cultural communication has increased, decreased, or been altered in any way as the number of international students studying in the U.S. has increased.

Summary of Literature

Literature delving into the lack of cross-cultural communication occurring on college campuses within the United States and other English-speaking countries presented a framework from which to view this lack of cross-cultural communication. To understand this lack of cross-cultural communication, the experiences of international students in the United States, as well as the experiences of domestic students regarding intercultural communication were presented. Additionally, theoretical constructs such as social self-efficacy and homophily which can help to further understand students' experiences and explain the lack of cross-cultural communication within higher education were presented. Finally, to identify ways in which cross-cultural communication might be improved, barriers to cross-cultural communication as well as facilitators of cross-cultural communication, both of which are implemented at the student, instructor, and university-levels were presented. Through this case study, I hope to contribute to the body of work on how both first-year international and domestic students make decisions about how to interact with one another across culture, focusing specifically on a large, public, four-year, research-intensive university.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The lack of cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students on English-speaking campuses throughout the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and other parts of the world is troubling, particularly when considering the benefits that accompany cross-cultural communication are often cited as the main goals of international education (IIE, 2014). Therefore, for international education to reach this main goal of facilitating cross-cultural communication, and for international and domestic students alike to reap the benefits of such communication, cross-cultural communication and relationships among international and domestic students must become the norm rather than the exception. In order for cross-cultural communication to become the norm, however, it is important that researchers and those with the ability to aid in the facilitation of cross-cultural communication understand both the ways in which international and domestic students make meaning around cross-cultural communication and the ways in which students experience this communication and cross-cultural relationships. This qualitative research study seeks to aid in this understanding through exploring how first-year students at a large, research-intensive, four-year, public university communicate across culture primarily in the classroom but also on the college campus generally. This qualitative study operated within a constructivist paradigm, and utilized case study methods, including observations and semi-structured interviews, to glean data regarding the decisions first-year international and domestic students make about cross-cultural communication, and students' lived experiences engaging in cross-cultural communication.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions of this case study were developed in order to further examine the cross-cultural interactions of first-year domestic and international students studying

at a large, public, four-year, research-intensive university in the Midwestern United States. The following research questions were used in creating the methodology for this research:

1. How do international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to engage in cross-cultural communication in the classroom?

2. How and when do international and domestic students communicate with one another in the classroom? How do those communication interactions fit within the larger communicative dynamics in the classroom?

3. What factors within the classroom environment influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students?

4. How do personal factors, specifically past cross-cultural experiences, influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students in the classroom?

Methodology Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative research was to learn from the participants in this study (Creswell, 2002), thus allowing their voices to be heard in an effort to understand the perspectives they held regarding cross-cultural communication in the classroom and additional campus environments. As a tenant of qualitative research, I acted as the primary instrument in the data collection and interpretation (Mertens, 2010). I decided to use qualitative methods to understand the *how*, specifically how international and domestic students make decisions about how to interact with one another across culture. Qualitative research further allowed me to study cross-cultural communication within its natural setting through observations, and to gain an understanding of students sense-making around cross-cultural communication via one-on-one interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

A constructivist design was used in this research with the intent of allowing participants to "examine how their own understandings, skills, values, and present knowledge both frame and constrain their actions" (Creswell, 2002, p. 610). Through the use of qualitative methods, my participants and I were able to collaborate with one another with the goal of generating knowledge that helps to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

This qualitative study also represents a case study. The case study methodology allowed me to gather context-dependent knowledge through proximity to the phenomenon and direct interactions with and feedback from the participants (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The case study method also allowed me to study cross-cultural communication and the direct thoughts, perceptions, and ideas of participants themselves in-depth as "the main strength of the case study is depth – detail, richness, completeness, and within-case variance" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 314). In order to aid in the richness and completeness of this particular study, and ultimately to understand students personal assumptions, it was crucial to engage one-on-one with the participants, be present in an environment in which the focus of this study was also present, and ultimately to choose a case or unit of analysis which would glean rich, personalized data from the participants involved.

This particular case involved a first-year seminar for business students. Consistent with case study methods, the first-year seminar course acted as the bounded system upon which this study was conducted. According to Merriam (2001), a bounded system is "a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries" (p. 27). This allows researchers to distinguish what will be studied from what will not be studied (Merriam, 2001). For this particular study, the bounded system was the first-year seminar course and further, the students enrolled in the course. It was important to study the phenomenon of interest within this particular system because the Business 101 (pseudonym) classroom represented an environment in which the phenomenon of interest

was widely represented. Due to the large numbers of both international and domestic students enrolled in the Business College and thus within this course, as well as the large number of first-year students specifically, there was ample opportunity to study the phenomenon among this specific population and within the specific context in-depth.

Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological perspective utilized in this research was a constructivist epistemology. Users of the constructivist paradigm believe that "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2010, p. 16), and that both researchers and participants in research are active in the construction of knowledge regarding the phenomena under study. Due to the researcher's active role in the construction of knowledge, constructivism requires researchers to consider their biases and understand that "research is a product of the values of researchers and cannot be independent of them" (Mertens, 2010, p. 16). Also of importance within the constructivist paradigm is the notion that there can be multiple realities and multiple perspectives of the same data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Furthermore, the constructivist paradigm assumes methods that are conducted in a naturalistic manner – that is, within the natural world. It is for these reasons that I conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with participants, allowing them to construct their own realities and interpretations of the phenomenon under study, and that I conducted classroom observations, thus viewing the phenomenon of cross-cultural communication within its natural environment.

Participants

This case study included a purposeful sample, so that I could identify an information-rich case that would allow me to study the case in-depth (Mertens, 2010). The participants chosen for this study met certain criteria in that they were first-year students at a large, public, four-year,

research-intensive institution and were enrolled in a first-year seminar course for majors within the College of Business Administration. For the purposes of this study, this course will be titled Business (BUS) 101: Introduction to Business. The course is designed around introducing first-year students to the campus, through highlighting the resources available to students on the campus. BUS 101 also maintains a strong focus on helping first-year students to realize their strengths, and to develop strong study and life skills within their first year of study, with the goal of ultimately setting students up for success throughout their collegiate career. This course was chosen due its location within the College of Business Administration, the college at the university known to have the highest numbers of international students in comparison to the other six colleges at the university. The interaction of international and domestic students in the classroom was a strong focus of this study, and therefore the researcher's decision to use the BUS 101 course and the students within this course in this case study exemplified the use of intensity sampling, in that the BUS 101 course represented a site "in which the phenomenon of interest was strongly represented" (Mertens, 2010, p. 321).

In order to obtain access to this course, I spoke with the administrator and administering office of the BUS 101 course. To identify a section of this course to work with, I worked with the administrator of the course to determine the sections with the highest number of international students. I then contacted the instructors of these courses to determine their number of international students and to obtain permission to conduct observations in the classroom and recruit participants from the course for interviews. A course section was chosen based on the course which enrolled the highest number of international students so that I could continue to research a site in which the topic of interest was more widely represented than it may have been in classes with a smaller ratio of domestic to international students.

To recruit interview participants within the BUS 101 course section that was observed, I utilized a recruitment email (see Appendix A) that was sent to all students in the course. As an incentive for participating in my research, all participants who agreed to participate in one-on-one in-depth interviews were provided with a free meal.

Observation participants. The BUS 101 course in which I conducted my observations consisted of twenty-seven students total, eight international students and nineteen domestic students. Due to the fact that some of the students were second-year students at the university, they were eliminated from my observation notes and did not consent to be observed given that they did not fall under the category of interest in this research. Therefore, eight students were excluded from this study, and nineteen students were observed in total, five international students and fourteen domestic students. In general, the majority of international students appeared to be from Asian countries, which is consistent with the larger international student population at Great Plains University. All of the observation participants majored in an area within the College of Business Administration, given this is a criterion for enrollment in the BUS 101 course.

Interview participants. A total of two participants from the observed BUS 101 course chose to participate in interviews. One participant was an international student from China, who for the purposes of this study will be named Nora. Nora identifies as female, and was an International Business major. The other participant was a domestic student from a small town in a Midwestern state of the United States, who for the purposes of this study will be named Rachel. Rachel also identifies as female and was an Economics and Accounting double major. Both participants were traditionally-aged first-time first-year students, and lived in on-campus

housing, each in a two-person room within a residence hall. Both participants were also in their second semester of study at the University.

Institutional Review Board Approval

Prior to the start of the study, I completed the Consortium for Institutional Review Board Training Initiative in Human Subjects Protections (CITI) for certification in human subjects research. Additionally, approval was sought from and granted by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). During data collection, participants from the BUS 101 course selected were given an informed consent letter for both the observations and interviews conducted in this study (see Appendices B & C). Prior to the start of the observation and interview sessions, each participant was given the opportunity to review the informed consent letter and signed the document. Participants in both the observations and interview sessions were also given a copy of the informed consent letter for their records. Confidentiality of the participants in this study was maintained in the observations as no identifying information was recorded about the participants during these sessions. During interview sessions, participant's confidentiality was maintained by assigning each participant a pseudonym. Additionally, all research related documents were stored on a password-protected computer.

Research Site

The research site for this study was a large, public, four-year, research-intensive institution located in a Midwestern state within the United States. For the purposes of this study, the institution will be referred to as Great Plains University.

Great Plains University is a land-grant institution and the Flagship University of the Midwestern state in which it is located. As of the fall 2014 semester, there were a total of 19,979 undergraduate students, 4,517 graduate students, and 510 professional students enrolled. The

entering class of 2014 consisted of 4,652 first-time freshman students. Great Plains University is primarily a residential university with 17,768 resident students as of the fall of 2014 and 7,238 non-resident students. Further, the population of undergraduate international students in the fall of 2014 was 1,784 students while the population of undergraduate domestic students consisted of 18,195 students. Of these 1,784 international students at Great Plains University, approximately 49% are Chinese.

Within the College of Business Administration at Great Plains University, the college in which this study was conducted, there were 3,547 undergraduate students as of fall 2014.

Data Collection—Observations and Interviews

The data collection methods for this study were observations and interviews. These methods fit within the constructivist paradigm for two reasons. Firstly, the constructivist paradigm assumes researchers will utilize methods that allow researchers to view the phenomenon of interest in its natural setting or within the natural world (Lincoln et al., 2011). It is for this reason that I chose to conduct observations within the classroom, a natural setting. Second, the constructivist paradigm acknowledges there can be multiple perspectives and differing realties related to the same data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln et al., 2011). Therefore, I chose to also conduct semi-structured interviews with observation participants, to understand their individual perspective and reality as it related to the phenomenon of interest.

During the spring of 2015 two observations were conducted in the BUS 101: Introduction to Business classroom. During observations, I played the role of a "complete observer" (Mertens, 2010), entering the classroom and engaging directly with the students only through the announcement I gave prior to the observations in order to obtain consent (see Appendix D), otherwise remaining as invisible as possible while observing and recording notes about the

participant's interactions and behavior during the class sessions. As described by Creswell (2002), "observation is the process of gathering first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site" (p. 199). Observation thus allowed me to directly observe the cross-cultural communication and behaviors of students as they existed in the classroom, and further corroborate and inquire about these behaviors with students in subsequent interviews.

During the spring of 2015 I also conducted one-on-one interviews with willing students from the BUS 101 recitation course which I observed. Originally, I had planned on conducting two separate focus groups, one including domestic students only and another focus group with international students. However, due to the low number of students interested in participating in focus groups, I changed my methods to instead conduct one-on-one interviews with the students who were interested in participating in my research further. Therefore, following the observation sessions I completed one one-on-one interview session with the two willing participants from the BUS 101 course. Each interview was conducted on the Great Plains University campus in private group study rooms located in the main library. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. During each of these interviews, I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol to initiate conversation, which can be found in Appendix E. Each interview was audiotaped with participant's permission and then transcribed and checked for accuracy by the primary investigator. As Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) describe, "by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes" (p. 529). For the purposes of this study, this function of interviews was essential to understanding the attitudes, perceptions and lived experiences of students regarding cross-cultural communication.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis represents the meaning-making process of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). Analyzing the data in this qualitative case study involved the use of inductive data analysis, open coding, and in vivo codes. When researchers come to the data without previously established categories and allow categories or themes to emerge naturally, this is referred to as open coding (Creswell, 2002). Therefore, through review of field notes and interview transcripts, codes and themes were identified that assisted in the formation of categories useful in making sense of my raw data and formulating findings. Further, through the use of in vivo codes, I was able to form categories that were directly related to the reflections and information shared with me by participants in one-on-one interviews. In vivo codes are, in fact, "labels for categories (or themes) that are phrased in the exact words of the participants" (Creswell, 2002, p. 448). Following this coding process, I went through the field notes from observations and transcripts from interviews to place information and direct quotes from them into the coded categories and themes, helping to make meaning around these categories. Ultimately, I identified one overarching theme and four sub-themes that help to answer my research questions. These themes are presented and elaborated on in Chapter 4.

Researcher Reflexivity

Understanding this research also requires understanding the role, perspective, and influence the researcher has on this process and the research itself. As mentioned previously, a tenant of constructivist research is that constructivism requires researchers to consider their biases, values, and positionality in relation to the research (Mertens, 2010). I am a 23-year-old Caucasian female, born and raised in Lincoln, Nebraska. Currently, I work in international education, a field in which this research bears relation. Based on my observations as a former instructional assistant for the BUS 101 course in the fall of 2014, I came into this research with

the notion that cross-cultural communication within the BUS 101 classroom and among first-year students generally was quite lacking at Great Plains University. Based on these observations, I held a deficit view of the role of cross-cultural communication occurring on campus and among first-year students. Further review of the literature related to these assumptions validated my observations, and framed my thinking around this issue. Also, working in the field of international education, I had prior knowledge regarding the goals and purposes for international education, study abroad, and the recruitment of international students to study in the United States. My observations in the BUS 101 classroom, coupled with my review of relevant literature, led me to the conclusion with which I began this research; that international education was not meeting and serving one of its main goals. Based on this conclusion, I set out to conduct research on this topic within the context of my current institution, and to understand the personal views, perspectives, assumptions, and attitudes around cross-cultural communication of first-year students themselves.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In this case study, the concept of trustworthiness, related to the constructivist paradigm and used as an alternative to the concepts of reliability and validity utilized within the positivist paradigm, was used to validate these findings (Merriam, 2001). Establishing trustworthiness is important in all research in order to produce "valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner" (Merriam, 2001, p. 198). In this study, trustworthiness was established via triangulation, rich and thick descriptions, and member checks.

Triangulation. In this study, triangulation of data was used to determine the trustworthiness and goodness of this research. According to Merriam (2009), "triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through

observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives" (p. 216). In this particular study, both of these criterion for establishing triangulation of multiple sources of data were met. Through conducting two observation sessions at different times within a two-week period in the BUS 101 classroom, I was able to understand the phenomenon of interest in this study within its natural environment on two separate occasions. This was helpful in aiding in the elimination of factors that may affect cross-cultural communication that were perhaps unique to one single course session. Also, one-on-one interviews allowed for the triangulation of multiple sources of data in that they were conducted with two separate individuals, both of whom had differing perspectives. The most notable dimension on which their perspectives differed was their nationality. By conducting an interview with both an international and domestic student, I was able to understand and triangulate my data from individuals who each represented a significant perspective related to cross-cultural communication.

Rich and thick descriptions. Also utilized within this qualitative case study were rich and thick descriptions within the findings of this study. Rich, thick description involves "a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participants interviews, field notes, and documents" (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). Within the findings of this study, both direct quotes from participants and direct accounts of observations in the classroom are used to corroborate my findings. In addition to rich, thick description aiding in the trustworthiness of my study, rich, thick description can also contribute to the transferability of qualitative research and this particular study. Transferability, in the context of qualitative research, refers to "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 2009, p.

223). Therefore, my use of rich, thick description can perhaps be useful in generalizing these findings within other similar contexts.

   Member checks. Member checks were also utilized within this case study to contribute to the trustworthiness of this research. According to Merriam (2001), member checks involve "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results were plausible" (p. 204). During the spring of 2015, following the one-on-one interview sessions and data analysis, I wrote up a summary of my findings and emailed these to each interview participant. This was done to ensure that I had correctly captured and interpreted what my interview participants had to say about the phenomenon of interest. Following these e-mails I received a response from each participant confirming that I had correctly interpreted what they had said during our interview session and represented their meaning-making around cross-cultural communication properly.

Conclusion

   This third chapter described the methodology of this qualitative case study in more depth, including a discussion of the ways in which I co-constructed knowledge with my participants. With this knowledge, the reader will be better equipped to understand and interpret the data, findings, and related discussion and recommendations in chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this research was to gain a greater understanding of cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students at a large, public, four-year, research-intensive university located in the Midwestern United States. Of primary interest in this study was the ways in which first-year international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to interact with one another across culture. While this research maintained a focus on cross-cultural communication and factors affecting it within the classroom, other influential factors related to various spaces on the University campus outside of the classroom were also inquired about via in-depth interviews with research participants. To further explore this topic, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to engage in cross-cultural communication in the classroom?

2. How and when do international and domestic students communicate with one other in the classroom? How do those communication interactions fit within the larger communicative dynamics in the classroom?

3. What factors within the classroom environment influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students?

4. How do personal factors, specifically past cross-cultural experiences, influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students in the classroom?

The themes that emerged from this case study seek to answer these questions in order to contribute to a greater understanding of how first-year international and domestic students make

decisions about how to interact across culture, and how these students make meaning of their lived experiences with cross-cultural communication.

Introduction to Participants

The participants in this study were primarily communicated with via email and in face-to-face interactions in their classroom during observation sessions and one-on-one interview sessions with two students from the class observed. During observation sessions, the participants all shared common characteristics in that they were all first-time first-year students at Great Plains University, the institution on which this case study was conducted. Additionally, all of the students in the course observed majored in the College of Business Administration, as the course was a first-year seminar specifically for business majors. Within the observed course, a total of nineteen students consented to be observed, including five international students and fourteen domestic students.

Following two observation sessions during late January and early February, students from the observed course were invited to participate in interviews to provide a more in-depth and personal inquiry into the student's assumptions about and experiences with cross-cultural communication. From the observed course, two students volunteered to be interviewed, one international student and one domestic student. Both students were interviewed in private study rooms in the Great Plains University's main library. One shared commonality among these two students was their interest in the topic, mostly due to their desire to further internationalize their collegiate experiences. When asked if they were interested in studying abroad during their time at Great Plains University, both students expressed they had already been looking into such opportunities. Also, as with all observation participants, both of these students were first-time first-year students at Great Plains University majoring within the College of Business

Administration. Although both participants were business majors, each were in a variety of other general education classes during the spring of 2015 as well, including English, Political Science, Spanish, and History. Thus, both participants were able to reflect on their experiences with cross-cultural communication in a variety of settings outside the business classrooms of which they were a part. Lastly, both students lived in on-campus housing, each in a residence hall. While sharing these similarities, however, both participants differed in many ways as well, most notably in their national origin. What follows in the succeeding two subsections is an introduction to each participant.

Nora. Nora was an international student from China, majoring in International Business. She was quite involved in campus, expressing appreciation at the vast number of clubs and organizations present at Great Plains University. Nora was involved in the Culture Club (pseudonym), a club for domestic and international students aimed at facilitating the sharing of cultures among students from a variety of different countries and backgrounds. Nora was also involved in the Fine Arts Learning Community (pseudonym), a community of first-year students living all on the same floor of one of Great Plains University's residence halls. While still considered an international student, Nora came to the United States independently two years prior to her enrollment at GPU for the purposes of attending her final two years of high school in the United States. This experience provided Nora with an introduction to American schooling prior to experiencing American education at the collegiate level.

Rachel. Rachel was a domestic student from a small town in Northeastern Nebraska. During our interview Rachel discussed her transition to college life, noting that although she had only moved two hours to attend college, this transition had felt like "a major thing" in her life, particularly due to the fact that her graduating class in high school had been only twenty-six

students and that thus far she had lived in rural Nebraska her entire life. Rachel was majoring in both Accounting and Economics, and discussed her uncertainty in deciding which major she ultimately wanted to pursue, though she may eventually decide to pursue both. Unlike Nora, Rachel explained that she had little time to become involved in campus activities as of yet, but that she had used several of the resources available to her on the Great Plains University campus thus far, most of these related to helping her succeed academically.

A variety of factors influencing cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students were introduced by both of the participants in this study. Both students also shared stories related to their experiences thus far with cross-cultural communication at Great Plains University. These stories and the factors identified by Nora and Rachel, as well as observations within the business class of which Nora and Rachel are enrolled, make up the themes and findings reported in the sections that follow.

Research Themes

In response to the research questions developed in this case study, one overarching theme and four sub-themes developed that help to explain the ways in which first-year students at Great Plains University come to conclusions about how to interact with one another across culture. The overarching theme or factor that affected whether or not first-year students chose to engage in cross-cultural communication was the assessed level of ease or convenience in initiating communication across culture. The ways in which the students assessed this level of ease or convenience made up the four sub-themes of this research, which are (a) the existence of nationally-shared characteristics, (b) University-sanctioned gateways and barriers to cross-cultural communication, (c) challenges in communicating across culture in the classroom, and (d) the effects of student personality on their likelihood of initiating cross-cultural

communication. The subgroups and related actors under each research theme are listed in Table

1.

Table 1. *Research Themes and Subthemes*

Overarching Theme: Assessed level of Ease/Convenience in Initiating Cross-Cultural Communication
Subtheme I: Effects of Nationally-Shared Characteristics
Nationally-Shared Characteristics: • Language • Culture • Co-national Comfort
Subtheme II: University-Sanctioned Gateways and Barriers
University-Specific Factors: • Housing • Programming
Subtheme III: Challenges in Communicating Cross-Culturally in the Classroom
Elements of the Classroom: • Class Size • Lecture-Driven Teaching Style
Subtheme IV: Effects of Student Personality on Initiating Cross-Cultural Communication
Student Personality Characteristics: • Introversion and Extroversion

Overarching theme: Assessed level of ease/convenience in initiating cross-cultural

communication. The main way in which students in this study made decisions regarding

whether and how to engage in cross-cultural communication was through their assessment of the

level of ease or convenience present when making these decisions. There were several ways in

which students approached this assessment, which make up the four sub-themes of this research.

In general, if students determined that the level of ease or convenience in initiating cross-cultural

communications was high enough, they were more likely to initiate these communications. In

contrast, if students determined it was not convenient or easy to initiate these communications,

based on their assessment of the four sub-themes presented below, they were less likely to initiate these communications.

     Subtheme I: Effects of nationally-shared characteristics. The most prominent nationally-shared characteristics cited by interview participants in this case study were language and culture. For the interview participants, both felt these nationally-shared characteristics were major barriers to cross-cultural communication among first-year students at Great Plains University. These nationally-shared characteristics contributed to the ease students felt when communicating intraculturally and ultimately led to co-national comfort. The opposite of co-national comfort was described by participants in this study as the discomfort or difficulty in communicating with students across culture who did not share their language or culture. This difficulty often led participants to avoid engaging in cross-cultural communication, particularly if it was not required of them in their courses.

     Language. In this study, language was mentioned frequently by participants as a barrier to cross-cultural communication. In the case of both participants, both based whether or not they could successfully communicate across culture on the international student's ability to communicate in English. For Nora, this meant evaluating her own language ability as well as the language abilities of other Chinese students:

     I don't know how other international students feel talking with Americans, but it depends

     on their English level. If they pretty good at English hopefully they will talk more, but if

     they're not, they just really quiet. If you good at English you can talk with Americans.

     Language is really big problem if you can't speak English then you can't talk with

     people.

Nora expressed that for her, language and students' confidence in their language abilities played a crucial role in determining how international students felt about interacting with domestic students. Nora also highlighted the ways in which Chinese, Nora's native language, differed from English in meaning and in the way students expressed themselves through language. Similarly, Rachel noted that her more unsuccessful cross-cultural encounters had occurred as a result of the language ability of those with whom she was conversing:

> I mean I think it can be difficult because I feel like a lot of the times they kind of, like, go towards more their own culture so it's kind of like, you know, they can speak their own language so especially, like, 'cause I have, you know, talked to a couple of them and it's just like when you're there they're trying to like speak English with each other and it just kind of gets weird and, you know, when you know that they would rather speak their own language.

Rachel also described that her more successful encounters with cross-cultural communication had occurred mostly at her high school, where there were exchange students each semester who came mainly from Europe, and therefore knew how to speak English well which "made it easy."

During observation sessions, the effects of language could be seen first-hand. On one particular day when observing the classroom, there were several international students in the class that had not spoken at all during the class session. However, following the end of class there was a group of three international students who all convened in the center of the classroom, and had a conversation with one another at length in their home language. This helped to further make sense of the statements made by both Rachel and Nora in that these students were perceived to feel more comfortable during their interactions with each other in their home language than they had throughout the class session during which they had not spoken at all.

Culture. A second important mediating factor that often serves as a barrier to cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students is culture, or rather the lack of cultural competence among both international and domestic students about cultures outside of their own. This lack of cultural context among international and domestic students about the other group's culture contributes to the difficulty students experience in forming relationships with students across culture. This lack of context is evidenced by Nora's statements about the difficulties in interacting across culture, "I would say its local culture and the local joke. Yeah, 'cause Americans they have background for the culture so I don't know or understand." When discussing what prevents cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students, Rachel spoke in a similar way to Nora regarding the lack of cultural competence or understanding among these two groups of students:

> I think maybe it's just like the preconceived notion that we just automatically assume that, like, oh they don't share our culture, they don't share our language, they're going to be like completely different from us and just weird and there's going to be like no common ground that we find. I think that's kind of like the main one, is that you don't really see where, where or how your two cultures can even, like, you know, like merge and how you can even be friends with somebody else.

Co-national comfort. Each of these nationally-shared characteristics, language and culture, contributed to an overall feeling of comfort that students stated they felt when interacting with students from their own cultures. As mentioned above, the opposite of feeling co-national comfort for students was feeling discomfort, leading students to express that interacting across culture was difficult, while interacting with co-nationals was easier. Thus, this difficulty and these feelings of discomfort led students to largely avoid interacting across culture or choosing to

initiate cross-cultural interactions. This feeling of co-national comfort was described by Nora as

what made international students "stick together":

> I think not so many international students in the classes so they kind of stick with each
>
> other. If you often hang out with Chinese, like, you cannot practice English but you
>
> maybe feel more comfortable because they know what you're talking about and the food
>
> will be the same, yeah.

For Nora, these nationally-shared characteristics are what made her feel more comfortable when

interacting with Chinese students, in Nora's particular case, than she felt when interacting with

American students. Rachel described co-national comfort and the tendency of international

students to stick together in similar ways:

> I can see though why they stick together, because then they can kind of all like transition
>
> together and kind of, you know, go to each other for support, just because it makes them
>
> feel more comfortable, like, that would make me feel more comfortable if I was around a
>
> lot of American students if I was in a foreign country. Um, so I see why that happens but
>
> I don't know, I feel like it's, it limits them and us from communicating with each other.

> Co-national comfort and the tendency of international students to stick together was also

seen through classroom observation. During one class, various quotes about leadership were

posted on the classroom walls. The students were then asked to go and stand by the leadership

quote that best represented their perspective of leadership. Subsequently, all of the international

students in the course gravitated towards the same quote and stood all at the exact same quote.

While this may indicate differing cultural perspectives on leadership, it is also important to

consider the possibility that international students felt more comfortable standing together in a

group. This possibility was further evidenced by other group activities, particularly those that

involved the students having to stand up and move around the classroom. These activities had similar outcomes in that the international students, should they be allowed to self-select partners or groups, always had at least one other international student with them.

Subtheme II: University-sanctioned gateways and barriers. For all the ways in which the existence and depth of cross-cultural communication depends on the students themselves, as well as on nationally-shared characteristics as noted above, colleges and universities also play a significant role in their creation – or not – of environments that foster cross-cultural communication. Participants in this study noted two factors, housing and programming, that contributed to their perceptions of how easy it is to initiate or engage in cross-cultural communication. Both of these were factors that the students in this study determined to be university-sanctioned, or controlled by the university, and both were also factors that had influenced the experiences the participants in this study had around cross-cultural communication.

Housing. For these first-year students, both who lived in on-campus housing, their residence hall was the place in which they had made the most friends and the place in which they felt it was easiest to make friends. As a result, these participants cited housing as a major factor contributing to the lack of cross-cultural communication happening between international and domestic students at Great Plains University. At Great Plains University, a large majority of the international students who live on-campus are housed within two residence halls, both of which are designated by many students as "the international student dorms," a designation which both students in this study were aware of. For the purposes of this study, these two residence halls will be referred to by the pseudonyms Hartley and Randolph, in order to maintain confidentiality.

Rachel responded directly to this designation in her explanation of how Great Plains University could assist in facilitating cross-cultural communication:

> Um, I mean, maybe not put them all in Hartley! I feel like that, that really emphasizes the fact that even they themselves won't speak to, um, domestic students. Um, because that, I think, you know, especially like for me as a freshman some of the first friends that I met here on campus were the ones that lived on my floor and in my dorm hall. I think that's kind of like where a lot of friendships start when you first come to college so I think that like putting them all there is just, it limits them and, and the other people too, from communicating with each other.

Nora shared similar thoughts regarding how she had made friends in her residence hall and the cross-cultural communication that can occur as a result of housing international and domestic students together. Interestingly, Nora did not live in either of the two "international student dorms" on campus, but instead lived in a dorm that was occupied primarily by domestic students. Nora also had a roommate who was a domestic student, which she believed helped her to become better accustomed to interacting across culture:

> I hang out with American students more than Chinese because I live in Arbor (pseudonym) so they don't have Chinese over there. Hartley and Randolph is, uh, there will be more. Like, if you, um, talk with people, want to talk with Americans, I think you…oh yeah! Or your roommate, like if you live with American that would be easier.

As evidenced from both Rachel and Nora, where students live on campus and the make-up of the student population that students live amongst will contribute greatly to a student's likelihood of engaging in cross-cultural communication. It can be demonstrated, then, that housing and housing policies have implications for cross-cultural communication.

Programming. Programming is another way in which universities and their personnel play a role in facilitating cross-cultural communication on the college campus. While housing acted primarily as a university-sanctioned barrier to cross-cultural communication, save for the few instances in which international and domestic students had formed relationships as a result of being housed together, programming served as a gateway for cross-cultural communication. While Rachel indicated that she was not involved in any organizations on campus, Nora discussed two specific organizations that had assisted her in communicating and forming relationships across culture. One of these was the Fine Arts Learning Community, a community that consisted of the students who lived on her floor in her residence hall, and another, the Culture Club, was an organization aimed specifically at facilitating cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students at Great Plains University. Nora discussed the Culture Club more in-depth, focusing on the ways in which the organization had assisted her in communicating cross-culturally:

> Participating in activities and clubs will be easier to make friends with Americans than class. I participate in the Culture Club so they have so many international students and American students so we um, just international student and American student talk and communicate, culture, yeah, and hang out.

Nora further discussed programming, specifically clubs and organizations, when describing how Great Plains University could better facilitate cross-cultural communication. Nora specifically stated she felt it would be great for international and domestic students to take a trip with one another that was planned by the University and explained that she planned to continue to join clubs and organizations throughout her time at Great Plains University to work towards her goal of making friends with more American students.

The university-sanctioned barriers and gateways to cross-cultural communication, specifically housing and programming, contributed a great deal to the ease students felt when interacting across culture. When considering both housing and programming, the proximity of international students to domestic students and vice versa plays a role in facilitating cross-cultural communication – the closer these groups of students are to one another the greater the likelihood they will engage in conversation with one another and the easier it is for students to do so. The indirect encouragement provided as a result of this proximity also helps to contribute to students' perceptions of the ease, and convenience, of initiating cross-cultural communication.

Subtheme III: Challenges in communicating cross-culturally in the classroom.
Another factor related to whether or not it is easy or convenient for students to initiate cross-cultural interactions involves the classroom setting, a space which was initially at the primary focus of this study. During observations of the Business 101 course, it was noted that there was very little interaction happening at all, let alone across culture, particularly when the class consisted of lecture-style instruction. While the Business 101 course observed was unique in that it combined both lecture-style instruction with activities and group work, both participants in this study described that this was unique for their classes, particularly those within the business college. In addition, the Business 101 course observed was relatively small with only twenty-eight students, which as participants described was also unique in relation to their other courses. Class size, then, in addition to lecture-style instruction, represented another challenge within the classroom that often hindered cross-cultural communication.

Lecture-driven teaching style. One factor present in the classroom that hinders cross-cultural communication is the lecture-driven teaching style of many classes – particularly large classes – which was seen during observations in the Business 101 classroom. During the times

at which the students were listening to a lecture they all sat in rows of desks, facing intently

forward and remaining silent while listening to the instructor lecture. As a result, there was little

to no communication happening among any of the students in the class. This type of teaching

style was further elaborated on by both participants in this study as a hindrance to

communication in the classroom. As Nora described, lecture-style courses did not help to form

friendships among students, "basically people just listen to lecture and then just leave. So it's

kind of hard to make friends." As the participants mentioned, Business 101 and a select few

other classes were unique in their implementation of group work in the classroom. Rachel

elaborated on this during her discussion of a class she had taken the previous semester:

> Well, one of my classes last semester, yeah we had, it was really like discussion based so
>
> we would talk about, he would lecture about a topic, and then we would kind of, um, like
>
> turn to our neighbors and kind of have discussion and elaborate, um, but other than that, I
>
> mean, we don't really work in groups at all, it's just lecture.

Nora also described another class, specifically her English course, in which students worked in

groups frequently. Through these groups, Nora explained she had been able to make friends

with some American students, however Nora mentioned several times that this class represented

a special case. In instances where classes enrolled hundreds of students, and were held in large

lecture-style halls, students were not encouraged to communicate with one across culture, or

even necessarily to communicate with one another in general. This contributed to student's

feelings that communicating across culture in the classroom was not easy or convenient.

   Class size. At Great Plains University, many of the classes within the business college,

and many introductory classes at the university generally, were described by participants as

having a large number of students, some classes with over 100 students total. Due to these large

class sizes, participants explained that they often found it difficult to communicate across culture because the number of students in the class was so intimidating. As Nora further described, large class sizes make it very difficult to make friends with either domestic or international students:

>'Cause class is impossible to make friends, especially the large classes. In large classes, international and American students cannot talk, like in big lectures I think it's impossible to know everyone's name, even in small classes I know few people but not all of them.

Rachel shared similar thoughts about the large class sizes, explaining that there were not many instances in which she had made any friends at all in classes.

During observations in the BUS 101 course, both lecture-style instruction as well as class size contributed to the communicative dynamics in the classroom. For example, as mentioned previously BUS 101 was a unique class it that there were a mix of teaching methods were used including both lecture-style and group activities. During lecture-style instruction there was no communication occurring among students at all in the classroom, whereas in contrast there was a much higher level of communication occurring during group activities in which communication among students was necessary. BUS 101 was also a relatively small class, with twenty-seven students total. As was seen during observations, this allowed students to be paired in smaller groups during group activities and thus facilitated communication among small groups of students. Based on these observations, it also seemed that many students knew one another's names, or at least some other students names due to the smaller class size, as Nora attested to. This was determined through the observation that when students were assigned groups they were able to find one another with little to no assistance from the course instructor.

Subtheme IV: Effects of student personality on initiating cross-cultural communication. In addition to the factors affecting cross-cultural communication highlighted so far, participants in this study also identified student personality characteristics as indicators of the likelihood that students will initiate cross-cultural communication. The characteristic that was mentioned most frequently by both participants in this study was that of introversion and extroversion, or whether students were shy or outgoing. This particular theme was in part about students' assessment of their own shyness or outgoingness, but was also related to students' perceptions about another student's shyness or outgoingness.

Participants in this study mentioned frequently that irrespective of the other factors which facilitate or hinder cross-cultural communication, their perception of the other student's personality is important in discerning whether or not that student is likely to initiate or engage in cross-cultural communication. Also noted by participants was that idea that regardless of their own personality or whether or not they were extroverted or introverted, their likelihood of initiating cross-cultural communication with a student who they perceived to be shy or introverted was low. Both students indicated they felt that it was easier for students who were extroverted or outgoing to initiate intercultural interaction, and that shy or introverted students, no matter the circumstances, were unlikely to do so. As Rachel described, this distinction between introverts and extroverts was applied to both international and domestic students:

> I mean I think that, um, quiet students and I mean even if they're domestic, you know, they're not, it's not like they really seem approachable. I think that's, you know, the main thing, is that, I mean, there's domestic students that don't seem approachable as well as international students that really don't, so yeah.

When discussing the few encounters she previously had with international students, Rachel again indicated that student personality played a role, specifically in her interactions with an international student from Taiwan who she had lunch with every week the previous semester:

> My friend that I told you about earlier from Taiwan, she was the one that came up to me and she was just like "hey", you know, she started talking to me. She hangs out with a lot of domestic students but I think it definitely has to do with the fact that she is, you know, she's an extrovert so she will, she's not afraid to just talk to whoever.

In further discussion of student personality characteristics and their effects on cross-cultural communication, Rachel also indicated that in the case of the exchange students at her high school, their outgoing qualities, in addition to their high English language abilities, had contributed to the ease she had felt in interacting with them. Nora felt similarly about student personality characteristics when describing why many international students do not interact with Americans or domestic students, "it just depends on international student personality, yeah, because some really shy or they don't really like to share the experience, yeah, with Americans." This theme can also then be related to cultural differences or the English language abilities of international students. As Rachel mentioned, the English language abilities of exchange students at her high school contributed to the ease she felt interacting with them, and also likely contributed to their more outgoing nature in that these exchange students felt confident interacting with domestic students in English. Similarly, Nora related student personality characteristics to international students' desire to share their experiences with Americans.

Participants related student personality characteristics to the ease of initiating or engaging in cross-cultural communication through their perception that it was easier for students who they perceived to be more outgoing, regardless of nationality, to initiate intercultural communication.

Based on their self-assessments in interviews, both students indicated that they found themselves to be more introverted students, and thus initiating cross-cultural communication was at times difficult for them. This was one of the reasons that the students gave for often choosing not to initiate cross-cultural communication.

While this particular sub-theme came up frequently in interviews, it was difficult to discern how the effects of student personality characteristics had impacted the communicative dynamics within the classroom observations. This was due to my inability to assess introversion or extroversion by observing students in the classroom.

Additional Considerations

While the preceding research themes help to explain the ways in which students assess the ease and convenience of initiating or engaging in cross-cultural communication and ultimately answer the question of how students come to conclusions about how to interact with one another cross-culturally, it should also be noted what contributed to successful cross-cultural interactions when they did occur. According to the participants in this study, both of whom gave examples of their lived experiences with cross-cultural communication, the instances in which cross-cultural communication had been most successful or rewarding for them was when these interactions involved some type of cultural exchange. Both participants discussed that sharing their respective cultures had contributed to interesting, sustainable, and ultimately successful interactions with students from different cultures. Rachel described this sharing of culture in discussing her interactions with the international student from Taiwan who she had eaten lunch with in the dining hall each week during the fall semester:

She asked me a lot about, um, Nebraska, and just, you know, what it was like growing up

here, so, and she really enjoyed hearing about that because I've lived in Nebraska, um,

more specifically rural Nebraska, my entire life, so yeah, she really enjoyed hearing about

that. And then she talked to me about growing up in Taiwan and just kind of, like, the

sociopolitical, you know, problems and issues that they face, so that was really interesting

to hear.

Rachel further explained that, from her viewpoint, this cultural exchange was the primary benefit

of engaging with students from other cultures present on campus:

Getting to learn a different culture I think is the primary benefit. Um, when I have

interacted with international students it's been really cool to, like, hear about, home and

what home is like for them and kind of like the social issues that face them and how they,

how they're different but also similar to students here in the United States. So I think

that's really cool, like, getting to kind of almost like experience their culture through

them.

In her discussion of her English class, another rare case in which students were able to work in

groups in class, Nora also discussed how sharing culture had allowed her to initiate cross-cultural

communication with domestic students and ultimately even form some friendships in the

classroom:

In class I do not get to share my culture often except for English class. Sometimes in

English class Americans are easy to talk with, um, and they don't really familiar with

Chinese city and culture so if you introduce it they really enjoy it. Um, because I, my

English class in my essay I describe a place. So I described my hometown and so I talk

about, talk a lot about my city and the other students like it. I like to talk about cultures

and introduce more culture from China to everybody.

Therefore, while culture and the lack of cultural competence among international and domestic students about one another's culture can act as a barrier or hindrance to cross-cultural communication, the sharing of culture and cultural exchange is one way in which cross-cultural communication can be successful.

Conclusion

The four sub-themes that emerged in the analysis of the data illustrate how first-year students assess the level of ease or convenience in initiating or engaging in cross-cultural communication. This assessment and the four themes that help to describe how this assessment occurs contribute to an increased understanding of how first-year international and domestic students come to conclusions about whether or not to communicate with one another across culture and how to initiate or engage in these interactions. Further, from analyzing the lived experiences related to cross-cultural communication of the two interview participants, factors were identified that lead to successful intercultural interactions among international and domestic students. From observations in the Business 101 classroom, in addition to interviews with two first-year students attending Great Plains University, data seeking to answer the research questions has been provided. Chapter 5 connects the research presented to the literature reviewed and makes recommendations for future research and best practices based on the implications of this bounded case study on cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students at Great Plains University.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The final chapter of this study focuses on a discussion of the five themes of this research while connecting the findings to the literature presented in Chapter 2. This research was conducted using a qualitative, semi-structured interview protocol along with two classroom observations to identify the cross-cultural dynamics among first-year international and domestic students at a large, four-year, research-intensive university located in the Midwest. This research also assisted in identifying the ways in which first-year international and domestic students make decisions regarding whether and how to interact with one another across culture.

As international students continue to enroll in universities across the United States and at Great Plains University specifically, research in this area and on first-year students in particular is necessary in order to foster relationships early among international and domestic students. As discussed in Chapter 2, international students face a host of adjustment issues when sojourning to the United States for their higher studies (Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2009; Lin & Betz, 2009; Wright & Schartner, 2013). Andrade (2006) further noted that these adjustment issues can in some cases be alleviated by the formation of relationships between international and domestic students. Research also indicated that it is not only international students that benefit from cross-cultural interactions or friendships but domestic students as well (Barron, 2006; Campbell, 2011; Geelhoed et al., 2003; Leask, 2009). Therefore, forming these relationships early and encouraging cross-cultural communication has the potential to increase international and domestic students' likelihood of continually forming relationships across culture throughout their time in college and therefore also has the potential to lead to increased benefits for both groups of students over time (Summers & Volet, 2008). Thus, this research seeks to provide answers regarding how first-year international and domestic students make decisions about how to

interact with one another across culture, and also seeks to unveil the factors within the classroom as well as within other spaces on campus that advance or hinder the likelihood of cross-cultural communication occurring.

Summary of Findings

The guiding research questions developed for this study intended to explore the ways in which first-year international and domestic students at Great Plains University make decisions about how to interact with one another across culture. The research questions created for this study were:

1. How do international and domestic students make decisions about whether and how to engage in cross-cultural communication in the classroom?

2. How and when do international and domestic students communicate with one another in the classroom? How do those communication interactions fit within the larger communicative dynamics in the classroom?

3. What factors within the classroom environment influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students?

4. How do personal factors, specifically past cross-cultural experiences, influence communication decisions and behaviors of international and domestic students in the classroom?

At the start of the research, my primary focus was on cross-cultural communication within the classroom, and how first-year international and domestic students came to their conclusions about how to interact with one another in the classroom specifically. However, the semi-structured qualitative interviews with the two participants – one international student and one domestic student – also went in-depth regarding other factors that played a role in the student's

decisions about how to interact across culture.   The findings of the case study presented in Chapter 4 were organized into one overarching theme and five sub-themes that help to describe how students came to conclusions about cross-cultural communication and how they made meaning of their lived experiences with cross-cultural communication. Under each sub-theme, sub-factors were discussed that highlight various elements influencing cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students.

In this concluding chapter, the five primary themes of this research will be summarized and links to previous research on cross-cultural communication will be discussed. Subsequently, I will provide implications from the study for future practice at Great Plains University and potentially at other higher education institutions looking to analyze, increase, and enhance cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students on their campuses. Finally, I will discuss overarching implications of the study and offer recommendations for future research.

Summary of Themes and Links to Literature

Four themes, all linked to one overarching theme of this study, emerged from the research that help to describe the ways in which first-year international and domestic students at Great Plains University make meaning around cross-cultural communication. The overarching theme of this study, the assessed level of ease or convenience in initiating cross-cultural communication, represents the primary way in which students come to conclusions about how to interact across culture. In order to complete this assessment, students took into account four different factors which make up the sub-themes of this research. The first factor was the presence of nationally-shared characteristics, specifically language and culture. Second was the University-sanctioned gateways and barriers present at Great Plains University, specifically

housing and programming. Third was the challenges presented in the classroom, specifically class size and lecture-driven classrooms, and fourth was student's assessment of their own and other student's personality characteristics such as introversion or extroversion. Using the factors that make-up the four sub-themes and using the sub-factors within these sub-themes, students were able to assess whether they believed that initiating intercultural communication was easy or convenient. If students determined that it was easy or convenient based on these factors, they were more likely to initiate and engage cross-culturally than if they determined that the level of ease or convenience was low. The following major summary points were identified from the findings:

- The presence of nationally-shared characteristics such as shared language and culture among students often led to a feeling of co-national comfort among students, making it easier and more comfortable for them to communicate with co-nationals than to communicate across culture with students who they perceived to be different from them.

- Universities and their personnel play a critical role in creating environments that can help to foster cross-cultural communication among students.

- Cross-cultural communication among students in the classroom setting specifically is less likely to occur than in other spaces on the college campus.

- Student's encounters with cross-cultural communication proved to be most successful when these encounters involved cultural exchange.

Assessed level of ease/convenience in initiating cross-cultural communication. The overarching theme present from the findings in this study indicates that the primary way in which students make decisions regarding how to interact across culture involves the student assessing the level of ease or convenience present when deciding whether or not to initiate or

engage in cross-cultural communication. This finding is corroborated and enhanced by Dunne's (2009) study, where he explained the process whereby domestic students assess the perceived utility or usefulness for them in engaging with students across culture. Similar to assessing the benefits provided as a result of engaging with students dissimilar to themselves, students in this study, through analyzing the level of convenience or ease, analyzed the level of effort necessary to engage cross culture. While Dunne's (2009) study focused on primarily on domestic students, and the assessments they made when deciding whether or not to engage across culture, this study also demonstrates that international students, as Nora explained, engage in similar assessments regarding ease, convenience, and by extension the perceived utility for them in communicating with domestic students.

Nationally-shared characteristics. One way in which both international and domestic students assessed the level of ease or convenience present when deciding to initiate interactions across culture was the presence or lack of nationally-shared characteristics among themselves and the student with whom they considered initiating conversation. The main nationally-shared characteristics the students in this study mentioned were language and culture, both factors which are also present throughout the literature on cross-cultural communication. Within the literature, cultural competence, or the lack of cultural competence shared by both international and domestic students about the other group's culture, is highlighted as one factor hindering cross-cultural communication (Andrade, 2006; Li et al., 2009). This was evidenced by both interview participants in this study who explained that it was easier for international students to communicate and interact with international students and for domestic students to do so with domestic students because the ease and convenience of doing so was less than was present when communicating with a student who did not share the same cultural context. Similarly, within this

study students indicated that it was also easier to communicate with those who spoke the same language as them. This finding was corroborated within the literature by both Andrade (2006) and Lin and Betz (2009) who discussed international students' preference for communicating in their home language. Further, Dunne (2009) discussed the level of effort domestic students felt they exerted when communicating with students who did not share their language.

Both language and culture and the preference of students to engage with those who share their same language and culture was evidenced throughout this study and within the literature on homphily, or the idea that similar people are more likely to communicate with one another than dissimilar people (Dunne, 2009; McPherson et al., 2001). Within this study this term came to be defined as co-national comfort, or the tendency of international students, as described by both Nora and Rachel, to "stick together." This tendency was fueled by the fact that international students, such as Nora, felt more comfortable interacting with those who shared their same culture and language while in the United States.

University-sanctioned gateways and barriers. Students felt the university also played a role in their determination of whether or not it was easy or convenient to engage with students across culture based on the university's practices around housing and programming. Within other studies students shared similar sentiments regarding the grouping of similar students in housing accommodations or providing programming that seemed to serve only a specific, similar population (Wright & Schartner, 2013). While students in this study shared similar opinions regarding Great Plains tendency to house all of the international students within two residence halls, Nora described that she felt the programming available at Great Plains currently served as a gateway for cross-cultural communication, specifically in her discussion of the Culture Club, an organization aimed at fostering cross-cultural communication among international and

domestic students. Also, the claim made by Nora that further programming at Great Plains University could contribute to more cross-cultural communication was evidenced through literature on international and domestic student peer-pairing programs such as Geelhoed et al.'s (2003) study as well as Campbell's (2011) study which explained the benefits of peer-pairing programs for both groups of students.

Challenges in communicating cross-culturally in the classroom. Students in this study indicated that they often, when assessing the level of ease or convenience present in choosing to initiate cross-cultural communication, determined that it was not easy or convenient to initiate intercultural communication within the classroom. This was due to challenges specific to the classroom space, most notably large class sizes and lecture-style classrooms where instructors did not often implement group work. Within the literature, Leask (2009) took the challenge lecture-style classes present a step further, and argued instructors should take an active role in encouraging cross-cultural communication in their classrooms and guiding students in their cross-cultural interactions. Dunne (2009) and Summers and Volet (2008) also indicated within their respective studies that large classrooms served as a hindrance to cross-cultural communication. Summers and Volet (2008) further argued that irrespective of the class size, instructors should be implementing group work with teams of both international and domestic students. While students in this study did not specifically state this as a way to foster cross-cultural communication, they did mention several times the absence of group work within their classes and noted the difficulties in making friends in class without being able to engage in group work.

Student personality characteristics. Students in this study indicated that another way in which they assessed the level of ease or convenience in initiating cross-cultural

communication dealt with their assessment of their own personality characteristics as well as

their perceptions regarding the personality characteristics of other students with whom they

might choose to communicate. Specifically students assessed whether or not they or the other

student was introverted or shy, or extroverted or outgoing. If students were shy, or if the person

with who they planned to communicate seemed shy or unapproachable they often determined it

would not be easy to initiate conversation with them. In contrast, if students were extroverted or

perceived the other student to be an extroverted or outgoing person, they felt it was easier to

initiate conversation with them. Andrade (2006) and Wright and Schartner (2013) discussed a

similar concept, though these authors related the responsibility of initiating conversation to

nationality. In these particular studies, domestic students often felt that it was international

students' responsibility to initiate conversation with domestic students while international

students felt it was domestic students' responsibility (Andrade, 2006; Wright and Schartner,

2013). For this case study, students determined that the responsibility was not tied to nationality,

but rather to students who were more extroverted or outgoing.

   Cultural exchange. Another theme and consideration of this research emerged as a way

to describe what made cross-cultural communication successful when it was initiated. Through

listening to the participants in this study describe their lived experiences engaging in cross-

cultural communication, it was discovered that the times in which students felt they had been

most successful in their intercultural interaction was when these interactions involved some type

of cultural exchange. This often represented an exchange of cultural or country-specific

knowledge, or the exchange of stories about each student's upbringing and background. Within

the literature, these types of exchanges were encouraged as ways to facilitate and enhance cross-

cultural communication among international and domestic college students (Campbell, 2011;

Geelhoed et al., 2003; Pritchard & Skinner, 2002; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994). Specifically, Pritchard and Skinner (2002) highlighted international and domestic student partnerships or peer mentor programs that involve students engaging in activities together such as cooking a meal or watching television, both of which can be related to culture, either the culture of the host country or the home country of the international student. Similarly, the stories of the participants in this study about their successful cross-cultural communication often involved eating a meal together, such as Rachel's lunches with the international student from Taiwan, or watching television together as Nora described when she talked about watching the television show *Friends* with other American students on her floor. Ultimately, these instances of cultural exchange can lead to international students feeling as though their campus is utilizing them as a resource in sharing their culture (Urban & Palmer, 2013), which is similar to what Nora described when she discussed how her most successful interactions with American students often involved her sharing her culture.

The five themes identified from the research have been connected to the research questions as well as the relevant literature presented in Chapter 2. In the succeeding sections, implications of this research for future practice at Great Plains University will be described as well as recommendations for future research in the fields of higher education student affairs as well as international education.

Implications of the Current Study for Practice

Implications of this case study for increasing cross-cultural communication among first-year international and domestic students at Great Plains University through understanding the ways in which students come to conclusions about how to interact across culture include the following:

1. Great Plains University was seen to have played a significant role in determining whether or not students found it easy or convenient to initiate cross-cultural communication. One of the main areas in which Great Plains University played an important role regarding cross-cultural communication was housing. In determining housing arrangements, Great Plains University and student affairs practitioners working in housing should consider avoiding placing all international students within the same two residence halls. As students in this study expressed, the residence halls and other on-campus housing was the environment in which they felt it was easiest to make friends and initiate conversation with other students. In fact, the times in which the students in this study were most likely to interact across culture occurred in the residence halls.

2. Another way in which Great Plains University was determined to play a role in student's perceptions of the ease or convenience of engaging in cross-cultural communication was through programming. According to Nora, the student in this study, Great Plains University was succeeding by providing organizations such as the Culture Club. In the future, Great Plains University and student affairs practitioners working in programming or student activities might consider implementing more organizations with goals similar to those of the Culture Club, or as Nora mentioned implementing trips or excursions that international and domestic students could participate in together. These organizations and the implementation of these trips could ultimately facilitate in providing students a place to participate in cultural exchange, thus increasing the likelihood that students will engage in successful cross-cultural interactions.

3. As students in this study stated, and as was observed in the Business 101 classroom, unique challenges present in the classroom often work towards hindering cross-cultural

communication in classes. The main challenges expressed by students were class size and lecture-style teaching. In order to enhance cross-cultural communication in the classroom, Great Plains University may consider decreasing class sizes if possible. However, regardless of class size Great Plains University and instructors at GPU may instead find it more feasible to implement more group work in the classroom and to sort groups themselves, with the intention of ensuring that international students and domestic students are working in groups together, avoiding co-national groups wherever possible. This could ultimately contribute to students perceptions that interacting across culture is more convenient in that group work would require it.

4. Given that the findings that emerged from this case study, which was initially focused on the academic environment of the classroom, seemed to also point to ways in which sectors of student affairs can facilitate cross-cultural communication, universities may continually consider ways in which to bridge the gap between academic and student affairs. Academic and student affairs partnerships, particularly with regard to international students and their integration into U.S. higher education, may help to facilitate cross-cultural communication and relationships among international and domestic students in environments such as the residence hall. Additionally, though, these partnerships could also encourage these relationships to flourish outside of more closely-knit environments such as the residence halls, specifically academic environments such as the classroom.

Recommendations for Future Research

Research exploring cross-cultural communication in higher education among international and domestic students at all years of study, but particularly in students early years

of study should continue to be conducted. As this case study has demonstrated, there are various factors that play a role in determining how students come to conclusions about interacting with one another across culture. Each of these factors could be explored more in-depth, particularly those that are controlled by the university or specific university-affiliated individuals such as instructors rather than by students themselves. The exploration of these factors may lead universities to discover best practices for designing their environments in a way that increases and enhances cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students.

It may also be interesting to conduct longitudinal studies on students beginning in their early years of college and continuing on through graduation to determine if the ways in which they make assumptions change or if their tendency to engage in cross-cultural interactions increases or changes in any way. This may help researchers to understand how the developmental level of the student plays a role in determining their likelihood of engaging cross-culturally.

Lastly, given that a main finding of this research determined that students primarily make decisions about how to interact across culture based on whether it is easy or convenient to initiate that interaction, further research might explore ways in which educators and other individuals within higher education can work towards communicating the benefits of cross-cultural communication to students, even if reaping those benefits means engaging in or initiating interactions that may not on their surface seem easy or convenient. In addition, these studies may help to further explore and add to the research regarding what the benefits of cross-cultural communication are.

Conclusion

This study sought to determine how first-year international and domestic students at a large, public, four-year, research-intensive university in the Midwest came to conclusions and formed assumptions about how to interact with one another across culture. Under each of the five themes identified, sub-factors were discussed to explain the various ways in which students determined whether or not and how to interact across culture in the college classroom and in various other spaces on the college campus. The hope is that this research will help universities and colleges and the individuals working within them to understand and further explore the ways in which cross-cultural communication can be fostered among international and domestic students, and thus the ways in which higher education can work to truly internationalize the college experiences of both of these groups of students.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear [name],

I hope your semester is going well! As you might remember, I came into your ▮▮▮▮▮▮ course on [dates] to observe your class session for my research. I am writing to ask for additional help from students who might have an interest in participating further in my research project, exploring cross-cultural communication among first-year students at ▮▮▮ It is my hope that this project will eventually help me and others in the field of international education identify the best ways to facilitate cross-cultural communication among students from various cultures at college campuses in the U.S.

If you are willing, I would love to schedule one hour-long focus group to talk with you about your experiences in your college classes so far, your interactions with students from cultures other than your own, and how you make assumptions about how to interact with other students. I plan to conduct one focus group with domestic (U.S.) students and one with international students, and I of course would be willing to schedule these at whatever time was most convenient for you. In addition, as an incentive for participating my research, I will provide free pizza at the focus group session.

Whatever we discuss in the focus group would of course remain confidential. With your permission, I would audio record each interview and have it transcribed. All files would be labeled with a pseudonym, and I would also use that pseudonym in any presentation or paper that came from this project.

If you would be willing to talk with me about your experiences, please e-mail me back and let me know. We can then schedule a time via email communication for the focus group session that works with the schedules of all participants involved.

Thank you so much for considering helping with this project. I definitely understand how busy you are, so I appreciate you even taking the time to read this e-mail! I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Haley

Haley French-Sloan
Principal Investigator

Elizabeth Niehaus
Secondary Investigator

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Observations

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title: Examining Cross-Cultural Communication Among First-Year Domestic and International Students at a Large, Public, Four-Year Research University

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to learn more about how first-year students at a large, public, four-year research university communicate across culture. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a first-year student at a large, public, four-year research university and are enrolled in ██████████████████████, the course on which the primary investigator is conducting her study.

Procedures:

Your permission will be requested for the principal investigator to complete two observation sessions in your course. During these observations, the principal investigator will be recording notes about the activities conducted in the classroom and the communication behaviors among the students in the classroom who have provided consent to be observed. Following these observation sessions, you will have the option of participating in a one-hour long focus group where you will be asked to discuss a variety of topics, including your communication habits with students of other cultures and experiences communicating with students in your classes. The focus group session will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant other than the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and to make potential connections as a result of focus group sessions. This study will be beneficial to you indirectly because it will help us come to a better understanding of how students communicate across culture.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and will only be seen by

the primary investigator during the study and for one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study will be presented as part of a master's level thesis requirement but the data will be reported without identifying information. Although information that could identify you will be removed, quotations from interview transcripts may be published.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the e-mail provided below. Please contact the ███████████████████ Institutional Review Board at █████████ to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University ████████████, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation or withdrawal from this study will in no way affect your grade in your ████ course. You may also choose at any time to request your portions of your participation not be recorded and/or analyzed for the research.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Research Participant   Date

Name and contact information of investigators:

Haley French-Sloan, M.A. Student, Principal Investigator

Cell: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Elizabeth Niehuas, Ph.D. Secondary Investigator

Office: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Appendix C

Informed Consent for Focus Groups/Interviews

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title: Examining Cross-Cultural Communication Among First-Year Domestic and International Students at a Large, Public, Four-Year Research University

Purpose:

The purpose of this research is to learn more about how first-year students at a large, public, four-year research university communicate across culture. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a first-year student at a large, public, four-year research university and are enrolled in ███████████████████████, the course on which the primary investigator is conducting her study.

Procedures:

Your permission will be requested to participate in a one-hour long focus group where you will be asked to discuss a variety of topics, including your communication habits with students of other cultures and experiences communicating with students in your classes. Your permission to be audio recorded will also be requested as the focus group session will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Following the focus group session, you will be assigned a pseudonym which will be used in the writing of this research. No identifying information will be shared and any records linking your pseudonym to your identifying information will be seen only by the primary investigator, kept solely on the primary investigator's password-protected laptop computer, and will be destroyed following transcription of the focus group sessions.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant other than the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and to make potential connections as a result of focus group sessions. This study will be beneficial to you indirectly because it will help us come to a better understanding of how students communicate across culture.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks associated with this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and will only be seen by the primary investigator during the study and for one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study will be presented as part of a master's level thesis requirement but the data will be reported without identifying information. Although information that could identify you will be removed, quotations from interview transcripts may be published.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the e-mail provided below. Please contact the ███████████████████████ Institutional Review Board at ██████████ to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University ██████████████, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your participation or withdrawal from this study will in no way affect your grade in your BUS ███ course. You may also choose at any time to request your portions of your participation not be recorded and/or analyzed for the research.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐ I understand that audio recordings will be taken during the focus group session. I consent to be audio recorded, and understand that audio recordings will be transcribed, and that no identifying information will be included in the transcript.

☐ I agree to maintain the confidentiality of the information discussed by all participants and researchers during the focus group session.

Signature of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Research Participant   Date

Name and contact information of investigators:

Haley French-Sloan, M.A. Student, Principal Investigator

Cell: ████████████

Email: ████████████████

Elizabeth Niehaus, Ph.D. Secondary Investigator

Office: ████████████

Email: ████████████

Appendix D

Verbal Announcement Prior to Observations

Verbal Script

Announcement made in ▮▮ ▮ course prior to observations

Hello, everyone! Thank you for having me today. My name is Haley French-Sloan and I am a master's student here at ▮ earning my degree in Educational Administration. I am here today for the purposes of collecting data for my master's level thesis. I am interested in studying cross-cultural communication habits among first-year students here at ▮

I would like to request your participation in my research through observations and possibly through follow-up focus groups. If you consent to be observed in class today and on [date], I will hand out a consent form you to sign where I will highlight the procedures associated with this study and highlight any potential risks. During the observations, I will not use an audio recorder or record any identifying information in any way. I will be taking notes on what I observe in your course related to cross-cultural communication habits. Following these two observation sessions today and on [date], I will ask for participants who are interested to complete a one-hour long focus group session with me where you will discuss your cross-cultural communication habits in your classes, activities in your courses, and your experiences in communicating with other students in college thus far. I would like to complete one focus group with domestic U.S. students and one with international students. If you are interested in participating in a one-hour long focus group in the next month I will also be providing pizza as a thanks for your time. Please indicate your interest via email.

I will now hand out the consent forms for my observations. If you do not wish to provide consent, I will not record any notes about you in class today. If you do wish to provide consent, I will read over the consent form with you, have you sign a copy to return to me, and also give you a copy to keep for your records. To ensure I am aware of who has provided consent and who has not throughout your class session, I will hand out stickers for all of you to wear based on your provision, or not, of consent. For those providing consent, I ask that you affix a red colored sticker to your clothing while those not providing consent affix a blue sticker to your clothing.

Does anyone have any questions regarding this research?

[answer questions]

[Hand out consent forms, determine who has provided consent and who has not, distribute colored stickers]

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Note: each focus group will be semi-structured, meaning that it will be based on the questions below, but follow-up questions will also be asked for clarification or if more information is needed in a particular area.

Interview

Introduction: Thank you all so much for taking the time to talk to me about your interactions in the classroom and your cross-cultural communication habits. As I mentioned in my e-mail, I am interested in learning more about how students studying at a U.S. campus make assumptions about how to interact across culture in the classroom. That is how domestic students from the United States make assumptions about how to interact with international students and vice versa. I became interested in this topic due to my interest in working in International Education one day. I noticed that International Education has the goal of promoting cross-cultural communication among international and domestic students but that cross-cultural communication, as I perceived from my own observations here at ▮▮▮▮, is not necessarily happening. I hope through this project that I can get a better sense of how students view and engage in cross-cultural communication, with the goal of how individuals working on U.S. campuses can better facilitate cross-cultural communication in order to better meet the goals of international education.

In this focus group session I am going to focus mostly on your thoughts regarding cross-cultural communication and your experiences interacting with both domestic and international students in the classroom. I will have a series of questions, but I also want this to be more of a conversation about these issues.

Any questions before we get started? [answer any questions]

Great, so let's get started.

First, I was hoping you could each tell me a little bit about your academic major, where you're from, and what types of classes you're currently taking.

How have your college classes been so far?

What friends have you made in your classes?

How often do you work with other students in your classes?

What interactions have you had with international students (for international students I will ask them what interactions they have had with domestic students)

How often do you interact with students from other cultures?

What do you think about interacting with students from other cultures?

Does the instructor in your courses put you in groups where you have to interact with students from other cultures? How do you feel when this happens?

What benefits do you perceive as a result of interacting with students from other cultures?

What obstacles do you perceive as a result of interacting with students from other cultures?

Do you perceive possible language barriers as an obstacle when interacting with students from other cultures? If so, how does the language barrier affect your interactions with students from other cultures?

Describe how you feel when you interact with students from other cultures.

When you came to college, did you expect that you would be interacting with students from other cultures?

I have asked you a lot of questions over the past hour, but I just have one more big-picture question before we wrap up.

First, I have been talking this whole time about communicating across culture, but I am curious, when I bring up the idea of cross-cultural communication, what do you think of? What are your first impressions of this topic and these issues?