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Sponsored International Students

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Sponsored International Students at University of San Diego

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Abstract

The purpose of my study was to explore and understand the spaces sponsored international students experience at the University of San Diego. Given that we live in a diverse society, it is important for me to explore and understand the experiences of students who have traveled thousands of miles away from their home country to seek education in the United States. It is important for one to take the time to connect with students from other cultures in order to gain insight on how to better serve diverse student populations. As we come from different backgrounds our stories can be shared with the community and by sharing our personal experiences we are able to have open conversations and connect with others on a more supportive and inclusive level.

My study connected students to each other who were all affiliated with the International Center at the University of San Diego and their particular sponsorship/scholarship program that has funded their education at the university. The purpose of my research was to allow voices of sponsored international students be heard and honored. I hope to share students' stories with the community about their experiences acclimating to the U.S. education system. The stories compiled allowed me to create a space during my research to offer students to connect with one another in order to provide support and resources.

Introduction

As an immigrant growing up in two distinctively different cultures (Cambodia and the United States), I noticed my curiosity gravitated toward those who identified as an international student, or first-generation student in higher education because it was very similar to mine. Through my personal experience of immigrating to the United States at a young age and having to acclimate to a culture far different from my native country, I always felt I held both the Cambodian and American identity interchangeably. Along with the culture shock and language barriers growing up, I noticed the difficulties for immigrant families and first generations' adjustment to the U.S. education system. Being part of that struggle I felt behind compared to my peers whose English was their first language. Although my adjustments as a first-generation immigrant may be relatively different from other individuals, I noticed there were some common trends among students' assimilation to the U.S. educational system.

With a personal interest in studying the international student population, I wanted to explore the sponsorship of international students and provide support and voice to this cohort that may be dismissed. From what I have perceived about international students, it is assumed that the majority of the population come from a higher socioeconomic class that are more able to provide educational accessibility for themselves. But through conversations with a close friend who is sponsored through an organization to assist her with her master's degree in the U.S., I noticed many difficulties for her and her cohort struggling to acclimate academically, financially, and emotionally. This led me to further explore the complex international population that is dependent on a funded program either by an outside private or public agency such as: corporations, educational institutions, or government agencies to fund their education.

The educational system, cultural differences, and language barriers are a few of the common difficult adjustments seen in the international students' adaptive experience in the United States. I am curious to explore the sponsored international students' experience in which other complexities may arise given the specific sponsorship they are on. Furthermore, some of these students may come from low income backgrounds from developing countries that lack the educational understanding and support to prepare them for U.S. education standards. Without the knowledge and support from their home country, they may enter into the educational system fully unaware of what they have committed themselves to. As a result, some may struggle with the acclimation of the educational system, culture shock, and financial burden.

Given the limitations I have seen about this fascinating cohort, I wanted to understand the process of sponsored international students' experience at University of San Diego through their personal journey to the university. The information I received from an action research methodical approach allowed me the opportunity to dig deeper into understanding this population and find effective solutions in supporting a diverse population.

Background

International Education

The foundation of international education was developed under the Institute of International Education, founded on February 1, 1919 to strengthen the relationship of foreign students' pursuit of a U.S. education. Due to lack of funding, the director of the institute appealed to fellow university presidents to offer scholarships for students. In order to compensate, many colleges would need to budget fees in order to balance the cost for international students, effectively its first wave brought nearly 2,500 foreign students to U.S education. Other scholarship such as the Rhodes Scholar Fund, the Rockefeller Foundation, the

Commonwealth Fund have also paved the way for educational prospects in a range of subjects (Duggan, 1944). These scholarships were the foundation in permitting meritorious students without financial resources the opportunities to pursue the exchange program.

Furthermore, the aftermath of the WWI and U.S involvement was the turning point that shifted the world's interest in the American civilization and culture.   Not until the 1930s did the government cooperate with the institute. With Hitler's totalitarian rule throughout Europe, the U.S was determined to take any measures to repel any attack under the German Fuhrer. The alliances with the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Library Association, the American Council on Education, and the Institute of International Education helped build alley relationships with Latin America in defense to strengthen relations before Germany would further seize any more countries (Duggan, 1944).

With high demands in higher education, the mobility for international students began to tighten.   The policies that regulate institutions of higher education create a direct effect on international students in the education market. In the book, "Higher Education and International Student Mobility in the Global Knowledge," the author stresses the fact that higher education is "structured principally by government regulation into a semi-public sector responsive to demand and competition, and the process is continuing" (Guruz, 2011, p. 41). With pressure from the government to re-enforce stricter policies in doing more with less, it has become clear that "no country could afford to provide higher education of the most expensive kind free of charge to whoever demands it, and that those who personally benefited from that service, including students and employers, had to contribute to its costs" (Guruz, 2011, p. 41).

Two developments had a profound impact on higher education policy formulation throughout the world: The first is a report issued by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and

Principals, known as the Jarrat Report, after its chairman, Sir Alex Jarrat, made the following recommendations:

1. Universities must be responsive to the market

2. The university head should assume the role of the chief executive

3. Managerial techniques must be introduced in university administration

4. Unite costs and efficiency of resource utilization should be among the key concerns

5. Evaluation of university performance must be based on qualitative and quantitative performance indicators (Guruz, 2011, p. 42).

The second development was the aftermath of WWII and the U.S involvement as the turning point that shifted the world's interest in the American civilization, culture, and education. Not until the 1930s did the government cooperate with the institute. With Hitler's totalitarian rule throughout Europe, the U.S was determined to take any measures to repel any attack under the German Fuhrer. The alliances with the American Council on Education, and the Institute of International Education built alley relationships with Latin America in defense to strengthen relations before Germany would further seize any more countries (Duggan, 1944). Given the years since the IIE was founded, the growing interests of U.S. education and its reputation to the international world has increased the influx of international students' entry to the country. Through implementation of regulations created to keep order for nonimmigrant visa students, some of these changes could limit and/or alter their experiences in the U.S.

The recent Muslim ban on various countries has restricted international students from entering the United States (Newsweek, 2017, para 2). Tension throughout the international student population has been uneasy because the law can shift a student's entry into the country at any given time. As much as the current president and his administration believe this ban would

protect the country, many disagree and I feel it discriminates against people solely based on the religion they practice. This action can also be perceived as close minded by the international world, and in effect would only harm our interaction and relationship with neighboring countries and allies. Furthermore, other restrictions from the government have caused additional limitations for the international population to pursue education in the United States (Newsweek, 2017, para 4). Limitations from work visas constraint, to inaccessibility to scholarships, and barriers to the education system are factors that are challenging for students to achieve accessibility to higher education if they do not have the means to do so.

With recent political upheaval, my understanding of this topic is that it has been a heated political debate. I agree that there need to be certain regulations in order to keep note of international students, but there are some restrictions that I feel should be less restrictive. For example, those on a student visa are only permitted to work for 20 hours a week on school campus. This assumes that the majority of international students are financially able to cover their tuition and cost of living in the U.S. But, those who are not as financially privileged (for instance those who are sponsored by an NGO or foundation) may struggle with the restricted hours of work.   I understand that the main purpose for students who are entering the States is in pursuit of education and it should be a priority but there are other factors people should consider when international students are seeking higher education.

International students must meet U.S. Institutional admission requirements, and federal immigration requirements before arriving in the U.S. Before international students may be issued an 1-20 immigration document necessary for securing a visa, they must be accepted into a U.S. program of study. Students must submit the following information in order to be considered for admission into an academic program at most universities:

"a signed application for admission; an admission application fee; TOEFL (Test of

English as a Foreign Language) scores; and a credential evaluation report translated in

the English Language. In addition to submitting the application, application fee, TOEFL

scores, and credential evaluation report, students applying for most graduate programs

must also provide GRE (Graduate Record Examination) scores, letters of

recommendation, and a letter of application" (Hofer, 2009, p.37).

With all the requirements international students have to abide to, it is important to be mindful for

their transition to the United States while having to acclimate to the education system, cultural

differences, and unsaid expectations that may have been pressured on to them.

U.S. Immigration Requirements

Once the student has applied and is accepted into an academic program, they must prove

that they meet immigration requirements so that an 1-20 document may be processed by the

hosting institution/university. The student will then need to provide a letter of financial support

which is typically is

" ... a bank letter verifying that they have the funds available to support themselves for

their first year of study in the United States, or a signed letter of financial support from

their scholarship sponsor. Students must then present the 1-20 document, their acceptance

letter, and document of financial support during their visa interview as verification that

they have been accepted into an institution and have met all necessary immigration

requirements. International students desiring to study in the United States must apply for

and secure a visa, which allows them to travel to the receiving port of entry in the United

States" (Department of State, 2018, para 1-3).

Forms of financial support can be perceived that all international students entering the United States are financially independent from any grants, and loans. This perceived idea can be misleading and stereotype an overall population that people could potentially assume are all financially stable. Therefore, instead of compartmentalizing all international students in one space, it is important to acknowledge that many come with financial dependency from their government in order to obtain a degree in the U.S.

What is SEVIS?

Furthermore, in order to understand the lived experience of international students, I believe it is important for one to understand the background transaction students must undertake in order to be accepted into U.S. universities. For instance, the implementation of SEVIS and its immigration form is heavily regulated for all incoming international students. SEVIS is

> a web-based system for maintaining information on international nonimmigrant students and exchange visitors in the United States. It is the core technology for the DHS in this critical mission. SEVIS implements Section 641 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which requires DHS to collect current information from nonimmigrant students and exchange visitors continually during their course of stay in the United States. In addition, the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT Act; Public Law 107-56, amended Section 641) mandated implantation of SEVIS prior to Jan 1, 2003 (Department of State, 2018, para 4).

Under the U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Student and Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) is a "part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a

bridge for government organizations that have an interest in information on non-immigrants whose primary reason for coming to the United States is to be students." (Department of State, 2018, para 5). SEVP manages schools,

> nonimmigrant students in the F and M visa classifications and their dependents. The
> Department of State (DoS) manages Exchanges Visitor Programs, nonimmigrant
> exchange visitors in the J visa classification and their dependents. Both SEVP and DoS
> use the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to track and monitor
> schools; exchange visitor programs; and F, M, and J nonimmigrants while they visit the
> United States and participate in the U.S education system (Department of State, 2018,
> para 5).

These various circumstances and regulations are important factors international students need to abide to in order to continue their study in the United States. From the literature, there has been a common understanding that the systems for international students need adjustments given the large influx of students and the changing society. With an introduction of how SEVIS works with documentation for nonimmigrant students, Wennerstrom (2008) voiced her concerns about the SEVIS program and how much it is no longer serving these students. Wennerstrom argues that although history has been lenient on issuing student visas, recent years have detracted SEVIS progress with international students' engagement. In recent years, due to governmental policy changes, SEVIS has little flexibility to accommodate alternative learning experiences. As a result of stricter policies laid out by the U.S. government officials, SEVIS personnel struggle with the immigration process from the large influx of students (Wennerstrom 2008).

The financial aspects that leverage many international students are influenced by the institutions in the U.S through various recruitment characteristics. From the Open Doors 2010

report, "a record number of 690,923 international students studied in the U.S in 2009-2010. The University of Southern California is the top United States institution for receiving international students (7,987) followed by the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana (7,287), New York University (7,276), Purdue University (6,903), and Columbia University (6,833)" (McFadden, Maah-Fladung, & Mallett, 2012, p.160). The primary groups of international students are from origins of China, India, South Korea, and Canada (McFadden, Maah-Fladung, & Mallett, 2012). Why are U.S campuses recruiting students from abroad? What is the process? The benefits to recruiting international students are: cultural and economic. With today's society reflective of diversity, culturally rich universities strive to enhance the appearance through recruiting those from all over the world (McFadden, Maah-Fladung, & Mallett, 2012).

Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM)

When former President George Bush and Crown Prince Abdullah met in April 2005 to discuss ways for the two countries to develop a relationship, they agreed that "person-to-person contact was a viable approach to dispelling apprehension for the Saudis and the Americans" (Bollag, 2006, p. 2). In correspondence of this agreement, the commitment to fully fund incoming Saudi students to study in the U.S., the King pledged to "increase the number of young Saudi students to travel and study in the United States" (Bollag, 2006, p.2).

Since the agreement became effective, the U.S has been the recipient of Saudi's brightest students, "as evidenced by the fact that more than three-quarters of the Saudi Cabinet ministers studied in the United States" (Bollag, 2006, p.2). "The April 2005 meeting laid the groundwork for the massive scholarship program, which allocated funding for a five-year period of study. Students were provided full financial support for one year of intensive English followed by an approved program of study at the undergraduate level. Scholarship recipients were also

appropriated a $1,700 monthly stipend for living expenses. A large number of Saudi students began arriving in the U.S. in August 2005" (Alsabatin, 2002, p.18). The program implements Saudi national educational and training policies to provide qualified individuals the opportunity to achieve the 'country's goals of progress and development' (Alsabatin, 2002, p.18).

By supporting the students academically and financially, students are then able to concentrate on achieving their academic goals. Furthermore, the organizations stressed the importance of collecting and disseminating information that "reflects Saudi culture, tradition and heritage through [their] active participation in academic, cultural, and social activities" (SACM, 2018, para 1).

USD International Center

At the University of San Diego, all international students have some relationship with the International Center in order to process their visa documentation and stay connected with immigration paperwork in order to legally attend the university. Housed under the International Center is the Office of International Students and Scholars where USD has hosted over 70 countries around the world. Multiple resources are provided for international students, such as: information on F-1 students, exchange programs, J-1 visa application, and newly admitted students. Within the Resource tab of the website, there are links to the language department and English Language Academy that is provided for those who may find these resources useful. Furthermore, there are links to campus partners and programs that are internationally engaged and connected with USD student (USD International Center, 2018, para 3).

Research Question

Given the challenges outlined thus far, the research questions for this study are: In what ways can I better understand the sponsored students' experience at USD, and what are the limitations

for sponsored international students at USD? A sub-question to the study is, how can I work around these limitations, and create a space in order to support to the students' needs?

Through my interviews with various sponsored international students, I had the opportunity to connect and gain valuable insights on the lived experiences of these students in order to help me find effective solutions to supporting them during their time at USD.

Positionality

Given that I have never worked at the International Office at USD I understand that this is my personal limitation to connecting with the students and I am aware of the impact this had on my action research. Additionally, the people I interviewed were limited, coming from various departments of graduate and undergraduate programs that I was more familiar with. Even though this could be a hindering factor, I wanted the voices of the students I interviewed to be shared with the community in order for others to seek greater empathy for the international student population.

Literature Review

International Scholarship

International scholarship programs in higher education have existed for many years. "In the early 20th century, some nations established overseas study abroad programs to train the administrative elite of their colonies" (Travers, 2012, p. 1). More recently, some countries in the Middle East and South America have launched international scholarship programs to educate undergraduate and graduate students broad. Suggesting the magnitude of some governmental commitments, in 2011 the Brazilian government funded 100,000 undergraduate and graduate students to study abroad for one year through the Scientific Mobility Program" (Travers, 2012, p.1). The introduction to international scholarships spearheaded the movement to encourage international students to pursue higher education in the United States.

Human Capital

The Human Capital theory assumes that "an individual decides to enroll in higher education in general or foreign education in particular when the economic and noneconomic benefits exceed the costs" (Becker, 1993, p.15). Therefore, if a country has the means to invest in its youth, there is a higher probability that they will be able to fund scholarships for students to pursue higher education in western regions. For instance, this can be seen with the growing influx of international students from Saudi Arabia where the political context could also shape a government's approach to international student mobility.

It is easy to

> "assume that an individual's actions are determined by the ideological perspectives of the State, as manifest through the State's social practices, including the provision of higher education. These ideological perspectives and related social practices may be designed to repress the interests of the working class while advancing those of the ruling class. Noting that higher education contributes to highly functioning demographic political institutions, civic involvement, promotion of human rights, and political stability and the security concluded that higher education policies in many nations are not oriented toward equalizing opportunity for higher education, but instead serve to perpetuate differences across social classes in higher education outcomes" (Perna, Orosz, Gopaul, Jumakulov, Ashirbekov, & Kishkentayeva, 2014, p.64).

Hence, with the wave of certain countries access to higher education, we must be prepared to accommodate the influx of international students.

Culture Shock

Culture is important in how we perceive, communicate, and interact with one another. By understanding how we work with each other, we are able to understand and comprehend our commonalities and differences. These various sets of norms, customs, values, and assumptions are what guides the behavior of a group of people. Culture can be inherited conceptions that are uniquely expressed through communication. It is important to acknowledge that culture comes in various ways that may not be visible to people. There is the surface culture where behaviors, norms, and rituals are visible for others to see. Then, past the visibility line of the iceberg is the shallow culture which focuses on the attitudes, roles, expectation, and perceptions of the people within the culture. Finally, in the deep culture, (where it is not easily noticeable), core values and deep assumptions are held within the group of people (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

The United States is a diverse country with various backgrounds of people from all of the world. Some students who have traveled for the first time to the United States experience culture shock which includes stress reaction, cognitive fatigue, role shock, and personal shock. Pederson (1991) writes, "of all the roles confronting the international student, perhaps the most diffuse and difficult to fulfill is the stereotype of what international students are supposed to be" (p.13). Culture shock can affect the students' daily experience which in effect would harm them of their education and mental wellbeing.

In order to work together in a global environment surrounded by various cultures, religion, and values, we have to understand the fundamental values of the culture in order to effectively communicate, respect, and work with one another. Ultimately, when we are able to understand and comprehend how a culture functions in its unique way, we are able to empathize that we are more alike than we think we are.

Individualism Vs. Collectivism

Triandis (2001) focuses on the concept of individualism and collectivism and the positionality that could influence the population. For Triandis, individualism and collectivism is seen as the most significant cultural differences among cultures for the elements of culture are shared standards "operating procedures, unstated assumptions, tools, norms, values, habits and sampling the environment" (Triandis, 2001, p. 909). He argues that people from individualist cultures with "high probability, there are elements of personal self - where people from collective cultures, such as Asia, Africa, and South America tend to sample elements of the collective self " (Triandis, 2001, p.909). In collective cultures people are interdependent within their in-groups, while in individualist societies, people are independent from their in-groups, giving priority to their personal goals over goals of others (in-groups).

The concept of cultural competency as well as understanding a students' cultural background and their norms is important to understand when digesting the differences and similarities within cultures. With the U.S. identified more as an individualist culture and accepting incoming international students from a culture that is more collectivistic, it would be very crucial to incorporate cultural competency in our work in order to connect on a level of understanding that could help bridge the gap between cultural backgrounds.

Methods

Participants

My participants included male and female undergraduate and graduate students. Of the following students interviewed: two women were in the Leadership PhD program, one in the Masters Leadership program, two men were in the undergraduate Engineering program, and one woman in the undergraduate social sciences program. I also interviewed some staff members at the International Center at USD in order for me to gain clarity on the understanding of the

international students' process, experience, as well as their scholarship needs and expectations. Given that the scholarships are varied depending on the students, I also interviewed the adviser who is responsible for the student's processing. Doing this I hoped to gain more insight on the background of each scholarship and how it became part of USD's experience. I also hoped to gain direct engagement with the students in order to connect and learn more about their experience. I also served as one of the core participants in my research and engaged with the student participants during each cycle because I wanted to fully understand their lived experiences and how I might learn more to support the population. Furthermore, in order to respect the students' identity, their personal information has been edited and pseudo names had been used to respect their privacy.

Action research cycles

I used O'Leary's cycle of research for my practice because I felt it would allow me the opportunity to observe a situation, reflect on the findings, plan, and act on the situation. With the three cycles, I was able to further deepen my research practice in order to allow more space and time for students to express their experiences and it allowed me the opportunity to initiate possible actions to offer support to my participants. I found this research methodology useful because it gave me the opportunity to modify according to previous results and analyses. The methods allowed me the opportunity to be flexible with my research in order to cater to the variety of possible student responses and their needs- which in effect allowed me the possibility to modify when needed. This study has uniquely been focused on sponsored international students' experience and provided insights on their academic experiences at the university as well as their cultural and social experiences.

Positionality and Limitations

        With limited knowledge I have of the preexisting limitations on international students experience as well as the limited resources, I cannot assume that there is an issue that needs to be solved. Although a few of my international friends may have voiced their concerns regarding certain dilemmas such as restricted 20-hour work week on campus, to feeling disconnected from the university due to cultural differences, comprehending racism, and their inability to keep up with the workload, I still did not want to assume that there is a common issue for the entire population. Therefore, it was important for me to enter the study understanding that I have a bias and certain perspectives through the experiences I've gained from previous interactions, and my own experiences as an immigrant. I acknowledge that I was entering with a biased perspective assuming that the students will need help in solving their dilemmas, but my own experiences gave me more capacity for empathy and ability to probe. I tried to be cautious about how much I was exerting myself with my students during our interactions and I kept note of when I seemed to be interjecting my personal bias into the conversation.

        I believe this action research is relevant because it allowed me the opportunity to acquaint myself with the student population I'd like to further understand and hopefully work with in the near future. With the world intertwining globally together, I feel it is important for us to understand one another in order to work together as a collective. Through interactions with sponsored international students, I was given the opportunity to listen to dilemmas, offer methods to help resolve them or lessen any adaptive challenges, and most importantly, be a resource and supporter for these individuals.

        The method of this action research has provided an organized, structured chronological framework that allowed me the opportunity to construct the research in order to create a space I

envisioned with the students. The limitation of this action research though is that it does not

represent the overall population. The selected sponsored international students' experience may

differ dramatically from traditional international students due to the scholarship aid or

sponsorship they have. Given those who have chosen to participate in my research, I understood

that their voice was solely their experience and should not account for the entire group. Another

limitation of the action research methodology was that the cycles incorporated only gave me a

limited amount of time to work with my population. The overall time frame of the entire

research expanded between 7-8 months. Due to a time crunch to condense all I could within a

limited time, I encountered some roadblocks as I struggled trying to find students who would be

comfortable sharing their experiences with me.

Like any human being, it takes time to build relationships and trust to be able to discuss

sensitive issues, I feared the limited time frame of the action research as well as my limited

presence working at the International Center at USD did not allow me enough time to gain a

close relationship with my students for them to express their dilemmas. Therefore, this study has

allowed me to interview a total of six international sponsored students. Of the six students, five

were from Saudi Arabia (2 men, 3 women) and one was from Brazil. Although each student's

intake was extremely valuable in showcasing me their experiences, I believe if I had more time

and more students, I would have gained more insights on their experiences. Due to the sensitive

issues brought up by each female Saudi student, I believe if I was able to compile more

interviews, it could have possibly allowed me the chance to further delve into their lived

experiences and connect with additional Saudi women on campus.

Cycles

Introduction

Cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
Instrument	Individual Interviews	Values Survey Responses	Mentoring Group Meeting
Participants	Grad, undergraduate students, staff members	Grad, undergraduate students	Grad, undergraduate students
# of participants	6 students 3 staff members	5 graduate and undergraduate students	4 graduate and undergraduate students

Figure 1

As I explored the international student structure and how best to work with this diverse group, I anticipated data to be generated through various methods: observations during programmed events, interviews with incoming and current sponsored international students, existing data within the department, and exit interviews. I planned to engage in dialogue with the individuals in order to help me further understand their personal situation and personalize what resources we could allocate to support their educational and personal experience. I understood that it could take some time for students to become acquainted with me, therefore, I had hope to attend as many programed student events as possible to make myself familiar and be a resource to them.

My initial cycle occurred during the immersion program in early Fall 2017 semester began. I had the opportunity to connect with staff members from the International Center who then forwarded my flyer to prospective students who fall under the sponsorship category. This seemed to be the most efficient way to reach the entire population and to advertise my research

to all of the sponsored students on campus. Those who were interested responded to my google

form with their contact information. I had planned to attend the monthly coffee meetings held on

Thursday, but due to my full-time work schedule at a different university, my student

engagement time was very limited. As a result, this limitation hindered my ability in reaching

out to more sponsored international students.

I also discovered that the best way to find student participants was by word of mouth. By

sharing my research with students at the International Center, I was able to connect with people

on a more personal level and was able to create relationships with them. Once students had

agreed to participate in my research, I provided them with a consent form and reminded them

that their personal information would not be shared with anyone else. Due to schedule conflicts,

I was unable to meet students in the ways I had planned, as outlined above. Therefore, in order

to accommodate the student's schedule, I met with each student individually for a check in, and

this would in turn represent Cycle 1 of my research.

My second cycle was conducted during the student's return from winter vacation, during

the spring 2018 semester. The second cycle consisted of additional follow-up interviews with the

students and two staff members who I felt would be relevant to my work. After the initial Cycle

1 interviews with all six of the students, I reviewed the data, and then decided to send out a

survey to ask all students to anonymously categorize their values to help me find a theme within

the common conversations shared. I decided to have a survey for Cycle 2 because I noticed there

were some common themes and traits that were mentioned throughout the interviews. I wanted

the survey to be anonymous in order to allow each student to feel comfortable in selecting traits

that they valued without feeling judged.

In the third cycle, from the information I had gathered from Cycle 1 and Cycle 2, I suggested to the student participants in creating a mentorship within their existing student groups to encourage and support incoming sponsored international students.

Cycle 1

As previously mentioned, I learned that there were a handful of international students who are sponsored by their government or receiving full ride scholarships from other private sectors.   Given that international students are not permitted the opportunity to apply for any form of financial aid loans, they need to sufficiently provide proof of income to accommodate their stay during their time of study. Because they were financially funded from the specified government agencies or private agencies, their proof of income is then excused which allows them to enter the United States legally. Therefore, in my first cycle, I reached out to these specifically identified international students in order to gain participants for my research.

Through the support from the international center staffs, I created a flyer that displayed my research interest and the population I was interested in learning more about. Once the flyer was completed, the adviser from the international center sent out a mass email to all current sponsored international students who would be interested in sharing their stories with me. The first mass email flyer was sent out in November 2017, and to my disappointment, only two students responded. As I struggled to find participants, I had to be more creative in reaching out and I realized that a face-to-face connection would be better before they would agree to committing to be part of the research. Thus, I connected with students who identified as international students in hopes to reach out to this population. Given that I was working full time at the moment, I knew it would be difficult for me to attend events on campus. Therefore, I found it useful to connect to students who were already part of a student group that was affiliated

with the sponsored scholarship. This group was called the Saudi student club and their purpose is to connect and support current and incoming Saudi students to USD. This was very helpful to me as I was also able to connect with the current Vice President of the club who happened to be part of my action research. With her relationship to the student club, it allowed me the opportunity to connect with other fellow Saudi students.

During cycle one, I conducted interviews with both graduate, undergraduate international students, and staff members from the International Center. During the interview, I asked an array of questions (see appendix B) in order to learn more about the student's and staff's experience with their sponsorships. Given that I was unfamiliar with the whole procedure of documentation for international students, the first person I interviewed was the international adviser who worked closely with sponsored students. Her role was to ensure that the necessary documents each student needed to file was noted in the system with the school, embassy and their specific sponsored agencies.

When I asked the adviser about some benefits and possible limitations she sees with the students she works with, her response gave me a better grasp of the students' transitions. She noted, "well, they are fully funded by their sponsor-which means: tuition, healthcare, flights to the U.S., and a monthly stipend to cover their rent and cost of living. That might sound like a dream and there is nothing to worry about, but these students do come with a lot of stress and limitations with their own personal stories." The adviser recommended that I take into consideration the part of the region the student is from and be mindful of their cultural adaptation and the roles of the male and female student- how they can differ dramatically depending on their country of origin and the expectations their family back home may have on them.

By understanding the region the students were from, I was able to explore more about their country and connect with friends who were from the region who could advise the right way for me to gain student participants. I've learned that the fastest way to gain participants was through mutual connections with staff members or friends. As a result, in my first cycle I was able to meet and connect with six sponsored international students. The six students identified in a variety of ways (figure 2).

Pseudo Name	Gender	Academic Level	Major	Country of Origin
1) Adam	Male	Undergraduate	Engineering	Saudi Arabia
2) Aaron	Male	Undergraduate	Engineering	Saudi Arabia
3) Hannah	Female	Undergraduate	Environmental Health	Saudi Arabia
4) Sam	Female	PhD candidate	Leadership	Saudi Arabia
5) Amanda	Female	PhD candidate	Leadership	Saudi Arabia
6) Paula	Female	MA candidate	Peace Studies	Brazil

Figure 2

Five of the students identified as Saudi Arabian students (2 male, 3 female students) while there was one student from Brazil, who was fully funded from another private scholarship. Of the five students from Saudi Arabia, all are currently sponsored by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission (SACM) to the United States, while the student from Brazil was fully covered by multiple private scholarships. Given that I was introduced to a handful of students from Saudi Arabia, a country and culture I had limited knowledge of, my interviews were very insightful. For example, the male and female students had different responses in how their transition as sponsored students has been at USD.

Before interviewing every student, I wanted to make sure that my questions were neutral in order to avoid any kind of cultural biases or portrayed through a western perspective. Thus, there were eight overarching questions (Appendix C).

Cycle 1 findings.

Male Saudi Arabian students.

Given that the scholarship covers full tuition, monthly stipend, and health insurance, the male students responded that there was not much to complain about with the scholarship. For them, the common theme was adjusting to make sure they pass all of their courses in order to continue receiving funds from SACM. Both male students are currently undergraduates both majoring in engineering.

The first male respondent, Adam mentioned how his transition to the U.S was very much supported by his family back home because his father and uncles also studied in the United States. For him, this was a family tradition: do well in school, apply for university in the United States, and then return to work back in Saudi Arabia once he completed his engineering degree. He mentioned the big wave of trend for Saudi students who wanted to pursue a degree in the United States because it has been heavily supported by their King and government officials back home. For him, his assimilation to the U.S. was a common lived experience compared to his peers, who also decided to come study in San Diego for the beautiful weather and the reputation USD had back home.

When I asked him if there was anything the university could do better to support this experience, his response was, "actually, no. I actually transferred from a different university to USD for the reasons that I feel very accepted as a Muslim Saudi man here. I left my last

university because the professor was so racist towards Middle Easterners and I hated my time there... I didn't feel welcomed at all."

The second student, Aaron also had similar responses, as he was also an undergraduate student in engineering and decided to study at USD because of former classmates and family members who came before him.   He mentioned that because his family back home have studied abroad in the U.S., he knew what to expect. English is his second language and he has been studying English back in Saudi since he was 11 years old. Though he is fluent in English, he mentioned there were some language barriers that took some time for him to adjustment when he first moved to San Diego. He also expressed his intense workload as an engineering student and he spends most of his time on campus always studying.   One of the biggest culture shocks with the male students was the workload they did not imagine would consume most of their free time.

When I asked Aaron what the university could do better in supporting his time here, his response was, "perhaps if my funding could come in on time, or else there will be a hold on my account and I won't be able to register for classes." From my understanding of the payment plan, SACM would send the scholarship money directly to OneStop Center in order to remove any holds on the students' account. If payments are late, students are then not able to add/drop classes until the account is cleared. Adam mentioned that sometimes SACM is a little behind on their payment to OneStop, this then creates a dilemma for him because he is unable to add/drop anything until all balances are cleared. Given the limited time he has while managing classes full time, working in workshops, and actively participating in the International Club, he felt there was a bit of discomfort knowing that money may be delayed which could create a ripple effect on his classes and how he could add/drop classes for the upcoming semester.

Given that both students are engineering majors, they noted how many hours they spent on campus studying for the courses. With the little free time they have, both men are a part of the Saudi Arabian student club and involved with the international center. They both very much value their education and are excited for what they plan on accomplishing upon graduating. When I asked what their plans were for the summer, a common response I received from both men was: finding an engineering company that will allow them to intern for the summer.

Unfamiliar with the visa process for international student employment, I learned about how difficult it was for students to find work that would allow them the opportunity to explore the engineering field. Everything depends on if the student is on an F1 or J1 visa and they need to consult an international adviser at the International Center to see if their visa will allow them the opportunity to work in the U.S. during the duration of their time of study. Therefore, it is highly stressed from the International Center that all international students become acclimated with the International Center in order to be kept up to date on their visa status and to be sure they are completing all steps to be eligible to continue to study, or work in the U.S. (International Center-University of San Diego, 2018).

Female Saudi Arabian Students.

Next, I had the opportunity to interview three female Saudi students who are also on the SACM scholarship. Given the positive responses I received from my male Saudi participants, I had the assumption the responses from the female students would be similar to theirs, I was definitely in for a surprise.

The first woman I had the privilege to speak with Sam is currently a PhD candidate. Sam is currently married with children, while her husband is working back in Saudi Arabia. Sam was very transparent with her reason for pursuing a PhD, for it was to help her gain more educational

experience in the field of education and to someday return to Saudi Arabia to teach in her home

university. SACM has been the greatest supporter for her interest in pursuing a PhD and with the

hopeful possibility that with her new knowledge, she would return to her home country to share

her education with the younger generation. Aside from her scholarship benefits of supporting

her financially, there are certain restrictions she needs to abide to as a Saudi woman.

When Sam was accepted to USD, she was already married and had children. In Saudi

culture, this then makes her husband the head of the household who is the authority of the

family. In order for Sam to be permitted to study in the U.S., she would then need permission

from the male of the house who would grant her the chance to study abroad. Given that Sam's

husband was currently employed in Saudi and could not take time off to accompany her to the

U.S. for her education, she mentioned, "my husband had to write to the government telling them

that he gave me permission to study. Since he couldn't come with me, and I am not allowed to

travel alone because I am a woman, my father or another male figure would need to accompany

me at all times." This means, for the times she will be in the U.S. studying for her PhD, she will

need a male accompany (guardianship). In Sam's case, her father was here to assist her.

I learned through my conversation with Sam, all Saudi women would need to be given

permission by the man of the house to grant any woman the access to travel, or study abroad. If

a woman is permitted to travel, she will need to be accompanied by a man at all times (either her

father, brother, male family member, or her husband). Sam's experience shed light on the access

of higher education for Saudi women and this opened the door for me to hear more experiences

from other Saudi women pursuing higher education.

Amanda, another PhD candidate in the leadership department shared her personal

experience as a Saudi woman studying in the United States. Amanda is focusing her research on

non-profit and stressed how important it is for her to work in a space that would allow her to continue to support the youth population of Saudi Arabia. Amanda is married and her husband is accompanying her while she completes her PhD.

Before Amanda applied to the PhD program, her background was in physical therapy, which made her transition to the PhD leadership studies difficult for SACM to approve her scholarship. She notes that during the application time, it was heavily stressed that she continue her PhD in a field that could be more relevant to her previous studies, and perhaps would allow her the opportunity to work in a relevant field once she and her husband returned to Saudi Arabia.

Once Amanda was accepted into her PhD Leadership Studies program, she was not funded by SACM and had to finance her first few years alone. Amanda was informed that because her major did not align with her Bachelor's degree, she would need to further petition with the scholarship committee to receive approval for funding. Her petition lasted for one year. Afraid she would be behind on her courses, Amanda had to depend on her family to financially support her in the meantime. She stressed the importance of her family allowing her the opportunity to study in the U.S as well as their financial support during the early years she was not funded by SACM.   Given that the field of leadership and the emphasis of non-profit management was a new field for SACM, Amanda voiced how it was difficult for her to maneuver in an educational space that was dominated by students who majored in fields of engineering and sciences.

Amanda's experience was my first introduction to understanding that SACM scholarship has many multiple regulations that students must abide by in order for them to continue to receive their scholarship. For instance, from the voices shared, students must maintain a 3.0

GPA, and major in an accepted field that would be beneficial to a demanding career once they returned to their home country.

Hannah is currently an undergraduate freshman who did not have the opportunity to choose her major, for it was decided by her scholarship. During my interview with Hannah, I was informed that in 2013, the SACM scholarship changed much of their requirements for the incoming students. Students would need to select one of the majors that was accepted by the scholarship because it was expected that once a student completes their degree at the university, they would need to return to Saudi Arabia and commit to working for a specific government agency or business. From Hannah's interpretation, if she agrees to accept the scholarship, then she would need to commit to a major that is specified in the contract (in her case, Environmental Health), and return to work for an agency back in her home country after completing her Bachelor's degree.

I sensed a lot of frustration coming from Hannah, for she felt she did not have any ownership on her educational experience if she were to follow a scholarship that would fund her. Although she noted that this scholarship provided her leverage to study abroad in the United States and obtain a degree from the U.S., she felt that there was still a lot of backwardness that she wanted to address. For instance, Hannah felt any decision she wants to make for her life needs to be approved by her guardianship- in her case, it is her father. Hannah felt it was frustrating because if a woman chooses to study abroad, or major in a particular subject, the ultimate decision is solely based on the woman's guardian. If the guardian is supportive of her decision to study abroad or for any life decisions, then she is granted the opportunity to do as she wishes. On the other hand, if she comes from a family that is not accepting of her decision for the choices she would like for herself, then ultimately, she would not be able to do anything.

Hannah mentioned to me that her father was very much against her decision to study abroad in the United States. Fortunately, over time, her father accepted the fact that Hannah would like to study abroad and gave her the opportunity to do so. Although Hannah had the support from her family, she wanted me to be aware that not all women are granted this kind of privilege. Hannah shared with me that even her close friends back home were not allowed to study abroad because they never received the approval from their guardian.

Last but certainly not least, I had the honor of interviewing Paula from Brazil who is on a different scholarship compared to the other students interviewed. Paula was born and raised in Brazil and has acclimated herself through studying in the U.S since her undergraduate years. During her undergraduate years in New Mexico, Paula was only allowed to work a certain number of hours (20 hours on campus) and was not eligible for any financial aid for as an international student. Paula shared that her family back in Brazil could not financially support her so every dollar she made went towards her tuition, rent, and cost of living in New Mexico. She mentioned how stressed she was, which lead to a lot of emotional breakdowns and anxiety during her undergraduate years. Paula's initial plan was to complete her bachelor's degree and return to Brazil, for she would never have thought she could afford completing a master's degree in the U.S. given her financial circumstances.

By chance, when Paula completed her Bachelor's degree from New Mexico, she was granted OPT (visa to work after graduation), which landed her the opportunity to work in San Diego. Through connecting with other people who were interested in her particular line of work, Paula decided to apply for the Kroc School of Peace & Justice and was fortunately granted a full ride scholarship to complete her degree. Paula was granted the Rotary Scholar, and the Grillo-Marxuach Family Scholarship. The Rotary scholarships are global grants for graduate students

studying abroad in one of Rotary's six causes: 1) promoting peace, 2) fighting disease, 3)

providing clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, 4) saving mothers and children, 5) Supporting

education, 6) Growing local economies. "Scholarships last from one to four years and can

include an entire degree program. Global grant scholarships are funded using cash or District

Designated Funds matched by the World Fund" (Rotary International, 2018, para. 4).

The Grillo-Marxuach Family Scholarship supports tuition for international students in the

Master's in Peace and Justice or the Master's in Social Innovation program. This scholarship has

a preference given to students from Puerto Rico and Latin America (University of San Diego,

2018, para 1).

Paula noted that if she did not receive a full ride scholarship, she would not be where she

is today. She mentioned that the scholarship gave her the opportunity to explore her line of work

by providing her financial support and time for her to intern in the field she wishes to pursue.

She noted that during her undergraduate years when she had to work her 20 hours per week

while juggling classes full time limited her the opportunity to explore internships and career

development.

Discussion of Cycle 1 Findings

In this section I discuss the themes that emerged from the interviews I conducted. First, I

explain the concept of guardianship and how this law may have affected the various Saudi

Arabian women who are currently studying in the United Stated. Then I explored the regulations

of women dependents on the SACM website to apply how these regulations could affect each

Saudi woman who plan to study abroad.

Guardianship.

What is guardianship? According to the Humans Rights website on Saudi Arabia, "every woman must have a male guardian – a father, brother, husband, or even a son – who has the authority to make a range of critical decisions on her behalf. Women are required to receive guardian approval to apply for a passport, travel outside the country, study abroad on a government scholarship, get married, or even exit prison" (Human Rights Act, 2018, para. 1).

In understanding that all Saudi women would need to abide to the Guardianship law in their country, learning about this regulation helped me understand the possible setbacks Saudi women may feel in pursuit of higher education. To my understanding, if you are not given permission by a male figure in the household, you would not be permitted to do anything on your own. In further understanding the various regulations within the Guardianship Law, there are specified definitions that are law that might apply to women once they are given permission to study outside of Saudi Arabia. The regulations of Guardianship are listed below:

Who is the Dependent?

According to the Saudi Arabian Cultural Missions (SACM) scholarship website, the definition of a dependent is, "1.) When the main scholarship holder is a female, her dependent is the legal kin or guardian as officially authorized by the Ministry of Higher Education (husband, father, brother, son, etc.). 2.) When the main scholarship holder is a male, the dependent is his wife as formally registered with SACM" (SACM, 2018, para 3). This means that there is also something called the *Regular Dependent*, which is, "A person who accompanies the main scholarship holder to the assigned country of scholarship with no interest in pursuing any kind of studies" (SACM, 2018, para 3).

I felt it was important to understand the process and regulations of the Guardianship Law that currently affects all Saudi women's experience. Under the Guardianship Law, every woman would need permission from the male guardian in order to pursue their decision in travel, and studying abroad. Men are not categorized under the Guardian Law and do not need permission to decisions in travel or obtaining education. In grasping the understanding of a law that is far unfamiliar to my personal lived experience, I wanted to put myself in these women's lived experience in order to connect with them on a more personal level. By understanding the Guardianship Law, I was able to empathize with the particular limitations the Saudi women expressed in their personal interviews.

Limitations expressed by Saudi women.

A common theme I heard from the Saudi women was the frustration they felt about a tradition that continues to limit women from accessibility to education, travel, etc. For instance, Sam noted how frustrated she felt that although her country is encouraging its citizens to pursue higher education and is providing accessibility for women to obtain higher education abroad, she noted, "but this old law that we can't do anything without a man by our side at all times, is annoying… I can't do anything unless I get permission from a guy. It's this backward mindset where they say, hey we support women in education but make sure you have a man there with you at all times to protect you."

Hannah, a freshman at USD, noted how much the scholarship has changed over the years as she has compared it with her fellow peers who were also on the scholarship. She stressed that starting in 2013, "students did not have the option of choosing their major. If you are on the SACM scholarship, they have a list of majors for us to choose from...it is expected that we work in the field that is growing (i.e engineering, environmental health) when we complete our degree

and return to either work for a company or the ministry back home." Knowing this from my

participants was informational because it helped me put their lived experiences into perspective.

For instance, if I was not allowed to choose the major I'd like to study, I personally would have

felt very distressed. In knowing that some of the students could not choose their desired major

helped me personally empathize in their difficult transition as an international student.

Cycle 2

Values Survey

As I had the opportunity to meet a diverse group of male and female students who were

open to discussing their sponsored experiences, the students' qualitative responses were

generally positive. Yet, I noticed a common theme was the underlying support of the family in

order to pursue higher education. In trying to make sense of what these values were, I decided to

have the students participate in an anonymous values survey, which allowed them to identify and

rank values that were most important to least important to them. I wanted a closer understanding

of the students' values and if they were in conflict with the issue of needing family support.

From previous comments from earlier interviews, I noticed that family was the biggest indicator

in pursuing higher education. Furthermore, the conflict of family expectations, personal

expectations, and sponsored expectations were conflicting the student's lived experiences. I felt

it would be helpful in asking students to rank their personal values from most important to least

important. They also had the opportunity to express more about their values if they chose to do

so. Of the following six students I interviewed, five participated in the survey, and in the chart

(Figure 3) Below are the top two responses for each category:

Most Important	More Important	Neutral	Less Important	Least Important
Honesty & Integrity (4)	Curiosity (4)	Professional Conduct (4)	Recognition from One's field (4)	Faith (4)
Personal Growth (2)	Understanding, Helping, or Serving others (3)	Visions (anticipating future directions, seeing the big picture) (4)	Spirituality (4)	Fame, Success (4)

*In parentheses are the number of students who selected the values

Figure 3

The common most important value among the group (4 out of 5) was to continue to incorporate honesty and integrity in the student's everyday life and educational experiences given the diverse background they come from. Curiosity and helping others was identified as more important, while faith and fame/success was least important for the students. Given that these values were selected among the variety listed in the survey (see Appendix D), I wanted to hone in on how these selected values could be used effectively in order to honor each students' values and incorporate it with their daily lives. The results from the Cycle 2 values survey (figure 4), were instructive, and in the next sections I discuss the most and least important values the students identified.

Most Important Values.

From the initial interview data and survey data, I tried to better understand what it meant for the students to choose honesty and integrity for their most important trait. In further wanting to understand their responses to the survey, I proposed for the students to meet together to discuss more about their values. As a result of the invitation to meet, 4 Saudi women agreed to meet in person to further discuss more about their values. From the responses of the female

Saudi students who chose to share, the common theme the students shared was the theme to give

back in order to continue the work, which aligned with the reason as to why they selected

honesty and integrity as an important trait for them. For instance, Amanda shared that she chose

to pursue her degree because ideally she would like to return to Saudi Arabia. She mentions,

"although my husband would prefer to have a future here in the United States, my heart is with

the people of Saudi, especially the youth. I have more access here as a woman, but I would like

to incorporate these new ideas I've learn in the work back home." Amanda also noted that if she

was not supported by her male guardian, she would not have the life she has now.   Given that

Amanda is married, all decisions are made by her husband, whom she noted has been extremely

supportive of her pursuing her degree in the U.S.

Family Support.

The other female participants, Sam, Hannah, and Paula also noted that if their family did

not support them, they would not be where they are presently. In understanding that all of these

women come from a culture that stresses the family structure, it helped me better understand

their educational experience having to travel so far away from home to pursue higher education.

In Saudi Arabia, the family is the single most important unit of society. "The structure of Saudi

families are traditionally patriarchal, the male being the head of the household and in charge of

duties that are usually found outside the household such as protecting and providing for his

family. Family identity is also tied to the father and he, therefore, has custody of the children

should the question arise" (Metz, 1992, p.1). Therefore, given that family structure and identity

is tied to the father (or other male figure), each woman from Saudi noted they would need the

approval of their guardian (husband, or father) in order for them to be allowed to study abroad.

Given that family is strongly emphasized in the students' culture, I wanted to find effective methods in supporting their educational development while also fostering their culture. Upon speaking with the various students, many stressed how important it was for them to connect with a mentor in order to help them feel more at home especially being away from their native country. Based on the values and traits reported by the students, I wanted to incorporate their values in creating a space that would allow them the opportunity to foster their values, create a safe space and continue to support one another throughout their educational years.

From the previous survey, the most important trait reported was Honesty & Integrity. In wanting to further support this trait and find a tangible way to honor Honesty & Integrity, I asked the students what they felt would be the best way to honor these traits in an education setting. The students responded by brainstorming possible interventions that could help foster Honesty & Integrity, and concluded that creating mentorship opportunities would be helpful. Understanding that support is the biggest passageway for these various students to pursue higher education, they proposed the creation of a mentorship program within their pre-existing student club in order to help continue to create a bonding relationship with newly incoming international students. Given that five out of the six students I interviewed were Saudi, three of the Saudi women highly felt it was important to create mentorships. The three Saudi women personally felt that if they had been connected with current students on campus, they would have proactively dealt with their education differently. The male Saudi students as well as the Brazilian student also voiced the need of creating a mentorship in order to foster healthy relationships.

Cycle 3

The six participants were interested in the idea of creating a mentorship program within their pre-existing student club, and I noticed interest in focusing the mentorship toward incoming

female students. The responses from the current Saudi women noted that female students who are given the permission to study abroad most likely come from a family that is open to her educational advances-because if the family disagreed, the guardian of the woman would not permit her to be far from her family. Making meaning of this, I understand that they would like to focus the mentorship on incoming female students because it is more uncommon for women to this day to obtain higher education compared to men. A mentorship program could provide a safe space for students to turn to their peers for advice. It will allow women the opportunity to connect with others who have similar experiences and be able to provide positive input to help incoming students to acclimate to their environment.

Having learned that e-mail was not an effective means of communication, I sent out a text message to all of my participants (including the male participants) to meet together in order to brainstorm and share meaningful ideas on how to incorporate mentorship in the student club, and also talk about ways we could support incoming female students who would like to participate. The three students who attended were all Saudi women, no men were able to attend the mentorship discussion.

At the mentorship meeting I learned that the majority of my students heavily stressed the importance of family and how their parents are a major contributor to their decision making. Understanding this, I thought it would be helpful to create an 'in-clan' like structure for mentorship to help familiarize students with a culture they feel most comfortable around. During our conversations together, I proposed some questions I had for the group to further understand how they would respond and consider how they would create mentorship within their student group. The questions were: 1) I noticed that the common theme from your responses was the theme of family support-how would you like to incorporate this kind of support within this

group? 2) What are other support systems you think would help foster your educational experience here? And 3) Why do you think having a mentor would help you?

From the responses, all students acknowledged that education is a new privilege for many incoming female students. To their belief, it has been engrained for Saudi men to pursue higher education abroad (without the need of a guardianship), while for women, she will need to overcome more restrictions such as the permission from her guardian. Sam noted, "my husband had to write a letter to the government giving me permission to study here without him. I had to go through that lengthy process of a male's approval while the male students only needed to be approved by a scholarship to allow them to study in the U.S. Another female Saudi student, Hannah, voiced, "my father did not want me to be here. To him I did not need to come and pursue a degree abroad and should not be far away from home. We fought a lot about studying here where at one point, I felt hopeless because his permission was my only ticket to the United States." Fortunately over time, she was able to receive her father's approval to study abroad.

Gender roles and expectations toward the men and women were heavily stressed in the conversation, for instance, Hannah noted, "it is actually frowned upon for women to pursue an education in medicine because culturally that means women are interacting with other men, which is not accepted in our culture. It is expected for us to either become a teacher or just be a housewife and let the husband take care of us." The introduction of women in higher education is relatively new for many Saudi women. Of the three Saudi women I interviewed, two of them are the first women in their entire family (compared to other women in the family) to pursue higher education and to study abroad in the United States. Their lived experience of higher education and living abroad is very new to their family, which made the transition for their time in the U.S. more unfamiliar given they had no pretext or what to expect.

In response to the second question about having a support system, each student had their own response. The student from Brazil mentioned she dedicated her free time to giving back to the organization that sponsored her. Through attending meetings and presenting for the scholarship donors, she feels her support is through the organization that funded her studies. The two PhD women mentioned their family has their biggest support during their academic years. Given that both women are married, they voiced how grateful they are to have partners they could turn to for support in all areas of their life. The female undergraduate student also voiced her mother's support. Although she mentioned her father was not accepting of her studying abroad, it was her mother who was able to encourage her father to change his mind. I noticed that every women I interviewed had mentioned that they call home daily to their loved ones, and has stressed how family have played a tremendous support in their education.

In response to the third question in how mentoring could be helpful, every women voiced the importance of having someone from a similar background to share their experiences with. For instance, all the Saudi women shared that only women from their background would be able to understand the family structure and rules of Guardianship. With the opportunity to confide in one another to share similar experiences and struggles, they believe creating a mentorship within their pre-existing student group will continue to foster a supportive relationship for current and incoming sponsored international students.

Summary

The theme of backwardness was commented by every individual. For instance, with the growing scene of Saudi Arabia opening to encourage women to obtain higher education, the students commented how difficult it is for women to even pursue higher education when the law of guardianship was still heavily enforced. Each participant noted how privileged they were to

be allowed to study in the United States because of the support from their guardians back home.

But they noted that their lived experiences were not the lived experiences of all Saudi women

who may not have the same kind of support in accessing higher education due to their family

structure back home. Therefore, they feel it is extremely helpful to continue to support incoming

female Saudi students because it is common that they are the first in their family to pursue higher

education. Therefore, incorporating a mentorship program it could connect incoming Saudi

women students to current students who could help navigate and support the transition to the

university. The female Saudi students agreed that reintroducing the mentorship with their current

Saudi student club will be beneficial in the mentorship program. They had proposed on funding

from SACM to financially support upcoming meetings and hosting events to welcome incoming

students. Through early events and potluck, the women have suggested in proposing the idea of

connecting incoming students with current students to foster relationships and ensuring each

student had a mentor. Once they receive funding, they plan on initiating the event for the

following academic school year.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

Based on my time with the various students who kindly opened up about their personal

experiences on the particular sponsorships, I have learned so much from each individual's

personal hardships in obtaining higher education while also juggling cultural differences.

Understanding that gender roles between men and women were complicated, and each was

treated very differently, I wanted to find ways to foster and encourage international female

students to feel supported at USD. The students I interviewed suggested having a mentorship

program in order to help foster relationships with current and incoming international Saudi

women (in particular) was a good idea.

When the other female students suggested creating a mentorship within their pre-existing Saudi student group, I thought it was a terrific idea to encourage male and female students to work together in order to encourage and support current and incoming Saudi women who may have been limited from educational access back home. The Saudi women felt it would be beneficial for the mentorship group to co-exist with male students because this will allow Saudi women to gain experience working with the opposite sex. They also felt this would expose male Saudi students to the challenges women face, and perhaps to empathize and understand the lived experiences Saudi women have to go through due to traditional gender roles.

Second, I personally suggest incorporating a cultural power point/webinar with the international center for students who are interested in learning more about different cultures in order to continue to educate others on cultural dynamics that could be affecting our peers, students, and friends. California is a very diverse state that brings together people from all walks of life. I believe if we incorporate a cultural class that allows the space for students to learn about cultural differences, we would be able to connect with others from all over the world.

If a form of mentorship is developed, I believe it is crucial for incoming mentors to be culturally aware of the student's cultural background in order to foster the mentor-mentee relationship. Kutchner and Kleschick believe,

> "personality traits and other matching variables to consider include work ethic, need for achievement, career interests, drive, structure, and productivity. The more similar the traits of the mentor and the protégé, the greater the perceived benefits of mentoring for both. Expectations need to be established at the outset; during the initial mentorship phase, protégés should clearly articulate their expectations as well as their goals and career interests" (Kutchner, and Kleschick, 2016, p.5).

The more traits we are able to comprehend about one another, the more likely it would be for the mentor-mentee to connect and support one another on a more personal level.

In wanting to be part of mentoring other incoming female Saudi students, I am aware that I am of a different culture and will need to become accepted by the group in order to be able to connect with the students on a comfortable level. Through our series of meetings and bonding through shared experiences and food, I feel my time with these various individuals has helped open doors for me to understand a culture far from the one I am most familiar with. My experience with these talented and resilient individuals has shed light on how openness can allow people from various walks of life to connect on a more personal level. Through dialogues, expressing vulnerability, and supporting one another through connecting students to resources on and off campus, I have come to a conclusion that is near and dear to me; that we are all human beings influenced by a culture but all working toward the common goal of obtaining higher education.

Furthermore, after expressing my findings to the International Center, the center was extremely supportive of my research about this small underrepresented group of Saudi women students on scholarships they feel have been dismissed from the general public. Although my finding was nothing new to the center, they have acknowledged how important it is for Saudi women to be supported by one another. Given that the current Saudi student group is awaiting their funding to host events for incoming Saudi students and to reopen their mentorship for the following academic semester, the center is hopeful it will offer more incoming Saudi women the opportunity to participate in the mentorship. Since my research was in the early process of their intent to revamp their mentorship, the Saudi women have stated they will being to network with incoming students to encourage as many people to participate. They have proposed on having a

social that will connect incoming students with current students while holding a monthly check-in meeting/social event to continue the effort and relationship building.

The International Center has encouraged student groups to publicize their mentorship to host incoming students to participate. They also agreed that cultural competencies are very important in working with the international population and voiced they would also recommend that other staff members, students, and professors take advantage of the opportunity to learn more about different cultures in order to gain a closer relationship with those they interact with on a daily basis. Current events such as weekly meetings and the annual fashion show is an example of valuable work the center has dedicated to continue to foster opening relationships to people from various parts of the world.

Overall, my time with the students has shed light on lived experience far from what I am familiar with. I believe in order to continue to foster relationships, one must be open to learning about different cultures and recognizing our own biases; and the lenses we may hold.   By letting go of judgments and recognizing that we are all human beings brought up by various cultures working toward the same common purpose, then we can connect on a more personal, mindful, and empathetic level.

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Appendix A: Welcoming Immersion Program

Welcome! Congratulations on your acceptance to University of San Diego!

Also, I would like to introduce myself. My name is Chim and I am a graduate student at the University of San Diego. I am very interested in learning more about International Students, particularly, sponsored international students who are here. I understand you had to fill out many paperwork to be here today and want to learn more about you and your process getting here!

Along that line, I understand that you had to travel very far away from home, and this may be the first time you've been away from home, or even outside of your homeland country. Given that this is a big change in your life, I want to be able to help create a focus group for sponsored international students in order to hear what are some things the department could focus more on in order to help serve you.

With your participation, I would be able to help advise, mentor, and pass on information to the department in order to serve your educational and emotional support. Participating in this research group will help me get to know you all better, as well as possibly help you and future incoming students make a smooth transition to this new place and call it your home.

If you are interested in participating, I will be sending you a consent form for you to sign. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you!

Appendix B: Interview

Hi there,

Thank you so much for making the time to meet with me for a one-on-one interview. I want to take the time to get to know each and every one of you. I think it is very important to learn about one's background because a lot of it will play in our daily activities on how we respond to certain situations, how we want to live our lives, and how we will apply what we learned to those around us.

If any of these questions become uncomfortable for you, please feel free to ask to skip. I do not intend to make you feel uncomfortable, only to understand your story and experience more so I am more conscious of the population I am working with. I appreciate that you are comfortable in meeting with me and explaining to me more about your home country and what you've done to get to where you are now. You should be so proud of yourself!

Here are some questions I will be asking you. Again, if you do not want to answer, please let me know.

Please note, your name will not be shown to anyone. The responses will be kept anonymous for your privacy

-What was your experience like transition to USD?

- Were the resources at the International Center and from the University helpful to you? How so?

- What do you appreciate most about USD?

- What do you wish the University could improve on?

- How was the visa transaction like? Do you think it limited your experience or help open more doors for you?

Appendix C: Questionnaire

1) Tell me a little bit about your background, and why you decided to apply and attend USD.

2) Could you explain to me a little bit more about the scholarship you are on and how it may have helped or hindered your experience as a student?

3) What did you find more challenging with the transition to the United States?

4) Are you enjoying your time here in San Diego? What are your plans after your complete your degree?

5) What do you want to share about your experience that you would like for others to be aware of?

6) Has your transition to USD been more rewarding or challenging? Why?

7) What was your biggest culture shock you've experience? How did you come to terms with your new living situation?

8) Overall, are you enjoying your experience here?

Appendix D: Values Survey

From your responses from the previous meet-up and interview you had mentioned some things that we could definitely work on. To help me understand your lived experiences, I want to learn more about your personal values and how they may come into effect with your educational decision, please feel free to visit this website and identify the values that are most to least important to you. You are welcome to leave your input confidential!

http://www.pztools.org/valuesort/event/MGUwM165

Appendix E: Consent Form

Research Participant Consent Form

 For the research study: Sponsored International Students experience at University of San Diego

Student Researcher: Chimchanbo Uk

1)Purpose of the research study
The purpose of my study is to explore USD's Sponsored International Students' experiences. Interventions and data collection methods include focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and activities focused toward students' educational and social development. I will provide resources to offer effective methods to empower sponsored International Students' educational needs.

2)What I will ask you to do
If you agree to this study, I will be conducting interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experience as an international student at the university, and as a sponsored student. I will be asking questions about your visa application process, the transition to the University, and your personal experience coming here. I will also be asking about the classes you will be taking and where you plan to see yourself in the upcoming years.

The interview will take about 30 minutes. With your permission, I will be recording the interview with my phone so I can go back to refer to your thoughts. Your name and personal information will not be displayed to anyone. Your identity will be left anonymous to respect your privacy.

3)Foreseeable risks
There is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your condition to be sensitive. If some questions or interaction do stir up some emotional factors, please seek USD Counseling Center at https://www.sandiego.edu/counseling-center/ or call them at (619)260-2222. At any time of the research, you are permitted to end the research.

4)Benefits
While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you have helped researchers like myself to better understand the sponsored international student experience and how advisers could better serve the population.

5)Confidentiality
Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a number or pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually

6)Compensation

You will receive no compensation for this participation in the research study.

7)Voluntary nature of this Research

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this, and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

**Please note that choosing to participate/or not in the Action Research will not impact your student status with the University or with the sponsored agency. Your information will be kept confidential and will not be shared with any sponsored agencies or with your home government.

8)Contact Information

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Chimchanbo Uk
Email: cuk@sandiego.edu   Phone: (562) 607-3143

2) Cheryl Getz
Email: cgetz@sandiego.edu   Phone: (619)260-4289

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant   Date

Name of Participant (Printed)

Signature of Investigator