



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Katherine Nordell Fort for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling presented on December 12, 2014.

Title: Experiences of Transition to the American Community College: A Thematic Literature Review of International Student Adjustment and Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students' Successful Transition

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Deborah J. Rubel

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold; to review existing literature regarding the process of international student transition to the United States and to specifically increase the understanding of the experiences of a defined international student population through an original grounded theory study. Specifically, the study describes experiences of South Korean international students who have recently studied within an American community college and who have viewed their transition experience as "successful." Ten South Korean international students participated in this study. Nine of the participants were interviewed three times, with interviews totaling approximately 180 minutes each. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed, resulting in the emergence of a grounded theory. This theory revealed five main categories: one *context* category and four subsequent developmental stages of *challenge*, *reflection*, *action*, and *growth*. *Challenge* was found to be the central category due to its pivotal role in participants' ultimate experiences of successful transition. In particular, the process following the point of *encountering challenges* set in motion a set of decisions through which participants navigated their difficulties by utilizing a set of personal and cultural

skills. Many of these skills were unique to the South Korean population. Through the use of these unique skills and attributes, participants in this study reported developing the strength to "*manage with diligence*" and ultimately gain confidence to do more on campus and in their larger communities. The process of self-reflection, self-awareness, and confidence building highlighted these experiences of success. These findings are relevant to counselors and student services personnel who support international students in higher education.

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Experiences of Transition to the American Community College: A Thematic Literature  
Review of International Student Adjustment and Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of  
South Korean Students' Successful Transition

by  
Katherine Nordell Fort

A DISSERTATION

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Dean of the College of Education

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I understand that my dissertation will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my dissertation to any reader upon request.

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Katherine Nordell Fort, Author

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 1: General Introduction .....	1
Dissertation Overview .....	1
Importance to Profession of Counseling .....	3
Current Trends in Literature.....	4
Manuscript 1 .....	6
Manuscript 2 .....	7
Organization.....	9
References.....	10
Chapter 2: A Thematic Review of the International Student Adjustment Literature: Application to and Implications for Community Colleges .....	15
Abstract.....	17
Introduction .....	18
Purpose and Methods.....	25
Factors Affecting the International Student Experience .....	26
Adjustment Issues.....	27
Academic Adjustment.....	28
Socio-cultural Adjustment.....	29
Personal psychological Adjustment.....	32
In-Group Differences.....	32
Cultural Distance.....	33
Coping and Well-being.....	38
Social Support .....	39

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Discussion .....	42
Implications for Community College Practice, Training, and Research.....	46
Conclusion .....	48
References .....	49
Chapter 3: Adjusting to the United States: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students' Successful Transition via American Community Colleges.....	
	64
Abstract .....	66
Introduction .....	67
Methodology .....	74
Participants and Setting .....	75
Data Collection .....	78
Data Analysis .....	79
Researcher Disclosure .....	80
Measures to Promote Trustworthiness .....	81
Results .....	82
Context/Foundational Attributes.....	83
Stage I: Challenge .....	87
Encountering Challenges .....	87
Considering Giving Up .....	88
Stage II: Reflection .....	89
Connecting to Motivation .....	90
Deciding Not to Give Up .....	91
Stage III: Action .....	92
Managing with Diligence .....	92
Taking Action and Learning .....	93
Stage IV: Growth .....	94
Gaining Confidence .....	95
“Jung” Compassionate Community .....	95
Experiencing Positive Outcomes .....	97

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Discussion .....	99
Implications .....	101
Limitations .....	103
Figure 1: Stage II: Reflection & Stage III: Action: Interactions.....	105
References .....	106
Chapter 4: General Conclusions .....	112
Recommendations for Future Research .....	118
Conclusion .....	120
Bibliography .....	122
Appendices .....	139

## LIST OF APPENDICES

<u>Appendix</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Appendix A Recruitment Letter of Introduction to International Student Advisors and International Student Leaders .....	140
2. Appendix B Recruitment Email to Potential Participants.....	142
3. Appendix C Verbal Consent Guide .....	144
4. Appendix D Script: Initial Contact with Potential Participants .....	147
5. Appendix E Participant Information Form .....	149
6. Appendix F Initial Interview Questions.....	151
7. Appendix G First Round Interviews .....	152
8. Appendix H Figure 1 Encountering Life as a Community College Student .	209
9. Appendix I Figure 2 Encountering Life as a Community College Student, Challenge Process .....	210
10. Appendix J Figure 3 Experiencing Life as a Community College Student in the U.S., with Experiencing a Challenge & Experiencing the Outcomes of Coping.....	211
11. Appendix K Second Round Interviews.....	212
12. Appendix L Figure 4 Experiencing Challenges, Confidence Development..	235
13. Appendix M Third Round Interviews .....	236
14. Appendix N Persisting Through Challenges.....	265
15. Appendix O Figure 6 Context/Foundational Attributes.....	266
16. Appendix P Figure 7 Stage I: Challenge.....	267
17. Appendix Q Figure 8 Stage II: Reflection .....	268
18. Appendix R Figure 9 Stage III: Action.....	269

## LIST OF APPENDICES (Continued)

	<u>Page</u>
19. Appendix S Figure 10 Stage IV: Growth.....	270
20. Appendix T Member Checking .....	271
21. Appendix U Peer Review.....	273
22. Appendix V Expanded Round 2 and 3 Interview Questions .....	275

## LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Figure 1: Stage II: Reflection & Stage III: Action: Interactions.....	105

## LIST OF APPENDIX FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Appendix H, Figure 1. Encountering Life as a Community College Student .....	209
2. Appendix I, Figure 2. Encountering Life as a Community College Student, Challenge Process .....	210
3. Appendix J, Figure 3. Experiencing Life as a Community College Student in the U.S., with Experiencing a Challenge & Experiencing the Outcomes of Coping.....	211
4. Appendix L, Figure 4. Experiencing Challenges, Confidence Development.....	212
5. Appendix N, Figure 5. Persisting through challenges .....	265
6. Appendix O, Figure 6. Context/Foundational Attributes.....	266
7. Appendix P, Figure 7. Stage I: Challenge.....	267
8. Appendix Q, Figure 8. Stage II: Reflection .....	268
9. Appendix R, Figure 9. Stage III: Action.....	269
10. Appendix S, Figure 10. Stage IV: Growth.....	270

## **Chapter 1: General Introduction**

### **Dissertation Overview**

Over the past four decades, rapidly increasing numbers of international students have come to the United States to study abroad within the American system of higher education. During this period of time, the landscape of international education in the United States has shifted dramatically through the use of social media, the tightening of restrictions placed on international students following 9/11, and an increasingly connected global economy. Within the context of such change lies the numerous and varied transition experiences that international students have, beginning on the day that they arrive in the U.S. Historically, social science scholars have framed this transition experience as “culture shock” and set forth a standard model through which all international students were seen to experience the same psychological highs and lows of studying abroad.

The purpose of this dissertation is to produce scholarly work that explores the transition experiences of a defined population of international students who first study in the United States within the community college setting. As outlined by the Oregon State University Graduate School, this dissertation will follow the manuscript document dissertation format. Following this format, Chapter 1 provides an overview and background on the topic of international student transition processes experienced within American higher education. Chapter 1 also describes the journal-formatted manuscripts found in chapters 2 and 3, which are thematically tied. Chapter 2 is an article titled *A Thematic Review of the International Student Adjustment Literature: Application to and Implications for Community Colleges*. Chapter 3 presents a manuscript titled *Adjusting*



*to the United States: An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students' Successful Transition via American Community Colleges.* Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the overall results, limitations, and general conclusions.

As the number of students coming from around the world to study in the United States increases and the psycho-social demands of today's college students compound, a need exists for community college counselors and student services personnel to understand how to better aid in the transition experiences of international students. This focus ties both manuscripts thematically on the topic of international student transitions experienced when studying in the United States. The first manuscript (Chapter 2) is a literature review on the theoretical and research literature on international student transition experiences over the past four decades. This manuscript defines and describes the current population of international students studying in the United States and provides theoretical and research background on the cross-cultural transition process, which has been defined in numerous ways, including adjustment, acculturation, and culture shock. By identifying the main themes extant within this body of literature, this manuscript also serves as a position paper highlighting the need for college administrators and student services personnel to develop further understanding of the various factors that may positively or negatively affect international students' transition experiences. Finally, this manuscript aims to aid community college counselors and students services personnel in the creation and utilization of more comprehensive support services by providing specific implications for practice, training, and research regarding the community college environment.

The second manuscript (Chapter 3) describes the qualitative research methodology utilized to complete a study on international student transition experiences within American community colleges. In order to better understand such experiences, the primary researcher chose to study students from South Korea due to the rapidly increasing number studying within American community colleges, evidence of higher risk factors, and a lack of current research on this specific population. This study sought to understand how South Korean students articulate and experience “successful transition” in order to better understand the student perspective on “success,” highlighting coping skills, and finding out which services and experiences have aided in their success. Specifically, this grounded theory study explored how international students from South Korea experience successful transition as they move from home and study within American community colleges. From this study, a theory emerged that aids student support personnel in better understanding the needs of and creating and providing services for this growing yet underserved and insufficiently known population.

### **Importance to Profession of Counseling**

These two manuscripts are significant to the professional counseling literature for several reasons. Over the past 25 years, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in the number of international students entering American community colleges and four-year institutions of higher education (IIE, 2012; IIE, 2013; Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007). Recently, the majority of these students are from Asia, with the largest number of students coming from South Korea and China (IIE, 2013). These students choose to study abroad in the U.S. primarily due to their desire to complete a Bachelor’s Degree, to gain international education experience, and to solidify English language skills

(Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007). In order to reach these goals, a growing number of international students have recently chosen the American community college as a more intimate and less expensive environment within which to begin their journey (IIE, 2013). On the path to university transfer and four-year degree completion, most international students today must take college level courses in their second or third language, develop social supports, navigate the college system, and survive on their own thousands of miles from home (Abraham, 2011; de Araujo, 2011; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay et al, 2002; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin & Yi, 1997; Liu, 2009; Michailidis, 2006; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Redmond, 2000; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Yang & Clum, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Young, 2005; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011).

Currently, international education is one of America's largest service exports. International student tuition and living expenses contribute over \$21 billion to the U.S. economy annually (IIE, 2012). Despite this fact, American community colleges face an increasing discrepancy in funding compared to other American forms of higher education. As such, community college personnel must do more with less when it comes to serving the needs of their students. Connecting this issue to international student support, concerns have arisen regarding the ability for college personnel to adequately provide support for underserved, at-risk students. Research shows that international students experience more stress, depression and anxiety than their American peers, yet they utilize campus support services far less often (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Byon, Chan, and Thomas, 1999; D'Rozario and Romano, 2000; Mori, 2000; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Zhang,

1998).

Keeping in mind this growing need for support and the underutilization of such services, further concerns arise regarding the lack of preparation that academic and student support personnel receive for instructing, supervising, and advising international students (Arthur, 2004; Aspland, 1999; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). More information is needed in order to provide quality academic support services through the developed skills, attitudes, and knowledge of campus faculty and staff (Arthur, 2004, p.6). Understanding the transition process of international students is especially important for counselors who could help to meet their specific psychological needs, yet student development and counselor education programs rarely include information about international students (Arthur, 2004; Fouad, 1991). Identifying the unique transition experiences of international students will ultimately help community colleges to provide more ethically and culturally competent support services, resulting in campuses with higher persistence rates and greater financial prosperity.

### **Current Trends in Literature**

Literature regarding the international student transition process provides a variety of theories and empirical data on acculturation, cultural adjustment, and cultural assimilation. Unfortunately, many of the studies identified within the literature build upon outdated theories that do not consider the increasing connectedness of today's social media, the growing economic interdependence between nations, nor the added psycho-social stresses reported by today's students in higher education. Foundational theorists such as Adler (1975), Berry (1980, 1985, & 1997), and Golden (1973) identified unique cultural difficulties faced by international students and initially argued that the transition

process, or “acculturation,” was a “unidimensional” construct within which international students increasingly identify with the adopted culture and let go of her/his home culture. More recent work by Pedersen (1991 & 2008) and Sue (2008) shows the acculturation experience to be more multidimensional and unique from person to person, based upon his/her world-view. However, most research combines the study of students from various nations or even global regions of origin. Additionally, existing literature speaks to the experiences of international students studying within American four-year institutions, but very little is known about the community college experience specifically.

### **Manuscript 1**

The purpose of the first manuscript is to review and thematically characterize current scholarly research on the transition experiences of international students studying in the United States, specifically those studying within associate’s institutions/community colleges. This review aims to provide answers to the following questions: (1) How do international students experience transition into life in the United States? (2) What challenges and barriers do international students face when they study in the U.S.? (3) How do international students experience transition to the U.S. via the American community college? (4) What allows for an easier/more seamless transition process for some international students during their transition process? (5) How effectively are support services utilized by international students during their transition process? In seeking to answer these questions, five major themes emerge that create further understanding of the existing body of research, yet identify gaps in the current literature as well. This review is aimed toward publication, adding to the body of knowledge found within community college and international education journals. Specifically, the article

seeks to better inform the counseling and student services fields of practice and training implications when working with international students at the community college level. The literature review concludes with such implications, strengths and weaknesses of the existing literature, and recommendations for future research.

## **Manuscript 2**

The second manuscript reports a grounded theory study of the successful transition experiences of South Korean international students who are currently studying or have recently studied within American community colleges. International students studying within community colleges face unique socio-cultural stressors during the transition process that impact their ability to succeed in school. Students from South Korea currently rank first in the number of students coming to study within the American community college system (IIE, 2013) and third in terms of the overall number of students studying within the U.S. system of higher education, just behind China and India (IIE, 2012). Current research on South Korean students reveals higher psychological risk behaviors of depression and suicidality than any other first world, young adult population (Kim & Park, 2014). Thus, a critical need for support exists, yet there is a stark gap in their utilization of support services on American campuses (Byon, Chan, & Thomas, 1999; Yoo & Skovolt, 2001). As such, this population was found to be ideal for studying the unique needs and experiences of international students within the American community college system.

The central research question guiding this study was: “What is the experience of South Korean students as they successfully transition into life as an American community college student?” This study employed the qualitative methodology of grounded theory.

As the majority of previous research on the international student transition process has utilized quantitative methods, recent literature has called for the use of qualitative research with this population. Grounded theory was chosen specifically for its ability to draw out a detailed nature of the experiences of its participants through prolonged engagement and thick, rich description (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Grounded theory is well suited to approach the central question because it empowers the participants to carefully describe and employ their own voices in the creation of a unique theory specifically matched to their experience. Within this study, 10 South Korean students who are or have recently studied within an American community college (within the past five years) and who identify themselves as having been “successful” in their transition process were interviewed.

Initial referral to and contact with participants was made through student clubs/organizations, those who knew and/or worked with South Korean students at community colleges, and those who knew and/or worked with South Korean students who have recently attended community college. During the first round of interviews, participants were first asked these four main questions: (1) Tell me your personal story about adapting to life as a community college student in the U.S. (2) What does success in this process mean to you? (3) How do/did you respond to transitioning into life in the U.S. via an American community college environment? (4) What experiences contributed to your success when transitioning? Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher, following which, the interviews were coded, and concepts and themes were outlined to begin to identify relationships between categories. At the same time, the primary researcher checked for any missed information and completed follow-

up interviews after the initial coding process. Throughout the study, the primary researcher sought to use methods that promoted trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to create an emerging theory on how South Korean students identified and described experiences of successful transition within the American community college environment. This manuscript is also aimed toward publication within community college and international education journals.

### **Organization**

Both the first manuscript (Chapter 2) and the second manuscript (Chapter 3) are thematically linked on the importance of adding to scientific inquiry on the subject of international student transition. Chapter 2 provides a literature review on scholarly work regarding the major issues faced by international students when adjusting to life in the United States and how these students find support within systems of higher education. Given the lack of current theoretical understanding and existing literature regarding specific experiences and issues faced by international students within the community college system, a grounded theory study (Chapter 3) on the experiences of South Korean international students who have transitioned within American community colleges is provided. Chapter 4 discusses general conclusions and recommendations for future research. Finally, appendices and figures that support and give further insight to the process of the study (Chapter 3) are included at the end of this dissertation.



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## Chapter 2

A Thematic Review of  
the International Student Adjustment Literature:  
Application to and Implications for Community Colleges

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this manuscript is to review the theoretical and research literature on international student transition experiences over the past four decades. This manuscript defines and describes the current population of international students studying in the United States and provides theoretical and research background on the cross-cultural transition process, which historically has been defined in numerous ways, including adjustment, acculturation, and culture shock. By identifying the main themes extant within this body of literature, this manuscript also serves as a position paper highlighting the need for college administrators and student services personnel to develop further understanding of the various factors that may positively or negatively affect international students' transition experiences. Finally, this manuscript aims to assist community college counselors and student services personnel in the creation and utilization of more comprehensive support services by providing specific implications for practice, training, and research regarding the community college environment.



## Introduction

The American Council on Education (ACE) states that the term “international student” is formally used in the United States to designate a student who is neither a U.S. citizen, immigrant, refugee, or permanent resident (ACE, 2006). According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) and the U.S. Department of States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the number of international students studying at colleges and universities in the United States has increased by over 62% in the past 25 years and 5% in the 2010/2011 academic year alone, now totaling 764,495 students (IIE, 2013; Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007). This number reflects an increase of 32% in the number of international students studying within the United States over the past decade (IIE, 2012). Within these numbers exists a growing population of international students who come to the United States to study within the American community college system, most aiming to save money during the first two years of a Bachelor’s Degree before transferring to American colleges or universities.

In the 2004/5 academic year, 81,859 international students were reported studying within American associate’s institutions, or community colleges (IIE, 2013). Cohen and Brawer (2008) define a *community college* as “any institution legally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science” and includes “the comprehensive two-year college as well as many technical institutes, both public and private” (p.6). Community colleges currently operate in every state and enroll half of first-time college-going students in the United States (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). More recently, the number of international students studying within the community college system has risen to 87,997 during the 2011/12 school year (IIE, 2013). Of this number, 24,408 were “new”

or first-time international students. The largest percentage of that total, 13.4% of these students, originated from South Korea, followed closely by 13% from China, 8.7% from Vietnam and 5.8% from Japan (IIE, 2013). As the cost of tuition in the United States continues to rise and the global economy becomes more interconnected, the percentage of international students seeking to save money by first entering college via associate's institutions in the U.S. will undoubtedly continue to increase. Many of these students arrive in the U.S. before the age of twenty, living on their own for the first time in their lives. These students face the multilayered challenges of learning a new language, dealing with family pressures back home, making new friends, living thousands of miles away from home, and "succeeding" personally and academically despite entering entirely new socio-cultural systems.

International students have a significant impact on the U.S. economy, contributing over \$22.7 billion via tuition and cost of living expenditures, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce (IIE, 2013). Approximately 70% of all international student primary funding comes from sources outside of the U.S. and 82% of undergraduate international students rely on personal and family funds to pay their tuition and living expenses (IIE, 2013). As such, higher education is seen as one of the United States' top service exports (IIE, 2012). Accordingly, institutions of higher education in the United States have worked to increase the internationalization of their campus communities. International students also increase the richness of diverse thinking and global experiences within college and university campuses. In essence, such internationalization is defined as a "process that prepares the community for successful participation in an increasingly interdependent world" (Arthur, 2004, p.3; Francis, 1993). International

education provides opportunities for increasing the interdependence of social and economic systems. It promotes cooperative efforts to address global problems and involves activities that are grounded in values ranging from humanitarian goals to increasing international business and commerce through higher education (Arthur, 2004).

“Because of the excellence and diversity of our colleges and universities, more students worldwide are choosing to study in the United States. Young people who study abroad gain the global skills necessary to create solutions to 21<sup>st</sup> Century challenges. In turn, international students globalize our campuses and communities.” Anne Stock, Assistant Secretary of State, 2011(IIE, 2012).

American community colleges currently educate approximately 11 million students, or 44% of the U.S. college-going population (TCF, 2013). Statistically, 81.4% of these students enter community college with the intention of transferring to a four-year university, however only 11.6% successfully do so over the course of six years (TCF, 2013). Additionally, the recent wave in immigration has caused an increase in community college English as Second Language (ESL) course offerings, changes in campus culture, and has highlighted a need for change within student services programming (Levin, 2007). Despite the growing number of students around the world accessing education through American community colleges, funding for these institutions has fallen far short of the need. For example, from 1999-2009, per-pupil operating expenditures of private research universities increased by almost \$14,000 compared to the \$1 increase in community colleges during the same period (TCF, 2013). Together, the underfunding of community colleges and the growing focus on campus internationalization have caused rising concerns regarding the adequacy of institutional

resources allocated to support the increasing number of international students. The economic value of international students drives internationalization, yet there is not enough funding for adequate support services within the campus infrastructure (Arthur, 2004).

Further, a deeper issue exists regarding the lack of preparation that academic and student support personnel receive for instructing, supervising, and advising international students (Arthur, 2004, p.4; Aspland, 1999; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). In a competitive market, the reputation of an institution lies in its capacity to deliver quality academic support services where international students are not treated as “commodities” but as those whose culturally rich experiences are supported through the developed skills, attitudes, and knowledge of campus faculty and staff to specifically support this population (Arthur, 2004, p.6). Such comprehensive services are especially important to develop on community college campuses, as the campus culture and available support differs significantly from four-year universities. Some such differences include:

- 1-3 year average enrollment time.
  - Open enrollment (little to no entrance exams or entrance requirements).
  - Lack of residence life/on-campus housing, thus higher numbers of “commuter” students.
  - Higher number of students who work while attending school.
  - Smaller class sizes with more in-class discussion.
  - Classes including dual-enrolled high school students.
  - Higher number of disadvantaged, low socio-economic status, non-traditional (adult learners), and students with disabilities (overall at-risk students).
  - Higher number of English Language Learners (ELL) and recent immigrants.
  - Inexpensive English as a Second Language (ESL) courses.
  - Higher number of vocational and technical courses.
  - Lower per capita funding.
  - More politically driven development of support programs.
  - Limited to no health care services.
  - Lower rates of persistence/retention and graduation.
- (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Levin, 2007; Study in America, 2013)

Moreover, the transition experiences of international students make counseling an especially important service, yet counselor education programs rarely include information about the unique experiences of international students (Arthur, 2004; Fouad, 1991). Instead, existing literature focuses on American college students and their mental health concerns. This literature states that the number of students “in crisis” on college campuses rises each year, students have shown an increased capacity to take drastic measures in their cries for help. In 2010, respondents of the National Survey of Counseling Center Directors (on college and university campuses) reported that 44% of their clients had severe psychological problems (Gallagher, 2010). This was a drastic increase up 16% from 2000. The most common issues and disorders reported were depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and self-injury (Gallagher, 2010). The American College Health Association conducted a national survey in 2010, finding that 45.6% of students reported “feeling that things were hopeless” and 30.7% reported “feeling so depressed that it was difficult to function” during the past 12 months (APA, 2011).

Depression and anxiety consistently rank as the most common mental disorders treated at college counseling centers, while oftentimes other overlooked and serious issues exist as students struggle with eating disorders, substance abuse, and self-injury (APA, 2011). In 2004, congress recognized the need to take action in addressing the growing mental health crisis on college campuses with the passage of the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act (GLSMA) (APA, 2011). The GLSMA created three programs to address the mental and behavioral health needs of young people: Campus Suicide Prevention, State/Tribal Youth Suicide Prevention, and the Technical Assistance Center.

These three programs highlight the seriousness of student crises, especially the risk of suicide, which remains the second leading cause of death among all college students and the third leading cause of death for young Americans ages 15-24, across the nation (APA, 2011). To better understand the possible risk behaviors associated with the larger international student population, the author of this manuscript searched for information regarding psychological risk factors of international students and found a critical study. In this study, Kim and Park (2014) shared statistics showing that South Korea currently has nearly three times the suicide rate of the United States when it comes to young adults/college age students. As such, they conducted a series of two-way 3 x 2 between subjects ANOVA tests with 300 participants; American, South Korean, and South Korean students in the United States. Their questions focused on suicide risk factors and attitudes and found that students in South Korea have distinct attitudes that may correlate to the "startling high suicide rates" (Kim & Park, 2014). They also reported that South Korean college students currently have the highest numbers of attempted suicides and completions worldwide.

Due to the overall increase in the seriousness of student mental health needs, the demand for providing culturally sensitive support to international students coming to the U.S. from other countries and cultures is growing. "The infusion of multiculturalism in the theory and practice of counseling will be a long process requiring the understanding of "new rules." The imposition of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to counseling is no longer acceptable to clients from their diversity of social contexts" (Pedersen, 1996, p.xvi). As the population and diversity of international students in the U.S. increases rapidly, data shows that international students under-utilize campus support services (less

than 1/3 of the amount utilized by their U.S. peers) but face just as serious, if not more so, mental health needs due to the added stress of cultural transition (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores & Lucas, 2004).

Identifying the needs, desires, goals and challenges faced by international students will ultimately help community colleges to provide more ethically and culturally competent support services, resulting in campuses that have higher persistence rates, are more financially efficient, and more equitable. This understanding may also aid the field of mental health by further questioning the effectiveness of counseling those from other countries by using Western ideological norms. This may, in turn, inform new or further developing counseling theories and perhaps ultimately create suggestions for training future counselors on how to meet these needs. As general attention to multicultural issues falls short in preparing student services personnel and counselors to work effectively with international students, colleges run the risk of imposing ethnocentric biases into their work with this population (Arthur, 1997; Arthur, 2004, p.9; Jacob & Greggo, 2001).

In light of the growing number of students coming to the United States from various nations in order to receive an American education via community college, it is imperative that student support services grow and adapt to fit the needs of international student populations. In today's international climate, specific questions regarding the perceptions and experiences of non-American groups as they study within institutions of higher education in the U.S must be considered. This manuscript aims to inform student services professionals within American associate's institutions of the unique needs, experiences, and psychosocial process of acculturation of international students who

originate from non-Western cultures. Further, this manuscript will offer suggestions for future research in the field of international student success, while providing professional implications and considerations regarding service to these populations. Questions such as “How do international students experience transition into life in the United States?” and “What challenges and barriers do international students face when they study in the U.S.?” and “How do international students experience transition to the U.S. via the American community college?” and “What allows for an easier/more seamless transition process for some international students during their transition process?” and “How effectively are support services utilized by international students during their transition process?” drive the inquiry of this manuscript.

### **Purpose and Methods**

The purpose of this article is to examine and characterize themes in literature regarding the acculturation and transition process of international students on American community college campuses. Specifically, this review seeks to answer the central question: “What is the experience of international students in the community college system as they transition to life in the U.S.?” Through a search of the Educator’s Reference, ERIC, PyschArticles, and PsychInfo databases under the topic headings of “international student transition,” “international student acculturation,” “international student higher education,” “international student community colleges,” “international student success,” “international student experience,” “international student counseling,” “international student mental health,” and “international student support,” this article overviews the acculturation process that international students experience as they transition from life in their home country to life in the U.S. One-hundred and five articles



were identified and categorized under the central theme of factors affecting the international student experience. Occasionally, articles outside of this theme are discussed to provide supportive background information. Whenever possible, peer-reviewed articles and those published within the past 15 years were chosen. Articles first chosen for review discuss the transition process of international students in the United States within institutions of higher education. However, due to a lack of specific research in this area, some research originating in Australia and Canada (in light of their predominantly Western culture) was added. In addition to these parameters, only articles involving international student subjects from non-Western countries were reviewed.

Further, this literature review includes research on international students' perceived and experienced effectiveness of services provided to college/university students with the hope of aiding in the creation of future student development and counseling practices that uniquely suit this vulnerable population. More specifically, this research seeks to inform community college counselors and administrators about the specifics of the transition process experienced by international students. Further, additional suggested areas for future research will be made explicit.

### **Factors Affecting the International Student Experience**

Under this central theme, five major subthemes of this literature review have been identified that encompass the international student transition experience when studying in the United States. However, most of this literature has accumulated through research conducted within four-year institutions. Very little information exists specific to the international student experiences within American community colleges, and the literature that was found focuses mainly on international student recruitment and is not empirically

based. Thus, the following highlighted themes have emerged through a body of literature based within the four-year university or graduate context, one that has similarities to and differences from the community college.

International students face numerous unique challenges upon their arrival to American institutions of higher education. Immediately, these students must contend with layers of cross-cultural understanding, communication, the formation of social support, and the maintenance of personal health and well-being in a new country that may be very different than their own. These factors have been narrowed into five total themes and include: (1) adjustment issues, (2) in-group differences, (3) cultural distance, (4) coping and well-being, and (5) social support system. The following includes a discussion of each of these themes as they pertain to the central research question.

### **Adjustment Issues**

Extensive research exists on the adjustment problems faced by international students. Oftentimes, the literature refers to adjustment as acculturation. Acculturation is a widely used term across the social sciences when working with individuals who “traverse cultures” (Yoon et al., 2013). In the context of counseling psychology, Yoon et al. (2013) define acculturation as a bilinear and multidimensional process of cultural socialization into mainstream culture, whereas enculturation is defined as the retention of one’s own culture of origin (Yoon et al., 2013). Not until recently has such a bilinear understanding of these constructs existed—in the past, acculturation was viewed “unidirectionally,” where an individual acquires mainstream cultural competence and grows distant from her/his culture of origin (Yoon et al., 2013). Now, the term adjustment tends to refer to an active process of managing stress that leads to various

degrees of change, both personality change and situational change (Zhou et al, 2008).

Three major areas of adjustment issues have been identified in various forms across the literature, including: (a) academic adjustment; (b) socio-cultural adjustment; and (c) personal psychological adjustment (Abrahao, 2011; de Araujo, 2011; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay et al, 2002; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin & Yi, 1997; Liu, 2009; Michailidis, 2006; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Redmond, 2000; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Yang & Clum, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Young, 2005; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). When seeking to understand the transition experiences and stressors affecting international students, counselors must consider such consistent factors and concerns.

**Academic adjustment.** Academic adjustments faced by international students include English language proficiency, understanding of the U.S. education system, and use of successful learning strategies. International students who are not fluent in English encounter unique challenges such as extra time needed to read assigned readings, difficulty understanding class lectures and discussions, and problems with communicating concerns and viewpoints (Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Misra & Castillo, 2004). International students also bring with them an understanding of learning strategies that may have worked well in their home country but do not fully align with the teaching and pedagogy of the U.S. (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Pedersen (1991) posits that the language barrier between international students and English speaking peers can create barriers that impede the building of interpersonal relationships. Similarly, the inability to converse confidently in the host language can

deter students from becoming socially involved in the overall host culture (Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007). De Araujo (2011) identified 12 studies within which English language proficiency directly correlated to the level of acculturative stress faced by international students. Not only were students' academic performance affected by English language competence, but a lack of confidence in English language skills has been shown to cause increased depression, anxiety, social isolation and homesickness (de Araujo, 2011). Dao, Lee and Chang (2007) conducted a study on the links between perceived English ability and depression in Taiwanese international students studying in the U.S. and found that the more international students avoid social interactions, the less their social and language skills develop. "As a result, a negative cycle occurs in which a negative perception of English fluency continues to be reinforced. Overtime, these negative perceptions may lead to chronic somatic problems that have no clear organic basis." (Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007).

In addition to language difficulties, international students from Asian countries may face more extreme familial pressures on academic achievement, contributing to greater fear of academic failure than non-Asian students (Liu, 2009; Sue & Sue, 1990). By studying more hours per week on average than their cohorts, foreign-born Chinese students have been found to experience greater anxiety, loneliness, isolation and difficulties with social interaction (Liu, 2009). Finally, international students face added logistical challenges such as differences in housing, food, transportation, and health care systems (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

**Socio-cultural adjustment.** Socio-cultural adjustments include experiences with culture shock, culture fatigue, racial discrimination, and differences in social/cultural

norms. In crossing over to another culture, international students automatically face differences in social and cultural communication. Historically, Western models of culture shock and culture fatigue portrayed a more negative and prescriptive process through which international sojourners experience the transition process from one culture to another and the toll this process can take on one's well-being (Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980; Berry, 1985; Berry 1997; Berry, 2001; Golden, 1973; Winkelman, 1994). Szapocznik, Kurtines & Fernandez (1980) argued that acculturation was "a unidimensional construct, in which an individual adopts aspects of the dominant culture at the expense of the native one" predicting that those less acculturated students experience more psychological distress (Rahman & Rollock, 2004, p.131). Sue, Mak, and Sue (1998) described a process where those moving to a new country adopt the practices of the host culture and in doing so, slowly lose the customs of their original culture (Yang et al, 2002).

Such past models placed more responsibility on international students to "assimilate" into American culture, often ignoring the positive qualities of resilience and persistence so frequently displayed by international students when facing discrimination and prejudice. Racial discrimination and stereotyping can add to the fatigue that international students face when living in the United States. Various quantitative and qualitative studies conducted during the past ten years have examined international students' perceptions of such discrimination and prejudice, and the impact of these negative experiences have on their ability to adjust within the American higher education system (Abraham, 2011; Young, 2005). More recent theoretical models argue a developmental stage process in which the international student first accepts the majority

posture, then is rejected by and rejects that posture, and finally discovers true self-identity (Yang et al, 2002).

In coping with each of these issues, social support has emerged as a key ingredient in moving from acculturation to enculturation (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). However, as noted above, international students face added barriers toward seeking out and receiving this support. One study by Misra, Cris and Burant (2003) found that low-levels of social support corresponded with higher levels of academic stress, while other studies found a significant connection between emotional-social support and acculturative stress. In these studies, “social support” included fellow international students from the same home country, host families, family and friends at home, tele-support and virtual support (via email and internet social networks) (de Araujo, 2011).

In comparison to their home countries, Asian students in particular encounter more contradictory values and customs, such as cooperation versus competition, collectivism versus individualism, and hierarchical relationships versus equality of relationships (Lee, Koeski, & Sales, 2004; Liu, 2009; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Sue & Sue, 1990). For example, Western cultures that value independence and individualism may relate to aphorisms such as “pick yourself up by your own bootstraps” or “take the bull by the horns,” whereas a stressed Chinese individual may take comfort in “sharing a common destiny” or “brotherhood in adversity” (Kuo et al, 2006, p.161). These variances in values and coping strategies can make it more difficult for international students from Asia to establish critical relationships with Americans and to connect with American support systems, which have been found to facilitate healthy personal adjustment (Abrahao, 2011; Kashima & Loh, 2006).

**Personal-psychological adjustment.** The personal psychological adjustments faced by international students include homesickness, loss of identity, loneliness, depression, and isolation. Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) discuss family expectations and loss of identity, stating that these issues take a unique toll on international student well-being. International students are found to be more reluctant to discuss psychological issues with others than their U.S. cohorts, further compounding these issues (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004). Additionally, research has found correlations between homesickness and level of discrimination faced by international students, homesickness and number of credit hours completed by international students, and homesickness and international students' length of stay in the United States (Abraham, 2011).

Within the literature focusing on international student adjustment, three major areas of adjustment emerged; academic, socio-cultural, and personal-psychological. This information provides strong insight into the issues and struggles that international students may face during their transition to life and higher education in the United States. However, most of this information was gathered within the university setting and does not speak directly to the unique experiences and challenges faced by international students studying within community colleges.

### **In-Group Differences**

A variety of quantitative research exists suggesting that within-group differences among international students should be taken into account when discussing their needs (Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007). However, a clear consensus on which groups experience the most acculturative stress remains to be found, pointing instead for a need to understand within-group differences rather than across-culture differences in

successful transition. For example, one study by Wilton and Constantine (2003) found that Latin American international students reported significantly higher levels of psychological distress than Asian international students, while another study by Tomich, McWhirter, and Darcy (2003) found that European international students show less “adaptation strain” than Asian international students (Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007, p.118). In a quantitative study comparing U.S. and international student usage of counseling centers and self-reported psychological concerns, Mitchell, Greenwood, and Guglielmi (2007) found that both sets of participants tended to have the same diagnosis (depression and anxiety) when visiting the counseling center (p.126). However, the same study found that the top concern reported by international students was “academic problems” (p.127). Thus, the authors suggested that future support programs address international student success and academic achievement issues within the context of adjustment (p.127). These findings show an emphasis on academic success within the international student experience, or at least a higher tendency to report those concerns over traditional/Western mental health concerns. Although the issue of in-group difference may be an important factor when seeking to understand the overall international student experience, more information is needed regarding the specific in-group differences and the effects of such on international students within the community college. In-group differences and the implications of such likely exist for students studying with the community college, as well.

### **Cultural Distance**

Recent theoretical research shows that a major factor affecting international students’ experience and understanding of their new host culture is the concept of



“cultural distance” (Redmond, 2000; Zhou, 2008). Cultural distance refers to Hofstede’s four dimensions of cultural variability: power, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity, and individualism (Redmond, 2000). On a spectrum, some cultures can be extremely “distant” from one another on these four variables, causing an increased chance for misunderstanding, culture shock, miscommunication, and disappointment. For example, a cross-cultural study revealed strong differences between how Japanese students and American students determined emotions behind non-verbal cues given on photographs of human expressions, indicating that reactions both to and within mental health counseling between a Western counselor and a Japanese client, or visa versa, could be misinterpreted (Sakamoto, 2006; Sweeney et al, 1980). Such differing communication styles may hinder international students’ ability to connect with their American peers, causing feelings of social isolation, which may in turn lead to depression (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004).

Wondering if a student’s level of acculturation or adjustment would impact an international student’s willingness to seek mental health counseling, Atkinson and Gim (1989) conducted a quantitative study of 557 Asian-American students (263 Chinese Americans, 185 Japanese Americans and 109 Korean Americans). They hypothesized that Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-American university students who still strongly identified with their culture of origin would have relatedly negative attitudes toward mental health services. Their hypothesis further posited that those who were more acculturated would have relatedly positive attitudes toward mental health services. In using the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale and the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale, the authors connected willingness to seek

psychological support to being "more acculturated" (Atkinson & Gim, 1989, p.209).

However, this research is problematic on two levels: 1) it frames itself as literature on acculturation, while the subjects in the study were American born citizens (and not international), and 2) the study claims that those who are more "acculturated" are more likely to seek counseling help, yet the study does not operationalize the meaning of "acculturated" as it pertains to those already from the United States. Furthermore, this study was conducted in 1989, and is more than 20 years old.

Finally, various studies show that the length of time spent living in the United States/a Western culture can predict the level of cultural distance and thus the adherence to one's home country values. Essentially, the more time spent living away from home, the less strictly international students maintain the values of their country of origin (Shim & Schwartz, 2007). In turn, the cultural adjustment process is found to be most difficult for international students whose culture is highly discordant with the host culture, who have spent less time living abroad, and who more closely adhere to their home country value systems (Shim & Schwartz, 2007). Additional difficulty is found when international students attempt to balance expectations and discrepancies between two social systems, causing them to feel extra pressure to choose one set of norms (Yeh et al, 2005). Yeh et al (2005) conducted a qualitative study of the "cultural negotiations" of 13 Korean immigrant youths, finding difficulty within this population in balancing differences between Korean cultural expectations and American cultural expectations, in particular in regards to family pressure, gender roles, and discrimination.

Likewise, a discrepancy in "world view" has been shown to impact international students' understanding and use of campus support services. Al-Darmaki and Kivlighan

(1993) argue that an important aspect of this congruence in world view is the degree of agreement in client-counselor expectations about counseling. With this, international students from countries where college and university support systems differ greatly from those found within the United States have a low-level awareness and usage of such services. In many Asian cultures, stigma may be attached to utilizing mental health services, and/or a clash may exist between their cultural values and those found within the Western counseling styles of the United States (Mallinckrodt, Shigeoka & Suzuki, 2005; Young, 2005). Byon, Chan, and Thomas (1999) performed a quantitative study with 136 Korean international students, administering the Expectations About Counseling-Brief Form, finding that these students have low expectations in terms of their motivation to seek counseling. Students expected counseling to operate more like a classroom learning environment where they could present, ask questions about, and work on assignments to solve their problems. Similarly, Yuen and Tinsley (1981) found that Chinese students had lower expectations than American students in behaving in a motivated manner in counseling. In another study, Asian students were found to expect the counselor to play a more authoritative and directive role, providing clear-cut solutions to problems (Young, 2005).

With such examples in mind, it is easy to see how even though research indicates that international students face greater stress and more psychological problems than their American peers (Arthur, 2004; Mori, 2000), it is also found that international students are more likely to approach friends, family and even professors first, then mental health/student services professionals when seeking personal help regarding adjustment issues (Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011). Thus, while support staff may play a

potentially critical role in reaching out to international students when stressed or homesick, a gap exists in understanding and identifying avenues through which international students may better gain support (Olivas & Li, 2006).

Cultural differences in problem solving were also identified in the theoretical literature as a barrier faced by international students when they consider counseling. Hayes and Lin (1994) suggested that international students' lack of awareness regarding the purpose and functions of counseling keeps them from accessing and continuing to utilize counseling services, while Arthur (2004) suggested that the impact of Western values within the counseling structure (i.e. time management) and differences in cultural norms for problem-solving and help-seeking are prohibitive factors in international student utilization of counseling. Unfortunately, specific student-driven definitions of such values were not described. Mori (2000), D'Rozario and Romano (2000), and Zhang (1998) all suggest that general differences in communication style, for example direct versus indirect and formal versus informal, may cause underutilization. Understanding that such a variety of experiences and expectations exist across cultures is critical for anyone working with today's college students. When thinking about the experience of international students, "counselors must be aware that, for many Asian students, pleasing the parents requires adherence to parental expectations, a departure from the notion that during college students should survey an array of fields to find the best fit based on individual intellectual facilities, interests, and intrinsic motivation" (p.151).

In general, cultural distance appears to be a significant issue when it comes to the transition experiences of international students in higher education. Depending on how

closely an international student relates to or understands the adopted cultural components of the United States, he/she may have an easier or more difficult time accessing and adjusting to academic and social systems. Specifically, cultural distance may affect if and how students access and utilize support services on campus. However, literature addressing the implications of cultural distance on international students in higher education is primarily based upon research conducted within four-year universities and not within community colleges or their distinctive systems. It is clear that more information is needed to better inform community college counselors and administrators of these issues and to develop best practices for helping students with these difficulties.

### **Coping and Well-being**

Although areas of adjustment difficulty have been researched, there is a considerable lack of focus on the positive ways in which students experience their studies abroad. More recently, researchers have called for future analysis to shift from “problem focus to strengths focus” and look at international students’ strengths, coping resources, and student experiences of positive adaptation (Arthur, 2004, p.124). Specifically, Pedersen (2007) asked that future research identify what counseling roles and activities highlight the positive adaptation of international students and how these activities might enhance services for all students. Likewise, Moores and Popadiuk (2011) asked that future research speak from the international student’s perspective, looking at the enculturation process as a positive learning experience faced by all who move from one culture to another. However, in order to understand such learning experiences of international students, researchers must first recognize how international students define and experience “well-being.”

Identifying this need, Tseng and Newton (2002) conducted a grounded theory study aimed at exploring international students' definition of well-being in order to discern their strategies for enhancing their well-being when studying abroad. They found that international students surveyed defined "well-being" as "physical health, happiness, joy and pleasure; harmony of the body, mind and soul; feelings of security; sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, or achievement; and feeling as if their life is meaningful" (p.593). Specifically, this research found that the following coping strategies were used in achieving overall well-being: "1) knowing self and others, 2) making friends, 3) expanding worldview, 4) asking for help with problems, 5) establishing socio/cultural contacts, 6) building relationships with faculty and staff, 7) building English proficiency, and 8) letting go" (p. 595-596). This is one of very few qualitative studies used to describe and understand the experiences of international students. Likewise, additional implications may be found when studying the coping and well-being skills of international students studying in community colleges.

### **Social Support**

The key role that social support plays in international student acculturation is clear throughout existing research. Specifically, Zhou et al (2008) found that international students have three primary social groups: "the 'home group' (primary network in home country, maintaining culture and values at a distance), the 'host group' (peers, teachers, counselors in host culture teaching students culturally relevant skills and academic success skills), and the 'other foreign students' group (providing social support and recreation)" (p.70). Further, this research finds that more interaction with host nationals leads to fewer academic problems, "fewer social problems/difficulties,

improved communication skills, better adaptation, lower stress level, and better psychological adjustment of international students, thus contributing to the enhancement of psychological well-being” (p.71). However, communication between all of these groups can vary across specific cultures and more research is needed to see how styles of communication from host nationals may hinder or advance academic success.

Recent quantitative research by Sumer, Poyrazli and Grahame (2008) found social support to have a significant impact on depression levels of international students. The National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide (2011) states that international students have higher rates of suicide ideation. Wei et al (2008) cited numerous quantitative studies where Chinese students and Taiwanese students’ rates of depression were positively associated with acculturative stress and perfectionism. Research in the area of Social Identification Theory further suggests that social comparison is directly connected to self-esteem and thus looks at both the person and the situation from a social-psychological framework (Zhou et al, 2008). However, existing research shows that most international students seek counseling in order to improve academics (Arthur, 2004) and not personal mental health issues such as depression or anxiety (Byon, Chan, & Thomas, 1999). Leong & Sedlacek (1986) found that this is likely due to international students’ desire to keep social issues separate from academics. More over, recently Arthur (2004) found that international students have a desire to utilize counseling services in order to improve social and networking skills.

Although a lack of research exists on the specific activities that would allow and promote such social and networking skills to develop, many studies have documented the underutilization of campus support services by “individuals from minority cultures”

(Atkinson & Gim, 1988; Brinson & Kottler, 1995b; Byon, Chan & Thomas, 1999; Cheng, Leong & Geist, 1993; Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Hall & Tucker, 1985;; Kim, 1993; Meyer, 1998; Komiya & Eells, 2001; Hyun, Quinn, Madon & Lustig, 2007; Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007; Pedersen, 1991; Russell, Thomson & Rosenthal, 2008; Yakushko, Davidson & Sanford-Martens, 2008; Scheel et al, 2009; Yakunina & Weigold, 2011; Yi, Giseala & Kishimoto, 2003; Young, 2005). A majority of these studies found that international students' usage of university counseling and support services is less consistent than their U.S. peers (Scheel et al, 2008, p.34). For example, Harju, Long, and Allred (1998) found that only 14% of the 107 international students who completed a healthcare survey reported using some type of counseling. In a quantitative study looking at international student usage of a university counseling center in Australia, Russell, Thomson and Rosenthal (2008) found that 65% of international students chose not to use counseling services because they "felt their problem was not important enough," while 30% chose not to seek help because of "cultural discomfort with counseling" (p.68-69). Boyer and Sedlacek (1989) found similar numbers with only 8% of 230 international students reporting the use of counseling center services (Scheel et al, 2008, p.35). In contrast, nearly 1/3 of American students utilize counseling services at the university level (Sieben, 2014). Further evidence supports that international students are more likely than domestic students to drop out of counseling after a single session (Anderson & Myer, 1985; Yoon & Portman, 2004).

Once again, existing literature highlights the importance of social support in the transition process of international students on the university campus, yet does not specifically address the needs of community college students. Community colleges



maintain a large number of part-time students and do not usually provide on-campus housing or residence life services. Also, given the shorter length of time that students are usually enrolled in community colleges and the “commuter” mentality of most American community college students, international students may find developing and maintaining social support on campus even more difficult. More information is needed to understand the unique needs and experiences of this population.

### **Discussion**

There are numerous strengths within the existing body of literature. A large number of studies have been conducted over the past 35 years on international student acculturation, culture shock, and adjustment issues, indicating a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of the general topic. Throughout the literature, factors have been identified that affect the experiences of international students. Among these factors, adjustment issues, in-group differences, cultural distance, coping and well-being, and social support stand out as main themes.

Adjustment issues are well documented and can be understood in three categories: academic, socio-cultural, and personal psychological. Many quantitative and mixed method designs conducted within university and graduate settings show the effect of real-life adjustment issues on international students (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Boyer & Sedlacek, 1989; Byon, Chan & Thomas, 1999; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Gelso & Carter, 1985; Komiya & Eels, 2001; Leong & Sedlacek, 1986; Li, Wong, & Toth, 2013; Misra, Cris, Burant, 2003; Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007; Sakamoto, 2006; Sumer, Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008; Sweeney et al, 1980; Tomich, McWirtter, & Darcy, 2003; Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Young, 2005; Yuen & Tinsley, 1981; Zhou, Frey & Bang,

2011). Both primary and secondary articles exist on this topic and correlational designs have substantiated relationships useful for future research (Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980; 1985; 1997; 2001; Chalungsooth & Schneller, 2011; De Araujo, 2011; Ozturgut & Murphy, 2009; Popadink & Arthur, 2004; Redmond, 2000; Scheel et al, 2008; Shim & Schwartz, 2007; Wei et al, 2008; Winkelman, 1994; Yang et al, 2002; Zhou et al, 2008). Most of these studies include international students from Asia, the region from which the largest number of recent international students coming to study in the United States originates. These strengths highlight international adjustment as an important topic and may aid in student services personnel and counselors' abilities to develop trainings and best practices around issues faced by international students. Existing articles have also been helpful in suggesting the need for more qualitative and strengths based studies, helping to aim the direction of future research.

However, more information is needed in order to understand how international students define successful transition/adjustment into their lives in the U.S. The majority of theoretical research defining the international student adjustment/culture shock process is out of date and various cultures of origin are combined within most of the literature. Such outdated theories do not take into account the rapid globalization and drastic economic changes that have occurred within the last 10 years. In utilizing outdated theories when working with this population, student services personnel and counselors risk labeling international students with inaccurate stereotypes that further compromises the services available to these students. Specifically, more research is needed in order to identify how certain international students experience transition specific to the community college environment. For instance, community college international students

may face adjustment issues at a younger age than four-year or graduate students, therefore possibly facing more extreme stress in the first year.

In-group differences have also become a clear factor affecting international student experiences. Research findings at the university level confirm that international students face a variety of mental health issues that may be different from those of their U.S. cohorts. Likewise, various studies exist that show more adjustment difficulty for international students from certain global regions over others. It is clear that international students face issues unique to their population and different from their peers (Cho, 2003; Constantine, Okazaki & Utsey, 2004; Poyrazli et al, 2004). Unfortunately, most of the literature reviewed groups “Western higher education” into one category and combines studies of international experiences across cultures and regions. More research is needed that looks at specific groups and sub-groups. Also, many of the studies reviewing the international student transition experience were conducted in countries outside of the U.S., such as Australia and Canada and students from Asia were studied as a whole, if not intermixed within a global representation of Eastern and Western cultures. This is problematic because Eastern and Western cultures are shown to adapt to life in the United States (a Western dominant culture) at entirely differing rates with diverse experiences. While it is clear that cultural dynamics play a key role in working with international students in general, a lack of clarity exists on specific interventions/programs through which community college counselors and student services personnel can create/utilize to better support the international student transition process on their campuses, tailoring to the unique needs of specific populations.

Cultural distance has been highlighted throughout numerous studies comparing

Western cultural norms to Eastern cultural norms and the effect that these values may have on the application and use of systemic support services. College personnel in the United States may not have been provided the necessary training to best understand and support the needs of international students. Numerous studies point out both the risk factors of international students and their underutilization of college counseling services. This indicates a problem with support personnel understanding the needs of this population as well as possible issues in equity and access of such support services.

Coping, well-being and social support all clearly impact a student's ability to seek help. The fact that certain students cope with adjustment and facilitate personal well-being, while others may struggle to do so, is an issue that has been highlighted within the literature. International students clearly benefit from the development of social support and there are academic implications related to this issue. Students who build support networks increase their confidence and language skills, allowing them to better perform in the American classroom (Zhou et al, 2008). A need to better understand the positive coping skills developed by international students as they study abroad has been a focus of more recent implications within the literature. However, the skills that may contribute to the successful transition of international students remain to be identified.

Although a large number of international students enter the United States' system of higher education through community college, not one study was found which focused solely on the experiences of international students in the community college setting. The community college system and environment is distinct from the four-year university setting and ironically, most community colleges struggle to build community due to the lack of social outlets and campus life. As more and more international students choose to

save on the cost of tuition, seek out smaller class sizes, and begin their journey to a Bachelor's Degree through community colleges, it is imperative to understand what unique needs and services exist within these schools. Such specific needs affect international student transition experiences within community colleges in a unique way, thus impacting their academic, social, and emotional well-being, as well as their ability to persist to graduation. In order to remedy these weaknesses and gaps in literature, research is needed that studies international student experiences within the community college environment. Specifically, research that looks at the unique needs of individual groups and sub-groups would help student services personnel to better understand how certain groups may be more at-risk or may benefit from particular interventions more than others. Numerous studies point out the general lack of qualitative research and ask for future research to utilize qualitative methodology. Further, research that looks at how individual groups define "successful transition experiences" will remove some of the guesswork currently that exists when discerning what hurdles international students face and how to better resolve these issues. This in turn, will aid in the ability of educators to better train themselves and serve this population.

### **Implications for Community College Practice, Training, and Research**

Some practical suggestions and implications for student services personnel, including counselors and administrators, are apparent within the research. First, those on college and university campuses who provide direct services to international students should understand the many variables that can affect the transition and adjustment process. Developing awareness of these variables and creating services and interventions directly aimed toward supporting international students in the areas of general living

adjustment, English language confidence, the development of social support, and academic support is critical (Abraham, 2011; de Araujo, 2011; Chavajay & Skowronek, 2008; Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Frey & Roysircar, 2006; Hechanova-Alampay et al, 2002; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin & Yi, 1997; Liu, 2009; Michailidis, 2006; Misra, Crist & Burant, 2003; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Redmond, 2000; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Yang & Clum, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Yoon & Portman, 2004; Young, 2005; Zhou, Frey & Bang, 2011). Further, student services personnel should understand the unique social, familial and psychological pressures that international students face as they move abroad. As the research suggests that international students seek help when they recognize professionals who provide culturally competent services, staff/faculty/administrators who understand the transition process could come together to educate/provide trainings for campus employees who many not have as strong an understanding (Byon, Chan, and Thomas, 1999; Mori, 2000; Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Zhang, 1998). The research also confirms that most international students prefer directive, goal-oriented support services and seek counseling that also serves their academic needs. As such, counselors should make an effort to learn about and utilize directive treatment modalities as well as emphasize the positive impact that counseling support can have on academic achievement when marketing services to this population (Arthur, 2004).

Specifically, campus personnel should be aware of the transition issues that international students face and help to support these potential hurdles. Recommendations include providing orientation courses that help students to adjust to American academic culture and classroom expectations and providing formal opportunities for casual English

conversation practice. Possible social interventions include providing on-campus housing, building social and cultural components into an orientation course, providing more opportunities for social interaction between international students and domestic students, and creating opportunities for international students to get to know their instructors in a more casual capacity, such as welcome parties for new students and encouragement of the use of office hours. Psychological interventions that may be more effective include working with international students in groups, meeting students in more academic environments (such as holding group meetings in the classroom rather than in a counseling center), proactively reaching out to students to ascertain how they are doing, and helping students to work through personal issues within the context of academic support. Finally, providing faculty, staff, and administrators with additional cultural training that pertains to international student transition issues may aid in creating a deeper level of understanding of their unique needs and experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Due to the growing number of international students entering the United States through community colleges, research is needed that directly speaks to the experiences and issues faced by this population, as they may differ from those previously defined. Pedersen (1991) posited that "the lack of grounded theory has been a major factor inhibiting research about international students" (p. 14). Due to the lack of research on this topic at the community college level, future studies should focus on how international students define the successful transition within the community college as a unique academic and social environment. Resulting information should guide the aims of these departments when working with this population.

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### **Chapter 3**

Adjusting to the United States:  
An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students'  
Successful Transition via American Community Colleges

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### **Abstract**

This manuscript describes a grounded theory study of the successful transition experiences of South Korean international students who are currently studying or have recently studied within American community colleges. International students studying within community colleges face unique socio-cultural stressors during the transition process that impact their ability to succeed in school. Students from South Korea comprise the largest population of international students attending American community colleges and current literature reveals higher psychological risk behaviors of depression and suicidality within the South Korean college student population. This population was found to be ideal in seeking to study the unique needs and experiences of international students within the American community college system. The central research question guiding this study was: “What is the experience of South Korean students as they successfully transition into life as an American community college student?” Within this study, 10 South Korean students who are or have recently studied within an American community college and who identify themselves as having been “successful” in their transition process were interviewed. Grounded theory analysis revealed central categories linking *refection* and *action* within a developmental process of four stages leading to successful transition.

## **Introduction**

Every year, an increasing number of international students choose to study in the United States in order to complete their higher-education degrees (Mitchell, Greenwood & Guglielmi, 2007). A large number of these students begin their path to a Bachelor's Degree in the community college system (Institute of International Education, 2012). The Institute of International Education (IIE) confirms that the vast majority of these students come from countries in East Asia (IIE, 2012). In light of these trends, counselors and administrators in higher-education, specifically those who work in American community colleges, have a responsibility to understand these populations and their experiences in order to provide effective and comprehensive services.

In East Asia, a large number of socio-cultural expectations are placed upon college students, creating pressures and challenges unique to their backgrounds and experiences (Dao, Lee & Chang, 2007; Lin & Yi, 1997; Redmond, 2000; Tseng & Newton, 2002; Yoon & Portman, 2004). As distinct cultural groups deal with adjustment, acculturation, and stress in a variety of ways and as those working within U.S. institutions of higher education have been trained within Western cultural norms, faculty and staff are oftentimes unaware of the unique needs of this student population. Although numerous studies have been conducted on the concept and issues of cultural adjustment faced by international students at the university and graduate levels, a lack of research exists on the specific experiences of international students studying at the community college level. Additionally, most studies conducted within four-year institutions combine cultures of origin within their studies. As such, student development professionals in American institutions of higher education, both at university and

community college levels, may not have an accurate picture of the adjustment and transitional challenges that international students from East Asian countries face, nor is it understood how some may adapt more successfully than others. Thus, a need exists to look more deeply at the experiences of students who feel as though they have “successfully transitioned” into life in the United States, students who originate from a specific country/culture of origin, and those who enter the American education system via the community college. Such research may provide insights that allow student service providers to better understand what “works” for these students in order to build more comprehensive support.

Research confirms that international students face a variety of mental health issues that are different from those of their U.S. cohorts (Pedersen, 1991; 2008). As international students may view the transition process differently than someone born and raised in the United States, it is important to look more deeply at the transition process of those who have moved to the U.S. as experienced by the students themselves. Implications for the fields of counseling and student development exist as the demand for providing culturally sensitive counseling and support services to those coming to study in the U.S. from other countries/cultures increases.

Currently, the majority of research found on the international student transition process either includes or is limited to students from Asian countries. This research indicates that Asian cultures may be less inclined to seek professional help and are more likely to use maladaptive coping strategies such as repression, avoidance and other passive coping strategies (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Mori (2000) and Zhang (1998) suggest that general differences in communication style between Eastern and Western

cultures, for example direct versus indirect and formal versus informal, may cause international students from Asia to underutilize support services.

According to the Institute of International Education in their most recent NAFSA Report on community college enrollment published in 2009, South Korea ranked number one in “Top Places of Origin” with 8,399 students studying in American community colleges (Bhandari & Chow, 2009). Most research conducted with this population has utilized methods where various East Asian cultures were studied together. Existing literature that looks primarily at South Korean international students states that students coming from South Korean cultural backgrounds may acculturate to Western society differently than persons emigrating from other Asian cultures (Shim & Schwatz, 2007). In Korean society and education systems, relationships are vertically structured and patrilineal, reflecting Confucian values (Millar, 2011, p.11). Strong emphasis is placed on the family, and due to Korean parental expectations of academic achievement, children are taught to strictly adhere to familial duties, obedience and honor in the context of their educational goals (Millar, 2011; Yeh et al, 2005). The bond between teacher and student is seen as “essential and parental in nature” (Yeh et al, 2005, p.11). English language studies in South Korea are focused primarily on reading and grammar, not on the building of conversation skills (Yeh et al, 2005). Such emphasis may be especially problematic in the transition of Korean students to English speaking countries such as the United States, as “poor English language ability negatively impacts a students’ ability to communicate, complicating the formation of essential relationships with peers and teachers” (Yeh et al, 2005, p.17).

Another example of how Korean culture can vary from other Asian cultures is found in how Koreans may experience shame. Saarni (1998) discussed a distinction of those experiencing shame within collectivistic cultures, such as Korea, stating that “in societies characterized by highly texturized social relatedness, shame may well not be so aversive to the solitary self, but is aversive when it casts a shadow on one’s other relationships” (p.648). Collective behavior may also make individuals more reluctant in seeking or accepting assistance from outside sources, further complicating successful implementation of interventions (Shubert et al, 2007).

Existing literature on South Korean student self-efficacy and academic achievement is limited. Only one study was found that reviewed the “internal variables affecting Korean community college students’ academic achievement” and this study took place within the Korean community college system (Joo et al, 2011). However, this study is helpful in that it surveyed 352 Korean community college students and identified that self-efficacy, intrinsic value, and flow should be considered in order to design effective instructional strategies for improving academic achievement. “Self-efficacy” was identified using Bandura’s theory (1977) as an individuals’ “judgment of his/her capabilities to perform actions successfully in order to obtain desired results” (Joo et al, 2011, p.262). “Intrinsic value” referred to “the individuals’ belief in the utility, importance and interest of tasks that justify why they study” (p.263). Finally, “flow” is defined using the concept developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1990) “where learners feel pleasure and success in their learning activity” (p.264).

Some literature exists on the current status of attitudes toward counseling in South Korea. This research shows the introduction of the Western model of counseling by

American education delegates in the 1950's (Han & Heo, 2008). Since this time, Korean counseling psychology has evolved and grown and "the public's demand for mental health services has increased and diversified" (p.58). More recent research shows that Korean students' experiences with depression and help-seeking behavior vary greatly compared to their American cohorts. In a quantitative study conducted by Yoo and Skovolt (2001), 88 American undergraduate university students and 95 undergraduate Korean students studying in an American university were given various assessments to better understand and compare their mental health needs and help-seeking behaviors. The study found that Korean students had more negative effects in regards to depression and anxiety, expressed their somatic symptoms more than American students, and held significantly less positive attitudes toward seeking professional help than American students (Yoo & Skovolt, 2001).

A quantitative study performed by Byon, Chan, & Thomas (1999) with 136 Korean students found that Korean international students have low expectations in terms of their motivation to seek counseling: only 3.3% of students had visited the counseling center (mainly for help with academic problems) and 29.4% of South Korean international students believed that counseling should only be used for "serious problems" (p.104). These students expected counseling to operate more like a classroom learning environment where they could "present, ask questions about, and work on assignments to solve their problems" (p.104). In each of the above studies, a clear difference is evident in the experiences and expectations of Korean students seeking support when studying in American colleges and universities.

A specific need exists to examine the experience of students who study in the

community college system. A growing number of international students attend community colleges in the United States before transferring to Bachelor's Degree programs or graduate school (IIE, 2012). Approximately 87,000 international students are currently studying in the United States seeking Associate Degrees (IIE, 2012). However, most research on the international students has been conducted within the university setting, where the environment and support systems significantly differ from the community college environment. For example, most community colleges do not have dormitories and as such, there is an entirely different social support network on campus. Due to underfunding, the decreasing number of on-campus mental health counselors, and lack of campus health centers, when community college students experience physical or emotional distress, most students are forced to seek help off campus if they can afford it and know where to go.

Research has shown that a range of stressors, such as culture, discrimination, adjustment to unfamiliar cultural norms, values and customs, communication/language difficulties, isolation, and loss of established social network negatively impact the learning and well-being of international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Most of the research in this area employs quantitative methods and a large number of these studies include international students from Asia, the region from which the largest number of recent international students coming to study in the United States originates. Although the current body of literature may aid in counselors' ability to develop trainings and best practices around common stressors and adjustment issues faced by international students, a lack of research exists from the student perspective, which could aid in giving a more transparent voice to adjustment issues faced by today's international students.

Although helpful, quantitative procedures may be written and developed for use with limited cultures and may not be suitable for all international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Further, quantitative methods include predetermined assumptions, response areas and a limited range of pre-coded responses that may not capture the complexity and diversity of the international student experience (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). In addition, much of the theoretical research defining the international student adjustment and/or culture shock process is out of date, such as Adler (1975), Berry (1980), and Gelso & Carter (1985) (Arthur, 1997; Arthur, 2004; Fouad, 2001; Mori, 2000; Sue, 2008; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008). Similarly, this research does not capture the experience of social networking as a means of emotional support and connection to one's home country while living abroad (de Araujo, 2011; Kuo, Roysircar, & Newby-Clark, 2006; Lee, Koeske, & Sales, 2004). A need exists to hear directly from international students and to update old theories when working with this population. Without such research, counselors risk labeling international students with inaccurate stereotypes that further compromise the services available to these students.

A rare qualitative study that might inform those working with South Korean community college students was conducted in Australia (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011) and has increased the understanding of the challenges and coping strategies of international students. Specifically, this study found shared international student experiences of adjustment, social isolation, academic difficulties, unmet expectations and psychological distress. However, this study included men and women studying in Australia from all over the world and did not focus on one particular country or population. There is currently a lack of research in this area, begging the need to conduct a descriptive study;



one that will look carefully at the experiences of those who have identified their acculturation experiences as ‘successful’ in order to find out how students from more at-risk international student populations could be better supported by college mental health counselors and student service personnel. With this, changes and improvements to existing programs could be made in order for institutions of higher education to provide more culturally competent and equitable support services.

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to understand the experiences of international students from South Korea who are studying or have studied in a community college within the United States and have identified themselves as having successfully transitioned/adapted into life as a college student in the U.S. Better understanding of what constitutes a successful transition or adaptation process for international students will aid in the development of counseling practices and support services that uniquely suit the needs of this growing population. Such awareness of this process will ultimately help counselors and college personnel to provide more ethically and culturally competent services to students who have appeared statistically at-risk. Specifically, the main research question guiding this study is, “What is the experience of South Korean students as they successfully transition into life as an American community college student?”

### **Methodology**

In order to gain a more complete and detailed picture of the acculturation experience of international students studying within institutions of higher education in the United States, the primary researcher believed that the very people who have had this experience are best suited to provide a comprehensive understanding of it. This

qualitative research utilized the grounded theory approach, which is comprised of an analysis of qualitative data in order to construct a theory grounded in the perceptions and experiences of multiple participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of this study centers on understanding the process of international student transition. Grounded theory is well suited for this purpose due to its strength in creating understanding of processes. Individual interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. These codes were created due to their "relative salience" and eventually created more detailed meaning, which led to the final grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.67).

### **Participants and Setting**

Purposeful sampling, seeking to interview a sample population that is "representative of the population to which it is desired to generalize" ensured that participants were chosen carefully (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.200). This was conducted by sampling "typical cases" based on history of studying in American community colleges within the past five years. Further, they were selected based on self-identification as having successfully transitioned to life in the United States. The larger meaning of "success" was left open to the participants for their own interpretation, as success itself was an emic construct that the researcher wished to explore. More specifically, the study was comprised of ten international students from South Korea who met the above selection criteria. Students who identified as having been "successful" in their acculturation process were able to uniquely show what support systems and approaches have worked for them during their initial time in the U.S. and in their integration into the American community college environment. These success stories were analyzed and a grounded theory emerged that aims to inform college counselors and

administrators on how best to provide support and guidance for at-risk international students.

Participants were selected based on their answers to questions regarding their own feelings of success pertaining to their transition, personal, and academic experiences. Initial referral to and contact with participants was made through those who knew or worked with South Korean international students who currently study or have recently studied in an American community college. Contacts were asked to pass on study information to individuals they believed fit the study criteria. Contacts did not have knowledge of whether the individuals to whom they provided study information were eventually involved in the study or not. Simultaneously, the primary researcher confirmed that interviews were conducted with participants who had begun their academic careers in the United States via an American community college. Access to this population was also gained by contacting international student programs offices, Korean student clubs/associations within community colleges and universities, and through personal contact of those who knew participants who fit the criteria. Once informed about the details of the study, mutual agreement was reached with participants using documentation that met necessary communication standards of English Language Learners, as specified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Oregon State University. All participants reported basic comfort with college level English (a requirement in community college degree and certificate completion) and they each felt academically, mentally and emotionally able to undertake the time required for the interview process. Special care was given to maintain anonymity, through the use of either closed rooms in the college or university setting, or in locations suggested by the

participants, and by careful maintenance of confidential material.

Participants included five men and five women, ranging in ages from 21-38 years old. Demographics were reported via the *Student Participant Information Form* (see Appendix E). All participants were South Korean nationals, three of whom had become legal residents of the U.S. within the preceding five years. Within the past five years, all participants had attended, or currently were attending, an American community college. Community college GPAs ranged from 3.4-4.0, known TOEFL scores ranged from 78-94 prior to entrance, and all but one participant already did or currently had plans to transfer to a four-year university in the United States. All participants who were no longer attending community college had completed degrees or certificates. A range of academic disciplines was represented; including (but not limited to) economics, aeronautics, communication, education, biology, international studies, and engineering. Nine out of ten participants attended international student orientation class/es upon arrival to their community college and nine of ten reported becoming involved in on-campus clubs/activities.

Half of the participants attended some amount of college/university in South Korea (prior to arriving in the U.S.) and four out of five of those participants had graduated from those programs. About half of the participants maintained the same course of study/major in the U.S. and others chose new career/education paths, however, most were related to previous work/studies in some way. Of the five male participants, two had served in the South Korean military prior to their studies in the U.S., one participant served during his studies in an American community college (was called to serve in the South Korean military one year in to his time in the U.S., returned to Korea

and served in the military, then re-enrolled in the same community college), and the other two would begin their service after completion of their Bachelor's Degrees (within months after participating in this study). About half of the participants reported that their parents attended college/university in South Korea and about three quarters of the participants' parents spent significant time traveling abroad to English speaking countries.

All participants had completed college level English requirements (at least English 101). Six participants reported having lived with family members during their time in the U.S., the rest reported living with roommates and/or host families. Most participants used a combination of mass transit and walking while living in the U.S., though some eventually purchased and drove cars. Three participants used English "at home" in the U.S., while the rest did not. Six participants reported having specific career goals and six participants had part or full-time work experience prior to their arrival in the U.S.

### **Data Collection**

The primary researcher of this study conducted initial interviews in-person or over internet telephone (SKYPE) with live video feed, both formats were given the option of email follow-up. Initial interviews lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and allowed extra time for participants to become comfortable and maintain a relaxed pace of conversation. Questions were composed and interviews conducted in English and interviews were recorded through the use of a digital recorder. Interviews were semi-structured and conducted around a grand research question: What is the process that international students from South Korea experience when they successfully transition into life as a community college student in the United States? Initial interview questions

included:

- (1) Tell me your personal story about adapting to life as a community college student in the U.S.
- (2) What does success in this process mean to you?
- (3) How do/did you respond to transitioning into life in the U.S. via an American community college environment?
- (4) What experiences contributed to your success when transitioning?

Audio interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher and special care was given to seek out nuances/missed interpretation. Two additional rounds of interviews and one round of member checking was conducted after the initial interviews in order to clarify meaning, ask questions regarding missed information, and to build upon concepts uncovered during initial interviews. (See *Appendix V, Expanded Round 2 and 3 Interview Questions*). All responses were integrated into the final grounded theory conceptualization.

### **Data Analysis**

Grounded Theory analysis methods, as discussed by Charmaz (2006), Corbin and Strauss (2008), and Fassinger (2005) were used in this study. In order to produce a theory “grounded in data,” the researcher collected data from the participants “based on the complexities of their lived experiences in a social context” (Fassinger, 2005, p.157). The researcher derived this theory inductively by identifying emergent themes, categorizing concepts and connecting using a process of axial coding (p.157). First, open coding was utilized to examine the transcripts for various possible meanings, codes were assigned to those meanings and similar concepts were grouped together into themes. The

data was then divided into categories, subcategories, properties, and dimensions. Corbin and Strauss (2006) define this stage in data analysis as "breaking down data into manageable pieces, reflecting upon that data in memos, and conceptualizing" the data (p.193). Line by line open coding was conducted with three first round interview transcripts, two of the transcripts were chosen due to their detailed and explicit content and the third was the most extreme outlier of the ten. Next, axial coding allowed the primary researcher to select codes based in part from a list of codes generated by the original three open-coded interviews, while at the same time, this process was flexible and allowed for the addition of new concepts and codes. Theoretical sampling was conducted on the basis of concepts with proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory and further evolved subcategories, properties, and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Concepts were constantly compared with the data and analyzed for process relationships and interactions, leading to the formation of the grounded theory. The data analysis process ended when categories were saturated and no new properties, dimensions, or relationships were found (Strauss & Corbin).

### **Researcher Disclosure**

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher aimed to be aware of as much of her personal experience as possible, focusing on participants' experiences and meanings. Prior to the start of the study, she identified her assumptions and biases as the following:

- (1) International students from South Korea experience more difficulty in transitioning to higher education in the United States than other international student groups.

(2) International students from South Korea define transition success in terms unique to their cultural background.

(3) The current support services available to international students do not exactly fit the needs of students from South Korea.

(4) South Korean culture is group focused and collectivistic.

As a European-American woman and Western educated counselor, the primary researcher suspected that her own assumptions of "success" were framed in a more individually centered way. Having spent over two years immersed in a collectivistic and group oriented Asian culture, having studied an Asian language formally and informally for nearly 20 years, and having worked in two urban and highly international community for the past six years as an advisor, counselor, and instructor colleges where the largest percentage of international students comes from South Korea, the primary researcher felt that she had a strong understanding of collectivist Asian cultures and the needs and experiences of Asian international students. The primary researcher was acutely aware that her understanding of East Asian cultures, and the experiences of international students in the United States, was absorbed through the lens of her own skin and experiences, and through being born, raised, and acculturated in the United States.

### **Measures to Promote Trustworthiness**

The primary researcher sought to use methods that increased trustworthiness through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specific activities to increase trustworthiness, as discussed in Creswell (2007), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Morrow (2005) included: (a) working with participants face-to-face (or on SKYPE when prohibited by location) for at least two



hours of direct interviewing contact, and (b) utilizing “prolonged engagement” by conducting in-depth interviews, working with the participants of the study over a number of months (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews with collateral participants, such as other counselors and advisors, aided in triangulation, as did the triangulation of this data with other literature, in order to check the alignment of her findings with other studies. Interviews with participants were at times longer than expected in order for trust to form around long conversations where layers of the students’ experiences naturally peeled away slowly. Following initial transcription, the primary researcher gave the participants a chance to review their own transcripts, though none of them chose to do so. This was given as an opportunity to allow them to critique and correct any errors found within the transcripts. To increase transferability, the primary researcher described the participants and settings of this study in written detail. Following the participant interviews, the primary researcher discussed various aspects of non-confidential type information, such as core themes and data analysis, with a disinterested counselor-education peer in order to test working hypotheses, improve judgment and increase credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary researcher utilized member checking by taking participant feedback into account and included all participant corrections and reactions.

## **Results**

In alignment with the grounded theory approach of this study, the aforementioned structure was refined into a theory and involved the researcher evaluating the developing structure for consistency, checking validity against the data and seeking to fill in further information in lesser developed categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During

initial open coding, the primary researcher found groups of codes or concepts related to the participants' previous life-experiences, personal attributes, motivations for and initial experiences of their time in the United States within the American community college system. These categories were conceptualized as mutually dependent yet somewhat individually fluid. Axial coding was then used to examine the process and structure of the categories identified during open coding, and the researcher looked for possible relationships between categories through their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this process, emerging categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions were further clarified. Throughout all three rounds of interviewing, this process of open and axial coding was utilized, which then led to a process of theoretical sampling and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the selective coding process, the above categories were connected into a larger "schema" in accordance with their relationship to an emerging central category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). At this point in this study, the central category appeared to lie within what happened directly after participants experienced challenge(s), which pushed them toward making decisions that were profoundly influential in their ability to identify as "successful." The following sections describe the most essential categories and their interactions, along with supporting data given by the participants.

### **Foundational Attributes**

The first broad category was the foundation for the theory, as it was within this category that the overall experience took place. Various elements of personality, history, and perspective created unique circumstances within which South Korean students first experienced life in the United States. Subcategories included *personal characteristics*,

*having past experiences, choosing an American community college, and living in the U.S.*

*Personal characteristics* included properties such as internal personality traits, external influences, personal goals, life perspectives, or other demographically defining traits disclosed by participants. *Having past experiences* was defined as influential, historical experiences that impacted the participants' initial stages of the transition process. Properties included previous study abroad experience or other influential experiences such as historical grief/loss experiences, past military service and/or previous career experience. *Choosing an American community college* was defined as participants' reasons for choosing to study in an American community college, especially in comparison to reasons for not going directly into/attending an American university. This included interest/goal to transfer to university, seeking specific career opportunities, seeking certificate/AA degree, seeking to improve English, interest in small classes/intimate atmosphere, interest in diversity, and interest in saving money. The final subcategory, *living in the United States* included initial reasons for choosing to live in the United States, initial impressions of their transition process to American culture, and logistical aspects of their living situation. Properties included being surprised by standards of living, being surprised by diversity, family living in the U.S., experiencing older student population, living with host family, being surprised by peers, and experiencing discrimination. Each of the subcategories involved a variation of experiences, backgrounds and motivations depending on the participant.

Participant 3 describes the influence of *internal personality traits*:

I looked at a lot of students and they just don't really try to go out there and just put themselves out there and really experience it. But, well, I guess I was kind of

different...I guess it just came from my mentality that I have to do everything by myself...my personality is I'll just go try and work it out. If I fail, then I've failed, but I have tried, you know?

The same participant also describes having a particular *life perspective*:

I think I learned from my parents...my dad is a good mentor. My mother, she passed away when I was six...So I grew up watching my father trying to be optimistic all the time... So I guess it just naturally came to me that, instead of sitting at home being miserable, it's better to go out and have fun at least.

Participant 3 describes certain influential *demographic traits*:

Since I'm older than other students, I'm more mature in the class. I think that kind of helped me, you know, being a diligent student.

Participant 2 describes *previous study abroad experience*:

I was studying in (European country) before I come here. So like adapting a new culture, for me, was like very easy because I was already living in different countries. And I studied with different foreign students, so it was kind of fun for me. And it was easy to me to accept like American culture...

Participant 1 describes *previous military experience*:

I had two years in the military to think about my life and what am I going to do when I get out of the military. The entire two years, you only think about "What will I do when I get out? What will I do when I get out, the moment I get out?" So I planned everything in detail. And as soon as I came to the United States, I put those plans in action.

Participant 2 discusses both an *interest in saving money* and an *interest in small classes*:

There's reason to go to community college for...Like big reason is the money. The tuition cost is three, four times less than regular university for us. So, of course, the cost was biggest reason why I choose coming to community college first...it's smaller class. You can have a more conversation with professor. And there can be some kind of negotiation in community college. Of course, it's not easy. But I think...well, like people are around friends who already took that professor. They can encourage that student, "Oh, you should definitely go to that professor. He's really kind and he can really listen to you."

Participant 10 describes how *career interests* impacted a desire to *improve English* and the interaction of each of these dimensions with reasons for choosing a specific school:

Actually, I went to Korean university. And I studied there for two years and a half. But I decided...one of my mother's friends was told that we cannot really get a good job if we graduate Korean university. English is so very important thing to us to have a good job. So he suggested it, to study English, yeah, in the United States. So I came here. One of my friends recommended this school. And he said (community college) has better system.

Participant 5 shares an *interest in diversity*:

My brother led me to attend the community college because it's a pretty good school. He said that (city) was really one of the best cities and it's like a very big school which has a lot of cultures. So he just said to me like I can have a lot of different experiences, I can meet a lot of diverse people.

Participant 6 discusses *living with host family*:

I met good home stay parents...I heard many complaints about home stay from the other international students. But for me it was so nice. Their cooking was just amazing.

Participant 5 shares *experiencing discrimination*:

The first one year is really hard to adapt myself to American culture because lots of things were different. Like, I sometimes have to experience some stereotype or...like prejudice.

Following the *foundational attributes* described above, the process through which participants described successful transition to the United States can then be broken down into stages. At first, the primary researcher found 8 categories comprising this process. Upon further reflection, it became clear that those 8 could be broken down into four larger categories centered on bigger concepts. These four categories were thus named as stages because of their critical and sequential interaction with one another.

### **Stage I: Challenge**

The first stage centers on the fact that all participants reported encountering and dealing with challenges not long after their arrival to the U.S. It included subcategories of *encountering challenge* and *considering giving up*, which were progressively linked.

**Encountering challenges.** This subcategory established participants' very first meeting with a challenge. The word "encountering" was chosen here because it seemed to better capture an initial "meeting up with" or "facing" of a challenge where participants had yet to do much with that encounter. It was seen as a less active word, which fit the very initial shock and often times lack of movement first experienced by participants upon meeting up with a difficult experience. Common "challenge" properties and

interlocking impacts exist across various aspects of their *personal, social, academic, and cultural/logistical* lives. Participant 7 describes an interaction between *cultural* and *personal* challenges:

I grew up in a family-oriented society, which made me miss my family so much.

I often felt depressed because I thought I am alone in the U.S.

Here, Participant 8 describes difficulty in connecting *socially* due to *cultural* challenges:

Being South Korean was a challenge when I had to participate...In the United States, participation points can impact our grade. However, in Korea, it is better for students to not interrupt instructor's lecture. It's even better if you stay quiet during class and ask questions after class. When I just came here, I didn't talk a lot or express my ideas during group work. I was the one who acted like a shadow in the group.

The same participant describes experiencing *academic challenges* and the impact it had on creating *personal challenge*:

Whenever I had to take tests, write essays, and read books, I had very hard time. I mean I know that I had to do it in my mind, but my brain just didn't follow me so it took me a lot of time. I spent three times more than normal students. It really made me want to give up so I cried a lot.

**Considering giving up.** This subcategory described an internal process and reaction to encountering a challenge. All participants reported experiencing this specific moment in some way, though the extremity with which it was felt varied from person to person. For some participants, this was a fleeting thought of dropping out of school and returning to South Korea and for others, the feeling was debilitating and may have even

brought on suicidal ideations. The following exemplify such feelings:

Participant 4: I get hurt when I fail to do something...I had packed my luggage bag to go back to Korea whenever I felt I am a failure...

Participant 1: During the hard time I wanted to give up everything and just simply go back to South Korea..."So, like, what's the point?" I wanted to go back.

The same participant describes the lowest feelings after encountering a physical challenge:

P1: I could envision myself, by myself...not being able to walk, cook, go to the bathroom. I might, I shouldn't say this, but in that case, I might get to the point of wanting to kill myself.

The types of challenge(s) faced by participants varied with some common concepts.

These challenges often affected one another with interlocking impacts across various aspects of their personal, social, academic, and cultural/logistical lives.

## **Stage II: Reflection**

This stage was found to be central in the success process, as it encapsulated the experience where participants looked within themselves, their motivations, and decided not to give up. From this decision point, momentum began to grow toward success and ultimately, engendered a deeper and more confident sense of self. Subcategories included *connecting to motivation* and *deciding not to give up*, which were connected in that participants have to do some internal reflection during these two steps in order to stay and not give up. This internal reflection was found to be key in order for participants to connect to what motivated them. These steps involved internal and external motivations and implications for consideration. (See *Figure 1*).



**Connecting to motivation.** This subcategory had external properties of *not wanting to disappoint others* (including *not wanting to disappoint parents* and *not wanting to disappoint Korean society*) and *career/financial goals*, with internal properties of *not wanting to disappoint self* and *fear of repeating past mistakes*. Participant 3 describes the external property of *not wanting to disappoint others*, specifically *not wanting to disappoint parents*:

My father actually kept reminding me about his and mom's ages and how they at some point, they can't support me...but he did not put any pressure on me by saying things like how much he pays for my education. But I had a thought about how expensive my education was and I wanted to make the best of it. I thought that in that way, I could make my parents proud about their sacrifice. Also, talking to my family about successes in transitional challenge relieved was a great pleasure and their encouragement kept me from failing the challenge.

This was a common motivation for all participants. The degree of motivation was quite strong for all participants when thinking of the possibility of letting others down—they would reach that thought, reflect, and then decide to push on. Participant 6 describes the connection between *not wanting to disappoint others* and the *deciding not to give up*:

If the failure of my study abroad experience had only mattered to myself, I would have chosen the "giving up side," whenever I faced challenge. But that failure did not only matter to myself but also to my family's hope...I could imagine that if I gave up the challenge, my family's financial and emotional sacrifice to my study abroad would be meaningless. I could not let that happen to my family.

Therefore, I always thought of my family whenever I wanted to give up on a

challenge and pushed myself to find solutions to overcome that challenge.

Similarly, Participant 8 recalls making a choice after watching other South Korean students give up:

I saw many students going back to Korea because they cannot adapt American culture. I just didn't want to be that person. I didn't want to let my parents down.

Participant 6 described a thought process that involved both external and internal motivations that ultimately led to a decision not to give up:

(Because of) Korean society's high standard on students who have study abroad experience, I could push myself a little harder and easily change my mind to "challenge accepted."

Finally, these participants shared common thoughts of not wanting to let themselves down as a internal motivation to keep going:

Participant 1: I told myself that if I go back now, when facing challenges, I'd fail again in Korea and I won't be proud of myself.

Participant 3: I would say the main motivator was realizing my capability and potential to grow.

Participant 4: (not wanting to let people down in South Korea) was one of reasons why I did not give up, but not my main motivator. That was about myself—

I think I have been anxious to keep my self-respect...I just endured and tried harder and harder because I did not want to let myself down—fail myself.

**Deciding not to give up.** This subcategory captured the point in the development process where participants reported consciously making a choice not to give up (thus choosing to keep trying/persisting). In essence, this is the point in which participants

reported that staying was succeeding and that other potential failures did not matter.

Participant 6 describes the change in viewpoint from succeeding as "winning" to succeeding as "just doing it" and keeping a "positive perspective:"

I have failed more than I have succeeded when facing challenges. Winning over something has an expected outcome, therefore we can keep ourselves putting in the effort to "win," and also we can easily give up when we lose, and we will not have those expected outcomes. But my challenge was different: it always gave me unexpected outcomes and so I could not plan anything when I decided to face the challenge: I just have to "do it." Therefore, I would say the more important thing is the tool to manage the failure of challenge, rather than a tool to succeed on challenge...and that tool was having the positive perspective on the failure from the challenge.

### **Stage III: Action**

This stage described the next phase in the process of success where participants made a concerted effort, or took actions, toward becoming more involved. Specifically, this stage contained two subcategories: *managing with diligence* and *taking action*. Once participants decided to keep going, they entered a time of management and diligence in their efforts. Properties included *implementing academic strategies* and *responding to expectations of other South Korean students, connecting with other South Koreans/South Korean culture, getting a job on campus, joining campus activities, and developing a broader social network*.

**Managing with diligence.** This subcategory contained strategies and pressures that seemed to help participants persist. Since this experience was specific to the South

Korean population, choices that originated from the participants themselves were found to best describe it. Participant 6 used the term "manage" to describe what it was like to persist and not give up:

I would say the more important thing is the tool to manage the failure of challenge, rather than a tool to succeed on challenge...and that tool was having the positive perspective on the failure from the challenge.

Participant 7 described this experience as "diligence:"

Diligence here means not just persisting or pushing through challenges but also doing my best in everyday life. For example, Koreans regard the diligence for a student as not being late in class, studying regularly, not putting off homework etc.

Thus, although I often encountered challenges, I did what I needed to do.

Participant 8 described implementing specific strategies at this point in the process:

I started participating so hard because I had a class that had grading of 50% discussion and 20% participation, which to me, it was 70% talking points. I just quickly realized this is real and I really have to talk or I will literally fail this class. So... in that class, I raised my hand with red tomato face, and shaky voice then answered as far as I know very slowly.

**Taking action and learning.** This subcategory was a natural progression of the previous subcategory, where participants reported feeling pressure to act. Participants took clear actions to build community, strengthen resources, and become involved on campus. Within actions taken, participants reported an openness/willingness to learn from such activities and networks. Some participants simply joined an on-campus club and others applied for off-campus internships. Each of these actions involved a

broadening of social circles and often, there was an importance in connecting with other South Koreans. This was an interesting turning point for most participants, as many shared that up until this point, they had purposefully avoided "too much socializing" with other South Korean students in attempts to improve their English skills. A number of participants reported having been told, by friends and family back home before coming to the U.S., to limit their time with other Koreans for this reason.

Here, Participant 4 shares the impact of social support:

Whenever (facing challenges) happened, my friends made me laugh. My friends made me forget those school works and show me that I am a really good person, which inspired me to do my school works because I am a "good person." I guess I can definitely say that my friends were and are my energy.

Participant 10 describes how becoming more active on campus helped to boost confidence, the next stage in the process:

During the time I spent at (community college), I had a lot of experiences in many activities. From the activities, I have built up my confidence and realize now I can do more work that I have never experienced.

#### **Stage IV: Growth**

The last stage includes two subcategories: *gaining confidence* and *experiencing positive outcomes*. As participants gained confidence, they did more and experienced more positive outcomes. A key point mentioned by Participant 6 was the ability to "learn from the challenge" and not to "expect to win as much as gain from the process of transition itself." *Gaining confidence* occurred when participants developed a wider network of social connections and interactions, as well as when they utilized and

capitalized on internal and external skill sets. Properties included "*jung*" (a Korean term describing *compassionate community*), *utilizing skills* with internal subproperty skills of *connecting to a dream* and *staying positive* and external subproperty skills of *foundational academic skills*, *cross-cultural skills*, *career skills*, and *military skills*. The second subcategory in this stage was *experiencing positive outcomes* and occurred somewhat simultaneously with *gaining confidence*. Properties of *experiencing positive outcomes* included *having increased motivation/confidence to face future challenges*, *having increased feelings of success*, and *wanting to give back/lead*. (See Figure 1).

**Gaining confidence.** Within this subcategory, participants gained confidence from a variety of outlets. Confidence appeared to come from both *external sources*, including community interaction and the utilization of acquired external skills, and *internal sources/skills*.

**"Jung" (*compassionate community*).** Within this property, participants connected to people and activities within the community and reported feeling more "comfortable," "motivated," "confident" and "encouraged" through the support of others. This aspect of growth and confidence was an important cultural aspect of South Korean persistence and success. Connecting with the South Korean community was ultimately critical in their path toward success. Participant 7 describes a seminal aspect of this connection:

...we have a culture called "jung." It is hard to translate it into English, but I would say it's about love, compassion, brotherhood. In other words, because of this culture of Korea, I could meet a lot of kind Korean peers who helped me a lot in terms of overcoming the homesickness and living in the U.S. in general. To

fully understand Korean culture, it is really important to know about Jung because it is one of the most important foundation of Korean culture.

Participant 1 describes the Korean word, "hyung," which refers to the larger concept of respecting elders and the structured Korean relationship and respect of junior and senior (ages):

I was lucky to meet friends who were so passionate in their dreams and goals through college and I was able learn from them and that motivated myself as well... To be specific, I think it's finding the right friends who can together work for their individual dream and goal. For me, this especially came from hanging out with those who I call "hyung," meaning "older brother."

These participants described an increase in confidence from utilizing acquired skills from previous life experiences and experiences within the Korean culture/community:

Participant 4: My successful career as a high school teacher and my academic skills...played in an important role in my success in community college. It made me more positive when I faced challenges since I knew how to cope with it... If I had not had any work experience in Korea, my transition could have been harder...

Participant 3: I thought about hardships that I had to go through back in the military whenever I had challenges here... I thought those challenges were nothing comparable to the military...I remembered challenges during past transitions, such as coming to the US, joining the military, transferring to the community college credit academic program from the ESL program and I tried to apply the same coping mechanisms that I used in the past.

In the previous excerpt, a connection is apparent between the subcategory of *utilizing an external acquired skill* and ultimately becoming a leader, which is a property of the final subcategory *experiencing positive outcomes*.

**Experiencing positive outcomes.** The final subcategory in the developmental process included positive outcomes from encountering, managing, learning and gaining confidence from having experienced challenges within the transition process. This subcategory held obvious excitement for participants: an outcome of success that brought about increased comfort in the face of a challenge, whether a little or a lot, which gave them additional zest to take on new hurdles. Encounters that may have been seen as "scary" (such as speaking out in class or applying for an on-campus job) before experiencing a buildup of successes may now be enthralling, which in turn, allows for more comfort in the unknown and moxie for "trial and error." In general, participants were able to more often speak out in English, became more independent, made more social connections, and navigated American cultural norms with more comfort and ease. Within the positive outcomes were participants' conceptualizations of "success."

Participant 3 shares how confidence grew with continued momentum as challenges were faced and achievements were reached:

My confidence grew as I looked at successes and achievements I made. For even small successes, such as getting a good score on a simple quiz, I felt great and proud about myself and it encouraged me to try something more challenging afterward.

Participant 7 shares a similar feeling of gaining confidence after going through hard times:



My confidence developed as I went through the hard time and overcame it.

Getting over the hard time encouraged me that I can do well the next time I go through this kind of transition period.

Participant 8 attributes a gain in confidence to increased class participation:

A lot of that participating made me brave and more brave as the time goes.

Participant 9 describes feeling more successful:

Technically, whenever I was done with each class, I was encouraged by the class, which was done in a good or better grade. Completion of each class helped me build confidence up. I had not only the technical reason, but also had a personal reason. I was sure that God planned some thing for me and had a purpose to bring me here. This belief guided me to endure till my entire course was completed.

Finally, many participants describe feeling a desire to give back to their fellow South Korean international student community. They also shared increased motivation toward leadership in on-campus clubs and off-campus community groups. Participant 9 shares current leadership:

(N)ow I am serving other international students from multi-nations in a Korean community church.

In summary, participants in the study described a developmental "success process" through which they first entered the U.S. with personal and familial hopes and expectations, where they encountered various personal, academic, social, cultural and logistical challenges, where they reached a point with these challenges where they considered giving up, and ultimately, where they decided to reach out, form community, become more active, and through those experiences, where they felt confident enough to

keep going. Ultimately, taking action when facing challenges proved to be key as they pushed onward and joined numerous on and off-campus activities. These experiences helped them to build the confidence needed to do even more, which brought forth feelings of success and finally, a desire to give back to the South Korean community through positions of leadership.

### **Discussion**

This grounded theory study described South Korean international students' experiences of successful transition to the United States during their time in American community colleges. The major findings of this study were both the overall developmental process of, and the managing of challenges existent within, the transition process faced by participants. The process itself broke down into four stages that led participants to experiencing successful transition and within these stages of *challenge, reflection, action and growth*, participants all utilized a combination of preexisting personal, academic, cultural and professional skills to manage their challenges. Central to their experience was a moment in the process where participants reflected upon their challenges, tapped in to their motivations, and chose to take action to become more involved in their surroundings. In the utilization of these skills, participants reported simultaneously reaching out to others (on and/or off-campus), and very often, they gained critical support from connecting with South Korean communities and culture. Through these actions and connections, participants were able to work through their challenges "with diligence," which brought forth small and consistent experiences of achievement. These smaller, often daily, achievements led participants to feel increased motivation and confidence to keep going. In the process of experiencing challenge, managing, and

persisting, participants reported a consistent reframe of what "success" meant to them; what had been viewed as an external achievement such as good grades, English skills, or transferring to a good school, was now coupled with, if not overshadowed by, the appreciation of their own diligence in the face of difficulty. This, in itself, was the experience of succeeding.

The majority of literature on South Korean transition experiences only reviews their process within the overall international student population. Past studies and theories regarding cultural transition looked mainly to models of culture shock and culture fatigue in terms of explaining the international student experience, often times describing a step by step process where adaptation was the end goal (Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980; Berry, 1985; Berry 1997; Berry, 2001; Golden, 1973; Winkelman, 1994). These approaches are outdated and do not take the preservation of cultural identity, and the strength that comes with doing so, into consideration. This study sheds light on more specific elements, activities, and feelings experienced within the successful transition process. The participants of this study represented those from a single country, South Korea, from which the largest American community college-going international student population currently originates. Previous research has shown that a range of stressors, such as culture, discrimination, adjustment to unfamiliar cultural norms, values and customs, communication/language difficulties, isolation, and loss of established social network negatively impacted the learning and well-being of international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). The findings of this study support the identification of such stressors as critical challenges faced by South Korean international students, but goes further to describe how South Korean students successfully navigate those challenges. Previous

studies involving South Korean college students reported that "cultural negotiations" and cultural differences in communication led to experiences of increased depression (Popadiuk & Arthur, 2004; Yeh et al, 2005). This study revealed that when South Korean students faced difficulties, it was important for them to communicate with others in order to move forward. Specifically, this study found importance in South Korean students making healthy connections with other South Korean students, despite their initial reluctance in doing so based on desires to rapidly improve English. Central findings of this study were consistent with the qualitative study of Sümer, Poyrazli and Grahame (2008) on predictors of depression and anxiety with international students—social support appears to lower depression and anxiety.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have several implications that may be beneficial to the fields of counseling, counselor education, and student affairs in higher education. These implications may impact future practice, training and research. In beginning to understand the successful experiences of one of the most at-risk international student populations independently of other international student groups, this study gives a clearer picture of what may work or not work with a specific group. Thus, results of this study can be compared and contrasted with other nationalities and cultural groups more easily. This is important because not all international student populations experience the same struggles during their time in the United States, nor do they enlist the same tools for success. In the end, participants did not describe success as adaptation or assimilation. Rather, it was something more complex where challenges were internally reflected upon, personal skills, community, and cultural elements were tapped into, and ultimately, where

they experienced growth in confidence and an appreciation of the overall transition process itself.

For counselors and student services personnel, deeper awareness has been brought to the specific challenges faced by the South Korean international student population. These descriptions may be useful to community college counselors, who can best serve students who face academic, personal and social challenges. However, as this population does not seek support from college counselors at the same rate as American students, or even as other international student populations, these results may inform counselors on how to support South Korean students outside of the traditional 1:1 counseling model. For example, counselors may find it more useful to work from a platform of advocacy-based interventions with South Korean students in groups by connecting them to peer mentors and to the South Korean community off-campus. The stages expressed in this study may also help counselors to conceptualize where students are in their transition process and give language through which to better communicate and explore those stages with students. This study also indicates a need for campus personnel to connect international students to campus resources, where they can utilize their own skills and more easily gain purchase on their new life in the U.S. For some students, this may require working with a counselor to identify such strengths and highlight areas/ways in which those strengths could be implemented on campus. Similarly, counselors and campus personnel might consider actively working with this population in groups, encouraging mentoring partnerships where new South Korean students could become connected with those more familiar with the system—those who may want to give back.

This study may be informative to those writing curriculum for international

students and may help to develop trainings on international student success for community college faculty. For example, as participants in this study reported having strong study skills from their time in the South Korean educational system, energy may be better spent checking-in with students to normalize challenges, developing comfort in speaking out in class, practicing networking on campus, and discussing where and how to reach out to others for support. Likewise, this study may be useful to the South Korean international student population themselves, as it may help to normalize fears and challenges, while providing a pathway of success through the voices of their peers.

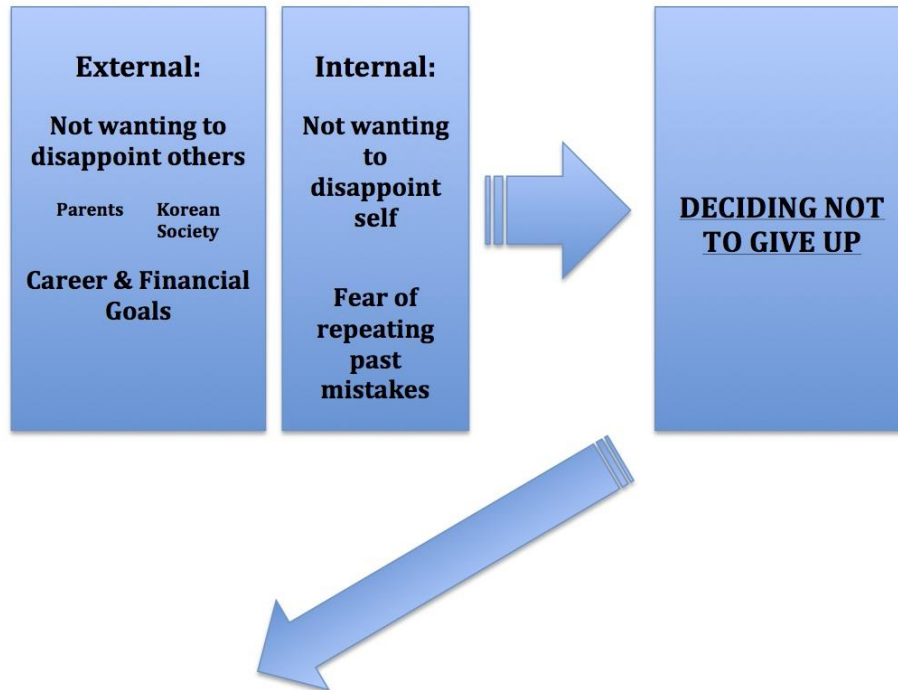
Finally, implications for future research include a shift in focus to success and resilience within the international student population. Having heard directly from one cultural group, this study could be replicated and possibly transferrable with other nationalities or at-risk groups to better understand the unique cultural nuances of their success processes. Also, future research that includes both students who view themselves as successful, as well as those who do not, may allow for a broader spectrum of experiences from which to draw further understanding.

### **Limitations**

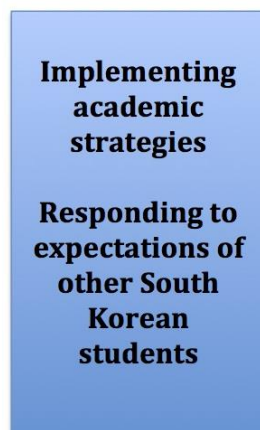
Limitations of this study included possible meaning lost in translation, availability of participants, and the students' ability to accurately remember their transition process. The researcher's gender, age, race, ethnicity, educational background and job title may each may have contributed to how participants reacted to and discussed their answers within the interview. Participants all studied within community colleges in Washington State, though some had experienced community college in New York, Florida, and Hawaii before moving to Washington. Though numerous community colleges were

represented in their experiences, varying significantly in size and support systems, it is of note that certain cultural and logistical aspects of life in Washington were pervasive throughout the representation of their experiences. Factors and challenges such as the weather conditions and transportation system may have been different had this study taken place in another region in the United States. Thus, these specific elements may not be transferrable to other areas. Experiences in certain institutions may be unique to those places and situations and may not be transferrable to other institutions. Likewise, South Korea is a country with its own unique culture, and as such, certain themes from this study may not be transferrable to other countries or cultures.

## CONNECTING TO MOTIVATION



## MANAGING WITH DILIGENCE



## TAKING ACTION





*Figure 1. Stage II: Reflection & Stage III: Action: Interactions*

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## **Chapter 4**

## **CHAPTER 4: General Conclusions**

This dissertation includes two manuscripts that are thematically linked through their exploration of transition experiences of international students studying in the United States within the community college setting. The first manuscript (Chapter 2) reviews a literature review on the theoretical and research literature on international student transition experiences over the past four decades to derive implications for community college policy and counselor practice. This manuscript defined and described the current population of international students studying in the United States and provided theoretical and research background on the cross-cultural transition process, which has been historically defined in numerous ways, including adjustment, acculturation, and culture shock.

Due to the rising number of students coming to the United States from various nations in order to receive an American education via community college, it is imperative that student support services grow and adapt to fit the needs of international student populations. Given the current global system, specific questions regarding the perceptions and experiences of non-American groups as they study within institutions of higher education in the U.S must be considered. In identifying the main themes extant within this body of literature, the first manuscript highlighted the need for college administrators and student services personnel to develop further understanding of the various factors that may positively or negatively affect international students' transition experiences. This manuscript also aimed to aid community college counselors and



students services personnel in the creation and utilization of more comprehensive support services by providing specific implications for practice, training, and research regarding the community college environment.

Five major subthemes of the literature review were identified regarding the international student transition experience when studying in the United States. The vast majority of this literature evolved from research conducted within four-year institutions. Very little information exists specific to the international student experiences within American community colleges, and the literature that was found mainly focused on international student recruitment and was not empirically based. As such, themes identified in the literature were based in the four-year university or graduate context, which has both similarities to and differences from the community college. Throughout the majority of the literature, factors that positively or negatively affect the international student transition experience, consisting of a variety of personal, cultural, psychological and social variables, were named and discussed. Specifically, the five themes included (1) *adjustment issues*, (2) *in-group differences*, (3) *cultural distance*, (4) *coping and well-being*, and (5) *social support system*. Within the larger theme of *adjustment issues*, the major areas of difficulty were identified: (a) *academic adjustment*, (b) *socio-cultural adjustment*, and (c) *personal psychological adjustment*.

Research highlighted the importance of social support for international students, specifically due to higher rates of suicide and depression (Arthur, 2004; Kim & Park, 2014; Mori, 2000; The National Center for the Prevention of Youth Suicide, 2011; Wei et al, 2008). On the topic of international student mental health treatment on college campuses, numerous studies showed that international students had lower rates of

utilization of support services, such as counseling. This was largely attributed to cultural differences in the conceptualization of issues, treatment expectations, and problem solving between the international students and college counselors (Byon, Chan & Thomas, 1999; Young, 2005; Yuen & Tinsley, 1981). These differences implicate new approaches in reaching out to international students and highlight a need to understand the various causes of depression and anxiety within this population. Specifically, counselors should consider the various cultural negotiations faced by international students and the successive emotional stress that accompanies such navigation. Colleges and universities should keep in mind the added training needed for campus personnel to more thoroughly and thoughtfully consider and begin to address these unique stressors and begin to seek out means and avenues through which to provide this additional education. Research also suggests that more qualitative and strengths-based studies aim the direction of international student research, in order to better inform counselors and administrators of the unique needs of and approaches utilized by international students, through their own experiences. The resulting study in Chapter 3 sought to address this need.

The second manuscript (Chapter 3) included a detailed description of the successful transition experiences of South Korean international students who are currently studying or have recently studied within American community colleges. South Korean international students who had recently studied within an American community college and who viewed themselves as having "successfully transitioned" to life in the United States were invited to participate in this study, which utilized grounded theory methods. South Korean students currently rank first in the number of students coming to

study within the American community college system (IIE, 2013) and have higher psychological risk behaviors of depression and suicidality than any other first-world, young adult population (Kim & Park, 2014). Thus, a critical need for support exists, yet there is a stark gap in their utilization of support services on American campuses (Byon, Chan, & Thomas, 1999; Yoo & Skovolt, 2001). As such, this population was found to be ideal for studying the unique needs and experiences of international students within the American community college system.

The central research question guiding this study was: “What is the experience of South Korean students as they successfully transition into life as an American community college student?” Within this study, 10 South Korean students who are or have recently studied within an American community college (within the past five years) and who identify themselves as having been “successful” in their transition process were interviewed.

Participants in this study reported experiencing a developmental process of, and the managing of challenges existent within, the transition process. The process itself broke down into four stages, each existing within a contextual sphere of *foundational attributes*, which led participants through successful transition. The larger stages included *challenge, reflection, action and growth*. Participants all described utilizing a combination of preexisting personal, academic, cultural and professional skills to manage their challenges. In the utilization of these skills, participants reported simultaneously reaching out to others (on and/or off-campus), and very often, they gained critical support from connecting with South Korean communities and culture. Through these actions and connections, participants were able to work through their challenges "with diligence,"

which brought forth small yet consistent experiences of achievement. These smaller and often daily achievements led participants to feel increased motivation and built the confidence to keep going. In the process of experiencing challenge, managing, and persisting, participants reported a consistent reframe of what "success" meant to them; what had been viewed as an external achievement such as good grades, English skills, or transferring to a good school, was now coupled with, if not overshadowed by, the appreciation of their own diligence in the face of difficulty. This, in itself, was the consistently reported experience of succeeding.

This study may be beneficial to the fields of counseling, counselor education, and student affairs in higher education in several ways. This research increases the understanding of how international students experience the transition process and navigate it successfully. Specifically, it fills a gap in knowledge about the experiences of international students in the American community college system, communicated from the voice and perspective of the largest population of community college attending international students currently studying in the United States. This is a population that has been reported to be of higher risk potential, so hearing how certain students were successful may provide community colleges with the information needed in order to better understand, serve and help this group. These findings may also shed light on possible experiences and interventions for other international students who may be struggling.

Results of this study were consistent with the research in some areas, while it expanded upon others. For example, Tseng and Newton (2002) studied how international students defined "well-being," and these findings were similar to how participants of this

study viewed success, which may be a useful connection. This research also found many of the same challenges as past studies, however, past studies looked at challenges through the lens of "adjustment." This study found that not all challenges were rooted in "adjustment issues," yet ultimately, how participants handled their challenges did impact their transition process in a critical way. Implications for counselors and college personnel include increasing the focus on international student networking and mentorship, the creation of community connections, and the utilization/employment of international student strengths. Future research may further this study by looking at the success process of other specific international student cultural groups and comparing and contrasting their unique experiences and needs. This comparison may better inform community colleges, counselors, and counselor educators of new, more effective, approaches fostering international student success.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The results of this dissertation provide various opportunities for continued research. This study employed grounded theory methodology, which is exploratory in nature, and calls upon participants' direct participation in the creation of meaning (Lincoln & Guba). Through the use of prolonged engagement via three interviews and a member checking session, participants shared their experiences and developed trust with the primary researcher, resulting in thick, rich description (Corbin & Strauss). The resulting information gave voice to a population that is quite large in number, more at-risk in their level of functioning, and has been traditionally left out of the literature. Future research might seek to further the understanding of challenges faced by this population by listening to the experiences of those students who do/did not view

themselves as successful in the transition process: those who are still struggling with challenges, those who have gone back to South Korea, or those who have simply left school. Future studies may also replicate this study with a different international student population in order to see what themes are consistent across cultural groups and to identify what concepts are unique to South Korean students.

Finally, future studies could be developed that may be able to test this theory by utilizing methodology where a larger number of participants are able to be reached or where various cultural groups could be compared to confirm, challenge, or clarify findings in this study. Similar qualitative methods could be used to replicate this study with other populations of international students to look for common themes across both studies. The results of future qualitative studies that gather knowledge and meaning from other international student populations could also be tested quantitatively by developing a survey based off of this theory. In total, this collaborative information may be useful to aiding the overall international student experience in American community colleges.

Together, both manuscripts may have implications on future practice, policy and research. It is clear that community college counselors have growth potential in understanding international student experiences. Counselors can become more educated on what specific tools have been useful for international student success, within specific cultural communities. From these results, it is clear that counselors in community colleges would be able to advocate for the needs of international students by getting out of their offices and stepping out of the traditional Western 1:1 counseling model. The findings encourage a social justice approach, where counselors become more active in the community, connecting to the larger needs of a population as a whole. Likewise, it

would appear that South Korean international students comprise a population who would benefit from careful connection with one another, in a mentorship capacity. New students seem to benefit from social connection with other South Korean students and "successful" students clearly have a desire to give back to their community and serve in leadership roles. Culturally, this model fits the Korean aspect of "hyung," the hierarchical relationship between junior and senior, which, when used in a positive way, nurtures an extremely supportive relationship between peers. These relationships connect to the larger Korean concept of "jung," which roughly translates to brotherhood or compassionate community. Thus, counselors and colleges should foster actions and policies that support these connections, allowing South Korean students to connect with their cultural communities, for needed support in times of challenge. Finally, future research might look to compare the findings of this study with reported experiences of other specific international student groups, seeking out commonalities and unique differences, in order to better support international students within the American community college system.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this dissertation parallel existing literature on the international student experience in the United States in a number of ways. It is clear that most international students enter a period of struggle or challenge during their time of transition. However, the results of this study show that "success" is not always seen as "adaptation" or "assimilation" but rather, for the South Korean population, a place of personal reflection, growth, community and appreciation of oneself and culture of origin. Although this population uses various tools and approaches to reach a point of success,

the larger developmental stages are consistent across all participants, as are the implementation of unique cultural attributes and perspectives to get there. It is the hope of the author that this study inspires similar work with other populations, where independent voice is given to their experience—specifically, to those groups who are most at-risk within the American higher-education community and who have yet to be heard from directly.



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## **Appendices**

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Recruitment Letter of Introduction to International Student Advisors and International Student Leaders**



Dear [advisor/student leader],

My name is Katherine Fort. I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at Oregon State University. I am in the process of recruiting participants for an exploratory study of the experiences of international students from South Korea as they transition to the United States, studying or having recently studied within an American community college. This study is being conducted in accordance with the dissertation/thesis qualifications as set forth by Oregon State University. I am under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Rubel, Ph.D., Associate Professor, who serves as my dissertation chair.

Due to your ability to access South Korean international students who have studied within a community college, I would like to ask for your help in the recruitment of participants for my research study. The criteria for participation are as follows:

- Must be over the age of 18.
- Must be or have been enrolled in an American community college within the past five years.
- Must be a South Korean national.
- Must view themselves as having “successfully transitioned” into life in the United States.
- Must have an interest in and ability to explore cultural transition and adjustment issues related to their community college experience.

If you know any individuals who meet the above criteria, I would appreciate it if you would give them the information I have attached. This information includes a letter of introduction and a participant consent form, which further explains the research study. Please indicate to the prospective participant that participation is strictly voluntary, and if interested he or she may contact me directly. By contacting me directly, the risk of breach in confidentiality will be minimized and other individuals will have no knowledge of their participation in the research study. My email address is: [katherinenfort@gmail.com](mailto:katherinenfort@gmail.com). Participants may also contact the principle investigator, Deborah Rubel, Ph.D. at [deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu](mailto:deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu).

The title of the study is “An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students’ Successful Transition: Adjusting to the United States via American Community Colleges.”

The research design and method for this investigation is a qualitative, grounded theory study. Participating in this research study will involve an initial interview that will take 60-90 minutes, and one or two shorter follow-up interviews. In the interviews, participants will be asked some questions about their personal and academic backgrounds, but mainly about the transition experiences in coming to the United States from South Korea within the context of studying within an American community college. The interviews will take in person place at a mutually agreed upon location convenient to the participant. The study will span no more than five months.

I appreciate your help with this research, which will add to the body of literature related to the transition experiences of international students studying within American community colleges.

Thank you in advance for your support and assistance.

Sincerely,

Katherine N. Fort, MA, LMHC

Oregon State University PhD Candidate

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Recruitment Email to Potential Participants**



Dear (student name),

My name is Katherine Fort. I am a doctoral candidate in Counselor Education and Supervision at Oregon State University. I am conducting a study entitled; "An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students' Successful Transition: Adjusting to the United States via American Community Colleges." You may be eligible to participate in this study, if you choose. Participating in this research study is strictly voluntary and, if you qualify, it is up to you to decide if you would like to participate. If you believe that you qualify and desire to be a part of this study, please contact me, the student researcher, directly.

Briefly, to be eligible for this study you:

- Must be over the age of 18.
- Must be or have been enrolled in an American community college within the past five years.
- Must be a South Korean national.
- Must view themselves as having "successfully transitioned" into life in the United States.
- Must have an interest in and ability to explore cultural transition and adjustment issues related to their community college experience.

As stated previously, participation is strictly voluntary. If you are interested, you may contact the student researcher, Katherine Fort, MA, LMHC, directly via email at [katherinenfort@gmail.com](mailto:katherinenfort@gmail.com) or by calling me at my direct phone number: (206)354-3457. Please include phone contact information so that I might contact you to set up an initial screening interview. During the initial screening interview, you will also have the opportunity to ask questions about the research. You may also contact the principle investigator, Deborah Rubel, Ph.D. at [deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu](mailto:deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu) or by direct phone at (541)737-5973.

Thank you,

Katherine N. Fort, MA, LMHC  
Oregon State University PhD Candidate

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Verbal Consent Guide**



### *Verbal Consent Guide*

**Purpose.** The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the experiences of international students from South Korea, who are studying or have studied within an American community college, and identify themselves as having “successfully transitioned/adapted” to life in the U.S.

There is a lack of knowledge in the counseling field about community college international student experiences. This research aims to address that lack of knowledge by developing a counseling theory and creating an understanding of what practices work best for international students.

This study is being conducted by a student for the completion of a dissertation and will include interviews with up to fifteen participants.

**Activities.** Participating in this study will involve an initial interview that will take 60-90 minutes, and one or two short follow-up interviews. In the interviews, you will be asked some questions about your personal and academic history, but mostly about your experiences coming from South Korea and studying within an American community college.

The interviews will take place in person at or near your college campus or close to your current location. If travel time is a concern, interviews may be conducted over the phone. The study will last no more than five months. The initial interviewing session will be video or audio recorded if we meet in person. If we meet by phone, it will be audio recorded.

Participants may be asked to take part in follow-up interviews, which will be limited to asking clarifying questions only. Follow up interviews will be audio recorded. You are advised to not enroll in this study if you do not want to be recorded. Transcript copies of the interviews will be emailed to you. If you find something incorrect in the transcript, we will fix it together in a follow-up interview. All information gathered in this study will be confidentially stored at OSU for six years.

**Risks.** The interviews will cause no physical or economic risk to you. The interviews are confidential and the information gained in the interviews will be reported in a way that minimizes risk of you being identified. There is a small chance that we could accidentally disclose information that identifies you.

The greatest possible risk may be psychological. This study requires a level of self-awareness and reflection. Feeling extremely emotional is very unlikely. As a counselor, I am trained to process emotional reactions and decide if there is a need to refer to an expert or to stop our interview. The



interview questions will be general and auto-biographical. Because of this, you are not likely to feel distressed.

**Benefits.** There are no known direct benefits to you in participating in this study. Your participation will help to contribute to the professions of counseling, counselor education and supervision, and student development. You will also be contributing to knowledge about international student experiences in American community colleges.

**Voluntariness.** Participation in this study is up to you. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without penalty. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop being a part of the study. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you. This information may be included in study reports.

**Contact information.** If you have any questions about this project, please contact: Katherine Fort, at (206)354-3457. Email: katherinenfort@gmail.com or Deborah J. Rubel, Ph.D. at: (541)737-5973. Email: deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights or welfare as a participant, please contact the Oregon State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office, at (541) 737-8008 or by email at IRB@oregonstate.edu

**Sponsor.** There is no sponsor

Office of the Institutional Review Board  
Oregon State University  
A312 Kerr Administration Bldg, Corvallis, OR 97331-2140  
ph. (541) 737-8008 fax (541) 737-3093  
IRB@oregonstate.edu  
<http://oregonstate.edu/irb>

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Script: Initial Contact with Potential Participants**



Dear Students:

- Must be over the age of 18.
- Must be or have been enrolled in an American community college within the past five years.
- Must be a South Korean national.
- Must view yourself as having “successfully transitioned” into life in the United States.
- Must have an interest in and ability to explore cultural transition and adjustment issues related to your community college experience.

Are you over the age of 18?

Are you or have you been enrolled in an American community college within the past five years?

Are you a South Korean national?

Do you view yourself as having “successfully transitioned” into life in the United States?

Are you interested in and comfortable with exploring your cultural transition and adjustment issues in relation to your community college experience?

If you answered affirmatively to the above questions, we would like your assistance.

Katherine Fort, under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Rubel, is recruiting international students from South Korea who are or recently (in the past five years) have studied within an American community college and who view themselves as having “successfully transitioned” into life in the United States, to participate in a study entitled: “An Exploratory Grounded Theory Study of South Korean Students’ Successful Transition: Adjusting to the United States via American Community Colleges.”

For this case study, you will be asked to participate in two to three interviews. The first interview will last 60-90 minutes and will take place at a mutually agreed upon location convenient to you. If travel distance/time is a concern, the interview may be conducted over the phone. Participants may be asked to take part in follow-up interviews, which will be limited to asking clarifying questions only. You may be asked to participate in one, maybe two, such follow-up phone interviews that will last approximately 30 minutes. The total expected time if you agree to participate in this study will be approximately two-three hours.

Do you have any questions regarding the research and informed consent?

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

Katherine Fort – Student Researcher

katherinenfort@gmail.com

Telephone: (206)354-3457

Deborah J. Rubel, Ph.D. – Principal Investigator

Email: deborah.rubel@oregonstate.edu

Telephone: (541)737-5973

## **APPENDIX E**

### **Participant Information Form**



*South Korean Student Participant Information Form*

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Are you currently studying in an American community college? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what is your GPA? \_\_\_\_\_ Do you plan to transfer to a four-year university? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you recently (in the past five years) studied in an American community college? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, did you complete a degree or certificate? \_\_\_\_\_  
Did you transfer to a four-year university? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is/was your college major? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do/did you participate in any on-campus clubs/organizations within your community college? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Did you partake in an international student orientation/success course at your community college? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Did you attend college in South Korea before studying in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, did you graduate? \_\_\_\_\_  
What was your major? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Were you enrolled in the Korean Army before/during/after your time in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify before, during, or after)
10. Did either/both (circle) of your parents attend college in South Korea?
11. Did either/both (circle) of your parents study abroad or travel to the United States?  
And/or another country? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify country)
12. Did you enroll in pre-college level English courses upon your arrival at the community college? \_\_\_\_\_
13. What is the highest level of English completed at the community college? \_\_\_\_\_
14. While in community college, do/did you live: (circle)  
alone          with roommates          with a host family
15. Did you use English at home during community college? \_\_\_\_\_
16. What is your career goal? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Did you have work experience prior to arriving in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_ (specify type of work/title) \_\_\_\_\_
18. Do/did you use (circle one) mass transportation, walking, bike, or car as your primary mode of transport during community college?
19. Did you take the TOEFL prior to enrolling in community college? \_\_\_\_\_  
If yes, what was your score? \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Initial Interview Questions**

**Grand research question:** What is the process that international students from South Korean experience when they successfully transition into life as a community college student in the United States?

**Four main interview questions:**

- (1) Tell me your personal story about adapting to life as a community college student in the U.S.
- (2) What does success in this process mean to you?
- (3) Describe your own internal response to the transition process.
- (4) What experiences contributed to your success when transitioning?

## **APPENDIX G**

### **First Round Interviews**

#### **Introduction**

The initial set of first round interview data was gathered from ten participants using a combination of face-to-face, telephone, and internet phone (SKYPE) platforms, with the additional option for participants to add further detail to answers via email. The four questions asked during the first round of interviews were:

- (1) Tell me your personal story about adapting to life as a community college student in the U.S.
- (2) What does success in this process mean to you?
- (3) Describe your own internal response to the transition process.
- (4) What experiences contributed to your success when transitioning?

Initial interviews were conducted around the four main research questions, however, the style was flexible and allowed for the discussion of both broader and more specific questions and themes. The intention was to explore participants' experiences transitioning to life in the United States and to American community college, place them in context, and to further understand how participants defined their experiences with success in this transition process. During the initial interviews, the primary researcher established rapport with participants by deeply listening and attending to each individual's story, asking numerous clarifying questions, and disclosing/connecting some of her own past experiences when adjusting to life abroad, carefully listening to what participants had to say, and using empathy and humor when appropriate. The researcher sought to obtain a depth and detail of the experiences of participants. Initial interviews

ranged from 50-90 minutes in length. Interviews were transcribed with the primary researcher, further allowing her to become immersed in the data.

### **Participant Demographics**

Participants included five men and five women ranging in ages from 21-38 years of age. The following demographics were reported via the *Student Participant Information Form* (Appendix E). All participants were South Korean nationals, three of whom had become legal residents of the U.S. within the preceding five years. Within the past five years, all participants had attended, or currently were attending, American community college. Community college GPAs ranged from 3.4-4.0, known TOEFL scores ranged from 78-94 prior to entrance, and all but one participant was or had plans to transfer to a four-year university in the United States. All participants no longer attending community college completed degrees or certificates. A range of academic disciplines was represented; including (but not limited to) economics, aeronautics, communication, education, biology, international studies, and engineering. Nine out of ten participants attended international student orientation class/es upon arrival at their community college and nine of ten reported becoming involved in on-campus clubs/activities.

Half of the participants attended some amount of college/university in South Korea (prior to arriving in the U.S.) and four out of five of those participants had graduated from those programs. About half of the participants maintained the same course of study/major in the U.S. and others chose new career/education paths, however, most were related to previous work in some way. Of the five male participants, two had served in the South Korean military prior to their studies in the U.S., one participant



started his studies in American community college, was called to serve in the South Korean military and thus took a break, served in the military, and later returned to the same school, and the other two were starting their service after completion of their Bachelor's Degrees (within months after the time of interviewing). About half of the participants reported their parents having attended college/university in South Korea and about three quarters of the participants' parents had spent significant time traveling abroad to English speaking countries. All participants had completed college level English requirements (at least English 101). Six participants reported having lived with family members during their time in the U.S., the rest reported living with roommates and/or host families. Most participants used a combination of mass transit and walking while living in the U.S., though some eventually purchased and drive cars. Three participants used English "at home" in the U.S., while the rest did not. Six participants reported specific career goals and six participants had part or full-time work experience prior to their arrival in the U.S.

### **Results of Open Coding**

Transcriptions were initially coded using an open coding process, during which each line of three selected interviews was thematically coded through the use of gerunds. The goals of this process were to conceptualize and categorize the data. These three interviews consisted of two that were somewhat similar in content and were interviews that the primary researcher found to be strong in content detail and articulation (P1 and P3) and one that was quite different in content and internal process; an outlier in the ten (P9). The three interviews were compared in the open coding process and the most common gerunds that emerged in these three interviews included:

- I. ***Experiencing difficulties:*** "For one year, I commuted...I used the bus. It was limited...I couldn't go anywhere I wanted." "Nowadays a lot of international students are in a difficult situation with getting a job, so they are going back to South Korea. Some students decide to stay here, but it's illegal." "The first quarter is pretty difficult...I didn't know what I had to take and I did not know which professor is good and bad and all that." "I was trying to make my life get used to American society." "A lot of students get depressed when it's raining and they're just sitting at home, maybe watching Korean drama or movies, feeling nostalgic with their memories back in South Korea." "I was really depressed and wanted to go back to South Korea. I got injured and could not do anything. I quit my job, couldn't go to class. It was raining a lot. I didn't talk to anyone, didn't eat, just drink and slept." "Everything just collapsed overnight." "The hardest thing was the language...I just couldn't follow the professor, what he was talking about." "My first host mom was an alcoholic and a heavy smoker...she had two kids and her house was full of fleas." "Every homestay I stayed was kind of crazy...one incident I remember was I heard something in the kitchen and I went there and I saw an opossum!" "It was so different than I expected." "In the first quarter I had to read the text books over and over and over. I had to listen to the lecture all the time, to really understand what the professor was talking about."
- II. ***Persevering through a hard situation:*** "I thought, "Dude, if you keep going like this, you're gonna die." "I guess it just came from my mentality that I have to do everything by myself."
- III. ***Wanting to improve English:*** "I think the most important is language. If I can

understand, I can speak...that's the first step of adapting or transitioning." "I purposefully limited myself interacting with other Korean students because my main goal was to improve my language...I wanted to interact with people in English all the time."

- ***Identifying career and academic goals:*** "I wanted to study engineering." "I wanted to study aerospace engineering and this region was known for that." "My goal was to have a taste of the American life...and to transfer to a good university." "I wanted to be a marine biologist, so I was looking for any opportunities for volunteering and actually ended up doing at internship at (location)."
- ***Choosing community college:*** "University tuition expense...it was three times more than the community college."
- ***Living in the U.S. with family:*** "I stayed with my uncle here in the U.S." "I lived with my sister."
- ***Feeling lonely:*** "I think I was lonely." "I wasn't lonely in the ESL class, but after that, I went to the college credit course. From that time, I felt lonely because there were not much international students that I talk with." "I had to get used to it...I had to do everything on my own." "I spent more time outside, with others, so I wouldn't get depressed."
- ***Receiving support/guidance from the Korean community:*** "I went to the Korean Community Church. They were always kind and they were always supportive." "It supported me." "My uncle gave me a lot of advice." "I think that relationship (Korean cultural junior/senior relationship) is the most important thing." "Even if

you're not close to them (Korean junior/senior relationship)...you just learn from them how to act in the position." "My dad is a good mentor...I grew up watching my father try and be optimistic."

- ***Joining on-campus activities/jobs:*** "I participated in a lot of campus activities. I played a lot of sports...something you can do without a common language or culture." "You have a lot of free time...the whole evening. So the reason I wanted to make friends in class and on campus was to find someone to spend that spare time together. But it was kind of hard though...pushing myself to become involved in something or become attached to something. The sports and the campus activity were the good example I found." "I had a few jobs on campus...I searched for a job that I could do, in which I could use my skills and ability." "I worked in the International Student office so I could learn the process of how to transfer so that I could." "I wanted to be in a position where I could help other people with my abilities." "(Growing up) I was a troublemaker, so I guess it just came naturally to me that, instead of sitting at home and being miserable, it's better to go out and have fun, at least." "Having a study group helped a lot...it gave me a good opportunity to interact with American students." "I was having study group with my friends and I could feel that my language gets better. So like throughout that process, I can feel that I'm asking more questions, and more critical questions in a more correct manner. So I can see myself improving throughout the process."
- ***Trying to make American friends:*** "I couldn't make many American friends." "I didn't make many friends because I came from a culture which, in psychology

terms they say is a collective culture, whereas U.S. is individualistic."

"Everybody would just rush out the door as soon as class ends. There is no time to actually make friends." "The impression that I got, the reaction from them was not really friendly." "They would just do their own thing." "I looked around the campus and see how other students are like studying, and the clothes they are wearing and having chit-chat with their friends...just look around and feel like, what should I do?" "I mainly made friends through group study and like through any other discussion regarding the class." "I saw the students smoking after class, so I just joined them...naturally, we'd just talk together."

- ***Communicating with others:*** "I would always go to class ten minutes early...and just listen to other students' conversations. I could feel the topic of the conversation is like really not important things. Most not telling them, not telling the other students about their life, which is like...there's a wall between those friends. I would talk to my friend, tell my private stories and all that, but they're like...just having casual conversation, you know?" "The first quarter I had difficulty in finding...making friends." "I had an advantage in English because I spent a year when I was eight years old in international school, so my hearing ability was, I think, way better than other international students." "A lot of Korean students would just be shy after the moment they see (Americans) not understanding what they're saying. They're like, "Oh, never mind" you know?...and a lot of times, people who didn't understand wouldn't ask again...so I think that's a barrier."
- ***Seeking academic/career advice:*** "They (off-campus mentor) knew what I have

to do and what I should...they were the same case as me...not born here." "I think that is the weak point of the advisor in community college: they knew the process of how to transfer to another college but they have not enough idea for career."

"Trial and error...just going out and asking questions."

- ***Having previous military experience:*** "I could learn some skills from the military.

I learned from that experience, like know what I want to do." "There's a lot of training, we can strengthen our mental and physical thing, too." "(After the military) I was much more effective, much more driven toward my goal." "I had two years to think about my life and what I am going to do when I get out of the military. The entire two years you think, "What will I do when I get out, the moment I get out?"...so I planned everything in detail." "I think the most important thing is the military...I was a Korean soldier assigned to the U.S. military, so from 6:00am to 5:00pm, the moment I wake to the moment that all the work was finished, I worked only with U.S. soldiers." "My English improved a lot in the military...I had responsibility and that made me to study and work hard." "After my military service, I got kind of a new mindset."

- ***Connecting with others on campus:*** "ESL course teachers were very kind...they guided me...how to make a friend or make a decision on the future." "When I asked a questions (the instructor) said "Oh, that's a very good question!" and I like that...I loved to hear that because I never heard it in Korea before."

- ***Feeling confident in facing difficulty again:*** "When you do something at first, it's really hard and it seems impossible because you don't know anything about it. But when you do something for the second time, you get kind of scared because

you already know what it is. But you go through it. It's kind of like, "Oh, I've already done this. I've already, you know, had to do this." So it's easier." "I look at it as, "It's hard, this is difficult. But you know, we'll get through it." "Because of those kind of hardships in the military, I could overcome studying for a long time." "Since I went through those kinds of things, I can do something easier."

- ***Feeling successful:*** "I graduated with a (field of study) license...and got a job offer." "I think of success as academic, and almost equivalently, English comes second...the ability to have a conversation with other people." "Feeling effective came from having a plan." "Have more confidence to overcome the shyness, be more arrogant than be sorry...you learn to appreciate the process" "Even though it's hard, I learned something from it. And it kind of made me a better person." "Self-improvement was the biggest success for me." "I feel confident...that was my biggest success." "When I first got my grades, you know, my friends were just looking at my grades and, "Wow, dude that's awesome!"...I had this fear that they will not like to interact with International students, but through my academic ability and just didn't really care about my language as long as I can teach them, we could study together, they liked it. So that kind of gave me another confidence." "I kind of mentored a couple of students. And they all got into pretty good colleges...And that kind of helped me a lot too that, "Wow, I'm actually making a contribution..." you know?" "I think the confidence was a very big thing...no matter what kind of stuff that you learn, as long as you have that confidence in yourself, you can always try...That kind of fuels you to understand more and...I mean, study harder."

Following open coding, the researcher broke down lists of all codes into categories, organized each nuance of these codes under umbrella categories, and took careful steps in reviewing and refining these lists multiple times in order to make sure not to leave anything out. A diagram was created to illustrate the process involved in the larger emerging category of "Encountering Life as a Community College Student" leading up to which there appeared to be a clear process of decision making and within which, there appeared to be an overlapping set of interacting experiences academically, socially, and logistically (see Figure 1, Encountering Life as a Community College Student).

Next, the researcher created an exhaustive list of categories, subcategories, properties and subproperties following the open coding of all ten interviews:

Categories are in **BOLD CAPITALS**  
 Subcategories are underlined  
 Properties and subproperties are in standard format  
 Dimensions of properties were not yet defined

- **BEING MOTIVATED TO STUDY IN THE U.S.**

English skills

- Seeking to improve English
  - TOEFL score
  - Grades
  - Conversation

Cultural learning

- Having a "feel" or "taste" for American life

Improve career

- Identifying an area of academic interest
- Identifying an area of career interest
- Choosing to study in PNW region for career reasons (i.e. Boeing, Microsoft, Amazon...)
- Feeling the importance of having a clear career goal
- Putting military-time career plans into action



- Wanting to make money

#### Family influence

- Receiving support from parents
- Receiving encouragement from parents
- Receiving mentorship from parents
- Relative also attending college in US
- Living in US with relative

#### Academic success

- Feeling that success is first measured academically
- Measuring academic success by GPA

#### Transfer to university

- Measuring success as transferring to a good university
- Having clear goals as a transfer student.
- Feeling as though university meets long term goals.
- Taking pleasure in attending university after CC.

### • **FEELING CHALLENGED**

#### Personally

- Feeling let down
  - American reality is different than expected
- Feeling shy
- Feeling isolated
  - ❖ Having to survive "on own"
  - ❖ Boredom
  - Having evenings free
  - Watching lots of TV
  - Using social media
  - Having lots of time to think
  - Not wanting to waste time
  - ❖ Feeling nostalgic for SK
  - Watching Korean drama/TV in US
  - Talking on the phone to friends/family in SK
  - Wanting to return to SK
- Feeling depressed
  - Not wanting to do anything
  - Not wanting to talk to others
  - Feeling the emotional effects of bad weather in PNW
  - ❖ Staying home when it rains
- Dealing with something physical ailment/getting sick
- Feeling unsure of the future
- Feeling torn between two cultures

- Feeling "reverse culture shock"

### Logistically

- Waking up early
- Distance to school
- Experiencing mobility issues
  - Using mass transit/bus
  - Walking a long distance to bus/school
  - Losing mobility due to illness/physical ailment
- Learning to complete daily tasks alone
- Wanting to make money
- Living with a host family
- Not being able to attend classes due to illness/physical ailment

### Academically

- Academic pressure
  - ❖ Internal
    - Having a low GPA/lower than expected
  - ❖ External
- Career guidance
  - ❖ Not getting career information
- Classroom environment
  - American students speaking more
  - American students asking more questions
  - Surprised by classroom norms
  - Not being able to speak often with other international students
- Language barriers
  - ❖ Feeling misunderstood by faculty/staff
  - Misunderstanding needs of international students
  - Misunderstanding language/accent
  - Studying at home
  - Feeling loss of understanding in college level courses
  - ❖ In the classroom
    - Feeling lost during lecture
    - Interacting with peers on assignments
- Systemic difficulties
  - Experiencing a difficult first quarter
  - Difficulty in registering
  - Having low expectations
  - Feeling unsure of classes
  - Wondering about quality of instructors
  - Having a full schedule
  - Relating to early academic norms from SK
  - Feeling lonely in college level classes with mostly Americans
  - Experiencing issues with campus work

### I. Difficulty finding on-campus work

## II. Difficulty maintaining work Socially (peers, interaction)

- Trying to make friends
  - Reaching out/introducing self to Americans
  - Inviting Americans to have lunch
  - Feeling that Americans are busy
  - Expecting to make friends more quickly
  - Feeling bad for stopping Americans to make friends/talk
  - Not having enough time to make friends
  - Reaching out to Americans and giving up
  - Failing to make friends
  - Feeling less able to relate to Korean friends
  - Wanting to make friends to fill spare time
- Having few friends
  - ❖ Measuring success by number of American friends
  - ❖ Not able to find a student club that connected International students to Americans
- Relating to Americans
- Comparing self to American students
- Feeling shy compared to Americans
  - Feeling disconnected from American peers
- Noticing American casual conversation norms
- Sensing an independent focus in American social culture
- Sensing a wall between American friends
- Not understanding American humor
- Noticing American independent social interactions
- Wanting to be similar to Americans
  - Communicating with Americans
- Not relating to American student conversation
- Feeling as though Americans have more superficial conversation
- Interpreting a negative reaction from American students to ESL/language
- SK students giving up on speaking to Americans
- Experiencing a language barrier
  - Wanting to practice English with American friends
- Feeling that Americans can't understand SK accent
- Feeling an advantage for having stronger English skills
- Losing interest in Korean student club

## Culturally

- Identifying with collective culture
  - ❖ Feeling different from US individualist culture
    - Differences between students/peers
      - Different priorities of American students
    - Differences between students and faculty/staff
  - ❖ Feeling different cultural norms.

- **COPING WITH A CHALLENGE**

Personally

- Relating/learning from past experiences
  - ❖ Having lived previously in American city
  - ❖ Having lived with Americans before
  - ❖ Having previously persevered through difficulty using English
  - ❖ Identifying as "smart" during childhood
  - ❖ Having lived with multiple host families
  - ❖ Having attending college/university in SK
  - ❖ Being in the military
  - ❖ Being in the US military as a Korean soldier
    - Working with US soldiers
    - Struggling with depression during the military and surviving
    - Being the only Korean in an American organization
    - Balancing two lives, American and Korean
- Improving English skills in the military
- Gaining focus in the military
  - Solidifying career goals
  - Improving knowledge
  - Growing stronger/more perseverant
  - Learning specific marketable skills
- Feeling responsibility
  - ❖ Studying hard in the past
  - ❖ Working hard in the past
  - ❖ Balancing between work, friends and family in the past
  - ❖ Experiencing the ebb and flow of English skills in the past
  - ❖ Losing English skills when spending time with SKs in the past
  - ❖ Experiencing a bicultural lifestyle in the past
  - ❖ Making it through a difficult situation in childhood.
  - ❖ Learning optimism from a parent
- Knowing goals before coming to US
- Living with extended family
  - Speaking Korean at home
- Becoming independent
  - Feeling more "free"
  - Feeling a "release of pressure"
  - Doing things "on my own"
  - Having own car
  - Choosing to spend time outside to avoid depression
  - Not watching Korean drama/TV
  - Not talking often to friends and family in Korea

- Being assertive
  - Finding cheaper housing
  - Putting self out there
- Getting used to American society
  - Observing American behavior
  - Finding things s/he likes in American behavior
  - Emulating American behavior
- Being persistent
  - Feeling an importance in trying (even if failing)
  - Realizing/naming the depression
  - Making more of an effort
  - Going through a familiar hard situation
  - Overcoming shyness
  - Choosing to make the best of a hard situation
- Taking pride/having confidence
  - Feeling that his outlook on the world is rare/unique
- Feeling different from other SK students
  - Identifying with SK culture roots as a part of identity
  - Having empathy towards self
  - Valuing the opportunity to live abroad
  - Choosing to do things that make him happy
  - Identifying resilient traits
  - Feeling confident in facing difficulty
  - Having confidence
- Changing life perspective
  - Noticing an improved quality of life
  - Approaching problems differently than before
  - Measuring success by personal growth
  - Appreciating the process
  - Valuing the process as much (if not more) than the outcome
  - Identifying successes in adaptation
  - Enjoying free time
  - Thinking about things differently than before
  - Enjoying the flexible schedule of CC life
  - Realizing "I don't know everything"
- Feeling more mature
  - Listening to an internal voice/guide
  - Age
  - Feeling difference in transferring as an adult v. directly attending university from HS
- Staying connected to SK culture
  - ❖ Maintaining SK identity while assimilating
  - ❖ Staying connected to family at home
  - ❖ Letting go of certain aspects of Korean culture

Academically

- Choosing not to take ESL classes at first, but taking non-English college level classes
- Taking ESL at first to feel more comfortable
- Jumping into harder courses
- Transferring community colleges
- Transferring to a technical college
  - Feeling more comfortable with technical college atmosphere
  - Feeling tech. college is more in line with career goals
- Improving English skills
  - Being aware of improved English
  - Learning more American "vernacular"
- Connecting to faculty
  - ❖ Appreciating CC faculty
  - Receiving guidance from ESL teachers
  - ❖ Feeling valued by faculty
  - ❖ Connecting to CC teaching style
- Being complimented by faculty
- Feeling more reassured/confident in class
  - ❖ Asking questions
  - ❖ During class
  - ❖ After class
  - Connecting to classroom environment
- Acting maturely in class
- Being diligent in class
  - Interactions with peers
  - Interactions with instructors
  - Gaining confidence
  - to speak
  - to participate in class
  - Becoming more aware of own growth
- Identifying career interests
  - ❖ Volunteering in area of interest
  - ❖ Getting an internship
  - ❖ Studying courses directly related to career goals
  - ❖ Getting career information
- Becoming more focused
  - Having a plan
  - Setting and keeping goals
  - ❖ Academic/transfer
  - ❖ Career
  - ❖ Daily
- Taking classes without other SKs
- Experiencing positive friendship connections in school
  - Making friends in class
  - Being influenced by friends' career goals

- Looking for opportunities
  - Joining study groups
- Relating to past international education experiences
- Increasing/maintaining motivation
- Shifting priorities
  - From success as "adjusting" to success as "academically achieving"
- Feeling level of course work was easy
- Emulating other students' study habits
- Working on campus
  - ❖ Getting out and looking for work
  - Asking questions
    - ❖ Looking for new work with higher pay
    - ❖ Working in the international student office
    - ❖ Tutoring
    - ❖ Having fun at work
- Taking on transfer student identity
  - Choosing a CC near a good university
  - Learning transfer requirements
  - Looking at school/life differently as a transfer student
  - Focusing more on studies
  - Taking pride in transferring
  - Feeling self assured in university
  - Taking pride in meeting a personal goal when transferring
- Working hard to be successful
- Getting a job offer
  - Getting a visa

### Socially

- Managing social logistics
- Reaching out to others
- Making connections/friends with other students
  - ❖ American
    - Interacting with more Americans
    - Using English with Americans
  - ❖ SK
  - ❖ International
  - ❖ Outside of school
- Placing importance on relationships
- Following the advice of older students
  - Koreans
    - ❖ Getting help from those who have had similar struggles
  - Americans
  - Other international students
- Becoming a leader
  - Wanting to lead
  - Identifying as being a helpful student

- Gaining confidence through helping/teaching others
- Wanting to help others
- In church
- In school
  - International students
  - Korean students
    - "Giving back" to new Korean students
- Balancing Korean friends with American friends
  - ❖ Choosing not to hang out often with international students in a group
  - ❖ Joining Korean student club
  - ❖ Relating to other SK student experiences
  - ❖ Learning from examples of other SK students
  - ❖ Limiting interactions with other SKs
  - ❖ Staying connected to Korean community
  - ❖ Receiving support from Korean community
- Living with peers
  - other international students
  - American students
- Spending time off campus
  - ❖ Helping with a family business
  - ❖ Connecting to community resources
  - ❖ Attending church
    - Receiving mentoring from church
  - ❖ Support from family in the US
- Spending time with older students
  - ❖ Connecting to a mentor
  - ❖ Noticing socialization of older students and career orientation
  - ❖ Connecting to older American students
  - ❖ Connecting to older international students or SKs
- Dating
- Getting married
  - ❖ Wanting to take care of partner
  - ❖ Gaining citizenship
- Modeling others' social behaviors
  - Listening to other students talk
- Feeling a deeper connection with previous friends in SK
- Finding common interests to make friends
  - Finding similar goals
  - Finding career oriented friends
    - ❖ Receiving academic/career advice
- Increasing chances for communication with Americans
- Participating in campus activities
  - Identifying importance of getting involved on campus.
    - ❖ Playing sports
  - Identifying sports as a good campus activity



- Feeling the importance of playing sports in adapting to US culture
    - ❖ Taking risks to get to know others/networking
    - ❖ Pushing self to become involved
  - Choosing to go out and have fun
  - Choosing not to stay home
- **CHOOSING COMMUNITY COLLEGE**
    - To save money
    - To improve English
    - Small classes
    - To have time to figure out academic/career goals
    - To transfer to university

### **Emerging Hypothesis**

During the initial categorization process, the primary researcher wondered a lot about the relationship of language skill/perceived language skill during the transition process, specifically, *How does language fit into these categories? It seems pervasive across all areas, so where does it go?* Additionally, the concepts surrounding participants' living situations seemed to be connected to their "successes" in many areas, and the researcher wondered, *Is staying with family a dimension of daily life that affects other areas such as making connections with Americans? Such as the desire to reach out to others? Or getting connected to the Korean community?*

Also, some of the concepts and codes seemed to become background/context, which seemed to precede or lay the foundation for "successful experience/s," namely:

- Personal characteristics
- Having past experiences with challenge (before coming to the U.S.)
- Being motivated to study in the U.S.
- Choosing to study in a community college
- Daily life (logistics such as transportation, living situation, home stay, etc.)

As such, axial coding was utilized across the remaining seven transcripts and the researcher started to look for commonalities among codes and played with the level of abstraction in them. The above initial codes were grouped into a larger context code and **BEING MOTIVATED TO STUDY IN THE U.S.** was renamed **COMING TO AMERICA TO LEARN ENGLISH**. Various possible motivations for coming to the U.S. to study English were embedded within this background context category as properties, such as the desire to improve English, gain cultural knowledge, improve one's career, and family influence. Each of these properties housed dimensions listed below in *italics*.

- **COMING TO AMERICA TO LEARN ENGLISH**
- English skills (ranging both *internally* and *externally* from *slight to strong desire* to increase English skills)
  - Conversational
  - Academic (grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing)
- Cultural learning (ranging both *internally* and *externally* from *slight to strong desire* to increase cultural learning from interactions connected to learning English)
  - Learning American cultural norms
  - Adapting to/becoming more American
- Improve career (ranging both *internally* and *externally* from *slight to strong desire* to improve career opportunities upon learning English)
  - Complete degree/certificate
  - Get good grades
  - Transfer to university
  - Have more job options (in the U.S. and/or back in Korea)
- Family influence (ranging both *internally* and *externally* from *slight to strong internal desire to fulfill* and *external influence* from family for participant to learn English)
  - Family paid for community college
  - Family wants participant to succeed

Encountering a challenge and **FEELING CHALLENGED** remained a central phenomenon in the overall question. Within experiencing a challenge, overlapping areas of possibility and interrelation were identified between personal, academic, social, and

linguistic/communication. For example, if a participant experienced a challenge personally, such as an illness, he/she reported being more likely to feel depressed at first, thus not attend class or reach out socially. When social and academic interactions decreased, participants in turn reported feeling less confident in their communication skills: a downward spiral. It did not seem possible to tease these areas apart.

▪ **FEELING CHALLENGED**

- Personally (ranging from feeling *slightly challenged* personally to *extreme challenge*)
  - Physical health challenges (injury/illness)
  - Mental health challenges (anxiety/depression)
- Academically (ranging from feelings of *some challenge* to *complete failure*)
  - Grades
  - Test scores
- Socially (ranging from feeling *slight difficulty in making friends* to *complete isolation*)
  - Relationship challenges (friendships, homestays, peer relations, romantic relationships)
- Linguistically/communication (ranging from *slight communication challenges* to *total lack of communication*)
  - Communication with instructors
  - Communication with classmates on assignments

Likewise, how participants reported **COPING WITH A CHALLENGE** revealed equally fundamental components, and that category name was maintained. Upon experiencing a challenge, how participants reacted to or coped with that challenge appeared central to their success. When challenges presented themselves, participants had the choice to find ways to cope or to give up on those challenges. All ten participants reported that they found various ways to cope, sometimes coping more successfully than others. The main steps that participants took to cope with their challenges included studying more, interacting with peers, joining activities, and reaching out to campus employees.

▪ **COPING WITH A CHALLENGE**

- Studying more (ranging from *some* to *many* hours)
- Interacting with peers (ranging from *some interactions* to *many*)
  - Talking in class
  - Talking outside of class
  - Getting together off campus
- Joining activities (ranging from *some activities* to *many*)
  - Clubs
  - On-campus job
  - Sports
  - Community activities (church, volunteering)
- Reaching out to campus employees (ranging from *some interactions* to *many*)
  1. Faculty
  2. Staff/advisors
  3. Student workers/leadership

Some resulting concepts also began to emerge from this category: such as gaining strength from adversity, increasing motivation, experiencing the long-term outcomes of coping, and within this, appeared the dimension of "succeeding." The final code from the initial list, **CHOOSING COMMUNITY COLLEGE** was dropped from the list and absorbed into the background context of the study.

At this point in the process, the researcher felt it would be helpful to memo a loosely common timeline, which seemed consistent in first round interview data and was captured as follows:

- Hears about studying abroad in US by encouragement from family member in SK, SK family in US, peer or agency.
- Is inspired to strengthen English skills and gain experience living in US as prompted by current SK economic trends
- May have had similar experiences in previous study abroad situations/travel
- May have experienced a time when English was valued in previous work history
- Is interested in a career where improved English will put them at an advantage
- Is interested in a career where study abroad experience, or specifically in the US, will put them at an advantage.

- Finds about US community college option/system from international study abroad agency in SK or by family member who has studied/knows someone in US.
- Chooses CC due to the following factors:
  - Open enrollment
  - Low cost
  - Small classes
  - Non-traditional age range
  - To improve TOEFL score to later attend university
  - To complete basic English/EP5 courses:
    - To return to SK with a certificate (for work/career advancement options)
    - To complete AA degree and transfer to university in US
- Enters CC and first lives with SK family members or home stay
- Experiences various frustrations as US experience is not exactly what they thought it would be:
- Difficulty in English conversation
  - i. Difficulty socializing with peers
    - 1. Unable to make friends, especially with Americans
  - ii. Difficulty in academic classes after EP5 courses are completed (i.e. college credit courses)
- Difficulty with American social norms
  - i. Increased pressure to be independent
    - 1. Effecting social norms, classroom norms, living situation
  - ii. Unable to understand English nuanced jokes, media/TV
- Difficulty with American logistics
  - i. Transportation
  - ii. Knowing what classes/teachers are good
  - iii. Basic living differences (laundry, tipping, etc.)
- Not wanting to be overly reliant upon Korean community
- Pulls strength when faced with adversity/disappointment/depression:
  - From past challenges
    - i. Ex) Military experiences
    - ii. Ex) Living abroad before
  - From ability to grapple with extra difficulty in current situation
    - i. Ex) Very difficult homestay
    - ii. Ex) Illness or injury
- Is inspired by friends, family, mentors
- Gains independence
- Sometime in the first year moves in with friends (away from homestay)
- Seeks out new friends, makes EXTRA effort to connect to others
- Joins on campus organizations
- Gets a campus job
- Improves English conversation skills
- Improves classroom participation

- Joins more study groups
- Connects to staff/faculty
- Gains increased confidence, which leads to motivation to do more, take more risks
- Applies to join more activities
  - Is inspired to “pad” transfer app
  - Has become more confident in “getting out there”
- Applies to universities for transfer
  - Gains more confidence as acceptances roll in
- Wants to become a leader in ISP/SK community (on/off campus)
- Wants to give back to new SK students/ISP students

This timeline seemed consistent with the prior list of concepts, properties, and dimensions, but was rather overwhelming to look at, so she sought the help of her advisor, who helped to reduce the timeline back down to four key concepts and categories. The following are definitions of each, with supporting direct quotes coded from Round One participant transcripts:

Categories are in **BOLD CAPITALS**  
 Subcategories are underlined  
 Properties and subproperties are in **bold lowercase**  
 Dimensions are *italicized*

**(CONTEXT CATEGORIES):** Context categories were defined as aspects of participant background and history, motivations for coming to the U.S. and reasons for choosing to study in an American community college. In order to choose to study in the US in a community college, it was clear that participants must attach to certain attributes. They were conceptualized as mutually dependent yet somewhat individually fluid. For example, some students had more past experiences that motivated them to come to the U.S., while others had stronger driving personal characteristics. Thus, there appeared to be layered dimensions of this larger concept of **CONTEXT**, within which the entire phenomena occurred: the ground upon which the overall equation, or active part of the theory, was built upon, but these pieces of the picture did not seem to be the main actors

in answering the specific question.

**I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS:** These characteristics included properties such as internal personality traits, external influences, personal goals, life perspectives, or other demographically defining traits disclosed by participants. Dimensions included *little to high motivation, little to high English skill, and little to high interest in American culture.*

**Internal personality traits:**

P1: When I see something that I think it is a problem or it's difficult, then my personality is I'll just go try and work it out. If I fail, then I've failed...but I have tried, you know?

P2: I had to learn English because Korean culture, right now you must learn English. Otherwise, you are not educated. So, yeah, that's why my parents wanted me to go to just see, look around and also to learn a little bit of English, start to learn. That's why I came here. I had no fear about seeing different people...many students in Korea, they are afraid to talk with foreigners because of the lack of experience. So even though they can speak English, they do not approach. Just that's the culture right now.

P3: I looked at a lot of students and they just don't really try to go out there and just put themselves out there and really experience it. But, well, I guess I was kind of different that I actually went to (internship site) or any other places that I can do something about it and... I guess it just came from my mentality that I have to do everything by myself.

P6: I think I was just too shy.

P8: I was a very active girl when I was in Korea...but then when I came here, my personality changed completely. I couldn't talk to anyone...not just the language, but cultural stuff.

**External influences (community, family):**

P7: I am the only student in my high school that came to U.S. So they really envied me, because I am at the (university). It's like a pretty famous school in Korea. So by the time I came to the U.S., like all of my friends and family they expected I would go to a really good university. So it was kind of, actually, a burden for me.

P8: All of my friends just went to universities, four years colleges. I'm also the only

one who's going to community college. And it was really different from what my friends were doing and what I have to do. So I struggled a lot. I'm the first kid in my family, so I have to figure everything out by myself. And that's pretty hard.

P8: My mom was a nurse in Korea. And I heard that nurses here was really good...from that, I was finding a way to be a nurse as fast as I can. And I never changed my dream since then.

P10: Actually, I love art. I wanted to take interior design, but my parents really don't like it. And there weren't any other choice that I can do it. So I just take the economics.

### **Personal Goals:**

P1: I had like clear goal to transfer to certain universities that I wanted to.

### **Life Perspectives:**

P1: I think I learned from my parents...my dad is a good mentor. I grew up... My Mother, she passed away when I was six...So I grew up watching my father trying to be optimistic all the time, because without a mom it's really hard to raise kids. And I was a troublemaker. So I guess it just naturally came to me that, instead of sitting at home being miserable it's better to go out and have fun at least.

### **Demographic Traits:**

P3: Since I'm older than other students, I'm more mature in the class. I think that kind of helped me, you know, being a diligent student. Yeah. I guess like twenty-five is not bad [laughs].

**II. HAVING PAST EXPERIENCES:** These were defined as influential historical experiences that impacted the participants' initial stages of the transition process, properties included previous study abroad experience or other influential experiences such as historical grief/loss experiences, past military service and/or previous career experience. Dimensions included little to *high confidence in the face of difficulty*, *collective* to *independent*, and *reserved* to *outgoing/adventurous*.

### **Previous study abroad experience:**



P1: I was born, raised in South Korea, besides one year that I lived in (Asian country) and lived in (another Asian country) with my family. And I graduated high school in South Korea...my sister was transferring to (American university) from a university in (Asian country). So my Dad was kind of worried, you know, send a daughter to Western part of the world by herself, so he made me go there, too.

P1: I had an advantage in English because I spent a year when I was eight years old in an International school, a year. So my hearing ability was, I think, way better than other International students.

P2: I was studying in (European country) before I come here. So like adapting a new culture, for me, was like very easy because I was already living in different countries. And I studied with different foreign students, so it was kind of fun for me. And it was easy to me to accept like American culture, because we were in the same page.

**Previous military experience:**

P1: I had two years in the military to think about my life and what am I going to do when I get out of the military. The entire two years, you only think about what will I do when I get out? What will I do when I get out, the moment I get out? So I planned everything in detail. And as soon as I came to the United States, I put those plans in action.

**III. CHOOSING AN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE:** This category was again reworked and seemed to be more accurate than "Coming to America to Learn English." Although all participants reported their reasons for coming to the U.S. were some or wholly rooted in improving their English skills, it seemed more pertinent to look into specific motivations for choosing American community colleges and then separating those aspects of experience from the experiences of living in the U.S. "Chooosing" to was defined as participants' reasons for choosing to study in an American community college, especially in comparison to reasons for not going directly into/attending an American university. This category also contains reasons why specific community colleges were chosen. Properties included interest/goal to transfer to university, seeking specific career opportunities, seeking certificate/AA degree, seeking to improve English,

interest in small classes/intimate atmosphere, interest in diversity, and interest in saving money. Often, many of these properties were intertwined. One such example shows how interest in studying English was driven by interest in transferring to a university, which linked to career opportunities:

P7: The primary reason that I came to the U.S. was to study English. And just learn a new culture. And beyond that, I failed to go to university that I want in Korea. So I really wanted to go to another university with just more English than a Korean university. So by the time I graduated from my Korean high school, my English was not good enough to take a class in America. So I decided to go to community college instead to learn English and take some class. So that's how I decided to come to the U.S.

#### **Interest/goal to transfer to university:**

P1: I knew I wanted to do a study in engineering, but in (American city) there's no school. I mean, there is a community college, but there's no school with good reputation for transfer, like transfer paid and all that. So I tried to find one in West Coast. And California is one. And Washington is the second one, I think.

P3: I was looking for a community college that's close to the (local university). And people just told me that (community college) might be the best option, so that's why I came.

P6: I had a conversation with Korean students...they told me about the community colleges (for transfer). So, yeah, I kind of researched it...in Korea we have a many companies that help in school abroad. So I found one company.

P7: (Community college) is a pretty famous community college in Korea...a lot of Korean people go there before transferring to a university.

#### **Seeking specific career opportunities:**

P1: I wanted to study aerospace engineering. And, of course, Seattle having Boeing in the city, it's the place for it.

P6: My goal in the beginning, in America, was have something can I write on my resume.

#### **Seeking certificate/AA degree:**

P2: I think most Korean people think in the same way. For us, getting certificate or

diploma is most important. Since you come here, you have to get something to return. So that's why I was so desperate to finish my school, like as soon as possible. For going back to Korea, whether you speak good or not, the diploma or the paper can tell you were successful there.

### **Interest in saving money:**

P2: There's reason to go to community college for...Like big reason is the money. The tuition cost is three, four times less than regular university for us. So, of course, the cost was biggest reason why I choose coming to community college first.

P9: I couldn't transfer to the four-year university because of the tuition expense. It was three times more than community college.

### **Interest in small classes/intimate atmosphere:**

P2: It's more...it's smaller class. You can have a more conversation with professor. And there can be some kind of negotiation in community college. Of course, it's not easy. But I think...well, like people are around friends who already took that professor. They can encourage that student, "Oh, you should definitely go to that professor. He's really kind and he can really listen to you."

P3: The environment of community college, it was pretty quiet. And there was very little distraction from studying. And also the atmosphere in class really helped me a lot, because it was very small.

P4: I heard the reputation of (community college) from my friends who took a class in there before. And I think the English language course is great. That's why I chose (community college) for the first class. Because the four year college, like (university), is very hard to adapt for me, I think. Classes are very larger, more than twenty people, right, I guess...I guess. And then I think the younger students are at (university).

P4: They can get confidence from the classes...get good relations with their instructors. They know almost everything, I think. They understand the international students a lot, especially the small classes, like in the community college, I think is benefit for the Korean students...the interaction with instructors.

P6: The infrastructure is different in community colleges—they have advisors who do more than just Visa. We used to have an advisor from Korea...that helps a lot, really. She was really kind, you know. Whenever she met the Korean students, like she gave us some snacks or something like that.

### **Seeking to improve English:**

P2: From Korea, not many (students) come from the high school or middle school...most (Korean students studying in American community colleges) are over twenty-one and come to U.S. and get some experience, and with that experience, they can get a better job in Korea. You can just write in resume that I was studying in American college for one year. I took English classes. I can speak.

P3: I came initially to learn English. Then my father actually asked me if I wanted to study in the U.S. So going to community college for me was kind of unexpected at that time.

P10: Actually, I went to Korean university. And I studied there for two years and a half. But I decided...one of my mother's friends was told that we cannot really get a good job if we graduate Korean university. English is so very important thing to us to have a good job. So he suggested it, to study English, yeah, in the United States. So I came here. One of my friends recommended this school. And he said (community college) has better system.

#### **Interest in diversity:**

P4: (Community college) has more diverse culture around. So I think the instructor or teacher, and even the other people, can understand diverse accents.

P5: My brother led me to attend the community college because it's a pretty good school. He said that (city) was really one of the best cities and it's like a very big school which has a lot of cultures. So he just said to me like I can have a lot of different experiences, I can meet a lot of diverse people, so I should choose (community college).

**IV. LIVING IN THE U.S.:** This category included initial reasons for choosing to live in the United States, initial impressions of their transition process to American culture, and logistical aspects of their living situation (such as living in a homestay or family members living in the U.S.). Properties included being surprised by standards of living, being surprised by diversity, family living in the U.S., experiencing older student population, living with host family, being surprised by peers, experiencing discrimination,

#### **Being surprised by standards of living:** (fashion, food, weather)

P2: I was imagining like more big and more fashionable. But actually, like Seattle, everyone wore North Face. So I was like kind of shocked, like really!? Oh. And

Food. Here is a lot like just huge foods, and especially compared to (European country) life, I was just, whoa!

### **Being surprised by diversity:**

P2: I was expecting to see only White people. But here, it's really diverse. So I was a little bit shocked. Like wow, not only White people living in the U.S.

P10: The United States has like a multiethnic society. So I needed to understand other cultures at first. So, actually, I hadn't experienced that.

### **Family living in the U.S.:**

P2: My cousin was here. So I lived with him...with his family like three months. Actually, I was planning to do only one quarter study and go back to Korea. But later, he got a job offer here. And he decided to live in Seattle. So basically, my family moved to here, so I had to stay here.

P4: The reason I decide to move in U.S. is my fiancé decided to live in U.S. He got a green card, the residency. So anyway, I moved so we could live together.

P9: My uncle was living here, so I lived with him at first.

P10: My cousin lives in (city) and he has been here for ten years, so he helped me a lot for studying...or revising my papers. We are visiting each other very often. Twice a year.

### **Experiencing older student population:**

P2: I think more higher age group (Korean students) come to the West Coast, because it's much more easier to adapt and easier to focus on study here.

### **Living with host family:**

P3: I was originally living with a host mom. It was home stay. But I would say that was really a horrible experience. She had two kids and her house was full of fleas. My second homestay...it was still kind of dirty too. She had a lot of canned stuff and she didn't really cook for me. She said I could eat anything that I want to, but I looked at drawers and like freezers, and everything was actually expired. I mean, she was a really nice person. But yeah, the...the house was kind of dirty...one incident that I remember was I heard something in the kitchen and I went there, and I saw an opossum! When I first came, I was expecting more like family environment that I saw in soap drama. It was so different than I expected.

P6: I met good home stay parents...I heard many complaints about home stay from the other international students. But for me it was so nice. Their cooking was just amazing.

**Being surprised by peers:**

P5: When I was in Korea, like I choose my major as my father wanted me to do as. After becoming a teacher, I realized how many young students did not have any dream for their future, and they just wrote about their parents' order on the question "what do you want to be in the future?" I wanted to break this bad chain, and I also realized that I could not stop this if I did not change. So, I decided to come to the U.S., and it always give me motivation to keep going, even though I have lots of walls.

**Experiencing discrimination:**

P5: The first one year is really hard to adapt myself to American culture because lots of things were different. Like, I sometimes have to experience some stereotype or...like prejudice. But the biggest problem was I cannot open myself to different situations.

P6: When I arrived at (airport), I thought, "Wow, this is the beginning. Finally, I am in the U.S." or something like that. Since I'd been planning to go to study abroad in middle school. But what I faced is totally just something that I never expected and was... I think every negative emotion that I can have. First of all, I never experienced like – how can I say – discrimination. When I get there, like I could see the people were treating me in a different way. So those, I had never had those experiences in Korea, right? I'm Korean. So it was very uncomfortable, even when I walking...I walked the street with my friend and when we spoke Korean to each other, some women just like back to us and then say, "This is America!" Okay. Like, whoa... Wow. So I cannot even speak my own language here? That was so...And it was in Washington D. C., the Capitol City! I was amazed by all of the sculpture...it was so nice...and then suddenly someone said that—It was, "Whoa, that's not the America that I imagined!"

**V. ENCOUNTERING LIFE AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT:** This

category included interlocking subcategories of encountering academic, social life, and living logistics. All three of these subcategories were seen as impactful upon one another and as not mutually exclusive aspects within the experience of being a community

college student. This concept was also part of context, but seemed to be more at the foreground/active. It was seen as current context, whereas the previous concept was in the past. This concept was more fluid in the present, though the other concepts could come back and continue to affect this one. For example, experiencing a challenge in the past may impact the experience of life as a community college student and current success can impact the future experiences of a challenge. This cycle seemed to recur within the overall experience of life as a community college student in the US.

A. Encountering academics: This subcategory included various properties of the academic experience, such as classroom environment, registration, curriculum, interactions with instructors and advisors, and having goals.

**Classroom environment:** (communication, language, teaching/learning styles)

P3: Language was one of the biggest problems in the first.

P3: In community college, I had the totally different lifestyle than...than in my training college (in Korea). The class style...I mean, the style of the class was a lot different...Like the environment that professors actually welcome the questions during the class. It's not like that in Korea. If you ask questions, other people will just look at you like you're crazy. They want to just get done and leave.

P4: You know, I'm a very shy person. So I'm not so outgoing. So the classes help me to make friends from the diverse cultures.

P7: When I came here my first communication class, I think it was really interesting, especially inter-cultural communication. So I started to think about majoring in communications.

P7: The learning styles are totally different. In Korea, the teacher only tries to insert knowledge to the student. We rarely ask questions to teacher. Class in America is really discussion oriented... So I had a language barrier and it takes time to adjust myself to the debate oriented classroom environment.

P8: I didn't have any problem with the grammar and conversation stuff, because I wasn't afraid at all because that's the process that I've been in.

**Registration:**

P1: (The) first quarter was pretty difficult, because as every other student gets the first registration, the first quarter, it's difficult. So I didn't know what I had to take. And I did not know like which professor is good and bad and all that. So I just put my schedule all in the morning.

**Curriculum:**

P6: I didn't know how the curriculum works. I didn't even know what the credit means. [laughs] So everything was...Everything was so confusing.

**Interactions with instructors and advisors:**

P2: My ESL teachers were like very friendly...they were encouraging me to speak up, even though I was not really good in English. And everyone was on same page.

P9: ESL course teachers were very kind. They were more helpful than regular instructors. And they guided me...how to make a friend or make a decision on the future.

P9: I think that is also a weak point of the advisor in the community college. They knew the process how to transfer to another college, but they have not enough idea for career.

**Having goals:**

P2: Basically, my first goal was just finish...as soon as possible and think later. For me, it was first I finish, and then think.

B. Encountering social life: This subcategory included various properties of the social experience, such as making friends, communication between peers, and experiencing campus activities.

**Making friends:**

P1: I did not make many friends because...I guess I came from a culture, which, in psychology terms they say collectivity culture; whereas U.S. is individualistic. So it was kind of hard for me to make friends in class, as opposed to it was easier when I was in South Korea. There's no language barrier, no cultural difference.

P1: Everybody would just rush out the door as soon as the class ends. There's like no time to actually make friends. And like I kind of feel bad for like stopping them, because they're kind of really busy like maybe going to work or going to another class.



So I tried that at the first quarter and then I stopped doing it.

P1: I would always go to class like ten minutes earlier, before everyone gets there. And I would just listen to other students' conversations. And I could feel like the topic of conversation is like really just not important things. Mostly not telling them...not telling the other students about their life... I could sense like there's a wall between those friends. They may not have, but just the way that I felt it. I would talk to my friend, and I'll just tell my private stories and all that. But they're like, umm, just having casual conversation you know?

P2: My age was like four or five years older than everyone. And most were from China, Hong Kong...or from France, from some Europe countries. But most was younger than me. So for me, it was very easy to approach them. That's why I could make friends very easily, because of...I don't know...I think it's a little bit culture thing, that if you are like older, you can like easy can go to like younger people. It's easy kind of.

P2: I only made a few friends and they were like same as me, like don't go to party, but straight studies. We were hanging out during weekends, but we went to mountains or lake. So it was kind of like we were totally different than other, regular Korean people.

P3: I guess I mainly made friends with other students through group study and like through any other discussions regarding the class. I saw some students smoking after the class. So I just joined them. And I was having a cigarette with them. We talk about class. And naturally, we talk about let's study together sometimes or have lunch, you know. And then I kind of branched off from that point. I made one friend. And he invited another person to our group study...I mean study group, or to our lunch, yeah.

P4: Actually, I wanted to make a lot of American friends. Actually, without being friends, how can I understand their culture? So I want to make a lot...I want to make friends. But actually, because of the community college, I think they are not easy to make friends. I feel almost everyone has part-time job, I think. So they have to go right after class.

P4: Asian (international) students, they don't have any jobs. Some have part-time jobs, but they actually don't have full job, so we can hang out a lot.

P7: Since I lived in my host family, where there were a couple of other people who were from different countries. So I think there was no problem for me to make friends... In America, everyone can be a friend. But in Korea, there's really...It's really different between older people and younger people. Now I really like the fact that I can...that everyone can be my friend, regardless of age.

P10: Yeah, here in (community college) there are lots of Korean students. So it was really easy to make friends. But the truth is, Korean people do not really want to get along with other Koreans...because they came here to learn English. So in my case, at first, I had lots of Japanese friends. But after that, I felt I needed some Korean people to help each other. Like, I can tell this: we can share all our textbook. We can like give over our like old resources.

### **Communication between peers:**

P5: It was really hard to like keep connecting with my classmates. You know, we kept changing classes. So, that time it is really hard to make the connections.

P6: People kept asking me, like "Are you coming from North Korea or South Korea?" I don't know why they're asking me.

P6: In the beginning, I didn't want to speak with South Koreans because I'm here to learn English. (But now) I feel it's so important. We can have a conversation very deeply and more comfortable. In Korean I can say things more emotionally. Like I can persuade them how much like I'm having a tough life here or something. And since they feel empathy with me, their assistance is more a...how can I say? A higher level of assistance. It's like almost family, not just friend, yeah.

P8: I got into classes that I wanted exactly. I didn't have any trouble with that. But I didn't have any friends, like in my classroom. I can see that they are new to each other, but then...I don't know what they're talking about. Well, I can understand what they're talking about, but that's not what I'm experiencing, like, it was just everyday life that's not what I do ordinarily. For me, I still don't have any friends to like socially meet like after classes. But after first quarter, I kind of have friends like to chit chat about like our daily lives. But after quarter ends, I didn't...stay connected.

P8: When I talk with my like classmates, like about classes, about like other professors, who's good or who's bad, or what happened yesterday or stuff...when I talk with my classmates about things like that I feel like I fit in the school.

P8: When Americans are talking they look into their eyes, right? Koreans don't. Koreans don't do that. They think that's...embarrassing...and not gentle... I'm like, "Why are they looking at me?" [laughs]...and Americans think if I'm not looking into their eyes, then I'm not talking to them.

P8: I liked it better than high school. Well, except that I didn't have any connection with classmates. Yeah. Except for that, I liked it.

P9: There was club for international students...but for international student and resident student, there was no connection.

### **Experiencing campus activities:**

P6: When I was leading my club, I met a lot of international students. Then they didn't have the passion to advocate for themselves, their rights or their equality.

P8: If (university) does something, there are lots of people going, right? But when community college does something, not many people go.

P10: I had to try to improve my English skill while studying credit courses as well. So I started to do some like school activities such as working at international student association. Because it has weekly meetings and all members would come together and talk about our events in English. So I thought that I could improve speaking skill if I work with other students who speak different languages and have different cultures. But even though it was for improving my speaking, but I had like so much fun and enjoyed a lot.

C. Encountering the logistics of living: This subcategory included various properties which are components of the daily living experience, such as transportation logistics, housing logistics, broader cultural communication/societal issues, looking for work, dealing with standards of living, and strategies in dealing with such.

### **Transportation logistics:**

P1: Every day I had to wake up at like 6:30, because I was living kind of far away. I had to take two buses to get to school. And I had to walk like thirty minutes to the bus stop.

P2: At that time I had no car. And my place was little bit like inside...It was hard to catch a bus too. Here, for me, it was not convenient.

P6: In my first quarter, I had a 7:30am class and I commuted from (city) and it took about one hour...on the bus. So I should wake up at least 5:30 to like just...It's so crazy. I never had that kind of life, even in Korea!

P8: I have to share my car with my sister, so we have to use the transportation, like buses.

P9: For first one year, I commuted. I used bus. But after one year, I got a car. If I have a car, I can go anywhere, when I want. So bus, it is limited... in Korea, there's a lot of transportation than here, so...But here, there's none...[laughs]

### **Housing logistics:**

P7: At first I lived with my host family. They were really nice. But since I have...Since I was also older, I mean, I want to be independent. So I decided to move out and live by myself.

P10: I had really hard time to find a good place, because I was living in a home stay. But actually, home stay is really high priced because they take care of me. And they are serving some foods for me. So I decided to move, like share a house. But at that time, when I decided to move out, the house owner didn't want to give me back the deposit because they know I live alone in the United States and they know there aren't any like...people who can take care of me. Like my parents.

### **Broader cultural communication/societal issues:**

P1: ...a lot of the times, people who did not understand (the Korean accent) they wouldn't ask again, unless they're like really curious.

P4: Sometimes there is misunderstanding. Like I was in class with U.S. students, a classmate asked, "What do you have outside of school? What is it you are doing outside of school?" But at the time, I couldn't catch what she's saying. So I heard, "What is the other school? What is other school?" So, I thought I have no more school, just community college. But it she has another school? So I could just say "I'm only taking class at community college." And then she got embarrassed, I think, and she kept saying, "What is your hobby outside of school?" like that. But I kept hearing "other school," instead of "outside of school." So I...I felt terrible. I felt so terrible. So after that I couldn't speak in the classroom. I felt bad, because I maybe made her get embarrassed.

P5: The first three months was very hard for me...I feel like where I faced differences in culture and language, I usually wanted to avoid the differences.

### **Looking for work:**

P9: Nowadays, a lot of international students are in a difficult situation with getting a job. So they are going back to South Korea. Some students decide to stay here, but it's illegal.

### **Dealing with the standards of living: (food/weather)**

P1: I had like freedom to spend my time and do anything on my own, unlike high school where you have to only study, right? You don't hate school because it's hard...difficult. You just hate your situation where you are bored and you have nothing to do, just blame the weather. I think it's different.

P8: The food, it was very greasy to me.

**Strategies for dealing with the logistics of living:**

P1: Trial and error at college for a time. If not, then we'll try something else. Just being, really push forward...

P2: Once I entered the community college, like first freshman, I had to think about like, "Okay, I have to live here, and my language skill is this much, so how...what can I do after...after I finish? Will I improve more in my English? Will it be easy to live here?" So I was kind of struggling, during this transition. I was kind of worried that, "Okay, I will get a degree, but I have no experience. I have not much contact with English speaking people. So can I go to American company to work? Or should I stick to a Korean company? Or should I go back to Korea?" Yeah, that was most of my stress.

P8: I think if you just come here alone, you better get a roommate with the same language, because... if you have to use English outside of the school, which they're not really good with it, that will be really stressful.

P9: I think the most important is language. If I can understand, I can speak the language that I learned. That's the first step of adapting or transitioning... And if I make American friends, even though I couldn't make many American friends.

**VI. COPING WITH CHALLENGES:** This category included participants' experiences with challenges faced during the transition process, which was emerging as a central category in the theory due to its apparent pivotal impact on participants' reported experiences of subsequent "success." There seemed to be an obvious connection between having past experiences with challenges, developing strategies from those, to developing new strategies/coping. Subcategories appeared to occur in stages where participants first had an emotional experience/response to the challenge, possibly drew upon lessons learned in past experiences with life challenges or drew upon personal strengths, and then developed strategy for dealing with such challenges.

A. Having an emotional experience (ranging from *some minor* to *a lot of personal stress*):

Included participants' emotional reactions to challenges, including a range of minor

concern (such as a little bit of emotional difficulty) to a lot of personal stress (such as extreme depression). Properties included feeling depressed, feeling stressed, feeling afraid, feeling isolated, feeling family pressure, feeling homesick, feeling oppressed, feeling sad

### **Feeling depressed:**

P1: A lot of students get depressed when it's raining. And they're just sitting at home, maybe watching Korean drama or movies, feeling really nostalgic with their memories back in South Korea with everything they're used to and their family, friends.

P1: There is a moment that I was really depressed and almost wanted to go back to South Korea. I (got injured) and so I could not do anything. I was talking twenty-one credits and I was working. And I had to quit the job. And I could not go to classes. And the time of the year it was raining a lot. And so that time was really hard. But I had to like get back up and keep going because, if I just...I think about half a month or a month, I was not doing anything, not wanting to do anything, not wanting to talk to anybody. Almost depression, I think. I did not eat. I just drink. I just slept. At some point, there was a dream that I heard. It was, "Dude, if you're going to keep on doing this, you're going to die." It just came to me.

P8: It was really depressing. I couldn't think about anything. My whole plan was like I thought my...what is it, my path was open. But then it suddenly it closed and I couldn't see anything. Yeah, it was pretty sad.

### **Feeling stressed:**

P2: I barely talked in class. Of course, we had a group project, but it's just one time project, so we don't really communicate a lot. And when I come to home, I have so much stress that I don't really speak in Korean with my family too. So for me, I really didn't talk much while I was (in community college)...I was really stressed.

### **Feeling afraid:**

P2: I could not speak out loud because I was afraid if I get it wrong...if the professor doesn't understand my intonation.

P4: When I moving in U.S. I was over thirty years old. So I kind of afraid to take class in the USA, because I don't know how to speak English and know my talking skill is very low. So I was too afraid.

P7: The most difficult thing was to participate in class. Because my English is limited, still is limited, to just say whatever I want, especially in terms of the kind of situation...so a lot of times I was kind of afraid that some Americans would not understand what I am saying in English.

P7: Before I transferred to (university), I was kind of really afraid that I might fail to go to the university, so (community college) was really emotionally hard for me.

### **Feeling isolated/lonely:**

P2: I had to find myself, like about the professor, about the class, about the grade, about the test, quizzes. But (Korean students) who were partying...of course, party was not good idea, but they had a source...as long as they attend the class, they knew like, "Oh, the test will be like this. So I just need to prepare for that." I was not participating in any parties, I think because of my religious status, that I'm Christian, that I don't really enjoy that kind of party. I had a little bit hard time to get with people, like a lot of people like together...it was not my type.

P8: (It's) lonely. In Korea there are lots of things to play. Really, really lots of things to play and lots of places to go during the night.

P9: (After) I went to the college credit course. From that time, I felt lonely because there were not much international students that I talk with. They're resident students. They're almost all American or...people who speak English very well.

### **Feeling family pressure:**

P2: For me, living with parents was kind of hard. Because I lived in (European country) without parents for nine years, from the middle school...So for me, living with parents (in the U.S.) was kind of hard, because I lived in...I had to take care of myself only when I was in (European country). But now, I have to take care of my parents, too.

P3: When my sister actually called me "American," that was kind of sensitive. I mean, she was joking...I didn't really care about that, but I just thought about it. And I mean, yes, you can say I'm American. But I'm still Korean... So that was kind of offensive. But now I feel like I have to admit it. [laughs] Yeah, I just think differently. Plus, I'm going to live in the U.S. for next couple decades.

### **Feeling homesick:**

P4: I just had hard times with the first one here, because I have homesickness. So yeah, I lost my confidence... because it was very hard for me.

P4: I don't have any family in the U.S....my sisters and my parents still live in Korea.

So, yeah, I miss them a lot. And then I was the eldest daughter. So I used to be involved with things, everything a lot. But I kind of feel alone. And then at that time I couldn't touch my phone a lot because we don't have a smart phone. So we just, you know, talk by phone. And then we have time difference, so we couldn't actually keep in touch a lot.

P10: Before coming to United States, I was very worried about adapting to American life, because it is new and totally different from me. I experienced it like culture shock.

P10: I felt homesick so many times. Whenever I felt like homesick, I usually called to my parents or friends. But actually, last year I visited Korea for the first time. The sad...the saddest thing is that...I became like different person. So because my friends have like similar life to me before, doing the same things...I now can have better conversations with like people who studied in the United States. I mean, like my Spanish speaking friend. And actually, honestly, it was not a good trip. I mean, last year. Friends just asking about like American culture, like for example marijuana. [laughs] "Do they really do it?"... always are asking me to speak some English.

#### **Feeling oppressed:**

P5: I face some situation about the stereotype or the prejudice of some people. Many American students in credit class, had a lot of discussion, a lot of the small group activities. At that time some of the students kept saying, "Okay, you don't need to talk because we understand...we totally understand that Asians don't want to talk. Asians are very, very shy."

#### **Feeling sad:**

P8: That's the most hard part of the international students, if they cannot connect to the American students at all...it's very lonely. In class, people are chit chatting, but I'm the only one who's not talking anything. So I just have to look at my phone or like wait for the teachers. This is very embarrassing, but some of the days, I just don't talk at all in class and just come out. On the first day of the quarter once, I took three classes and I didn't say anything. That was really sad.

B. Drawing upon past experiences and strengths: Included participants' reported increased abilities to cope with challenges after having significant learning opportunities in their past. Properties included military experience, hobbies, study abroad experience, and academic/career experience.



### **Military experience:**

P1: I was a South Korean soldier assigned to U.S. military. From 6:00 am to 5:00 pm, from the moment that I wake up until the moment that all the work finished, I have only worked with U.S. soldiers...from 6:00 to 5:00 I only get to spend time when we'd break with U.S. soldiers. And after 5:00, I would only go hang out with my other soldiers who were Korean. So I had two lives... So my English improved a lot when I was in the military, because I had to work and I had to interact.

P3: After my military service, I kind of got a new mindset. I have to do something about my life... It just felt like, since I finished the military, I just felt like I can do it... for me (the Korean military) was pretty bad. I mean, I'm glad that I actually went through that, but at the same time, the experience itself was pretty hard because it made me want to commit suicide a couple times... But you know, since I went through those kind of things I can do something easier.

P9: I could learn some skills from the military. I learned from that experience like know what I want to do... Because there's a lot of training too, we can strengthen our mental and physical thing too.

### **Hobbies:**

P1: I did make friends, but not as quickly as I thought I would. But in order to make friends, I participated in a lot of campus activities. And also, I played a lot of sports, like soccer and basketball, volleyball.

### **Study abroad experience:**

P7: I think, because I lived with my first host family particularly in (state), they taught me a lot of American culture. So that, you know, that definitely helped me to find out about American culture things.

### **Academic/career experience:**

P4: I didn't know about (on campus office) before. But I know the tutoring job is on campus. And then during taking (international student orientation) class, the instructor gave us a school research project to go to different campus resources. So we have to interview them. Then we have to present this information, so I then knew better. And I applied at (on campus office) because they have the tutor position, one-on-one tutor and general tutor like that. I wanted to meet students who want to learn. I tried to help them from my heart, and they noticed.

P7: In high school, I spend so much time studying to go to Korean university. So that really helped me to be academically ready. So even though my English was not good

enough to study, I knew how to study. So that experience, that encouraged me I can do it.

C. Developing or having strategies: Included participants' reported strategies utilized to cope/deal with challenges. These properties included change strategies that could be internal, such as "pushing oneself," "trying to figure it out myself," and "changing myself" or external "joining a club," "talking with advisors," or "getting an on campus job."

**Internal change strategies:**

P1: The reason I wanted to make friends in class and on the campus was to find someone to spend that spare time together. But it was kind of hard though. So my internal response was...just like pushing myself to be involved in something or be attached to something. And the sports and the campus activity were the good example that I found.

P1: I did talk to my family, but not that often. I did not want to be sad or missing them on a rainy day.

P2: Even though I had a lot of like ability to approach people and have more conversation with other like people, I just kind of stepped back and I just figure it out myself. I tried to figure it out myself and tried to study at home.

P3: I was very surprised that I can actually ask the questions (in American community college). And (instructor) was very nice about it. And he did his best to explain what are the things that I couldn't understand. And also, I had this fear that since my language wasn't that good, he might be...feeling uncomfortable me asking question to him. But even though my question was very not that understandable, he tried to understand me, you know, and answer my question. So I really appreciate that. When I asked the question, if that was good question, they will tell me, "Oh, that was actually a very good question." And I liked that. I love to hear that, because I never heard that in Korea before...it kind of shocked me. And it kind of made me feel very good in the same time. So that really...That little comment made me want to ask more questions, in the class and outside of class...I had more confidence from that comment. And also, it boosted me in terms of studying too, that by listening to the kind of comments it makes me want to study more so I can ask more critical questions during the class.

P4: You cannot escape from this situation. I have to, you know, just do it...and I

should enjoy the situation.

P5: There was lots of chance to change myself. Like I can be involved in the international student organization, or student programs. And that also lead me to get job as a student employee at (community college). So small changes just made the big change.

P5: I used to be the person who always think about what will happen next. So fear for choosing something wrong or fear for doing something. I always think about like, oh, if I like do this thing, maybe this problem will come follow me. That maybe I have to reach at this opportunity or reach out like that. So I think I'm also a person who thinks too much. But when I saw a lot of good examples of students who challenge for some development or some good transition, like I just challenge myself to be more like them...more challenging, and even toward like understanding the new culture. For me, that's the American culture usually. Like, try to understand it and not lose myself. While keeping my own culture and my identity, I can also see and appreciate the American culture and I can participate in it as a part of the community.

P5: Some of my co-workers...think like...Like, "oh Asians are so hard working. They never enjoy their life." I just tried to explain to her like that's maybe not every person...I just talked to her, "like not every Asian is like that." Before, I didn't say anything and just accept...But right now, I just feel like I can see everything as a person...I can see this situation with...like...hmm...like I can observe, say, the situation.

P6: I thought I need to find things that I have high interest in. So that way I can adjust myself and then I can enjoy my study. Otherwise, I will just...I thought the whole study experience in America would be chaos for me. So I just talk to my parents that I always want to study (major).

P7: The first year, I didn't speak anything in class. But I learned from the experience that I needed to review the class material, I can...I can participate in class. I couldn't say what I wanted to say in class before and then I started to speak up.

P7: Whenever I have stress, I try to talk to my friends and family. And they always encourage me. My mom really, really helped me in terms of that, because if I tell my mom, "I can't do this." If I say something like that, my mom always encourages me, "Yes, you can. You can do it, because you are my son." something like that. So she's really kind of optimist. She always try to make me see the bright future. So that really helped me... And at the same time, I really want to prove myself that I can do it.

#### **External change strategies:**

P1: I liked having a hot coffee outside and it's sunny out there. And look around the

campus and see how other students are like studying, and the clothes they're wearing and having chit chat with their friends. Just look around and like feel like, what should I do? When I see a person having a life that I desire or that I am...I think is really nice or cool, then I would behave in that kind of way so that I can be maybe not that person but similar person one day.

P1: For U.S. students, I felt that I needed to workout a lot. They're big. And a lot of the guys, I knew they were younger than me, or maybe my age. They were tall. And they were like built, had muscles so... I thought it was a good thing so I could take it in and implement it myself.

P1: I spend time outside more so that I won't get depressed and feel like I'm in the States more, you know?

P1: Working on the campus. I had a few jobs on campus. The first one was a math tutor. And the only reason why I got the job was I wanted to get a Social Security number. I wanted to make money. So I searched for what I could do. And for International students it's illegal to work off campus. I had to find one on the campus in which I could use my skills and ability, and that was math. So I did that for a quarter. And then the next quarter, I think I worked in a bookstore because they had a higher pay rate. And it seemed more fun, like more interaction, and I could practice my English. So I did that. And worked at the International Student Office, so I got to know a lot of International students and their process of coming into school and transferring out, because I wanted to learn... when I transferred, I already know the information. So it was planned.

P2: You have to focus everything and do by yourself, individually. But most people from Korea, they have not adjusted to this mindset...they only have a Korean mind. So they party a lot. And from there they make a connection, relationship with people. And it's kind of good to get information and good to get a connection with people. But it also means they study less, but can get good grades because they have a source.

P2: When I was in community college, I was working on campus at International Student Office. It was a lot helpful for me, in terms of improving my speaking skills and how people work and how should I help... Like "How can I help other International students?" It really encouraged me to think that, "Oh, I'm in second level. I'm not in like first level." Like "I can live here." I think it really helped me. Before I got that job, I was kind of afraid to talk...I didn't speak. So after I work, even if I cannot really say good, I just try. I was trying to talk like people. It really helped me.

P2: I was watching a lot of (American) animations when I came here. It helped a lot, rather than just hanging out with same (Korean) speaking students.

P4: I met friends who had same situation as me, like... We shared our experience and

then hang out a lot. Maybe that helped a lot... they have same problems like me, homesickness and depressed and like that. We hang out a lot, so go out to eating and watch movies.

P4: Actually, the class was not hard for me. The hard part is listening...listen to lecture from teacher and speaking, talking like that. So I studied a lot. I studied...I read the book before the class, so I can understand what instructor said. And sometimes I recorded the lecture...those kind of tools, I used them.

P4: I feel like I have a supporter (in international student office). They know me. They have my record. And then they think, if I have trouble and then they just call me and let me know how can I...how I can, you know, get through it. So, very helpful for international students, not only Koreans, but for others.

P5: I actually get some advising from advisor in our school. To get some classes, like American culture courses...I just keep learning about, "Oh, this is kind of like a stereotype. And I have to, when I face these things, like I have to express myself. This is learning to speak out." For instance, how a little baby can learn more and more from speaking real words. That's just totally the same process to me.

P5: I just decided to register for some programs or some club. And I found lots of great programs...all campus volunteering program. I registered there. And in there I met some friends who work for (campus club), so I can also join over there. And one of my club mates worked in the (student association), so I can join that, too. Then, I have plans to do things. So it gets bigger and bigger like that.

P5: I also made a lot friends who were making great transitions to the university. One girl actually became a president for the whole student government. Not only for international students, but the whole campus, and she was an international student. So those things made a good example. Make me like, "Oh, maybe I can do those things without just being frustrated."

P6: In second quarter, since I have an interest that is more passionate about study abroad, I looked for the way to get involved in campus. So I just went to (student program office) and found a job application. I didn't even know what it was, but I applied for it and got it.

P7: So I often go to the (international student program) advisor. And they told me a lot of opportunities, a lot of options I can do. So that sort of helped me to be ready to transfer too.

P8: Yeah. By just talking to (advisors), and then let somebody know that I'm struggling, that's really helpful, just mentally.

P10: It is really, really good experiences to work in school and taking a position.

**VII. EXPERIENCING THE OUTCOME OF COPING:** This category included participants' experiences after having faced and coped with a challenge during the transition process, which was emerging as a secondary central category in the theory due to its apparent/often re-conceptualization as "success." Subcategories appeared to occur in stages where participants first had an experience of "succeeding," which in turn, brought forth added confidence, skills and connections (to others), ultimately inspiring participants to take on leadership roles.

A. Succeeding (ranging from *knowing what not to do and trying again and failing to really succeeding*) this subcategory included participants' descriptions of feeling successful in the transition process.

P1: When you do something at first, it's really hard and it seems impossible because you don't know anything about it. But when you do something for the second time, you get kind of scared because you already know what it is. But you go through it. It's kind of like, oh, I've already done this. I've already, you know, had to do this. So it's easier.

P1: I think I can call myself as successfully transitioned. But I can too say I have tried. And I have worked hard enough...maybe more than others, at community college. So I think the most important thing that I can take is...Maybe I can put it in one sentence: if you live in the states, live in the states, I mean your body is living in the states. But your friends... I balanced the portion of Korean friends and American friends in my life, as a Korean and as an International student who is living in the states. Get involved in campus activity and all that.

P3: The internship helped with my social activity in terms of my own...How can I say this? I guess I got more used to interacting with people, because it was my first opportunity to actually work with people in different country. And also, as a volunteer I also had to (communicate) with customers a lot.

P3: I was having study group with my friends. And I could feel that my language gets better. So like throughout that process, I can feel that I'm asking more questions, and more critical questions in a more correct manner. So I can see

myself improving throughout the process... I felt like it was like, you know, walking up the stairs. I felt confident at this level. But at the next level, I felt confident too, I just feel like I can do better.

P3: I would say that the self-improvement was the biggest success for me... I saw my improvement throughout the two years. And toward the end, how I am is so different than when I started. And I would say those kind of improvements was my biggest success.

P3: I guess (the community college environment) made me more comfortable approaching to professors and other classmates, and ultimately contributed to become successful I guess.

P4: If (Korean students) have success from that (group) project, maybe they will have confidence...then they can be brave, I think.

P6: I will say success is people...meeting people. We (need to) change our goal, the meaning of success, the meaning of our study abroad to something else, not just the career. I'm not saying giving up the career thing, but they should have something other than that...a diverse perspective.

P10: My success was more...first I wanted to improve my English skills. Second, I wanted to graduate with four-year university, like transferring. Actually, that was my expected as my goal. But I learned a lot of things that I couldn't expect.

B. Gaining confidence (ranging from *some increased confidence* to *really confident in many areas*) this subcategory includes participants' descriptions of feeling confident in the transition process. The majority of participants described significant increases in personal levels of confidence after having coped with challenges. This confidence appeared to be critical in participants labeling their ultimate transition experience as successful.

P1: My goal was shifted from just living and adjusting like to getting into something, like achieving something. So I guess my perspective of life has changed or shifted very much.

P1: Whenever I failed at something, which I mean I'm a human being...and at that time, I just thought that spending time disappointed and sad in a negative way is a waste of my time, because I know you live only once. And your time of right

now will never come back. So why not just go out and do something that makes you happy, instead of sitting at home making you feel miserable? So this is the way I look at the world.

P1: I have more confidence and have overcome the shyness...(My advice is) be proud of the fact that you are learning a foreign language and living in city or country where you have never been. And try to like compliment yourself instead of bringing yourself down. Be more arrogant than be sorry... you learn to appreciate the process. Not satisfied because of the outcome, but because of the process.

P3: My abilities just got better. And so I feel confident that I can take classes in four-year university in the U.S... going to a four year university in the U.S. was very big achievement for me.

P3: When I first got my grades, you know, my friends were just looking at my grades and, "Wow, dude that's awesome!" And I could see that, you know. Because I had this fear that they will not like to interact with international students. But through my academic ability, they just didn't really care about my language as long as I can teach them, we could study together. So that kind of gave me another confidence...Then I felt like, wow, I'm actually very smart. [laughs] And I thought, "Yeah, I'm a lot smarter than I thought!" That's how it felt, for the first year in my community college.

P3: I think the confidence was a very big thing. That no matter what kind of stuff that you learn, as long as you have that confidence in yourself, you can always try, you know. That kind of fuels you to understand more and...I mean, study harder.

P4: (The) instructor doesn't know me the first time because I'm so quiet. And they didn't think I'm good. But, yeah, I was good. After the first test, I got 100 out of 100, so they noticed me. And then, that time I can know that built confidence...in the class. So I can talk to instructor, then ask question to instructor, things like that. Yeah. That time was very important.

P4: I feel like I can do...survive in U.S. I feel useful in the U.S. too, because I'm confident.

P6: While I work in (student program), I figured out what are they doing...I met many, many student leaders and got lots of information about campus resources...I got tons of information. So for the third quarter, I kind of tasted what clubs...how clubs work in community college. So I thought, well, maybe I can create a club! So I had the confidence that now I can do something in America...then I looked for other things outside of campus since I'm studying (major), I thought I can have some experience with (field of study). So I just went to the (major organization) in (city) and asked about volunteering positions and



got one. It changed my life! Motivating, passionate, just like total change. Just one opportunity. I think it's beginning with having a job on campus. It changed everything.

P7: Now I feel more comfortable than that, because I learned that they understand almost everything I say, even though it is not perfect. I can use my body language... I became more confident about whatever I said in English. I realized they could understand me.

P7: The transition like gave me a sort of confidence that I can survive wherever I go.

P7: I learned that Americans really don't care about like their poor English or pronunciation like that. So as long as one has a will to speak up and participate, they will be probably more than willing to accept them the difference. I think that would sort of help with confidence.

P10: I feel like really honored as to represent Korean students. And I have never experienced it before... to be like leader. So I felt confidence. I feel like, "Oh I can get another thing like, a better one," I can be like, "I can take the higher position in the future," like that. I got my confidence about it.

C. Gaining skills (ranging from *some* to *many skills*) the majority of participants reported feeling as though they had gained significant skills in the process of coping with a challenge, which in turn, led them to begin feeling more confident during their transition time.

P1: I think personally, in terms of getting used to speaking English, there's a point where I felt like, oh, now it works. And I would talk to my sister over the phone in English.

P3: My internship helped me a lot in my volunteer experience...That kind of lowered my fear dealing with people. And also made me more confident in speaking English. Because I have to speak all the time doing the volunteer.

P5: Right now, when I face the moment that is very unfamiliar, like unfamiliar and uncomfortable things, right now, I just feel like I have some, hmm...How can I say this word in English? I just feel like I can handle that right now. I have some space in my mind to handle those things like that, not just avoid or like not just reject.

P7: First it was preparation and communication. Then, my GPA became higher the very first year in the U.S. And the rate I participate in class improved...and now I have a lot of American friends. So that's all kind of...That's all been a factor.

P9: After getting my license...it showed me I could feel very successful.

P10: Now I'm more comfortable in the United States than before. I think because I live with my friends that I can rely on. And also like working at (community college) helped a lot through the transition process, because we did a lot of like culture things...or events. So I learned a lot of like different kind of culture things.

D. Gaining connections (ranging from *one* to *many connections*) this subcategory

includes participants' descriptions of gaining more connections (mostly socially) within the transition process. Numerous participants reported that upon feeling more confident after experiencing a challenge, they were able to reach out to more people and gain more connections.

P4: So I think I can make relationship with other diverse culture people. And I felt good.

P4: I took a lot of advice from the counselor, and many other students. And, yeah. My experience was good. So I think I could study more, I think, and more useful things I take so I can be...I can get a job from that...The chemistry professor advised me to take this course to be a doctor or a pharmacist. It's what I'm thinking, "Oh, I can be a pharmacist or the doctor."

P5: I get some advising were very helpful to me, like getting advice with adviser. So I attend some seminars...like how to respect the diversity. How to maintain myself against some discrimination, those things. I try to attend those things... living in Korea, that's kind of like a homogenized country, so I didn't have more chance to think about the different culture or living in the different country. But meeting lots of persons who have different background, different culture like...very different background like even the language or relations or beliefs of things...I just realized just learning from all those...or learning from differences learning from people. That just helped me to build more understanding about that and realize the real situation.

P6: We recruited the people (to join the club) and then since I'm working the (student program), I could met many student leaders. So I just go ask them to join... I always tell it to my friend. "People are amazing." You know, the reason why I could have a job is because of people...everything is about people...Without people's support, I couldn't have done anything.

P7: I try to look for another opportunity. So I did some kind of (internship site) internship.

P8: (In Korean culture) if the upper classmen say like, "Oh, you have to do this, you have to like study hard on this kind of material," then (younger students) might do it. I think that upper classmates should take new students to school events or something to make connection with the American students...kind of social network.

P9: My uncle's family is living here, so they helped me a lot. It's not actually work, but I could help them, because they run...they ran a business. So I helped...and they paid me some pocket money so I maintain my car, could buy some food. And also, my uncle gave me a lot of advice too....also, in the church, there was one more mentor. he was working for (business). He's my father's age. So he gave me a lot of information on what I have to study. They knew what I have to do and what I should, because they were the same case with me. Actually, they were not born here. So they were international student or they went here just for job.

P9: If the community college can make more connections for international students and regular resident students, I think that would be helpful for the international student.

P10: I went to the writing lab, like three times, but my grammar score was still low. So I said, "I would like to get some of your advice" like that to (instructor) on e-mail. She replied me with long, very long, paragraphs of emails. So I was really impressed about it. And also our club advisor helped me a lot to work at school well.

E. Becoming a leader (ranging from *becoming an informal mentor* to *starting and*

*leading a new organization*) this subcategory includes participants' descriptions of

becoming a leader within the transition process. Most of the participants reported some desire to lead/help others following their feelings of successful transition.

P1: I wanted to be in the position where...I could help other people with my abilities.

P3: After community college, I actually advised a lot of students who had just started their life as an International student.

P4: I figure out I'm useful (in on campus job). I feel like...I felt like I can teach. I can help other people. So I'm useful here, at least. Yeah. And then I studied so hard. And then I got an A. I got A from all classes. And then I got permission from the (university). Yeah. So I think, "Oh, I can make it."

P5: I shared this experience at the leadership seminar when we discussed about how we treat the international students. When I shared my experience, lots of American students were really surprised about that. They said to me like, "Oh my, that's such a stereotype. I'm really sorry about that."

P6: What I'm saying now (to fellow Korean students) is, "I will help you. But you should help the others. You don't have to pay back to me. But why don't you help the others, like the new people or something?" Each person have different motivation. But for me, now I think I find my motivation is helping people is my goal...concrete goal.

P7: After I came to here, I realized that I am really Korean. So I found that I am proud of myself that I was born in Korea. So I really want to do something for my country.

P9: In the church I served as youth group leader.

P10: (Club advisor) was really helpful for my like...he made me like...he led me to have like new experiences that I never got....because of his suggestions I could start (student club) and manage fifty members. I never imagined I could do that.

### **Further Analysis of Data**

In reviewing emerging concepts from this round of axial coding, the researcher worked to create a diagram that began to capture the interactions between categories (see Figure 2). Lines with arrows pointing in both directions highlighted particular areas of curiosity. Questions emerged regarding the possible interaction between experiencing challenges in the past and coping with challenges during their transition time, such as,

*What is the relationship between experiencing difficulties (prior to and/or during time in the U.S.) and succeeding in the community college? Does having experienced something difficult in the past help participants to succeed in American community college? What does this relationship have to do with motivation/persistence through difficulty/experiencing challenges?* Further insights on participant motivation when persisting through challenges and the connection to future success also seemed important to understand. For example, *Does being motivated cause one to encounter more challenges, yet also persist through them more easily? What shifts internally when students start to feel more successful*

Increased social networking, community and support appeared to be key in the ability for participants to find and utilize the tools to cope with challenges, thus questions emerged regarding *What role does social support play in participants' view and experience of success? What's going on when participants reach out to others and engage their community? How are social, academic, personal, and career success intertwined?* As not all participants focused equally on the importance of social support, the researcher also became curious about *What explains the variability in coping/success strategies?*

Finally, more questions emerged regarding the overall "path" to successful transition, *What are the major transition points on the "path to success" for participants? What role does the ability to anticipate an upcoming challenge play in the ability to succeed? What is the outcome of coping with current challenges and its relationship to students' view of success?* The above questions focusing on the concepts of participant coping and motivation highlighted a gap in the emerging theory.

## Summary

Round One interview data did not seem to fully capture the process that occurs when students experience success; the grand research question. However, the data did seem to reveal that all participants experience success after they pushed through a challenge. Thus, this became the most integral piece of the emerging theory. Something clearly happened when participants were challenged, though the challenge could occur in a variety of ways/contexts, and the overall outcome was varied, success seemed to occur when participants realized they were able to cope and thus could succeed, and even lead. The more challenges that the participants perceived themselves to "succeed" through, the more risks they appeared to take and the more success they seemed to experience. This appeared to be a cycle that often began with coping through a challenge back in South Korea, before moving to the U.S. Another revised diagram emerged at this point in the conceptualization process (see Figure 3). In this diagram, the order of **CONTEXT** categories was reworked in an attempt to more accurately ordering of layers of contextual background experience from most "core" or foundational to the participant (i.e. **PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS** was kept as the base). Possible new names and orders for the subsequent **CONTEXT** categories of **BEING MOTIVATED TO STUDY IN THE U.S.** (formerly **LIVING IN THE U.S.**) and **CHOOSING AN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE (CC)** were considered in the new diagram. The researcher began to think more about questions to be asked during a Second Round of interviews, hoping to target a gap in knowledge relating to the internal process and experiences of participants between **ENCOUNTERING LIFE AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT** and **COPING WITH CHALLENGE**. More information was needed in

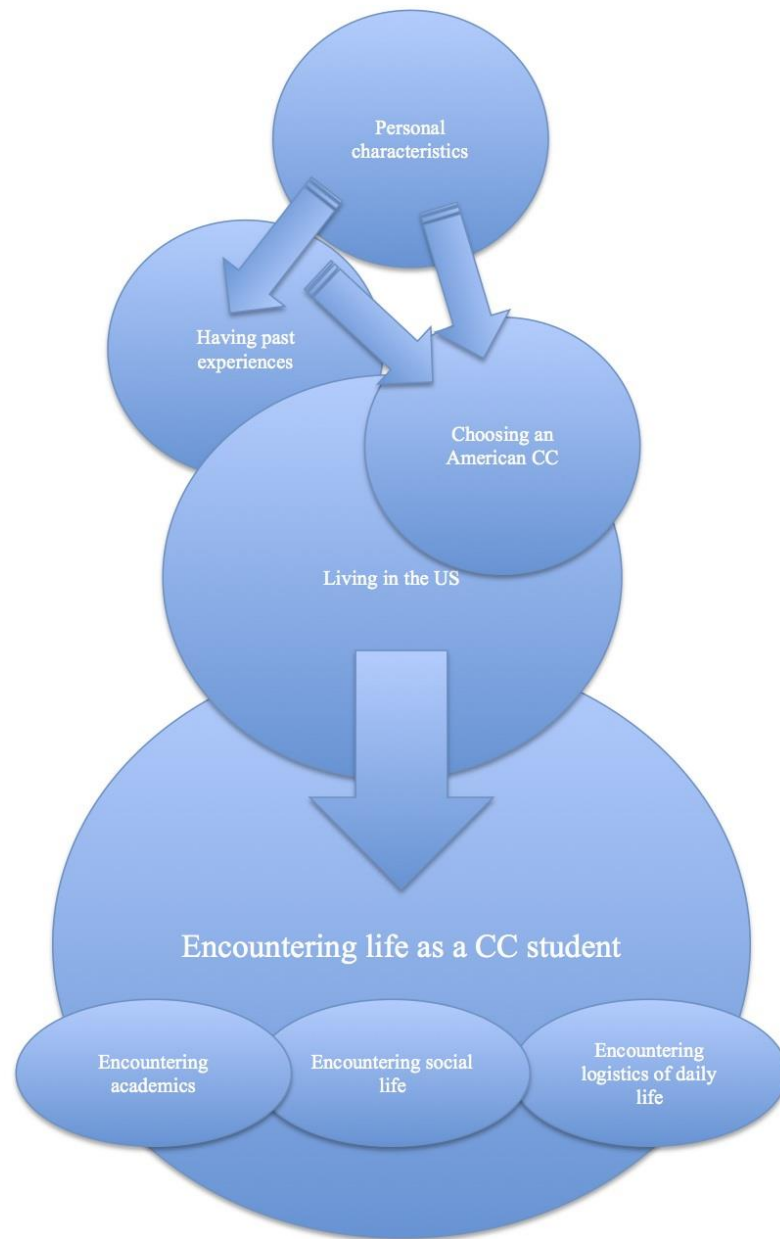
order to better understand the experiences of the challenge itself, thus preliminary Round

Two questions included:

- (1) What caused you to learn how to manage/cope with/overcome challenges faced during your transition period to life in the US?
- (2) When challenged with an overwhelming situation, what motivated you to continue?
- (3) How did past experiences specifically affect your ability to cope with challenges in the US?
- (4) What is the relationship between coping with a challenge and succeeding?

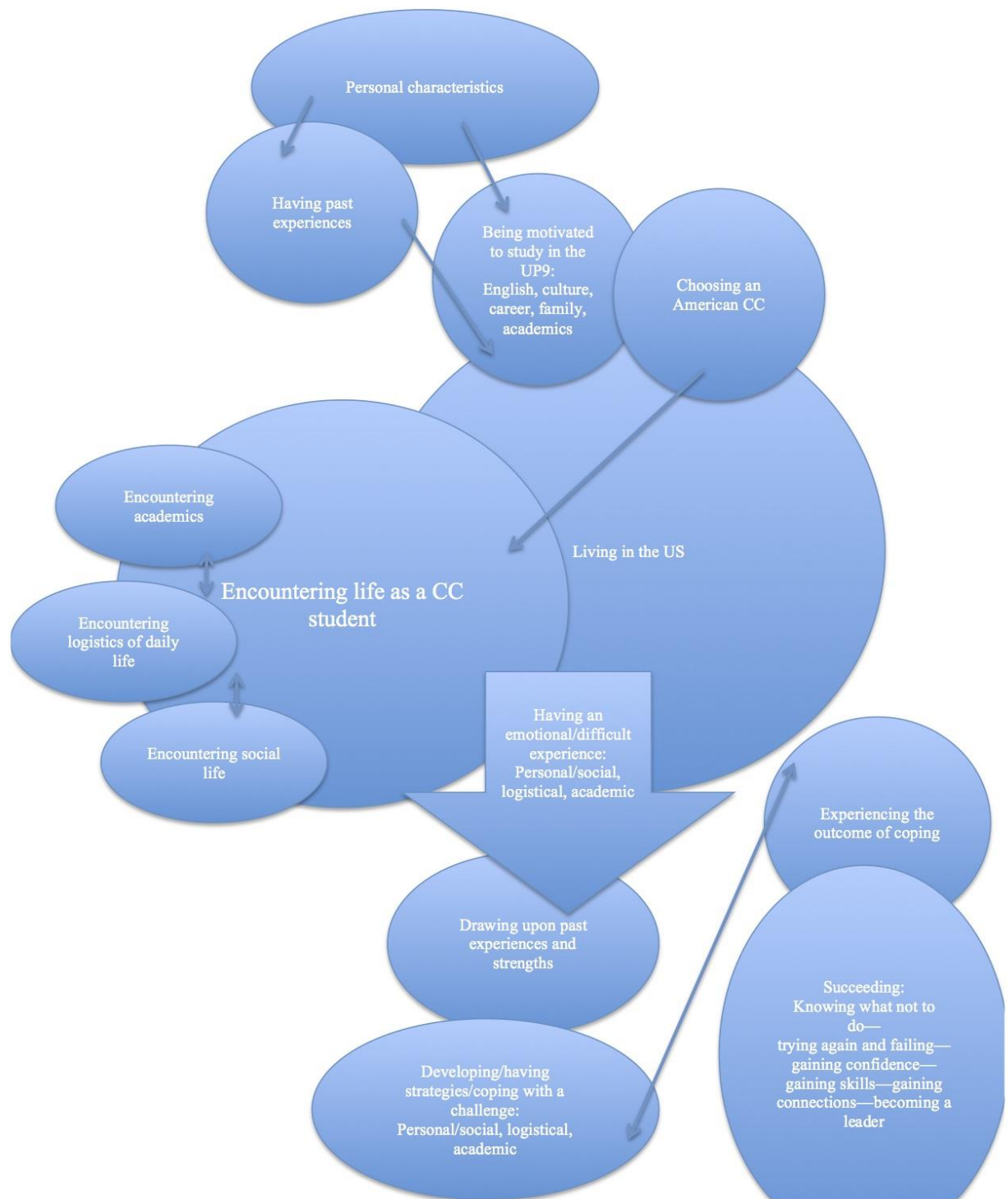
Upon further reflection, the researcher felt that participants were thinking about, developing, and taking an action, which sounded like "taking a risk." Thus the first question was revised to explain this potential phenomena to the participant. After conferring with the advisor, the final second round interview questions became:

- (1) Many participants encounter a challenge when transitioning during their first year of community college and seem to know that they need to do something different in order to survive/cope/succeed. How did you experience that process of knowing that something needed to change and then doing something different/new?
- (2) The above mentioned process seems to involve risk-taking to become more involved socially, academically, and personally. How did you experience taking risks during your transition time?
- (3) How did experiences from your past affect your ability to cope with the challenges that you faced during your time transitioning into American community college?
- (4) What happens when you face a new challenge after having successfully worked through one while studying at an American community college?

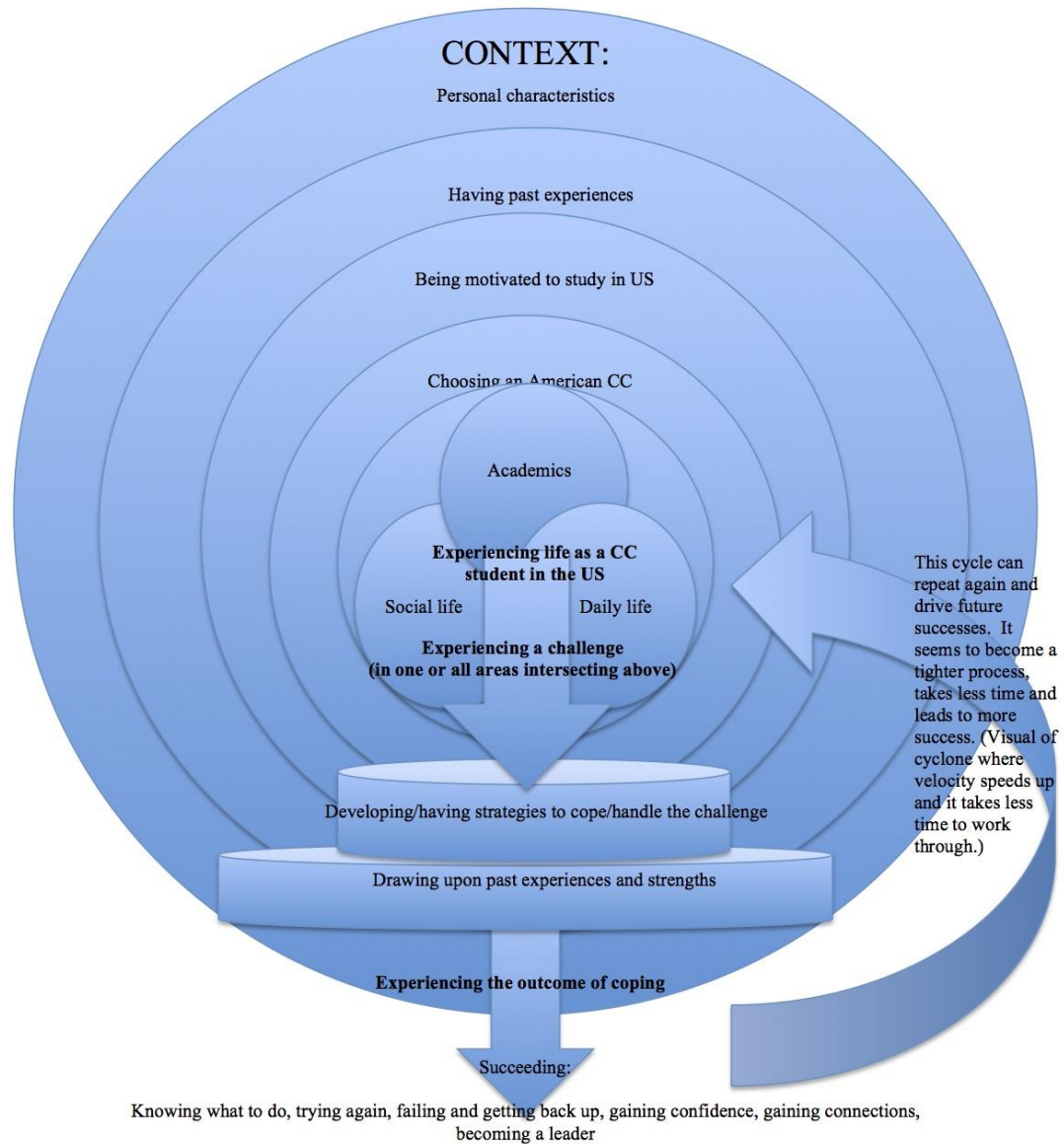


*Appendix H, Figure 1. Encountering Life as a Community College Student*





Appendix I, Figure 2. Encountering Life as a Community College Student, Challenge Process



*Appendix J, Figure 3.* Experiencing Life as a Community College Student in the U.S., with Experiencing a Challenge & Experiencing the Outcomes of Coping

## APPENDIX K

### Second Round Interviews

Open and axial coding methods were applied to the First Round of interview data and were utilized to analyze and form categories, properties and dimensions. A preliminary formation of a grounded theory followed this coding process. Seven categories emerged from the data collected in the First Round interviews: the first four categories existed under the umbrella category of **CONTEXT**, including **I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, II. HAVING PAST EXPERIENCES, III. BEING MOTIVATED TO STUDY IN THE U.S. and IV. CHOOSING AN AMERICAN COMMUNITY COLLEGE**. The next three categories had emerged as more central categories, including **V. ENCOUNTERING LIFE AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT, VI. COPING WITH CHALLENGES, and VII. EXPERIENCING THE OUTCOME OF CHALLENGES**.

The First Round data left the researcher with a gap in understanding regarding the experiences of challenges faced by participants. The specific nature of those challenges had become clearer with the identification of subcategories: Encountering Academics, Encountering the Logistics of Living, and Encountering a Social Life. However, more detailed information was needed in order to better understand how such challenges were encountered/experienced and even more importantly, more information was needed in order to better understand what was happening after participants faced said challenges and then began to utilize tools and methods for coping. Thus, all four **CONTEXT** categories appeared to be moving to the background, setting the foundation of the overall experience of successful transition. Specifically, the researcher implemented questions in

Round Two that began to focus on deeper understanding of aspects of participant experiences of challenge, seeking more information about possible connections to experiences of increased coping and internal motivation. Round Two interview questions included:

- (1) Many participants encounter a challenge when transitioning during their first year of community college and seem to know that they need to do something different in order to survive/cope/succeed. How did you experience that process of knowing that something needed to change and then doing something different/new?
- (2) The above mentioned process seems to involve risk-taking to become more involved socially, academically, and personally. How did you experience taking risks during your transition time?
- (3) How did experiences from your past affect your ability to cope with the challenges that you faced during your time transitioning into American community college?
- (4) What happens when you face a new challenge after having successfully worked through one while studying at an American community college?

Eight out of the original ten participants responded and were interviewed. One male participant of the original ten was unable to be reached due to active military service in Korea (P7) and one female did not reply to requests for the second interview (P5).

### **Reconceptualization of Categories**

Analysis of the Round Two interview data further solidified interconnections between academic, social and logistical challenges experienced by the participants. A forth subcategory of challenge emerged in the data as "Personal." This subcategory seemed to add an important layer where experiences of internal struggle could better be captured. How participants actively engaged in their challenge(s), how they experienced them internally and not simply how they encountered them externally was emerging as a central concept within the overall experiences of successful transition. The larger

category regarding how participants interfaced with challenges was thus changed from **ENCOUNTERING A CHALLENGE** to **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES**. This category now had four subcategories: Academic, Personal, Social, and Logistical/Cultural aspects of the overall category. The added aspect of "culture" was added to become Logistical/Cultural in order to better reflect the apparent marriage between any reported logistical issue (such as difficulties with transportation or living conditions) to the absolute cultural differences reported from previous life experiences in South Korea. Moreover, each potential area of challenge was found to have an impact of some kind on one or more of the other subcategories. For example, a participant who reported experiencing Social challenges also experienced Academic challenges, both of which were wrapped up in the Logistical/Cultural challenge of speaking English as a second language:

P3: I did feel it was scary the first time...I was scared, but I wanted to be friends with them. I tried, but my English wasn't good enough to associate with them. I tried to talk properly after class, so it kind of made me draw back from the conversation. I wanted to say something, but it wasn't accurate. I saw them and they were very confused about what I was talking about!

The following are definitions of each of the four subcategories conceptualized within the category of **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGE(S)** with a description of dimensions found within each:

### **I. EXPERIENCING CHALLENGE(S):**

A. Academic: This subcategory contained challenges faced by participants with issues in school. More specifically, problems faced regarding curriculum, instruction, classroom expectations, and peer interaction. Dimensions within this subcategory included a range

of potential feelings and/or outcomes, such as *Struggling somewhat to speak out in class*  $\leftarrow$  *Feeling discouraged*  $\rightarrow$  *Wanting to give up/failing*.

P2: One thing I noticed from many American students that they try to find or select the courses by their interest. I saw some student just had a break time from school just because they couldn't find a subject that they would enjoy to learn. I think this is the difference between how Korean student take the word "study." It is not about enjoyment having enough time to think about. It is just obligation to finish on time and good.

P2: The thing is that because college level classes require more individual work, in ESL classes, I had more chances to talk to people, but I wasn't as comfortable—we had to share all the work with other students.

P3: I often felt shame when I tried to ask questions and mumbled because I could not think of appropriate vocabularies to describe my questions.

P3: I think that in (class), that was the hardest ever—not because of the materials, because of how he described things.

P8: I was afraid of the grammar....and...I was afraid if it was a stupid question or not... I asked a stupid question then that's something that's really embarrassing that I never want to do again.

B. Personal: This subcategory contained challenges faced by participants with issues experienced internally. More specifically, this included concepts of self-esteem, motivation, stress level, anxiety, physical health issues, depression, homesickness, and feelings of loneliness/isolation. Dimensions within this subcategory included *Feeling motivated*  $\leftarrow$  *Feeling unsure/annoyed with current situation*  $\leftarrow$  *Feeling scared*  $\rightarrow$  *Feeling sad/angry*  $\rightarrow$  *Feeling completely worthless/depressed*.

P1: I could envision myself, by myself, having (physical injury), not being able to walk, cook, go to the bathroom. I might, I shouldn't say this, but in that case, I might get to the point of wanting to kill myself.

P4: Yeah, still lonely because I gave up my job in Korea as a teacher...everything...

P5: I felt isolated from the society...to be isolated was my challenge.

P8: I was just afraid to be embarrassed. Most shy people's voice is really, really quiet.

P9: I was so afraid.

C. Social: This subcategory contained challenges faced by participants with social issues. More specifically, this included problems faced regarding making friends, developing a support network and feeling social pressure. Dimensions within this subcategory included *Making friends*  $\leftarrow$  *Having a hard time connecting with others*  $\rightarrow$  *Feeling completely alone/isolated*.

P3: I tried, but my English wasn't good enough to associate with them. I tried to talk properly after class, so it kind of made me draw back from the conversation. I wanted to say something, but it wasn't accurate. I saw them and they were very confused about what I was talking about!

P3: ...not everyone was friendly. Some classmates thought I was a weirdo. Seriously.

P4: American students were really busy, having a job, running away after class...

P8: (I)t was really easy for me to make friends before. To get along, to be invited to parties and stuff...but, here, that didn't happen. When I wasn't trying, it was really sad and I missed that so much.

D. Cultural/Logistical: This subcategory contained challenges faced by participants with cultural differences and logistical issues. More specifically, this included problems faced regarding living arrangements, communication with the public, transportation, and differences in traditions, beliefs, and values. Dimensions within this subcategory included *Confusion over registering for class*  $\leftarrow$  *Difficulty getting to school*  $\leftarrow$  *Feeling pressure to do things alone/for oneself*  $\rightarrow$  *Feeling completely overwhelmed*  $\rightarrow$  *Feeling totally frozen/shutting down*.

P1: In my first quarter, I realized that I am in a totally different world compared to where I grew up. To be honest, it was really depressing because I started going to BC from winter quarter, a lot of rain, and I didn't know anybody in school, everything seemed so different. Pretty much everyday was the same and nothing really excited me. I found it hard to get along with other American students in class too.

P1: ...after going through (the Korean education) system and then coming to the US, you are really by yourself. You arrive here, at the airport, by yourself. You don't have the same system here. You choose your class. You go to the next. There's no common platform for students in the same situation to stand on.

P3: But with the school mentor, I had some negative experiences too, because sometimes their information was not accurate. Some of them were way off the realities of how to transfer. That was more discouraging than helpful.

P4: You know, even just conversations on the phone were scary, if I talk face to face, I can understand more easily...but on the phone, it was hard to understand and then I felt embarrassed.

P9: Korean parents are very conservative. For study abroad, they send their sons more easily than their daughter. So the women who come to foreign country, they are stronger than regular Korean women. They have stronger mind, are more determined... most parents, they don't want their daughter to send foreign country.

P10: I was so excited to study in the US. I have not been here before, so I was very hopeful for my big trip. I was very confident to do everything by myself, but I often had to have hard time while I was staying her...for example, with housing, academic problems, etc.

Interestingly, these subcategories seemed to be connected in terms of influence on one another as well, not simply through coexistence alone. If one aspect of the four was challenged and the participant responded negatively, then other subcategories seemed to experience increased challenges. Likewise, if participants experienced positive outcomes in one area of challenge, other areas seemed to improve as well. For example:

P8: I was really surprised; I always thought I was a shy student here. But then in one of my communications classes I had experiences in that quarter where I connected to classmates in the class and we started to say hi outside of class and thought, "I think we have the same class" and we saw that we had classes together



and they recognized me and said, "Oh, you're that student who participates a lot and speaks a lot in class" and that really surprised me. Because that wasn't the "me" that I thought of here, but was me in Korea. It really changed the image of me for myself.

Something also began to interest the researcher at this point in the analysis regarding the difference in participant perspectives on the term "challenge" itself. Some participants seemed to conceptualize the term to mean "outright failures" where others saw challenges as "positive opportunities." This posed two questions for consideration and further analysis: *What causes some participants to view "challenge" more positively than others?* And *Is the positive conception of challenge linked to a more rapid/likely experience of success?*

In unearthing a bit more about the experiences of challenge, further analysis revealed details regarding the specific linkages both within and between the experiences of challenge to the experiences of coping and then succeeding. The previous category of **COPING WITH CHALLENGES** included three subcategories of Having an emotional experience, Drawing upon past experiences and strengths, and Developing or having strategies. Since the prior category had changed from **ENCOUNTERING A CHALLENGE** to **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGE(S)**, it no longer seemed to make sense to include the emotional experience within this category on coping. Coping looked more like what participants decided to do following the experience itself. Round Two data clarified a more sequential process of coping that involved awareness and decision-making. Thus, this category was broken down into four subcategories: Knowing something needs to happen, Deciding to do something, Doing something, and Gaining increased confidence.

## II. COPING WITH CHALLENGE(S):

A. Knowing something needs to happen: Dimensions include: *Ignoring the problem* ← *Resisting change* ← *Reflecting on what's not working* ← *feeling like current skills aren't enough* ← *Feeling frustrated with self* → *Being bothered enough to do something*. This subcategory captures the concept that upon experiencing a challenge, participants eventually all connected to a need for something to happen. They could not go on ignoring a challenge or continue along their previous course/path. Before knowing that something needed to happen, some participants reported that they ignored the problem or resisted something happening at first. However, once the participant came to a place of "knowing," the following properties were found to be common experiences:

### **Remembering/connecting to original goal/purpose for coming to the US:**

P1: I had a solid goal coming in to the community college: transferring to university. I did not have any idea where I wanted to transfer to, but I knew I wanted to transfer to a good well-known university. In order to achieve that goal, I knew that I had to maintain a good GPA, find information, participate in club activities, and plan my life a couple years ahead. I just really believed that it would be more fun if I was in a famous university, then I started planning to arrive at the dream.

P10: I felt study abroad is kind of investment for my future. I didn't have to pursue a dream career, but I just hoped that my dream will come true based on my experience of study abroad. It means I strongly believe it will be a huge help to achieve my dream. It is not my obligation, but my will.

### **Not wanting to let down parents/family:**

P1: (A)t a certain point, I didn't feel like I was doing any better than in my life in Korea. So, like, what's the point? I wanted to go back. But I didn't want to let down my parents, so I decided to just push myself harder...I was thinking, "I'm gonna try every single thing and see if that works, and after I try it all and if it still doesn't work, then I will go back." I think that Korean students my age, a lot of them live by meeting their parents expectations. When the parents are happy, we are happy. So I guess a lot of my motivation came from them.

P1: It's not just about me. My parents made sacrifices to send me to the US. Time, money. I didn't want to let them down.

P2: It was about time and what I spending money on education forced me to do that I was not able to do without some pressure. I think I mentioned before that I was 21 and starting new education and life in America, I had some pressure that I need to finish this as fast as I can. It was because of the time limitation...even though no one pushed me, but Korean society is very critical about when you finish school...I still got financial support from my parents, so I had in mind that I need to do it good and fast.

P4: I felt lonely a lot because I had never left my parents before. I had not planned to study abroad, but because I was going to marry my husband...it had not been my plan...but I think if I had not felt that I needed to come here for my husband, I wouldn't have come.

### **Being required to do more individually:**

P1: I guess that because America is more individual, more than Asia...for us, it's really usual and normal to go eat together, study together, go do things together, right? Here, it's...a little different...so getting that circle of friends like we are used to is really important.

P2: There were definitely a lot of difficulties occurred every year and every quarter. But (after the first year), I think it was the same problems with other students, not only Korean or Asian. Once you get into college level, it was mostly individual work.

P10: After I started college life, I had to take risk socially, academically, and personally. When I first turned 21, I thought I already am an adult. However, there were so many risks to become an adult... First, I had to responsible for grading system and registration system—it is the biggest risk all students have to take during college life. Second, I was not a child who could get a scared by teaches or advisors. I mean they do not care for me anymore, so I had to do all those jobs by myself.

### **Feeling pressure of Korean culture standards:**

P1: I have three friends who we studied together at community college and two of them are still here studying with me (names university). One of them is like an older brother, so I try and do what he says because he is usually right.

P2: I think it's for all Korean students who come here...time wise, timeframe wise, it's so tight.

### **Wanting English to improve more quickly:**

P2: I had really no chance to talk to people speaking English because I lived at home with my parents, I never used my English...when I went to school I only used in-class English conversation, and that's it. I felt that I needed to use more English, so I found some classes and on-campus activities where I can really talk with somebody.

P3: I strongly felt that I need to improve my English on the very first day of my geography class. Even though my English was good enough to simply communicate with friends and other people outside of the classroom, I was not able to follow the instructor on that day. I even wrote full sentences of his joke on my notebook then I later found out that it was actually "joke"...not part of his explanation.

P3: I made good friends with other classmates and we did group study a lot. Even though they were very understanding about my language barrier, I felt sorry for them because I often dragged the discussion due to my inefficiency in describing my thoughts. So, I wanted to be more precise and effective during the study session...so it kind of made me push through, you know, umm, to improve my English I guess?

P3: I tried to talk to as many people as I could...I didn't limit my talking to just a few classmates. When I wasn't really fluent with one person, I would reach to another person the next day.

### **Feeling the need to be perfect:**

P3: There is a thing with Koreans...that they have to be perfect when they say something. When they speak English, it has to be PERFECT! They could say something more simple, but the pressure is there to be perfect...they do think it's kind of embarrassing when they can't.

Some questions arose after reviewing this category, including: *Is there some sort of small failure that must occur between these two steps in order to KNOW something needs to happen? Not all participants mentioned a specific "failure," in fact, most described the fear of failing but never a failure itself—how is this fear connected to their decision to take action? Failure does not seem to occur and participants seem to take big strides to avoid it. Is calling that "fear of failure" even accurate?*

B. Deciding to do something: Dimensions include: *Having some confidence to take a small step → Being ok with taking a risk to do something → Experiencing excitement/motivation to act*. This subcategory describes the point in which participants reported deciding to take action to avoid failure/to succeed (the relationship between failure and success and the best wording was still being considered at this point in the process). They were aware that something needed to be done/change and were now getting ready to do something.

**Realizing a need to do something different:**

P1: I tried to find something that motivates me... something that can improve my life quality. That's when I realized that I needed something different or rather something better in my life.

P4: I realized that I should change to succeed in the college life.

P6: You know that everyone knows that in order to be successful, we have to learn from the teacher, connect with other people, right? But not so many people really do something to get that connection. To challenge themselves to make that connection... I was also that kind of person before, in Korea. But when I got to America for the first time, I thought, as I told you, that I had never been isolated from society so I figured that if I don't take those challenges, I will be isolated. So, for my learning, from my teachers, etc...I just practiced reaching out to overcome that risk.

P8: But yeah, when I met my own challenge and realized that I had to do something different, it was that I just had to try to frequently ask questions of my professors and my classmates, to get over my shyness because before, I was kind of quiet and didn't ask any questions face to face.

**Realizing a need for community:**

P6: I didn't feel (reaching out to others) were risks. I don't know... somehow I was sure I would benefit more. I knew it was a risk, but to me, the isolation was most risky, so I didn't really think of the other things as risks, but more the solution to my risk.

**Being encouraged/inspired by instructor/staff/advisor:**

P3: I was highly motivated at my biology class because my instructor was very encouraging and he seemed to be always ready to listen to students...it was very different from what I felt at classrooms in Korea. I simply wanted to be more engaging at the class so I tried to ask a lot of questions.

P8: I heard things like, "Can you speak up?" and then after that, I got some good feedback and then they encouraged me to ask, like, "Oh that's a really good question" or "You know, someone might have questions like you" that really made me feel good and made me try one more time.

**Being encouraged/inspired by peer(s):**

P4: I think the big issue in the first year is not kind of just having success for academic process, but getting over homesickness, making relationship...many international students gave me an advice how they had gone through this difficult time. Also we shared our experience and information with other friends and encouraged each other.

P4: The students were so nice, they helped me relax. They would talk about themselves and that helped a lot.

P4: I thought, "If he can do it, I can do it."

P9: Actually, my mentor was taking the same classes. That's why I could transfer easily—I could make a decision with him.

**Not wanting to waste money:**

P4: I paid so much in tuition, that I decided that I would try just one year and after that, if I felt I wouldn't make it, I could leave. So I think that's why...I gave it one year.

P9: I had a part-time job because I was sorry to my parents to pay for every thing and also wanted to test myself to use English that I had learned for one year. This was my first transitioning to survive. It was about economical situation, mostly...If my parents could support me, I would go to four-year university, but the tuition was three times as expensive as two-year college.

**Being ok with change/changing:**

P3: Improving language and communication skills, in a different language, in a short period of time was not easy. I actually think I am still improving such things. I had to put a substantial amount of effort in improving such skills and it took a lot of time and energy. For example, it took more time than other students, reading textbooks because I had to look over dictionary very often. Also,

I had to relisten to lectures many times to understand because I could not catch certain important words. Not surprisingly, listening to lectures over and over made my English listening skills much better.

P6: You know, in Korea, I was a very inner person...so whenever I have met my friend now, people, my friends, always tell me, "Wow! You've changed a lot!" So, I guess I always had that something in my mind, but I had never revealed that hidden part of me.

P6: It changed the way that I approached people...before that, I was worried. Afraid to talk with Americans because I couldn't speak English to anyone, "I can't understand them, they can't understand me" and then in that moment I figured out I could.

### **Experiencing freedom**

P9: In South Korea, the culture is very strict. In the U.S. there is more freedom... more opportunity.

### **Being ok with failing (failing leads to learning):**

P1: If everything doesn't work out, I can always go back to Korea where I'm more used to living, where my beloved family is, and where all my friends are.

### **Recalling past experiences:**

P1: Throughout middle school and high school, I had learned that I need a strong motivation to keep myself moving. I know without a motivation or a goal, I am a really lazy person and I just like to have fun but to do nothing for future, I live in the moments not thinking about future. Once I have set my goal, I strive to achieve that goal with 200% effort. Also, I know I get very spontaneous if there is no plan...

P1: (Military experience) has been a big booster. Yeah. If I had not experienced any hard time in my life and then I went to the states...mmm...maybe I wouldn't be here today.

P2: I used to live in (European country) and it helped me a lot in the sense of not fearing to have a conversation with different faces, in terms of nationality. So it was hard for me to do something that I don't enjoy, like getting involved in activities, but doing the action was ok for me.

P4: I taught high school students, so they were almost like community college students. The same age. So in Korea, I knew I could teach. So it really helped me a lot in America. Once I had that fear, I could get over it by keep going...just

keep studying...so I think that experience was very important to me. I believe that my successful experiences in the past affected my successful college life. I could succeed in American community college since I had graduated university and had a job in Korea. I believed that I could make it when faced the tough time during transitioning. Those successful experiences keep making me more positive.

P9: Well, I would always be afraid of new challenges, but if I have to, I will. I think it's the same for most Korean men if they went to the military service. Before that, I don't know...they are a child still... I think the military experience is very special for Korean men... in the military, we learn how to overcome our limitation. In there, we do something new. It's a big advantage.

P10: When was I was in middle school that I realized and learned a lot from this experience I (became physically injured). After I was discharged from the hospital, I needed to start rehabilitation... I really wanted to give up but I had to do it to walk again. What I learned during this time was persistence. One of the most critical parts was a willingness to tolerate failure without giving up. Therefore, so we could cope with any challenge without giving up wherever we are... it helps a lot whenever I got into trouble. I always remember that time to bear difficulties.

#### **Staying focused on the positive:**

P3: I simply admitted the fact that I had to put an extra effort, since I am an international student, and tried not to view my situation as something negative. Ever since I had that thought in my mind, I actually got used to my routine and after all, it was not too bad

P5: (I) was more just like, let's do it!

P6: I felt, "Ok, I can do something."

#### **Doing more of what's working:**

P6: I think now I'm never afraid of taking a challenge. For instance, to apply to be an officer, I must provide proof of graduation, but I haven't finished (university name) yet. So I called (school) and I talked to them and I found out they can provide an expected graduation letter. So I think now I figured out that to solve issues, I need to talk to people. Whenever I talk to people, I can get answers, some solution to them. So I think that now that is my perspective. Whenever there is a problem, there is always a solution if you just talk about it.

In reflecting on this subcategory, the researcher found that many participants drew upon the powerful emotions and internal strength felt in remembering past experiences



and/or future goals in readying themselves to take action. Whether or not the past experiences were positive or negative did not seem to matter; negative experiences were described as life-lessons where participants learned something positive or developed internal strength. In this point in the process, staying connected to big picture motivations seemed to be key, although participants varied on reasons for motivation. In general, being open to change of some kind also seemed to be important in order for participants to take the next step in the process and do something.

C. Doing something (new/different/old): Dimensions include: *Making a small change/one introduction* ← *Doing something that worked in the past* ← *Stepping out of comfort zone* → *Doing something entirely new* → *Being exited to try something new/explore*. This subcategory describes the point at which participants reported taking action.

### **Setting a goal:**

P1: So, to overcome the challenges while I was in community college, I set a goal, planned ahead to keep my self-motivated to avoid just enjoying life and wasting the limited time that I could stay in the states. Knowing what I like to do and what I'm good at is what really helped me through community college.

P3: I knew that I had to finish that course and I knew that I wanted to transfer to a university...so in order to achieve that goal, I have to pass this course.

### **Joining on-campus club/activity/job:**

P1: I was enjoying my thing at the same time as meeting people. So it just came naturally. I just kept meeting people. Whether I like it or not, I just keep going...

P2: Most Korean students do not feel comfortable going to a new place or event alone, which means, Korean people prefer to do something most likely together not by their self so if there are no friends at the event, they don't want to attend. They would say "I'll just study rather than going to a meeting with unknown

people.” Of course, not all, but most would say this. I’m also one of these kinds of person, but I knew having more information and opening myself up into the public would definitely change my level of English skill, as well as communication skills, with unknown people.

P4: I think in my case, because I don't have my parents or sisters or friends at that time, I thought that if I worked in (on campus job), maybe I can make some connections...relations, that help me a lot. Actually, I worked (there) to make friends, not for the money.

P10: In order to make friends and become close to college employees and advisors, I started work in school...it was my first challenge and I could have so many good relationships with others. I still think that working in college was the best opportunity for my school life.

P10: I gathered some Korean students and chartered (student club) with them. It was my first big challenge that I faced, but I could successfully hold several events... Fortunately, every events completed well, and I could very proud of me for the jobs I did.

### **Reconnecting with old self:**

P8: (I)t was my personality in Korea! I can say that, yeah, before I came here I was a very active student in Korea. I had a lot of questions, always participated in everything, had lots of friends. And then, yeah, I was very close to my instructors and school activities and after school activities, too. But when I came here, because of the language, I became shy and closed off a little bit. But once I learned how to speak up, had confidence in myself, it started to show my old personality from Korea.

P8: I had experiences in that quarter where I connected to classmates in the class and we started to say hi outside of class and thought, "I think we have the same class" and we saw that we had classes together and they recognized me and said, "Oh, you're that student who participates a lot and speaks a lot in class" and that really surprised me. Because that wasn't the "me" that I thought of here, but was me in Korea

### **Becoming more assertive:**

P1: I don't think there was an idea of possibly failing in my head at the time. It came naturally. When I got up in the morning, I would just think..."Hmmm, maybe I should go play soccer!" Just naturally like this.

P4: I needed to be braver to get close to new friends and teachers.

P8: I just made an effort to participate and ask questions in the class. Like, you know, it's not like this in Korea, but American instructors like to be, umm...discuss with students when they have questions. And they always want the students to ask questions and when I ask them, they say like, "It's a really good question" so they encourage students. So I think by that, I just became more brave when instructors say that.

### **Pushing through fear:**

P2: I was really not wanting to go in, even after I arrived at the place...but mostly people were friendly toward new students, and that helped a lot... It was hard because I had to push my self into something I don't like to do.

P3: I didn't really think that I had two choices...I only thought that I had to, uh, overcome those things. I thought it was the only option for me.

P3: It was a persistence because they were more understanding about my situation.

P3: I mean, it was a little scary, but it was more exciting to me.

P3: I did feel it was scary the first time. And the first time, I would say I was half and half. I was scared, but I wanted to be friends with them.

P4: I didn't know how I would be able to teach someone who was born in America... "They know better than me" is what I thought. I was so scared. I knew math and science terms in Korean. But I was so scared. I needed to be braver to close to new friends and teachers.

### **Connecting with instructor/advisors (emailing, talking after class):**

P4: I got lots of help from international student office and nice teachers.

P4: (The) teachers helped me. They said hello to me. Like friends: not just teacher and student... in Korea, that never happens. It's like we are bothering them.

### **Connecting with Americans:**

P3: I reached that midpoint where I understand that my English isn't perfect but they also understand my situation. We were both understanding to each other, I guess. That's how we made friends. And that was a big transition for me. You can understand some things without even talking about it, right? You don't have

to fully describe it, but you can understand it.

P3: I can still remember some friends from community college who were very friendly. The majority of those were students who already had a degree and were coming to take more classes. One girl had actually already had an English degree from (university) and she went through a lot of things before. She was more understanding.

P3: I could connect with Korean Americans. They were more understanding than other Americans, I would say...their parents were from Korea...and like, the culture was in themselves. Part of Korean culture and part of American culture, as well. And some of them could speak some Korean. Maybe not fluent, but did tear down some of those barriers. When I could speak some Korean language, that would make me more comfortable.

### **Connecting with South Koreans** (sharing information, making friends):

P1: I didn't just go up to any Korean person and start speaking Korean, I would wait until maybe that person would try and talk to me or something...but then, I accidentally found out that I was aiming for the same goal... So we thought, "oh nice! Let's go there together!" and then we were working together for the same goal.

P1: I had a roommate who was a friend who took classes with me. And by that point, I was super dying...mentally, emotionally, physically...everything. And they would always call me, go to my door, take me to school, buy me food, bring me food so I could get back to my life. I think that was the only thing that got me back. I still tell them that I appreciate it.

### **Connecting with international students:**

P2: For me, making international friends...not Koreans...were the one thing that I tried hard. Korean people naturally tend to get together and study together so that they can share study information and to be or feel more "safe" in new circumstances. So if I did same thing like most Korean student do, I would have lower speaking and listening skills than other Asian group students.

P9: (ESL) classes were easy going and were not stressful, instructors were kind and friendly, and classmates were all international students during the time. I could make many friends during taking the classes, so I had a lot of time hanging with them.

Quite often, participants reprised something that had brought them success in the past. Many participants reported getting on-campus jobs utilizing skills that they had

developed/honed in past jobs/careers in Korea. Other examples included playing sports they were already good at and tapping into hobbies. There seemed to be an important connection here in terms of developing confidence in the U.S. and connecting to "old self" (past skills and experiences), although participants connected these in varying degrees. There also appeared to be dimension of pushing the envelope here, going from pushing *just beyond* ← to → *way beyond* the comfort zone.

D. Gaining increased confidence (to persist and succeed). Dimensions include: *Feeling slightly more confident* ← → *Becoming extremely energized*. This subcategory describes the experience that participants reported in gaining confidence after taking action.

Elements of confidence included learning, changes in perspective and direct connections to feelings of success.

#### **Learning from the experience:**

P1: Frankly speaking, I didn't think there was a risk-taking process during the transition time. I always had, and still have, this mindset that I have nothing to lose while I'm in the states. I never thought I failed, but I learned.

P1: I think I have been able to have more confidence in my self. When I face challenges, I sometimes look back on my life at community college and it brings me back to the moment and gives me the energy that I had while pursuing the dream...to transfer... when you go through challenges in your life and you have another, that means you have at least one challenge that you can look back up.

#### **Knowing that I can be successful:**

P4: Those successful experiences make me promote in my life. I believe that I can get a nice job like (example position)...Also, I can consider (American city) as my second home now. Those successful experiences still make me more positive when I face other challenges because I know how to cope with it.

#### **Getting used to the experience:**

P1: You know when you get a scar? Or, not a scar...a bruise! The first day, you rub it, but over time, it doesn't hurt anymore?... Well, here it is always challenging.

There are always new things. But I guess the reaction time, the time I would feel desperate is shortened. I get over it quickly.

P2: Once you are in the next step, it is just running to the goal. Which everyone does. I think from that point, there are no really Korean or American, or Asian. They are all facing educational difficulties and I can't say who will do better and who would fail.

P3: I don't really think that it's scary anymore. It was actually a motivator to improve my English. The first time it was scary, but when I get used to it, like when I made those friends that were understanding of my language barrier

#### **Doing more of what was successful:**

P4: ...a confidence momentum. I think that if I hadn't had that experience (past work experience) in Korea, it wouldn't have been the same for me to be successful here once I was in US.

P8: (N)ow, I'm really getting along at school and being social too. So I hope that I can continue to make more friends!

#### **Choosing to see the situation as a positive/opportunity:**

P1: (E)very time I encountered a challenge or difficulties, I just remind myself that I'm Korean, English is my second language, and I have only been in the U.S. for some years, not my entire life. Then I get my confidence to achieve or do whatever I want. I guess I was thinking about possibility. You know, probability.

#### **Developing a stronger voice:**

P8: Now I'm now trying to find what's right and what's wrong from my view... Previous me would try to understand their right, but now I try to find my right. I was surprised that I could (speak up) again, I thought that that part of me was completely gone after coming here...but then I found that still, it's there. That was completely amazing to me.

#### **Becoming a leader:**

P10: Whenever I succeeded the events, I was very proud of me and got confidence for becoming a leader in (student club). For doing an event, I should have spent lots of time and effort for a few months. Through the events, I could feel a sense of big accomplishment.

### **Summary**

By this point in the analysis of data, a cycle of momentum was emerging. Once the participants tapped into something successful, they reported doing more, learning more and feeling more successful. The researcher became very interested in this cycle as a core concept of the grounded theory and decided to employ theoretical sampling in order to more deeply explore this category, its linkages, properties and dimensions. Potential Round Three questions were emerging. Specifically, there was a gap in information regarding what kept participants in that cycle (without giving up) and how confidence was possibly connected to facing challenges. Many participants had spoken about confidence, but what that term meant to each participant was still vague and how much confidence developed during their experiences of challenge, or was needed in order to face those experiences successfully, was unclear.

The researcher also created a diagram to represent categories, subcategories, properties and their linkages from the Round Two data (see *Figure 4*). This diagram removed the foundational **CONTEXT** categories and focused on the process that seemed to be taking place between **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGE(S)** to developing confidence and experiencing an outcome of success. The four subcategories describing types of challenge (Academic, Social, Personal, and Logistical/Cultural) were connected via interlocking arrows to show their connections and impacts on one another. Process arrows moved downward from the place of "challenge" to the place of "success outcome," highlighting the more salient subcategories where linkages were most clear. It seemed clear at this point, that participants were doing a combination of drawing on strengths and past challenges, staying connected to goals and motivation, while being

open to doing something and taking action. It also seemed clear at this point that confidence was a result of that action, which was tied to overall success.

Potential Round Three questions were discussed with the advisor in consultation at this point in the research process, including:

- (1) When you encountered a challenge during your transition time, how did you keep from giving up?
- (2) What was happening internally when you decided to take action toward change/do something new?
- (3) How did your confidence develop when you connected to skills you had already developed in Korea?
- (4) How is confidence connected to your view of success?

Upon discussion with the advisor and further reflection of these possible questions, it was evident that some of the wording was overly nuanced and slightly redundant around questions regarding confidence. Question two was dropped due to its similarity to Round Two questions. Question three was edited and the direct link to confidence was made less explicit so that participants could better draw their own conclusions. Also, the advisor suggested that the research questions be looped back to the original choice in population, in order to further understand the essence of the unique South Korean experience. Specifically, the researcher still wondered about possible differences (compared to other International Student populations) in cultural issues such as family pressure, gender differences, and English language difficulties. The final Round Three interview questions were:

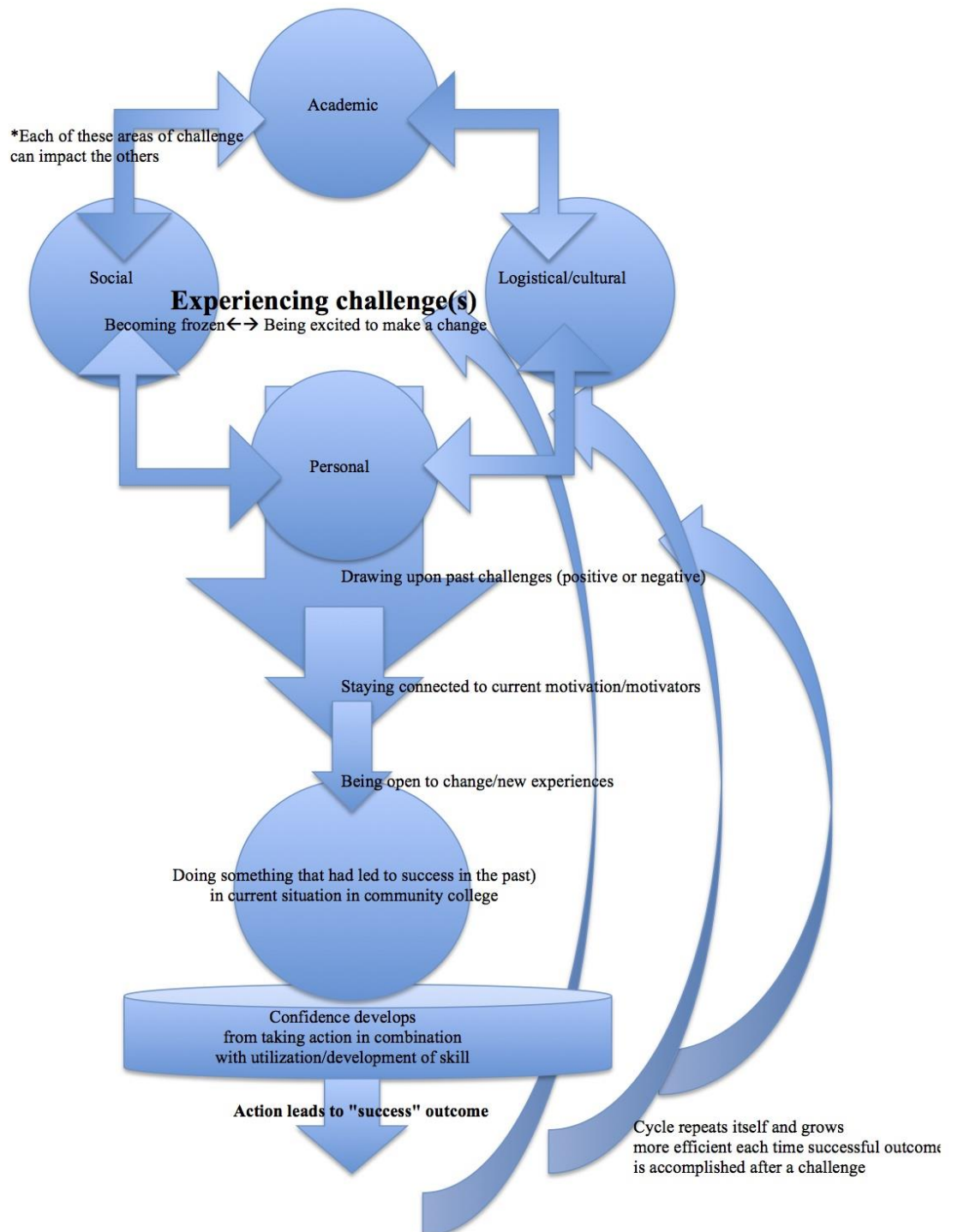
- (1) When you encountered a challenge during your transition time, how did you keep from giving up?
- (2) What about being South Korean made your transition more challenging than it was



for other international students? What about being South Korean made it easier?

(3) What role did the skills that you already had back in Korea (hobbies, career skills, academic skills, etc.) play in your success in community college?

(4) How did your confidence develop during this time?



Appendix L, Figure 4. Experiencing Challenges, Confidence Development

## APPENDIX M

### Third Round Interviews

Round Two data supported the developing grounded theory by further solidifying the foundational context categories and shedding light on critical gaps in information. Round Two questions focused on better understanding the apparent pivotal experiences of challenges that existed within participants' encounters with life as community college students. Following Round One analysis, there seemed to be a link between participants experiencing challenges and coping with those challenges, which later led to feeling successful in their transition. Round Two data confirmed that link and gave it more detail; **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES** and **COPING WITH CHALLENGES**, had clearer subcategories, properties and dimensions. The category of **EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES** looked at this point in the analysis to be replacing the previous overall category **ENCOUNTERING LIFE AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT**. This evolved category now had four intersecting subcategories of Academic, Personal, Social, and Cultural/Logistical, each of which appeared to critically link to the others: for example, academic challenges caused by social challenges, thus impacted overall personal experiences. The second major category reviewed, **COPING WITH CHALLENGES**, contained four reconceptualized subcategories following Round Two analysis: Knowing something needs to happen, Deciding to do something, Doing Something, and Gaining increased self-confidence.

Round Two analysis confirmed that all participants experienced challenges, yet responded to those challenges in varying ways. Within their response to challenge appeared to exist a set of tools or framework that was essential to the conceptualization of

overall success. How participants "coped" and then viewed that coping experience itself seemed central. The researcher felt the need to more deeply understand participants' conceptualizations of the process between coping and succeeding. Specifically, questions arose such as *How do participants not give up? How do they experience persistence? Is persistence the appropriate term for this experience, according to this population? How does the utilization of their skills (internal and external) play a role in persisting? How does confidence develop? Does it develop because they are tapping into something they are already good at, have already had "success" with? What about this overall experience of challenge and coping is unique to the South Korean international student population?* In seeking answers to these remaining gaps in knowledge, the researcher asked the following questions during a Third Round of interviews:

- (1) When you encountered a challenge during your transition time, how did you keep from giving up?
- (2) What about being South Korean made your transition more challenging than it was for other international students? What about being South Korean made it easier?
- (3) What role did the skills that you already had back in Korea (hobbies, career skills, academic skills, etc.) play in your success in community college?
- (4) How did your confidence develop during this time?

Round Three interviews added the third dimension of triangulated data collection and member checking. After this round of interviews, the overall theoretical sampling process concluded, as the researcher felt that there was significant saturation regarding detailed information of categories and their linkages. At this point, the researcher began to finalize the grounded theory of South Korean students' experiences with successful transition to the U.S. within American community colleges.

### **Prolonged Engagement**

Nine out of the original ten participants responded and were interviewed. The male participant who was unable to participate in the second round of interviews due to active military service in Korea (P7) was able to be interviewed in the third round and the female who did not reply to requests for the second interview (P5) was still unable to be reached. Prolonged engagement with the participants appeared to solidify trust in the researcher and familiarity with the overall process. The researcher notes an added ease in reporting some of the more personal fears and challenges experienced by the participants. Their answers felt more forthcoming with each round of interviews and participants seemed to respond with candor and ready detail. Participants seemed to be experiencing pride when sharing their experiences and were curious about how results of the study could be made available to incoming South Korean community college students. They each shared feelings of excitement and gratitude for the opportunity to help future South Korean students in some capacity. The researcher felt that these comments were interesting in that they mirrored the emerging Round Three data regarding the outcome of coping with challenges: participants appeared to feel increased pride, appreciation, and added confidence. A couple comments illustrate the established rapport and continued interest in this research process:

P2: I'm so glad that I could help you! Thank you for the interesting opportunity for me!

P4: I would love to get a whole copy of your study when it is done!

### **Reflexivity**

Reflexivity refers to the concept that the researcher is aware of any bias, personal

values, beliefs and experiences that may impact their collection and analysis of qualitative data. In order to maintain reflexivity, the researcher made sure to disclose her own history as a community college mental health counselor and instructor and any views she held regarding the validity of certain campus outreach programs and her past involvement with campus organizations. At times, the researcher made extra effort not to ask about possible experiences with counseling on the community college campus. Though she felt curious about these details throughout the process, she felt as though such questions would be too directive. She also disclosed her history of living abroad in Japan and experiencing her own process of transition to another country and culture. She made sure to ask as many direct questions clarifying descriptions about South Korean culture as possible, in order to become better informed with participants' viewpoints and experiences. Her reaction and thoughts regarding intersections of her own experiences and assumptions were documented in her written memos and she made sure to ask further questions whenever areas of assumption arose.

## **I. CONTEXT:**

Round Three interviews and data analysis clarified a sequential process of transition experienced by all of the participants. This process appears to follow a timeline of stages and begins with the foundational **CONTEXT** category identified in Round One, including subcategories of Personal Characteristics, Having Past Experiences, Choosing an American Community College, and Living in the U.S. This category and subcategories clearly sets the stage for participants' initial experiences in the United States upon which the process of successful transition is experienced. Each of these subcategories involves a variation of experiences, backgrounds and motivations

depending on the participant.

## **II. ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGES:**

The rest of the process identified in this grounded theory was more actively analyzed in subsequent interviews, mainly focusing on the central category of **EXPERIENCING/ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGE(S)**. Wording shifted back and forth in seeking to describe this category and final analysis landed on **ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGES** as the description of this category. The word "encountering" was chosen here because it seemed to better capture an initial "meeting up with" or "facing" of a challenge where participants have yet to do much with that encounter. It was seen as a less active word, which seemed to fit the very initial shock and often times lack of movement first experienced by participants. Also, since the grand research question asks about the overall experience of successful transition, it seemed more appropriate to title the theory itself an Experiential Process of South Korean Student Development Toward Success in the American Community College. This title envelops the larger experience itself and captures how action oriented it is, always moving *toward* a target of success, rather than simply arriving at success through a prescribed equation. Success, as participants ended up describing it in this experience, is found within *reflective actions and learning* in the *growth process* itself and was not seen as something obtained or arrived at, as they had once envisioned before their time in the U.S. Thus, the first active phase (second category) in this developmental process is titled **ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGES** and it includes four subcategories: Academic, Social, Cultural/Logistical and Personal. All of these subcategories seem to have strong ability to interact with and impact one another in many ways.

A. Academic: This subcategory includes most of the properties identified in Round One data analysis where participants reported encountering academic challenges, including: **classroom environment, registration/enrollment, curriculum, communication with instructors/advisors**. Dimensions include *some to extreme academic challenge*. The following include the most salient Round Three data in this subcategory:

P7: In terms of the English curriculum in Korea, it is mainly focused on the reading and grammar part. Thus, I had not fully practiced my speaking and writing abilities in English before I went to the U.S., which was, in fact, much more difficult than I expected. However, to be successful in an American college in an academic sense, speaking and writing abilities are the two most important things. Thus, during the first year in the U.S., I had a hard time adopting myself to this academic environment.

P7: It was a big challenge to speak up with English in a class, which was unusual in Korea. However, to get a grade, it was necessary to speak up in class.

P8: Whenever I had to take tests, write essays, and read books, I had very hard time. I mean I know that I had to do it in my mind, but my brain just didn't follow me so it took me a lot of time. I spent three times more than normal students. It really made me want to give up so I cried a lot.

B. Social: This subcategory includes properties related to social challenges, including **making friends, communicating with peers, developing a support network, and campus activities**. Dimensions include *some to extreme social challenge*. This is an example of a participant feeling difficulty in connecting socially with classmates:

P8: When I just came here, I didn't talk a lot or express my ideas during group work. I was the one who acted like a shadow in the group.

C. Cultural/Logistical: This subcategory includes most of the properties identified in Round One data analysis where participants reported encountering challenges in **transportation, housing, language/communication, societal issues, cultural differences and standards of living** (such as food, clothing, and weather). Dimensions



include *some to extreme cultural/logistical challenge*. This participant describes a situation where Academic, Social and Cultural/Logistical properties were linked:

P8: Being South Korean was a challenge when I had to participate. As you already know, in the United States, participation points can impact our grade. However, in Korea, it is better for students to not interrupt instructor's lecture. It's even better if you stay quite during class and ask questions after class.

This participant describes encountering a challenge that was linked across Cultural/Logistical, Academic, Social, and Personal properties.

P8: Because of the cultural difference, I lost lots of participation points and it impacted my grades at first. Also, culturally, Koreans, especially girls, don't want to eat, sit, and walk alone because we look very lonely. Therefore, when I spent many days alone, I made myself very lonely and sad during transition time.

This participant describes a Cultural/Logistical challenge of language and communication differences:

P9: I think all international students have a language barrier even though there are some differences coming from their first language. There is only a little bit more of hardness for (Korean) language structure...grammar.

D. Personal: This subcategory includes most of the properties described in Round Two data analysis, such as physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Dimensions include *some to extreme personal challenge*. Properties include **injury, feeling homesick, feeling depressed, and feeling stressed**. One participant describes the pressure that Korean men who have not yet served their military time face:

P1: (When) South Korean men haven't finished the military service (we) go through a huge stress and pressure of the upcoming mandatory two years of dedication and sacrifice. The stress can sometimes be overwhelming and can be an obstacle in life in the states and study at school.

This participant describes an interaction between cultural differences in and personal emotional challenges:

P7: I grew up in a family-oriented society, which made me miss my family so much. I often felt depressed because I thought I am alone in the U.S.

This participant lived with her family and even completed high school in the U.S., but she still felt a combination of social and cultural challenges:

P8: I watched a lot of Korean drama and tried to hang out with my high school friends because I didn't have friends at my college.

**III. CONSIDERING GIVING UP:** All participants have reported some aspect of thinking about giving up after encountering a challenge. How seriously this was considered differed from participant to participant. Dimensions include *slightly considering* to *seriously considering and taking action to give up*. The following two participants reported such feelings of wanting to give up and move back to South Korea:

P1: During the hard time I wanted to give up everything and just simply go back to South Korea.

P4: I get hurt when I fail to do something...I had packed my luggage bag to go back to Korea whenever I felt I am a failure...

**IV. CONNECTING TO MOTIVATION:** This step in the process emerged as acutely pivotal. When participants were able to connect back to their motivations, either internal or external, they appeared to begin to gather the strength necessary to stay and push onward through the challenge. Dimensions include feeling *somewhat motivated* to being *completely energized*. Subcategories are External Motivation and Internal Motivation.

Properties of External Motivation include the following:

**Not wanting to disappoint others:** This property captures participants feeling more motivated to push through challenges when they think about the possibility of disappointing others in their lives and not wanting that to happen. Subproperties include

specific influential groups: parents and Korean society. These participants describe the motivation of *Not wanting to let parents down*:

P1: I realized that if I gave up here then I would be letting my parents down as well as other friends. I could not give up because of the people who supported me and cheered for me... I could bare the challenge and stress because of them.

P2: First of all, it was more than responsibility, but my obligation to finish the university, meaning my parents paid my tuition, which most Korean parents do.

P2: ...it was not only for my parents but I was conscious of the way other people were looking at me, and their expectations. Korean parents usually like to talk about their children...how they got good job, entered a good university, and how much they earn. Not only parents does this kind of conversation, but in general Korean people like to compare who is winner and loser. I think it is not only a Korean thing, but they really do mind other people's judgment. My parents were not that kind of people, but was 21 at that time and I felt it was too late to start studying English, so I really cared about the outside view from people. I had to prove that I'm not dumber to those people and show my self as good and successful daughter to my parents.

P3: My father actually kept reminding me about his and mom's ages and how they at some point, they can't support me...but he did not put any pressure on me by saying things like how much he pays for my education. But I had a thought about how expensive my education was and I wanted to make the best of it. I thought that in that way, I could make my parents proud about their sacrifice. Also, talking to my family about successes in transitional challenge relieved was a great pleasure and their encouragement kept me from failing challenge.

P6: If the failure of my study abroad experience had only mattered to myself, I would have chosen the "giving up side," whenever I faced challenge. But that failure did not only matter to myself but also to my family's hope. There was no direct pressure on my success in the U.S. from my family, but I could imagine that if I gave up the challenge, my family's financial and emotional sacrifice to my study abroad would be meaningless. I could not let that happen to my family. Therefore, I always thought of my family whenever I wanted to give up on a challenge and pushed myself to find solutions to overcome that challenge.

P7: ...I had to think of my family and friends who expected that I would do well in the U.S. (It) was both pressure and expectation. That is, my friends and family expected that I would do well in the U.S. Their expectation often made me feel some pressure...I never thought of giving up my college life in the U.S., even though I often had to go through hard times... Eventually, their expectation and pressure led me to lead a college life in the U.S. without giving up.

P8: I saw many students going back to Korea because they cannot adapt American culture. I just didn't want to be that person. I didn't want to let my parents down.

These participants describe the motivation experienced in the subproperty of *Not wanting to let down "Korean society"*:

P6: (I)f I am not doing well, it would be a major disappointment to be less than expected. But it would not be as extreme as less than the norm. Since there are high demands on study abroad among Koreans, the failure of study abroad can be somewhat expected...if I am not doing well, it will give disappointment to be less than expected, and I did not want myself to give that image to the others...if we perform well, it would be considered as just a natural result of study abroad. As a South Korean, my sacrifice and effort to overcome the challenge during the transition can be easily undermined by the Korean high standard of "zero sum game." But with same reason, Korean society's high standard on students who have study abroad experience, I could push myself a little harder and easily change my mind to "challenge accepted."

P7: Diligence here means not just persisting or pushing through challenges but also doing my best in everyday life. For example, Koreans regard the diligence for a student as not being late in class, studying regularly, not putting off homework etc. Thus, although I often encountered challenges, I did what I needed to do.

**Career/financial goals:** This property describes the motivation experienced by participants when they connect to/remember their career or financial goals. The following data show this linkage:

P2: Financial success is connected to the Korean peoples' mind...that's "how other people think about me." Most of Korean parents send their children to the U.S because "their neighbor sent their children to the U.S." Meaning that even though they are not wealthy enough to support their child to send to U.S, they do because everyone else is doing it. And because of "every one else is doing it" the job placement competition got higher and harder. Therefore, the majority of Korean students know that they have limited time to succeed and what they need, in order to achieve a higher dream. That definitely applied for me too.

P2: In general in Asian culture, but especially in Korean culture, finishing university or some two-year degree or upper than high-school education is required to get a better salary job. So it was important to finish my university no matter how it was hard. In addition, community college saved me a lot of money

for tuition compared to going directly to a four-year college. It was my main reason that I chose to go to community college first. Another point of view is that international student doesn't come without purpose. Coming to U.S for studying means they are looking for better opportunity in their life. Some people want to stay in U.S so it is mandatory to finish education here so that they can continue their life here. Some people will go back to Korea with the certificate or diploma for the better job option. In other word, which ever was the reason, coming to U.S is an investment to all international students...

P3: I also thought about how much money I spend, and how hard my parents worked for it, as an international student and tried to have a mentality that any of my moments here in US should not be wasted. This challenge during transition was hard but when I overcame it, I felt that whatever amount of money paid for it was worth my accomplishment and also I felt rewarded with such accomplishment.

P6: ... I felt responsibility to my family's sacrifice, so I could keep myself to face the challenge. Also, my inspiration to the responsibility not only came from the good of my family, but also repay my family's sacrifice.... Korean society has a high standard on the Korean student who has a study abroad experience. If our (Korean students who have study abroad experience) performance cannot satisfy their high standard on us, we would be considered to be a person who has just wasted their family's money.

P7: Before going to the U.S., I had a clear purpose to go there...that is to go to one of the top universities and complete the college life successfully.

P8: I couldn't go back to Korea and study there again. I studied in United States about six years now and to me, its harder to study in Korean than English. You know, there are some Professional languages such as chemistry language and math languages? I am used to that language in English, so if I look at those languages in Korean, I have to start over again. So I always reminded myself that I cannot go back...it will be harder...so I have to get along here. For me, it's either finish my school here or quit school in my life.

Properties of Internal Motivation include the following:

**Not wanting to disappoint self:** This property describes the motivation experienced by participants when they think about the possibility of letting down their own internal standards and capacity for growth. The concept of maintaining "self-respect" is threaded throughout this property. The following data best illustrate this property:

P1: I told myself that if I go back now, when facing challenges, I'd fail again in Korea and I won't be proud of myself.

P3: I would say the main motivator was realizing my capability and potential to grow.

P4: (not wanting to let people down in South Korea) was one of reasons why I did not give up, but not my main motivator. That was about myself—I think I have been anxious to keep my self-respect.

P4: I just endured and tried harder and harder because I did not want to let myself down—fail myself.

**Fear of repeating past mistakes:** This property describes the motivation experienced by participants when they think about the possibility of repeating mistakes made in the past. These participants shared how they view the difficulty in doing something a second time and how the thought of possibly repeating mistakes from the past was a motivator:

P1: I personally believe that doing something a second time is more challenging than the first time because you know what you will be experiencing that second time from the experience of the first time...I was just worried that I pretty much have to start all over again when I got back and I know how challenging it was the first time.

P3: I also thought about mistakes I made in the past and tried not to make such mistakes again, like I needed to do enough research before starting in a new school, study certain things ahead of time, or even how to treat new people in order to make sound relationships.

**V. DECIDING NOT TO GIVE UP:** This category captures the point in the development process where participants report consciously making a choice not to give up (thus choosing to keep trying/persisting). In essence, this is the point in which participants reported being okay with the possibility of failing:

P6: I have failed more than I have succeed when facing challenges. Winning over something has an expected outcome, therefore we can keep ourselves putting in the effort to "win," and also we can easily give up when we lose, and we will not have those expected outcomes. But my challenge was different: it always gave me unexpected outcomes and so I could not plan anything when I decided to face

the challenge: I just have to "do it." Therefore, I would say the more important thing is the tool to manage the failure of challenge, rather than a tool to succeed on challenge...and that tool was having the positive perspective on the failure from the challenge.

P6: I did not consider the challenge as a thing to win over. I knew that I would have many more chances to lose from this challenge. And when I recognized that truth, I could no longer expect "winning" from challenge, rather, I begin to value the nature of challenge, which is experiencing an unexpected result. And even it was very few times, when that unexpected result gives me the precious achievement like getting hired somewhere or an opportunity to meet the people who have achieved my dream...I have decided to never give up on facing challenge.

**VI. MANAGING WITH DILIGENCE:** This category contains strategies and pressures that seemed to help participants persist. "Persistence" itself was discussed with the participants to try and find an accurate description of what was going on at this point in the process. The researcher considered category titles of "laboring through" and "making it," however neither of these titles felt authentic, as they were quite nuanced/colloquial phrases, not word choices that originated from the participants themselves. As the researcher worked to create a clearer picture of the theory, she worked on a new diagram in the hopes of understanding persistence and its intersections with other categories (see *Figure 5*). At one point in the Round Three interview, a participant described his understanding of what it's like to persist and not give up. He described it as "managing" which seem to accurately describe the active, persistent nature of this category:

P6: I would say the more important thing is the tool to manage the failure of challenge, rather than a tool to succeed on challenge...and that tool was having the positive perspective on the failure from the challenge.

Another participant shared his thoughts on the term and experience of persistence as better described by the word diligence:

P7: Diligence here means not just persisting or pushing through challenges but also doing my best in everyday life. For example, Koreans regard the diligence for a student as not being late in class, studying regularly, not putting off homework etc. Thus, although I often encountered challenges, I did what I needed to do.

In light of these two descriptions and how they resonated with the researcher, this category was renamed MANAGING WITH DILIGENCE. Dimensions of this category include *trying something small to experiencing extreme pressure to do more*.

**Implementing academic strategies:** This property includes strategies implemented in order to be more successful.

P4: I did a lot of trial and error.

P8: I started participating so hard because I had a class that had grading of 50% discussion and 20% participation, which to me, it was 70% talking points. I just quickly realized this is real and I really have to talk or I will literally fail this class. So... in that class, I raised my hand with red tomato face, and shaky voice then answered as far as I know very slowly.

**Responding to expectations of other Korean Students:** This property describes the pressure that participants reported feeling from the expectations of other Korean students. This was an important pressure at this stage, as it served to push participants just enough beyond their comfort zones to hang out with each other (to create a social support network), or avoid each other (in an attempt to improve English skills):

P2: There is always the challenge for any Korean student that they are looking for the college or city with less Korean students, which means, they know that there would be less English speaking time unless you don't make friend with other Korean students. It is like a cultural trend that Korean people tend to get together a lot. I was the one who chose not to be a friend with a lot of Korean students, but still I had some...I couldn't ignore everyone.

P2: To become a friend who can I ask for the class materials, and other information, with a Korean, you have to be a close to each other. Korean students naturally don't go to other Korean students without knowing their name



and just ask for the class note. Of course not 100% Korean students, but most of them requires time to get close and share. So for me, I was busy with what I was doing, and I knew some of things that Korean student do after school time, which I really didn't enjoy, and that made me more separated from the other Korean students.

P3: I had to treat older Korean students differently than other people, such as other international students or American friends. Sometimes the older students gave me a hard time by being authoritative in a negative way... in my culture, people generally show respect to elders, even toward someone who's just 1 year order. Some people take advantage of this part of the culture and they make the younger person feel obligated to do as they say...not any thing illegal, but things like doing errands for them or not talking back to them. One thing that I hated the most was when older guys forced me to drink with them, or forced me to drink more when I was already drunk. Usually Korean folks don't go to this extreme, but there are few like this.

P4: (S)ome of the South Korean students did not want to hang out with other Korean students because they did not want to speak Korean while living in the US. But that did not make it hard for me...Maybe there were other Korean students who got hurt their feelings from them though.

**VII. TAKING ACTION & LEARNING:** This category is a natural progression of the previous category where participants reported feeling some pressure to act. In this stage, participants take clear actions to build community, strengthen resources, and become involved on campus. Within these actions taken, participants also report an openness/willingness to learn from these activities and networks. Dimensions range from *taking a small step* to *starting a new club on campus*.

**Connecting with other South Koreans/Korean culture:** This property includes actions taken to become more active with South Korean cultural activities both on and off campus.

P1: ...being South Korean, you get to meet many other Korean students on campus and you can kind of measure where you are at, whether it's in life or study.

P7: (E)ating Korean foods helped me to get out of the homesick. Or, I often Skyped with my family and friends in Korea.

P7: When I was in the U.S., I met many Koreans. They -- usually those who were older than me --- often invited me for dinner and gave some Korean foods. I think they felt kind of pity for me because I was alone without family in the U.S. They were so nice to me because I am a Korean.

P9: I would like to say about a strong point of the Korean community. Most of the Korean community consists of religious groups. The major group is the Christian church community. Many Korean international students visit the Korean community church to get helped. Church members help them find apartments, vehicles, and work places and then, provide worship services, bible studies, counsel, activities for their spiritual life to be grown. I got this from a Korean community church.

**Getting a job on campus:** This property includes actions taken to secure an on-campus job.

P4: I could have more chances to make success (due to on-campus job)—making friends and getting good grades—in (on-campus tutoring job) and in many classes because of my academic skills, too.

**Joining on-campus activities:** This property highlights the importance of campus

activities. Here, the researcher also noted a beginning discussion around the emergence of confidence.

P10: During the time I spent at (community college), I had a lot of experiences in many activities. From the activities, I have built up my confidence and realize now I can do more work that I have never experienced.

P7: When I felt depressed, I did what I really like in my free time. I played the piano and did some sports like soccer and basketball...Also, I tried to hang out with English speakers whether he or she is American or people from other countries, but not Korean.

**Developing a broader social network:** This property described the confidence that participants reported feeling from developing a larger group of friends and campus connections.

P4: ...social connections gave me a lot of confidence to succeed in the American community college...I gained a scholarship and started work in (on-campus tutoring job). The experience in (on-campus tutoring job) gave me a lot of confidence, too, because I felt like one of a college staff members.

P8: Whenever (facing challenges) happened, my friends made me laugh. My friends made me forget those school works and show me that I am a really good person, which inspired me to do my school works because I am a "good person." I guess I can definitely say that my friends were and are my energy.

**VIII. GAINING CONFIDENCE:** This category now formally picks up the developing experience of gaining confidence. At this stage, participants report gaining confidence from a variety of outlets. Dimensions range from *some increased confidence* to *major improvements in confidence*. Confidence appears to come from both External Sources and Internal Sources.

External Sources: Including community interaction and the utilization of acquired external skills:

**"Jung" (compassionate community):** In this property, participants connect to people and activities within the community and report feeling more "comfortable," "motivated," "confident" and "encouraged" through the support of others. One participant describes a seminal aspect of South Korean culture:

P7: ...we have a culture called "jung." It is hard to translate it into English, but I would say it's about love, compassion, brotherhood. In other words, because of this culture of Korea, I could meet a lot of kind Korean peers who helped me a lot in terms of overcoming the homesickness and living in the U.S. in general. To fully understand Korean culture, it is really important to know about Jung because it is one of the most important foundation of Korean culture.

Another student describes the Korean word, "hyung," which refers to the larger concept of respecting elders and the structured Korean relationship and respect of junior and senior (ages).

P1: I was lucky to meet friends who were so passionate in their dreams and goals through college and I was able learn from them and that motivated myself as well... To be specific, I think it's finding the right friends who can together work for their individual dream and goal. For me, this especially came from hanging out with those who I call "hyung," meaning "older brother."

Other quotes include broader experiences with finding community support through other influential individuals.

P1: I think most of Korean people, including myself, gain confidence through the people around them. I mentioned the term collectivism in our first interview. The more people I get to know, the more I felt comfortable going to school as well as studying.

P2: The good thing about being a Korean student is as you get together, a lot you have a lot of finished course materials and teachers information. In my opinion, Korean student share very strong loyalty to each other when they feel small...like they are minority in the class or at college...so once they become friends, they share a lot of information and then they get easier selections.

P4: Many friends and teachers helped me a lot in many ways. I was lucky to have them during my tough time.

P9: I had an advisor whenever I encountered challenge. The advisor also had a similar experience, so he showed me some ways that I could choose...I was motivated by his experience.

P10: Whenever I had hard time in the U.S., my friends and roommates were great encouragement. I could overcome my bad situations. Moreover, people who I met while I was joining clubs and club activities made me forget my trials.

**Utilizing skills:** This property includes previously developed academic skills, cross-cultural skills, career skills, and military skills and the confidence participants reported feeling when they found a way to utilize those skills in their life in the U.S. and American community college.

External/acquired skills:

**Foundational academic skills:** This subcategory includes learned academic skills/prepartation.

P1: One of the things that I greatly appreciated was that I was very advanced in mathematics and science compared to other students. In Korean high school, you have to choose...if either you want to take an engineering or science or a liberal arts path, it's somewhat similar to taking AP classes in American high school... Learning something in a second language is very challenging for international students, but if they already know the material, even if it's just a concept but not in detail, things become super easy.

P1: I chose to be on engineering and science track and because of that, I learned advanced mathematics and science (in Korea) that gave me confidence in taking classes at (community college).

P3: Korean high school curriculum is rigorous and I actually covered some of college level basic science and math courses back in high school. This early exposure was helpful to obtain good grades in entry level courses in community college.

P7: (T)he studying experience in Korea made me a prepared student to study. As I spent a great deal of time studying in high school, I knew how to study and how to do well on the tests.

P7: As I went to the Korean high schools and attempted to go to Korean universities...led a student life in a lot more competitive environment...I believe my academic skills were good enough to be successful in the community college. Even though it was a little challenging to study in a foreign language, the diligence that I had developed back in Korea as a student helped a lot in my studies in the community college.

P7: I prepared what I wanted to say in class before I went to my class. In other words, I read the class materials and thought of what I want to say beforehand. Thus, the preview helped me a lot to gain the courage to speak in class.

P10: I very much enjoy drawing a picture such as pop-art and also enjoy making a video with many video making programs. It helps a lot when I am working in (club). When the (club) had a kick-off event, I made a video which introduces Korean cultural things and drew some pop-arts for sale to students. It helped a lot to complete our event successfully.

***Cross-cultural skills:*** This subcategory includes learned cultural skills.

P2: I already had studied abroad before I came to the U.S and it helped me a lot when facing many people and different cultures. I had no fear of talking with 'white' people, which many Korean students feel not comfortable when they see different color people... now days it's happening less because Korean people are more getting foreigners in Korea, but even 7 years ago, before I came to the U.S.,

many people were afraid to talk with different color people while someone asked at the street for the direction. Even though they studied English at school, they froze at that moment. Same thing happens here in the U.S when they come for the first time. In Korea, 99.8% of the population is Korean, which means you only see Korean people when you go out to the street. It must be hard to go actively greet different color people at first chance. So my previous abroad experience was big plus for me that even though I was horrible English speaker at first time, I had courage to talk with people so I could improve my speaking skills.

P8: I think I have a wide view of the things because I have experiences that are "global." I see almost everything in two cultural views, which helps me understand it on both sides. It happens unconsciously now, but it is the result of trying to have an American perspective. I think I can use this well in the future like in my future career, whatever it is, because I am like a person who is like two persons. You know what I mean? I cannot be in two places at one time, but I can have two different perspectives than other normal people, which will be a "boost" in my life.

***Career skills:*** This subcategory includes learned career/work skills.

P2: I had an opportunity to work at community college where I could improve my speaking skills a lot. Community college gave me many opportunities and chances to gradually improve my educational level and express myself in public.

P4: My successful career as a high school teacher and my academic skills (played a role), I had already graduated university in Korea, played in an important role in my success in community college. It made me more positive when I faced challenges since I knew how to cope with it... If I had not had any work experience in Korea, my transition could have been harder...we need to learn how to get used to the new social life, develop patience, and so on during work. Especially since I had teaching experience in Korea, I could use it right on the spot in (on campus tutoring job). I think these are very precious experiences.

***Military experience/skills:*** This subcategory includes learned military skills.

P1: Prior and post military service times are totally different... When I first arrived at (community college), I did not have confidence and was somewhat worried if I was going to be able to make it through. But after the military service, I had no doubt that I would successfully make it through... to be more specific, I think in my head it goes like this "Well, whatever I do, it will still be better and easier than the military service. At least there is no rank, everyone is equal, not as many tough regulations and rules, and most importantly, I can do whatever I want. It's freedom."

P3: I thought about hardships that I had to go through back in the military whenever I had challenges here... I thought those challenges were nothing comparable to the military.

P3: I remembered challenges during past transitions, such as coming to the US, joining the military, transferring to the community college credit academic program from the ESL program and I tried to apply the same coping mechanisms that I used in the past.

P3: The leadership skills that I obtained from the Korean military were helpful in organizing and leading a study group.

P4: (B)eing South Korean can make the transition easier for Korean male students who have served military service before because it is a kind of unique experience that they could have in Korea.

P9: I could get mechanical background during serving as a military personnel in the Korean navy. The experience helped me take technical course at (community college).

P10: (M)ost Korean men get benefit when they transfer to four-year university or they write a resume. In South Korea, most Korean men should go to the army for two years. It is a men's duty and has been considered as an important thing in Korea, but it can be a benefit in the U.S.

#### Internal skills:

***Connecting to a dream:*** This subcategory includes the internal skill of staying connected to a dream for the future.

P6: I believe my desire to be a politician works very well for me to have success in community college. It is not the skills that I already had back in Korea, but the dream has somewhat continued from my life in Korea, therefore I would say my dream has helped me. (T)he dream is my "*heart*," which kept myself to go on to face the challenge and find a solution, the skill is my "*brain*," which can sophisticate my solution to the challenge. If my heart stopped, I would die, if my brain stopped, I would be in a vegetative state. Therefore, I need both to operate at the same time to achieve something.

***Staying positive:*** This subcategory includes the internal skill of staying positive in the face of difficulty.

P8: I tried to be positive, focus in class and study hard which led me "being

confident and speaking out” in class, I mean in the middle of American culture.

**IX. EXPERIENCING POSITIVE OUTCOMES:** This final category in the developmental process includes reported positive outcomes from encountering, managing, learning and gaining confidence from challenges within the transition process. This category holds obvious excitement for participants, an outcome of success that brings about increased comfort in the face of a challenge whether a little or a lot, gives more zest/moxy/vigor to take on new hurdles. Things that may have been seen as "scary" before experiencing a buildup of success are now possibly even enthralling, which in turn, allows for more comfort with the unknown and more taking on of "trial and error." In general, this brings on more "risk taking" to speak out in English, become more independent, make more social connections, and navigate American cultural norms with more comfort. Within the positive outcomes lie participants' conceptualization of "success." Dimensions include *some increased motivation to driven to become a leader.*

**Having increased motivation/confidence to face future challenges:** Many participants discussed feeling that the increases in confidence helped them to envision successfully facing new challenges in the future because of the challenges they faced during this transition experience. Some participants pointed to feelings of confidence that they currently enjoy due to their experiences with challenge during transition.

P2: I had more opportunities and chances at community college, which helped me a lot to experience details of U.S school life before entering to the giant factory called the university.

P3: My confidence grew as I looked at successes and achievements I made. For even small successes, such as getting a good score on a simple quiz, I felt great and proud about myself and it encouraged me to try something more challenging afterward.



P4: I have gained my confidence from my success in college life. First, I gained confidence from my academic success—teachers and classmates considered that I was one of the top students.

P6: The success of my transition reminded me of the true value of facing challenge. Facing challenge has not always given me the sweet result, but it always taught me some lessons. As I figure out the importance of those lessons, my confidence on facing challenge has peaked high. Now, I am not afraid of any challenge.

P7: My confidence developed as I went through the hard time and overcame it. Getting over the hard time encouraged me that I can do well the next time I go through this kind of transition period.

P8: It helps me a lot these days...I found my old self and became critical a bit. In the school life, I need that a lot in discussions, readings, essays and pretty much in everything. I became or found me now because I needed to help my parents out, it was mandatory, but I think this “(uses own name)” will be very helpful in my whole life.

P8: A lot of that participating made me brave and more brave as the time goes.

P9: While time goes by, I could get confidence.

**Having increased feelings of success:** In this property, the concept of success finally emerges at this point in the process.

P3: You could say it was like chain reactions of successes.

P8: (I)n the group, in this quarter, I am the one who throws out an idea, asks questions on everything my group mates said and lets people gather together for our project. Whenever I get engaged in a group, I surprise myself because I am different than before and because I can see the "me" when I was in Korea.

P9: Technically, whenever I was done with each class, I was encouraged by the class, which was done in a good or better grade. Completion of each class helped me build confidence up. I had not only the technical reason, but also had a personal reason. I was sure that God planned some thing for me and had a purpose to bring me here. This belief guided me to endure till my entire course was completed.

P10: ...I was scared to work with other people in English because I thought my English skill was too bad to work with them. However, over time, I worked with

many other international students and American students, I felt my English was getting better.

**Wanting to "give back"/lead:** This final property captures a concept that was apparent in all three rounds of interviews. All participants desired the ability to now, somehow, give back to their South Korean community and share what they have learned. Below is a quote from Round Three that exemplifies this desire.

P9: (N)ow I am serving other international students from multi-nations in a Korean community church.

### Interactions

Interactions between categories have crystalized at this point. First, there appear to be nine steps in the process of successful transition, which make up categories in the grounded theory. The first step is not so much a step as it is a foundation, but it is from the existence of that category this the overall process takes place, thus it was important to name and understand. Also, various elements of personality, history, and perspective create a unique foundation, or **CONTEXT** (also referred to as Foundational Attributes) (see *Figure 6*), for each participant. The next steps/categories, **ENCOUNTERING CHALLENGE** and **CONSIDERING GIVING UP** are also clearly linked. What types of challenge(s) faced by participants varied with some common concepts and interlocking impacts across various aspects of their personal, social, academic, and cultural/logistical lives. Together, these two categories are once again reconceptualized and drawn together as the **STAGE I: CHALLENGE** (see *Figure 7*). The next two categories of **CONNECTING TO MOTIVATION** and **DECIDING NOT TO GIVE UP** are connected in that participants have to do some internal reflection during these two steps/categories in order to "stay in the game" and not give up. This internal reflection is key in order to

connect to what is motivating them. Then, participants need to reflect again and weigh their options in making a choice to stay and keep on trying; choosing not to give up. These steps involve internal and external motivations and implications for consideration. Together they are once more reconceptualized as **STAGE II: REFLECTION** (see *Figure 8*). The following two steps/categories include MANAGING WITH DILIGENCE and TAKING ACTION AND LEARNING. These steps naturally follow the act of reflecting and making a decision. Together, they point to the participant taking action to do something, whether that something is simply doing what s/he can to survive/manage or doing something exciting and new. As such, these categories are placed together and reconceptualized as **STAGE III: ACTION** (see *Figure 9*), in which there are once again internal and external implications and actions. Finally, the last two steps/categories include GAINING CONFIDENCE and EXPERIENCING POSITIVE OUTCOMES. It is clear that as participants gain confidence, they do more and experience positive outcomes. A key positive outcome mentioned by P6 was the opportunity to simply learn from the challenge, as he mentioned that he didn't expect to win as much as he wanted to gain from the process of transition itself. With this in mind, the final two categories are reconceptualized as **STAGE IV: GROWTH** (see *Figure 10*), with internal and external sources and skills. Upon final reflection, each of these stages were renamed as final categories, while the previously defined categories became subcategories.

### Summary

This grounded theory study researched the successful experiences of South Korean international students transitioning to life in the United States via American

community colleges. Data was collected from ten participants, five men and five women, over the course of three rounds of interviews. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher and the data was reread multiple times and checked for accuracy. Data from the First Round interviews was analyzed using open coding methods with three of the participants' data, and axial coding was employed for the other seven. The researcher first looked for themes across interviews that were open-coded and those themes were then chunked together and reconceptualized as categories, subcategories and properties with potential dimensions and interactions. These codes were then used to complete axial coding on the remaining transcripts. A preliminary structure was created in the form of a diagram and this diagram was manipulated numerous times in order to move the theory along.

Round Two and Three interviews aimed at filling gaps in knowledge from the previous interview, while at the same time, questions also sought to confirm and enrich information that had been previously obtained. Second and third round interviews utilized a combination of open, axial, and selective thematic coding. Analysis of this process helped to solidify certain codes and conceptualizations, while creating new codes, shifting, and reconceptualizing others. Round Two interviews focused primarily on the experiences of challenge and coping, in order to more deeply understand the experience. Third round interviews helped to confirm, shed additional light and more concretely formulate the overall structure of the theory.

Throughout the process, the researcher maintained an active practice of memoing in order to capture ongoing reactions, questions, perceived connections and other process related thoughts for additional consideration. Triangulation of data occurred in the

analysis of three separate rounds of interviewing, and saturation of information was reached regarding participants' experiences. Constant comparisons were made of and between all three rounds of interview data throughout the process in order to continually check for consistency and saturation.

With the information garnered from all three rounds of interviews and through the analysis of that data, the researcher reached a final conceptualization and theory of the participants' experiences. The central category found within the REFLECTION stage, specifically in participants' *connecting to motivation* solidified by the third round of interviews and subsequent analysis. This conceptualization was captured final stage diagrams (*Figures 6-10*). Final categories, subcategories, and primary properties, dimensions and interactions are listed below:

### **CONTEXT/FOUNDATIONAL ATTRIBUTES**

The first broad category sets a foundation and it is within that category that overall experience takes place. Various elements of personality, history, and perspective create a unique foundation in this category. Subcategories include Personal Characteristics, Having Past Experiences, Choosing an American Community College, and Living in the U.S. This category and subcategories set the stage for participants' initial experiences in the United States upon which the process of successful transition is experienced. Each of the subcategories involves a variation of experiences, backgrounds and motivations depending on the participant. (See *Figure 6*).

### **STAGE I: CHALLENGE**

Challenge(s) faced by participants emerged as the central category and primary experience that sets the transition process in motion. Two subcategories exist in this stage:

Encountering Challenge and Considering Giving Up. The word "encountering" was chosen for the first subcategory because it seemed to better capture an initial "meeting up with" or "facing" of a challenge where participants have yet to do much with that encounter. Common "challenge" properties and interlocking impacts exist across various aspects of their **personal, social, academic, and cultural/logistical lives**. The second subcategory, Considering Giving Up is an internal process and reaction to the challenge. (See *Figure 7*).

## STAGE II: REFLECTION

This stage involves two subcategories of Connecting to Motivation and Deciding Not to Give Up are connected in that participants have to do some internal reflection during these two steps/categories in order to keep going in the transition process. This internal reflection is needed in order to connect to what is motivating them. Connecting to Motivation has external properties of **Not wanting to disappoint others (with subproperties of Not wanting to disappoint parents and Not wanting to disappoint Korean society)** and **Career/Financial Goals**, and internal properties of **Not wanting to disappoint self** and **Fear of Repeating Past Mistakes**. Participants need to reflect again and weigh their options in making a choice to stay and keep on trying; Deciding Not to Give Up. (See *Figure 8*).

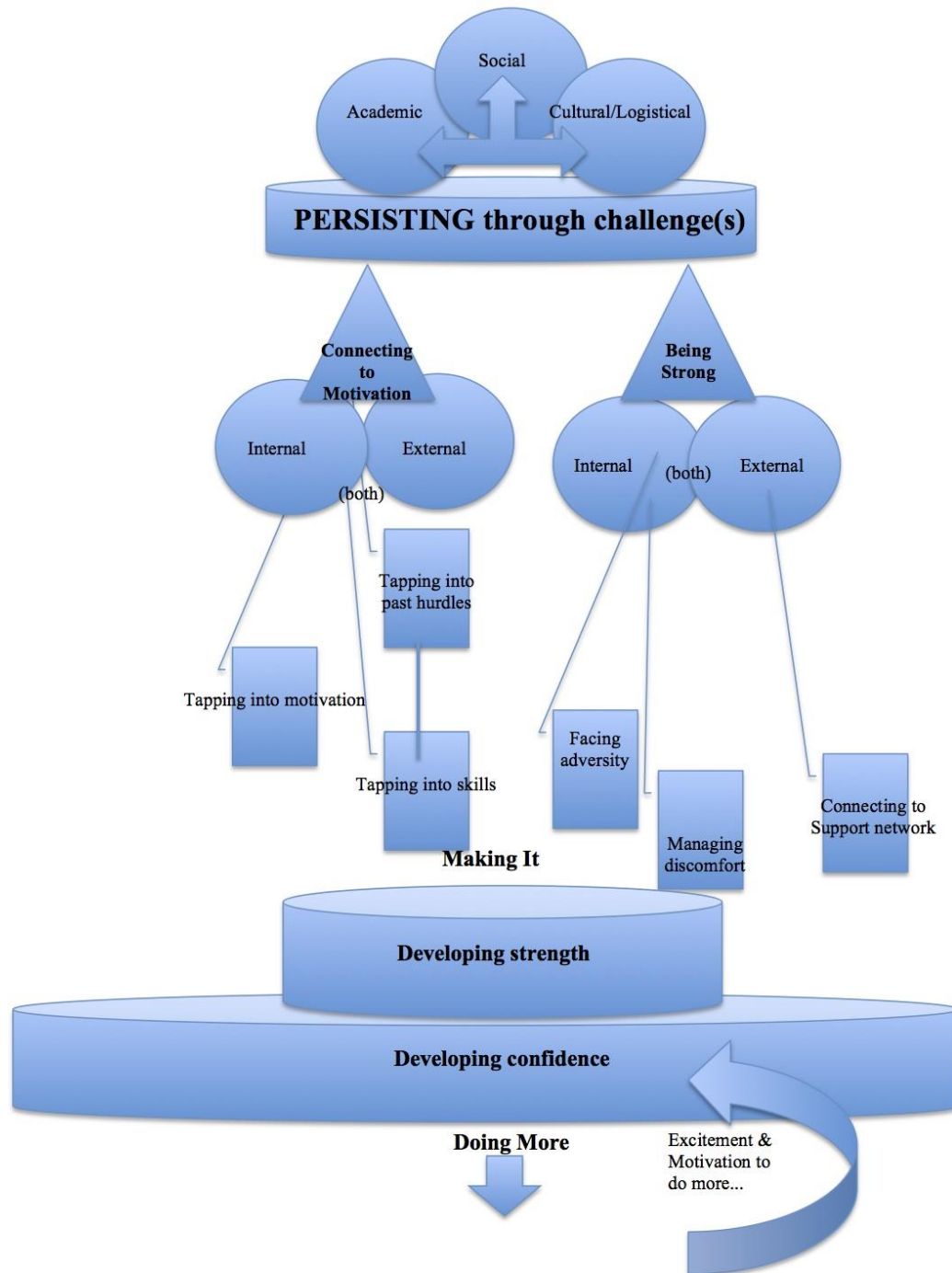
## STAGE III: ACTION

This stage includes two subcategories of Managing with Diligence and Taking Action. Once participants have decided not to give up and to keep persisting, they enter a stage of management and diligence of their efforts. Managing with Diligence has two properties, including **Implementing academic strategies** and **Responding to**

**Expectations of other South Korean students.** The second subcategory, Taking Action occurs when participants begin to experience momentum from managing diligence and has four properties: **Connecting with Other South Koreans/South Korean Culture**, **Getting a Job on Campus**, **Joining Campus Activities**, and **Developing a Broader Social Network**. (See *Figure 9*).

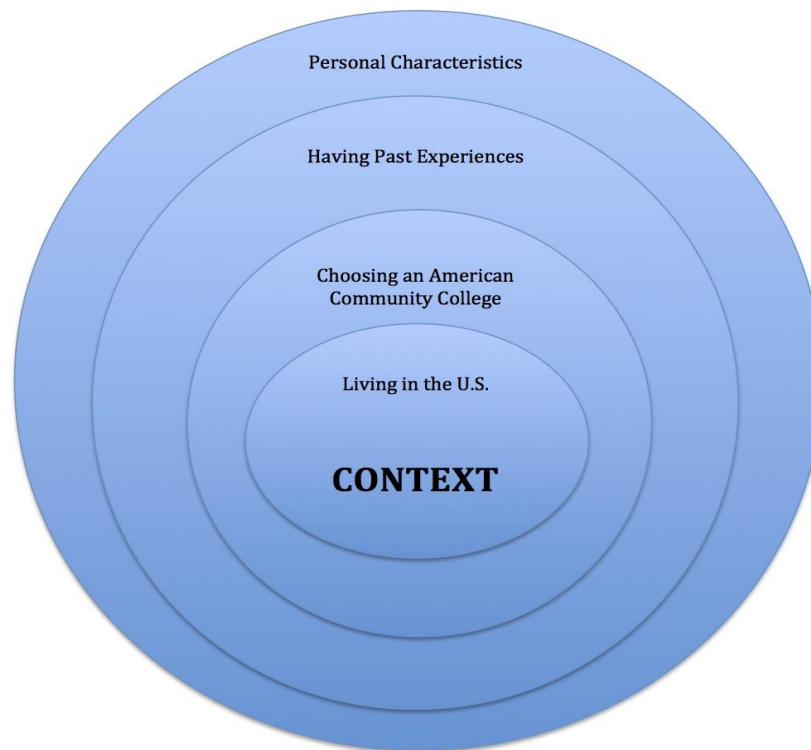
#### STAGE IV: GROWTH

This stage includes two subcategories of Gaining Confidence and Experiencing Positive Outcomes. Gaining Confidence occurs when participants develop a wider network of social connections and interactions as well as when they utilize and capitalize on internal and external skill sets. Properties include **"Jung" (Compassionate Community)**, **Utilizing Skills** with internal subproperty skills of *Connecting to a Dream and Staying Positive* and external subproperty skills of *Foundational Academic Skills*, *Cross-cultural Skills*, *Career Skills*, and *Military Skills*. The second subcategory in this stage is Experiencing Positive Outcomes and occurs somewhat simultaneously with Gaining Confidence. Properties of Experiencing Positive Outcomes include **Having Increased Motivation/Confidence to Face Future Challenges**, **Having Increased Feelings of Success**, and **Wanting to Give Back/Lead**. (See *Figure 10*).



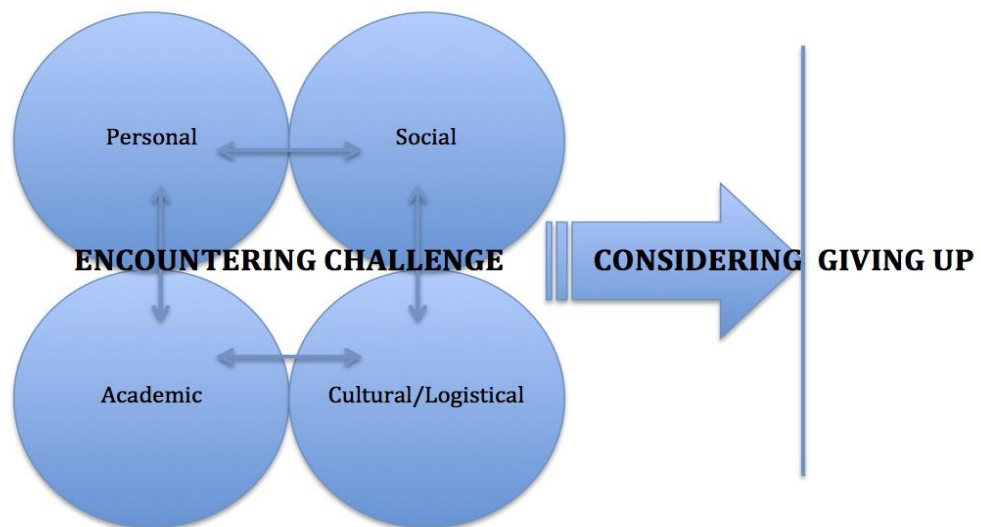
Appendix N, Figure 5. Persisting through challenges





*Appendix O, Figure 6. Context/Foundational Attributes*

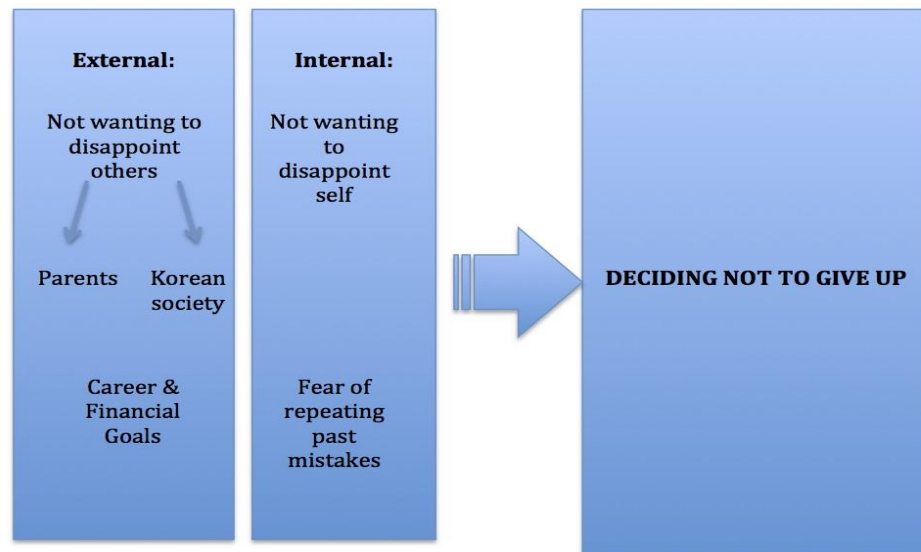
## STAGE I: CHALLENGE



*Appendix P, Figure 7. Stage I: Challenge*

## STAGE II: REFLECTION

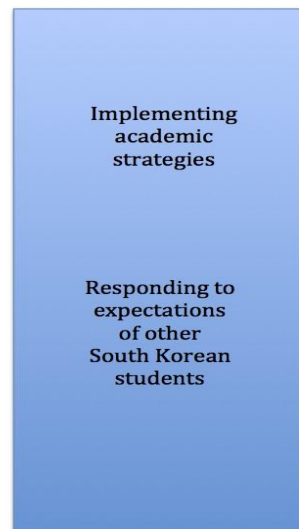
### CONECTING TO MOTIVATION



Appendix Q, Figure 8. Stage II: Reflection

### STAGE III: ACTION

#### MANAGING WITH DILIGENCE



#### TAKING ACTION



*Appendix R, Figure 9. Stage III: Action*

## STAGE IV: GROWTH



Appendix S, Figure 10. Stage IV: Growth

## APPENDIX T

### Member Checking

Triangulated data collection included member checking. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the use of member checking strengthens the trustworthiness and credibility of grounded theory results. These member checks took place after second interview data analysis and at the end of the Round Three interview process.

The researcher shared the most recent two diagrams (via email attachment) at that time (*Figures 3 & 4*) and discussed Round Two categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions with participants, asking the following questions:

- (1) Does this seem consistent with your experience?
- (2) Is anything missing, incorrect, or unclear?
- (3) Any other feedback that you would like to give me?

Five participants responded to the member checks and the responses included:

P1: I think the diagram seems very descriptive and correctly reflects my experience and other Korean students as well.

P2: The diagram looks perfect to me.

P3: Yes, I think that describes my experience and the last diagram is pretty good.

P4: I think that it is hard to say there is one main reason for my success during transition time...I think (the diagram) is perfect for me! Are those just from my story or the result from all your research participants? If it is the latter case, I think that it is amazing!

P8: I can understand your diagrams very well. I just think if you add relationships between academic and personal and social and cultural then it will be more clear. I am saying this because I don't see arrows between those...

Although the responses to the member checks were quite positive, the researcher wondered about a few things after hearing their feedback. *Could participants be burned out at this point in the process and not wish to add anything new to the equation (thus answering with little to no added information)? Did the diagrams make sense to the participants as much as they said they did, or were they being more socially respectful in their agreement?* Overall, results of the member check upheld the emergent grounded theory and confirmed the categories, subcategories, properties and dimensions. Suggestions given to the researcher were considered and incorporated where applicable.

## APPENDIX U

### Peer Review

**Upon review of the results and diagrams of this study (See Appendix M) please respond to the following:**

**1. What is your background in working with this population (South Korean international students in an American community college setting)?**

I have worked in the community college system for 7 over years. Currently, I am a full time faculty counselor at (community college). In this role, I have provided South Korean International students with academic, career, and personal counseling. Additionally, I have taught (international student orientation course title) approximately 10 times. This is a course designed for students new to the United States and assists them with transferring to a four year college and/or university. It also aims to help international students learn about American culture and normalize fears about transitioning to the United States. Students from South Korea have been highly represented every time I have taught this course.

**2. Do you think that the results accurately/closely describe the process of those who successfully transition?**

Yes, after reading the results I believe that the data accurately reflect the process of those students successfully transitioning. While working with South Korean International students I have found that many are apprehensive about their English Speaking abilities. Many have told me that they choose to stay quiet in classes in fear that they will not be understood or that American students will make fun of their English speaking abilities. Additionally, many articulated cultural and social apprehensions, but, because of fear of speaking, often their questions remained internalized, making the transition to the United States more challenges. The anecdotal evidence that I have gathered through teaching (orientation course) mirrors that of the interviewees responses in Katherine's dissertation.

Through speaking with students, however, I also found that motivation and fear of letting others down are pivotal in the success of the students. Many students with whom I have worked will push their comfort zone to ensure that they are academically successful, not just for themselves, but often for family in their home country. One example is an assignment that asks students to get up in front of the class and speak for at least two minutes. This asks a lot of the students as they are usually very apprehensive and self-conscious of their English. I have found that 99.9 percent of the time they follow through with the



assignment as the grade is very important to them and they want, and sometimes I feel need, to be academically successful.

**3. What do you think of the stages listed and their sub-categories, properties, and dimensions?**

Based upon my experiences working with South Korean International students, I think the stages listed and their sub-categories effectively highlight and define the transition of a South Korean International student. One piece that stood out to me was the sub category Managing with Diligence and, more specifically, the property of Responding to Expectations of other South Korean students. This property is not something that I had really thought about in terms of a student taking action.

**4. Do the final stage diagrams make sense to you (visually and conceptually)?**

The context bubble diagram makes sense both visually and conceptually. The final stage diagrams are straight forward and easy to follow.

**5. Is there anything you would add/change?**

No, there is nothing that I would add or change. However, I do feel that faculty and staff members who work with international students should be aware of how South Korean students transition in order to support these students academically. Additionally, by understanding how a student transitions, faculty and staff can be more supportive of the internal and external processes for which a student often wrestles. So often we teach or work with students and neglect to fully understand that student's "story." This theory and the stages that a South Korean International student moves through is of monumental importance if we are, as educators, to support students and facilitate a transfer of knowledge to this population and promote a welcoming place in which to learn and live.

## APPENDIX V

### Expanded Round 2 and 3 Interview Questions

First round analysis yielded seven preliminary categories, the first four of which were all tied to the contextual background and personal experiences of participants leading up to their arrival in the United States. These four categories were conceptualized together under the umbrella category of *foundational attributes* and further understanding the remaining three categories became the focus of the next set of interview questions. These categories included *encountering life as a community college student*, *coping with challenges*, and *experiencing the outcome of coping*. Moreover, a gap existed in understanding the experiences of challenges faced by participants. Although the varied nature of those challenges became clearer with the identification of subcategories, *encountering academics*, *encountering the logistics of living*, and *encountering a social life*, more detailed information was needed in order to better understand how such challenges were experienced. Additional information was needed in order to better understand what was happening after participants faced said challenges and then began to utilize tools and methods for coping. With this in mind, second round interview questions included:

- (1) Many participants encounter a challenge when transitioning during their first year of community college and seem to know that they need to do something different in order to survive/cope/succeed. How did you experience that process of knowing that something needed to change and then doing something different/new?
- (2) The above mentioned process seems to involve risk-taking to become more

involved socially, academically, and personally. How did you experience taking risks during your transition time?

(3) How did experiences from your past affect your ability to cope with the challenges that you faced during your time transitioning into American community college?

(4) What happens when you face a new challenge after having successfully worked through one while studying at an American community college?

Following the same process, third-round interview questions aimed to flesh out the categories, properties and dimensions of the grounded theory, which had become more specifically understood following round two interviews. Round two interviews revealed a connection between *developing confidence* and *taking action*, which was tied to participants' description of overall success. More information was needed to further understand these linkages. Also, round three questions sought out deeper understanding in the unique experiences of South Korean international students in this overall process. Thus, round three questions were:

1) When you encountered a challenge during your transition time, how did you keep from giving up?

(2) What about being South Korean made your transition more challenging than it was for other international students? What about being South Korean made it easier?

(3) What role did the skills that you already had back in Korea (hobbies, career skills, academic skills, etc.) play in your success in community college?

(4) How did your confidence develop during this time?